
CHRISTIANS AND MALAYALAM

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Historical Background

Kerala is noted in the cultural map of India for the presence of a Christian community, the origin of which goes to the preaching of St Thomas, one of the apostles of Jesus Christ. Great national leaders like Jawaharlal Nehru, have taken pride in the fact that Christian community in India is as old as Christianity. These early Christians who were labelled as Syrian Christians by the western colonialists, especially the British, had an Arabic word as their nomenclature in the precolonial period - Nazrani. This word which had puzzled almost every historian, as we understand today, is directly borrowed from the Arabic language and it means 'Christians'. This discovery ('the more original a discovery the more obvious it seems afterwards': Arther Koestler, *The Act of Creation*) once again reminds us of the connection of early Kerala Christians to the Middle East. The ecclesiastical and liturgical relation of the Nazranis with the Persian church may be described as cultural colonisation. Some scholars have labelled it as Syriacisation and others would call it Chaldeanisation. Those who propose these designations presuppose an earlier stage of Christianity in Kerala, perhaps before the 4th century AD, having an indigenous ecclesiastical organisation and typical Indian liturgy or other Socio-cultural institutions. This introduction may help the readers identify at least four stages in the history of Christianity in Kerala. They are:

1. Indigenous and autonomous Christian community (4/7th century AD)
2. Syriacisation/Chaldeanisation (4/7 - 16th centuries)
3. Western colonial period - Westernisation (16 - 20th century)
4. Postcolonial period (1947-)

This tentative division may help us understand and evaluate the contributions of Christians to the Malayalam language and literature.

We do not have any documentary evidence regarding the early Christian community of Kerala in the first few centuries of christian era. To search for the literary contributions of Kerala Christians during this period, probably one has to look into Sangam literature. Sangam literary works, especially *akam* and *puram* poems, do not express religious sentiments as they concentrate primarily on Dharma, Artha and Kaama.

The period of Chaldeanisation or Syriacisation is marked in the history of the Malayalam language by Tarisappally copper plate grants, of AD 848-849, the earliest remnants of the Malayalam language. These copper plate grants of king Ayyan of Venadu offer many privileges to the Christian community of Quilon. Many of the Christians in Quilon were migrants from Persia. Among them two brothers were known as Kandiisannal (< Syriac = Saints) - Mar Sapor and Mar Prot. The leader of the community is mentioned as Sapiriso. There are two more copper plate grants of this period of Syriacisation but their contents and dates are still being debated. They are known as Thomas of Cana copper plates and Vira Raghava copper plates. In general these copper plates are referred to as Syrian Christian copper plates. Some of these plates are still preserved in Kottayam and Thiruvalla.

Even during this period of Syriacisation Nazranis never let in Syriac words into their socio cultural life. All the borrowed Syriac words were and are restricted to their religious domain of life. This is a very strange linguistic phenomenon, as Syriac continued as the liturgical language of Nazranis till the second half of the twentieth century. Probably Nazranis were very conscious that they should not culturally deviate from the main stream society. This attitude of Nazranis provoked western missionaries during the period of

western colonialization and they insisted on westernisation as an integral part of Christianisation.

Today we may imagine Christianisation, westernisation and modernisation as three distinct circles of influence. Today in Kerala one can make use of modern amenities like printing and schooling without getting into the circles of westernisation or Christianisation. But during the period of vigorous western Christian missionary activities in Kerala, approximately from the advent of the Portuguese in the sixteenth century till political independence in 1947, all the tools of modernisation were looked upon as part of westernisation, and occasionally as part of Christianisation. So we may briefly state that modernisation, westernisation and Christianisation may be imagined as three intersecting circles in the life of Kerala during the four centuries, prior to Independence. Though these three influences were not identical, they had many things common so that they were not and are not clearly demarcated on the cultural map of Kerala.

Source Materials

Now we propose to give below a bird's eye view of the Christian contribution in the development of the Malayalam language during the period of western colonisation - Portuguese, Dutch and British periods.

Though there are references to the contributions of Christian missionaries in all major works on the history of the Malayalam language and literature, the first single book that has been fully devoted to this subject is *Keeralattile Kristiyya Saahityam 'Christian Literature in Kerala'* by Dr P J Thomas. This book, published in 1936, though written by an economist, comprised the results of original research. The author, in person and through correspondence, had gathered information from various archives and libraries in various parts of the world. The facts were presented and analysed with a scientific perspective. The enlarged second edition of this work was published in 1961 with the title *Malayaala Saahityavum Kristyaanikalum 'Malayalam literature and Christians.'*

In 1989, the third edition of the work was published with an appendix of 229 pages by this investigator. Now this work provides

all available information about the literary activities and literary works of Christians in Kerala before the dawn of the twentieth century. The results of researches held in different academic institutions by several persons are made use of in the latest edition in the form of footnotes and complementary references in the appendix.

A study of Missionary Malayalam Prose with Special reference to Varttamaanapustakam, an unpublished thesis, University of Kerala 1977, also deserves special mention. The author, *Samuel Chandanapally*, has approached the problem from a literary point of view. He has published a reader of missionary Malayalam prose entitled *Misyanari Malayaala Gadyamaatrukakal* (1975) 'specimens of missionary Malayalam prose'. The Ph.D. dissertations of *Yesudas* (1980) *Irumpayam* (1984) *Eapen* (1985) *Manavalan* (1990) and *Sam* (1988) which are available in print also provide a lot of valuable information about the cultural pursuits of Christian missionaries in Kerala. *Kunhappa* (1973) and *Raghavan* (1985) have pointed out the importance of missionary Malayalam prose in the history of Malayalam Journalism. Gundert studies published recently in Malayalam (Zacharia 1991-92, 1993-94), English (Frenz and Zacharia 1993), and German (Frenz 1992, 1993) provide contemporary assessment of Christian contribution to Malayalam. The present author's Ph.D. dissertation (unpublished) in linguistics on *Early Missionary Malayalam Prose* deals with Christian contribution to Malayalam.

Printing Press

Christian missionaries were responsible for the introduction of modern printing in Kerala. In order to facilitate the mechanisation and modernisation of printing they became agents of script reform also. The story of printing in Kerala can be traced in detail through *Kesavan* (1985, 1988), *Zacharia* (1989) and *Kizhakkemuri* (1977).

The first printing press in India was established at St Paul's College, Goa, in 1556. *Joao de Bustamante*, a Spaniard was the masterbrain behind the printing work done at that time. *Doctrina Christa*, a catechism by *Francis Xavier*, was the first book in any Indian script to be printed. As *Kesavan* (1985:13) has pointed out 'if the locations of the earlier printing presses in India were plotted on

the map, it will be found that they all hug the coastline of the peninsula, Goa, Cochin, Punnaikkayal (near Kanyakumary), Quilon, Vaipicotta, Ambazhakadu, were the earliest centres of printing in India.

All these presses were established as part of academic programme imparting higher Christian knowledge. So it is evident that missionaries treated printing as an indispensable medium for dispensation of Christian knowledge and the presses were established as an integral part of centres of Christian training and teaching.

Doctrina Christam, en lingua Malaaur Tamil, a sixteen-page book printed at Quilon in 1578 is preserved in the Harvard University Library. This book is the Tamil translation of a catechism by Francis Xavier and it has the Tamil name '*Tampiraan Vanakkam*'. Two priests, *Henrique Henriques* and *Manoel Pedro* were the brains behind the production of this book. The latter was Indian though his name sounds alien.

Another *Doctrina Christiana*, printed at Cochin in Tamil is available in Bodleian Library, Oxford. This catechism printed in 1579 has 116 printed pages. The printing presses at Vaipicotta and Ambazhakkadu also were very active in printing Tamil books.

The first Malayalam book to appear in print was a catechism by *Clement Peanius*, a carmelite missionary. *Samksepa vedaartham* was printed at the Polyglot press, Rome in 1772.

Clement Peanius has a book on writing systems in Kerala and it bears the title *Alphabetum Grandonica Malabaricum siva Samscrudonicum*.. These two books were printed in Rome making use of 1128 square types prepared for this purpose.

Malaylam printing in Kerala was started at Kottayam by *Benjamin Bailey*, a CMS missionary. The first major Malayalam work printed at Kottayam was the translation of the *New Testament*. In the beautiful printing of the *New Testament* *Bailey* made use of only 500 types. This was a major breakthrough in the history of Malayalam script. He reduced the number of types and changed their shape from square to round. It may be noted that the present shape of Malayalam characters in print is the brainchild of *Bailey*.

The *Basel Mission in Malabar* started Malayalam printing at *Mangalore* and *Tellicherry* before 1850. The Basel Mission press at Mangalore won national fame during the British Raj as the best printing press in South India and retained it till the press was closed down under the Enemy Trading Order 1916.

Spelling

Missionaries and their modern tools like the printing press and journals have played a major role in the *standardisation of Malayalam spelling*. Foreign missionaries were aware of the inconsistencies in the writing system. *Hermann Gundert* and other Basel Mission workers popularised the use of a *special symbol for enunciative /u/*.

Punctuation

The use of *punctuation marks* was not known in Kerala traditions. According to evidence available today *Roosin Re Niyamaavali* 'Rozian Statutes' (1606) is the first major prose work in Malayalam that makes use of various punctuation marks. The use of internationally accepted punctuation marks like the *period*, *semicolon* and *comma* in the scribal and printing tradition of Malayalam is an innovation popularised by *Basel Mission presses* at *Tellichery* and *Mangalore*. Cf *Velayudhan* (1981:147)

Paper

The use of *paper* was well known in Kerala from the fifteenth century as testified by the history of printing in Kerala. For the *Doctrina* printed in Quilon in 1578 *paper made in China* was used. Missionary writings are found invariably on paper.

Journalism

The *Basel Mission* at *Tellicherry* started *Raajya Samaacaaram*, the first Malayalam journal, in June 1847. The primary aim of the publication as it can be normally expected was the dissemination of christian news. It was intended to help the neoconverts grow in faith and Christian knowledge. The journal as testified by *Kunhappa* (1973:99) helped the members of the Basel Mission get over their petty feelings and emerge as a casteless community, a rare phenomenon in the caste-based traditional society of Kerala.

In October 1847 another periodical with the title *Pascimodayam* was started, again from Basel Mission, Tellichery. F.Muller was the editor of this journal. Hermann Gundert, as seen from the titles published in it, was the mastermind behind this publication. *Pascimodayam* published articles and small write-ups on topics of general interest like geography, astronomy, history, science, graphemics, etc.

The third journal in Malayalam *Jnaananiiksepam* was published from Kottayam. The first issue came out in 1848. Bailey, Mathen and Koshy were the missionaries behind this publication. The first college magazine in Kerala was published in July 1864 viz., *Cottayam College Quarterly Magazine*. As a bilingual journal edited by Mathen, this carried research - oriented articles on various topics. The lead provided by Christian missionaries in journalism was taken up by many organizations and individuals in the Christian community.

The momentum of Christian missionary initiative is still felt in the field of printing and journalism. Some of the most famous presses and publications in Kerala still belong to Christian organisations which in turn trace their origin or inspiration to missionary efforts.

Dictionaries and Grammatical Works

Great foreign missionaries like Arnos, Gundert, and Bailey are remembered for their monumental contributions to Malayalam lexicography. All of them gave primary importance to bilingual dictionaries. The multilingual background of missionaries might have helped them in the compilation of these voluminous works.

Among the oldest dictionaries of Malayalam *Vocabularium Malabarico Lustianum* by Arnos paatiri deserves special mention. This Malayalam-Portuguese dictionary, though extensively used by many foreign missionaries, appeared in print only in 1986. To this printed version an English translation also is added. The fact that it was printed in Kerala after centuries will bear testimony to its importance.

Arnos as per secondary information available today, composed two other dictionaries also: Sanskrit - Portuguese

Dictionary and Malayalam - Sanskrit - Portuguese Dictionary. But they are yet to be traced.

There are scholars who would describe *Arnos* as the *first indologist of Europe*. It is true that he prepared a *grammar of Sanskrit* on the basis of *Sidharuupam* and it was used by many other European indologists, especially missionaries. But this book never appeared in print. This work is known as *Grammatica Grandonica*.

Among western Christian missionaries who worked in Kerala, *Arnos* has the *rare distinction* of being honoured as a *popular poet*. Christians in Kerala still sing some of his poems, especially *puttenpaana* or *kuutaasappaana*, with great relish and deep devotion. Some of the *hymns* composed by *Gundert* also are still used by certain Christian congregations.

Arnos prepared a grammar of Malayalam in portuguese for the use of other missionaries. This has the title *Arte Malabar*. A manuscript copy of this work is preserved in the British Museum with the subtitle *Grammar of the Malabar Language (Grantham) in Portuguese*. A close perusal of the book which is very much paying reveals that the author is dealing with the literary dialect of Malayalam. Again, in this respect also *Gundert* has followed the line of *Arnos* and he has surpassed him by the quality of his works. He has dealt with the *literary dialect of Malayalam synchronically and diachronically* in his monumental grammar and dictionary.

A Malayalam and English Dictionary by *Gundert* was published in 1872. This has been reprinted several times and still an *indispensable reference work* for any serious study of Malayalam language. This book has *citations* from Malayalam literary classics, official records, folk songs, proverbs, etc., and may be described as a *miniencyclopaedia* on Kerala and its people. *Velayudhan* (1981) has the following observation about this work:

'One could say without any exaggeration that the publication of *Gundert's Dictionary* marked the take-off stage of lexicographical and grammatical work in Kerala. There has not been a student of Malayalam before and after him who knew as many languages as he did, who could boast of sound philogicial training coupled with actual proficiency in a score of languages, Indian and foreign'.

Malayaala bhaasaa vyaakaranam, Gundert's Grammar of the Malayalam language excelled all other grammatical works available in Malayalam at the time of its publication by its scientific rigour and popularity. This book continues to influence grammarians of Malayalam, including modern linguists. *Ezhuthachan* (1975:50) provides a contemporary objective evaluation of this work.

'Gundert's grammar has a number of defects and has been superseded by more popular works. But the fact remains that there is no other grammatical work even now which gives so many examples and details connected with the actual structure of the language... His Malayalam grammar though written 100 years ago with imperfect data, has many interesting points and his opinions still carry weight with all writers who work on Malayalam grammar'.

Gundert, immediately after his arrival in Malabar, had prepared a short treatise on Malayalam with the title *Grammar of the Malayalam*. A manuscript copy of this work, completed in 1839, is available in Tuebingen University library. This work in English was meant for other foreign missionaries who were to join him in Malabar. In 1851 when he published the first part of his grammar it was completely in Malayalam. But subsequently he permitted his publisher *Diez* to include English subtitles in the complete edition of 1868. However, it must be admitted that Gundert's treatment of the Malayalam language, both in his grammar and in his dictionary takes into account the *native speaker's point of view* and needs.

Gundert's Herculean efforts for mastering the genius of the Malayalam language and understanding the cultural ethos of Kerala can be clearly understood from the vivid descriptions and thought-provoking comments recorded in his *diary* which is now available in print in three volumes.

Malayaalmayute Vyaakaranam by *Mathen* was published in 1863 at Kottayam. This work sparkles with originality of ideas and strikes the reader with the feeling of freshness it provides among all other grammatical treatises on Malayalam. He has used many new terms to designate grammatical concepts and parts of speech. Recognizing the importance of *mid-central vowel /u/* in Malayalam,

he accorded *phonemic status* to it and also pointed out the need to have a *special script* for it. *Variar* (1979) has pointed out on several occasions the importance of Mathen's grammar.

Mathen was an *ardent supporter of the Malayalam language*. He wanted it to be used in all spheres of life including education and administration. He himself translated some scholarly works from other languages and *coined beautiful technical terms* using the inherent capabilities of Malayalam. Cf *Chandanappally* 1969. He sought the use of Malayalam in all public offices in Kerala. This love of Malayalam made him *critical of the intellectual elite of Kerala*. He prefaces his grammar with the following remarks:

'The absolute want of a Malayalam Grammar in the Language itself, was the motive, which prevailed with him to take up his pen on the subject. The Ancient Literati of the country, being chiefly Brahmins, were only anxious to acquire a knowledge of the Sanscrit and regarded the vernacular as unworthy of their attention; which fully accounts for the *want of any of Grammatical work by the Natives themselves*. It was this circumstance, which made the Language to be commonly looked upon by foreigners as a poor and ungrammatical jargon whereas its natural capabilities are as good as those of any other language of South India, requiring only cultivation to develop its riches and beauties. My acquaintance with the Learned Language as well as with some of the cognate Dialects and my being engaged in translations, revisions and original compositions in the language, qualified me in some measure for undertaking the work, which was felt to be great desideratum (Mathen (1863) 1969:11)

The Christian missionaries in general shared the noble sentiments expressed by *Mathen* in the words quoted above. In the sixteenth century, when the Portuguese came to Kerala, the Christian missionaries stressed the need for giving importance to Malayalam. The *seminary of Vaipicotta*, established by the Portuguese, was perhaps *the first academic institution to offer a course in the Malayalam language*. Bishop Roz, prepared materials for this purpose and set apart hours to teach Malayalam.

The *Synod of Diamper* condemned the practice of teaching catechism in the Syriac language and insisted that it should be in

Malayalam. It specifically pointed out that the universal custom of the church was '*to teach the doctrine to children and the people in their mother tongue*' (Hough 1839:65). This point is being stressed here to avoid the contemporary prejudice that Christianisation has been partly responsible for the *non- promotion of regional languages*. In fact, it is the opposite that is true. One may be in the right if one says that it was the upper class members of the Indian society, irrespective of caste and religion, and bureaucracy who joined hands to keep the regional languages like Malayalam out of education and administration. Anyhow, *western Christian missionaries*, as testified by documentary evidence, were *ardent promoters of regional languages like Malayalam*.

Joseph Peet has published two books on Malayalam grammar. *A Grammar of the Malayalam Language* (1841) is designed in such a way that it can be profitably used both by foreigners and by natives. The sections on orthography and syntax provide fresh insights. An excerpt from the preface of this work will give any reader a feel of this missionary grammarian's linguistic sensibility.

'The young student's attention is requested to the two following cautionary statements

That no native Malayalam Grammar has ever been written, and therefore it will occasion no surprise to find that, until within the last 25, or 30 years, no native written purely Malayalam Work can be found.

There does indeed exist a written conglomerate called baasha, or common Dialect; but nearly all, and, entirely all termed good native writings of the kind, are in slogums; in which *Sense* is sacrificed to Sound.

These writings are, for the most part made up of Provincialisms, mixed with words, ideas, and illustrations from Sanscrit, Tamil and their Cognate languages; so that, without an Interpreter, they are a dead letter, even to a native reader. Indeed they were partly composed upon the ancient Brahminical principle "*Amuse but Impose*".

Elements of Malayalam Grammar is a grammatical treatise in Malayalam which was extensively used as a textbook. The second edition of this book was printed in 1854.

A Progressive Grammar of the Malayalam Language for Europeans is a unique treatise on Malayalam as Frohnmeyer, the missionary author, very clearly analyses the relation between language and society. Occasionally he compares Malayalam with many European languages like Greek, Latin, English, German, etc. This book will be a useful guide to any European who has an active interest in Kerala studies. For a native speaker it provides valuable information about dialects and special languages. In fact he has given more importance to the spoken language. Ezhuthachan (1975:618) has the following complimentary remark about Frohnmeyer:

'An exhaustive grammar paying equal attention to theory and practice is still a desideration in Malayalam and for those who embark on writing such a work will doubtlessly get very much help from the work of our author'.

Frohnmeyer's *Introduction* to his grammar is noteworthy for several reasons. In this he has made the following pertinent remarks which may be of interest in the context of the issues discussed in this paper:

'Turning to the Malayalam Prose, besides the Keralolpatti... some ancient medical treatises and the Tellicherry records (Chiefly A.D 1796-1799) *not much can be mentioned of old prose. On the advance of Western culture, the task of moulding the colloquial language in such a manner as to make it an appropriate vehicle for conveying new ideas and occidental knowledge had been left almost entirely to foreign educationists and missionaries; aided by the Indian assistants. This did not only result in the frequent use of English constructions in Malayalam (e.g, the use of the Passive Voice, scarcely ever occurring in classical Malayalam,) but has with the difference between the Northern and Southern dialects increased the difficulty of arriving at anything like a general standard for Malayalam prose. Genuine native productions from the South and North of Malabar show that the difference between North and South is not irreconcilable. That the Malayalam language has yielded to a process of modification due to Western Culture and Christianity is a matter of course. It is for the Malayalam Bible, good school books, newspapers, and periodicals to prepare the way for a standard Malayalam. But nothing can be hoped for until the educated part of the Malayalam people has come to understand that their mother- tongue must be made the vehicle of*

modern culture making the language keep pace with the general national progress and the advance of civilisation. The manner in which the language is dealt with in government offices and court translations (Sometimes more like a transliteration than a translation), together with the Anglo-Malayalam jargon of English-learning pupils does much to impoverish the language.

Bailey compiled and published two standard bilingual dictionaries. They may be described as the first two printed dictionaries of Malayalam.

A Dictionary of High and Colloquial Malayalam, Cottayam 1846

A Dictionary of English and Malayalam, Cottayam 1849

The preponderance of Sanskrit words in these dictionaries may be pointed out as a major defect. Gundert (1872:vi) has criticised Bailey for not discriminating between Sanskrit and Malayalam words. Guptan Nair (1986:111) treats this work as important as it includes many archaic expressions and dialectal variants.

Gundert has expressed his indebtedness to two other bilingual dictionaries also. They are generally called *Verapoly dictionaries* and Gundert marks them as *V₁* and *V₂*. Aiyar (1940: 324) has the following observation about these dictionaries.

'The Portuguese-English and English-Portuguese Dictionaries, called by Gundert the "*Verapoly Dictionaries*", are (to cite the words of Gundert who has freely utilised the materials of these dictionaries for his own work) "very valuable works compiled by the Portuguese and Italian missionaries of Verapoly, which though completed in 1746 rest upon materials accumulated in the 17th, perhaps even the 16th century, and rank as the *oldest monuments extant of European scholarship in India*".

No copy of this work is available to-day; but the numerous items cited by Gundert in his work sufficiently indicate that the work may have been mainly based on the language of the Christians'.

These dictionaries are available in Tuebingen University library. Cf Zacharia 1989:388-394. *Malayalam-Portuguese Dictionary (V₁)* compiled in 1745 has more than six hundred pages. Perhaps, this is the biggest Malayalam dictionary compiled before the

publication of dictionaries in the nineteenth century. *Portuguese-Malayalam dictionary* (V₂) which is undated has fewer than four hundred pages. These works may be considered the cumulative result of the lexicographical efforts of several Catholic missionaries who were working in Kerala, especially in central Kerala.

A *Latin-Malayalam dictionary of about eight thousand words* is available in Vatican library. Vallavanthara (1984) treats it as the dictionary of Peanius. Colloquial words are given a prominent place in this manuscript dictionary. A *Malayalam-Latin-English dictionary* was published from Verapoly in 1851.

The first *Malayalam-Malayalam dictionary* was compiled by Richard Collins with the help of *Raman Variar* and *Subramonian Potti*. This was published in 1867 with the title *Malayaanma nighantu*. In the second edition of 1905 the title was changed to *Malayaala nighantu*.

Missionary efforts in Malayalam lexicography continued till the second half of the twentieth century. Many lexicographers of recent times, especially catholic monks, have refrained from putting their names on their voluminous works.

Historical Perspectives

Christian missionaries had an active interest in the *history of Kerala*. So they took pains to collect all the possible source materials of history. In 1843 Gundert edited and published *Keeraloolpatti*, the famous legend about the origin of Kerala and its people. Depending on reliable sources he narrated the history of Malabar (1498-1631) under the title *Keerala Palama* and this was published in 1868. Gundert's *translation and analysis of copper plate records in possession of St. Thomas Christians and Jews* appeared in the *Madras Journal of Literature and Science*, Vol. xii, part I & II, 1844/45 pp. 115-146. Gundert's collection of *Tellicherry Records (1796-1800)* preserved in 13 volumes in *Tuebingen University library* also reveals the interest he and his colleagues had in historical records. As early as 1606, Gouvea, a Roman Catholic priest who accompanied archbishop Alexis Meneses in his Kerala tour, published a voluminous book with the title *JORNADADO Arcebispo De Goa DOM Frey Aleixo de Meneses Primas da India oriental religiso da ordem de S. Agostinho*,

Coimbra. Two other treatises on the Christian community in Kerala also deserve special mention for the pains taking research and source materials behind those works. *Voyage to the East Indies* by Vincent Maria (Venice: 1728) provides very interesting information about the life of people in Kerala, especially St Thomas Christians.

India Orientals Christiana by Paulinus provides a description of Kerala with details of principalities, kings, churches and social leaders of the eighteenth century. A sixteenth century curious description of Kerala and Kerala Christians ran into twentyfive different versions in seven European languages needs to be mentioned. The narrator is *Joseph the Indian*, a St Thomas Christian priest who travelled aboard one of the ships of Pedro Alvares Cabral from Cochin to Portugal in 1501.

Folk Literature

Missionaries were the pioneers in collecting *folk literature of Malayalam*. In 1791 a collection of *Malayalam proverbs* with Latin translation was printed and published in Rome: *Centum Adagia Malabarica cum Textu Originali*, Versone Latina. The great scholar missionary Paulinus was the compiler of this book.

In 1845 Gundert's collection of *Malayalam proverbs* was published from Mangalore. The Basel Mission press at Mangalore has brought out several editions of this book with additions and comments. The following editions are available in various libraries:

Palancolmaala, Mangalore 1845

Oru Aayiram Palancol, Tellicherry 1850

Oru Aayiram Palancol, Mangalore 1856

Gundert's critical edition of *Keeraloolpatti* also reveals his love for mythological and folkloristic studies. Gundert himself considered this an important work. He has referred to *Keeraloolpatti* on several occasions in his own writings.

Translation

Missionaries were very good translators. They have translated books from classical languages like Hebrew, Greek, Sanskrit and Syriac to Malayalam. Some of their translations are from modern European languages like Portuguese, German and English. Their

translations in Malayalam include works from modern Indian languages like *Bengali*, *Kannada*, *Tamil*, etc. In this translation work they used to receive assistance from local experts.

The early Catholic missionaries who reached Kerala took pains to study Syriac, the liturgical language of St. Thomas Christians. Scholar missionaries like Bishop Roz translated many Latin texts into Syriac. Bishop Roz knew Syriac and Malayalam very well. So in the Canons of Diamper synod there are several references in which the synod authorises Roz and his colleagues to translate Latin documents and prayers into Syriac language. Even the *text of the Mass was translated from Latin to Syriac*.

Among hundreds of translated works of missionaries the following are very important for their literary quality or for their unique position in the history of the Malayalam language.

- (i) *John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress* had two translations in Malayalam -

Paradesi Moksayaatra

(tr) *Archdeacon Koshy*, Kottayam 1847

and *Sancaariyute Prayaanam*

(tr) *Hermann Gundert*, Tellicherry 1849

- (ii) A religious play by *Hermann Moegling* was translated from Kannada by two missionaries.

Mata Vicaarana

(tr) *Hermann Gundert*, Manglore 1845 Tellicherry 1846

and *Matavicaarana*

(tr) *Joseph Peet*, Kottayam 1846

Both the translations are noteworthy for the use of dialect in the conversations. *Gundert's* translation is full of dialectal variations of North Malabar. *Peet* uses the dialects of Kottayam and surroundings. A contrastive analysis of these two works will bear ample testimony to the linguistic sensitiveness and literary aptitude of the translators. Cf *Zacharia* 1989:492-499.

- (iii) *John Bunyan's Holywar* which is very often described as an excellent example of mystic literature, was translated by *Archdeacon Koshy* with the title *Tirupporaattam*.

- (iv) *Joseph Butler's Analogy of Religion*, a complex treatise on religion was translated by *George Mathen* with the title *Veda Samyukti* and its first part was published at Kottayam in 1866.
- (v) *Herzbuchlein* of *Johanness Evangelista* was translated from German by *Hermann Gundert* and this work is most noteworthy for the quality of pictures found in this booklet. This book was printed at Tellicherry in 1848 with the title *Maanusa Hrudayam*. Cf *Choondal* 1975.
- (vi) *Jnaanma piiuusam* and *Jnaana Prajaagaram* are two books translated from Tamil and they were printed in 1847 and 1862 respectively.
Cf *Zacharia* 1989: 466
- (vii) *Hermann Gundert's* translation and commentary of *Asvaghosa's Vajrasuuci* is a powerful attack on the caste system. It was first printed in 1851 at Tellicherry.
- (viii) *Catherine Hannah Mullen's* Bengali novel was translated into Malayalam by *Joseph Peet* and it was published from Kottayam in 1858 with the title *Phulmoni ennum Kooruna ennum peeraaya rantu Striikalute Katha* 'the story of Phulmoni and Koruna'. This was the first work to appear in the form of a novel in Malayalam. In that restricted sense this work may be described as the first novel in Malayalam.
- (ix) *The Slayer Slain* by *Mrs Collins*, a novel depicting the social life of Central Kerala, was translated into Malayalam by *Mr Collins* and it was published from Kottayam in 1877 with the title *Ghaataka Vadham*. Some Scholars consider this the first novel in Malayalam.

The Bible Translations

The Bible translations in Malayalam deserve a special reference. Two great missionaries, *Bailey* and *Gundert*, devoted a large share of their time and energy to this task. Though Kerala has a very ancient Christian community, the Malayalam Bible came out later than its counterparts in Tamil (1714), Urdu (1743), Bengali

(1800), Hindi (1809), Marathi (1805), Sanskrit (1808), Gujarati (1809) and Oriya (1809).

With the support of *Claudius Buchanan* and *Colonel Munro*, *Philipose Ramban* of Kayamkulam prepared the first Malayalam translation of the *New Testament* from Syriac. *The New Testament* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus christ translated into Malayalam, Part I containing the four Gosepls - Bombay printed at Courier Press 1811. This translation was defective in many ways. The undue influence of the Tamil Bible is visible everywhere. The high percentage of Syriac words makes it hardreading. *Aiyar* (40:324) has the following comment on the language of this work:

‘Though many old Malayalam words, forms and usages are used, there are also peculiar corruptions strange constructions (due to the influence of the Syntax of Syriac, I am told) and artificial translations that definitely betray the interference of non- Malayalis. The full circumstance in which the translation was printed in Bombay might perhaps explain these artificialities’.

Bailey completed the translation and publication of the Malayalam Bible during the period 1829-1841 with the help of local experts including a Jew and a few priests. The first part was published in 1829.

The New Testament of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ Translated into the Malayalam Language, *Cottayam*, printed at the Church Mission Press, for the Madras Auxiliary Bible society 1829. *The Old Testament* was published in two parts in 1840 and 1841 completing the whole Bible. Considering the various limitations in the execution of such a Himalayan project, this translation is definitely commendable. But it was severely criticised. Some have found it full of Sanskrit words. *Gundert* found this translation devoid of the literariness of the original in Hebrew and Greek and attributed this loss to the indirect translation through English. Cf *Thomas* 1989: 212 & *Zacharia* 1989: 348

Dissatisfied with *Bailey's* Bible translation *Gundert* translated most of the Bible.

New Testament: Putiya niyamam, Tellicherry 1852

Poetical Books: *Pavitra lekhakal*, Tellicherry 1857

Prophetic Books: Pravaacaka lekhakal, Mangalore 1886

This translation is most noteworthy for the use of traditional literary expressions with which *Gundert* was most familiar. Subsequently the translations of *Bailey* and *Gundert* were combined at the initiative of the Madras Auxiliary Bible Society and the combined edition was printed at Mangalore in 1887.

Influence of the Bible and its Translation

The influence of the Bible translation in the development of modern Malayalam prose has been estimated differently by various scholars. *George* (1972), after taking into account the divergent views on this subject, makes the following statement:

'The Malayalam version of the Bible has shown that great ideas can be couched in simple language not far removed from the spoken tongue. There have been critics of the prose style of the Malayalam Bible. Some of them feel that certain usages smack of western idioms, and they call it *paadiri Malayalam*, in a derogatory sense. There is a certain amount of truth in this. The translators must have been more keen about fidelity to the original than about the beauty of diction. And since most of the work was done by small groups, no individual style was possible. It is quite a difficult task to give expression to a completely alien culture in a language far removed in background and mode of expression. In certain situations, therefore, the translator is obliged to sacrifice either *idiom of faithfulness to the original*. And in the translation of Scripture, it is better to sacrifice idiom in order to preserve fidelity. By and large, this is what happened in the Malayalam translation. In any case, it is true to say that modern Malayalam prose has been to some extent influenced by the language of the Bible'.

The influence of the Bible on the Malayalam language and literature is a topic that is worth pursuing. But the question whether the influence of the Bible on Malayalam can be directly attributed to missionary or Christian efforts is likely to meet with a negative answer from many lovers of literature. Bible culture has reached Malayalam through various other sources especially western literature. Anyhow it has to be admitted that in the modern Malayalam language and literature *Bible images are used abundantly* and their frequency is on the increase.

Text Books

The involvement of western missionaries in the preparation and execution of *school curriculam* has influenced the form and content of *school textbooks in Kerala*. The missionaries were the pioneers in the preparation of school textbooks. The first textbook committee of Travancore was formed in 1868. But much before that many standard textbooks in Malayalam were in use especially in Malabar.

The first Malayalam Reader was compiled by *Hermann Gundert* in 1860: *Paathamaala*. This anthology which was used in Malabar for several years comprised selections from Malayalam classics like *Raamacaritam*, *Raamaayanam*, *Bhaaratam*, *Pancatantram*, *Veetaala Caritam* etc. Most of the prose lessons were the handwork of the compiler. Gundert's *Malayala Bhaasaa Vyaakaranam* was used as the textbook of grammar from its very first edition in 1851. *Catechism of Malayalam Grammar* prepared by Gundert and edited by Garthwait went through many editions and was used as the textbook in schools.

Textual Criticism

Many Malayalam classics like *Pancatantram* and *Mudraaraaksasam* were edited by missionaries for the use of students in schools and colleges. *Pancatantram* appeared in print in 1847 at Kottayam and in 1851 at Tellicherry. In the 1868 Mangalore edition of *Pancatantram* (ed) Garthwait all the words are separated using the dash so that students can follow the text more profitably. The *technique of editing* with a scholarly introduction, copious notes, basic references and the index is an innovation propagated in Kerala by Christian missionaries.

Propagation of Science

The missionaries especially members of CMS and Basel Mission were keenly interested in propagating *scientific knowledge*. *Vidyaamuulakannal*, a general knowledge digest published from Kottayam in 1858 is most noteworthy for its subject content, mode of presentation and Malayalam diction. The book explains natural phenomena like the wind, cloud, rain, thunder and cyclone. Products of modern technology like divingbell also are introduced. *Mrugacaritam* by J G Beuttler is an introduction of animal life

printed with multicolour pictures at the CMS press, Kottayam in 1861. *Prakruitisaastram*, a textbook of physics by Frohnmeyer presents the beauty and vigour of Malayalam prose in science literature. Missionaries made a good job devising a prose style and mode of treatment which would serve as the medium of modern science. At the same time they maintained their commitment to religion and spiritual values. They believed that religiosity and scientific temperament are not opposite but mutually complementary. This sober vision of science and religion enabled them to be effective agents of modernisation.

Prose Style

Modern Malayalam Prose has occupied a prominent place in literature and in many types of formal discourses. But it was not so before the advent of the western Christian missionaries. Prose, the common language of the people, was never treated as a powerful medium of effective communication. In *classical Indian languages* like Sanskrit and Tamil *prose had no significant role* to play as the medium of literature or scientific discourse. This tradition was shared by all Indian languages and *Malayalam was no exception* to it. Inscriptions, a few sections of literary works generically called *campu* and minor puranic treatises may be cited as samples of early Malayalam prose.

Dr P J Thomas, author of the monumental work on Christians and Malayalam literature has summarised the contributions of Christians to Malayalam language under five headings. They are:

- i. evolution of powerful prose style
- ii. development of printing
- iii. development of publishing
- iv. massive improvement of literacy
- v. growth of journalism.

During the colonial period Christians became instrumental in the development of these branches of knowledge industry. Towards the end of the last century and the beginning of the present century, gaining momentum from the above-mentioned sources forces of secularism surfaced in the Kerala Society. *Kandathil Varghese Mappila*, the founder of the *Malayala Manorama* symbolises the role played by Christians at this crucial turn of

events. His newspaper and a literary forum promoted by him called *Bhasaposini Sabha* brought together writers from different religions, castes and regions. The oldest Malayalam literary journal, founded by him, promoted cultural symbiosis, the hallmark of Kerala culture. So for the people of Kerala, especially Christians, transition to the postcolonial period was very smooth in Malayalam language and literature. Christian writers could smoothly join the mainstream of society.

Poetry

Native Christian poets were mainly interested in narrating Bible episodes, especially the story of Christ in neoclassical forms like the Mahakavya. *Kattakkayathil Cherian Mappila*, *KV Simon*, *Puthenkavu Mathen Tharakan*, *Pravithanam Devasia*, and *Mathew Ulakamthara* have produced bhakti kavyas without attempting reinterpretation. Many other Christians have proved their ability in versification but very few have established themselves as poets in Malayalam. *Sr Mary Beninja*, *CA Joseph*, *Cherian K Cherian* and *George Thomas* have manifested poetic genius through their lyrics. Among all the Christian poets *George Thomas* has a special place, as his poetic language is studded with biblical images and signs.

In this respect he is surpassed only by non-Christian poets like *Vayalar Rama Varma*, *ONV Kipurup*, *Sachidanandan*, *Balachandran Chullikkadu* and *Nellikal Muraleedharan*. It may be noted that most of these poets draw inspiration from the Marxian world view.

Impact of Marxism

The impact of Marxism in Kerala and its reflections in Malayalam literature are too well known. Most of the well established Christian writers in Malayalam came under the spell of Marxism. The authoritarianism and servility rampant in many traditional churches of Kerala promoted eminent writers like *Ponkunnam Varkey* and *CJ Thomas* to echo the famous words of *Prometheus* as quoted by *Karl Marx*:

'I shall never exchange my fetters for slavish servility. It is better to be chained to the rock than bound to the service of Zeus'. (Marx and Engels, *On Religion*). For them freedom is the basic purpose and incentive of human life or is the supreme value. Modern feminist writers like *Gracey* and *Sara Joseph* represent this mood in contemporary fiction.

Fiction

As for veteran novelists like Ponjikkara Rafi and Parappuram their Christian knowledge and formation, enabled them to depict the emotional chains of Christian characters. *Kakkanadan*, *Zachria* and *John Abraham* are obsessed with the guilt consciousness of Christians. *E M Kovoov*, *Muttathu Varkey*, *Kanam*, *E J*, *J K V*, *George Onakkoor*, *T V Varkey*, *Mathew Mattam* and *Joseph Mattam* are popular Christian novelists. *CL Jose* is popular as a dramatist. In the field of literary criticism *M P Paul* and *Joseph Mundasserry* are regarded as 'master builders'. *I C Chacko* and *P C Devasia* are regarded as grand masters of the Sanskrit language and literature. *Dr K M George* and *K M Tharakan* have made substantial contributions to the study of literature.

A casual glance through the popular periodicals in Malayalam may bring to our notice names of several Christians serialising novels in them. They are very popular writers. But usually they are not regarded as literary masters. Most of the Christian writers, who appear only in Christian periodicals are also not counted as serious literary figures. Some of them may be living on writing, but not regarded as writers. This is a topic that is usually debated in forums of Christian writers. Many of them would consider this religious discrimination. To me, it appears, that they are denied accreditation as writers, simply because their works are lacking in literariness.

Secularism

Personally speaking, I am reluctant to segregate Christian writers of the twentieth century as a special group and to deal with their works separately. The forces of secularism are so strong in contemporary Malayalam literature that the best literary compositions manifesting Christian motifs and values are produced mostly by non-Christians. *Vallathol Narayana Menon*, *Kainikkara Padmanabha Pillai*, *G Sankara Kurup*, *Edasseri Govindan Nair*, *Vayalar Rama Varma*, *ONV Kurup*, *Vishnu Narayan Nampoothiri*, *Sachidanandan*, *Balachandran Chullikadu*, *D Vinaya Chandran*, *M T Vasudevan Nair*, *N S Madhavan*, *C V Balakrishnan* and *K P Appan* manifest more christianness in contemporary Malayalam literature than most of the Christian writers.

Dr P J Thomas, who composed the most authoritative work on Christians and the Malayalam language refused to describe separately the contributions of Christians to Malayalam literature in the twentieth century. His argument was that such a listing was irrelevant as Kerala society has entered the age of secularism. The modern literary texts of Malayalam, especially intertexts, amply justify the view of this veteran scholar who loved both Christians and Malayalam.

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