

Conversion, Industrial Development and Social Engineering: Basel Mission in Malabar During the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract

All missionary activities have posed a challenge to traditional cultures. The exact manner in which these interfaces and challenges took place differs from place to place as well as the world vision of the missionary organizations concerned. Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, a Protestant missionary organization, was established at Basel, Switzerland. This society which started working in the western coast of India from 1834 onwards was unique in many aspects. Inspired by the Pietist and Calvinist theologies, this missionary organization combined its religious activities with industrial activities to such an extent that the industrial activities were seen as essentially religious activities. Operating in Malabar district which was known to carry caste rigidities and exclusions to grotesque levels, Basel Mission used industrial activities to challenge not only the caste system but also a whole set of belief systems and religious practices that supported it. The praxis of Christianity introduced by the Basel Mission resulted in social engineering. It created a class of converts who had disowned their previous caste affiliations, acquired new industrial skills and developed a new way of looking at life and work. This paper examines how specifically the activities of Basel Mission demonstrated to a traditional feudal society an altogether new way of looking at life and work.

Keywords: Basel Mission, Industrial Activities, Conversion, Social Engineering, Malabar

This article examines in the context of impact of Christianity on Indian culture, the activities of a Swizz/German Protestant Christian missionary organization called the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society (Basel Mission).¹ The area of study is district of Malabar in the erstwhile Madras Presidency. The period of study is nineteenth century. As part of its conversion activities, the Basel Mission ended doing some unique things which no other missionary organization in India had ventured to do. They started the first modern industries in Malabar and the district of South Canara (present Dakshina Kannada) of Karnataka State. Through its industrial activities, its efforts to spread basic education and starting of orphanages and hospitals, this missionary organization was challenging the philosophies and belief systems that existed in Malabar district as well as Kerala as a whole. The Basel Mission succeeded in social engineering in the sense that it created a group of converts who did not carry their previous caste affiliations. The expansion of activities of the Basel Mission came to an abrupt end with the outbreak of the First World War when the German missionaries became suspects in the eyes of the British administration.

¹ Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, (Basel Mission) was established in Basel, Switzerland in the year 1816. This was a non denominational Protestant missionary organization. Basel missionaries first landed at Malabar Coast in 1834. The expansion of activities of Basel Mission came to an abrupt end with the outbreak of the First World War in 1914 and the German missionaries working with the Mission became suspects in the eyes of the British government (see appendix at the end of the article).

Before we go into the details of activities of Basel Mission we must examine the background of activities of Christian missionaries in India.

Christianity is supposed to have been first brought to Kerala by Saint Thomas, a disciple of Christ. Here I am dealing with the relatively later part of the history of Christianity. It can be safely said Christian missions followed the flag of colonization. The conversion activities of Christian missions started after the voyages of discovery and the knowledge of new continents and 'heathens living in darkness.'² It is from this knowledge that colonial powers took up their 'civilizing mission' of conversion. There are broader ramifications to this civilizing mission. Without looking into the very minute conceptual aspects of this 'civilizing mission' let us examine what the colonial powers actually did, particularly in the Indian context.

In the year 1498, Vasco de Gama landed at Calicut, and from that period missionaries from various Roman Catholic orders came along with the Portuguese colonists. For example, Saint Francis Xavier was one of such missionaries. Portugal is a small maritime nation facing the sea. Portugal did not 'colonize' India. Portuguese power rested on control of sea routes and for this purpose they established forts and settlements along the coast. The only Portuguese colony in India worth mentioning is Goa. Since the country had a small population, it was the policy of the government of Portugal to encourage inter-marriages between Portuguese living in their colonies and the native population. It was assumed that the mixed races that emerged out of this wedlock would be sympathetic to Portuguese. The Portuguese colonial administration financed priests who established congregations for the new mixed races along their coastal settlements. They also established churches, primary schools in these places.

The 'praxis' of some of the priests and missionaries who came along with their colonial administrators were sometimes different. They took up conversion activities on their own. The 'Paravar' fishermen community along the coast of Tamil Nadu was converted by Catholic missionaries *en masse*.³ Here, the profession of the community did not change after conversion. But there were other and unexpected consequences. The Bishops had to frequently come into conflict with their local 'moopans' or chiefs of community who held traditional authority over the community.

British colonization in India started with the Battle of Plassy in 1757 and for the next one hundred years, which is up to the outbreak of the First War of Independence in 1857, it continued unabated. Within a span of one hundred years, rather by default, the East India Company (EIC), a joint stock trading company established in London in the year 1600, became the rulers of India.⁴ With this the East India Company stopped its trading activities focused on extraction of agrarian surplus through revenue settlements. Being a company of traders, it was the policy of the EIC not to interfere in religious matters and hence did not encourage functioning of missionary groups in India. However, when the Charter of the Company came for renewal in 1834 there was specific demand from the Parliament for permission to be granted to missionary groups to function in India. We must now go back to the picture in Kerala.

² This is an expression commonly found in missionary correspondence while referring to the people living in missionary fields of operation.

³ For a detailed account of the activities of Christian missionaries in India refer: Firth C B, *An Introduction to Church History*, Madras, Christian Literature Press, 1960.

⁴ For a concise account of the activities of the East India Company in India see: Tirtankar Roy, *The East India Company, The World's Most Powerful Corporation*, New Delhi, Penguin Books, 2012.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, what is now the State of Kerala, remained as three distinct political and administrative entities. These were the Princely States of Thiruvithamkoor and Cochin which operated with relative independence under the suzerainty of the EIC, and the newly created District of Malabar. Malabar District was formed after the defeat of Tipu Sultan in 1798 in the Anglo Carnatic Wars and was first part of the Bombay Presidency and later, the Madras Presidency. This district was directly ruled by the British administration. Since Malabar District is our area of study, we have to dwell a little more on the geography and society of Malabar.

Malabar - Land and People

Malabar district extended from north to south along the coast, a distance of about one hundred and fifty miles lying between N Lat 10° 15' and 12° 18' and E Long. 75° 14' and 76° 56'. The coast line of Malabar proper stretches from north, (north-west) to south (south-east) and the distance of inland from the coast varies from 32kms to 241 kms. The district can be seen vertically divided into three sections, viz the *malanad* (hill area) which are part of the Western Ghats, the *edanad* (midlands) which form the hilly terrain and thirdly the long coast line, referred as '*theera pradeshnam*' (coast). The district covers 14,460 sq kms.⁵

There is a certain aspect of geography of Malabar which makes it a centre of trade to such an extent that the most important city of Malabar, the city of Calicut was known to the whole world for its trade as early as the first millennia. The explanation lies in its location in the Arabian Sea. Malabar appears roughly half way in the sea route from Europe to China. Long back, seafarers discovered the trade winds which could bring the ships across Arabian Sea. As a result, two types of trading flourished here. The first is the emporium trade. From different parts of the world traders brought their wares to Calicut (Kozhikode), its chief port for exchange. This port was considered as safe and the city came to be known as the 'City of Truth'. Here different trading communities flourished and in Calicut many languages were spoken.⁶

The East India Company, after their conquest of different parts of India, had implemented different land tenurial systems to facilitate extraction of agricultural surplus. These systems depended mainly on the practices that had existed in different regions, but with suitable modifications. For example, in Bengal, *Zamindari* system was implemented. Earlier, under the Mughal administration, the *Zamindar* occupied a middle tier between government and the cultivators and they were the tax collectors. Under Permanent Settlement made by the British administration, the *Zemindar* received ownership rights by paying a fixed sum to the government.

Malabar formed part of *Ryotwari* settlement. In principle, the *Ryotwari* system was a contract between the cultivator - the *ryot* - and the state in connection with payment of land tax. This system strengthened the peasant right although weakened the middle tier. However, the implementation of the *Ryotwari* system by the British was with serious distortions. We will return to this aspect as this discussion progresses.

Schematically, we can relate the agrarian hierarchy that existed in Malabar at the advent of the British through the following format. The economic or more precisely the agrarian hierarchy

⁵ The most authoritative work on land and people of Malabar is: William Logan, *Manual of Malabar District*, Madras, Government Press, 1906.

⁶ Ashin Dasgupta, *Malabar in Asian Trade 1740-1800*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1967.

was closely linked with the then existing caste structure. The economic division of labour and land ownership could be schematized with risk of abstraction or reduction of complexity. This is an abstraction of a much complex reality. In reality, various combinations of tenures existed.

Table 1
Pattern of Land Tenures in Malabar⁷

Occupation	Tenure	Caste
Priests, rulers and administrative officials	Jenmom	Brahmins, Rajas aristocratic Nayars
Militia in charge of law and order, petty officials	Kanom (superior lease rights)	Nayars and Nambiars
Petty producers, traders, artisans, dry land labour	Verumpattom (inferior lease)	Non-aristocratic Nayars, Ezhavas, Christians and Muslims
Wet land labour	Agricultural labour	Tiyas, Pulayas, Cherumas

In Malabar, the position that each community occupied in agrarian hierarchical order roughly corresponded with the position it occupied in the social or caste hierarchy. But, in terms of tenurial relationship, as long as each group paid its rent, fixity of tenure was available for the holders of different tenancies. When lands were sold, the purchaser had to recognize the inferior rights that existed.⁸

British rule altered the existent law and order and replaced it with a system as was required for the revenue administration. But this was coupled with the drain of agrarian surplus through tax settlements. Such settlements were heavily skewed against the actual producers of the land. This created conditions for revolts culminating in the Mopla uprisings in 1920 and 1921.

The feudal system in Malabar had other dimensions. The caste divisions were carried to grotesque levels such as unseeability and polluting distances. For example, a member of Pulaya caste had to keep a distance of 16 feet from a member of Thiya caste. Similarly, members of Thiya caste had to keep the same distance from the Nair caste, so on and so forth. This is affecting social communication. The distance to be maintained between the members of Nambuthiri caste (priests and land owners) to the Pulaya caste who actually toiled in the fields was 64 feet.

During the 19th century British investments in Malabar were in estates and in trading. Investments in modern industries were made by a Swizz/German missionary organization called Basel Mission. Since the Basel Mission was the only industrial entrepreneur in Malabar during the nineteenth century, we explore the entrepreneurial functions of Basel Mission in terms of its evolution, transfer of technology, mobilization of labour and development of market.

⁷ Source: T M Thomas Issac and P K Michael Tharakan, "Sree Narayanan Movement in Travancore-Social Basis and Ideological Reproduction, *Working Paper No 214*, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram, 1986, p.5.

⁸ Varghese T.C., *Agrarian Change and Economic Consequences*, Allied Publishers, New Delhi, 1970.

Basel Mission - Ideology and Praxis

Protestant missionary groups drew their inspiration from the Pietist Movement⁹ which flourished in Europe during the 17th and 18th Centuries. The emphasis of Pietism was on (i) Personal salvation through acceptance of Christianity and (ii) Christian restructuring of the world. The latter emanated from the belief that European civilization is universally most superior, because it has the knowledge of Christ. Information of distant countries brought about by colonialism further strengthened the belief that these societies of 'heathens living in darkness' will have to be civilized based on Christian understanding of life. The dominant theological influence of Protestant Churches in Europe was that of John Calvin. Calvin was one of the leaders of Reformation in Europe during the 16th Century. As R H Tawny puts it "[t]he influence of Calvinism was not simple but complex and extended beyond the churches which would be properly called as Calvinistic."¹⁰ It was Max Weber who first propounded the idea that Calvinist ethics was instrumental in supplying the moral energy and drive for capitalist enterprise in Europe during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹¹ As we have related the activities of the Basel Mission to the setting up of capitalist enterprises, the basic precepts of Calvinist ethics will have to be explored.

Calvin saw the world of economic order as not alien to the life of the spirit. World existed for the glorification of God and for that purpose alone. But God requires social achievements because He wills that social life is organized according to his commandments. At the centre of Calvinist ideology is the doctrine of predestination. This doctrine states that only a few persons are chosen for eternal grace by the superior wisdom of God. The chosen Christians are in the world only to increase God's glory by fulfilling God's commandments to the best of their abilities. But God requires not individual actions, but social achievements. These social actions are reflected in the collective labour of individuals.¹²

As for an infallible criterion of membership to the elect, the small group of predestined persons, is yet unknown. Calvin saw good works in organized labour not as a means of salvation but as an indispensable sign of having achieved salvation. "In its extreme inhumanity" comments Weber "this doctrine must above all have had one consequence for the life of a generation which surrendered to its magnificent consistency... a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness."¹³ This was because a person does not know whether he is chosen for salvation and has to reassure himself by constant good work. Weber holds that from this inner torment the spirit of capitalism was born.

Calvinism is associated with 'this worldly asceticism' as against 'other worldly asceticism' or renunciation of the world. In this sense, according to Weber, "[i]t substituted the spiritual

⁹ "A movement in Protestantism seeking a return to vital evangelical Christianity as over against the intellectualism and formalism of the 17th Century Protestant Orthodoxy..." Vergilius Ferm, *An Encyclopedia of Religion*, New York, Philosophical Library, 1945, p.585.

¹⁰ Tawny R. H., *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, Middlesex, Pelican, 1975, p. 121.

¹¹ All references from Max Weber are from: Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, London, George Alan and Unwin, 1976.

¹² Refer to: John Calvin, *A Compendium of the Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Board of Education at the Presbyterian Church in the Unites States of America, 1939.

¹³ Tawny, *op cit*, p. 104.

aristocracy of the monks outside and above the world by the spiritual aristocracy of the saints."¹⁴ (Here the term 'saints' is used to describe the predestined souls) This religion demanded the believer neither the celibacy of the monks nor poverty, but elimination of enjoyment of all unearned wealth and income. The clear and uniform goal of this asceticism was discipline and methodical organization of conduct. As Weber saw it, the typical representative of this worldly asceticism was the 'man of vocation' (*Berufman* in German) or 'professional'. The unique result of such an understanding was the rational organization of social relationships as we see in an industrial or social organization. Weber showed that certain types of Protestantism notably Calvinism was supportive of rational pursuit of economic gain and worldly activities dedicated to it seeing them endowed with moral and spiritual significance. Calvinism emphasized rational organization of labour. By this, it meant "routinized calculated administration with continuously functioning enterprises."¹⁵ Weber's exposition of Calvinism gave rise to wider polemic on the subject. The controversy continues even now.

Here we argue that notwithstanding the above criticisms, Weber's thesis should be seen as exploring the interactions between various religious ideas and economic behavior. What Weber has attempted to show is not that Calvinism created entrepreneurship but that Calvinism was supportive of rational pursuit of economic gain and worldly activities dedicated to it were seen as being endowed with moral and spiritual significance. Here on the basis of evidences on Basel Mission, we see links as more than casual. Basel Mission was a non-denominational missionary organization in which all protestant churches could have affiliation.

The city of Basel where the Mission was established was also a major Calvinist centre. Calvin and another reformer Zwingli had lived and worked there. They had recruited a large number of followers in the city. Logically the influence of Calvinism must have been stronger in the Christian organizations formed there. Well after the Reformation in Europe, Basel was a centre of Pietist Movement. This movement had acquired several hues and colours. At one end were the social activists who demanded a total change in the church structure. Another group preferred to remain close to the institutional churches in spite of its hostility and grew steadily as a ferment of renewal of church and society - a process often described as 'Church within Church'. A good many of such groups existed in Wurttemberg province of Germany. The members of these groups were artisans such as shoe makers, carpenters, blacksmiths, weavers or people of similar trades who being financially independent were not easily subjected to the intimidation by the city councils and chief pastors.

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, two missionary societies were already functioning in Kerala. The two missionary societies were the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the London Missionary Society (LMS). Both these societies were British and had their headquarters in London. The LMS which started its activities in Southern Tiruvithamkur (present southern Kerala and part of present Kanyakumari district of Tamil Nadu) in 1806 and the CMS started operations in Central Thiruvithamkur in 1820.¹⁶ Travancore State was an independent state under indirect British rule. But both these societies being of British origin, had patronage from

¹⁴ Weber, *op cit*, p.121.

¹⁵ Weber, *op cit*, p.3.

¹⁶ For a detailed account of the activities of the above societies, see: Agur C. A., *Church History of Travancore, Madras*, SPG Press, 1903.

the British administration. The small island of Anjengo or 'Anjuthengu' was gifted by the Raja of Travancore to the CMS. The missionary enterprise of the above organizations involved establishment of schools and college, printing press and also seminaries for training of priests and church workers. The above societies enjoyed some amount of patronage from the government and hence many of the converts could enter into government service at various levels.

The case of the Basel Mission was different. The Mission itself had industrial orientation and many of the missionaries had come from the class of craftsmen. At the Home Board level officials were businessmen and theologians. Basel Mission faced a crisis while it started its work in India. Many of the converts lost their traditional caste related jobs on account of their conversion to Christianity. When the converts lost their jobs due to conversion, the missionaries from the very beginning started experimenting with crafts - both traditional and modern. The end result was the Basel Mission became the most important industrial entrepreneur in Malabar by establishing the most modern tile factories and weaving factories.¹⁷ Following table gives the dimensions of these industries.

Table 2
Dimensions of Industrial Enterprises of Basel Mission in Malabar¹⁸

Type of industry	Number of units	Total employment
Weaving factories	5	1294
Tile factories	4	1134
Total	9	2428

The above factories were modern factories comparable to the ones existing in Europe during that period. Weaving industry of Basel Mission produced various types of new products like Damask Linen Counterpanes, towels, trousers, coats, shirts, jersey and hosiery products. Most of these products were exported. Tile industry produced various types of ceramic products like roofing tiles, flooring tiles, salt glazed pipes, Ornamental pottery, ceiling tiles, (called hourdies) and ventilator tiles. The technology that was transferred is given in the following table.

Table 3
Transfer of Technology by Basel Mission Industries

Nature of up gradation done by Basel Mission	Impact	Whether this was adopted by handloom industry that came up in Malabar later or not
Introduction of fly shuttle	Increases productivity of weaver from 50 to 200 percent depending on the width of cloth	Adopted
Use of frame looms	Weaving cloth of greater weft in comparison with pit loom	Adopted

¹⁷ For a detailed account of the industrial activities of the Basel Mission see: Jaiprakash Raghaviah, *Basel Mission Industries in Malabar and South Canara 1834-1914: A Study of Its Social and Economic Impact*, New Delhi, Gyan Publishing House, 1990.

¹⁸ Source: various Annual Reports of the Basel Mission: Report for the years 1846, 1856, 1869, 1901, 1912, 1913, 1914.

Nature of up gradation done by Basel Mission	Impact	Whether this was adopted by handloom industry that came up in Malabar later or not
Introduction of Jacquard looms	Weaving a variety of designs	Adopted
Use of chemical dyes	Yarn can be dyed to a wide variety of colour combinations	Adopted
Development of Khakhi dye from the bark of a tree	This colour came to be adopted in uniform for army	New units did not make any inventions in dyeing
Establishment of a dye house	Specialization, vertical integration of weaving	In Kannur region specialized units for dyeing did come up
Introduction of machine power for handloom industry for spool winding, dyeing, etc	Improvement in the productivity of handloom	Only one or two large units used machine power
Introduction of power loom	Large scale manufacture of standard designs	One or two large units introduced power loom

Net result of the activities of Basel Mission, was the emergence of a new group of people who included converts to Christianity as well as those who had come into close contact with the Basel Mission but had not converted. These included non-Christian workers in tile and weaving factories as well as school teachers, and workers in schools and hospitals. This group was not very large in number and were about 30000. In some ways, they were at the fringes of the society of Malabar but at the same time strongly demonstrating that an alternate value base and a corresponding life style was possible. Here we introduce the concept of culture, in order to know how the culture of this group differed from the rest of the population. Culture is the system of knowledge shared by a relatively large group of people. It is communicated and shared by symbols, language, values, beliefs and norms. According to Bordieu culture is "a competitive system of social relations functioning according to its own specific logic or rules". Let us examine in specific terms how the Christian culture as a competitive system of social relations influenced the traditional culture of Kerala.

Caste

Caste is one of the oldest institutions in India. We can distinguish caste from class. Class existed also in western societies. In such societies, one can be born in one class but move into another in terms of social hierarchy. But as far as caste is concerned, one is born into a caste and dies as the member of the same caste. The food a person eats the dress he or she wears and even the language he or she speaks (dialects, specific words, names) is determined by the caste into which one is born.

What Basel Mission did was to demolish the notion of caste among the converts. Basel Mission had converts from high, middle and lower castes. These converts had come from a society in which casteism was taken to grotesque levels of untouchability and unseeability. A

convert to Christianity normally lost his job. His job was determined by his caste and stood at some level of social hierarchy. The Basel Mission did social engineering in order to get rid of casteism among converts. Converts left their traditional occupations and were forced to learn new activities. New lines of employment included work in weaving and tile factories. Very often the new work involved interfacing with machines. Other work available to them included work at schools and hospitals. In all the above employment, it is not possible to differentiate between castes. Work also involved physical touching. Untouchability and polluting distances could not be practiced in an environment in which work of machines and work of men were synchronized. Basel Missionaries took interest in arranging marriages of people who belonged to different castes previous to their conversion.

Concept of Time

In a traditional society time is a relative factor – in fact stretchable. A wet land labourer or a garden labourer went to work soon after arrival of daylight. He rested when it was very hot and continued to work till it started getting dark. Before starting factories, the Basel Mission had tried to introduce modern crafts like watch making and repairing. This activity failed due to lack of local demand.

As against this, for the Basel Mission, time became an objective factor, determined by a watch or clock. The factories established by the Mission instilled a sense of discipline with regard to time. All the factory workers lived within a radius of one or one and a half kilometers from the factory. Factories used to have powerful steam operated whistles that were audible for that distance. There used to be two whistles to help the worker to prepare and report for duty on time. Every activity in factories followed a schedule and the worker was learning a new work-related sense of self.

Work and Leisure

In a traditional society, the margin between work and leisure was thin. The field worker or garden worker or a carpenter or blacksmith rested when he needed to rest. As against this, the factories, schools and hospitals established by Basel Mission operated on the precision of time. In factories and schools there were regular breaks of work. The concept of a Sunday as a day of rest is taken from the Jewish concept of Sabbath. God took six days to create heaven and earth and he rested on the seventh day. Industrial societies clearly distinguished work from leisure or rest. Among the converted Christians Sunday was a day of rest and the worker's family was not even permitted to do routine family chores like washing. Industrial work in factories was monotonous, hard and drudgerous. Management of labour demanded that a worker is rested at regular interval to keep up efficiency of work.

Attitude to Work

This factor raises the issue of attitude to work. In order to understand the Calvinist concept of work, one must go back to Christian theology. Adam and Eve, the first man and woman lived in the Garden of Eden in a state of bliss. After they were expelled from the garden on account of disobedience to God's commands, God cursed them saying "you will eat from the sweat of your brow."¹⁹ Thus man is condemned to work.

¹⁹ Genesis 3:19.

From this perspective, Calvin started looking at work as something through which a chosen elected person for God's grace proved his being in the group of elected persons. According to Calvin the decision to make a man an elected person is done by God's wisdom not understood by man. According to Max Weber from this perception comes the concept of *berufman* or a man of calling for whom work is the means through which he exhibits being a member of a select group of predestined individuals.

Basel missionaries often contrasted the above perception of work with the attitude to work that they found in India. They noted that in India a good many number of persons consider doing their life's work or the most important work they feel defines their existence after their retirement. In the Report of the Industrial Commission which existed as a part of Basel Mission, the qualities that the Mission strove to impart to converts are expressed as under.

"Loyalty in word and deed, loyalty in fulfilling duties to oneself and others, awareness of the value of time, circumspection and looking forward, understanding and acquisition of what is new and changing are found so seldom in heathens, for he sees nothing of them, and hears nothing of them, and an entire generation may be needed till those more external Christian achievements may emerge as quite visible and effective fruits of first conversion."²⁰

Perceptions on Technology

The Basel Missionaries encountered a different type of science in India. This varied from the manner a local potter identified a good clay, a traditional Ayurveda doctor looked at diseases and the manner horoscopes were used. There was a certain amount of interaction between the sciences. Basel Missionary George Plebst who first successfully established tile factory at Mangalore is supposed to have used the expertise of a local potter in identifying the suitable clay for making tiles. But then, the Basel missionaries who were technocrats understood clay as feldspar material and had the samples tested in laboratories in Switzerland. This means that in the latter stages clay was scientifically tested for its plasticity, breaking strength etc. Traditional potters also understood these qualities of feldspar, but a little differently and hence could not classify it. Western empirical science was backed by the knowledge of basic disciplines like mathematics, physics and chemistry.

Basel missionaries and technocrats were products of the post Industrial Revolution era. They understood a machine from a very different perspective. They understood what existed in India as the form of craft. Report of the Industrial Commission of the Basel Mission for the year 1856 expresses these aspects.

"We should not ignore the fact that a converted Hindu is not by far a European, not forget that our civilization created by the Gospel and existing since one and a half millennia is a gift of a special divine grace, which confers on us also manufacturing skills of an unusually great advantage".²¹

²⁰ Report of the Industrial Commission for the year 1856, retrieved from Basel Mission Archives, p.4.

²¹ Report of the Industrial Commission for the year 1956, p.7.

No Sacred Places, No Auspicious Times

We have argued in this paper that the Basel Missionaries were influenced by Calvinist theology. Calvinist theology talks of universal priesthood. In other words, every person predestined for salvation is a living saint. Similarly, there are no sacred places and auspicious times. Basel Missionaries went great lengths to prove that the so called traditional science of horoscope was not based on any scientific grounds. Basel missionaries went out of way to prove that there were no evil places or haunted places. Bhuta worship was often practiced in South Canara. In order to prove this the missionaries often rented houses that were known to be haunted.

Marriage as an Adult Sexual Choice

In its concept, marriage is a sexual choice made by members of opposite sexes for lifelong partnership and perpetuation of society through procreation. This institution has undergone many stages and is still in a state of evolution. In traditional Indian society, marriage age was low and pre-pubescent girls were often married to adults. Child marriages were also common. Marriages were often arranged without even knowledge of the couple who will be married. Basel missionaries came from a different society in which some amount of adult choice was available for partners. When Basel Mission established churches, they made elaborate rules of conduct for members of congregation. Here, by rule, marriages were not solemnized until the couple were above the age of eighteen. Moreover, the couple who were engaged to be married was given opportunity to mix and get to know each other. The factories and schools established by the Mission gave employment to women as teachers, office workers, nurses, factory workers. There were opportunities for members of the community to fall in love and marry. This was something unheard in Kerala society in which marriage was a social choice imposed on couples.

Dress Code and Emphasis on Personal Cleanliness

In traditional Kerala society, members of lower castes lived under abject conditions. Their houses were unhygienic and they themselves were not expected to look neat and clean. Moreover, each caste had a certain dress code. Certain types of garments were to be worn only by members of upper castes. Basel Mission converts were encouraged to wear neat and clean garments and also to keep their houses neat and clean. Institutions like factories, schools and hospitals established by the Basel Mission had enough facilities like bathrooms and toilets for the personal cleanliness of workers. In weaving factories even brushes were fixed on the walls to enable workers to clean their nails. Workers were not asked to wear uniforms but all of them were expected to be neat and clean. Housing facility were also given to workers.

Summing up

Among the many missionary organizations that worked in India, Basel Evangelical Missionary Society has a unique place. While all missionary organizations were influencing Indian culture, the Basel Mission took up two unique things. Firstly, this society was one that did deliberate planning and development of industries. By mobilizing labour of converts, the Basel Mission created a society of casteless converts who could look at their own *habitus* in a very different way.

Appendix I



Map of West Coast of India Indicating
Basel Mission Stations