

Volume 1, Issue 1 (April 2024)  
ISSN 3049-9704

# Journal of Religion

# and Public Life





RESEARCH ARTICLE

## The Tamil Library in Tranquebar (1708) and its Significance

Professor Daniel Jeyaraj<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Historians of libraries have thus far asserted that the library of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (1784) and the Calcutta Public Library (1836) are the forerunners of public libraries in contemporary India. By contrast, this essay presents the Tamil Library (Bibliotheca Malabarica) in Tarangambādi (Tranquebar) in 1708 as the first public library of modern India. The essay gives an overview of German Lutheran Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719) work of cataloguing the extensive literature contained in the library, concluding that the historic memory of the library Tamil Library can powerfully speak to the current conditions and use of public libraries in our places.

**KEY WORDS:** Tamil literature, History of libraries, Indian Christians

### Introduction

Historians of libraries have thus far asserted that the library of the *Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1784) and the *Calcutta Public Library* (1836) are the forerunners of public libraries in contemporary India. By contrast, this essay presents the *Tamil Library (Bibliotheca Malabarica)* in Tarangambādi (Tranquebar) in 1708 as the first public library of modern India. It started a process by which common people from all walks of life could have access to the “local gateway”<sup>2</sup> to accumulated and classified knowledge. Until the dawn

---

<sup>1</sup> Daniel Jeyaraj is Professor of World Christianity and the Director of Andrew F. Walls Centre for the Study of African and Asian Christianity at Liverpool Hope University.

<sup>2</sup> The *International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions* and *UNESCO Public Library Manifesto 1994* (<https://repository.ifla.org/bitstream/123456789/168/1/pl-manifesto-en.pdf>) stresses the indispensability of public libraries for the holistic development of individuals and their societies: a public library serves “as the local gateway to knowledge”; it “provides a basic condition for lifelong learning, independent decision-making and cultural development of the individual and social groups”. It ensures “equality of access for all, regardless of age, race, sex, religion, nationality, language or social status.”

of eighteenth century, most of the libraries, owned by Buddhists<sup>3</sup>, Jains<sup>4</sup>, Śaivites<sup>5</sup>, Vaiṣṇavites, Muslims<sup>6</sup>, and others<sup>7</sup>, remained largely private. In this context, the foundation of the first public library in the Danish colony of Tranquebar opened a new chapter in the history of libraries in India.

### Origin of Tranquebar as a centre for Danish trade and Tamil Lutheranism

In November 1620, King Ragunātha Nāyak of Tanjore and Ove Giedde, the commander of a fleet belonging to the Danish East India Company established a trade treaty. Accordingly, the Danes received the small sea-shore town of Tranquebar and began developing it into their centre of trade and diplomacy. According to the trade treaty, the Danes had the right to freely practice their *Religion of Ausburgia* (i.e., Lutheranism). First, they built a fort and named it Dansburg; their utter dependence on their Indian employees prevented them from establishing a separate place of worship. These employees included Indian trade partners, revenue collectors, soldiers, police, spies, and providers of diverse services. In 1701 they dedicated their Zion Church for Danish worship services. In 1702, the walled city of Tranquebar had 6,047 inhabitants; about 14,000 people lived in fifteen villages that belonged to Tranquebar. By 1712, the inhabitants of the city of Tranquebar included twenty-four Danes, 100 Portuguese, 500 Portuguese-speaking Tamil Roman Catholics, 2,000 Muslims; but most of them were either Śaivites or Vaiṣṇavites or worshippers of several guardian deities and had fifty-one temples at their disposal.

Obviously, the established West European principle of governance, namely *Cuius regio, eius religio* ("whose realm, his religion") of the Peace of Augsburg (1655), did not work in Tranquebar; the Europeans, most of whom were Lutherans, were already "secularised". They kept their religious identity private. These Europeans did not learn

---

<sup>3</sup> Until the fifth century CE, the Buddhist university library of Taxila (in modern Rawalpindi District of Punjab in Pakistan) served as storehouse of intellectual and cultural exchange between Indians, Persians, Greeks, and others. Likewise, the university library at Nalanda (near modern Patna in Bihar, India, from 427 to 1197 CE) housed large collections of manuscripts on various subjects of human endeavour. The decline of these public libraries in subsequent centuries weakened the intellectual, cultural landscape of India.

<sup>4</sup> The Jain libraries, known as *jñāna bhandār* ('knowledge storehouses') and often housed in their ornate temples, were well-known for their collection and preservation of manuscripts on their teachers, histories, theologies, philosophies, rituals, jewels, statues, and other art works. The Svetāmbara and Digambara groups of the Jains maintained their own libraries. For example, the medieval Jain libraries in Pātan and Vallabhi in Gujarat and Mathura in Uttar Pradesh serve as representative examples.

<sup>5</sup> Local temples, monasteries (*maṭams* in Tarumapuram and Tiruvāvaṭuṭurai near Tranquebar), and seminaries of the Śaivites and Vaiṣṇavites possessed valuable manuscripts.

<sup>6</sup> Since Babur's time (1525 CE), the Mughal libraries played an important place in administrative headquarters; they preserved sacred texts, records of income and expense, seals, inscriptions in Persian, Arabic, Turkic, and Urdu manuscripts on geography, mathematics, astronomy, warfare, diplomacy, paintings, art, and architecture. Particularly, in 1605, the Akbar's Imperial Library in Delhi is said to have contained more than 24,000 volumes of manuscript records. There the young persons in the royal households received their education and training required for aristocrats, and revenue and military officers. Mughal ways of record keeping involved specialists such as information gatherers, writers, copyists, printers, binders, translators, sellers, and the like.

<sup>7</sup> Local religious leaders, landowners, practitioners of native medicine (Siddha or Ayurveda) kept palm leaf manuscripts and viewed them as sacred. They prevented outsiders from even seeing them.

Tamil and avoided direct social contact with them; the Tamil too did not wish to have direct contact with the Europeans, who ate beef, drank alcohol and were licentious. Consequently, the Tamil and the Europeans maintained diverse prejudices: for example, the Europeans believed that the Tamil were underdeveloped, uncivilised, lazy, and dishonest. On the other hand, the Tamil viewed the Europeans as the most foolish, corrupt, inhumane, irreligious, ill-educated, greedy, unjust, immoral and irresponsible people.

In this context, the landing of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719) and Heinrich Plütschau (1677–1746) in Tranquebar on 9 July 1706 marked a milestone in the history of Protestant Christianity in India. These two young men were German Lutheran pietists. King Friedrich IV of Denmark sent them as missionaries to see whether the Tamil inhabitants of Tranquebar would embrace Lutheranism. They faced initial resistance not from the Tamil people, but from fellow Europeans. Contrary to the prevailing custom, the missionaries met the Tamil people where they were, began learning their language, read their writings, studied their religious beliefs, observed their rituals and festivals, and became their critical friends (*ciṇēkar*). They respected the residual “image of God” among the Tamil and used it as a steppingstone to lead them to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. In this process they helped them to think differently; consequently, the New Jerusalem Church, which they founded in 1707, became the centre of their socio-cultural life; they learned to make informed decisions, act on them, and remain responsible for all consequences. The missionaries worked with a few Tamil persons, who helped as informants and interpreters. Two months after their arrival, Ziegenbalg reported on 25 September 1706 the following:

The Tamil people are very intelligent. If they heard how the learned scholars in Europe teach from their pulpits the subjects of logic, rhetoric, and metaphysics, they would ridicule and laugh over it. They would also consider this art of teaching as the greatest folly and the most unfortunate thing on earth. By contrast, they love free, unrestrained, and informative lectures. They reject all kinds of figurative speech because they think that the time spent in speaking strange and colourful words can profitably be used to search for truth. I earnestly desire to understand their secrets (Ziegenbalg 1957: 40).

Ziegenbalg continued reading various Tamil works and familiarised himself with the basic vocabulary and their nuanced usage in the daily life of the people. The more he read various Tamil writings and interacted with the Tamil, the more he changed his opinion about them. In his attempt to convey his transformed positive evaluation of the Tamil people, he translated in 1708 three works on Tamil morality, namely *Ulakanīti*, *Koṇraivēntaṅ*, and *Nītivenpā*, and dedicated his translated texts to various members of the Danish Royal Household. In his foreword to *Nītivenpā*, he narrated his opinion about the Tamil, which can be paraphrased as follows:

Most Europeans opine that the Tamil are an extremely barbarous people who do not know anything about the one true God. They also assume that the Tamil do not study academic subjects, do not follow good customs or virtues. This misconception comes from the fact that some Europeans who had written about the Tamil did not know their languages or read their books. They derived their conclusions from their observations. I must confess that, at the time of my first arrival in Tranquebar, I too thought that the Tamil language was without logical grammatical rules and that the Tamil lived an unorganized life and did not follow any civil codes of conduct. In the beginning, I observed what they did or omitted, arrived at wrong ideas. For this reason, I excuse those Europeans who have never known the Tamil personally and are prejudiced against them. Before I lived among them, I too entertained similar misconceptions. However, after I have learned to speak their language, at least to some extent, and to discuss with them all kinds of subject matters, I gradually gave up my wrong ideas. I learned to understand the Tamil better. Finally, when reading their books, I realized that they have an orderly way of teaching complex philosophical doctrines and other disciplines. These subjects resemble the disciplines, which the learned Europeans discuss (in their academies). Additionally, the Tamil have many written religious scriptures and derive their theological ideas from them (Halle Reports 1882a: 44-5; Ziegenbalg 1930: 11-12).

Ziegenbalg's positive assessment of the Tamil attracted the attention of his readers in Germany. One of them requested Ziegenbalg to give additional information about the common books, which ordinary Tamil were reading. In 1709, Ziegenbalg sent his answer to this person. His answer can be summarised as follows:

The Tamil possess written scriptures and books for several thousand years. One can find them in cities, towns, villages, schools, in other places, where the children practice reading and writing. They include books on nearly all subjects that are being studied in Europe, namely books on theology (*vēta cāttiram*), ethics (*griha cāttiram*, "household etiquette"), art of debate (*tarkka cāttiram*), science of oratory (*cāturya cāttiram*), poetical compositions (e.g., *pañcalaṭcaṇa cāttiram*, "treatise on five poetical characteristics"), philosophy (*lōka cāttiram*, "treatise on worldly matters"), geography (*pūmi cāttiram*, "treatise on earth"), medical science (*vaittiya cāttiram*), politics (*nīti cāttiram*), mathematical sciences (*jyeṣṭha cāttiram*), astronomy (*naṭcattiram pārkkira cāttiram* ("treatise on observing the stars"), musical science (*parata Cāttiram*), alchemy (*irācavittai*), geometry (*kaṇita cāttiram*). Besides, the Tamil have books on countless other sciences and disciplines including Blackmagic (Halle Reports 1882b: 127).

Ziegenbalg's translation of some subject names (e.g., ethics, physics, mathematics, geomatics, music, and the like) are not accurate by modern standards. He

summarised the local knowledge that he had absorbed in Tranquebar. His Tamil informants would have explained to him their understanding not only in Tamil, but also in Portuguese or German, in which they were not proficient. In any case, he made Tranquebar the main hub, from which intercultural communication between India and Germany about the Tamil, their language, culture, and other peculiarities continued for nearly 150 years.

### Origin of the Tamil Library as a public library (1708)

In August 1708, Ziegenbalg sent a list of 119 Tamil books that he had read and annotated to Franz Julius Lütken, the court preacher in Copenhagen. He entitled this list as *Bibliotheca Malabarica* (“Tamil Library”). This library was the third public institution that Ziegenbalg and his Tamil followers founded in Tranquebar: on 14 August 1707, they dedicated a small building for Christian worship and social gatherings, and they named it *The Jerusalem Church*. About 100 Tamils belonged to this church. They persuaded Ziegenbalg and Plütschau to establish a school for their children. Accordingly, on 28 December 1707, they started two Tamil-medium schools, one for girls and the other for boys. This school for girls was the first of its kind. It was unheard of anywhere in Tamil-speaking regions of southern India. The Tamil Library met the academic needs of the school children. The members of the church and the public of Tranquebar had free access to this library.

Ziegenbalg’s list of Tamil books astonished and shocked not only Lütken, but also other mission authorities in Halle (Saale), Germany. They did not expect to receive a report on Tamil literature that would refute their assumption about the Tamil as unlettered and uncivilised people. Therefore, they did not publish it; fortunately, they kept it in the *Mission Archives of the Francke Foundations* in Halle (Saale), Germany (AFSt/M 2A6:4).<sup>8</sup> After 192 years, Wilhelm Germann (1840–1902), one of Ziegenbalg’s well-known biographers, discovered and published it in 1880. Subsequent generations of scholars on Tranquebar Mission and Tamil Literature forgot it for seventy-nine years. In 1959, Professor Arno Lehmann (1901–1984) at the Martin Luther University Halle–Wittenberg rediscovered it; he introduced it as the *Newly Discovered Handwritten Manuscript of Bibliotheca Malabarica* (Lehman 1959: 903–906). Ten years later, Albertine Gaur found another copy of Ziegenbalg’s Tamil Library in the British Library (Sloane 3014) and published it twice as *A Catalogue of B. Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library* (1966) and *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's Verzeichnis der malabarischen Bücher* (1967). In 2012, Will Sweetman, with the help of R. Ilakkuvan, translated Ziegenbalg’s German text into English and published his version as *Bibliotheca Malabarica: Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library*. For English readers, Will Sweetman’s translation remains useful. It outlines the nature and scope of the Tamil Library as follows:

<sup>8</sup> This manuscript contains Ziegenbalg’s long letter of 22 August 1708 to Lütken. The actual text of the Tamil Library is missing.

The Bibliotheca Malabarica is an annotated catalogue of Tamil texts collected by Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, a Protestant missionary in Tranquebar, between July 1706, when he arrived in India, and August 1708, when he sent the catalogue to Europe. The catalogue consists of 165 entries in four sections, covering Protestant, Catholic, “heathen,” and Muslim writings respectively. The third section is by far the longest, containing 119 entries for works of Hindu or Jaina provenance. After compiling the catalogue, Ziegenbalg continued to collect and a survey of his other works and letters reveals that he mentions in total no fewer than 170 Hindu and Jaina texts” (Sweetman 2012: 1).

Gaur and Sweetman devoted their attention to the third section that dealt with 119 Tamil works. They did not discuss anything about Ziegenbalg’s narratives about books on other themes that were in his library. The omitted books included various works on Tamil Lutheranism, Roman Catholicism, and Islam. Additionally, Ziegenbalg’s library also possessed European books on diverse themes that have not been considered by scholars until now. For the present purpose, a summary of these sections would be sufficient and those who wish to engage with them at a greater depth can pursue the summary further.

### Section 1 of the Tamil Library

The first section contains fourteen writings on Lutheranism: 1) A conversation between a Christian and a non-Christian about the foundational teachings of Lutheranism; 2) Martin Luther’s Small Catechism; 3) Several hundred questions and answers about baptism; 4) Administration of the Last Supper according to the rites of the Danish Church; 5) A collection of twelve worship songs; 6) A book on pronouncing forgiveness for confessed sins; 7) 26 Sunday Sermons on important themes about Lutheranism; 8) Fourteen weekly sermons held on Fridays; 9) A dialogue on Lutheranism between Ziegenbalg and his non-Christian Tamil discussion partners; 10) A book with more than 200 ethical principles; 11) Moral theology (*Theologia Moralis*) with 398 life principles; 12) Sixteen conversations about Lutheranism; 13) a lexicon for words used in Tamil prose, and 14) a lexicon for words used in Tamil poetry.

Of these writings, information about the lexicons with words for Tamil prose and poetry were fully published during Ziegenbalg’s lifetime in the famous Halle Reports (Volume 1: 31–33). I, the author of this essay, have deciphered and critically evaluated the Tamil text of the *Moral Theology* from a palm leaf manuscript. In 2017, the Tamil University of Tanjore published it (Jeyaraj 2017).

### Section 2 of the Tamil Library

The second section of the Tamil Library contains Ziegenbalg’s reflection on the works by Roman Catholic missionaries. By chance, he discovered a library in Tranquebar that possessed the palm leaf manuscripts of these works, mostly written by Jesuits such as

Henrique Henriques, Roberto de Nobili and others. Ziegenbalg gave detailed accounts of five books that he had already read. As a child of his time he doubted the truthfulness of these works by Roman Catholic authors; yet he appreciated them for writing them and collected them for his public library. This list of books proceeds as follows: 1) Gospel Readings for Sundays; 2) History of 27 Saints; 3) A book on Prayers for Nuns and Monks; 4) a Report of Don Peter's Travel in Upper Asia; 5) a book on Astronomy that rejected the popular notion and practice of astrology. Ziegenbalg confessed that he had not read eleven works that contained narratives of miracles, prayers, and saints. Particularly, four Tamil books were composed by Catholic Christians: *Jūliyaṅ Ammāṅai*, *Icakkī Ammāṅai*, *Aticaya Kāṅṅam*, and *Kīristu Ulā*. These works were example of cross-cultural transfer of knowledge that was essential for a flourishing society that provided options, which people could freely choose for a responsible living.

### Section 3 of the Tamil Library

This largest section contains Ziegenbalg's annotated list of 119 Tamil works. Two months after his arrival in Tranquebar, Ziegenbalg reported on 16 September 1706 that he began collecting various Tamil works. He did not spare money in getting Tamil books, either bought or copied. His language teachers copied some books for him. His friends such as Aḷakappaṅ, and Peter Malaipayppaṅ could procure additional books on popular piety, stories, and morality. People who kept palm leaf manuscripts as secret and sacred treasures, were apprehensive of Ziegenbalg as a missionary and were unwilling to entrust them to him. This is one of the reasons that his library could not get any Tamil works belonging to *Caṅkam*-period.

*Tirukkuraḷ*, which Ziegenbalg called *Tiruvalḷuvar*, was an exception. He appreciated the ethical and moral teachings of *Tirukkuraḷ* that defined the personhood of the Tamil people. He compared its teachings with that of Greek book of Sirach in the Bible and of the Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca (ca. 4 BCE – 65 CE). Ziegenbalg wondered how some Tamil, like his 70-year-old blind teacher could recite the couplets flawlessly from memory. He estimated that *Tirukkuraḷ* would have been written around 200 CE. Secondly, Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library did not possess all sacred writings of either the Śaivites (e.g., 12 *Tirumuṅai*) or the Vaiṣṇavites (e.g., *Nālāyira Tivviyaṅ Pirapantam*). However, it had a copy of Māṅikkavācakar's *Tiruvācakam*. Ziegenbalg stated that how the Śaivites recognised it not only as their sacred scripture, but also as a Code of Conduct.

Thirdly, Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library contained a copy of the Tamil epic [*Cīvaka*] *cintāmaṅi*. There was no mention of the remaining four Tamil Epics, namely *Cilappatikāram*, *Maṅimēkalai*, *Vaḷaiyāpati*, and *Kuṅṅalakēci*). Ziegenbalg commented that [*Cīvaka*] *cintāmaṅi* was a large book with stories, parables, information about science, and the like. Only learned people could understand. Most of these missing or forgotten books came to broader light about 150 years later, when U.V. Swaminatha Iyer (1855–1945) collected Tamil manuscripts in different parts of Tamil Nadu.



Fourthly, Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library did not possess written works on Tamil medicine such as *Citta Vaittiyam*. Preparation of medicine remained a guarded secret within the same families. It was seldom revealed to outsiders. However, in 1712, Ziegenbalg's colleague Johann Ernest Gründler convinced a local Tamil doctor to disclose to him description of various diseases and their treatment. His manuscript entitled *Tamil Doctor (Medicus Malabaricus)* has recently been discovered; its condition is poor, and the old ink ate up some pages. However, it still awaits scrutiny by Tamil medical specialists.

Ziegenbalg's library contained copies of Tamil works on grammar (e.g., *Tolkāppiyam*, *Naṅṅūl*), lexicons (e.g., *Tivākaram*, *Cūṭāmaṇi Nikaṇṭu*), morality (e.g., *Nīti Cāram*, *Mūturai*, *Nalvaḷi*, *Ātticūṭi*, *Ulakanīti*, *Koṅṅrai Vēntaṅ*, and *Nīti Veṅpā*), popular epics such as *Kamparāmāyaṇam* and *Makāpāratam*, *Purāṇas* (e.g., *Kantapurāṇam*, *Ariccantiraṅ Purāṇam*, *Tiruvātavūrār Purāṇam*, and the like), drama (e.g., *Nīli Nāṭakam*), etiquettes (*Ācārakōvai*), philosophy (e.g., *Civavākkiyam* and *Tattuva Viḷakkam*), stories (Nalaṅ Katai, Kucalavaṅ Katai, *Cittira Puttiraṅ Katai*). This library also possessed literary compositions in the genres of *Ammāṇai*, *Antāti*, *Kalampakam*, *Piḷḷaitamiḷ*, *Ulā*, and *Vaṅṅam*.

Ziegenbalg's annotated list of books was a work in progress. He never claimed that he had obtained copies of all available works in Tamil. However, his list helps us to gain an insight into what ordinary Tamil were reading in the beginning of eighteenth century. His efforts to gather what was scattered in different households and to keep them in a single place for public use were laudable. This library must have been a countercultural force that encouraged the habit of reading and literacy among all sections of the Tamil community.

#### Section 4 of the Tamil Library

Until now scholars have not engaged with Ziegenbalg's list of eleven Tamil writings on Islam: 1) *Āyira Macalā* (literally: Ayromuschala). Vaṅṅapparimaḷappulavar seems to have been its author. According to Ziegenbalg's annotation, this book contained 1000 songs about the teachings of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam; school children in Muslim schools learnt these songs by heart and thus imbibed Islamic theology. 2) *Culaimāṅ Katai* (literally: Tschugawiliman kadei) narrates in greater detail the life and teachings of a holy prophet named *Culaimāṅ* and the Muslims esteem this greatly. 3) *Mukamatu Katai* consists of a detailed history of Muhammad, the prophet of Islam; the Muslims view this book as their code of conduct. 4) *Islām Cuvaṭi* narrates the history of a holy Muslim man. Ziegenbalg stated that he had to get his writers to make a copy of this book, which missed both the beginning and ending. Muslim poets esteemed this book greatly. 5) *Cēṭṭu Katai* (literally: Tschettakadei) is a sad and wailing story about a holy man called *Cēṭṭu* (literally: Tschettadu). 6) *Piḷḷai Kavi* contains songs and rhymes appropriate for young children. It teaches Islamic theology. 7) *Noṅṅi Kavi* critiques the uselessness of dances. 8) *Kācimpaṅraiēṭu* (literally: Kasinbareiweddu) narrates the heroic acts of (Muhammad Bin) Qasim. Ziegenbalg added a note saying that Muslims had many such books.

9) *Narapatimālai* (literally: Narabadimalei) describes the teachings of the Quran. Ziegenbalg noted that he could get only half of this book copied. 10) *Periya Tūvā* explains Islamic ceremonies. Usually, the priests have a copy of this book. When they perform funeral services, they sing the songs found in this book. It contains many Arabic words. 11) *Napi Ulā* contains songs about the prophet Muhammad and many other saints. The school children sing it with a specific melody and memorise them. Ziegenbalg added the impact of such signing on children so that he introduced this way of singing to the children in his schools.

### Growth of the Tamil Library

Ziegenbalg and his Tamil partners enlarged the holdings of the Tamil Library. By October 1709, he reported that the Tamil Library had 300 Tamil works. Regrettably, he did not provide a list of the additional books. In 1711, he compiled a book on the Tamil Society, which the author of this present essay translated as *A German Exploration of Indian Society: Ziegenbalg's "Malabarian Heathenism": An annotated English translation with an introduction and a glossary* (2006). Its chapters include references to and quotes from Tamil books. To understand the thought and behaviour patterns of the Tamil better, Ziegenbalg and his colleague Johann Ernest Gründler wrote letters to various Tamil scholars in and outside of the Kingdom of Tanjore. One of these scholars seems to have been the above-mentioned interpreter *Aḷakappan*. These scholars responded to the questions raised by the missionaries and sent their answers to them. Ziegenbalg and Gründler chose ninety-nine of these letters and translated them into German. The famous *Halle Reports* published them as *Malabarian Correspondence* (1712–1714). The author of this present essay translated these informative letters from German into English and published it in 2013. Its title reads as follows: *Hindu-Christian Epistolary Self-Disclosures: 'Malabarian Correspondence' between German Pietist Missionaries and South Indian Hindus (1712–1714)*. The missionaries, for example, asked a Tamil scholar about the books that were commonly available in his place. In his reply, he named the following books and Ziegenbalg annotated them briefly:

Tēvāram, Tiruvācakam, Civapōtakam, Viḷakkoḷi, Tiruvaḷḷuvar, Nāṇapōtakam, Civakavacam, Tēvikavacam, Vaḷāppattu, Aṇṇacāsttiram, Apirāmiyantāti, Kācikāṇṇam, Periyapurāṇam, Viruttāccalapurāṇam, Kantapurāṇam, Tiruveṅkātṭuppurāṇam, Mūtūrpurāṇam, Mārkantapurāṇam, Vātūrpurāṇam, Ēkātacipurāṇam, Irāmāyaṇam, Pālakāṇṇa Irāmāyaṇam, Pāratam, Intiracittuppaṭalam, Kumpakaruṇapaṭalam, Iraṇiyaṇ Vataippaṭalam, Irāmaceyam, Irāmavatāram, and Kiruṣṇāṇ Tūtu.

It is worth noting that each palm leaf manuscript was considered a separate, independent book even though it may have been just a part of a much larger work such as *Irāmāyaṇam*. These references prove that Tamil society was always a literature-loving

society. By 1712, Ziegenbalg knew that the study of *Vētāṅkam* rested on specialist literature. He also knew that the *Cariyaikkārar*, *Kiriyaikkārar*, *Yōkikaḷ*, and *Ñāṅikaḷ* derived their theological and practical guidelines from written sources. Tamil scholars explained to him the books which they used to train students from learning to read and write to them becoming skilled professors of Tamil literature (*cāstiriyārs*). The students began reading and writing alphabets, words and sayings found in the booklets such as *Arivari* and *Ariccuvaṭi*. By the time they became professors, they mastered the contents of the difficult books such as the *Nikaṇṭu*, *Tiruvaḷḷuvar*, *Nālatiyār*, *Tolkāpiyam*, *Ilakkaṇa Utāram*, *Irāmāyaṇam*, *Pāratam*, and the like. Ziegenbalg explained to his European readers about become a *Cāstiriyār*:

The Tamils call a professor *Cāstiriyār*. This title indicates that the person has mastered certain disciplines. The Tamil do not have any real university as it is usually found in Europe where the professors teach publicly. However, many *Cāstirikaḷ* are here. If one of their disciples wishes to become a *Cāstiriyār*, he must perform ceremonies that resemble the ceremonies that accompany the conferment of a master's or a doctor's degree in Europe.

Even after Ziegenbalg had concluded the translation of the ninety-nine letters, new letters came from learned Tamil scholars. He incorporated some of them to compile his well-known work *Genealogy of the Malabarian Gods* (1713). In 2005, the author of this current essay prepared an English translation of Ziegenbalg's original German manuscript that he had identified in Copenhagen. Its English version reads as follows: *Genealogy of the South Indian Deities: An English translation of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's original German manuscript with a textual analysis and glossary*. This work too contains references to other Tamil books such as *Puvaṇa Cakkaram*.

#### **Library for European Books (1714)**

Just before Ziegenbalg left for Denmark and Germany in 1714, he prepared a detailed list of West Asian and West European books in the library of the Jerusalem Church in Tranquebar. Its Portuguese title reads as follows: *Catalogo dos livros que se achaõ [sic! = acham] na Bibliotheca da Igreja chamada Jerusalem em Tranquebar* ("Catalog of books found in the Library of the Church called Jerusalem in Tranquebar"). By that time, Ziegenbalg realised that the economic, social, and other troubles caused by the administrators of the Danish East India Company had their roots in the decisions of the directors of that company in Copenhagen, Denmark. The governor of Tranquebar carried out their orders to hinder and destroy the works of the missionaries that focused on providing the Tamil inhabitants alternative ways of thinking and living based on Lutheran values. The company wanted to make as much financial gain as possible for the shareholders of the company in Denmark and neglected the welfare of the people of Tranquebar. Hence, Ziegenbalg decided to travel to Denmark and seek the king's

intervention in solving the problem. Since he had already sent his list of Tamil books to the court preacher Lütken, he prepared a list of all the West Asian and West European books on Christianity that he had in his library. He hoped to obtain more books in Europe and bring them to this library.

Thus far, no scholar has examined the bibliographical entries of this list. All books were published in the sixteenth, seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. They are divided into fourteen sections. The first section refers to thirteen Hebrew books related to the Hebrew texts of the Bible. Most of them were published by the biblical scholars attached to the Francke Foundations in Halle (Saale). The second section contains information about sixteen Greek books about the New Testament. The third section counts 126 Latin works consisting of dictionaries, commentaries, geographies, sermons, and the like. A copy of all major Latin works published by the Pietists in Halle (e.g., August Hermann Francke, Joachim Lange, and the like) was in this library. The fourth section gives detailed information about thirty-four Portuguese books about grammar, vocabulary, the Bible, and the like. The fifth section contains five Spanish works. These were about the Spanish language. The sixth section reports nine French works on grammar, vocabulary, and lives of saints. The seventh section informs about 100 English works that deal with biblical texts, sermons, exegesis, reports on various institutions in Britain, grammar, teaching aids and the like. The eighth section contains 296 entries about German books; they were primarily written by the Lutheran Pietists such as Johann Arndt, August Hermann Francke, Philip Jakob Spener, Gottfried Arnold, and the like. They included biblical texts, commentaries, apologetics, and polemics. The ninth section contains eleven Dutch works on the Bible, teachings of the Dutch Reformed Church, and devotional texts. The tenth section refers to six Danish books on personal piety and devotion. The eleventh section contains information about three types of Tamil Lutheran literature:

- i) Three books printed on paper in 1714: a) Martin Luther's Small Catechism, b) Abominable Absence of Salvific Knowledge, and c) the first Five Books of the New Testament.
- ii) Books written on palm leaves: a) a Compendium of Theology; b) 34 Theological Articles; c) The New Testament of the Lord Jesus Christ; d) The Books of Moses in the Old Testament from Genesis to Exodus; e) History of the New Testament; f) the Gospels and Epistles for Feast Days and Special Sundays, g) Christian Morality; h) 26 Sermons on the Christian Faith; i) 11 Sermons on diverse themes; j) 14 Sermons on Theology; k) History of Christianity; l) Skiagraphy of the four main World Religions (i.e., Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Heathenism); m) Church History in Questions and Answers; n) a Common Letter to the Tamil People; o) Diverse Letters to the Tamil people; o) Several Letters from Europe sent to the new Christians of the Jerusalem Church in Tranquebar; p) a Letter from Madras City to the members of the Jerusalem Church in Tranquebar; q) the Way of Salvation; r) the Rites of the Danish Church; r) a Song book conforming to European Music; s) a Song book

conforming to Tamil Music; t) Christian Speeches; u) Brief questions on all Christian Doctrines; v) Catechism in Questions and Answers; w) a Dictionary on paper; x) a Dictionary on Palm Leaves with the root words and their derivations; y) a Dictionary on poetic words; z) a Book on Tamil Maths; z-a) a Book on Tamil Words; z-b) an A-B-C Book with variation of letters; z-c) Christian Rules of Life; z-d) a Tamil Grammar written on paper.

- iii) Books on which we are still working a) a Book on the Missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church; b) a Book on Theology, Medicine, and Philosophy of the Tamil.

The twelfth section contains bibliographical entries about four Armenian Books, namely a song book, a book on meditation, a New Testament, and Thomas a Kempis's Imitation of Jesus Christ. All four books were printed in Amsterdam between 1696 and 1705. The thirteenth section refers to two Malay books: a Malay-Latin Dictionary printed in Rome in 1631 and another book printed in Batavia in 1707. The last section consists of a reference to a single Thai book about Reformed Christianity printed in Amsterdam in 1662.

### **Disappearance of the Libraries in Tranquebar**

Ziegenbalg faced many problems caused by the administrative principles of the Danish East India Company. The administrators were Lutherans. However, when they administered the commercial company supported by numerous Tamil employees (e.g., soldiers, police, spies, service providers), they followed the administrative principles stipulated by the shareholders of the company in Copenhagen. These shareholders had no understanding for the missionary work, and they had asked the governor of Tranquebar, for example, to destroy every attempt of the missionaries to develop their work. Moreover, the commercial and colonial interest of the administrators prevented them from identifying themselves with the Tamil people; they were not required to learn the Tamil language. They could use Tamil interpreters and other intermediaries to oppress other Tamil people. By contrast, Ziegenbalg and his colleagues befriended the Tamil people and interacted with them daily. They sought to empower the downtrodden inhabitants of Tranquebar by providing them education and vocational training; they promoted critical thinking and the importance of making decisions and to stay by the outcome of these decisions. These opposing principles of the missionaries and the colonial administrators collided often.

Ziegenbalg was unable to bear the burden of all problems, became sick, and died suddenly in February 1719; he did not prepare any successor to take care of his library. Most of those German and Tamil leaders who had succeeded him, failed to protect the library. They might not have had enough funds to maintain it. They did not foresee the necessity of understanding of the socio-cultural backgrounds of the Tamil because by that time, they had the first translations of the entire Tamil Bible, systematic theology, and hymns for all occasions. They did not feel the necessity for creative engagement with the Tamil language, literature, and culture. One exception was Christoph Theodosius Walter, a Hebraist. After earning his doctoral degree about the ellipses of the Hebrew language, he

came to Tranquebar as a missionary (1725). In 1731, he prepared a catalogue of the books that were still available in the *Bibliotheca Tamulica* ('Tamil Library'). Sweetman noted that this list included thirteen works on Islam, twenty-nine works on Tamil Roman Catholicism, fifty-two palm leaf books and fourteen paper books on Tamil Lutheranism works, and thirty-three additional Tamil works.

Gradually, the Tamil Library declined. It is possible that this library was housed in a building near the Jerusalem Church, which was eventually whipped away by the waves of tsunamis. For example, the tsunami of 1716 destroyed the ring wall of the city of Tranquebar. Heat, moisture and termites were enemies of palm leaf manuscripts. Above all, lethargy, negligence, and ignorance of the later generations led to the destruction of this library. None of the books in Ziegenbalg's two libraries could survive human negligence. Sweetman, who studied the history of this library, concluded his observation as follows:

Ziegenbalg died in 1719 and his library did not long survive him. In 1726 the missionary Christian Friedrich Pressier reported that most of the manuscripts collected by Ziegenbalg had been stolen and sold. A schoolmaster recalled being present as a boy during the cold season when a box containing the books had been opened and the books used to light a fire. In 1731 Walther repeated this story and added that in the intervening five years worms had taken still further toll of the collection. Thus Ziegenbalg's library finds a place within a long history of the catastrophic loss of Tamil manuscripts, stretching back to the legends of the first two Tamil academies consumed by the sea, and including the loss of virtually all of the supposed 102,000 original *Tēvāram* hymns to white ants, the deliberate destruction of *cittar* manuscripts by Śaiva zealots, the reverent but thoughtless burning of manuscripts which so frustrated U. V. Swaminathaiyar, and the destruction by fire of the Jaffna Public Library in 1981.

In 1813, Claudius Buchanan, a Scottish man filled with zeal to assist Indians to attain greater levels of civilisation, wrote an essay entitled *Natural History cultivated by the Protestant Missionaries in India*. It referred to Dr Christoph Samuel John (1747–1813), who worked as a scientist-missionary in Tranquebar and influenced the beginning of modern education in the Tamil regions. This essay included references to Ziegenbalg's *Tamil Library*: when John came to Tranquebar in June 1771, the *Tamil Library* contained "a whole press of ancient manuscripts on palm leaves" on Sanskrit religions. Vedas, Shastras, medicine, and the like.

Buchanan particularly highlighted Johann Ernest Gründler's *Medicus Malabaricus* ('Tamil Doctor', that he wrote in 1712 and is still unpublished) and Ziegenbalg's *Mythologia Malabarica* ('Tamil Mythology / Religion', namely the *Genealogy of the Malabarian Gods*, 1713). He pointed out "many more relics of botanical observations, with other testimonies of the many labours and attentions of the older Missionaries in different sciences". Then, he added the following depressing news about the negligence and decline of this precious

library: "But by the inclemency of the climate, and the want of means to preserve, and pay due attention to these literary treasures, a great deal has been unhappily lost. However, what was still legible has been copied, and made use of in later times."

Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library disappeared in Tranquebar; but its impact and legacy continued for a long time. For example, Ziegenbalg's information of this library impressed his European readers in Germany, Denmark, and England to such an extent that some students desired to study Tamil. Consequently, Plütschau and his Tamil friend, Timothy Kudiyan, taught Tamil to a group of students in Halle (Saale). These and other students of Tamil needed a grammar. To help them, Ziegenbalg compiled the first Tamil-Latin Grammar (*Grammatica Damulica*) and had it printed in Halle (1716). Due to Ziegenbalg's various efforts, during this time, information about the Tamil, the Tamil language and culture became common knowledge among numerous churches and households in regions such as Saxony; in some respects, these connections paved way for the later development of Indo-German relationships.

## Conclusion

At present, the Tamil Library of Tranquebar belongs to history; however, now this essay has refreshed its memories, introduced its contexts, and expanded the horizon of available knowledge. Normally, general history of libraries in India recognises the Asiatic Society of Bengal in Kolkata (1784) as the first public library of India. In this connection, it is good to recall the close relationship between Tranquebar and Serampore near Kolkata. Both were Danish colonies. Many of the English colonial administrators closely followed what both Tranquebar and Serampore did to promote commerce and military alliances. It is possible that William Jones (1746–1794), the founder of the *Asiatic Society of Bengal*, might have heard about the missionaries of Tranquebar and their work as cultural mediators between India and Europe. For example, Jones's contemporary in the High Court of Bengal was Judge Robert Chambers, who as a friend knew the extraordinary works of Christian Friedrich Schwartz (1726–1798) in Tranquebar, Trichy, and Tanjore (1750–1798). Among many great things, Schwartz was known as the chief guardian, protector, and educator of King Serfoji II of Tanjore. Schwartz would have known about Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library and passed on its significance to King Serfoji II, who in turn developed the *Saraswathi Mahal Library* in Tanjore.

Though Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library is no longer available physically, his intentions, broad vision, and admirable efforts to establish and enrich a public library remain afresh. The library was an integral part of his service to the people of Tranquebar. Hence, he made it non-sectarian, interreligious, multi-cultural, and multilingual. Thus, Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library can powerfully speak to the current conditions and use of public libraries in our places.

## References

- Gaur, Albertine (1966), 'A Catalogue of Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library'. *The British Museum Quarterly*, Vol. 30, Nos. 3–4: 99–105.
- Gaur, Albertine (1967), 'Bartholomäus Ziegenbalgs Verzeichnis der malabarischen Bücher', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 99, 2: 63–95.
- Halle Reports (1882), Vol. 1, 1st Cont. Pennsylvania: United German Evangelical Lutheran Congregations in North America.
- Halle Reports (1882), Vol. 1, 3rd Cont. Pennsylvania: United German Evangelical Lutheran Congregations in North America.
- Jeyaraj, Daniel, ed. (2017), *Tamiḷ kirittava aram: cikanpālku eḷutiya taṇmavaḷi: ḍāiccuvaṭiyiṇ ṭlamum viḷakkamum* (i.e., *Tamil Christian Ethics: Ziegenbalg's Way of Dharma from a Palm Leaf Manuscript: Original Text with its Explanation*). Tañcāvūr: The Tamil University.
- Lehmann, Arno, ed. (1959), *Bibliotheca Malabarica: Eine wieder entdeckte Handschrift*, *Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther-Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Gesellschafts- und Sprachwissenschaftliche Reihe*. Halle, VIII, 4/5.
- Sweetman, Will and Ilakkuvan, R. (2012), *Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg's Tamil Library: An Annotated Edition and Translation*, Pondicherry: French Institute of Pondicherry.
- Ziegenbalg, B. (1957), *Alte Briefe aus Indien: Unveröffentlichte Briefe von Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg 1706–1719* (ed. Arno Lehmann). Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt Berlin, 1957.
- Ziegenbalg, B. (1930), *Ziegenbalgs Kleinere Schriften* (ed. Willem Caland). Amsterdam: Koninklijke Akademie van Wetenschappen.

### To Cite (Harvard)

Daniel Jeyaraj (2024), 'The Tamil Library in Tranquebar (1708) and its Significance'. *Journal of Religion and Public Life*, 1, 1: 30-45.



### **Disclosure Statements**

The author has not reported any potential conflict of interest.

The author has not reported the use of generative AI in the research for and preparation of this paper.

This research received no specific funding.