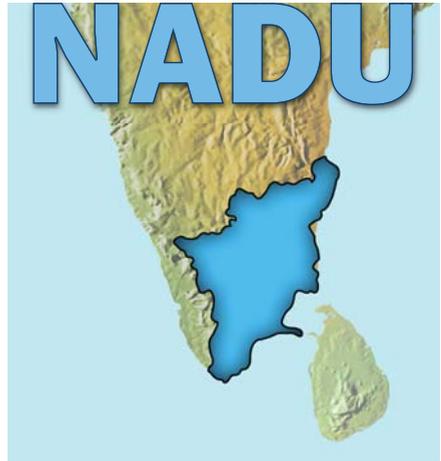


TAMIL

NADU

The Land of the Tamils



Part 1

by C. P. Hallihan

The 'country article' in *Quarterly Record* 553, October to December 2000, was an ambitious attempt to cover all of India. There was surprisingly (disappointingly?) little reference to the Tamil people, language and Scripture.¹ Recent events and crossing of paths at Tyndale House have stirred up renewed interest and research.

■ The Catalyst

During a recent trip to Tyndale House, where my office door still identifies me as Librarian, I was asked to speak with a visitor in the library about 'old Bibles', a not infrequent request. In the library I was introduced to David Jerald from Tamil Nadu, who did indeed want to talk about old Bibles. He also told me that since 1964 his father, followed by him, had been an

enthusiastic supporter of TBS and valued our material for their work. The Jeralds are involved with India Bible Mission, and I give my summary of his own subsequent e-mail description of the work.

India Bible Mission is a Baptist Evangelistic Ministry with a network of two hundred Bible Baptist Churches and three Bible Schools. The vision is to reach the millions of needy, poor and deserted children, helpless

widows and suffering, forsaken

patients by establishing churches, orphanages, schools, colleges, hospitals and Social Service centres, and to make literate the millions still living in spiritual darkness.

India Bible Mission desire to bring non-believers to Christ, and to teach and train workers. Last year over one hundred



**David Jerald
with his wife**

pastors and workers were sent out into areas where there are no Christians so that God's Kingdom is established more and more in India.

We spoke about Tamil Bible versions, and I pulled a copy from the library shelf to show him. 'This isn't Tamil!' was his heart stopping response. What incompetence of

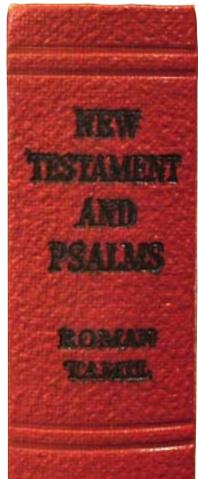
Roman Tamil New Testament open at Hebrews 1



language recognition, classifying and cataloguing had I perpetrated? A few anxious moments resolved the problem—the particular copy that I had pulled was Tamil in Roman script. He was then as pleased as he was surprised, and was even more pleased to learn that we had stocks of these Roman Tamil New Testaments in hand for which there seemed to be no call. He promptly called, and told us of their potential usefulness in Tamil-speaking areas outside of India. This started a line of enquiry for me, resulting in this article, but before going to the article there is another delightful e-mail to be shared in part. This is from a friend in Cambridge, who also knows the Jeralds. He visited the UK in 1962, presumably from South India, where he had knowledge of the Roman Tamil New Testament.

[I] had to travel via the Cape because the Suez Canal had still not been fully cleared. The ship was to call at Durban where a brother from the Baptist Church was working as a missionary amongst the Indian population there, using English medium. He introduced me to some of the Tamil Christians there who were fascinated to talk to a white man in their own vernacular. In the course of my visit I learnt that they were singing Tamil Christian songs. Although they spoke the language they had not been taught the script, so I enquired how they managed to sing the lyrics. 'We have a song book', they told me, and showed me a copy. To my surprise it used ROMAN TAMIL script, so I asked whether they had Scriptures in the same format. 'Sadly, no, but we would love to read the Bible in Tamil', they told me. I wrote back to Madras and pressed for the unused Testaments to be sent to the Republic of South Africa, which I believe was done. I do not know the current situation there but D. Jerald seemed to think that younger Tamil-speaking (but not users of the script) residents in the Sydney area of Australia might also appreciate Roman Tamil literature.

And that, dear readers, is the genesis of this account, written with much holy surprise and gladness, and renewal of the desire to publish and distribute the Holy Scriptures throughout the



1956 publication in Tamil by the TBS (detail of spine)

world and to be instrumental in bringing light and life through the Gospel of Christ to those who are lost in sin and in the darkness of false religion and unbelief.

■ Tranquebar and Ziegenbalg

Any inquiry into the history of the work of the Gospel in Tamil Nadu quickly brings into view the town of Tranquebar, and the missionary Bartholomaeus (Bartholomäus) Ziegenbalg. The name Tranquebar is a Danish rendering of the Tamil Tharangambadi ('place of the singing waves'), which is now the modern name of the town. Situated on the Coromandel Coast of south-east India, the town was founded in 1620, centred on Fort Dansborg, a commercial settlement of the Danish East India Company. In the Danish era, Tranquebar was a busy port, taken by the British in 1801, restored in 1814, and then bought back by the British, along with other Danish interests, in 1845.²

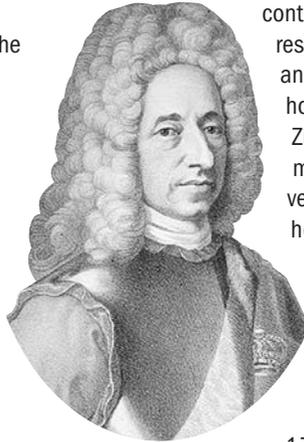
Frederick IV, King of Denmark (1699–1730), had a strong Christian interest in his overseas colonies. He was strongly influenced by his chaplain, a follower of Philip Jakob Spener, author of *Pia Desiderata*. The 'Pietist' movement which grew from this work in Lutheran Europe had simple but plain priorities: personal conversion, personal holiness, fellowship and witness as the bedrock of Christian experience, profession and life. King Frederick determined to send missionaries to Tranquebar. Response to

his call came from Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, who was born in Pulsnitz, Saxony, on June 10, 1682, and Heinrich Plutschau. These were two German Lutheran students from Halle University, then the centre of Lutheran Pietism, where A. H. Francke was teacher. In July 1706 Ziegenbalg and Plutschau arrived in Tranquebar, the first Protestant

missionaries in the Indian sub-continent.³ Danish authorities resisted the work, and Hindus and Roman Catholics brought hostile pressure to bear; but Ziegenbalg was popular with many Tamils because he was very sympathetic to them and he stood up to the Danish governor Hassius, who was widely unpopular for his iron-fisted rule. The two pioneers laboured in the Gospel, recognizing the first Indian converts in May 1707. Heinrich Plutschau returned to Europe in 1711, but

Ziegenbalg persevered until 1714, when official animosity obliged him to visit Europe for two years.

His European 'break' resulted in the appearance of a college of missions in Copenhagen, later a home-from-home for Moravian students. He also 'provoked' (Hebrews 10.24) the founding of the Order of the Mustard Seed at Halle, the first Protestant student missionary society, and that under the leadership of Nicholas, Count Zinzendorf! Bartholomaeus also acquired a wife before returning to Tranquebar in 1716. For three short years he resumed his ministry amongst the largely Hindu Tamils.



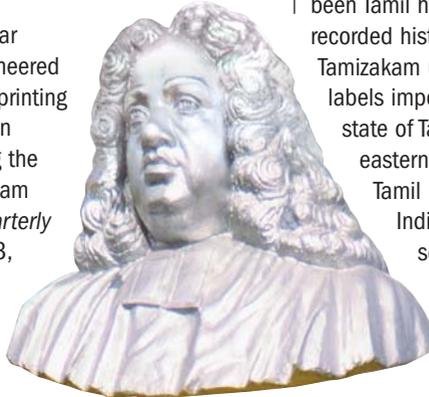
Frederick IV

Several principles characterised the work:

- education and Christianity go together, for Christians must be able to read God's Word
- the Word must be available in the local language as quickly as possible
- preaching and teaching must be based on accurate insight into the worldview of the local population
- the goal of the missionary work is personal conversion
- an indigenous church must be started as quickly as possible.⁴

In Ziegenbalg's views of Hindus he does stress their moral standards, and invariably contrasts this with the degenerate lifestyle of the supposedly Christian Europeans in Tranquebar, a cause of great resistance to conversion on the part of the Hindus.⁵

At Tranquebar Ziegenbalg pioneered the use of the printing press in mission work, preparing the ground for William Carey (see *Quarterly Record* no. 553, October to December 2000). He was acutely conscious of the importance of print in the history of the Protestant Church, thankful for it and its impact on the Reformation. Serampore had become an outpost of Danish Tranquebar by 1799, and when Carey was in great need the Danish mission effectually gave him both Serampore and printing technology. Their



Ziegenbalg

mission principles would not have been too far out of agreement either. Suffering, as missions did and do, from inadequate support, and refused recognition by the Copenhagen Missionary Society, Ziegenbalg was dependent upon the direct support of churches and friends. When he died in 1719 he left a widow, two sons, and a vast mission and Scripture heritage to the Tamil people and to the Christian world. He has a still acknowledged place in the history of Tamil and Hindu studies, and some of his works are still extant.

■ **Tamils: Who, Where, When...?**

Geography

Tamils can be defined as people having Tamil, a Dravidian language, as their mother tongue; South India and Sri Lanka have been Tamil homeland from the beginning of recorded history. It is identifiable as

Tamazakam up to c. AD 900, and by various labels imposed by others until the modern state of Tamil Nadu. Lying on the south-eastern coast of the Indian peninsula, Tamil Nadu, eleventh largest state in India, covers an area of 50,215

square miles (130,058 sq. km.). In the west and north are high hills, in the east and south are large, fertile areas along the Coromandel Coast, the Palk Strait and the Gulf of Mannar.

Tamil Nadu reaches the southernmost tip of the Indian Peninsula at Kanyakumari, meeting point of the Arabian Sea, the Bay of Bengal, and the Indian Ocean.

A high proportion of India's mineral reserves are in this traditionally manufacturing state. Tamil Nadu, also a



kingdoms—Chera, Chola, Pandya and Pallavas—by the 9th century there was an empire reaching to Bengal and parts of Sri Lanka. Tamil navies went far beyond, attacking coastal Burma, Sumatra, Java, parts of Malaya and many other island

territories. The Tamils were great temple builders, and Dravidian architecture reached its zenith during the 6th to 9th centuries.

Decline came through the 13th century, and in 1316 Muslim Khilji invaders from the north sacked Madurai. The ensuing Madurai Sultanate conquered the entire Tamil country by 1370.

leading agricultural producer, is the sixth most populous state in India, and Chennai, the state capital (Madras before 1996), is the fourth largest city in India. Chennai/Madras lies on the 13th parallel, roughly similar to Manila, Bangkok, Aden or Managua. In British colonial times Tamils migrated to other British colonies for employment, so that there are significant Tamil populations in Malaysia, Singapore, Mauritius and South Africa. Since World War II there has been a 'brain drain' of Tamil professionals to the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand.

History

Tamil Nadu has been inhabited since ancient times, with literary and cultural traditions among the oldest in the world. Anciently home to four powerful Tamil

In 1498 Vasco da Gama was the first European to set foot in India by a sea route. The Portuguese were in the vanguard of European exploration,⁶ closely followed by the Dutch. Vasco's Portuguese settled in Goa, already the largest trading centre on India's western coast, because the Portuguese wanted control of the spice trade, the land routes to India having been closed by the Ottoman Turks.

In 1522 the Portuguese landed also on the east coast, the Coast of Coromandel. The greater environs of the Portuguese west coast colony were referred to as Malabar; the highland region between Malabar and Coromandel became



Vasco da Gama



An early painting of Fort St. George

known as the Carnatic: any of these labels can be found as vaguely (and confusingly) referring to Tamil peoples and/or land from the 16th to 19th centuries. A Dutch settlement was established in Pulicat (north of Madras), and in 1639 the British East India Company established Fort St. George further south.⁷ They subsequently consolidated southern India into the Madras Presidency. Danes settled in Tranquebar in 1620, but that has a section of this article all to itself.

After the first Carnatic treaty of 1756 British influence in India grew towards full rule, and the Regulating Act of 1773 made the administration of Madras dependent on the British Government. In 1876 Victoria was flattered by Disraeli into the title of Empress of India, and the Indian Councils Act of 1892 completed the political framework of Imperial suzerainty. When India became independent in 1947, Madras Presidency became Madras State, comprising present-day Tamil Nadu, coastal Andhra Pradesh, northern Karnataka and parts of Kerala. This state was subsequently split up along linguistic lines. In 1968, Madras State was renamed Tamil Nadu, 'Land of Tamil'.

Religion

Hindus are reckoned to be over 80% of the population of Tamil Nadu; Christians and Sunni Muslims make up most of the remaining 15% to 20%. Buddhism and Jainism, both derived from Hinduism by reform or by divergence, now have a very small presence. Historically, Hindu, Buddhist and Jain were more evenly represented, and a vast polemical literature extended over one thousand years as each sought the adherence of more followers. Eventually a thoroughly syncretistic form of Hinduism, Saiva, began to be accepted as the Tamils' own home-grown Hinduism. Islam came initially by Arab traders settling and intermarrying, accomplishing a Tamil- and Malayalam-speaking community. Later Muslims invading from the north were Urdu speakers, but today some of these speak Tamil, too. It is interesting that so many local rulers installed in Colonial times were Muslim *nawabs* and *nabobs*.⁸ Being so much the cultural religion of the Tamil people, Hinduism needs a closer look.

■ Hindu Religion

Statistics

Adherents to Hinduism make up around 15% of the world's population, but the influence of Hindu teachings is much more pervasive than can be shown in numbers. Most Hindus, more than seven hundred million, live in India, well over 80% of the population. Hindus also have a significant presence in Bangladesh, Bhutan, Fiji, Mauritius, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Surinam and Trinidad. More than two million Hindus live on Bali, even though Indonesia as a whole is predominantly Muslim, and there are

more than one million Hindus in North America. Nepal, birthplace of Siddhartha Gautama—the Buddha—was, in the 1990s, the only constitutionally Hindu nation.

Overview

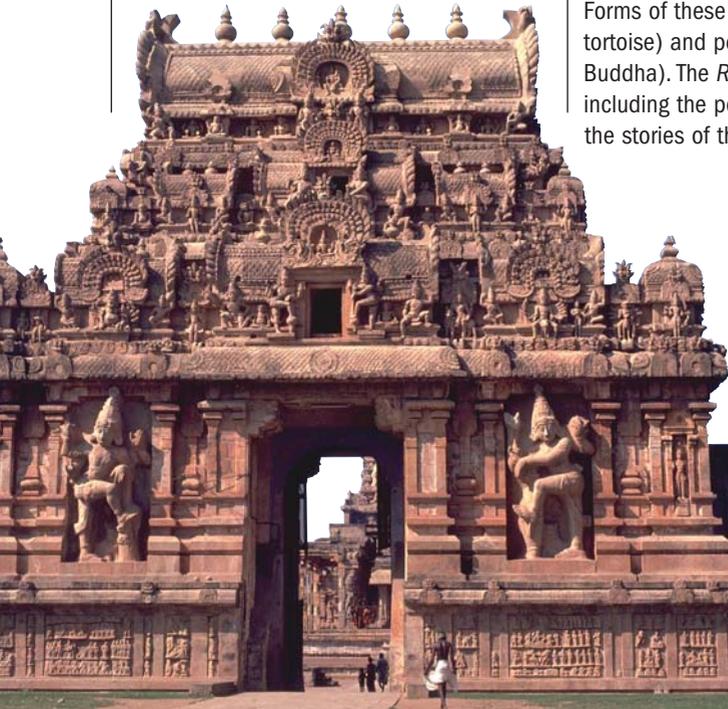
Hinduism can be traced back to around 1500 BC in India as a polytheistic and ritualistic religion. As the rituals became increasingly complex, priests emerged to perform them correctly. The *Vedas* were written to give instruction as to how to perform the rituals, and priests gained increasing power and control over the people. Around 600 BC, the people rebelled, and the forms of Hinduism after the revolt emphasised the importance of internal meditation as well as the rituals.

Between 800–300 BC the *Upanishads* were written. These, also called *Vedanta* ('the conclusion of the *Vedas*'), expound the Hindu idea that behind the many gods stands one Universal Reality, Brahman, an impersonal, monistic force. The highest form of Brahman is *nirguna*, meaning 'without attributes or qualities'. Hindu concepts of God continued to develop. God could be personal: Nirguna Brahman became Saguna Brahman, Brahman 'with attributes'. This personified form of Brahman, called *Ishvara*, was known through the *Trimurti*, 'three manifestations' of Brahman. These were Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver, and Siva the Destroyer. Each has at least one *devi*, or spouse.

There were the ten further mythical incarnations of Vishnu, called avatars. Forms of these include animals (fish, tortoise) and persons (Rama, Krishna, Buddha). The *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, including the popular *Bhagavad Gita*, tell the stories of these myths.

Beyond these it is estimated that there are three hundred and thirty million gods in Hinduism. Hinduism is divided along the lines of whether the physical universe is real or illusory. Along the course of history Hinduism has gendered three other movements: Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism.

10th century Hindu Temple at Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu



Summary Teachings

■ Impersonal Nature of Brahman.

Hindus see ultimate reality as an impersonal oneness, beyond all distinctions, personal or moral. Since Brahman is an impersonal force of existence, the universe is seen as being continuous with and extended (extruded?) from the Being of Brahman.

■ Brahman/Self Identity.

Hindus believe that in their true selves they extend from and are one with Brahman. As air inside an open jar is identical to the air around that jar, so 'self' is identical to the essence of Brahman.

■ Karma.

Mankind's essential problem, according to Hinduism, is that we are ignorant of our divine nature. We have given ourselves to the selfish desires of our separate selves, and, inevitably, the consequences. Mankind is subject to the law of karma, a moral law of cause and effect: we reap what we sow. This reaping, however, is not only for the present, but from lifetime to lifetime.

■ Samsara (Reincarnation).

Samsara is the ever-revolving wheel of life, death and rebirth. We reap in each lifetime the consequences of the deeds of previous lifetimes. A person's karma determines the kind of body—human, animal, insect—into which the next reincarnation will be.



Siva, one of the Hindu gods

■ Deliverance.

You might well exclaim 'Who then can be saved?' The solution in Hinduism is to be liberated (*moksha*) from the wheel of life, death and rebirth. This is attained in realising that the concept of self is an illusion; only the undifferentiated oneness of Brahman is real. One must detach oneself from the desires of the self, so attaining enlightenment. Three paths to enlightenment are offered: *karma marga* (the way of action and ritual), *jnana marga* (the way of knowledge and meditation), and *bhakti marga* (the way of devotion). Enlightenment is for the individual self to lose its separate identity in the universal Self.

Hindu Scriptures

The earliest of the Hindu scriptures are the *Vedas*, books of knowledge. These are four: the *Rig Veda*, the *Sama Veda*, the *Yajur Veda* and the *Atharva Veda*. Each *Veda* is also divided into fours: the mantras, basic verses or hymns sung during the rituals (also called *Samhitas*); the *Brahmanas*, explanations of the verses; the *Aran-Yakas*, reflections on the meaning; and the *Upanishads*, mystical interpretations.

These are called *shruti*, 'that which is heard.' *Shruti* literature is the Hindu equivalent to revealed scripture. Besides these there are also secondary writings, *smriti* or 'remembered', a body of 'saga' tradition.

The most popular of these is the *Bhagavad Gita*, featuring Krishna. While the *smriti* scriptures are not as authoritative as the *shruti* scriptures, they have exerted



The Rig Veda in Sanskrit

much more influence on the culture of India because of their popularity. Other *smriti* scriptures which may stir a warning note in those looking at the pseudo-spirituality of modern religions include *Sutras* (ritual of social conduct) and *Tantras* (how to manage occult power).

Apologia

The intent of this slightly extended treatment of Hinduism is to underscore the past and present climate in which the Gospel was and is to be preached, the Bible taught and circulated and, by the Grace of God, souls saved, and churches planted and maintained in Tamil Nadu. General religious adherence amongst the Tamils, apart from the Gospel, is mostly Hindu, and even this scanty look at Hinduism must surely stir the spirit to cry out in ringing gratitude for the Gospel and the Scripture of Truth, and the heart to be poured out before the Lord of the Harvest still for labourers, whilst it is called Today. In that ancient system there are indeed the broken and much distorted fragments of true knowledge, bearing a crooked witness still to One God and our sundered relationship with Him. There are slim points of appeal, such as Ziegenbalg, Carey, Martyn and Judson, too, were able to use. But the points of contrast for the Christian are even more dramatic: our personal God, personal forgiveness and individual love (called and saved by name). Any look at Hinduism must also stir our anxiety as we see its themes taken up by the Western world and heralded as real spirituality: many paths to God; must follow my own karma; the Christian Cross is violence, an offence to God and Man; good as He may have been Jesus is not unique; 'holy' writings are inspiring rather than

inspired, and may 'inspire' each of us differently. Pray for Tamil Nadu, and all who labour there for the furtherance of the Gospel, preached and published; but never think that the same devouring enemy of souls is not amongst us. The themes sketched here are leaking into the Western 'church' world, as the authority of Scripture, the centrality of preaching and the need for personal salvation are ignored or abandoned.

[Part 2 will follow in the January 2008 issue of the *Quarterly Record*.]

■ Endnotes

1. However, interested readers would still find some of the information and maps in that article and in the Carey article (*QR* 554, January to March 2001) useful background, and even parts of the article on Henry Martyn (*QR* 562, January to March and *QR* 563, April to June 2003).
2. All along the Coast of Coromandel Danish, Dutch, French and Portuguese settlements alternated with British in the 16th and 17th centuries, changing hands from time to time: sometimes peaceably, sometimes not! The commercial rivalries and competition were inextricable from the Protestant/Catholic strife.
3. On such information as I have, it would seem that they were the first Protestant overseas missionaries anywhere since the French Huguenots went to Brazil in 1550.
4. The first Indian pastor was ordained in 1733: Ziegenbalg did not see it.
5. I'm not quite sure how 'moral' he viewed *suttee* and the caste system to be; maybe the inwardness of his underlying individualistic pietism enabled an overlooking of such things. Not so with Carey and Martyn!
6. It should not be forgotten that whenever European 'exploration' east of Suez was accomplished from about 1500 on, throughout Asia there already were scattered Syrian and Armenian communities and Orthodox Churches *in situ*, some with one thousand plus years of near continuous history.
7. Possession of Fort St. George was aggressively disputed between the British and the French East India Companies for a century, and in the crazy way of European politics the treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle at the end of the War of Austrian Succession in 1749 settled Fort St. George in India as British. The aggression didn't end though, as the history of Shropshire-born Clive of India, 1725–74, makes only too plain.
8. Synonymous Urdu words derived from Arabic *na'ib*, a deputy.