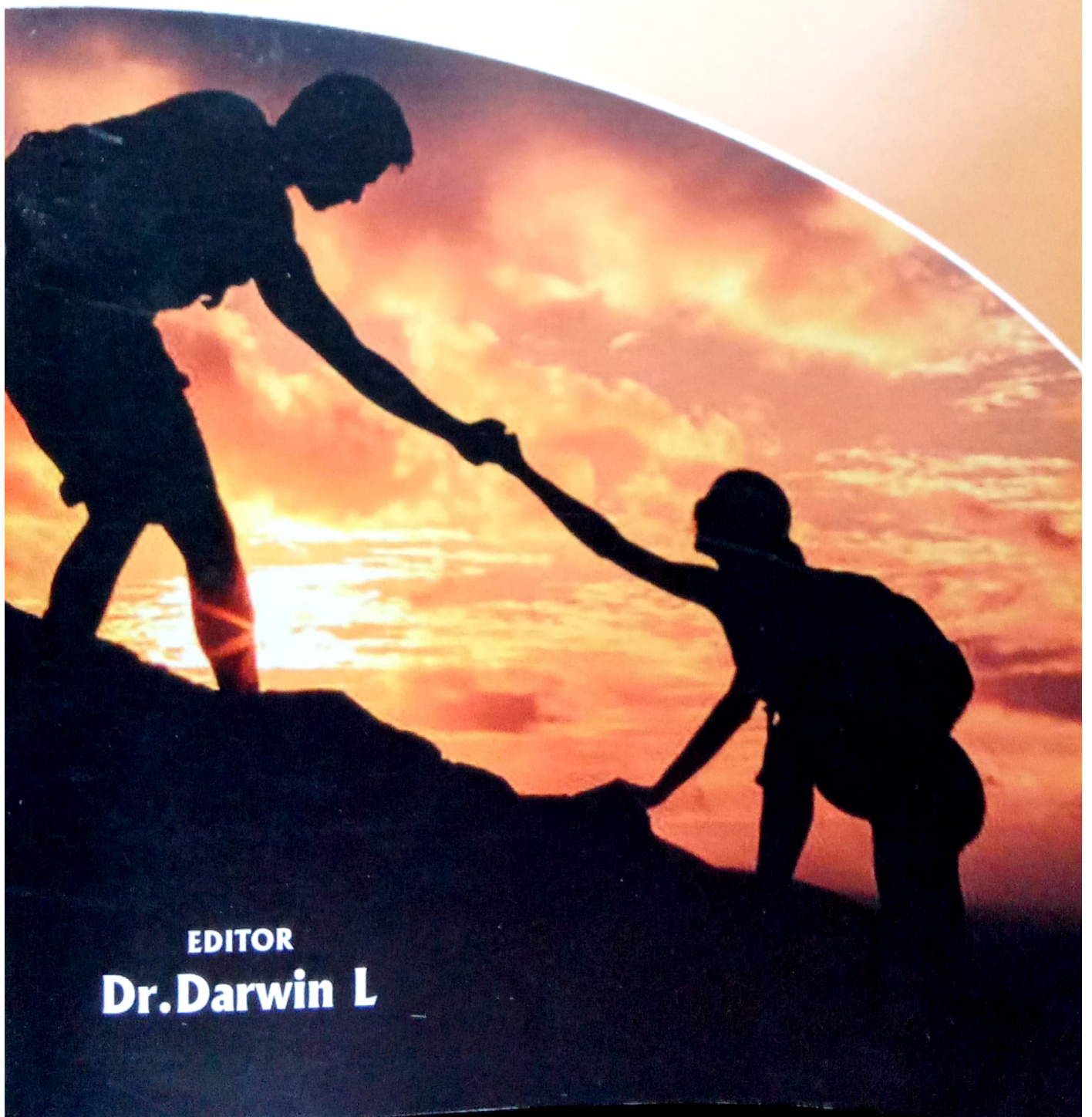


CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY CONTRIBUTION TO THE UPLIFTMENT OF KERALA SOCIETY



EDITOR
Dr. Darwin L

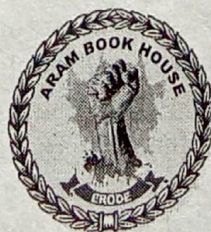
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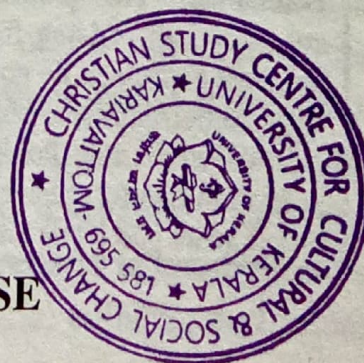
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**Christian Study Centre for Cultural and Social Change
University of Kerala
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HISTORICIZING MISSIONARY CONTRIBUTION TO THE MAKING OF MODERN KERALA

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I am going to talk on the relation between missionary work and history making of modern Kerala. Kerala's engagements with the Missionary past have been discoursed more as a civilizing act of charity and as the vehicle of modernity. Generally speaking the conventional belief is that the modern Kerala was shaped by the missionary modernity. In the discussion on the transformation of Kerala society, Christian Missionary Contribution had been accounted as a primary source by focussing that it induced Social Reformations, Cultural Changes, Economic empowerment, Education and Literacy, Healthcare and Services, Politics and Administration, Language and Literature, Mass Media and Journalism. Ignoring the traditional manifestations of knowledge heritage, the constructive systems of knowledge in religion, science, and technology were endorsed with the Missionary works. Their contributions have been widely observed in the major domains such as History/ Ethnology, Theology, Linguistic resources, Folklore materials, Textbooks, Translations and Prose and in the introduction of printing technology. This way of narrating the positive dimensions of missionary contribution is in vogue in Kerala context. It is more specifically based on the tradition of representing the missionary past through looking history, Influx of ideas, Image flow, reality and representations and Public experiences.

As parallel to the above way of looking at the missionary past, critical look is also developed globally on the missionary past. Such

critical way of reorienting and historicizing the missionary encounters is also valid to mention here. Christian study centre for cultural and social change, University of Kerala has the academic responsibility to be aware about the pluralistic understanding on the missionary encounters emerging globally. It is envisaged that this center's major responsibility is to sculpt out the distinctive features of Kerala's engagements with its missionary past to position Kerala context with its distinction or to endorse the global framing of the world experiences.

To encourage discussion and critical thinking regarding the roles of Christian missionaries in shaping society from a multi-disciplinary perspective based on representing the missionary past is inevitable. Engagement with the missionary world of objects and ideas, social lives and cultural biographies of ideas etc are specifically focussed in critical discourse studies. The interactions between the missionary past and the present are distinctively viewed as the missionary encounter of revelation and revolution separately. Christianity, Colonialism and modern consciousness in Kerala needs to be critically assessed based on the Missionary engagements like Transport of ideas, principles of faith and the meaning of life associated, vanished practices/ replacements etc. In fact Missionary past is a mono signifier with multiple signifieds embedded. Genres of discourses, Inter-textual practices brought together the work of linguists, government officials, and missionaries to achieve the widespread institutionalization of colonial power became one of the potential understanding. Even the ecclesiastical history can be looked into a textual tradition on the making of Kerala.

Indeed, Missionaries on holy assignments has been critically understood of had both political as well as religious intentions. As their moral obligation to transform the local's supposed sinfulness and backwardness by inculcating them with the signs of a perfected language, religion, and racial consciousness remains the balance sheet.

Thomas R Trautmann had elaborately discussed on the production of new knowledge in British India for the needs of colonial governance by evaluating the Missionary past and the present colonial language products. For good of the colony, the lexical, orthographic, and typographical forms, metalinguistic commentaries, citation practices, dictionaries, and grammars were produced. Missionary Orientalism had kept in mind to prove the local language had lack of conformity with Latin, theologically deficient and appeared sinful. The missionaries worked hard to rectify such imperfections by producing dictionaries, and grammars and translations. Thomas Trautman recognised it as grammar factory which was a new ethnological project, "impulse to blanket the world in grammars and dictionaries". How grammars and dictionaries represented as instruments of colonial rule that transformed indigenous forms to textualized knowledge is also recognised.

When we look at the Missionary ecosystem, various strands with diverse focus can be understood. Portuguese Jesuits (16-18C) were interested on religious conversion, British missionaries (18C) were focussed more on language and ethnological study mostly to modernize and French (18-19 C) Catholicism had advanced the scientific study of Indian languages and peoples. Indeed, the Catholic and Protestant missionary, Portuguese, Italian, and French Jesuits, Danish Lutherans had imperialist agendas of religious and commercial to execute. Thus to historicize the missionary practices and to interrogate its relation to major processes such as the colonial and racial interaction, the construction of new social and political institutions, scientific advance and identity formation is no doubt significant to revisit from the conventional discourse.

Missionary work had created trans-regional cultural formations, enabled alternative worldview which otherwise disconnects people of

the region from their ethnic and cultural ethos. It also had created two cognitive maps one the invaded and uprooted the other. Much of the discourse devoted on the emancipation from Social oppressiveness and Vedic social hierarchy. This claim of social emancipation was challenged by the social reformer PoykayilAppachan who zealously criticized the issue of social equity claimed by the missionaries by exposing the prevalence of caste structure among the Christian enclave. His vehement criticism made him to quit Christianity and to establish a casteless commune of slave class as a rupture to the colonial missionary practice. By realizing that the holy bible is not an instrument of social emancipation for the subaltern, he was the first one in India who burnt bible. This kind of streams also to be studied in deep by the center of Christian studies. Also, part of the missionary encounter, Christian literature had created two streams. One on the localisation of Bible and associated productions and other as anti Hindu discourses (sanchariyute prayanam, nalacharithasaraparishodhana, daivavicharana (Herman Gundart), Anjanakootaram, kuruttuvazhi, marujanmam, salgurulabham, sathyajnanodayam, samayapareeksha etc.). Anti Christian literature (Jnanodayam, kristhumathachedanam) also were appeared. This way of making presence in the encounter context needs special attention in academic endeavours of the center.

The Sanskrit strata of local language ensured continuity of the hegemonic Brahmanical values were ruptured by the missionary intervention which in turn catalyzes the social transformation. Introducing methodologies (foot notes, punctuation etc), Planning Vernacular education, Text book culture, Introducing Print culture, Linking the global to the local through Knowledge transmission, familiarising the Translation culture, Education methodology, Localization of western Knowledge etc were positively appreciated.

Printing technologies engendered an epistemological shift among the local folk which ended the elite scribal transmission of knowledge practice. The scientific authority was attained through the process of printing books in local script which otherwise baptised locals into the European traditions of writing by declining the reputation of palm leaf manuscripts and handwritten documents permanently. It had created discontinuity in scribal traditions, oral elicitation and text memorization and reoriented the goals of education toward the acquisition of grammar. They learned to view their languages from a foreign perspective as something to be “acquired, manipulated, and reformed” rather than used practically or venerated. The interaction of religions with contrasting codes of belief and practice has provided rich examples of how the construction of identity through difference, or ‘otherness’ has occurred. It was argued that missionaries had disparaged and undermined indigenous cultures in ways that made them complicit in colonial domination.

There is observation on Missionaries as cultural imperialists who had disparaged and undermined indigenous cultures in favor of colonial rule. Christian missionaries were not just the bearers of Christian ideology or merely the media of modernity. They were also the human vehicles of a hegemonic and sometimes altruistic Victorian-missionary worldview. The whole missionary enterprise was an attempt to replace and supplant one type of hegemony with another. The missionaries were not only the vanguard of the British presence. They were also the most active cultural agents of the empire. They were driven by the explicit aim of reconstructing the Kerala in the name of God and European civilization. The interactions between the representatives of western values and the Keralites raised a new cultural dialogue and resistance as well as complicity at the same time. It also needs to be noticed that the material evidences like experiences of texts and images remained imprinted in public memory.

Here, we should remember that, historically, missionary encounters have not been graciously conceded in currency. So continue to remain with traditional way of understanding and interpreting missionary past will not be industrious. It should be studied multidisciplinary ways in order to expose the distinctive and universal value of missionary experiences of Kerala. Let me conclude, by appreciating the organizers who has shown interest in unravelling the plurality of missionary encounter in Kerala through this seminar. Hope this seminar would be a brainstorming experience for one and all.

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