

Vol III Issue VI July 2013

ISSN No : 2230-7850

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Monthly Multidisciplinary  
Research Journal

*Indian Streams  
Research Journal*

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**RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595**

**ISSN No.2230-7850**

Indian Streams Research Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial Board readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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## DANISH MISSIONARIES AND THEIR SCIENTIFIC NOTES AND BOTANICAL EXPERIMENTS IN TRANQUEBAR

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**Abstract:** The Danish Missionaries who constituted mostly Germans were sent to Tamil Country by the King of Denmark. They landed at Tranquebar (Tarangambadi) and involved in the spread of gospel of Christianity. The early Danish Protestant Christian Missionaries contribute much to the Tamil literatures and for the introduction of Western Medicine and medical practices in Tamil Country. They introduced printing press in Tamil and enriched Tamilology. They did not underestimate the indigenous medical works Tamil Siddhas and Saints. They collected the native medical notes which are kept and preserved in palm leaves for a long time and sent to European Countries where they were compiled and published in books. Thus there was exchange of scientific knowledge and the missionaries served as a link between the West and East. The Missionaries at Tranquebar contacted the Missionaries of the different parts of the World and invited medicinal plants to Tranquebar where they had grown in nursery. The Danish Missionaries were employed by the British Administrators in their services and they were freely allowed to spread Christianity and share scientific knowledge and experiments to the needy native people who were suffered from chronic and epidemic diseases. The notes, letters and diaries of the Danish Missionaries at Tranquebar are filled with particulars about their acquirement of native scientific knowledge, culture of the indigenous people, financial constraints of the missionaries and the necessity of the western medical treatment. The Danish Missionaries like Ziegenbalg, Rottler, Schwartz Gruendler, and Christopher John are remembered for ever for their immense legacy in the sphere of science especially Botany.

**Keyword:** Danish, Missionaries, Germans, Tranquebar, Heathens, Moravians, Malabarians, sceptics

**INTRODUCTION:**

**Danish East India Company**

The Danish East India Company gained a trade monopoly between Denmark and Asia for a period of twelve years in 1616. Over a period it maintained trade contacts with the Portuguese in Ceylon, and Nagapattam. During 1621, the Danes began their occupation of Tranquebar. From 1670 to 1729 the second Danish East India Company resumed trade with Tranquebar. The Danes acted as neutral third parties in the intra-Asiatic or 'country trade', trading pepper and cloves, and taking part in the regional trading structure on a par with local merchants. They opened means and ways for many European company servants to engage in private trade and remit profits home. The Danes built up an intricate country-trade network from Tranquebar on the Coromandel coast. This Danish settlement and its country trade played a crucial role in supplying medicines to British surgeons. During war with France, William Roxburgh at Samulcottah sent specimens to Banks in England through 'neutral' Danish ships.<sup>2</sup>

**Royal Danish Missionaries**

The Danish settlement brought the first Protestant mission, the Danish-Halle Mission, to Tranquebar (1706-1845). The 'neutral' position of the Danes had allowed them, particularly the Danish Lutheran missionaries, to develop informal local contacts. In 1706, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1683-1719) and Heinrich Pliitschau (1678-1747), German Lutheran missionaries of the Pietist tradition at the University of Halle, landed at Tranquebar on 9th July 1706.<sup>3</sup> They were the first Germans to take up the Danish king's

orders. Hence all these missionaries, though Germans by birth, came to be called 'Royal Danish Missionaries'. But the Danish East India Company was not too keen to assist them, and often posed hindrance to their activities.<sup>4</sup>

**Missionaries' Friendly Contact with British**

These missionaries had to contest with other missionaries like the Moravians in the region, Danish officials at home and religious sceptics, and a constant paucity of funds.<sup>5</sup> They found consolation in interacting with their British neighbours, the naturalists and surgeons. Their common interest in the local natural history and local culture, served to create the bond. The Danish missionary Revd. John said that I would forget my chief employment but teach the inhabitants at the same time how to plant and rear Coconut.<sup>6</sup> Ziegenbalg and Grundler wrote too letters to the British that they considered the British settlements in the East Indies an ideal area for the spread of Christianity as Tranquebar was too small to afford us an open Door to preach among the Neighbouring Heathens'. The contacts were friendly and open and the Danes were often invited by the British, who did not have any missionary representative from home in these parts.

The missionaries collected plants and grew them in their own gardens in the Danish settlements especially in Tranquebar.<sup>8</sup> They studied and documented not only the religious life but also the plant and animal life of south India. Among them were the linguist Benjamin Schultze (1689-1760), the Hebrew scholar Christopher T. Walther (1699-1741), the diplomat and royal priest Christian Frederick Schwartz (1726-98), the Bible translator Johann Philipp

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	<p>Indian Streams Research Journal</p> <p style="text-align: right;">ISSN 2230-7850 Volume-3, Issue-6, July-2013</p> <p>Fabricius (1711-91), the educator and natural history enthusiast Christopher Samuel John (1747-1813), and the lexicographer John Peter Rottler (1749-1836). The missionaries had friendly and open contact with their English neighbours in Madras.<sup>9</sup></p> <p><b>Influence of Moravians</b></p> <p>Other missionaries on the coast were the Moravians. They arrived in 1760 and settled in Tranquebar, an international Protestant evangelical group. They played a significant role in the internationalism of medical botany in the Eighteenth Century, and learnt Portuguese and Tamil. The Moravians established a 'rival market' to that of the Germans. In two years the number of the Moravians increased. They soon became more popular among the Tamils and Europeans.<sup>10</sup> The two important figures in the Moravian Mission in Tranquebar were Johann Gottfried Klein and Benjamin Heyne.</p> <p>From the middle of the Eighteenth Century, the Moravian church too was marked by a certain 'Pan-internationalism'.<sup>11</sup> The mission had begun in colonies of the Danish crown. The Moravians followed a distinct lifestyle with a focus on financially supporting themselves. Often the Moravians bought and cultivated land for their subsistence.<sup>12</sup></p> <p>Although the Danish missionaries in Tranquebar were initially hostile to these Moravians, within a very short period the latter seemed to have become popular and they certainly helped the Danes to broaden their missionary network. Oluf Madrup, a Danish missionary, viewed that the Natives call them the "Saints" or the "Nyanigol" which means "the wise men".<sup>13</sup> By 1803, the Moravians had almost disappeared from Tranquebar, the last of them having left for Europe after selling their land and garden.</p> <p><b>WESTERN MEDICINE</b></p> <p>A major part of the engagement of the Danish missionaries in India was with Western medicine. Until the end of the Eighteenth Century, medicines prepared in the pharmacy of the Francke Foundations were sent to India. Schwartz introduced vaccination against chicken pox. Similarly, the Moravians were trained both in medicine and natural history as a part of their missionary preparation. In this globalization of plants and therapeutics the Moravians seemed to be unwilling participants, as their relationship with modern science and knowledge was rather ambivalent. Their own world-view was militantly anti-rationalist.<sup>4</sup></p> <p><b>Varied interests of the Missionaries</b></p> <p>The missionaries had among them people of varied interest. The early missionaries, Ziegenbalg, Plitschau, and Grundler, had as part of their religious duties built-up important linkages with 'locals' including the Sidhha practitioners. They had also read various texts. Ziegenbalg and the other German missionaries maintained diaries and sent them home periodically. These diaries, together with many station registers, letters, and private papers focused on Tamil life-festivals and temples, arts and crafts, music and dance, legends and fables, rituals and religious practices, ceremonies, customs and manners, diseases prevalent</p> <p>among them and the medicines used.<sup>15</sup> Ziegenbalg initiated conferences and exchanges of letters with Hindu priests. The reports of these conferences are compiled in the Genealogy of the Malabarian Gods, which was sent to Europe for publication. Plutschau wrote a letter to Europe about local medical practices and how they would amaze the European physicians back home. He wondered at the performance of Native Doctors<sup>16</sup> and viewed that the European medicine in Indian climates was not effective and powerful.<sup>7</sup></p> <p><b>John Peter Rottler</b></p> <p>John Peter Rottler, a Lutheran missionary with the Danish settlement in Tranquebar, published descriptions of the new plant species of his own collection in Europe; they appeared in Nova Acta Acad. Nat. Curiosorum at Berlin along with a Dictionary of Tamil and English Languages published in 1834.<sup>18</sup> Rottler was responsible for the garden at the settlement.</p> <p>The Hospital Board on receiving Patrick Russell's Coromandel specimens from London in 1788, requested the government for an apartment for the specimens. They added that some 'enclosed ground that might serve as a Botanical Garden for supplying new and fresh specimens should be appreciated and an intelligent Botanist appointed to the immediate care'. They commended Rottler has made great proficiency in the Knowledge of Botany, in which way it will serve as a deposit of Botanical discoveries and excite the exertions of such as may be qualified to make additions'.<sup>19</sup> The government did not show much interest and insisted on appointing someone from the English military establishment.<sup>20</sup> Eventually, one Ponton from the Guntoor Circar was appointed for the work on Russell's chest.<sup>21</sup> Rottler was acknowledged for his contribution by Whitelaw Ainslie in his Materia Medica which was dedicated to him.<sup>22</sup> Johann Ernst Gruendler</p> <p>The most important medical compilation was made by Johann Ernst Gruendler. He never left India, spending his life studying Tamil medical texts. To study Tamil culture and habits closely he left Tranquebar and settled in Poraiyar, a nearby village. There he started eating and dressing like the indigenous people and acquired from the local people, many medical palm-leaf documents on diseases, medicines, and herbs. This comprised his Malabar Medicus (Malabar Physician).<sup>23</sup></p> <p><b>Christopher John</b></p> <p>Another Danish missionary, Christopher John, prepared a list of several plants and their medical uses with names written in the local script. Roxburgh had persuaded John to study the local vegetation and send him specimens and notes. This corresponded with John's own interest in gardening and local flora, and they formed a close bond. John inspired Roxburgh in his pursuits in remote Samulcottah. This relationship unfolded in many terms, in medicine, natural history and friendship. About Father John, Roxburgh wrote that John is the Revd. Dr. John, a most worthy Dane, at Tranquebar near Madras; an able friend and zealous philosopher.' John had also appointed a 'black Natural Philosopher' to collect plants, shells, seeds, insects, fishes, in</p>	
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	<p>Indian Streams Research Journal <span style="float: right;">ISSN 2230-7850</span>  <span style="float: right;">Volume-3, Issue-6, July-2013</span></p> <p>Nicobar, which he shared with Roxburgh. John also offered to get cinnamon seeds from his 'Dutch friends' in Ceylon.<sup>24</sup></p> <p><b>William Roxburgh</b>  William Roxburgh was particularly insistent on medicinal plants, about which he often wrote to John.<sup>25</sup> Father John helped for Roxburgh in collecting medical plants from Ceylon and the Nicobar islands. In Ceylon, the Danish Lutheran Engelhard collected for Roxburgh cinnamon plants.<sup>26</sup> John's Dutch friends also obliged for the same. He was particularly interested in spreading Roxburgh's fame as a botanist, particularly in the countries of his and Moravian origins. He also offered to get books on botany for Roxburgh from Europe, through his contacts. John also shared his own research on snakes and snake poison with Roxburgh.<sup>27</sup> He mentioned that the Danish mission in Tranquebar always maintained through its connections a garden and nursery where various local and exotic plants were cultivated.<sup>28</sup> Roxburgh sent three papers on the hunting of the wild hogs on the pearl fishery, and the Description of Royal Tube that he received from John at Tranquebar for publication in the Transactions of the Society.<sup>29</sup></p> <p><b>Christian Friedrich Schwartz</b>  Christian Friedrich Schwartz who arrived in Tranquebar in 1750<sup>30</sup> as a Lutheran missionary. From 1750 to 1766, he worked from his headquarters at Tranquebar. He also worked in Trichinopoly and Tanjore, and learnt Tamil, Telugu, Sanskrit, and Persian. His linkages with the British were particularly strong. The British gave him free passage.<sup>31</sup> During the Anglo-French rivalries of 1764, he was requested by the British Commandant Major Preston to attend those wounded in the battle.<sup>32</sup> Although originally part of the Danish mission, from 1767 Schwartz was sponsored by the Anglican 'Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge' of London and in 1768 the English East India Company appointed him chaplain to the garrison of Trichinopoly.<sup>33</sup></p> <p>Among the many English doctors Schwartz befriended was Paul Jodrell who went to India as Physician to the Nawab of Arcot in -1787. Jodrell lived in the Nawab's palace, and had his own garden where he reared plants. Schwartz was a regular visitor to Jodrell. Schwartz considered himself an "English missionary" and signed himself 'Swartz'.<sup>34</sup></p> <p><b>Benjamin Heyne</b>  In August 1793 Benjamin Heyne was allowed by the Moravian order to join the British territories. Along with improving plantation activities in Samulcottah, like introducing potato and breadfruit cultivation, Heyne wrote the Tracts, Historical and Statistical, on India and Sumatra 1814, an important compilation regarding plants, natural resources, and medical preparations of the area, including the medical text, Kalpastanum.<sup>35</sup></p> <p>These textual and botanical interests were part of their larger engagement with the study of Indian languages, particularly Tamil, and culture. The Tranquebar missionaries were eager to learn Tamil and study its rich and ancient literature, mainly to get closer to the people among whom they had to work. As Ziegenbalg arrived at Tranquebar he found that the predominant idea among missionaries that Malabarians were 'barbarians', strange. Ziegenbalg conveyed his impressions to Francke, the pastor in Halle, who was instrumental in sending him to Tranquebar and requested him to have the letters published so as to remove this stereotype. He instead found that the local people discussed 'the same philosophical subjects as the Savants of Europe, and that they had a regular written law, wherein all theological subjects were treated of and demonstrated'. Francke, however, said that 'the missionaries were sent out to exterminate heathenism in India, not to spread heathen nonsense all over Europe'.<sup>36</sup></p> <p>This influenced the study of medicine as well. Benjamin Heyne, considering most of Indian practitioners to be quacks, argued that their knowledge was not altogether false. The medical works of the Hindus are neither to be regarded as miraculous productions of wisdom, nor as repositories of nonsense. Their practical principles were very similar to Europe and even their theories were reconciled with Europe.<sup>37</sup></p> <p>However, sceptics in Europe like Francke were not always ready to acknowledge such- studies or the missionary medical contribution. As pursuers of modern science, missionaries had little standing in Denmark.</p> <p>The French scholar Sonnerat, Commissioner of the Marine Naturalist to the King in his 'Voyage to the East Indies' (Sonnerat was sent to India at the behest of Louis XVI) commented that Indians were mostly pretenders to some knowledge of medicine with no understanding of anatomy; the physicians were mostly comprised of individuals who have been washermen, weavers, or blacksmiths.<sup>38</sup> And Hamilton Buchanan found the Sanskrit texts extremely confusing, if not untrustworthy, for the identification of local medicinal plants.</p> <p>Thus the medicinal botany projects were attempts at 'enrichment', both for the heathens as well as the modern sceptics. The Pietists and the Moravians settled on the Coromandel Coast, like the Orientalists, were dissenters and their work was shaped by a rejection of certain forms of modern life, particularly the increasingly prominent material and secular aspects of social existence. 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<p style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">DANISH MISSIONARIES AND THEIR SCIENTIFIC NOTES AND BOTANICAL EXPERIMENTS IN TRANQUEBAR D.Victoria</p>	<p>Indian Streams Research Journal <span style="float: right;">ISSN 2230-7850</span>  <span style="float: right;">Volume-3, Issue-6, July-2013</span></p> <p>5.Mohanavelu, C.S., German Tamilology: German Contribution to Tamil Language, Literature and Culture during the Period 1706-1945, South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Pub. Society, Madras, 1993, pp. 35-37.  6.Letter from Christopher John to William Roxburgh, 17 August 1793, Tranquebar, Botany Library, Natural History Museum.  7.Thomas Philipps, J., (tr.), Thirty Four Conferences between the Danish Missionaries and the Malabarian Bramans (or Heathen Priests) in the East Indies. London, MDCCXIX, pp. 343-52.  8.Denmark established a trading station at Tranquebar in 1616. Almost one hundred years later two Germans, Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Plutschau, arrived in Tranquebar as missionaries sponsored by King Frederick IV.  9.Emil Francke, P.H., Johan Ferdinand Fenger's History of the Tranquebar Mission: Worked out from Original Papers,Tranquebar, 1863, pp.12-20.  10. Mohanavelu, C.S., op.cit., pp.12-27.  11.Mason, J.C.S., The Moravian Church and the Missionary Awakening in England 1760-1800, New York, 2001, p. 187.  12.August Gottlieb Spangenberg, (tr.), An Account of the Manner in Which the Protestant Church of the United Brethren, Preach the Gospel, and Carry on Their Mission Among the Heathen, London, 1788, p. 83-84.  13. Ibid., p.268.  14.Patrik Chakrabarti, op.cit., p.15.  15.Daniel Jeyaraj, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, Delhi, 2005, pp.2-20.  16. An Account of the Religion, and Government, learning, and Oeconomy, &amp; c of the Malabarians: Sent by the Danish Missionaries to their Correspondents in Europe, London, 1717, pp. 61-62.  17. Ibid., pp.62-63.  18.Meenakshi Sundram, K., Iropiar Tamizh pani (Tamil), (Tamil Services of Europeans) University of Madras, Madras, 2003,p.68  19.The Hospital Board 10 October 1788, Surgeon's General's Records, Vol. 3, from 1 January 1788 to 22 December 1788, G. no. 12440, Tamil Nadu Archives (hereafter TNA), pp. 200-201.  20. Letter from the Military Board to the Hospital Board', Fort St. George, 14 October 1788, Ibid., pp. 209-210.  21. Hospital Board 22 May 1789, Surgeon's General's Records, vol. 5, from 1 January 1789 to 25 December 1789, G. no. 12442, TNA, p. 17.  22.Whitelaw, Ainslie, Materia Medica of Hindoostan, and Artisan's and Agriculturalist's Nomenclature, Madras, 1813.  23. Mohanavelu, op.cit., pp. 43-45.  24. Patrik Chakrabarti, op.cit., p.60.  25. In 1790 Father John sent a list of medicinal plants collected by him to Roxburgh with details of its local uses, as desired by the latter. In 1791 in another letter he sent a list of plants and information of their medical uses, as collected from 'Malabar Physicians', with their names written in Malabar script.  26.Letter from Christopher John to William Roxburgh, 17 August 1793, Tranquebar, 1793, Botany Library, Natural History Museum.  27.Patrik Chakrabarti, op.cit.,p.61.  28.Christopher Samuel John, On Indian Civilization, or, Report of a Successful Experiment, Made. . . in Fifteen Tamul, and Five English Native Free-schools; with Proposals for Establishing a Native School Society, London, 1813, pp. 38-40.  29.Patrik Chakrabarti, op.cit.,pp.61-62.  30.Lamb, G.H., C.F.Schwartz, Madras, 1948, p.3  31.Caldwell , R., Records of the Early History of Tinnevely Mission of SPCK and SPG, Madras, 1881, pp.3-9  32.Letter from Schwartz to the Mission College, 10 July 1766.  33.Wilson, W.J., History of the Madras Army, Vol. I, Madras, 1882, p.219.  34.The Journal of Sir Paul Jodrell, M.D., F.R.S., July 1st 1792-May 31st 1793, p. 74.  35.Benjamin Heyne, a naturalist and Moravian missionary, resided in India for over twenty years (he was at Tranquebar in 1792) under the patronage of the East India Company. He was superintendent of the Bangalore Garden from 1802 to 1808, and collected the plants that were published by A.W' Roth. He wrote the Tracts, Historical and Statistical, on India and Sumatra, 1814. (Patrik Chakrabarti, op.cit., pp.62-63 and 79.  36.Viswanathan, S., 'Tamilology and a German Quest: Material Relating to the Study of Ancient Tamil Literature and Culture by German Missionaries in the 18th Century Could Provide New Insights into the Tamil Past', Frontline, Vol. 15, No. 09, Chennai 1998.  37.Heyne, Tracts, Historical and Statistical, on India and Sumatra, 1814, p. 124.  38.Ainslie, Materia Indica, no year, p. xxxi.</p>	
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