

Research in Progress

Asian Christian Writers in the 16th-18th Centuries

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3. A SELECTION FROM INDIA

I. Sixteenth to seventeenth centuries

Indian writings in these centuries include letters, catechisms, verse, narratives, hagiography, treatises, dialogues, poetic songs and biographies.

1. Amongst the **letters** are those of four bishops in Malabar to Patriarch Mar Elias (1504) and by Mar Jacob of Cochin to John III of Portugal (1524 and 1530). These recount the earliest contacts—both in friendship and contention—between the Syro-Malabar Christians and the Portuguese.

Conflicts resulting from western intervention in doctrine, liturgy and leadership are illustrated in letters by Mar Aithalaha of Mylapore to Archdeacon Palliveetil in 1652; by Mar Gregorios to Syrian priests in his diocese in 1668; and in letters written from Malabar to Rome in 1658 and 1659 by the priests Jacob, Zachariah, Thomas, Paulos, Luka Alexandros and others.

Other letters of historical or cultural value, many of them in Indian languages, include those of Henry Henriques (fl.1550), Robert de Nobili (1577-1656), Thomas Stephens (fl.1610), Balthazar da Costa (fl.1640), Emmanuel Martins (fl.1656) and Jerome Xavier (b. 1649), Jerome Rodrigues (fl.1770), Andrew Lopez (1644) and Anthony Proenca (fl.1665).

2. **Catechisms** extant include:

A Tamil Catechism written by three Tamilians (Lisbon, c.1550). This is the first printed book in Tamil (Roman characters) and was assisted by the Franciscan Joao de Vila de Conde.

Tambiran Vanakkam, A Shorter Catechism (Quilon, 1578) and *Kirisittiani Vanakkam*, A Larger Catechism (Cochin, 1579) by Henry Henriques. These are the earliest books to be printed in Tamil characters, still extant.

Christian Doctrine in the Konkarni Language by Thomas Stephens

(published post-humously in 1662), reprinted by M. Saldanka, Lisbon, 1945.

Gnanopadesa Kandam (Large Catechism of ‘Spiritual Teaching’) parts I-V (a total of 1620 pages, c.1638-42) by Robert de Nobili. Reprinted, Tuticorin, Tamil Literature Society, 1963-1966.

3. Of the **verse narratives** extant, the most notable is the *Ramban Song* (The Thomas Parvam). This exists in many ancient traditions and is believed to originate from a disciple of St. Thomas. It recounts the coming of Thomas to India, his travels, and the founding of many churches and ends with his martyrdom at Mylapore in the year 72. Printed in *Orientalia Christiana* 32, 1933.

An unusual example of works by Brahman poets upon Christian themes is the narrative of the Thomas tradition written in Telegu by Pingali Ellana-reyudu (c.1603) and entitled *Tobhya Carita*.

4. The most widely known work of hagiography of the period is probably *Flos Sanctorum* in a Tamil version of 668 printed pages, by Henriques (Punnaikayal, c.1586)—“the greatest attempt of the sixteenth century to express Christian thoughts through the medium of Tamil”. In addition to catechisms, Henriques produced the first Tamil grammar and dictionary, along with booklets on doctrine and the life of Christ.
5. The most prolific writer of treatises in these two centuries was Robert de Nobili 1577-1656. (The consolidated listing of his works totals 38 volumes.) In prose verse and dialogue from these include:
 - Nittiya Jivana Callabam* (Dialogue on Eternal Life) and *Kaduwil Nirnayam* (Theodicy), both in Tamil, and written to stimulate Hindu interest in Christianity. Reprinted TLS, Tuticorin, 1964 and 1969.
 - Sesunathat Sarithiram* (Life of Christ) and *Devamatha Sarithiram* (Life of Our Lady), both written in Sanskrit by 1612, and reprinted by TLS, Tuticorin, 1964.
 - Attamia Nirmayam* (Science of the Soul), in Sanskrit and Tamil. A philosophical treatise on the origin and end of the human soul. Pondicherry 1899, TLS, 1967.
 - Mathasampanda Sallapam: un mathanamma?* (What is your religion?) c.1620. Considers the signs of true and false religion. Pondicherry, 1915.
 - Dushana Dhikaram* (Refutation of Calumnies) i.e. against Christianity, 1641, written for those already using the first volume of his catechism. Reprinted at Tuticorin, TLS, 1964.
6. *Christa Purana* (Christian Stories of Old) by Thomas Stephens (1616) is a long poetic work written in traditional form and metre in Marathi

and Konkarni. In almost 11,000 strophes this presents Roman Catholic teaching through the story of the Old Testament and of the Life of Christ, but also evinces concerns shared by such reforming Swamis in Maharashtra as Ekanatha (1549-1599). Reprinted 1649, 1654, 1907, 1956 and Bombay 1965.

Other Purana were later written by, for example, Etienne de la Croix (1629) and Antonio de Saldanha (1655).

7. Among the **biographical fragments** for Christian Indians which are available from letters and reports in the period, are those concerning *Anandu* of Thanjavur, found in a series of letters by Martins, da Costa, Lopez and Proenca (1639-1660). He emerges as a zealous lay 'pastor', and, despite continuing personal misfortunes, devoted to serving poor 'pariahs' and the burying the victims of pestilence.
8. A discussion on Hindu and Christian beliefs between a Christian and a Hindu Brahmin was written in Bengali ca. 1680 by an Indian catechist, alleged to be the son of the king of Benares, Dome Antonio do Rozario (Prince of Bhusanar). Its full title is *Portugaler Antarpatti Avorar Sadharan Granthaloyayey Rakshita Puthi Haitey Kalikata Visya Vidyalayayer Adhyapak O Senateyer Sadashya* (Argument and Dispute upon the Law between a Roman Catholic Father and a Brahmin). A MS of 100 pages, it was printed in Lisbon 1743 and by Calcutta University in 1937.

Other expatriate scholars in the period who have left studies of Indian languages include for Kannada, Leonard Cirinoma (d.1644); for Konkarni, the prolific Gaspar de S. Miguel (fl.1640); and for Hindustani, Francis Mary of Tours (fl. 1680)

II. Eighteenth century

Many of the same literary forms continue to be used with the addition of diaries, histories, travelogues and further varieties of exhortation, homily and poem.

1. *Narrazione* (Diary of Principal Events), begun by Ildefonso and others in 1653, continues with little interruption as a chronicle of the Carmelite mission in Kerala until 1740. (Rome, 1936-1939)
2. Among the correspondence extant from this century is a rare series of *letters from Mar Thoma IV* (1686-1725), head of the Jacobite community in Malabar, to Antioch, Leiden and Batavia. These are in Syriac and contain notes on the history of the Malabar churches, along with requests for the sending of bishops and priests and for Dutch help against the Portuguese clergy. They clearly preserve in concepts and

language ancient traditions of the East Syrian Churches. Written 1709, 1713, 1715, 1717, 1720 and 1728. Printed in part in Leiden, 1714 and 1863.

3. *Jacome Goncalvez* (1676-1742), of Goa and Ceylon, has left fifteen books in Tamil (apart from those in Sinhalese noted under Sri Lanka above). These include:

-*Christiyana Alayam* (The Christian Treasure House). Octavo MS 1725—"possibly the oldest prayerbook in Tamil now extant". Includes catechism and meditations.

-*Dava Arulveda Puranam* (Compendium of Sacred History). The Biblical story in verse, interspersed with doctrinal sections. Two volumes, Folio 1725, printed Madras 1886.

-*Suwishesha Viriturai* (Explanation of the Gospel for Sundays) —"with moral implications". Quarto 1728, printed in 1848.

-*Viyakula Pirasangam* (Sermons of the Passion). Quarto 1730, printed 1844. Still being used in Ceylon, in mid-20th century.

-*Gnana Unartchy* (Spiritual Exhortation). Fourteen doctrinal sermons on the soul, conversion and human destiny. Written in 1734, printed in 1844.

-*Sugurda Darpanam* (Mirror of Virtues and their Practice)—"with mystic and polite precepts". Octavo, 1736. Printed 1914.

-Five other volumes, written 1715-1738, contain arguments against Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Calvinism.

The extensive correspondence of Goncalvez has also been published by V. Perniola, Colombo, 1983.

4. Another Brahman poet writing, in Telegu, on Christian themes was Mangulgiri Ananda-Kavi (fl.1790). His *Vedanta-rasayana* presents the life of Christ and the doctrines of the Christian Church for the Hindu convert to Christianity.

5. Writings in Malayalam on Christian faith and practice in this century include:

-*Sankshe Pavedartham* (On the Christian Life) by Kathanar Clement (1772).

-*Gnana Muthu Maala* (Pearls of Wisdom), an anonymus MS written on palm leaf (1784). This comprises a series of exhortations for the Christian life written in a style similar to the Biblical Proverbs.

-A similar palm leaf MS, *Christogita* (Song of Christ) gives the life and work of Christ. Both printed by Kerala State Archives, Trivandrum, 1966 and 1972.

-*Vedatarkam* (On Doctrinal Disputes) by Kariattil Malpan Joseph (1768). This was written to attempt a reconciliation between various Keralese communities then in discord.

-The *Varthamana Pusthakam* (Kariattil Malpan's Roman Journey) by Paramakkal Kathanar Thoma (1788) is an impressive travelogue of an eight-year journey to Rome and back in order to gain freedom for Syrian Christians from 'Latin' Bishops, written in 562 pages of lucid prose. Including few western idioms, it also argues strongly for the independence of Indians from foreign domination.

6. Amongst expatriate writers in vernacular languages, some also showed considerable knowledge of Indian culture and religion:

-The oldest book printed in Malayalam is the *Symbolum Apostolicum in Lingua Malabarica* (1713) which with other Christian publications then "began a modern era for Malayalam literature".

-*Thirty-four Conferences Between Danish Missionaries and the Malabar Brahmins*, London, SPCK, 1719, records the frank exchanges and also letters arising from the Tranquebar Lutheran Mission, which prefigure much later debate.

-Veeramamunivar SJ (Joseph Constantuis Beschi) utilized many Hindu theological conceptions as a means of Christian teaching in *Thembavani*, an Epic on the life of Joseph in Tamil (c.1710). Arnos Pattiri (John Ernestus), in the same period, wrote many long poems on Christian themes in Malayalam, Bartolomaeus Ziegenbalg wrote *Angnanam Eathanai Aruwarukkappaddathakka Karyam Entrum* (How the Heathen Too Could be Saved) in 1713.

A brief note is necessary concerning the large number of **Syriac and other manuscripts** which were written, copied and/or translated between 1504 and 1760, and which are still held in Kerala libraries. These include letters, Gospels, commentaries, liturgical MSS, apologies for the Church of the East, and anthologies from the third to the fourteenth centuries. Among many Indian writers, copyists and compilers recorded in MS colophens are Mar Jacob (1504), Jacob Malpan 'of Malabar' (1556), Mar Joseph (1567), Mattai Panorkidan (1584), Metropolitan Simon (1701), Deacon Abraham of Mudurute (1734), Mar Iwannis (1749), and Jacob Julius (Konat) (c.1790).

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