

**Protestant Translations of the Bible (1714-1995) and
Defining a Protestant Tamil Identity**

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Abstract

The thesis aims to analyse the construction of a Protestant Tamil identity primarily through the examination of six Protestant translations of the Bible in Tamil and Protestant Tamil poetry. The chapters discuss the points of conflict that arose as a result of the different strategies of assimilation adopted by Protestant missionaries and Protestant Tamils.

Chapter 1 has two main sections. The first section provides an outline of the various levels of influence that Catholic and Protestant missionaries had on Tamil language and literature. The second section gives an historical delineation of Protestant translations of the six Tamil Bible versions that the thesis discusses in detail. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical debates on language, translation, and religious terminology that took place across the major Indian languages into which the Bible was translated in the nineteenth century. The chapter also looks at the pressures of the various institutions within which Bible translators worked and how far they affected the practice and theorising of Bible translation in nineteenth-century India. Chapter 3 focuses on the Tamil terms used in the different versions of the Tamil Bible. The discussion begins with the etymological history of each term and then moves on to consider why each one was either selected or created for use in the Tamil Bible. Chapter 4 is divided into two sections. The first section looks at nineteenth-century conflicts between missionaries and Protestant Tamils over the revision of the Tamil Bible and the alternative strategies used by some Protestant Tamil poets to translate Protestant concepts for Tamil culture. The second section looks at Protestant Tamil responses to twentieth-century revisions of the Tamil Bible as well as individual attempts to translate the Bible using means different from the official translation projects.

My study aims to indicate that the formation of Protestant Tamil identity is part of intricate political and cultural processes by analysing a set of related questions regarding the translations of the Bible into Tamil: why do some religious terms acquire sacred status when translation at a formal level does not match the translation of religious culture? Why has the nineteenth-century version of the Tamil Bible, in particular, acquired symbolic power, and is perceived by Protestant Tamils today as the only translation able to mark boundaries of identity and otherness? To what extent have Protestant Tamils, as an interpretative community of faith, been responsible for the shaping of a Protestant Tamil vocabulary and identity? And finally, my research points to inadequacies in current translation theory from a post-colonial perspective and suggests areas that require critical attention.

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Tamil Transliterations

Vowels

அ	a
ஆ	ā
இ	i
ஈ	ī
உ	u
ஊ	ū
எ	e
ஏ	ē
ஐ	ai
ஓ	o
ஓ	ō
ஓளை	au
ஃ	ஃ

Tamil Consonants

க	k	ம	m
ங	ṅ	ய	y
ச	c	ற	r
ஞ	ñ	ல	l
ட	t̪	வ	v
ண	n̪	ழ	l̪
த	t	ன	l̪
ஷ	n	ற	r̪
ப	p	ன	n̪

Sanskrit Consonants

ஜ	j	ஸ	s
ஹ	ʂ	ஹ	h
க்ஷ	kʂ	ஶ்ரி	śrī

Introduction

Although the Bible is both the most translated text and the most studied of translated texts, the history of its translation outside of Europe and North America has not formed a large part of Translation Studies or Humanities scholarship. Comprising a wide range of texts from different historical periods, written in almost all the available literary forms, and translated endlessly into different languages, the Bible has made an ideal subject for discussions on the problems of translation. Despite this history, the predominant view held by the translators of the Bible and its readers has been that however many languages it may, Proteus like, be translated into, every single translation was the original word of God. This view was possible because the presence of language was made absent by collapsing its function into a stable and transparent medium for communication. The questioning of the idea of the Bible as a unified and stable text began in Germany in the early nineteenth century. Developments in the twentieth century in various disciplines, besides that of biblical and translation studies, led to a further decentring of some important premises that had served to prop up the idea of the Bible as a single, stable text. This has meant that Bible translation cannot be seen as a neutral activity but as part of and produced by political, historical and cultural forces. Further, the Bible viewed as a cultural object has meant that the translation history of the Bible in any given language can be studied as participating in a network of social processes within which cultural identities are forged and/or formulated.

This thesis takes up the particular translation history of the Bible in Tamil in order to trace the formation of a Protestant Tamil identity in South India. Although attention is paid to the search for linguistic 'equivalence' in Tamil, the larger concern of this work is to analyse the translated Tamil Bible in the context of the extra-linguistic factors that have impinged on the making of the Tamil Bible and Protestant Tamil identity. These factors include the interlinked histories of religious and cultural practices in Tamil society, Tamil literary traditions and conventions, Tamil language politics, colonial intervention, and the evangelical project of Protestant missions. This complex web of cultural practices is seen in this study as working either in conjunction or in competition with each other to construct Protestant Tamil identity. The thesis analyses the process by which a particular translation and a particular vocabulary of Tamil terms have been developed to assimilate Protestant Christianity in Tamil culture and have thus, acquired symbolic power amongst Protestant Tamils to mark boundaries of identity and otherness. That is, the thesis examines how and why some translations of the Bible have been deployed to maintain old or invent new identities amongst Protestant Tamils. In particular, the thesis focuses on the extent to which Protestant Tamils, as an

interpretative community of faith, have been responsible in shaping a Protestant Tamil vocabulary and in defining themselves; and how different groups within the community have strategically claimed to represent Protestant Tamil identity at different points in time by using notions of ‘tradition,’ ‘purity,’ and the ‘sacred’ in language. Finally, the thesis points to inadequacies in current translation theory and suggests areas that require critical attention.

I. Theoretical frameworks

Any study of translation must draw on theories of language since developments or shifts in the understanding of language usually affect how translation is viewed. By the same token, attempts to understand the process of translation have also contributed to theories on language. This interdependence, where identifying how translation works becomes the key to unlocking the enigma of language, is evident in the works of those who, like Steiner (1975), have emphasized that translation can only properly be understood as part of a philosophy of language or who have claimed that translation expresses the central reciprocal relationship between languages¹ (Benjamin 1969). In the following paragraphs, I summarize the main issues at the centre of current theorisations of language and translation that provide a frame for the understanding of the material of this thesis. I then contract the frame to focus on some issues particular to the translation of the Bible. I end this section with a brief discussion of postcolonial critical perspectives, which provide a third, overlapping frame for the analyses of language, translation and identity in the study of the Bible in Tamil translation. It will be seen that an underlying concern of all three theoretical frameworks is analysing the process of assimilation of either texts or individuals into existing social structures.

A. Translating after Babel: Translation Studies

As mentioned before, changes in the understanding of the nature and function of language have led to a reviewing of the nature, practice and function of translation. Three main issues are identified as central to the problem of translation: ‘equivalence,’ ‘translatability,’ and ‘evaluation’ (Bassnett 1980; Lefevere 1992). All three are affected by the theorist’s attitude to language, that is, by those trends in linguistics and theories of semantics that ignore the historical and cultural contexts within which translations occur. Discussions of equivalence assume that languages are fixed categories that are invested with inherent meaning and that this meaning can be extracted and transferred from one language to another. This assumption, that languages are stable, promotes the idea of stable source and target language texts, between which equivalence is possible through ‘compensation’ or ‘loss and gain.’ However, there is a problem with defining equivalence and with drawing the limits of equivalence. Nida (1964) identifies

two types of equivalence, formal and dynamic, that carry meaning across languages. Neubert (1967) tries to solve the problem of translation equivalence by postulating that translation equivalence must be considered a semiotic category comprising syntactic, semantic and pragmatic components. Equivalence, according to him, results from the relation between signs themselves, what they stand for and those who use them.² André Lefevere comments on the inadequacy of this category for the analysis of translations: "The main problem with equivalence is, of course, that translators and translation scholars cannot agree on either the kind or the degree of equivalence needed to constitute real equivalence" (Lefevere 1992: 10). Connected to the issue of equivalence is that of the 'un/translatable.' Those who argue that equivalence is possible do acknowledge that there are some untranslatable elements in texts. For Jakobson (1959), for instance, complete equivalence cannot take place and so all poetic art is therefore technically untranslatable. However, others like Popovic (1958) identify the stable elements of a text that can be translated as its 'invariant core.' The question of evaluation has likewise been a persistent problem: the attempt has been to base the criterion of evaluation primarily on equivalence (Lefevere 1992: 8). Whether evaluation is based on the process of translation or the function of translation in a given context, it has been difficult to arrive at a set of criteria for evaluating translation. In brief, the above theorists have looked towards dominant theories of linguistics to develop prescriptive approaches to translation.

However, recent developments in theorising language function have provided more useful ways of tackling the problems of equivalence, translatability and evaluation. When language is seen not as possessing inherent meaning but as including a plurality of meanings, and not as being independent of material and human contexts but as a cultural phenomenon subject to acts of interpretation, translation becomes a cultural act. This understanding of translation takes into account the historical, social and material factors that control the transfer of contingent, multiple meanings from one language and culture to another. This has led to a re-examination of the standard critical terminology of translation studies: stable texts (source and target language texts), equivalence, compensation, loss and gain, invariants, translatability etc. have been questioned as adequate terms to conceptualise translation. Instead, these concepts are seen as having fulfilled certain specific needs at given points in the history of translations and translation studies.

Thus, in recent studies of translation, there is a significant increase in number of those who pay attention to the processes of translation, the translated product and the reception of the translation. André Lefevere, for instance, claims, 'translation is acculturation' (Lefevere 1992: 12); Gideon Toury (1995) and Theo Hermans (1999)

point out the importance of the linguistic and non-linguistic norms that govern the production and reception of translations. Lawrence Venuti (1992, 1998) sees translation as a cultural, political practice that participates in power structures to either 'domesticate' or 'foreignise' its readers. Translation, for these critics, is not ideologically neutral or transparent but is circumscribed and regulated by different forces at a given historical moment. As a result, the interest in the three problems of translation—equivalence, translatability, and evaluation—shifts in emphasis: that is, the notion of equivalence itself becomes an ideological construct (Hermans 1999: 58); ideas of translatability are defined by cultural contexts; and evaluation is seen as a historical, political process (Bassnett 1980) in which new questions arise, such as who is in a position of power to evaluate and for whom the evaluation is done.

Translation, in these critical reappraisals, is one of the sites that reveal power hierarchies between cultures and languages. It is thus seen as complicit with the processes that control and manipulate the paradigms of knowledge between cultures. Further, this approach gives the readers of translations a far more active role to play: the reader's expectations put pressure on the translator's task; the reader's act of interpretation can either submit to the authority of the text or radically appropriate, manipulate or reinterpret the text strategically. Either way, the role of the reader is highlighted: for instance, one of the most consequential of cultural and political effects of translation for Venuti is the formation of cultural identities, where readers are 'positioned' in "domestic intelligibilities that are also ideological positions" (Venuti 1998: 78). Increasing awareness that language use and politics are intimately connected with questions of cultural identity has led to the view that translating and translations participate in the process of identity formation. However, translation's effect on identity is not restricted to the individual reader but extends to encompass larger categories such as ethnic, national, class, religious, and community identities. When they are understood as important factors in group identification, language and translation also signal difference and, as Tabouret-Keller³ argues, acquire a boundary-marking function. Hermans (1999) suggests that even the history of a society's attitudes to translation is an indicator of its beliefs regarding language, identity and otherness. For instance, in Indian literary practice, translation did not demand fidelity to the original, but all translations were understood as re-creations 'in changed form' (*rupantar*), or that 'followed after' the original (*anuvad*) (Mukherjee 1981: 80). Thus, translation histories of a society can, and this is my starting premise, function as entry points to a study of the dominant discourses of language, culture and identity that operate within that society. Further, studying the history of the changing reception of translated texts in a particular society can serve as a means for studying the history of ideas of difference particular to that culture. Hence, this thesis examines the translation history

of the Tamil Bible to arrive at some insights regarding the competing interests of language, religion and culture in constructing a Protestant Tamil identity.

B. The Bible after Babel: Problems in Bible Translation

"Now, as a multilingual tower, the Bible is the polyglot Babel, and has annulled God's diaspora of the word" (Willis Barnstone, *The Poetics of Translation*, 1993).

The general issues regarding translation, identified above, are fully relevant to the specifics of translating the Bible. Since the Bible has almost always been read in translated format (Punt 2002: 94),⁴ Bible translation has contributed substantially to critical discussions in the field of translation. However, there are some issues that are unique to the translation of the Bible, and indeed to any religious scripture, as such texts are doubly 'sensitive' in their nature and function as both sacred and cultural objects. Karl Simms (1997) points out the special connection between translation and the sensitivity of sacred texts: "Sacred texts,present unique problems of sensitivity. Firstly, they themselves theorise translation, so that a translation should not only be faithful in the sense commonly understood by translators, but also faithful to the theory of translation presented in the text itself" (Simms 1997: 21). This problem becomes more apparent in the unique position of the Protestant Bible and its relationship with Protestant communities of faith: Protestant groups have had to base their faith on the notion of the validity of individual interpretations (and translations), but paradoxically, all these interpretations/translations must produce one universal text, which derives authority from its own internal claims. In view of the recent recognition of the complex links between language, reality and culture, I discuss four areas that render equivalence, translatability and evaluation particularly problematic for Bible translation: the question of authority; the question of inspiration; the relationship between the original and its translation; and the problems of defining 'religious language.' However, I have limited my discussion to those aspects of each issue that are of relevance to the analysis of the Bible in Tamil translation.

The question of authority comprises two interrelated issues—who has authored the Bible and where does the authority it claims derive from? Sacred texts, by claiming to be authoritative in nature, also make claims on language. Thus, what makes a text sacred is the belief that it expresses the intentions of the Original Author, so that the 'author of the text' in the commonly understood sense is merely a scribe, one who transcribes a more 'originary Word' with which he is inspired (Simms 1997: 19). When the Bible is translated, such claims heighten the problematic relationship between authority, language and translation: the translated Bible obfuscates the problem of translation by denying its translated status. Barnstone (1993), points out the history of

'disguisement' throughout the Christian scriptures, since any 'authentic, self-esteeming' gods or goddesses must deny being born of translation: "Hence, translation serves, in divine matters, not as an instrument for linguistic fidelity or historical accuracy but rather as a way of hiding likeness in proving or disproving the truth and import of an earlier text, praising or condemning the ancestral message, or, as with the Bible, revealing or concealing a prehistory" (Barnstone 1993: 144). However, the length of time a particular translation has been in circulation has also been used to define and justify its authority. That is, familiarity and prevailing tradition can constitute authority.⁵ Therefore, the longer a community of faith has used a particular translation, greater the sacred authority they invest it with. This aspect is evident in the histories of St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate, in the English King James Version as well as in the history of the Bible in Tamil translation.

The question of inspiration is related to that of authority. Christian communities have claimed not only that the Bible is inspired but that particular language translations are also inspired. This goes back to the first major translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek, the Septuagint Version⁶ of the early third century BCE, which acquired a legendary status of inspiration. Since then, numerous translations in different languages have been declared 'inspired,' thereby concealing the problems of translation. Pearson⁷ explains this belief in inspired translations by pointing out that any group that finds its existence based on texts, but cannot apprehend those texts in their original form or language, is on psychologically shaky ground. Hence, when a translation is believed to be inspired, it is no longer an interpretation of the original but becomes the original itself. Allert's theory (in Porter and Hess, 1999) on inspired translations is a useful one. He contends that if scripture is viewed as the product of a community, then inspiration is not an *a priori* assumption about the text or located in an individual author, but must be seen as a functioning criterion for the community that produces it. He proposes that claims to inspiration can be seen as part of the responses of a community to new situations that represent threats to the community. According to him, Bible translations can be viewed as inspired because "the community views them as accurately reflecting what the community as a whole believes" (Allert 1999: 112). Although Allert's theory is instructive for contextualizing inspiration as an expression of the needs of a community, it needs to be qualified and pushed further. Problems arise when there is lack of consensus within a single community on what can be considered inspired since different groups may experience conflicting needs at a given time. Further, some of these needs may change radically with time and a translation may continue to fulfil the needs of some members of the community but not of others. The case of the Protestant Tamil community provides a

good example of such conflicting needs, manifested in disputes over which version of the Tamil Bible is truly inspired.

The problematic relationship between a translation and its 'original' is an essential part of the problems of authority and inspiration discussed above. Both 'authority' and 'inspiration' are claimed (often simultaneously) in instances where translations are made to function as originals for a language community. Locating 'the original' is an impossible task in the case of the Bible and not only as a result of post-structuralist theories of deconstruction. At one level, if the Bible is believed to be the spoken word of God, then the very writing down of the word is itself a translation from orality to inscription. A further difficulty, as Pierre Grange comments, is that while "ordinary secular retellings preserve and spread the original text and enhance the author, religious translation, with its mission to make original, threatens the existence of both source text and its author" (as quoted in Barnstone 1993: 140). Yet, each translation by becoming the original is meant to bring the reader closer to the original voice of God, the author. The ambiguous relationship between the original and its translations is also revealed in the different ways translations have functioned for communities to create the idea of a universal community of believers. The unstable and unfixed nature of the Christian scriptures in translation can function to create stable communities of faith only if the translations become the original for the communities who have no access to the original: "Hence, translation in all Christendom replaced the source text, and effectively became ...the original" (Barnstone 1993: 186). Ironically, when this occurs, revisions or re-translations within the same language become suspect as heretical acts of tampering. This phenomenon will be examined in my thesis through an analysis of the historical processes that created an 'original' Tamil Bible and what implications this belief in 'originals' had for the Protestant Tamil community of faith.

A frequently asked question in the context of Bible translation is whether there is a special kind of language that is specifically religious as opposed to the mundane language of the everyday. Although the gnostic view of religious language, as being sacred to the extent of containing esoteric mystery, is not widespread in Christian communities, there is a general bias towards viewing a certain type of language as more sacred than others. However, as Stanley Porter (1996) points out, there is a need to distinguish between the language of organised religion and the language of the religious experience of a community of faith, that is, between the language of ecclesiasts and the language of the laity. Further, the language of popular piety, which usually occupies cultural spaces outside the official space of the church, can disrupt the official language of institutionalised worship and ritual settings. Besides, there may be differences in the religious language of different classes and different periods within

a culture. Often, the presence of archaic words within religious language is believed to be a sign of the translation's proximity (that is, faithfulness) to the original; conversely, modernising the language of a translation is seen as distancing the translation from the original. Thus, religious terminology tends to be conservative in the hope that it will acquire a sacred status more quickly. The question of religious language becomes complicated when a faith community begins to identify with it. In the colonial context, the defining of religious language was further compounded by the challenge posed by indigenous religious vocabularies—were they to be adopted for Protestant use or rejected as offensive? These problems of arriving at a suitable definition of a sacred Tamil for Protestant Tamils are discussed in detail in later chapters, in which will be shown that these definitions shift constantly according to the historical, social, cultural and political climate under which a version is produced.

Finally, the part played by institutions (governments, academia, the publishing industry, etc.) in defining, controlling, and preserving translations in general is even more apparent in the case of the translations of sacred texts. Institutions such as the church, which rely on translations, show a preference for a translation ethics of equivalence, that is, translations that ratify existing discourses and canons (Roberts and Street⁸; Venuti 1998). The pressure of the church as a monitoring institution has shaped the translation history of the Bible; in the case of the Tamil Bible, the imperatives of mission in Tamil society added a further dimension to the institutional pressure of the church. These institutions attempted to describe certain limits for the translations of the Tamil Bible by defining categories such as inspiration, originality, authority and the nature of religious language discussed above, which influenced the way the Bible was assimilated into Tamil culture.

C. Postcolonialism, translation and the Bible

Postcolonial theory seeks to scrutinize the categories of race, ethnicity, nation, language, class, identity and gender in colonial representations in order to reveal the constructed nature of these categories in colonising cultures. The point of departure is an evaluation of the modes of perception and representation that characterised colonial encounters. Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) was one of the most influential books in the development of postcolonialism. Said used the term 'orientalism' to refer to the knowledge produced by Western imperial powers about their colonies that helped to justify imperial conquest. However, this thesis of the colonial encounter was later criticised for presenting the colonial project (of representing the orient) as a totally hegemonic process and for assuming that both the colonizing powers and the colonized regions were culturally homogeneous and one-dimensional. Revisionist

scholarship (Aijaz Ahmad 1992, including Said's own position in *Culture and Imperialism*, 1993) recognized that orientalist assumptions and representations did not enjoy homogeneous consensus within the colonizing culture and that colonized peoples had some agency in resisting and subverting orientalist discourses. Postcolonial theory, as it has developed, aims at 're-reading' the different kinds of knowledge produced by colonizing cultures and post/colonial societies: those produced during colonialism, those produced from countries with a history of colonialism, and those produced by communities rendered migrant and diasporic as a result of colonialism. Postcolonial theory is interested in investigating the power hierarchies that hold Europe and America, on the one hand, and colonial and postcolonial societies from the rest of the world, on the other, in a series of dichotomies which begin with 'self'/'other,' centre/periphery, civilized/savage, and donor/recipient. Postcolonial readings are fundamentally concerned with identity—whether national, racial, linguistic or gender-based—and with how identity is produced and constituted within cultural representations.

Since one of the concerns of postcolonial theory is the politics of language use in both colonial and postcolonial societies, some postcolonial critics (Thiong'o 1986; Niranjana 1992; Dharwadker 1999; Devy 1999) have engaged with the political implications of the way language and translations function in colonial situations, opening a new area in translation studies. Drawing on Foucault's theorisation of power and knowledge, their approach is interested in the power that results from the knowledge produced by translation, and more importantly, how power relations between the colonizing and colonized cultures are maintained through translations. Douglas Robinson points out that, "[t]he study of translation and empire, or even translation as empire, was born in the mid to late 1980s out of the realization that translation has always been an indispensable channel of imperial conquest and occupation" (Robinson 1997: 10). Thus, translation at times became a primary tool of empire by possessing not just political or cultural power but by acquiring 'symbolic power' (Hermans 1996). Postcolonial translation theorists insist that translation in the colonial context always leads to the cultural transformation of the colonized because of the hierarchy assumed between the cultures and languages of the coloniser and the colonised. Such theorists are also interested in the role of translation as a strategy of decolonisation and they turn their attention to the role of translation in postcolonial societies (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999; Nair 2002), to retrieve indigenous translation practices, to investigate whether there are any shifts in translation practices from the colonial to the postcolonial situation and whether translation has been used as a strategy for stating cultural difference.

There are two parallel positions within this postcolonial approach to translation: one sees colonial translation as hegemonic and assimilative, 'interpellating'⁹ and transforming the colonised culture and its identity to a 'subject' position¹⁰; the other sees the possibility for colonised subjects to reinterpret a translated text radically, thereby, questioning the colonizer's authority and supposed cultural superiority. Lawrence Venuti's theorisation of translation falls in the first category although Venuti (1998, 2000), distinguishes two kinds of translations—'domesticating' and 'foreignising.' Domesticating translations are those that dehistoricize and assimilate foreign texts into the domestic canons and culture, thus reproducing domestic subjects in the translations: "Translation forms domestic subjects by enabling a process of 'mirroring' or self-recognition: the foreign text becomes intelligible when the reader recognizes himself or herself in the translation by identifying the domestic values that...are inscribed in it..." (Venuti 1998: 77). Foreignising translations, on the other hand, manifest their own foreignness and allow an ethics of difference. Foreignising translations are 'good' and domesticating 'bad': he is convinced that while domesticating translations produce complicit identities, a re-establishment of status quo, and a ratification of existing hegemonies, foreignising translations bring about a subversion of established institutions and create resistant audiences by calling attention to difference and the limits of culture. Venuti's argument, for obvious reasons, may seem especially attractive to the understanding of translation in the colonial context; however, there are some fundamental problems in such an analysis. As Robinson has pointed out, "[t]he impact of assimilative and foreignising translations on target-language readers is neither as monolithic nor as predictably harmful or salutary (respectively) as the foreignists claim" (Robinson 1997: 110). Thus, to claim that all 'domesticating' translations are always assimilative, and further, that this assimilative effect is always harmful is reductive. By the same token, all 'foreignising' translations cannot always have a liberating effect on receiving cultures.

Vincent Rafael (1988) and Tejaswani Niranjana (1992) are two critics who take the second position within the postcolonial approach to translation, arguing for the ability of the colonized to deconstruct and appropriate translated texts as part of a strategy of resistance, thereby destabilizing colonial power structures. In his study of the relationship between translation and conversion in the colonial encounter between Spanish Catholicism and the Tagalogs in the Philippines between the late sixteenth to the early eighteenth centuries, Rafael suggests that the presence of untranslated Latin and Castilian Catholic terms in Tagalog translations opened a space for resistance: "The missionaries meant these words to ensure the orthodoxy of conversion texts in the native language; to the Tagalogs, however, they meant other things" (Rafael 1988: 117). He observes that each group read into the other's language and behaviour

possibilities that the original speakers had not intended or foreseen. Thus, “[f]or the Tagalogs, translation was a process less of internalising colonial-Christian conventions than of evading their totalising grip by repeatedly marking the difference between their language and interests and those of the Spaniards” (Rafael 1988: 211). Likewise, Niranjana sees contradictions in translations as opportunities for resistance: “By reading against the grain of colonial historiography, the translator/historian discovers areas of contradiction and silent resistance that, being made legible, can be deployed against hegemonic images of the colonized” (Niranjana 1992: 75-6). There are some similarities in the position of Rafael and Niranjana with Lawrence Venuti’s analyses of translation. However liberating the readings of Niranjana, Rafael and Venuti may seem, it is also necessary to recognize that societies under colonial domination have not always offered resistance in a homogenous fashion for a collective agenda. Certain hegemonic translations may have enjoyed the support of elite sections within colonial societies at some points and may have been targets of resistance at others. This, as the thesis demonstrates, is true of the history of reception of the Tamil Bible.

Similarly, critiques of Protestant mission from a postcolonial perspective are also divided into two opposing groups: those who see missionary presence in colonial societies as inherently oppressive, damaging to local culture, and as perpetuating a form of cultural imperialism (Schlesinger 1974; Hutchison 1982; Stanley 1990); and those who tend to see the enterprise of mission as leading to cultural encounters that initiated positive movements, reforms or ‘reawakenings’ of local cultures and identity (Sanneh 1989; Frykenberg 1999, 2002). Stanley, from the first group, for instance, points out that in the Victorian sense of mission, “the propagation of the gospel had been coupled quite unashamedly with the pursuit of British commercial expansion” (Stanley 1990: 70). He further contends: “Christian missions played an essential part in the broadening of Britain’s imperial objectives in India” (Stanley 1990: 98). An excellent example of the second group is Sanneh’s celebratory view of the effects of the translated Bible: “The missionary sponsorship of Bible translation became the catalyst for profound changes and developments in language, culture and ethnicity, changes that invested ethnic identity with the materials for a reawakened sense of local identity” (Sanneh 2002: 70). Once again, the pivot on which debates on mission turn is the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic polarity—that is, those who read Christian mission as producing hegemonic discourses that fixed the subjectivity of the colonised on the one hand, and on the other, those who insist on seeing the liberating effects of Christian mission. However, there are some historians of colonial history who point out that in spite of shared interests and goals between the colonial agencies and missionary societies, there were also moments of tension and conflict that do not allow for simplistic binary readings of either/or. For instance, Susan Bayly (1989,

1999), Andrew Porter (1997, 1999), Ravindiran (2000), Chakravarti (1998) point to various instances when the missionary enterprise either provided channels through which imperial control followed, or delayed annexation and colonization and subverted colonial authority. Further, they show Protestant missions as producing complicit, resisting or appropriating moves within colonial societies. Likewise, Irschick (1994) has argued for a dialogic study of the colonial encounter where British and local interpreters participated equally in constructing new institutions to produce a new kind of knowledge.

II. Theoretical Framework of the thesis

Drawing on the critical paradigms provided by the various approaches discussed above, my own orientation that frames this thesis seeks to emphasize the plural, discontinuous and fragmentary nature of resistance to different discourses. I believe that translations are neither 'good' nor 'bad' but produce a proliferation of meanings in the cultures they enter, which interact with the elements already present in the cultures to evoke heterogeneous responses that may in turn be complicit or resisting. Likewise, I see no system as being completely coercive or hegemonic in practice but always working under the pressures of its internal contradictions; each system effects conditions for a range of subject positions. Hence, I take neither the British colonial administration nor Christian missionary operations as monolithic, hegemonic structures that determined the past and futures of colonial societies for all time. Literary translations undertaken by both missionaries and colonial administration introduced new literary practices into indigenous language traditions, which was either imitated in order to subvert or resist external influences or used to reform or 'modernise' literary tradition (for the specific case of Tamil, see Blackburn 2003). The translated Bible, similarly, produced both compliant and grateful converts as well as initiating radical forms of resistance against Christian missions. However, I also believe that compliance and resistance were often the combined result of other factors (such as caste) within societies under colonial rule. This meant that elite groups may have chosen compliance to maintain their social status, or resisted in order to enhance their social position. At the same time, non-elite sections of the same society may choose either option to improve their material and social conditions. Finally, I see 'cultural identity' not so much as reflecting a shared history and cultural codes that provide stable, continuous frames of reference and meaning, but as "the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence but a *positioning*...[where] there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'" (Hall 1990: 226 [emphasis in original]). More specifically,

I see religious identity as an awareness of belonging to a religious community, where there is identification with a larger religious tradition and the community envisioned by that tradition (Monius 2001).

My investigation into the practice of the translation of the Tamil Bible aims first to locate this history in the political and social contexts that produced it; and second, to analyse the processes by which Protestant Tamil identity has been constructed and articulated. I focus on three phases of key Protestant translations of the Bible:

I. The first phase comprises two German Lutheran missionary translations from the eighteenth century:

1. Ziegenbalg's New Testament (1714)
2. Fabricius's Version (1772)

II. The second phase was that of the British and Foreign Bible Society's translation committees of the nineteenth century under which two translations were published:

1. Rhenius's New Testament (1833)
2. *Union Version* (1871)

III. The third phase began with the rise of Dravidian Tamil consciousness in the twentieth century with increased Protestant Tamil translators, which resulted in two major translations:

1. *Revised Version* (1956)
2. *Tiruviviliyam* or Common Language Translation (1995)

These versions of the Tamil Bible, along with other Protestant Tamil texts, are analysed within the pluralistic and mutually polemical religious milieu of Tamil society. Likewise, the Protestant Tamil community are seen as active contestants in socio-religious debates and not as passive subjects of the missionary evangelical discourse or as marginal outsiders to religious movements in Tamil culture.

As a result, Protestant Tamil identity is viewed as provisional, shaped by changes in the religious dynamics in Tamil society. Conscious that "any understanding of the multiple senses of self one finds in South Asia must take into consideration the sacred others with whom those selves ritually interact" (Cort 1998: 9), this thesis analyses the several levels at which Protestant Tamil identity relates with other religious traditions. One of the prominent 'sacred others' for Protestant Tamils has been Hinduism and in the discussion that follows, the term 'Hindu' is used as a broad referent for a large set

of religious beliefs and practices that is loosely recognized as part of Hindu religious discourse. At the same time, however, the analysis appreciates the specific differences between Brahmanical and non-brahmanical traditions, such as Tamil Śaivism and Vaiśnavism, within this broad category, as they existed in Tamil religious culture. The influence of other religious traditions, such as the non-Vedic traditions of Buddhism and Jainism, on Tamil society is also taken into consideration: Tamil Buddhism (*pauttam*) and Jainism (*camaṇam*) have been minority (in terms of quantifiable statistical entities) religious traditions, that have nevertheless played an important part in religious polemics with Tamil Śaivism and Vaiśnavism. Although the earliest Buddhist and Jain settlements in Tamil society go back to the second century BCE, their most significant literary production in Tamil has been dated between the third and sixth centuries CE. However, the two sects adopted different strategies in their interaction with Tamil Śaivism and Vaiśnavism: the Jains chose a conscious ambiguity in their ritual that evidently compensated in part for the xenophobia that the Jains provoked but the Buddhists chose either confrontation or assimilation, which made them less successful (Schalk and Veluppillai 2002: 22).

Besides these faith traditions, Islam is the other important religious presence in Tamil society. Islam took root in the Tamil areas as a result of southern India's maritime trading networks, with Arab traders and navigators settling along the Coromandel coast as early as the eighth and ninth century CE. Bayly argues that the Sufis (Muslim mystical adepts) provided a focus for the transmission of Islamic ideas and teachings in South India: with its relative freedom from prescriptive or doctrinal formalities and focus on personal devotion and the charismatic power of the *pir* or saint, the Sufi tradition "provided a natural bridge between Muslim worship and the beliefs of non-Muslim groups in many different regions of Asia..." (Bayly 1989: 74-5). Bayly further points out that there are features of Tamil religion that have made it particularly easy for devotees to bridge the gap between the South Indian devotional traditions (Śaivite, Vaiśnavite and the Tamil goddess tradition) and the South Indian Muslim cult saint, by which the *pir* has come to be assimilated in the minds of devotees: "[i]n some cases this assimilation may take the form of a positive congruence of attributes which the *pir* is seen to hold in common with one of the deities; at other times, it may take place as an apparent conflict in which the *pir* conquers the non-Muslim deity by outclassing his or her powers" (Bayly 1989: 116). This thesis, thus, analyses Protestant Tamil identity as a constantly shifting category that is modified by on-going encounters between Protestant Tamils and the other religious (Hindu, Islamic, Buddhist, Jain and Catholic) traditions that share the same cultural space.

The central issue that structures my investigation of Protestant Tamil texts and identity is the question of assimilation that has been an underlying concern in all the theoretical positions discussed above. The idea of assimilation operates in the critical discourses at several levels in relation to the material under study: first, translation studies is concerned with the question of assimilation as one of the effects of a translation upon its entry in a new culture; second, assimilation is also a concern of postcolonialism and discourse theory per se (though the critical terminology used is 'hegemony,' 'interpellation,' 'subject position' etc.) in understanding the role played by colonial agencies in colonial encounters; and third, assimilation is one of the prime concerns of Christian mission, that is, the assimilation or 'indigenisation' of Christianity to local cultures across the globe is recognized as an important project of Christian mission in those cultures especially in the twentieth century.

The production of the Tamil Bible, the creation of a Protestant Tamil vocabulary, and the configurations of Protestant Tamil identity that have manifested themselves have all used these concepts of assimilation for self-justification. However, the idea of assimilation is used in different ways by each of the three overlapping theoretical frames of translations studies, postcolonial theory and studies on Christian mission. Hence, one of the aims of this study is to examine what aspect of the idea of assimilation is important to each, whether they contradict each other, and how Protestant Tamil identity has attempted to negotiate with all three at various levels. For instance, Protestant missionaries wanted both to co-opt Tamil religious discourse for Protestant use and to maintain distinctions between Protestant Christian doctrines and practice and other religious beliefs present in Tamil society; while Protestant missionaries were concerned with the assimilation of language, Protestant Tamils were engaged with assimilation of Protestant scripture into Tamil poetic genres; assimilation sought at institutional levels were different from popular forms of assimilation; similarly, there was confusion as to which Tamil culture to assimilate with—the 'high' culture of Tamil Brahmanism or the 'low' culture of Tamil folk.

This study also points out that different groups argue for assimilation of one kind or the other by exploiting notions of tradition, familiarity, purity, and the sacred in language. A further question that the thesis addresses is whether assimilation itself can lead to forms of resistance. The thesis analyses the contradictions apparent in the articulation of Protestant Tamil identity that signal the points of tension as these several ideas of assimilation compete with each other. By combining textual analyses with theoretical questions, the analysis engages with the cultural ideologies behind linguistic forms and practices, not to exemplify determinist theories of relating

language to society, but to provide a fuller view of both the politics and aesthetics of language use by Protestant Tamils in Tamil society.¹¹

III. Background

The first section presents the recent history of Tamil language, a brief summary of which might prove useful to non-Tamil specialist readers. Some aspects of the history (such as the Pure Tamil Movement) are dealt with in more detail later in the thesis. The second section delineates the existing scholarship specific to the Tamil Bible and the study of Christian mission and religions in South India, which this thesis has drawn on.

A. Tamil language movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

Although Tamil has one of the longest literary traditions amongst the world's living languages, much of the critical attention paid to the study of the Tamil language and the systematic writing of its literary history has occurred only in the last three hundred years. Further, the development of a set of ideas about the Tamil language from the mid-nineteenth century became central to the defining of Tamil identity in the twentieth century. This set of ideas depended to a great extent on the work of Catholic and Protestant missionaries on Tamil language and literature. Although the primary intent behind the missionaries' attempts to learn, study and introduce changes to Tamil was in order to use it as a medium for proselytising their faith, some of them developed a deeper interest in the language and its literature. The more visible and obvious effects of this missionary interest have been written about on several occasions.¹² Missionaries working in the Tamil-speaking areas compiled dictionaries, wrote grammars, gathered manuscripts, excavated and researched inscriptions, collected proverbs and folk songs, and translated into and out of Tamil. They studied and critically commented upon a wide range of literary texts. Their introduction of the printing press to further missionary activity also meant that Tamil texts, which had hitherto survived as palm-leaf manuscripts, began to appear in print. This initiated its own chain of developments: arriving at 'authentic' editions of literary texts, attempting to date all texts and ascertaining the author, building a literary history and finally, the cataloguing of printed texts. With printed Tamil texts now much more accessible to a wider Tamil audience, the cumulative effect of these developments was that the attitudes of Tamils to Tamil literary texts, Tamil language and the Tamil past began to transform concurrently. Further, certain critiques and categories of meaning within the missionary discourse on Tamil culture and society were appropriated and mobilised by emerging powerful groups (such as the Saiva Siddhanta sect) within the Tamil

community in the late nineteenth century to invent a Tamil identity based on a direct bond between religion and language use.

The processes by which this phenomenon occurred became most visible in nineteenth-century colonial Tamil society. Writing about the early nineteenth century, Stuart Blackburn (2003) analyses the effect of colonial encounter and the simultaneous entry of print on Tamil literary culture as one that led to a fundamental shift in the way Tamils viewed their language. That is, there was a process of objectification of language, where Tamil was perceived “no longer only as a patrimony, but as a thing to be measured, known and used.” He believes that “[w]ith the colonial encounter...Tamils began to see their language from the outside...it could be considered a thing to be acquired, manipulated and reformed. More important, language was not only malleable, it was itself a tool for ideological and social change” (Blackburn 2003: 27). This shift in attitude to Tamil derived greater strength and focus later in the century when the comparative study of Indian languages by European missionaries and scholars provided the Tamil language (along with Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam) with a distinct genealogy from the Indo-Aryan linguistic family.¹³ Robert Caldwell (1814-91) wrote his pioneering philological study, *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages* in 1856 where he provided ‘scientific’ grounds on which a separate lineage for Tamil could be claimed. Contesting the theory held until then that Tamil derived largely from Sanskrit he was also able to present a distinct racial, cultural and religious origin for the Tamils as separate from those of Aryan descent in north India. V. Ravindiran (2000) argues that Caldwell’s study was one of two “key moments” in the evolution of a Tamil nationalist ideology: “Caldwell not only coined the word *Dravidian* to describe the languages and peoples of South India, but he also constructed, with the aid of the modern disciplines of philology, archaeology, and history, a genealogy for Dravidian languages, culture, and people marked by their opposition to their Aryan/Brahman counterparts” (Ravindiran 2000: 53). Although Fabricius (1711-1791) was the first to distinguish with an asterisk words with Sanskrit roots in his dictionary (1779), Caldwell’s study fuelled the idea that it was possible to retrieve a ‘pure’ Tamil vocabulary from the mixture of Tamil and Sanskrit that was then prevalent, which would express what was essentially Tamil. Interestingly, one of the earliest instances of expurgating Sanskrit from Tamil use occurs in the mid-nineteenth century missionary context when two separate committees produced draft revisions of the Tamil Bible: the missionaries aligned with the Jaffna Auxiliary Bible Society and the Madras Auxiliary Bible Society each accused the other of producing imperfect translations on the ground that they contained too many Sanskrit terms.¹⁴

The work of missionaries such as Caldwell also went hand in hand with a religious revival centred on a re-worked Tamil Śaivism. Śaivism was claimed to be the most ancient and authentic religion of the Tamils pre-dating Sanskritic Hinduism associated with the Aryan north (Ramaswamy 1997: 25-29; Ravindiran 2000: 61-78). The Śaivite tradition was presented as the repository and guardian of the Tamil language: Śaivite worship, it was claimed, was conducted in Tamil, using pure Tamil rituals based on Tamil scriptures. G.U. Pope (1820-1908), an S.P.G.¹⁵ missionary, contributed to the elevation of the Śaivite tradition with his translation of *Tiruvācakam*: "Pope greatly enhanced the arguments in favour of the antiquity and sophistication of Tamil culture by placing the Saiva Siddhanta religious system in a high position among world religions, 'the choicest product of the Dravidian intellect'" (Irschick 1969: 280). There was a simultaneous rejection of Sanskrit and vedantic influences. P. Sundaram Pillai (1855-97), for instance, published an article titled 'The Age of Tirujnana-Sambhanda' in *The Madras Christian College Magazine* (1890-91) in which he presented the close connection between Tamil Śaivism and a Tamil identity independent of Sanskritic Hinduism: "The Tamil Saivas have their own system of sacred literature, compiled and arranged so as to match the Vedas, Puranas, and Sastras in Sanskrit" (Pillai 1890-91: 1-2). Thus, the resurgence of Saiva Siddhanta philosophy in the latter half of the nineteenth century depended on the claim that it was a peculiarly Tamil religion, which expressed a uniquely Tamil sense of culture and identity that was in opposition to Sanskritic culture.

Thus, both Tamil and the Tamil speaking community acquired a 'history,' which was "imagined organically" (Ramaswamy 1997: 14) around issues of race, language, and religion. Upon this history, it was possible to construct a Tamil/Dravidian identity that was distinct and superior to the claims made by the Aryan, Sanskritic and Brahmanical culture that had imposed itself on Tamil society. Further, the history and identity sought for Tamils was based on the rhetorical claims of 'purity:' the Tamil of 'pure' Dravidian stock (that is, not Aryan) who belonged to a 'pure' religious community of the worshippers of Siva (that is, not Brahmanical Hinduism) and who spoke a 'pure' Tamil (that is, one that was purged of Sanskrit terms and influences). As Ravindiran observes, in coining the word "Dravidian," Caldwell gave it a subversive potential, creating the conceptual basis for a "Dravidian" cultural and religious identity with an accompanying history (Ravindiran 2000: 56). This peculiar manifestation of Tamil identity in the late nineteenth century was deployed for political and cultural purposes in the twentieth century by a group of non-Brahmans who believed themselves to be the creators of 'southern Tamil' and Tamil culture (Irschick 1969: xv). In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the non-Brahmans organized themselves into a political movement in parallel with (and in opposition to) nationalist politics in the

Madras Presidency. Tamil, non-Brahman aspirations were consolidated through the political manifestations of the Justice Party (1916-17), and later the Dravida Kazhagam (1944) and Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (1949). Concern over Tamil language and literature was politicised further through the Pure Tamil Movement (*tanittamil iyakkam*), which from the 1930s sought to 'cleanse' Tamil of all foreign influences. The Movement received a boost after the DMK came to power in 1967, when it began an official programme of creating pedagogical and administrative terminologies in a Sanskrit-free Tamil. The Movement, however, had its internal inconsistencies and failings. Ramaswamy indicates some problems in the Pure Tamil Movement's attempt to define Tamil identity:

Indeed, the *tanittamil* movement attempts to transform Tamil speakers not just into subjects of Tamil but into subjects of a particular kind of Tamil—*tanittamil*—that is deemed to be its only right and possible form ... *tanittamil*... links this subjectivity to a particularly narrow and rigid definition of Tamil. The *tanittamil* project is thus concerned not merely with cleansing the language but also with singularizing and homogenizing the subjectivity of its speakers, for ultimately, it is only the speaker of pure Tamil who is worthy of being called a Tamilian (Ramaswamy 1997:154).

Post-1970s, the Movement has lost much of its vigour and support though individual adherents still promote the use of 'pure' Tamil in everyday use enthusiastically.

This condensed account of how Tamil has come to be perceived and employed by Tamils in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries has direct bearing on the history of the Tamil Bible in the corresponding years. The ideological pressure of the Pure Tamil Movement has influenced almost all Protestant translations of the Tamil Bible in the twentieth century. One of the primary aims of this thesis is to analyse the points at which the ideological construction of a Tamil identity by the Pure Tamil Movement and the aspirations of the Protestant Tamil community intersect and diverge. It will be seen that contradictory social aspirations amongst the Protestant Tamils claim or reject the ideology of the Movement according to their advantage. That is, while some groups within the community make a case for assimilation through the Pure Tamil Movement other sections reject it altogether.

B. Existing scholarship

Critical research on the translation history of the Tamil Bible is limited. Unfortunately, most of the materials available give mainly historical accounts of the translations of the Tamil Bible that concentrate on biographical details of the missionary translators, the circumstances of their mission society and when the translations or revisions occurred. By and large, there has not been a concerted effort to place each major translation of the Bible in Tamil in its socio-political and historical context, or to study the varying

responses of the Protestant Tamil community of readers. Likewise, there has been little interest in placing the history of the Tamil Bible in the context of other Indian language translations of the Bible or translations of the Bible in other colonial encounters or, within the colonial context.

Three essays have appeared in print so far on the Tamil Bible: two of the essays, 'A brief history of the Tamil Bible' (1984) and one on the translations by the Danish-Halle missionaries in the eighteenth century (1982) by Henry Victor were published in the *Indian Church History Review*. The third essay, by Michael Bergunder (2002), appeared in an edited volume on Christianity and its cultural interactions with Indian religious traditions. Of the three, Bergunder's essay 'The "Pure Tamil Movement" and Bible Translation: The Ecumenical Thiruvivilum of 1995,' is the most useful. He is the first scholar to critically analyze the imperatives behind the translation and its reception by late twentieth-century Protestant Tamils.

There are two studies on the Tamil terminology used in the various versions of the Tamil Bible. Bror Tiliander's *Christian and Hindu Terminology* (1974) is valuable for its detailed study of the various religious terms available in Tamil, especially their etymological history and how Protestant and Catholic use have differed from Hindu usage. However, although he reflects on why certain terms were selected by missionary translators, he does not investigate how the terms were received by Protestant Tamils, or the cultural and political factors that affected the reception of new terms. Ulla Sandgren's *The Tamil New Testament and Bartholomaüs Ziegenbalg* (1991) is a short study of selected passages of the New Testament in seven Tamil Translations.

Three books have been published on the history of the Tamil Bible and one on the history of Tamil Christian literature. Of the three histories written specifically on the translation of the Tamil Bible, the most recent is the *History of Tamil Bible Translation* (2002) co-edited by Michael Irudayam and Robinson Levi. The volume is useful for its detailed historical account of the Tamil Bible from its Catholic beginnings to the most recent one of 1995. It gives information on some less known translation attempts, which are difficult to find in other histories. However, there is no analysis whatsoever of the conditions of translations, the terms used, or the translators and their readers. The remaining two histories are in Tamil: Sabapathy Kulendran's *Kiristava Tamil Vētākamattin Varalāru* [A History of the Tamil Bible] published in 1967 and Sarojini Packiamuthu's *Viviliyamum Tamilum* [Bible and Tamil] in 1990. Both give a detailed history of the process of translation as well as discuss the specific problems of translating the terms for 'God' into Tamil. They investigate why some of these terms

were successful amongst Protestant Tamils while others were not. Packiamuthu relies on Kulendran but extends her history to the 1980s. Although the last-mentioned volumes are valuable for their historical detail, accuracy and analysis, they do not analyse the translation of the Tamil Bible in relation to theories of translation nor is there a critical analysis of colonial mission and its interaction with Tamil culture.

D. Rajarigam's *The History of Tamil Christian Literature* (1958) begins with an account of early Catholic missionary writings and translations in Tamil, and then narrates the history of Protestant translations of the Bible. He briefly discusses a few religious terms used by Protestants before moving to a discussion of literary works by Protestant Tamils. Although he seems to be aware of the problems of translation and the pressures on expressing Protestant Christianity in Tamil or through Tamil culture, his analysis presents these as universal problems. For instance, he sees "the task of making biblical words and concepts intelligible to the modern mind, whether in Europe and America or in Asia" as difficult and needing special attention (Rajarigam 1958: 58-9). Such a reading ignores the specific problem of translating the Bible for a Tamil culture. At the same time he suggests the rather simplistic solution of 'indigenizing' Christian expression in Tamil literature and society.

Beside this work specific to the translation of the Tamil Bible, there is a vast body of literature on Indian church history, on Catholic and Protestant theology in India and on the themes of 'inculturation' and 'indigenisation.' Dayanand Francis (1987, 1989, 1992), for instance, has written extensively on the influence of Hindu terms and poetic tradition on Protestant Tamil poetry and on the need for greater dialogue between the Tamil church and the Hindu religious traditions. S. Jesudasan (1966) was similarly concerned with 'indigenising' Christianity while retaining the uniqueness of the Christian message. The concern of such Protestant Tamil studies has been to focus mainly on the relationship between Christianity and Hinduism, which tend to be efforts at redressing what they see as the earlier harmful, divisive policies of Protestant missions. Although such work is useful in highlighting the cultural parallels between the Protestant Tamil and other Tamil religious communities, it suffers from being prescriptive rather than analytic.

Apart from work on Indian mission, there is of course extensive scholarship on Christian missions in general. I have limited myself to works that focus particularly on Bible translation and mission in order to provide a frame of reference for my study of the Bible in Tamil translation. As mentioned in the previous section, scholarship in this area can be divided into two categories. One set of scholars, while looking at translation and mission in the colonial context, seek to prove the positive and enabling

effects of Bible translation on receiving cultures. In this category are Lamin Sanneh's *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (1989); *Bible Translation and the Spread of the Church* (1990) edited by Philip C. Stine; and William A. Smalley's *Translation as Mission* (1991). They believe that it is possible for Christianity to translate itself completely and unproblematically from one culture to another. Further, that though mission and colonialism often played on the same economic and political stage as colonialism (Smalley 1991: xii), Western mission, unlike Western colonialism, did not destroy indigenous cultures. Refuting critical readings that view "mission as destructive of indigenous originality" (Sanneh 1989: 4), they argue that mission and Bible translation were important contributors to the renewal of indigenous cultures and put "local language and the relevant parts of local culture ... on a par with the missionary language and culture..." (Smalley 1991: 244). Further, they argue that Bible translation brings a universal text to a local language and culture and unites the local culture with a diverse body of believers all over the world. In short, the Bible was translated, always successfully, into local cultures, which radically 'renewed' indigenous languages and cultures, and where the translatability of the Bible was essentially egalitarian and unifying (Stine 1990).

The second set of scholars provides alternative readings that criticize this position. They tend to question the assumption that the communication of Christianity is possible without difficulty across time, language and cultural differences and without any political or cultural baggage that could often be destructive of local cultures. They place the enterprise of mission and specifically Bible translation within the context of European imperialism and colonial policies and find that often there was a collusion of interests that led to the perpetuation of hegemonic cultural structures. For instance, in *Macropolitics of Nineteenth-century Literature* (1991), the editors, Jonathan Arac and Harriet Ritvo, comment on the mediation of culture and authority to peoples who were actual or potential imperial subjects (Arac and Ritvo 1991: 7). Sue Zemka's essay on the British and Foreign Bible Society in the same volume argues that Bible translations led to "large-scale cultural displacement" in Asia and Africa (Zemka 1991: 104). Similarly, Sugirtharajah has on several occasions critiqued the processes by which the Bible was translated and disseminated in the colonial context. In *The Bible and the Third World* (2001), he analyses the link between biblical interpretation and power and the related question of the interface between indigenous and imported knowledge: that translating the Bible into 'vernaculars' was far from enabling local cultures; instead there was a repudiation of local languages and cultures as the alien 'other' that lacked the ability to convey the Christian message and often meant that the "missionaries, if necessary, did not hesitate to alter or falsify local cultural values or wrench them from their roots" (Sugirtharajah 2001: 57—65). In contrast to Smalley and Sanneh's

arguments above, Sugirtharajah claims that missionary translators did not harmlessly retrieve vanishing languages but that “[o]ne of the lessons missionaries learnt in the process of translation was that the Christian message was not necessarily universal nor easily applicable to those of different cultural backgrounds. They found that the languages were either sullied with pagan notions, or lacked a Christian equivalent” (Sugirtharajah 2002: 160). However, he also points to the resistance from colonized cultures resulting from such cultural encounters, which he terms “vernacular hermeneutics” (Sugirtharajah 2001). Jacob S. Dharamaraj (1993), despite being one of the few Protestant Tamils to investigate the relationship between Christian Mission and colonialism using postcolonial perspectives, fails to take this aspect of resistance into account. He, unfortunately, presents the Indian situation as one totally victimized by the twin forces of British colonialism and missionary activity.

Another stream of scholarship the thesis draws on, is on the use of Tamil and Tamil literary traditions by non-Hindu religious communities in Tamil society. This was particularly useful for studying the religious expression of Protestant Tamils in the context of the long history of dialogue and competition between the literary texts of different religious and philosophical persuasions. Working on Buddhist and Jain religious traditions in Tamil, these scholars have shown how religious rivalry between the various Hindu and non-Hindu sects were often expressed through their use of the Tamil language and Tamil literary traditions. Anne Monius’s work on Buddhist literary texts (*Imagining a Place for Buddhism*, 2001) calls attention to the several striking connections in the early medieval Tamil textual corpus “between literature, specific poetic literary expression, and religion or religious expression” (Monius 2001: 60). Equally important to the present work, she argues that the translation of Buddhist traditions from translocal languages such as Sanskrit and Pali into the ‘local or regional’ Tamil was a means by which the Tamil Buddhist community was able to create a space for itself in the multilingual and multireligious Tamil society, and could imagine “a new sort of Buddhist identity and community” (Monius 2001: 133). Similarly, the scholarship of Leslie Orr, James Ryan, and Richard Davis (*Open Boundaries*, ed. John E. Cort, 1998) on the Tamil Jain community and identity has highlighted the importance of viewing Tamil Jainism as part of “a shared religious culture where divine figures, literary tropes, and ritual forms could all be reincorporated, reformulated, and resituated for polemical purposes” in order to define Tamil Jain identity (Davis 1998: 218). Indira Peterson’s work on Tamil Śaivism’s project of fashioning a Saiva identity as the authentic representative of a Tamil regional culture (1989, 1994) and its redefinition of the concepts of Sanskrit, Tamil, and the Veda to aid the Śaivites in their project of excluding Jains from Tamil culture (1998) also draws attention to the self-conscious use of Tamil language as a marker of religious identity. Peterson’s more

recent engagement (2002, 2003) with Tamil Lutheran Evangelicals' use of literary forms to express Protestant concepts was also very useful for the study of Protestant Tamils' use of Tamil language and literary forms in order to express a Protestant identity. Likewise, Dennis Hudson's research on Krishna Pillai (1970) and on the Protestant origins of Tamil Evangelical Christians (2000) offered constructive ways of examining the relations between Protestant Tamils and non-Protestant Tamil communities. Hudson's essay (1992) on the effects of Protestant mission on a Tamil Saivite reformist, Arumuga Navalar (1822-79), was also useful. Further, S. Rajamanickam's (1967, 1999) work on Robert De Nobili and Ines Zupanov's examination of the Jesuit Mission in South India in *Disputed Mission* (1999) and, in particular, her insightful analysis of Robert de Nobili's strategies for accommodating the Catholic tradition in Madurai provided useful counterpoints for my study of Protestant strategies of assimilation. Finally, by highlighting the connection between conversion movements and the struggle for civil and political rights, Gauri Viswanathan's (1998) analysis of the history of religious conversion in India urges the need to historicise conversion as a political activity rather than regard it only as an assimilative act into a dominant culture.

IV. Sources of Information: archives and fieldwork

The material for this thesis was gathered from both archival sources in India, the UK and Germany and a six-month period of fieldwork in Tamilnadu. Several archives and libraries in India were important sources for my research on the Tamil Bible. In Bangalore, the library and office of the Bible Society of India hold files of correspondence on the Common Language translation project, which produced the *Tiruviviliyam* (1995) as well as follow-up projects such as the revisions of the *Tiruviviliyam* and the *Union Version* (1871, referred to as the Old Version, or 'OV') until 2002. The files also include several letters from Protestant Tamil clergy and lay persons writing in response to the *Tiruviviliyam*. Unfortunately, however, I was informed by one of the officials of the Bible Society at Bangalore that most of these responses (considerable in number) had been destroyed due to lack of storage facilities. The Madras Auxiliary of the Bible Society has a limited quantity of similar material. My discussion of the *Tiruviviliyam* is based on the material from these two sources.

The library and archive of the United Theological College, Bangalore, were invaluable sources for the cultural impact of the Bible in Tamil translation in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Of particular importance was the collection on Vedanayaka Sastri (1774-1864), a prominent Protestant Tamil poet who wrote in

response to early nineteenth-century revisions of Fabricius's translation of the Tamil Bible. Sastri's unpublished letters and pamphlets are the earliest surviving documents that directly discuss Protestant (mainly Lutheran) Tamil reactions to Bible translations in Tamil. Besides these, manuscript and print versions of his poetry (in Tamil) are also available. The library has a large collection of books and periodicals, which are an important source of information on current debates in Protestant Tamil circles regarding the Protestant Tamil church, its history, identity and culture. The Archives and library of the Gurukul Lutheran Theological College, Madras provided similar information but with specific reference to the Lutheran church in Tamilnadu.

The Archives of the Madras Christian College, Tambaram and the Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Madras, were most useful for their periodicals. For instance, the *Madras Christian College Magazine* published scholarly articles on Bible translation, the development of Tamil language and literature, and the reactions of Tamil Hindus to the effects of Protestant missions in Tamil society. The library of the Theosophical Society, Adyar, Roja Muthiah Research Library, Marai Malai Adigal Library, and the International Institute of Tamil Studies all located in Madras held material on the development and attitudes to Tamil language from the late nineteenth century to the present. The Library of the Theosophical Society was an important source for printed books and newspaper articles on the development of the Tamil language and attitudes to religion in the early twentieth century.

Within the UK, I consulted the British and Foreign Bible Society (now, the Bible Society) archive, which is located in the Cambridge University Library. The archive was most useful in its holdings of minutes of editorial sub-committee meetings. Although records of nineteenth-century minutes were limited, there were extensive records of editorial sub-committee meetings held at the London headquarters of the Bible Society in the first half of the twentieth century. I was also able to look at their Files of Correspondence for the Tamil language from 1909 to 1973 (with a few missing periods: between 1955-58 and some missing months between 1964-65), which contained correspondence between the Madras Auxiliary of the Bible Society and the editorial team in the London headquarters. Material from these sources provided most of the details for my study of the *Revised Version* (1956) of the Tamil Bible.

The Special Collections at the School of Oriental and African Studies and the Oriental and Indian Office Collection at the British Library in London, the archives of the Baptist Missionary Society at the Angus Library, Regent's Park College, Oxford and the Indian Institute Library of the University of Oxford were useful sources on the general history of Bible translation in India from the early nineteenth century. The

sources comprised mainly printed material, that is, missionary journals and books published in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the exception of the letters of William Carey at the Angus Library. My discussion of missionary debates on Bible translation and missionary attitudes to Indian languages and scriptures in Chapter 2 owes much to the collections at the four institutions. Especially enabling was the opportunity to compare the discussion on religious terms in Tamil with corresponding discussions in the other Indian language translations of the Bible such as, the Bengali, Hindi, Urdu and Marathi versions.

I also spent three months in Germany reading at the Archiv der Franckeschen Stiftungen, Halle and the Leipzig Lutheran Evangelical Mission Library, Leipzig. The collections at the Archiv der Franckeschen Stiftungen are a very important source for the study of Lutheran missions in South India. Rare, original manuscripts (both on palmleaf and paper) in Tamil and German provide considerable historical data of the arrival of Lutheran missionaries in Tamilnadu, their intellectual basis in German Pietism, their interactions with eighteenth-century Tamil society, and their representations of Tamil Hindu religious and cultural systems. The exchange between Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (1683-1719) and Ganapati Vattiyar, his Tamil teacher, manuscript copies of Ziegenbalg's sermons, and the notebooks of Christopher Walther (missionary in south India from 1725 to 1739) were particularly valuable. The letters written (in Tamil) by the first Tamil catechists appointed by the Lutheran missionaries in the second quarter of the eighteenth century were similarly very useful. Addressed to August Hermann Francke in Halle, the letters date from 1743 to 1756 and provided an important source of information on the use of religious terms by contemporary Protestant Tamils.

I conducted fieldwork interviews in May-June 2000 and February-May 2002. Persons interviewed can be divided into two categories: first, those who were involved in the twenty-year translation project of the *Tiruviviliyam*; and second, Protestant Tamil clergy and lay persons who regularly used one or more of the Tamil Bible translations available. The interviews were conducted in Madras, Madurai, Palayamcottai, Tiruchirapalli and Bangalore. I chose to concentrate on these five locations because they have a high percentage of Christians of various denominations, they were centres of Bible translation from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, had an established history of Christian missions, and were places where both translators and readers of the Tamil Bible shared a common religious and cultural space.

Those in the first category include most of the translators of the *Tiruviviliyam* as well as editors working in the Translations Department of the Bible Society of India.

Since this was an ecumenical effort at translation, the interviewees included Anglican, Lutheran and Catholic Tamils. Apart from a souvenir, and some essays published for Christian journals, there is not much published material available on the translation process of the *Tiruviviliyam* or reactions to it. Hence, these interviews helped to clarify reasons and details for some translation decisions taken. Almost all the members of the team claimed to support the use of *taṇittamil* (pure Tamil) in the Tamil Bible and that the change was necessary if Protestant and Catholic Tamils were to communicate with relevance in the present Tamil society. They revealed a further aspect of the difference between personal choices or decisions and the requirements of working as one of a translation committee. However, these interviews were not undertaken as an attempt to arrive at authorial or, in the present case, translators' intentions in order to evaluate choice of terminology or the general effectiveness of the translation project. They were also asked to comment on the symbolic function of the popular Tamil Bible version, and how it related to issues of culture and identity for the Protestant Tamil community.

In the second category of persons interviewed were clergy and lay Tamils who had not been directly involved in any Bible translation projects. Amongst the clergy, I interviewed Bishops of the Church of South India and the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church based in these cities, especially with regard to policy decisions on which translation of the Bible would be officially adopted for use by their respective denominations and dioceses. I also interviewed clergy in charge of individual churches in the cities and surrounding villages who were able to provide information on the reaction of their congregations to the introduction of the *Tiruviviliyam*, the elements of Tamil culture in church ritual practices, and the ways in which Protestant Tamils expressed or defined their identity through language use, ritual practices, and celebration of festivals. An important aspect of these interviews was that most of the clergy interviewed differentiated between urban and rural congregations in the areas mentioned above. The theologians interviewed were teaching at Protestant and Catholic seminaries such as, Tamil Theological Seminary, Madurai, the United Theological College, Bangalore, and St. Paul's Seminary, Bangalore. Particularly useful were interviews of the teachers and students of the Tamil Theological Seminary with its active engagement with radical experiments in expressing Protestant theology, especially its emphasis on the significance of Tamil folk culture for the Protestant Tamil church. I also interviewed Protestant Tamils teaching Tamil literature in Madras Christian College, Tambaram and Sarah Tucker College for Women in Palayamcottai, who were best able to point out the disjunction in language use of the Protestant Tamil community: that within the pedagogical space of educational institutions both students

and teachers functioned in *tanittamil* but continued to use ‘Protestant Tamil’ in sacred and domestic spheres. The last group of persons interviewed were lay members of the Protestant and Catholic Church in Tamilnad. I tried to speak to different categories within these: male and female, urban and rural, new converts and those who were third or fourth-generation Christians.

V. Organisation of the thesis

Chapter 1 has two main sections. The first section provides an outline of the various levels of influence that both Catholic and Protestant missionaries had on Tamil language and literature, from writing in and translating into Tamil, standardising Tamil language, compiling dictionaries and grammars, to the introduction of print into Tamil culture. Early Catholic translations of their catechism and liturgy are discussed, especially in relation to the development of a Catholic vocabulary in Tamil. This outline provides an historical context within which the translation of the Bible into Tamil and the development of Tamil religious terms for Catholic and Protestant use can be read. The second section gives an historical delineation of Protestant translations of the six Tamil Bible versions that the thesis discusses in detail. This background information of who translated which version and when is given in one chapter so as not to break the historical continuity of the narrative. The intention is also to leave the discussion of individual Tamil terms, the expression of Christian concepts in Tamil and strategies of translations in the subsequent chapters uncluttered by the material ‘facts’ of the translation process.

Chapter 2 discusses the main issues regarding Bible translation that arose in the Indian context. The theoretical debates on language, translation and religious terminology took place across the major Indian languages into which the Bible was translated in the nineteenth century. The chapter analyses questions such as: what criteria were set up by missionaries for evaluating a good translation; what gets defined as mistranslation in religious translation, and why; from which direction is force applied on translations—by missionaries who define what the ‘natives’ ought to have or by the latter in their expectation of what religious scriptures ought to contain; and what kind of pressure the receiving Tamil culture put on translators, the translated texts and its Tamil readers. Finally, the chapter looks at the pressures of the various institutions within which Bible translators worked and how far they affected the practice and theorising of translation in nineteenth-century India. A discussion of these issues provides a wide and general conceptual basis for the analysis of Tamil Bible translations and specific Tamil terms in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 focuses on the Tamil terms used in the different versions of the Tamil Bible. The discussion begins with the etymological history of each term and then moves on to consider why each one was either selected or created for use in the Tamil Bible. For instance, an important reason for the use of the terms was the creation of a Protestant vocabulary that would enable Protestant Tamils to express and define their new religious identity. However, this chapter demonstrates the fundamental paradox in the missionary translators' attempts to communicate difference while using familiar terminology.

Chapter 4 examines the various responses of the Protestant Tamil community to the Tamil Bible and its religious vocabulary. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section looks at nineteenth-century conflicts between missionaries and Protestant Tamils over the revision of the Tamil Bible and the alternative strategies used by some Protestant Tamil poets to translate Christian concepts for Tamil culture. The second section looks at the responses of the Protestant Tamils to twentieth-century revisions of the Tamil Bible as well as attempts made by individuals to translate the Bible using means different from the official translation projects. In both centuries, there were attempts by Tamils to translate portions of the Bible and Protestant concepts using Tamil poetic genres; thus, an important issue addressed in this chapter will be the function of genre in translation. The chapter contends that these several attempts made by Protestant Tamils were an effort to redefine their religious identity according to the changing political and cultural circumstances of Tamil society. While doing so, however, conflicting positions within the Protestant Tamil community are highlighted and it is argued that the arguments given for or against different translations derive from the ideological assumptions of caste and class of the different sections.

The history of the Protestant Bible in Tamil is a history of the process of assimilating Protestant Christianity into Tamil culture. The chapters discuss the points of conflict that arose as a result of the different strategies of assimilation adopted by Protestant missionaries and Protestant Tamils. The thesis argues that the competing models of assimilation both defined the parameters within which Protestant Tamil identity could be formulated and disrupted the formation of a homogenous Protestant Tamil identity. The thesis analyses the use of religious terms, of prose and poetry, and the conventions of 'high' and 'low' culture to suggest that each model of assimilation could serve either to conform with or to resist the dominant definition of Protestant Tamil identity in a given historical moment. Conflict regarding which Tamil version is the most suitable translation of the Bible for the Protestant Tamil community is ultimately a contest about who determines Protestant Tamil identity.

Notes

¹ "Actually...the kinship of languages is brought out by a translation far more profoundly and clearly than in the superficial and indefinable similarity of two works of literature" (Benjamin 1969: 72-3).

² My understanding of Albert Neubert and Anton Popovic's analyses comes from Bassnett-McGuire (1980: 25-27).

³ Tabouret-Keller, 'Language and Identity' in Coulmas, 1997.

⁴ Jeremy Punt, 'Translating the Bible in South Africa: Challenges to Responsibility and Contextuality,' in Brenner and Henten, 2002.

⁵ S. Noorda in Brenner and Henten 2002: 10.

⁶ According to tradition, recorded first in the Letter to Aristeas to Philocrates (late second century BCE) the translation of the Pentateuch (later extended to cover the entire Hebrew Bible) into Greek was commissioned by Ptolemy II (282-246 BCE); for this purpose an accurate Hebrew manuscript was sent from Jerusalem to Alexandria where the work was undertaken by seventy-two elders. The name, Septuagint, refers to the seventy-two Jewish elders who had supposedly individually translated the Hebrew scriptures into Greek in seventy or seventy-two days, and were miraculously 'inspired' to produce identical translations (*The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, 1993).

⁷ Pearson in Porter and Hess, 1999.

⁸ Celia Roberts and Brian Street, 'Spoken and Written Language' in Coulmas, 1997.

⁹ In Louis Althusser's definition: "...all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects, [...] ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects ... or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have called *interpellation....*" (Althusser 1993: 48, 49 [emphasis in original]).

¹⁰ I use the term 'subject position' as elaborated in Michel Foucault's work: subjectivity is constructed within historical, social and cultural systems of knowledge, or 'discourses,' that operate in a society. Power and control is exercised through various competing discourses but subjectivity is produced by the discourse that dominates at a given time.

¹¹ Rich Freeman points out that there are "relatively few studies that combine substantive textual analyses with theoretical agenda adequate to a treatment of the multiplex roles and articulations of specific languages and their interactions in the constitution of particular South Asian societies" (Freeman 1998: 2).

¹² See K. Meenakshisundaram (1974), C. and H. Jesudasan (1961), D. Rajarigam (1958).

¹³ There were similar attempts made for the other South Indian languages in the nineteenth century: C.P. Brown played an important role in the study of Telugu, Rev. H. Gundert in Malayalam and Rev. F. Kittel for Kannada.

¹⁴ For more details see chapter 3.

¹⁵ Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.

Chapter One: Catholic and Protestant Translations into Tamil and the Tamil Bible

This chapter outlines two interconnected histories. The first section is a brief history of Catholic and Protestant missionaries in South India who directly engaged with Tamil language and literature from the sixteenth century onwards. These missionaries initiated changes in the use of the Tamil language and also introduced new elements, such as print and the discursive use of prose, to Tamil culture. Besides compiling interlingual dictionaries and grammars, standardising spelling, and reforming the Tamil script, the missionaries undertook translations from European languages into Tamil. This section of the chapter also deals with the earliest translation projects of the missionaries since these were precursors to later efforts at translating the Bible into Tamil and this history shaped attitudes to language and literature within Tamil society. The second section outlines the history of the six versions of the Tamil Bible that the thesis focuses on. This section provides a detailed history of the different translators and the material conditions under which they were translating. This outline is intended as a reference for the later discussions of the tension between the ideological debates on the problems of translating the Bible and the reception of each version by the Protestant Tamil community.

I. Early Tamil Translations in India and Ceylon

A. Sixteenth to Early Eighteenth Century: Catholic Missionaries

1. Roman Catholic Missions established in India

Vasco da Gama's discovery of a new route to India by sea and his arrival in Calicut on May 1, 1498, established a passage for the flow of both commercial and missionary interests between Europe and India. Goa in 1510 CE was conquered from the Muslims by Alphonse de Albuquerque and thus became the capital of the Portuguese empire in the east. The efforts of Catholic missionaries and the patronage of the Portuguese State helped to establish Catholicism in Goa.

Portuguese influence extended to Tamilnadu during the maritime war fought between the Portuguese and South Indian Muslim forces from 1527 to 1539. A large part of the Tamil maritime population, that is, the Parava fisher community on the Coromandel Coast, had become Muslim by the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries. In 1532, a delegation of seventy Paravas presented themselves at the Portuguese stronghold in Cochin and appealed for protection against the Tamil Muslim diving groups and the local (Hindu) rulers who supported them (Bayly 1989: 325). The

Portuguese, who were eager to control the pearl fisheries, were willing to oblige on the condition that they would all accept Christianity. Priests were sent from Goa and about 20,000 of the Paravas were baptised between 1532 and 1537 without any religious instruction because none of the priests knew enough Tamil to instruct the neophytes (Rajamanickam 1999).¹

When Francis Xavier (1506-52) arrived at the Pearl Fishery Coast in 1543, he found most of the Paravas on the verge of returning to their previous Hindu affiliations. However, after his arrival, he established his headquarters in Tuticorin and stopped these defections. Xavier did not learn any Indian language but depended on a Tamil who knew both Portuguese and Tamil and together they translated the Portuguese catechism into Tamil. He instructed the Parava fishermen using Portuguese terms and left a copy of the Christian doctrine in each village he visited. Bayly argues that even at this stage, "when the Paravas were simply being taught to make the sign of the cross and to recite garbled Tamil renderings of the Creed...the group was ... acquiring a new and distinctive tradition of worship" (Bayly 1989: 328). Bayly points out that Xavier became a powerful tutelary for the Paravas as a result of Jesuit campaigns to create a shared convention of faith and cult devotion among their new converts; further, Xavier acquired the qualities of a guru and a Muslim holy man, which made it "easier for local worshippers to bridge the gap between Christian, Muslim and even Hindu saints and divinities" (Bayly 1989: 330).

Of the Catholic missionaries who followed, Henrique Henriques (1520-1600), Roberto de Nobili (d. 1656) and Constanzo Giuseppe Beschi (1680-1747) are the most important for the history of Tamil language and print. Henriques, who followed Francis Xavier, printed several Tamil books between 1556 and 1581 at the Jesuit printing presses in Goa. Nobili and Beschi established an extensive Catholic mission in Tamilnadu and took keen interest in learning the Tamil language. Although they did not translate the Bible into Tamil, these three Jesuit missionaries composed original religious texts in Tamil and engaged with the assimilation of the Catholic faith in Tamil culture through their use of the Tamil language and Tamil literary and cultural practices.

Roberto de Nobili, an Italian Jesuit, came to Madurai in November 1606 and founded the Madurai Mission. His was one of the most innovative Jesuit experiments at the adaptation and accommodation of Catholicism in South India. He adopted the penitential life of the Hindu ascetic. He tried for thirty-seven years to bring the Catholic faith nearer to the high caste Brahmans of Madurai, the citadel of South Indian Hinduism, through his adaptation of Hindu ritual practices and his knowledge of the

language and customs of the people. He was able to achieve conversions from the highest sections of society because of the conscious effort on his part to draw on certain religious and cultural codes that conferred high caste status on those sections. Isaac Padinjarekuttu (1995), enumerates the three levels of assimilation that Nobili aimed at: "He perceived clearly the three basic principles of mission: 1. Adaptation of the life of the missionary to that of the people; 2. Appropriation of harmless customs and ceremonies for Christian use and, 3. The study of the language and religion of the people" (Isaac Padinjarekuttu 1995: 44). However, when Padinjarekuttu gives specific examples of assimilative moves, he perceives the tension that informs such attempts:

Most of the practices he adopted were harmless social customs without religious connotations such as kudumi (the tuft of hair), the punul (the sacred thread), the sandal paste on the forehead, the usual ablutions, the tali worn by married women etc; but at a time when attitude towards other religions was rigid and inimical, it was impossible to evaluate these practices objectively (Isaac Padinjarekuttu 1995: 45).

Nevertheless, De Nobili is known in South Indian mission history as the missionary who was most successful in assimilating Catholicism to Tamil culture.

Beschi joined the Society of Jesus in 1698 and after ordination came to India in 1710 and joined the Madurai Mission in 1711. He served many mission stations but settled in a village called Elakurichi on the northern bank of Cauvery. Since Christianity was forbidden in the Tanjore kingdom he would visit his Christians by night and return by day. This was not possible for six months when the river would be flooded during the monsoons. In 1741, Beschi went over to the Pearl Fishery Coast and from there to Ambalakadu in 1746 and died there on February 4, 1747 (Rajamanickam 1999: 54). Beschi, like Nobili, adopted Tamil cultural symbols to claim elite status: legendary accounts of Beschi portray him as a bejewelled Hindu raja, sporting sandalwood paste on his forehead, dressed in flowing purple robes and riding in a palanquin with full royal accompaniment (Blackburn 2003: 48-9). However, Beschi's attempts at assimilation through his use of Tamil language and literary tradition were more significant. He drew on Tamil literary practice to express the Catholic faith so well that he came to be recognized as a poet-saint and given the title *Viramāmuṇivar* ('Heroic Devotee') by his Tamil admirers. He continues to be commended by both Christian and non-Christian Tamils for his knowledge of Tamil illustrated in his grammars and dictionaries, his Latin translation of the *Kural* and for his competence in composing Catholic Tamil poetry.

The Jesuit Mission in South India was weakened by a number of factors and its influence was on the decline from the early eighteenth century. The increasing

economic and political power of the Dutch and English trading companies as compared to diminishing Portuguese control in India, the losses suffered by the French in the Anglo-French wars from the 1730s to the 1760s, and the defeat in 1752 of Chanda Sahib in the battle for Trichirapalli, who had supported Beschi, together suppressed Jesuit influence in the Tamil area. The establishment of the rival Danish Missionary Society in 1706, by Protestant missionaries from Germany, challenged Jesuit presence especially in the areas around Tanjore and Trichinopoly (Grafe 1990: 25-6). Finally, the worldwide suppression of the Society of Jesus by Papal decree in 1773 included the Madurai Mission, which was restored only in 1834.

2. Catholic missionaries and Tamil works: translations, poetry and printing

In 1554, the first Tamil catechism was printed in Lisbon in Roman character (Blackburn 2003: 32).² Three Indians living in Lisbon, under the supervision of the Franciscan missionary, Fr. Joao Villa de Conde, translated a Portuguese catechism (*Cartilha*) into Tamil and then transliterated the Tamil into Roman script. This translation, printed in Romanised Tamil, was intended for use by Portuguese missionaries before their departure for South India (Blackburn 2003: 33). After Goncalves of the Jesuit Society moulded Tamil type in Goa for the first time in 1577, Henrique Henriquez printed the first book in Tamil, called *Doctrina Christam* or *Tāmpirāñ Vāṇakkam* ('Worship of the Lord'). No copy of this edition has survived but one copy of the second edition of the translation, printed at Quilon in 1578, is extant. Sixteen pages long, its title page refers to Tamil as 'Malabar' language. Since there was difficulty in tracing copies of *Doctrina Christam*, there has been disagreement over the question of the first Tamil book in print in India. Milai Seenai Venkatsami (1936) attempted to prove that *Doctrina Christam* was actually in Malayalam, thus making *Flos Sanctorum* (1586) the first printed Tamil book. However, Sabapathy Kulendran (1967) established otherwise: his evidence was that the title page clearly mentioned both Tamil and Malabar and in the early missionary days, Malabar was a generic term used by Europeans that included Tamil. More recently, Stuart Blackburn (2003) confirmed that *Doctrina Christam* was the first Tamil book, using Tamil script, to be printed in India. The *Doctrina Christam* comprised, besides the catechism, the Apostle's Creed, the Ten Commandments in brief, the Lord's Prayer and some other prayers of the Roman Catholic liturgy all in Tamil translation. Apart from *Doctrina Christam*, Henriquez published two other volumes for liturgical and catechetical use: *Kiřisittiyāñi Vāṇakkam* (1579) at Cochin, and a lives of the Saints, titled *Flos Sanctorum* (*Atiyar Varalāru*) in 1586 (Irudayam 2002: 50).

Besides these, the early Portuguese missionaries are also said to have composed the Bible in the form of dialogue, known as 'Sallabam.' There is no copy extant to prove

this conclusively but the letters of Ziegenbalg testify to the existence of manuscripts on palm-leaves of the translation of the gospels (Irudayam and Levi, 2002: 50). There is evidence of a Tamil-Portuguese dictionary by Antem de Proenca (1625-66) in existence since 1679. This was the first dictionary to be printed in any Indian language and Ziegenbalg apparently used this quite extensively for his translations of the Bible. Blackburn draws attention to the fact that this was the first dictionary in India to use western alphabetical order, which later became the standard for organising language for many intellectuals in Madras in the nineteenth century (Blackburn 2003: 43).

Nobili was proficient in Telugu and Sanskrit besides Tamil, and wrote several Tamil texts. The printed works of Nobili comprise *Nānopatēcam* (Spiritual Teaching) printed in 1677, which is virtually a *Summa Theologica*, consisting of five parts or *kanṭams*. The first and second *kanṭams* were printed in one volume in 1675 and the rest in the following centuries. *Ātma Niruṇayam* (Disquisition of the Soul) was printed in Madras in 1889; *Añāna Nivāraṇam* (Abolition of Ignorance) printed in Tiruchirapalli in 1891; and *Tivya Mātirikai* (The Divine Model) in Pondicherry in 1870. Nobili's writings contributed significantly to the creation of Tamil terms for Catholic use. Since he did not translate from Latin and Portuguese texts or transliterate from Latin or Portuguese, he derived these terms mainly from Sanskrit religious terminology. By adding Sanskrit terms to Tamil words, he was the first to conceptualise the Catholic system of belief in an original way in Tamil. The early Protestant missionaries adopted Nobili's terminology for their translations of the Bible into Tamil in the eighteenth century. However, according to Zupanov (1999), Nobili used a stilted prose in his theological discourses that was impossible to memorize, recite or sing. Thus, though Nobili's terminology was used by later missionaries, his prose style was not adopted by either Catholic or Protestant missionaries.

Beschi was a more prolific writer than Nobili, but like Nobili, composed, in general, original Tamil works rather than translated into Tamil. He is acknowledged by most literary historians of Tamil as a significant contributor to both poetic and prose genres of Modern Tamil literature. He brought back into service orthographical usage that was mentioned in the ancient Tamil grammars but had been forgotten in the intervening centuries (Blackburn 2003: 61-2). Unfortunately, he could not print any of his works since the Jesuit mission by then had no printing presses; however, the Lutheran Missionaries in Tranquebar printed some of his works during his lifetime.

Beschi's entire corpus in Tamil falls into three categories. In the first are aids to learning Tamil. Beschi's grammars and dictionaries belong to this class—*A Grammar of the Common Dialect of the Tamulian language, called Koṭuntamil* (1738); and *A*

Grammar of the High Dialect of the Tamil Language, with a preface dating 1730 but which was first printed only in 1822; *Catur-Akarāti*, (a quadruple dictionary, Madras, 1824); the Tamil-Latin Dictionary (Madras, 1844) and the Tamil-French and Tamil-Latin-Portuguese dictionaries (composed in the 1740s); and *Tonnūl Vilakkam*, (Pondicherry, 1830). While the interlingual dictionaries were meant for the use of missionaries, *Catur-Akarāti* was a monolingual dictionary meant for Tamils. This dictionary combined European and Tamil lexicographical traditions by using Tamil and Sanskrit models of a four-part structure, but alphabetisation of entries within each part. He also introduced prose commentaries on the grammatical rules that he dealt with (Meenakshisundaram 1974: 169). In his Introduction to *A Grammar of High Tamil*, Beschi states that his aim was to give future missionaries the means to learn Tamil more easily with the view to aiding their labours as ministers of the Gospel (Beschi 1917: 8).

The second category of Beschi's works was his prose writings. His first attempts were apologetic treatises, written in reaction to the Protestant missionaries at Tranquebar, from whom he had received a Lutheran pamphlet of thirteen pages, entitled *Tirucapai Pētakam* (the Corruptions of Rome). He wrote three polemical works entitled *Vēta Vilakkam* or 'Explanation of Religion' (1728), *Pētakamāruttal* or a 'Rebuttal of Dissent,' (Pondicherry, 1858) and, *Lütterinattiyalpu* or the 'Essence of Lutheranism,' (Pondicherry, 1842). With merciless sarcasm, he tells of seventy-eight 'lies', which he claims to have discovered in the Protestant attack. Besse highlights the importance of the work: "[t]his book is less a controversy than a kind of satire, in which the author ridicules the profusion of books the Lutherans spread on every side. To the fascinating beauty of the printing and of the binding of these books, Beschi opposed very maliciously the barbarisms with which the contents were teeming" (Besse 1918: 195). As a guidebook for the catechists, he wrote *Vētiyar Oluukkam* (the Duties of Catechists) evidently in existence in 1730 according to Besse's estimate and printed in Madras in 1844. *Nāna Kannāti* or 'Spiritual Mirror,' was printed in Pondicherry, 1843. *Paramārtā Kuruvin Katai* (London, 1822), which he finished composing in 1744, was a set of stories about the absent-minded Guru Paramarttan and his half-witted pupils. Although it did not have the same literary merit as his poetry, it was, apart from the *Kural*,³ the most translated of his books into European languages. In these several treatises, Beschi developed a discursive prose in Tamil, which was admired by his Lutheran rivals. Although discursive prose had been used to comment on traditional Tamil poetry from as early as the thirteenth century A.D., Beschi's major prose essay, *Vēta Vilakkam*, while using complex sentences and employing literary allusions, also achieved an intimacy with the reader that was entirely new in Tamil; it thus provided

impetus to the emergence of discursive prose as an independent genre during the eighteenth century (Blackburn 2003: 64).

The third category of Beschi's writings, for which he is best known, consists of his poetical works. The most important amongst them is *Tēmpāvāṇi* (Pondicherry, 1851-53), an epic in honour of Joseph in 36 cantos, containing 3, 615 lines. It is based on the meagre scriptural account of Joseph. Bishop Caldwell assigns Beschi the first rank among the Tamil poets for his *Tēmpāvāṇi*. Others such as Rev. Elijah Hoole are critical of his work: "[t]he work was intended to supply the place of the translation of the Holy Scriptures...It resembles rather the mythological fables of the Hindus, than the simple truths of the Scripture narrative. The descriptions are intended rather to please the fancy, than to convey a knowledge of facts" (Quoted in Besse 1918: 179). However, such Protestant detractions only highlight Beschi's ability to assimilate the Catholic message with Tamil literary practices. Although Beschi has been hailed as a great poet by Tamils, Protestant missionaries who were suspicious of the literary practices employed by Tamil religious poetry were reluctant to exploit similar strategies in their own work. In turn, Beschi was scathing in his attack of the Protestant use of Tamil (Lehman 1956).

These works by Catholic missionaries, both composed and translated into Tamil, introduced initial changes to Tamil literary culture. Blackburn points out that the translations of Henriquez signalled that these texts were translations, produced from another culture: "As translations, using interlingual titles, displaying Christian imagery, highlighting new words with diamond marks, and written in an unparalleled prose of advocacy using the conversational idiom, these books mark the beginning of a new literary culture in Tamil" (Blackburn 2003: 39). These translations also contained a higher number of terms transliterated from the Latin and Portuguese. Thus, the early Catholic translations drew attention to their connection to a culture extraneous to Tamil society. In contrast, the body of Catholic texts produced by Nobili and Beschi, are closer to Tamil literary culture, since both Jesuits borrowed from Sanskrit terminology used in Hindu Tamil scriptures as well as adopted Tamil literary forms to express the Catholic message.

Although the Jesuit missionaries did not translate the Bible into Tamil until much later (their first Tamil translation of the New Testament was printed in Pondicherry in 1857 and the Old Testament in 1904) because of doctrinal conviction that scripture should either be read in the original languages or in the translation approved of by the Roman Catholic Church, they did translate a significant body of other Catholic texts into Tamil. Their use of the Tamil language, while translating and composing Catholic texts,

is of great importance to the formation of a Catholic and Protestant vocabulary in Tamil. Protestant missionaries, Ziegenbalg included, were reluctant to admit this because of doctrinal differences, but these Roman Catholic Tamil translations and writings, provided a vocabulary of Tamil Christian terms on which they could base early Protestant translations and writings. In later decades however, the Protestants tried to further 'Christianize' these terms (which usually meant giving them a greater Protestant slant) initially used or coined by the Catholics. The discussion of several Protestant terms in Chapter 4 reveals strong links to Catholic usage of this period and highlights the point that Protestant and Catholic differences in doctrine and mission strategies were often expressed through disagreement over language use.

B. Early Eighteenth to the Twentieth Century: Protestant Missionaries

1. The Danes in Ceylon and India: Commercial, Political and Religious establishment

Protestants missionaries arrived in India in the early seventeenth century in the wake of the establishment of the Danish East India Company in Ceylon. The company signed a treaty with the Emperor of Ceylon in 1618 promising to aid him against the Portuguese in return for trading monopoly (Fenger 1863: 11). When this arrangement ended in disaster, the survivors found themselves in the court of Tanjore (Singh 1999: 40). The King of Tanjore signed a treaty written in Portuguese (the language of trade at the time) with the Danish Captain Ovi Gjedde on 19 November 1620, as a result of which Tranquebar was created as a Danish trading centre. Until the seventeenth century, Tarankampadi (or Tranquebar, as it came to be called by the Europeans) was frequented by Arab traders and later the Portuguese. Its history changed with the document sent by Sriman Ragunatha Nayak, King of Tanjore to Christian IV, King of Denmark in which he declares: "We order the creation of a port named Tarangambadi here and allow the export of pepper to the country [Denmark], as that commodity is not available there. We order that the people from your country could come and settle in this place" (Irudayam and Levi 2002: 34). From then, Tranquebar functioned mainly as a Danish trading centre until the beginning of the eighteenth century when the first Lutheran missionaries arrived to establish the Danish Mission there.

In 1706, Tranquebar became the first Protestant mission station. The first Protestant mission in India was established under the auspices of the Danish King, Frederick IV in Tranquebar. Previously, though there were one or two Danish pastors for the Danish Church, there is no evidence that they were interested in working amongst the Tamils. This was in spite of the charter that the New East India Company received from the Danish king when it was formed in 1670: "...it is to be hoped that many of the Indians, when they shall be properly instructed will be turned from their

heathen errors, there shall always be Priests in the ships and in the territory belonging to the Company, and the King promises to promote such Priests as have been in the service of the company" (Fenger 1863: 13). A possible exception to the lack of Danish interest in preaching to the Tamils, Fenger informs, were references to a Jacob Worms as the Danish Apostle of India who was said to have died in Tranquebar in 1691. Fenger, however, maintains that he found no evidence for the stories that Worms preached to the Tamils or that he translated parts of the Bible (Fenger 1863: 13).

Frederick IV appointed two Germans as missionaries to represent the Danish Missionary Society in November 1705. The appointment was done through Lütkins, preacher at his court, who contacted pastors in Berlin, who in turn got in touch with August Hermann Francke (1663-1727) in Halle. Francke suggested the names of two men, Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (1682-1719) and Heinrich Plütschau (1675-1752), who were then in Halle. With the arrival of Ziegenbalg and Plütschau in Tranquebar in July 1706, the first Protestant mission station was established in South India. Since the Danish king appointed the missionaries without consulting the Board of Directors of the Danish East India Company, there was initial hostility between the company's officials and the missionaries (Lehmann 1956). The two missionaries began to learn Tamil soon after their arrival and focused on translating the Bible into Tamil almost from the very beginning. Although Protestant missionaries in Ceylon had translated parts of the Bible into Tamil, Ziegenbalg and Plütschau had no access to these efforts and depended more on Catholic sources in South India to begin with. German missionaries who followed them from Halle often attempted to redress this initial dependence on Catholic vocabulary and instead, tried to establish a Lutheran tradition within Tamil Protestantism.

2. Protestant Missionaries: Learning Tamil and early translations into Tamil

Philip Baldeus, a Dutch missionary who lived in Ceylon between 1656 and 1665, made the first Protestant attempt at translating the Bible. The first grammar of the Tamil language by a Protestant now available is that of Baldeus but he himself referred to previous studies on the subject, especially that of the Jesuit Father Caspardaquilar, which are all unfortunately lost (Meenakshisundram 1961: 27). Baldeus had already translated into Tamil the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the Creed before he started translating the Bible but he could only put them in print when he returned to Rotterdam in 1671. He only got as far as translating the Gospel of Matthew before he was forced to leave Ceylon after disagreement with the Dutch East India Company. His translation of the Gospel of Matthew could not be printed due to the lack of a printing press. Apparently, his translation was used in Ceylon in manuscript form, which

presents an interesting case of the dissemination of scripture through traditional means before the arrival of print. It was finally printed only in 1741 after the printing press came to Ceylon in 1736 and after it had undergone several revisions at various hands (Kulendran 1967: 39). After Baldeus, Rev. Adrian De May, who came to Ceylon in 1678, attempted to translate the New Testament into Tamil. According to Kulendran, he finished his translation of the New Testament in 1692 but this was not printed. Thus, the first Dutch translation of the entire New Testament to be printed in Ceylon was in 1759, much after the Tamil New Testament was printed at Tranquebar (Kulendran 1967: 39).

The first Danish missionaries were sent to Tamilnadu in 1706 without any knowledge of either the local language or the culture of the Tamils. However, they soon realised the importance of acquiring Tamil in order to proselytise successfully. They appointed Aleppa, a Tamil, who also knew Portuguese, Dutch, German and Danish, for two years to teach them Tamil. Ziegenbalg admitted in his preface to the *Niti Venpa*, “I must acknowledge that when I first came amongst them I could not imagine that their language had proper rules, or that their life had the laws of civil order, and took up all sorts of false ideas on their actions as if they had neither a civil nor a moral law—but as soon as I had gained a little acquaintance with their language and could talk to them...I began to have a better opinion of them...” (quoted in Mohanavelu 1993: 7). Once they began to learn the Tamil language, Protestant missionaries also compiled lexicons and wrote grammars. Ziegenbalg was the first Protestant missionary to compile two lexicons—one, of words and phrases taken from Tamil philosophy, theology, medicine, with names of planets, etc. Not arranged in any order, each entry had its pronunciation in Roman and its meaning in German. The second dictionary listed the poetical names of various Hindu gods; poetic and mythic names for kings and hermits; names of animals, flowers, trees, mountains, rivers etc which he confessed did not help in preaching the Gospel (Singh 1999: 70). According to Mohanavelu (1993), two main reasons contributed to the writing of these: one, “the progressive realisation of the depth and sophistication of classical Tamil studies on grammar and linguistics”; and two, “the progress of philological studies in the West” (Mohanavelu 1993: 61). However, Ziegenbalg’s primary concern was to equip future missionaries with linguistic tools as quickly as possible. His initial efforts were added to by missionaries who followed and these were printed. Missionary headquarters in Europe later required missionaries to learn Tamil before they were sent out to their mission fields.

The arrival in 1712 of the printing press sent by SPCK (Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge), gave further impetus to the work of translation and compilations of grammars undertaken by the Tranquebar Missionaries. The earliest

books printed with this press in 1712 and 1713 were not in Tamil but Portuguese: these were Luther's Small Catechism, a hymn-book, a report of the Tranquebar schools and a history of the Passion. Fenger specifically mentions that the Germans later (he does not give a date) sent a Tamil printing press along with the Apostle's Creed printed in Tamil in Halle. A further advantage was the Danish King's permission: "...we herewith send you a most gracious privilege allowing you to print without supervision from the censor" (Fenger 1863: 90). However, interestingly, a letter from the SPCK to the Tranquebar missionaries dated December 1714 cautions them about getting too involved with the work of translation and printing: "We do not doubt that your work has been made much easier to you by the printing-press which you are now arranging; but take care that you are not inconsiderably led into so much translating and printing that you do not find sufficient time for constant intercourse with the heathen" (Fenger 1863: 93). This early warning indicates that Protestant attitudes to the role of print in mission were ambivalent. Although several Protestant missionaries were enthusiastic about print and distributing printed copies of the catechism, sermons and parts of the Bible, there were others who doubted the advantages of print over verbal preaching.⁴ The fear was that the printed text on its own encouraged individual interpretations that could not be monitored by missionaries; this meant that Tamil readers of these texts were free to assimilate the Protestant message in ways that could be contrary to the official, missionary line taken. This difference of opinion regarding the merit of Protestant texts in print continued right through the eighteenth century to the latter half of the nineteenth century.

Mohanavelu observes that the early Protestant missionaries to Tamilnad put their energies into acquiring Tamil and compiling lexicons of words while the later ones seem to have consolidated their position by familiarising themselves with proverbs: "...they came to understand that proverbs and phrases were largely used by the Tamil folk and in order to win them over to the Christian faith sooner, these missionaries of the second phase studied such phrases, maxims and proverbs and used them in their books and preaching" (Mohanavelu 1993: 78-9). The missionaries he refers to were Schultze, Pressier, Walther, and Geister who worked in Tranquebar, Cuddalore and Madras in the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Working among Tamils with low levels of literacy, they realised that what their audience was familiar with was a body of maxims, proverbs and phrases. Often these missionaries used moral teachings implicit in Tamil proverbs and maxims to attack what they saw as the superstitious beliefs implicit within Hinduism. This method of using literary material internal to Tamil culture to undermine it was useful because it initiated the process of assimilating Protestant Christianity in a culturally familiar way.

The Tranquebar missionaries sent reports on mission activities which were published by Auguste Francke at the orphanage press in Halle as what came to be known as the *Hallesche Berichte* of the Halle Reports, from 1708 to 1775, with a few missing months in between. Ziegenbalg's reports were translated into English by Boehm and published by the SPCK. Though a principal source of information for the Tranquebar Mission, the *Berichte* is not reliable as, "all that might hurt the Christian public or bring the work into discredit, is evaded" (Fenger 1863: 193). Fenger quotes Francke: "It has been my custom to omit *odiosa* from all journals when they were published" (Fenger 1863: 195). This is an early instance of missionary records being tailored to suit the taste and opinion of Protestants in Europe, many of whom contributed financially towards the Danish Mission in South India. While later missionary reports were probably edited for similar reasons, it is not admitted as openly.

On the whole, Protestant missionaries in South India and Ceylon focused on translating the Bible from the very beginning, unlike their Catholic counterparts. For many Protestant missionaries, translating the Bible was an essential part of mission and an important strategy for broadcasting the Protestant message. This meant that the Protestants concentrated more on the formal translation of Protestant tenets through texts. However, Catholic missionaries attempted to assimilate with the local religious culture, both through the literature they produced and the conscious donning of the Hindu ascetic persona. Such Catholic strategies were anathema to the Protestants and viewed with suspicion, sometimes with disgust. The aim of both Christian denominations was to assimilate their religious persuasions to Tamil culture effectively. This conflict in strategies of assimilation is analysed at several points in the thesis to study its effects on Protestant Tamil identity.

II. Tamil translations of the Bible

A. The Eighteenth Century: Translations by Lutheran Missionaries

In Europe, one of the primary concerns of the Reformation had been to challenge the idea of the Bible as a closely guarded text under the control of the Catholic Church, which claimed to be the sole and infallible interpreter of its meaning. Translating the Latin Vulgate into the European vernaculars became a site for conflict between the Catholic Church and those who later came to be known as Protestants. Although translations into English and German had appeared from the fourteenth (Wycliff's [1320-84] English translation of the New Testament, 1380) and fifteenth (first printed German translation of 1466) centuries, Martin Luther's (1483-1546) translations of the New (1522) and Old (1534) Testaments became one of the foundations of the



Reformation. Luther's emphasis on scripture as the ultimate key to faith and doctrine meant that the Reformation involved a change in the attitude towards the Bible from a closed to an open text, so that there was a move from "the accumulated tradition of the Church to private intercourse with the text of the Bible" (Norton 1993: 53). Luther's emphasis on translating the Bible to the language of the "common man," so that it encouraged a personal relationship between the text and the individual reader, remained an important part of the German Pietist tradition in the eighteenth century..

The German missionaries sent to South India were mainly from Halle and deeply influenced by the Pietist movement that rose as a challenge to Lutheran orthodoxy in Reformation Germany. Halle, in late seventeenth-century Germany, had become a primary centre for German Pietism. Deriving from the larger German Pietist movement for the religious and moral reformation of Lutheran orthodoxy, Halle Pietism put a high value on inward and affective Christianity. It emphasized a 'simple' Gospel, uncomplicated by theological arguments and historically defined dogma. Instead, it stressed an experientially verified biblical truth and devotional aspects of religious life, which were of prime importance to both the individual and church (Stoeffler 1973). This required Halle preachers to communicate the Gospel and a moral theology by using more persuasive approaches rather than the abstract language of orthodox preachers. As a result of these emphases, Halle Pietism produced on a mass scale both copies of the Bible as well as hymns, sermons, popular Bible commentaries, and edificatory tracts. The indoctrination and training that Halle theologians underwent influenced their approach to disseminating the Gospel in a mission context.

Halle Pietism grew in significance under the leadership of August Francke, who was the first to engage with the idea of world mission. Under Francke's programme for establishing Halle as a model educational community to train pastors and teachers, Halle developed a primary educational institution for the dissemination of pietism by the beginning of the eighteenth century (Stoeffler 1973: 25). Francke was determined to reform education where students were both indoctrinated against the evils of Catholicism and Calvinism and acquired knowledge of a practical nature that could provide invaluable service to the spread of Pietism (Gawthrop 1993). Francke's work involved making the Bible available to the people, that is, in a language and at a price more accessible to them. With the setting up of a printing press, Halle became one of the earliest centres in Europe for the production and distribution of Bibles and other Pietist literature at very low cost. Further, Francke's interest in reform resulted in a concern for world mission, an idea relatively new to Protestant churches both in Germany and other parts of Europe at the time. He used his contacts in Europe and

succeeded in linking Halle, Copenhagen and London in a joint missionary venture to South India.

Ziegenbalg and Plütschau, (and other German missionaries who followed them to South India), were conditioned in this intellectual and moral climate of Halle Pietist spirituality. Halle Pietism's redefinition of the theological task had created a new language that functioned as a fresh symbol of religious self-identity. Terms and phrases such as, "new birth," "living faith," "spiritual growth," and "active Christianity" were, for example, linguistic means by which Halle Pietism communicated its characteristic emphases. This Pietist ethos underlay the translations of the Bible and Lutheran liturgical texts into Tamil, impelling Protestant German missionaries to differentiate Pietist concerns from Catholic in their use of language in South India. Apart from showing early concern with the translation and printing of the Bible and hymns, they were also quick to start schools where Tamil children could be taught using the Pietist principles of training and reform that were grounded in Francke's brand of Pietism at Halle.

1. Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (1682-1719): New Testament, 1714-15

Ziegenbalg, who came to South India from this Pietist tradition, which emphasized simple and clear translations in an idiomatic language, engaged very quickly with the translation of the Bible into a Tamil that was familiar amongst the communities he worked with. Soon after his arrival in Tranquebar in 1706, Ziegenbalg demonstrated the Protestant preoccupation with making the Bible available in translation. Ziegenbalg's pioneering effort in Tranquebar was in supplying the young congregation at the earliest with the books of the Church, the Bible, Hymn Book, and the Catechism in their mother tongue as a matter of course, writes Lehmann (1956). Ziegenbalg himself asserted: "[f]or the translating of the Word of God is the foundation for directing and continuing such work, and so far has been of the utmost use, because it is constantly employed for reading, preaching and teaching" (Lehmann 1956: 25-6). Ziegenbalg seems to have started using Tamil very soon after he began learning it. On January 22, 1707, barely six months after he started his study he was catechising children in Tamil. (Ziegenbalg 1718: II.2) By October of that year, he had preached ten sermons in Tamil and his first Tamil tract, *First Principles of Christianity* was written in 1711.

In a letter dated August 22, 1708, Ziegenbalg first announced his decision to translate the Bible into Tamil and hoped "that with God's help, in a year or a year and a half, to complete the translation, and in such a way that neither the literal nor the spiritual sense shall suffer loss" (Lehmann 1956). However, desiring that God's Word might be translated as clearly into Tamil as into any European language, "he did not

begin the translation of the Bible until he felt himself at home in the language, and had acquired a clear and flowing style" (Fenger 1863: 83-4). In his letter of September 22, 1707, Ziegenbalg mentioned how he managed to get a Christian style from Catholic texts in Tamil: "[b]efore that, I did not know with what words and phrases I might express the spiritual ideas without having any touch of paganism in them. The best among them was the Gospel book. First I worked on this, extracted words and phrases, memorised them and used them in daily exercise" (Rajamanickam 1999: 49). In 1708, he expressed his intention to translate alone: "for I require no help from others, and even if I wished for it, I could not get it. Neither amongst the Christians nor the Malabarians can I find one person who could translate a sentence without mistakes. It is true that our interpreter knows several European languages, but he has only been able to help me in the meaning of words...the grammatical rules I had to find out for myself by a diligent study of Tamil books" (Fenger 1863: 85). Later (in a letter dated December 22, 1710) he admitted: "I have to confess that several books of the Papist missionaries, who have been on this coast for a long time, have quite a good style, but they present also so many human trifles and erroneous teachings that I thought it worth the trouble to go through them carefully and to free them so completely from such dangerous errors that they can be retained because of their style...." (Rajamanickam 1999: 49). These remarks are clear indications that Ziegenbalg depended on Catholic writings in Tamil and used their style and terminology in spite of the theological differences he had with them.

Ziegenbalg is said to have used the Greek New Testament, Luther's German Version, and the Dutch, Danish and Portuguese versions as sources for his translation. He finished his translation of the New Testament in 1711 and printed it in the years 1714-1715. A revised version was brought out in 1722. He did not translate verse for verse, choosing instead to telescope several verses together, though he maintained the division of chapters, because he said that the absence of punctuation except for the period and nature of the syntax required this kind of rendering (Singh 1999: 76). For his translation of the Old Testament, Lehmann and Singh mention that Ziegenbalg used the Hebrew original. His first reference to this work was in 1713. He was able to complete the translation of the Old Testament only as far as the Book of Ruth. Benjamin Schultze (1689-1760), the missionary who came to Tranquebar after him, started translating from the book of Ruth onwards in 1723, which he finished by 1725, so that the whole Bible was printed between 1724 and 1728.

Apart from the Bible, Ziegenbalg's translation of German hymns into Tamil provided his fresh converts with a more substantial Protestant literary corpus. He started translating German hymns in 1707 and the first twenty-six were printed in 1708; a

hymnbook containing forty-eight translations was printed in 1715. Later missionaries made additions to it and the number rose to 307 (Rajarigam 1958). For example, Schultze in 1722 started translating more German hymns into Tamil, to which Fabricius (1711-1791) added later. Ziegenbalg's translated hymns were mainly Tamil words forced to fit into the structure imposed by German tunes, rhythm and poetic structure. This would have made the singing of the hymns a difficult task for the early converts. Although his translations were revised later, translated Tamil hymns have continued to undermine assimilative strategies adopted by the Lutheran mission.

Ziegenbalg's lack of command of the *cen* or literary Tamil has been criticised by his contemporaries as well as by modern commentators on his work. Beschi, for example, spoke plainly against his use of 'low' Tamil and supposedly attacked Ziegenbalg's use of Tamil in *The Lutheran Enthusiasts* (Tamil): "[a]lready in reading the first line, the reader's eyes burn, his tongue dries up, and his ears must burst; one looks around and bursts into loud laughter!" (Lehmann 1956: 24). However, scholars such as, Brijraj Singh and C.S. Mohanavelu, defend Ziegenbalg on the grounds that he was accommodating the needs of his target audience, most of whom would have understood only the lower form of Tamil. Brijraj Singh, concludes that: "He deliberately chose Damul or demotic Tamil as opposed to the more hieratic kerendum [Sanskritised Tamil] because he wanted the Testament to be accessible to his audience of Sudra and Pariah converts who did not understand high-flown Tamil" (Singh 1999: 76). Mohanavelu argues that "[b]eing the pioneer [missionary], Ziegenbalg had to convert as many Tamil people as possible at the earliest...Also, the coastal fisher folk, whom he first converted, knew no shen [high, literary] Tamil and hence his knowing this high dialect of Tamil would not have been fruitful then and a practical Ziegenbalg would therefore have set aside his shen Tamil learning for a while" (Mohanavelu 1993: 43).

Walther, who was missionary in Tranquebar from 1725 to 1739, apparently tried to revise Ziegenbalg's translation in order to counter Beschi's criticism; however this led to a dispute with Schultze who believed that this revision was a failure: "Ziegenbalg's translation is distinct and clear, has been understood by Sudras and Pariahs, by high and low, and ... many impartial Brahmins had admired it, had praised its distinctness, and added that they would not take upon themselves to do it equally well" (Fenger 1863: 84). The revisers had introduced poetical expressions, "quite incomprehensible to the mass of the people. Schultze therefore advised that the old translation of Ziegenbalg should be retained, and that no one should trouble themselves about the sneers of the Roman Catholic[s], who would of course be better pleased if the Bible were quite incomprehensible. He said that the missionaries might as well read from a

Latin or German as from a high Tamil Bible, as it could not be comprehended by the common people" (Fenger 1863: 84).

Although Ziegenbalg borrowed specific terms from Catholic usage, which usually comprised Sanskrit and Tamil roots, the overall style and expression of his translations did not resemble Catholic writing in Tamil. While his detractors blame his lack of Tamil knowledge, his defenders attribute his language use to a deliberate strategy that targeted the lower sections of Tamil society. However, it is not always possible to draw such clear-cut divisions. Ziegenbalg's use of key high Sanskritised Tamil words (discussed in Chapter 3) from the Catholic tradition is at odds with the attributed policy of using lower Tamil registers. Being the first Protestant missionary to translate into Tamil, Ziegenbalg had not developed a well-charted methodology for the translation of Protestant texts for Tamil culture. Criticism from within Protestant mission in Tamilnadu, and the several attempts to revise Ziegenbalg's translation by Lutheran missionaries who followed him to South India, indicate that missionary strategies were being constantly revised in line with changing circumstances. Thus, the assimilation of Protestant Christianity went through several phases in the centuries that followed. However, this debate about the merits of the lower registers of the Tamil language as compared to literary Tamil, which began in earnest with Ziegenbalg's translations, has continued to be an important component in discussions regarding the use of Tamil in Protestant Tamil translations.

2. Johann Philipp Fabricius (1711-1791): Old Testament, 1776

Fabricius arrived in India in 1740 after having studied theology at Halle, like Ziegenbalg, and worked in Tranquebar until 1742. That year he moved as a German missionary to the English mission in Madras. His missionary and translation activities were conducted under constant political unrest. When the French invaded the Coromandel in 1746, for instance, the house in which he lived was pulled down and he had to move between Madras and Cuddalore several times while the English and French fought over possession of Madras.

Fabricius attributes his knowledge of Tamil to his teacher, Muttu, whom he came to know in Madras: "Soon after my arrival in Madras, I found a special opportunity to come into contact with a native Tamil scholar knowing English language and the Bible. Even before my arrival, he learnt and studied the Bible through his friendship with Schultze..." (Germann 1865, quoted in Mohanavelu 1993: 86). Unlike Ziegenbalg, he mastered both the literary and colloquial Tamil to a high degree of perfection (Lehmann, 1956: 160). Besides his translation of the Old Testament, his other works include *The Mirror of Papacy*, a discussion of Roman Catholicism, expanding under

French protection and a book of sermons (1867). His dictionary, *A Malabar and English Dictionary*, was first printed in 1779 (Lehmann 1956: 160).

Germann's biography (in German) titled *Johann Philipp Fabricius* (1865), gives the most comprehensive history of what happened to the Tamil Bible between Ziegenbalg and Fabricius and is the most important printed source for the procedures that Fabricius himself followed. When Ziegenbalg died in 1719, the New Testament, the Pentateuch, and the Old Testament books of Joshua and Judges were in print. Benjamin Schultze translated the rest of the Old Testament. By the beginning of 1726, Schultze had even translated the books of the Apocrypha. According to Fenger, Schultze read each Hebrew verse through and when he had 'understood it thoroughly' repeated it in Tamil and "when he and other natives thought that it was well expressed, Schultze dictated the verse for writing down...There was also a learned Brahmin present, whom he had taken into his service in order to ask his advice in difficult passages; and if a verse or text were difficult in the original, he had a Polyglot Bible and other good aids at hand" (Fenger 1863: 132-33). The rest of the books of the Old Testament were printed by 1728, but by this time Schultze was already in Madras.

According to Germann's version of the sequence of events, Walther in Tranquebar, who had very good knowledge of Hebrew, sent a list of mistakes that he had discovered in the Tamil Old Testament to Schultze. Schultze did not bother to reply, or upset at criticism, did not want to entertain such comments. Walther and Pressier were especially talented in Tamil and so were not satisfied with the Tamil translations of Ziegenbalg and Schultze. Apparently, Pressier used his own translation of the Bible in his sermons (Germann 1865: 211). Worm, in Tranquebar, was the first to start a revision of Ziegenbalg's Tamil translation of the Gospel of Matthew. After his death, Walther and Pressier continued revising until 1739 when the revised Matthew was printed as a kind of norm for further translation work. Schultze was against both the revision and the printing of it. When he returned to Germany he opposed this revision in public. Meanwhile, Germann claims that people in Germany came to know that Schultze's knowledge of Tamil was very limited and that, in fact, most of the work was done by his convert Peter Maleiappen.

While the missionaries at Tranquebar were discussing the revision of Ziegenbalg's translation, Philip De Melho (1723-90), a Protestant Tamil in Ceylon who had studied Hebrew, Greek, Latin, Portuguese and Tamil began revising Ziegenbalg's version in 1746. His New Testament was printed in 1759. De Melho's criticism of the existing Tamil version was sent to the missionaries at Tranquebar:

The language and style have not been arranged in accordance with the solemnity of such a divine revelation as the Holy Scriptures. The spelling of a great many words is very defective. Foreign words have been introduced, which in Tamil style appear ungraceful and deform the language and disfigure it. Abundant errors have also crept into it, consisting of unnecessary additions of words which are not in the sacred text and unadmissible omissions of those which are in it, bad and incorrect renderings and incompatible interpretations, instead of translations... (Chitty 1859: 75).

The Tranquebar missionaries in turn, although they pronounced the language employed by De Melho "to be excellent and choice," raised doubts as to whether his translation could be "generally understood by the common people" (Chitty 1859: 75). To counter this argument, De Melho's translation was publicly read "to a large body of learned Tamils" in the Jaffna Fort Church who, according to Chitty, unanimously replied that it was intelligible to common people and "that the language used therein was matchless, elegant, pathetic and heart cheering, worthy of becoming Holy Writ" (Chitty 1859: 75). In contrast, they thought "the Tranquebar version was a mixture of all words current on the Coast and was extremely uncouth, barbarous and ridiculous, owing to the grammatical errors and the vulgarisms with which it abounded" (Chitty 1859: 75). In a letter written to the Bishop of Colombo in 1850, 'the Principal Tamil Protestant Inhabitants of Colombo' claimed that the two revisions by Fabricius and Rhenius that followed De Melho's were "decidedly inferior, in many respects, to the approved Ceylon Version [De Melho's]..." (Letter 1850: 7). Thus, this conflict between the Tranquebar translators and the Jaffna Tamils, which focused on the correct type of Tamil suited to scripture, continued well after Fabricius had finished his revision.

a. Revision of the New Testament:

Fabricius took up the revision of the Tamil Bible after his arrival in Madras in 1742. Fabricius, together with a Tamil called 'Muttu,' read and revised the four gospels and half of the Acts of Apostles. They worked with the Greek original with the intention of making the translation as clear and simple as possible. Until the invasion of the French in 1746, he worked daily with Muttu. Muttu escaped to Cuddalore when the French invaded and there became a government interpreter while Fabricius continued the revision with the help of two catechists, Paul and Sawrimuttu. Paul had already helped Schultze with translation work and Sawrimuttu had helped another German missionary, J.A. Sartorius (1704-38), to learn Tamil. Fabricius sent the four gospels and the Acts of Apostles to Tranquebar and a little later, the epistle to the Romans and I Corinthians (Germann 1865: 213). Meanwhile, the mission board in Halle, decided to reprint the existing version of the Bible, claimed by Schultze to have been done by him. But all the missionaries in India were opposed to this as they thought it was full of errors, and so it was not printed.

By the autumn of 1750, Fabricius had revised the entire New Testament. Fabricius completed a second revision of the New Testament in 1753. Germann, admitting that it was ‘simply a story’ that could not be historically verified, narrates how Fabricius stood under a tree surrounded by Christians and non-Christians, reading extracts from his translation. He was able to judge whether his translation was clear and understandable as he conversed and discussed portions of his translation with them. If not, he would sit with a small group of co-workers in his office and go over the translated verses again. Germann remarks, “[t]his is very similar to the way Luther did his translation into German” (Germann 1865: 215), thus, drawing a comparison between Fabricius and Luther in order to enhance Fabricius’s status as Bible translator.

Without his knowledge, a revised version of the New Testament up to II Corinthians using some of Fabricius’s revisions was printed in Tranquebar towards the end of 1753. He was informed of this later on and requested to send some more manuscripts. Upset at this, he refused to send any further translations. The missionaries apologised and in the summer of 1754, Fabricius went to Tranquebar for consultations on the revisions. By that time Fabricius had completed the revision of II Corinthians and Galatians (Germann 1865: 215). After this consultation, the procedure agreed to was that Fabricius would send his revision to Tranquebar and they would return their remarks to him after which he would send them the final revision for printing. The New Testament was printed in 1758 but Germann reminds his readers not to forget that the correct translation by Fabricius began only from II Corinthians since the earlier books were a result of the combined input of several missionaries.

In 1760, the British conquered Pondicherry from the French and gave Fabricius the printing press that they acquired from there. In 1761, he established the press near the church at Vepery, Madras, but it took some time to get the Tamil fonts from Halle. Thus, the printing of the New Testament could be started only in 1766 and was completed in 1772. Germann conjectures that during this long time of waiting for the draft to be printed, Fabricius must have made further corrections to the text.

b. Revision of the Old Testament:

Fabricius began work on the Old Testament while still translating the New Testament. On October 18, 1756, he wrote that he wanted to begin with the most important and difficult books to translate, namely, the Psalms, Song of Solomon and the Prophets. He was able to finish translating only up to Jeremiah by 1756. In 1758, the French attacked Madras and captured some of the mission property in Madras. He lost some of his books especially two that he used daily for his translation—the Hebrew

Bible and Starcke's *Bibelwerk* (probably a kind of commentary on the prophets). Germann spends time giving a detailed account of how Fabricius lost and acquired these books, as Fabricius, according to him, could not have finished his translations without them. The same method by agreement of 1754 was followed again for the Old Testament: that Fabricius would send his drafts to Tranquebar and the missionaries there would write their comments on his work before the final draft was prepared. The missionaries involved in Tranquebar were Zeglin and Klein and Daniel Pillai, a Tamil.

The printing of the Old Testament was delayed because of lack of sufficient paper, ink and Tamil types. There was also some problem with co-workers, who were most probably Tamil catechists, helping with the proofreading.⁵ In 1786, the book of Psalms was printed and according to Germann, some of the verses in it were entirely new translations and not just revisions of the older version (Germann 1865: 217). Whether Fabricius revised or translated the entire Old Testament seems to have been under debate until the writing of Germann's version of the history. As the books of Psalms, Song of Solomon and the Prophets were printed in 1798 only after the death of Fabricius there was doubt whether Fabricius had completed his final translation of these books. But Germann suggests that since these were the books he began with, he must have completed them. He insists that the entire Bible in Tamil is Fabricius's translation and that claims that either his work was a mere revision or that it was a joint effort by several missionaries should not be paid much attention as there were no historical justifications for them. Germann insists that it is only because of Fabricius's contribution that the Bible is available in the Tamil language in a beautiful form.

It is interesting that Germann does not hesitate to reveal that there was some controversy regarding how far Fabricius was the sole translator of the Bible.⁶ Most subsequent histories, written by Protestant Tamils, impress on the reader that Fabricius was the sole translator of the Old Testament and the best individual effort for a long time to come. Fabricius's translation came to be referred to as the 'Golden Version' of the Tamil Bible. When attempts were made to revise his version in the early nineteenth century, Vedanayaka Sastri (1774-1864) a Protestant Tamil poet wrote in defence of Fabricius's version as the 'golden translation of the immortal father Fabricius (Germann 1865: 218). These are instances of how the writing of the history of the Tamil Bible and its translators had an almost hagiographic function, and served to provide the Protestant Tamil community with a past that became the basis for community identity.

The Fabricius version was used by the Leipzig Lutheran Missionary Society (known among them as the 'Golden Version') and the Missions of the Propagation of Gospel in

Thanjavur, Madras and in some areas of Tirunelveli (*Revision* 1869). Since his version was by and large a literal and faithful rendering of the Hebrew original, British missionaries in the nineteenth century considered it too unidiomatic and obscure and there were several projects to revise it. However, the Tamil Lutheran Churches refused to accept revisions of Fabricius's translation and continued to use it until the early twentieth century when they agreed to a joint translation of the Bible with the other Protestant denominations in the Tamil areas.

While there was some doubt about the extent of Fabricius's role in Bible translation, there was none concerning his role as a translator of German hymns into Tamil (Germann 1865: 218). Fabricius felt that the Tranquebar Hymnal, which by 1733 had nearly 300 hymns, had too many defects, was difficult to understand, and was not good enough even for children to sing. Fabricius started composing hymns in Tamil in 1747, and some of these were included in the fifth Tranquebar edition of 1756. In 1774, Fabricius published his own hymnbook comprising his original compositions. Fabricius added some selected hymns that he had translated in 1786. A second edition of his hymns was published in Madras in 1797. Lehmann claims that for Fabricius, hymns were meant to function as a special means of awakening, so he took care that his hymns had a simple style and only common words (Lehmann 1956: 161). Fabricius's concerns about the quality of Tamil hymns sung clearly reveal his Pietist background, which accentuated the importance of hymns in church devotion and private worship. Germann remarks that these hymns were a result of his experience but that they also emphasized the sacrament and history [of Christianity?]. Germann claims for this hymnbook a unique place in the history of world mission because most other hymns were only translated into and not composed originally in the languages of the 'natives' as Fabricius was able to do. Fabricius's hymns are unique in the particular history of the Protestant Tamil church as well, since no other Protestant missionary was able to compose hymns in Tamil. However, these hymns remained confined to the Tamil Lutheran tradition and did not become a part of the corpus of Protestant Tamil devotional songs.

B. The Nineteenth Century: the British and Foreign Bible Society

The history of Bible translations and printing entered a new phase in Indian languages, including Tamil, in the early nineteenth century with the entry into India of the British and Foreign Bible Society (hereafter BFBS) in 1811. The institution of the BFBS coincided with the ascendancy of the English East India Company in South India: Danish commercial interest in the area had been diminished by the French and the English; the French defeated by the English in 1760 and, following the Mysore Wars

(1767-1799), the Carnatic was annexed in 1801. From 1813, the British Parliament allowed the Anglican hierarchy to be established in British India. Several British mission societies were established in South India in the early nineteenth century: of these, the Society for the Propagation of Gospel (SPG) in 1825, Church Missionary Society (1814), the London Missionary Society (1805), and the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (1816), were the most prominent in South India. This meant that the task of translating the Bible into Tamil passed from German Lutheran missionaries into the hands of British Anglican missionaries. However, Anglican missionaries did not undertake to translate as individuals, but were appointed by the BFBS to serve several translation projects. Thus, the BFBS introduced the organisation and institutionalisation of the translation, printing, and distribution of Bibles in Indian languages. In most languages of India, this meant the production of the first translation of the Bible in that language. The Tamil Bible, however, was an exception since the BFBS got involved only a hundred years after the first Tamil translation of the Bible was printed.

The most important change that the creation of the BFBS introduced to the production of the Tamil Bible was its principle of working through committees. Though earlier translators had taken the help of other Protestant missionaries and Tamil catechists and pundits, each translation was mainly known as that of the individual translator's. This may have been because the assistance rendered was not regular or substantial. There was certainly no organisation like the BFBS that could provide reliable infra-structural support, which included a team of translators and revisers, and a networking system that could draw on resources from all over Tamilnadu, Ceylon and, if need be, from other parts of India. In turn, the translators and revisers were answerable to the BFBS and through them to other Missionary Societies working in the language area. For the first time, there was also an organised system of gathering audience reaction to draft versions of translations whereby criticism and suggestions for improvement could be incorporated in the final version.

The BFBS attempted to ensure the uniformity and standardisation of biblical and theological terms, not only within each language area but also between language groups and in fact, towards the second half of the nineteenth century, this attempt included almost all the languages of India into which the Bible had been translated. Translators were encouraged to use terms, which had Sanskrit roots, in order to establish connections between different Indian languages. This had an impact on the way religious terminology was allowed to develop within individual languages; the greater experimentation with Tamil terms of the previous century was curtailed to an extent in favour of establishing a common religious vocabulary as far as possible between Indian languages. More importantly, whenever there was disagreement on the

renderings of terms or meaning of phrases, the English King James' Version was referred to as the final arbiter to settle ambiguity.

The two nineteenth-century Tamil versions selected for study are Rhenius's (along with a revision committee) revision of the New Testament (1833) and the *Union Version* (1871) translated by a 'Revision Committee.' Both projects were undertaken under the authority of the BFBS and the latter was the more successful in achieving the objectives of the BFBS and most Protestant denominations in the Tamil areas. The sources for the history of these translations are mainly BFBS records and reports by the translators. However, like the *Halleische Berichte* of the previous century, these records too were often tailored to suit the taste and preferences of the European audiences they were meant for. Rhenius in a letter written in 1820, for instance, warned of misrepresentation in such missionary records as a result of 'overstating the case':

I will not say how far the journals themselves have misrepresented things; but it seems true that some private letters which have gone from Madras, and have been printed, are calculated to excite, in the minds of our Society and of readers in general, an idea of the religious state of India which is not consistent with fact. In reflecting on the causes of misrepresentation, I cannot help touching also on the Reports of the Societies themselves, which Reports, if I am not mistaken, have occasionally a degree of colouring... (Rhenius 1841: 205).

There is further evidence where official records of the BFBS do not show signs of dissent regarding revisions of the Tamil Bible translation. These will be discussed in the individual sections that follow.

1. Charles Theophilus E. Rhenius (1790-1837): New Testament, 1833

Rhenius too was a German missionary who came to India in 1814 and worked for the English Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Madras for six years. He moved to Tirunelveli, in South Tamilnadu, in 1820, and worked in the district for eighteen years. The British and Foreign Bible Society appointed him head of the revision committee, the first such committee formed to revise the Tamil Bible. He was given the task of revising Fabricius's version. In 1835, he had to leave the CMS due to disagreement over the enforcement of Anglican rituals, which he disapproved of.

There are three sources that provide accounts of Rhenius's translation of the New Testament into Tamil. These are: the *Contributions towards a History of Biblical Translations in India*, reprinted from the *Calcutta Christian Observer* in 1854; extracts from Rhenius's journals and correspondence which were compiled by his son, J. Rhenius, as *Memoir of the Rev. C.T.E. Rhenius* (1841); and Rhenius's "Essay on the Principles of Translating the Holy Scriptures, with Critical Remarks on various passages, particularly in reference to the Tamil Language," printed at the Mission

Press, Nagercoil, in 1827. The *Memoir* encompasses all spheres of Rhenius's duties as a missionary and includes comments on the Tamil language, on translating the Bible, and his interaction with Protestant Tamil congregations. His essay on translation, however, presents the specific problems of translating the Bible into Tamil with several examples of difficult terms.

Rhenius's method of learning literary Tamil was different from that of his predecessors who employed Tamils familiar with a European language. Rhenius decided to appoint a teacher who knew no other language but Tamil: "How then shall we acquire the proper Tamul idiom? I answer, that it can only be acquired by the assistance of a learned native who knows the native grammars well, has had no practice in English and foreign compositions..." He claims that he was introduced to such a Tamil early in his career and "attributed whatever degree of critical knowledge [he] may have obtained" to this circumstance (Rhenius 1841: 563). According to Kulendran, Rhenius studied Tamil grammar and literature over a fourteen-year period with the Tamil scholar and poet Tiruparkatalnathan Kavirayar in Tirunelveli (Kulendran 1967: 107). Rhenius also claimed on several occasions that the Europeans, including Ziegenbalg and Beschi, had not learnt to speak Tamil without using vulgar terms: "But they all have failed in giving us pure Tamul: they have mixed vulgarisms with grammatical niceties, and left us in want of a regularly digested syntax" (Rhenius 1841: 562). In his *Grammar of the Tamil Language* (1836), Rhenius claims to "supply these deficiencies" although it is not meant to be a grammar of the high or poetical Tamil but that "of the Tamul vernacular, as spoken and written by well-bred Tamilians" (Rhenius 1841: 562). Rhenius was one of the first Bible translators who attempted to steer between the high and low Tamil, avoiding, as he put it, the intricacies of the former, and the barbarism of the latter (Rhenius 1841: 562-3). His second concern was that of speaking Tamil idiomatically, which was a significant principle of translation that he adopted. According to him (in a letter written to a fellow missionary in 1837), the difficulty of speaking Tamil idiomatically hindered the progress of good work in India:

From our habits we are apt to speak European-Tamul; whereby we do not a little darken knowledge of words and phrases which the Heathen man does not comprehend, be they spoken ever so readily and fluently. Understand me:--I do not mean that we should speak in what is called *High Tamul*,--not at all—speak it as low as we please: I mean only that we should so express the sense of our European languages, as the native would express the same in his own tongue...the nearer we come up to the native mode of speaking, the better will they understand us, and the most success may we expect (Rhenius 1841: 584).

Thus, Rhenius voiced the two concerns that dominated discussions on the different versions of the Tamil Bible: one, to locate the right register of the Tamil language (that is, neither too high and poetical nor too low); and two, to express in an idiomatic Tamil,

which would approximate the articulation of the native Tamil speaker. However, like other translators, he was unable to define precisely what that right language register was or how idiomatic a translation needed to be in order to assimilate the Bible into Tamil culture.

According to *Contributions*, the decision to revise Fabricius's version, which was in use until then, came in 1814, as there was "a demand for a new edition of the Tamul Old Testament" (*Contributions* 1854: 4). Rhenius was to be chief reviser, to be helped by Dr. Rottler and a revision committee, appointed by the Calcutta Auxiliary Bible Society. Rhenius had been in India only a year and a half when he began to revise the Old Testament in 1815. He was convinced that the New Testament needed revision as much as the Old. In 1819, he mentioned meeting a headman who claimed not to understand the existing Tamil translation: "I enquired whether he is in the habit of reading it [the New Testament]: he said 'Yes, we are reading it; but we cannot well understand it.' So frequent have been the testimonies of the unintelligibility of the Tamul New Testament, that the necessity of revising it also cannot be doubted any longer" (Rhenius 1841: 190). Although Rhenius first began to translate the Old Testament, he finished revising the New Testament first, which took him twelve years. In 1819, he had finished the Pentateuch and Psalms; and the Calcutta Auxiliary Bible Society printed the Book of Genesis as a draft version for critical comments from Protestant missionaries in the Tamil areas. When he died, after a residence in India of twenty-four years, he had not finished the Old Testament, although it seems from the *Memoirs* that he continued to engage with the translation project all his life.

Soon after the Madras Auxiliary Bible Society (hereafter MABS) was established in 1820, it turned its attention to the Tamil Bible. It printed one thousand copies of Fabricius's version of the Old Testament for immediate use; and as there was a demand for the New Testament also, it was undertaken to print two thousand copies of the whole New Testament, besides two thousand copies of separate editions of the Gospels, Acts, and the Epistles. Publication of portions of Scripture was encouraged as it was considered that "both adults and youths were more speedily made acquainted with the truth" (*Contributions* 1854: 6). All these editions were ready in 1823.

Rhenius and Dr. Rottler, engaged by the MABS to revise Fabricius's translation, first went through the New Testament, and having laid their version before a Sub-committee for examination, Matthew's Gospel was finished in 1824. In 1825, ten thousand copies of this Gospel were printed and circulated. According to the *Contributions*, Rhenius's translation was found most acceptable, but as some alterations were suggested, it was resolved to revise the gospels again, before any

more should be printed. However, there is evidence of dissent from some sections of Tamil Lutherans from Tanjore and Madras. Vedanayaka Sastri, the Protestant Tamil poet based in Tanjore, wrote petitions against Rhenius's efforts after the revised Gospel of Matthew was circulated for criticism in 1825. Neither Rhenius's *Memoirs* nor BFBS records show evidence of this opposition from Protestant Tamils. This conflict between Rhenius and the Protestant Tamils is analysed in detail in Chapter 4.

In 1824, according to Rhenius's *Memoirs*, there was another disagreement over translation between Rhenius (and the translation committee working with him) and the 'General' or 'Madras Committee,' which most probably referred to the MABS committee in-charge of Bible translation. This conflict was over the use of the King James' Version as a standard of reference: "I attended two meetings of the general Committee; and was sorry to find that in fact they wish to adopt the English as the standard according to which a translation should be made. Against this I, as well as the Translation Committee, protested, as the originals ought to be our standard..." (Rhenius 1841: 255-56). However, Rhenius and his Committee were overridden and this principle of using the English James' Version for reference continued to shape the course of Bible translation in Tamil as well as other Indian languages. Unlike Rhenius, the next translation committee was happy to affirm this principle believing that it would help standardise Bible translation across all the other Indian languages.

Rhenius completed his version of the New Testament in 1826. The second revision was at once commenced, and five thousand copies of the Gospels which were sent to press, were ready in 1827; but before the remainder of the New Testament could be prepared, it was found necessary to print 5500 copies of a second edition of the Gospels and Acts. They were ready in 1830, and it was then recorded, "the desire of the native population to receive the Tamul Scriptures, more than keeps pace with the ability to supply them" (*Contributions* 1854: 5). The *Contributions* also claims that, "[s]o great had been the demand for it, that hitherto the portions were distributed as soon as they were printed" (*Contributions* 1854: 6). Such claims were often made by the BFBS, not only in South India, but in other parts of the British Empire as well. This promoted the notion that translated Bibles were not being thrust on non-Christian societies but that they were printed and distributed in response to a demand that already existed. By doing so, the BFBS could justify its role to critics in Europe.

The BFBS brought out Rhenius's final translation of the New Testament in parts, that is, the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles in 1825 and the entire New Testament in 1833. In 1840, the Bible Society published its first edition of the whole Bible in Tamil, comprising the Old Testament in Fabricius's translation and the New Testament by

Rhenius. The Missions of CMS and London Missionary Society (LMS), the Wesleyan Missionary Society (WMS), and the American Board of Missions used this version (Report 1863: 1).

In 1835, Rhenius wanted to commence work on the revision of the Old Testament, and therefore a hundred and fifty copies of *Genesis* were prepared, printed and circulated for examination. And after having obtained the opinions of missionaries and others, it was resolved, in 1836, that Fabricius's version should not be laid aside; but that another edition of it should be printed, with some alterations in the orthography, and that the revision of Fabricius's version should be continued. In 1836, the Sub-Committee printed their revision of Rhenius's New Testament, and turned their attention to the Old Testament. The Committee's attention to detail in examining the translations is evident from an entry in Rhenius's diary. He complained, "The Bible Revision Committees give us a deal of trouble. They go through the gospels again, and send me, on six chapters only, about one hundred and fifty remarks" (Rhenius 1841: 463). The *Contributions* mentions the care that was taken in the preparation of this version:

The Madras Committee state in one of their Reports, that after the translation was completed by Mr Rhenius, it was submitted to a Tamul Sub-Committee for their criticism. It was then returned to Mr Rhenius for his counter-remarks, and on these being received, it was again gone through by the Committee, with the assistance of native scholars, and every disputed point carefully considered. When the Testament was completed, an interleaved copy was sent to every missionary, that corrections and improvements might be suggested. At one time, there were three Sub-Committees engaged in the revision, and Dr. Rottler who had assisted Fabricius in his translation, and had studied the language for forty years, was on one of them (*Contributions* 1854: 7).

As mentioned earlier, translation projects under the BFBS began for the first time to solicit critical responses from other missionaries and Tamil catechists. However, official records of these translation projects, such as the one given above, portray an ideal scenario where there is an amicable resolution of difference, resulting in a translation acceptable to all. As the following chapters will prove, this was far from true. What is of importance here is not whose voice was more authentic but the significance of such truth claims for these translation projects: apparent unanimity in translation decisions was used to argue that a particular version of the Tamil Bible was the standard and most authentic version.

Rhenius died in 1837 before he could complete the Old Testament translation project. In the following years separate integral portions of Scripture of both Fabricius's and Rhenius's versions were issued. In 1841, it was stated that no satisfactory conclusion had been reached, in reference to the versions of Fabricius and Rhenius.

The translation committee appointed by BFBS to revise Rhenius's translation twenty years after his death observed that though Rhenius's translation was regarded as generally written in clear idiomatic Tamil, it was also considered too "paraphrastic" and, "as departing too frequently without sufficient warrant from the renderings adopted in the principal European versions, and as needlessly differing from Fabricius's forms of expression, even when Fabricius's forms happened to be perfectly correct" (*Revision*, 1869: 2). Many still preferred Fabricius's version, partly because they had known it from their childhood, and partly because one edition of it had marginal references and headings to the chapters (*Contributions* 1854: 7). The Tamil Lutheran churches were keen to retain Fabricius's version and refused to participate in BFBS translation projects until the early twentieth century.

In 1842, Winslow translated the headings and chronology of the English version into Tamil, and arrangements were made to print 6,000 copies of the entire Bible with these additions—the Old Testament version of Fabricius, corrected, and the New Testament of Rhenius. And in 1842, 5,000 copies of Matthew in Rhenius's version, and 3,000 copies of Psalms in Fabricius's version were also printed (*Contributions* 1854: 8). However, there were several attempts to revise Rhenius's version: "In 1842, a revised version of Genesis, formed on the basis of Mr. Rhenius's translation was circulated for examination, but no progress had been made in obtaining a standard version, and in 1846, another effort was made" (*Contributions* 1854: 9). The aim was to find a balance between the literal translation of Fabricius and the idiomatic translation of Rhenius: "That of Fabricius was 'more literal but more obscure,' that of Rhenius 'more idiomatic, and altogether in a better Tamul dress,' but 'too paraphrastic.' The desire was to obtain 'a medium version of the New Testament,' and 'an improved version of the Old Testament,' and thus to produce 'a uniform Bible'" (*Contributions* 1854: 9).

It is clear that Rhenius's translation strategy was to make his Tamil version as idiomatic as possible in order to facilitate comprehension and acceptance in Tamil society. He was critical of the literal translations by Fabricius and his colleagues. In a letter to Tamil Protestants in Madras (1833), who were members of 'The Religious Book Society for the dissemination of Christian Knowledge,' and engaged in translation work, he stresses the importance of idiomatic translations:

I have looked over the two sermons you sent me for correction, ... From the corrections I have made, you will see that there is a great deal yet to be done in order to give these sermons a tolerably intelligible shape. The former Tranquebar translation is not fit for the press. I have often found that what seems good in German or English, is not so in Tamul. The manner of stating a thing, and of reasoning, is very different in your tongue; and a literal translation will never do (Rhenius 1841: 442).

However, his fellow missionaries considered Rhenius's idiomatic translation as difficult as Fabricius's literal translation. This was in spite of the generally held missionary opinion that idiomatic translations enabled the greater assimilation of the Bible into local cultures. In his overview of the Tamil Bible, Dibb (1873) gives a critical analysis of Rhenius's translation: "...we may observe that he had such strong views of the difference between the idiom of the Tamil language and that of the New Testament that he used to invert the order of verses in such wholesale fashion that it was a puzzle to compare his verses with those of any other version" (Dibb 1873: 123). The other missionaries considered it more a paraphrase than a translation. However, according to Dibb, "It [Rhenius's version]...was an immense improvement in style upon either of those which preceded it, and made the Scriptures much more readable and intelligible than they had done before" (Dibb 1873: 123). Further, Rhenius translated the same word with different equivalents. Dibb gives the example of the way Rhenius treated the term 'temptation': "he would translate that word by whatever he thought it meant in the particular place where it occurred, and so it is sometimes rendered 'affliction' and sometimes by such a phrase as 'the means of bringing us into guilt!...' Again, in his desire for elucidation, Rhenius had constant resort to the habit of supplying words, and these were sometimes of doubtful correctness" (Dibb 1873: 123). This last criticism showed Rhenius's strategy as the opposite of the general trend of BFBS nineteenth-century translation policies in India: to standardise the use of key Protestant terms both within each language and across different language groups. This conflict, which continued through the 1840s, led to the next major translation project soon after Rhenius's version was published. This project gave Protestant Tamils the *Union Version* in 1871.

2. The British and Foreign Bible Society Revision Committee: *The Union Version*, 1871

The *Union Version*, which took nearly twenty years in preparation, was a result of there being two Tamil versions of the Bible in equal circulation in the first half of the nineteenth century. There was no consensus amongst all the Protestant missionary societies working in the Tamil areas of South India and northern Ceylon on which of the two was a satisfactory Tamil translation. The aim of the BFBS in starting a new translation project was to produce one translation by combining the advantages of Fabricius's translation with that of Rhenius, yielding a version which would be accepted by all denominations of the Tamil Church: "Neither Fabricius's version nor Rhenius's being in universal use among Tamil Christians, neither version had acquired among them that prescriptive reverence and authority which are conceded to the Authorized English Version [King James' Version] wherever the English language is spoken..." (Revision 1869: 2). Another purpose was that the new translation should unify the

various Protestant denominations, by “secur[ing] to the Tamil people the advantage of a version of the New Testament which should be worthy of being accepted by all, and which should tend, if possible, to bind together all religious communities in the Tamil country...by the bond of a common record and standard of faith, expressed in a common speech” (*Revision* 1869: 3). Except for the Lutherans, almost all Tamil Missions and churches accepted the *Union Version* as the standard Tamil Bible. This acceptance, once gained, was in fact so strong that a large portion of the Tamil Protestant community continues to hold this version as *the* only authoritative Tamil Bible today.

The Revision Committee that assisted the chief reviser, Henry Bower, have left two reports entitled, “Report of the Proceedings of the Delegates for the Revision of the Tamil New Testament” (1863) and, *Revision of the Tamil Bible* (1869). Together with a lengthier account provided by the Jaffna Auxiliary Bible Society, *A Brief Narrative of the Operations of the Jaffna Auxiliary Bible Society* (1870), these are the major sources of information on the translation process of the *Union Version*. Besides these, only two letters written by Bower to the BFBS head office in London, in connection with Bible revision, have survived.

Apart from Bower and his committee’s translation project, there were two other attempts to revise the Tamil Bible: one was a Protestant and the other, a Catholic effort, both of which occurred in the mid-nineteenth century. The Protestant revision was by P. Percival and other Protestant missionaries in Ceylon, which came to be known as the ‘Tentative Version’ (1850). But this revision was rejected by most missionaries in South India for using Tamil peculiar to Jaffna, thus making it unfamiliar to Tamils in South India. It was also rejected by the Lutherans who used Fabricius’s version, as inferior to it in faithfulness and simplicity, and by the Rhenius adherents, as being written in a style higher than Rhenius’s without being purer. There was also an accusation that it bore “too distinctly the marks of having mainly proceeded from one mind” (*Revision* 1869: 2). Further, it was pointed out that there was too much Sanskrit used in the translation but the Jaffna committee proved that it had used only forty more words of Sanskrit origin than the drafts circulated by the Madras Committee. According to Kulendran (1958), the Tentative Version was rejected not only by the missionaries but opposed by the Protestant Tamils of Thanjavur and Tirunelveli, who “comprised three-fourths of the Tamil Christian community of the day” (Kulendran 1958: 247).

In 1857, the Catholics published their own version of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles from Pondicherry, the first Catholic translation of any part of the Bible into Tamil. The Latin Vulgate was used as the original and the *Revision* claims that it

differed from Fabricius in presenting a curious "mixture of high and low Tamil, and the general character of the composition...[was] rugged and uncouth..." (*Revision* 1869: 2). Thus, the translation committee appointed by MABS was in a dominant enough position by the mid-nineteenth century to claim authority for its version over all other contemporary efforts.

In 1853, the BFBS recommended the formation of a new committee for the preparation of the translation acceptable to all Tamils in Tamilnadu as well as in Ceylon (Irudayam and Levi, 2002: 42). MABS appointed a Sub-committee, which then adopted several resolutions. First, the Elzevir Edition of the Greek New Testament was to be considered the standard. Second, Fabricius's version was to be the basis of the new version because of its faithfulness to the original and its renderings of the 'more important words.' Third, Reverend Henry Bower of the SPG was appointed principal reviser and a delegate appointed by each missionary society was to assist him.

Bower commenced his revision in early 1858 and by the end of the year had printed and circulated a revision of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark among Tamil scholars. The other two Gospels and the book of Acts were likewise revised and circulated the following year. "A mass of criticisms and remarks were communicated to Mr. Bower by the delegates and other Tamil scholars to whom copies were sent, including many educated natives" and the general impression from them seems that mere corrections were not satisfactory but that a more thorough translation was to be undertaken (*Revision* 1869: 3). In a letter to the BFBS headquarters in London, Bower claims,

It now appears that the majority of the Delegates are not satisfied with a simple revision of Fabricius. They all admit his faithfulness, but many of them find fault with his construction of sentences and collocation of words. They are of opinion that as we are now working for the whole Tamil people, and not for any particular province, and not merely for the present but for future generations, no pains for expense should be spared in the production of a version as perfect as possible (Bower 1860-62).

Accordingly, keeping this criticism in mind, Bower produced another version and circulated it among the delegates in 1860. The first meeting of Bower and the delegates took place in Palayamcottai in April 1861. The second such meeting took place in June 1863 in Palani Hills where the Epistles and the Apocalypse were discussed. At this meeting the Lutherans communicated that since Fabricius's version did not in practice seem to be the basis of the revision, they were withdrawing their support to the project.

On the completion and publication of the New Testament, a circular was addressed by MABS to all Missionaries in the Tamil country, requesting them to state how far they thought it desirable that such a revision of the Old Testament should be undertaken to bring it to general correspondence of style with the revised New Testament. Bower was again appointed to prepare some Old Testament books for circulation among delegates for comments. The delegates met for the third time in August 1866 at Courtallum and in Palayamcottai to discuss Bower's revision of the Pentateuch, the Psalms, the Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. The fourth and final meeting of the delegates took place in 1868 again at Courtallum and Palayamcottai.

The Revision Committee claimed a superior status for their translation as compared to all previous Tamil versions. Their reports presented several grounds for the establishment of the *Union Version* as the 'standard' Tamil version of the Bible among Protestant Tamils. One line of reasoning taken was that the proximity of the *Union Version* to the English King James' Version lent it greater authority. The English Version functioned as a standard of reference to settle differences between existing Tamil versions and to create one reliable version in their stead. For instance, the *Revision* claims that wherever Fabricius seemed obscure they had to go back to the original but when they did so they realised that he had not used Luther's German as much as the Hebrew original. In order to resolve such ambiguities between Fabricius's translation and the Hebrew texts, they referred to the English King James' Version as the final arbiter whenever there was disagreement on the renderings of specific terms (*Revision* 1869: 12). They do, however, mention giving preference to Fabricius over the English in instances where the Tamil "was capable of a closer adherence to the original than the English had found to be possible" (*Revision* 1869: 13). The significance of using the English King James' Version to arrive at a resolution of linguistic and doctrinal differences is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 2. However, it is worthwhile to mention here in brief that this use of the English version had considerable impact on the history of the Tamil Bible and the identity dynamics of the Protestant Tamil community in the twentieth century: one of the reasons the *Union Version* came to be regarded as the authoritative Tamil Bible was because it was known for its use of the English King James' or 'Authorized' Version.

The second justification for the claim that the *Union Version* was the first standard Tamil translation was that it was the result of a Committee's joint effort and not the work of an individual translator. The Revision Committee trusted that their version would be found more perspicuous and freer from individual peculiarities:

it is a special and peculiar excellence of the work on which we have now been engaged, that it is not the result of the solitary labours of any one man, however

eminent, like the versions of Fabricius and Rhenius, or even like the Tentative, in which the style of man is supposed to be generally predominant, but has passed through many hands, has been studied and criticised by many minds, and has finally been submitted, verse by verse, to the searching language pertaining to each individual present were neutralised by those of his neighbour" (*Revision* 1869: 13).

The potential threat that multiple translators could pose was cancelled by such contrary claims that differences were not only wholly resolved but that they made the translation richer. Although such claims were ambiguous and based on unspecified assumptions about language and interpretation, they further worked to confer authority on the *Union Version*.

In conjunction with the argument that a committee of translators would arrive at a better translation than individual efforts, was the further point that the committee drew on most of the Protestant denominations in the Tamil areas. For instance, the report stressed the wide representation in the translation committee: "Coming, as we have done, from different Missions, from different parts of the Tamil country, where different local peculiarities of expression prevailed, bringing to the discussion of every subject different habits of thought, and influenced, probably more than we were aware, by different theological predilections, there has never been the slightest jarring or discordance of feeling apparent among us during our long conference" (*Revision* 1869: 14). It was thus able to conclude confidently that their translation "will find acceptance with our Missionary brethren and with the Native Christian community, and be the means of opening a wide and effectual door for the entrance of the truth into the minds of the Tamil people" (*Revision* 1869: 14). This narrative of justification was accepted by the Protestant Tamil community as the historical facts behind the making of the Tamil Bible and used to oppose the revision of the *Union Version* in the twentieth century.

However, the report left by the Jaffna Auxiliary Bible Society, suggests that matters were not resolved quite as peacefully and unanimously as the Madras Sub-committee liked to report. In *A Brief Narrative of the Operations of the Jaffna Auxiliary Bible Society in the preparation of a Version of the Tamil Scriptures*, 1870, the Jaffna Committee narrated the history of its operations from 1836 to 1870, revealing the undercurrents of tension and conflict that underscored this translation throughout. At one point, the Madras Committee had even accused Jaffna of "unsettling the minds of the people" and "interfering with its success, as well as creating distrust in the minds of the supporters of the Bible Society" (*Brief Narrative* 1870: 117-118). It was only after 1868, following a period of mutual distrust of the other's competence in Tamil, that the two committees cooperated towards the joint revision of the *Union Version*. The Jaffna Committee even had to demand that the Madras Committee report be altered at

several points to accommodate their point of view. And yet the *Brief Narrative* ended with "How many consuming jealousies are hereby buried forever! How much of anxious controversies silenced forever!" (*Brief Narrative* 1870: 166), suggesting that the Jaffna Committee was as anxious as the Madras Committee to smooth over differences. However, the tension between the two reports reveals the historical compulsions behind the translation and the tensions arising out of fixing the *Union Version* as the final Tamil version of the Bible.

Finally, the report on the Revision of the Tamil Bible by Bower and his committee was signed by thirteen missionaries, out of which there was one Tamil name, P. Rajahgopaul. While much was said in self-congratulation, the assistance they received from a Tamil scholar was mentioned very briefly:

It gives us much pleasure to acknowledge the great assistance we have derived from Mootteiyah Pillay, originally Tamil Moonshee in Mr. Sargent's Institution, Palamcottah, and now Bible Society's Moonshee, who has been present at all our meetings, and whose thorough knowledge of his language, sound and ready judgement, and practical experience in the work of translation and revision, acquired by attendance as native referee at our four meetings in succession, render him peculiarly fitted to help in such a work as this (*Revision* 1869: 13).

Another 'native' Tamil scholar, Arumuga Navalar (1822-79) of Jaffna, who helped Percival in the translation of the 'Tentative Version,' gets barely mentioned in any reports or catalogues published by the Bible Society until Sabapathy Kulandran's article (1958) and book (1967) rescued Navalar from obscurity. Navalar was a Saiva Siddhantist, who used both his Tamil scholarship and strategies learnt from Protestant missionaries for a Šaivite revival in the nineteenth century. According to Kulendran, Navalar, with his training in Sanskritised Šaivite literature, introduced "a certain majesty and literary flavour" to the Tentative Version, along with a purity of idiom (Kulendran 1958: 249). Kulendran argues that these aspects of the Tentative Version strongly influenced the translators of the *Union Version* to use a literary and idiomatic Tamil. However, neither MABS translators nor nineteenth-century missionary records took note of Navalar's role in the creation of a Protestant Tamil idiom.

In conclusion, there were important changes in the practice of translating the Bible into Tamil from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. Translation was no longer undertaken by individuals but by Committees appointed by the BFBS to help a 'principal reviser.' There was more participation from the several mission societies in the Tamil areas, with representatives sent from most, to ratify translation decisions. Further, there was more evidence of draft translations circulated for critical comment and suggestions being incorporated in the final revisions. While the primary concern of the eighteenth-century translators was to translate the Bible as best they could, the

foremost concern in the nineteenth century was to arrive at a ‘standard’ Tamil translation of the Bible. However, although the practice of Bible translation saw some changes in the nineteenth century, the theoretical problems of translation remained. That is, the problem of arriving at the right register of the Tamil language for the translated Bible and finding a balance between literal and idiomatic translation remained largely an unresolved theoretical problem in both centuries. These theoretical problems continued in the twentieth century but were further complicated by changes brought to Tamil language by political and linguistic movements.

C. The Twentieth Century: Protestant Tamil translations

Tamil Bible translation underwent further changes in the twentieth century, though these were neither radical nor sudden. The BFBS began to reveal an awareness that they needed to include Indians in the process of translation. Although this was always discussed in the nineteenth century, Protestant missionaries paternalistically envisaged it as a possibility in the future, when Protestant Tamils acquired adequate maturity and knowledge to be trusted with such a task. By the early twentieth century, translation secretaries and editorial sub-committees of BFBS realized that revisions or new translations of the Tamil Bible needed greater participation by Protestant Tamils in the current political scenario of nationalist sentiment.

A second change was that there were more Protestant Tamils who were making individual and independent efforts at translating the Bible into Tamil. Those who felt that the Tamil in the Bible was not literary enough decided to translate the Bible into a more literary Tamil. Others, who felt that the Tamil Bible was too literary to reach the semi-literate, tried to recreate, sometimes paraphrase, the Bible in very simple Tamil. There were also efforts to produce poetic versions of the Bible. These attempts (discussed in chapter 4) suggest a greater engagement with issues of language and religious texts on the part of Protestant Tamils, who decided to work from outside the framework of the translation committees of the BFBS.

Besides this, greater evidence of Protestant Tamil reaction to revisions and translations has survived from this period. Responses to questionnaires, resolutions taken by some dioceses, petitions signed by groups and individual reactions now find a place in BFBS files. Although an effort was taken in the nineteenth century to get wider opinion, these were mainly the opinion of Protestant missionaries and a few Tamil clergymen. Negative criticism expressed by Protestant Tamils was not recorded in any of the nineteenth-century histories of BFBS that I have come across. For instance, the reaction of Vedanayaka Sastri and members of the Tanjore and Madras congregations in the early nineteenth century, survive not as Bible Society documentation but as part

of the Sastri collection at the United Theological College Archives at Bangalore. However, there was awareness within BFBS in the twentieth century, that the translated Bible needed acceptance from the Protestant Tamil Church as much, or more than from Protestant missionaries.

With the increase in response from Protestant Tamil readers, revisions and translations took longer and were fraught with tension. A further point of controversy was the use of different editions of the original text in the twentieth century. The BFBS adopted the use of Dr. Nestle's edition of the Greek New Testament as a base for all translations. This, when it brought changes to the *Union Version* Protestant Tamils were familiar with, was considered as tampering with the Word of God.

The main source for the history of the two twentieth-century translations was the unpublished correspondence on Tamil Bible translation in the BFBS archives at Cambridge University Library and of the Bible Society of India, Bangalore. There was a change in the structure of the British and Foreign Bible Society, and in the 1950s, the Indian auxiliaries came under the direct control of the Bible Society of India (hereafter BSI), which remained under the jurisdiction of the United Bible Society.

1. British and Foreign Bible Society Revision Committee: *The Revised Version*, 1956

Although there were scattered references in letters from individuals to BFBS about the need to revise the Tamil Bible, the first evidence of an editorial Sub-committee meeting of MABS held specifically to discuss a revision was in 1913. According to Reverend W. H. Organe, Secretary of the Madras Auxiliary, the subject had been under informal discussion for twenty years previously. An offer of cooperation from the Lutherans brought the discussion to a head (Letter to Kilgour, Editorial Superintendent, May 4, 1922). The Lutheran Missionaries, realizing the need for a revision of Fabricius's Version and at the same time unwilling to adopt the *Union Version* of 1871, offered to unite with other denominations to produce a new version of the Bible acceptable to the entire Protestant Tamil Church. Collating responses from the various Tamil Missions, the editorial Sub-committee presented the case to the London office as there being a consensus on the need for revision. The questions asked by the Sub-committee were: "a) Do you consider that a revision of the Tamil Version is necessary? b) If it is, should it be undertaken in the near future? c) To what extent do you think that the text of the *Union Version* requires modification in order to make it the standard Bible for Tamil Christians?"⁷ Of the fourteen responses filed, nine were in favour of a revision, two totally against it and three undecided as to the best time for it or on the general question of translation. After these responses were forwarded to London, the London editorial Sub-committee sanctioned in 1917 "a revision and not a new translation" of the

Tamil Bible. This decision was taken in spite of awareness that “considerable difference of opinion on the whole subject” existed. This may be the reason for their emphasis that the “Indian Christian element” have “its full share in any such revision...[which was] even more necessary at the present time than ever” (Letter from Kilgour Nov 20, 1917).

The recorded reaction of the Tamil Church that survived, however, revealed that a majority of the Tamil congregations were opposed to the idea of revising the *Union Version*. Subsequent to the London editorial Sub-committee’s sanction, resolutions of the Tirunelveli Diocesan Council comprising two hundred individuals, both clergy and lay, representing about 100,000 Tamils, recorded that though they “agree[d] that the translation now in use [wa]s not perfect”, they had reservations about the revision being conducted at “the present time” (Letter, Bishop of Tinnevelly, Madurai and Ramnad, December 19, 1917). The CMS District Church Council of Tinnevelly, “[r]esolved to put on record that the council d[id] not favour such a revision at the present time. They believe[d] that there [wa]s no such wide-spread demand among Indian Christians for a revision...”⁸ Organe’s letter recognized that “there [wa]s rather a determined opposition from the important diocese of Tinnevelly to any action being taken...partly because the Christian community as a whole ha[d] so far expressed no demand for a revision” (Letter, July 10, 1918). However, he insisted that, “...we think it is possible to lay too much stress on the demand of the Christian community because it is only a very limited number among them who are familiar enough with Tamil literature to offer an intelligent criticism of the Bible from that point of view...” (Letter, July 10, 1918). A conference was held in October of 1918 on Tamil Bible Revision where nine of the fifteen speakers including six Indians voiced their dissent or misgivings regarding a full-fledged revision. Organe also accepted that the Tirunelveli Diocese “d[id] number approximately half of the Tamil Christian community and it would be futile to attempt to carry a revision through without their cordial support”(Letter to Kilgour July 15, 1921).

In spite of these reservations, L. P. Larsen and G. S. Doraiswamy, along with a Consultative Committee, were selected to revise the Tamil Bible at the end of 1924. They were appointed after considerable debate about the ratio of European to Indian revisers. While Organe suggested three, with two Indians and one European, Kilgour emphasized the necessity of giving equal weight to both and thus wanted only two, one Indian and one European. This one-to-one ratio was maintained only after some pressure from London. The Consultative Committee was to have Indian representation in the majority. Dr. L. P. Larsen was from the Danish Mission and Principal of United Theological College, Bangalore, when invited to be one of the revisers. G. S.

Doraiswamy, the first Protestant Tamil appointed as one of the revisers, was Tamil Literary Secretary at the YMCA, Madurai.

In the meantime, as in the previous century, there were other attempts at translating parts of the Bible besides those initiated by BFBS. The Madras YMCA published N. Gnanaprakasam's translation of the New Testament in Tamil in 1919. Organe reported that the Roman Catholics had been 'stimulated' to publish a version translated in recent years (Letter to Kilgour, Aug 18 1921). This may be a reference to Trincal (1815-1891), a Jesuit of the new Jesuit Madurai Mission who translated and published the New Testament in 1890, (Roman Catholic Mission Press, Pondicherry). The Madras Auxiliary published Matthew Ellwein's (a Lutheran) translation of the four gospels in Tamil paraphrase in 1912: "[e]ach book carries on the cover page an appropriate verse from the great Tamil classic *Thirukkural*", for instance, Matthew's Gospel had Kural No. 34. (Irudayam and Levi, 2002: 45). His intention had been to produce a popular, colloquial version for the lay reader.

The chief revisers of the Revision Committee prepared a revision of the Gospel of Matthew, which was circulated for comment in 1925. It was based on the English Revised Version (1885), which followed the new edition of the Greek New Testament by Dr Nestle. In May 1926, Organe mentioned having "sent out a circular widely to ask for comments on the revised St. Matthew." Later, he reported: "some one hundred and fifty copies of his circular letters were sent to Indian ministers and laymen" (Minutes of the Madras Committee meeting, July 5, 1926). Out of the forty-three responses forwarded to London, twenty-eight were in favour of the revision while eight were completely opposed, four stated the pros and cons of both versions and one did not comment either way. However, Organe continued, "[w]e did not think it wise to ask for mere general statements of opinion or to count votes because we realised that such action would bring in comments of little value and would give encouragement to agitators like those referred to in the Bishop of Tinnevelly's letter" (Letter to Kilgour July 29, 1926). Kilgour, acknowledging that the general Indian opinion seemed favourable, cautioned Organe that the mixed Indian reaction should be kept in mind. In answer to anxieties raised by Protestant Tamils, he asked Organe to assure them that "they [we]re not to be deprived of having the old version if they wish[ed] it."

Concern over the alteration of the term for 'God' led Kilgour's committee to recommend retaining *tēvan* instead of changing to *kātavul* as it was unconvinced that "it was wise to make a change in such an important word after more than a century of its use ... We can quite conceive that such a radical change might wreck what otherwise might be a very acceptable translation" (Letter to Organe Aug 5, 1926). Organe insisted

that the majority of those present at the Consultative Committee meeting considered *kaṭavuḷ* better than *tēvan* and that the Lutherans were prepared to give up *parāparan* for *kaṭavuḷ* but not for *tēvan*. In the same letter he also informed of the “cold reception” that the revision was having in Tirunelveli, “partly due to an unscrupulous campaign in which the revision is used as a stick to beat diocesanisation and to frighten people by saying that it is one more example of modernism entering the church”(Letter to Kilgour September 9, 1926).

A resolution was adopted by the Executive Committee regarding the principles by which the Revisers should be guided in their work: “[t]he Tamil of the Revision shall be simple, and intelligible to the common people, such as is ordinarily used in dignified grammatical speech, in harmony with the style of the *Union Version*, and acceptable to the users of the Fabricius Version” (“Appendices” BFBS Tamil file 3, 1923-1926: 7). This, however, was a resolution that asked for the impossible from any set of translators. The minutes of the Consultative Committee meeting held in March 1927, stated that “The first edition of the revised Tamil New Testament would doubtless be ‘tentative’... and the Bible Society would welcome suggestions for improvement...” On a point of methodology, there was “a strong desire to avoid voting as the method of deciding questions in regard to which there was difference of opinion.” Organe, in his letter to Kilgour, dated August 23 1928, reported that the first edition of the Revised New Testament of five thousand copies was published earlier in the year, of which three thousand had already been sold by then and that “no adverse criticism of this Testament” had reached him so far.

The correspondence in the Tamil files subsequent to this date contains letters from Organe claiming that the Gospels of the Revised Version were selling very well. He asserted that it was being circulated far more than the old version and that mostly favourable opinion had reached him. Yet, there were signs of criticism that were difficult to ignore. A letter signed by thirteen lay Tamil Christians holding government positions countered Organe’s enthusiastic claims for the revision: “The new version of the New Testament is now come out of press and is in people’s hands and so there is a great hue and cry both in the papers and in public meetings from both the Indian Christian laymen and clergy voting against it and rejecting it as utterly a counterfeit production and solidly asking for the (old) version which follows the English authorised King James’ Version and contains all the necessary improvements also” (Letter to the Editor). One persistent critic was the editor of a Tamil-English monthly Protestant monthly magazine, ‘The Good Samaritan,’ who published virulent attacks on the revision and the revisers. There was a leaflet in the Tamil files, written and printed in English, by a John J. Raj, ‘Touring Evangelist, Trichy,’ which was an appeal asking “our

Lord's children to protest and ...not buy the new Tamil Translation of the **modernism** Bible." It alleged, "The new translations are lacking in originality, dignity and sacredness and has several corrections and has been made a book just like any other novel books in local book shops"(Raj: no date).

It is only in a letter dated April 1, 1931 that Organe acknowledged that the "reception given to the revised version varies a good deal in different districts and depends to some extent upon the lead that is given by people of influence." Since Tirunelveli continued to be a major pocket of resistance, Organe organised a conference in April 1932 between the chief revisers, Larsen and Doraisamy and some of the leading people in Tirunelveli. Likewise, a meeting regarding the revision of the Tamil Bible was held in Colombo in October 1936, "and the Society's Secretary at Colombo, report[ed] on the helpfulness of the meeting in dispelling misunderstanding about the revision" (Editorial extracts of Madras Committee meeting, December 11, 1936). However, articles in opposition were published in Christian journals outside India. *The Fundamentalist* and the *Sunday School Times* spread the controversy to wider circles outside Tamilnadu, to London and Toronto. As a result, there were some threats of withdrawal of support for BFBS work, both financial and otherwise: accusations of giving way to 'modernist' tendencies, "nothing else than atheists disguised," and leading to "unbelief among the native peoples" were levelled against it.

Targeted for release in 1940, the revision and final publication of this version took much longer. In June 1939, a further revision began with C.H. Monahan, a Methodist missionary from Northern Ireland, appointed chairman to oversee the revision. (Letter from Hooper to E.W. Smith, BFBS London, July 10 1939). The aim of this revision was to make the Bible easy to read for every one, and to follow Larsen's translation but using the idioms of the *Union Version*. Further, two members of this Bible translation committee, Rev. A. Arulthangiah and Bishop S. Neill, spoke for their use of *taṇittamil* words instead of Sanskrit words, which proposal the other members rejected, although a change in this respect had already started in Tamilnadu at that time (Sandgren 1991). In 1942, the Revised New Testament was completed and on sale. Monahan's Committee completed the revision of the Bible in 1947 and the whole Revised Bible was published in 1949 (Letter from business manager, BSI to W. J. Bradnock, BFBS London, 4 October 1951). Monahan's version was revised and edited in 1954 under the leadership of Diehl and the New Testament was brought out in 1954.

In 1955, Carl Gustav Diehl, a Lutheran, who was part of the revision committee in the last few years asked the Bible Society that the revision be published as a Jubilee edition celebrating the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the

Tranquebar Mission. Though Diehl felt that the jubilee celebrations would transcend denominational differences, Mahanty, the General Secretary, BSI, India as well as London, felt that this would not be acceptable to many non-Lutheran churches and especially to those who strongly supported the *Union Version*. The Old Testament of 1949 and the New Testament of 1954 were brought out together as the *Revised Version* in 1956 (*Historical Catalogues*, 1977).

A review committee was set up to re-edit but not revise the *Revised Version*. In the Minutes of their meeting held in April 1961, they stated that their aim was to correct mistranslations, to make a list of textual omissions and include them either in the body or the margins, and to eliminate unnecessary inconsistency in the use of certain words. The panel for the Old Testament comprised the Reverends A. Minosar, M. L. Kretzman, A. D. Manuel and Harris while the New Testament panel comprised the Reverends D Rajarigam, Jebagnanam and M. H. Grumim. After some initial misgivings voiced by Moulton in London, the Committee was given support. Correspondence during this period contain remarks that indicated that the *Revised Version* was not as successful as it was thought, or presented as being, at the beginning: "I am informed that one of the principal reasons why the *RV* is largely unacceptable to the rank and file of Tamil Christians is the omission of familiar verses" (Wesley Culshaw's letter to Moulton Dec 8, 1961). When BSI asked for a reprint of the *Revised Version*, Moulton's reaction was, "I am surprised...I had understood that there were large stocks still in hand" (Memo to GSK, October 6, 1964). Again, in a letter from the Business Manager BSI, to Bradnock, "I was astonished when I read quite recently of the amount which has been spent already by the Society on the Revision of the Tamil Bible bearing in mind the fact that the actual sales have been comparatively small" (October 4, 1951). Moulton's letters in 1964 indicate that it was the *Union Version* which was in use: "...Dr Bower's [*Union Version*] is still the most widely used in the Tamil church even though it is not the most up-to-date translation" (November 30, 1964); and, "[w]e still print this Bible regularly as it is in great demand. The Tamil people like it in the same way as people here like the English Authorised Version despite all the revisions which have been done since" (December 7, 1964).

The *Revised Version* had a troubled history both during the process of translation and after its publication. It was the first translation project that was affected by changes brought to the Tamil language as a result of the 'Pure Tamil Movement.' However, by the time it was available to Protestant Tamils in 1956, the *Union Version* had been in use for nearly a hundred years and hence, the community did not appreciate changes in key terminology. The Protestant Tamil community were suspicious of this translation project for several reasons: the change in terminology, the use of revised Greek and

Hebrew original texts, the use of textual criticism instead of (supposedly) divinely inspired interpretation were serious impediments to the acceptance of this version. However, theological seminaries, such as the Madurai Tamil Theological Seminary, used it for classroom discussion because it was considered the closest literal translation of the original texts. The *Revised Version* was, on the whole, not a success amongst Protestant Tamils, who continued to use the *Union Version*. In 1970, meetings of the Tamil Bible Review Committee were held in Madurai and Bangalore where the language of the Tamil Bible was discussed and reviewed. These eventually led to the subsequent attempt at a 'Common Language' and 'Inter-confessional' translation of the Bible.

2. Bible Society of India Translation Committee: *Tiruviviliyam* or the Common Language Bible, 1995

Unlike the *Union* and *Revised Versions*, both of which began as revision projects but developed into new translations, the *Tiruviviliyam* was begun as a translation project. After the unenthusiastic feedback on the *Revised Version* from the Protestant Tamil community, and in response to changing language and ecumenical movements, the Bible Society of India decided to start an entirely new project to translate the Bible into Tamil. The two primary principles that were the basis of this project were that it should be an 'inter-confessional' and a 'common language' translation. Although both principles seemed to repeat nineteenth and early twentieth-century concerns on language and doctrine, other elements entered the equation in the twentieth century.

"Inter-confessional" referred to an ecumenical coming together of all Christian denominations, both Protestant and Catholic, active in the Tamil areas. Michael Irudayam observed that in the 1960s, "the Bible Societies, all over the world—after initial fear and hesitation on both sides—moved closer to the Catholic Church under the leadership of the United Bible Societies, with regard to translation and production of the Bible in their respective languages" (Irudayam and Levi 2002: 56). One of the results was that the Vatican Secretariat for promoting Christian Unity and the United Bible Societies together published the document 'The Guiding Principles for Inter-confessional Cooperation in Translating the Bible' in 1968, which was meant to state fundamental points of agreement between Protestant and Catholic approaches to Bible translation. Thus, while previous Protestant translation projects concentrated on a union of all Protestant denominations through the use of one Protestant Tamil version of the Bible, the 'inter-confessional' principle was the first attempt to achieve a consensus between Protestant and Catholic systems of faith.

A “common language” translation referred to the principle of using a register of language “common” to all readers of the Bible. From the eighteenth and nineteenth-century histories outlined above, it was clear that this had been a concern for all previous Protestant efforts at Tamil Bible translation. It was also seen that no consensus had been reached on what type of Tamil was “common” to all classes, castes or regions. This translation project decided to adopt terminology derived from the ideology of the ‘Pure Tamil Movement’ and use a level of Tamil that would be familiar to all who had undergone secondary education in Tamilnadu. Unfortunately, there was no critical assessment of the success of *taṇittamīl* terminology in the public and political spheres of Tamil society, when the translation committee took this decision. This problem will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

The main printed sources for this project are publications by BSI of seminar papers held on the project—*Seminar on the Inter-confessional Tamil Bible Translation: A Report*, (Kodaikanal, April 29-30, 1986) and *A Souvenir: the Inter-confessional Tamil Bible* (1995). Apart from these, there are BSI Tamil files of correspondence from 1991—2001. Further, I interviewed the translators of this project: Fr. Hieronymus and Rev. J. Jeyakumar who headed the New Testament panel and, Father Michael Irudayam and Rev. D. Jones Muthunayagam, who headed the panel for the Old Testament. I also interviewed other translators involved such as Fathers Mariadasan, Peter Abir, L. Legrand and Reverends R. Levi, Gnanavaram, A. R. McGlashan, Jonadab and P. Nag and officials at the Bible Society of India, Bangalore.

The Bible Society of India and the Tamilnadu Bishop’s Council called for a consultation on November 23, 1972 in Madras to propose an ‘Inter-confessional’ Tamil Bible. There was a follow-up consultation in June 1973 at which this proposal was confirmed and panels were appointed for different parts of the Old Testament. Work commenced in June 1974. However, the project was delayed for various reasons and there was no immediate outcome for a few years.

In the meantime, D. Rajarigam, who had simultaneously been working as Convenor on a new version of the New Testament with three other scholars, was ready with his translation in 1975. Known either as the ‘Rajarigam Version’ or the ‘Common Language Translation,’ work on the project had begun in 1965. The other three members were A. E. Inbanathan, M. Grumm, and W. B. Harris, who was later replaced by A. R. McGlashan. One of the limitations of this Committee, as McGlashan admitted (Interview, February 9, 2002) was that two of them, Rajarigam and Inbanathan, were very familiar with Tamil while the other two mainly with Greek. They did not use either the *Union Version* or the *Revised Version* as points of reference but occasionally went

back to the English Revised Version to see what they had made of the Greek original. They proceeded by Rajarigam producing a draft that was circulated and discussed by the committee. When they finished the four gospels, these were circulated for response from persons outside the committee before they continued with the rest of the Testament. While the final decision on Tamil usage rested with the Tamils, the two Europeans raised questions that critically opposed certain terms. McGlashan feels that the committee became more radical as the work progressed and was to an extent able to free itself from the 'Christian Tamil' that was to be found in the previous Tamil translations. Reactions to this translation, however, were extremely negative. Though used in Tamil language seminaries for classroom study, (the Tamil Theological Seminary, Madurai, for instance) it was widely rejected by the Protestant community for its move away from the familiar Tamil terminology of the *Union Version*. Its publication was discontinued as a result.

The Catholics too produced a revision of the Catholic version of the Bible in the 1970s. Archbishop Arulappa with a team, revised the existing Catholic version and the New Testament was published in 1970, and the Old Testament in 1972. Until the publication of the *Tiruvivilium* this "continued to be the unquestioned text for biblical and liturgical usage among the Catholics" (Irudayam and Levi 2002: 58).

In 1978, Father Michael Irudayam and Reverend D. Jones Muthunayagam were appointed coordinators of the Bible Society project. In 1980, the project was extended to the whole Bible and renamed the 'Inter-confessional Tamil Bible Project.' In 1986, a separate panel for the apocrypha books was appointed and in 1989, one for the New Testament was constituted with Father C. Hieronymus and Reverend J. Jeyakumar as coordinators. In total, there were four panels working on different parts of the Bible with more than twenty translators each. All thirty-nine books of the Old Testament were published as a trial edition in 1992.

A seminar on the Inter-confessional Tamil Bible Translation was held in Kodaikanal in 1986, at which several members of the translation committee presented papers on the various problems of translation. Some of the areas covered were: the specific problems of translating the Bible; the need to keep one's audience's requirements in mind; the different styles that needed to be adopted; the translations of certain controversial terms; problems specific to inter-confessional Bible translation projects; the need for a common language Bible and the problems of producing one; the necessity of justifying to the public as to why a new translation was being introduced. Some other issues that confronted the translators were: to what extent were Sanskrit terms to be discarded? Or, were all of them to be done away with? Second, whether

the level of Tamil language used should be literary to give weight to religious language or popular, so that it would be more accessible to all Tamil Christians? According to Jones Muthunayagam, these questions were connected with the problem of how to relate dynamic equivalence with the principle of "common language" (Interviewed, June 15, 2000). None of the above issues debated by this translation committee were entirely new to the twentieth century but were discussed in one form or another by previous translators. However, since the social and political circumstances changed from one historical period to another, the same questions when asked in different contexts understandably yielded different answers. This indicates that there is no final resolution to the problems of translation, but that the combination of factors that make up each period will continue to address the same issues in different reconfigurations.

A trial edition of the four gospels was released in 1992 and sent "to more than one hundred people for comments" (Letter from Jeyakumar to G. Wilson Nov 30, 1992). The Report of the Tamil New Testament Common Language Committee, December 1992 stated that, "We circulated a tentative edition of the Gospels to theological teachers, clergies, pastors, Tamil scholars and lay people belonging to Roman Catholic Church and Reformed Churches, two hundred copies and one hundred copies respectively." Fifty percent of the Catholics and twenty-five percent of other Christians responded. While reviewing the responses, only comments related to the style of language were accepted and proposals to change some technical terms, idioms and adopting inclusive language were not incorporated as decisions on them had already been taken in the 'High Power Committee' meetings.⁹

The procedure followed, according to 'A Brief Resume of the Inter-confessional Tamil Bible Project,' was that one member, either Catholic or Protestant, prepared a draft directly from Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek, by preserving the proper names and numbers as in the original. Then, a panel of three or more, at least one being from the other side, processed this draft. The press copy was prepared after a lay Tamil scholar checked the draft. This draft went for a trial edition with a new title and in new Tamil script. Work on the project continued although response to these draft versions was not positive; according to Father L. Legrand, there was "an organised campaign by Christian sects" against this translation (Interview, June 11, 2000).

In a letter to John Philipose, Jones Muthunayagam, one of the coordinators, emphasized the need for the preparation of the intended audience of the new translation: "I ... earnestly believe that before we publish the whole Bible the Christians of Tamilnadu need to be mentally prepared to receive the same. It is high time the BSI take some effort to enlighten them about the new translation....at least the pastors and

interested persons among the laity should have access to the trial editions" (Tamil File 8 1991-1993). This proposal articulates more emphatically the attitude shared by earlier translators of the Tamil Bible, that they knew the needs of the Protestant Tamil community best. It is clear that at different points, different translation committees have attempted to impose their own ideological agenda on the entire community. However, dissenting groups oppose such attempts; thus, in spite of the circulation of the trial editions and 'advertising' of the new project, the Report on the Inter-confessional Tamil Bible Project stated, "[t]here is stiff opposition from Evangelical groups with regard to the Inter-confessional cooperation as per oral information received through Dr Thejus and Rev Jeyakumar" (Irudayam 1994).

The *Tiruviviliyam* was finally published, after much opposition and controversy, in 1995. Tamil Protestants and Catholics rejected both the Tamil used in this translation and objected to the involvement of the other denomination in the project. Among other objections, the Catholics found it difficult to accept the change of Catholic proper names in the Bible (the Catholic tradition has been to translate the meaning of biblical proper names into Tamil) to Protestant transliteration; and the Protestants objected to the printing of the Apocrypha as part of the canonised books of the Bible. The project was almost completely stalled when after strong opposition the Bible Society of India refused to take the risk of publishing it. The Union Bible Societies had to step in and publish the translation with the support of the Catholic organization, the Tamil Nadu Biblical Catechetical Liturgical Council (TNBCLC). After the first edition, the Catholic press continued to print the *Tiruviviliyam* with the Apocryphal books attached while the Bible Society of India prints limited editions without the Apocrypha.

The Bible Society of India, however, continued to publish the *Union Version* in equal, if not more, numbers on popular demand. While there was much opposition during the period of translation, the *Tiruviviliyam* has sunk into near oblivion seven years after its publication. Some dioceses of the Church of South India have sporadically attempted to promote it by gifting it at ordinations and first communions. However, it is not actively used by ninety percent of the Protestant Tamil community. Most Protestant bookshops in Tamilnadu either do not stock copies or have two or three as against thirty copies of the *Union Version*. When asked for a copy of the Tamil Bible, most outlets in Tamilnadu, including the Madras Auxiliary Bible Society, first offer only the *Union Version* and disclose the existence of the *Tiruviviliyam* only when pressed for alternative translations. In spite of the Bible Society's attempts to organise seminars for the clergy and lay to introduce and offer a rationale for the translation, many (mostly the laity) continue to be unaware of the existence of the new version. Of the clergy, those who profess to approve of it admit that they do not usually use it for

personal devotion but only as a point of reference when some difficult or obsolete terms in the *Union Version* need clarification. Supporters of the new version however are hopeful that twenty years hence, it may gradually succeed in replacing the *Union Version*.

On the other hand, the *Tiruviviliyam* has had a much better reception amongst Catholic Tamils. Both Catholic and Protestant clergy attribute this to the fact that the Catholics until recently did not have a textual tradition like the Protestants. Catholic Tamils found it easier to assimilate the *Tiruviviliyam* than Protestant Tamils because they had not memorized previous Catholic translations. Thus, the *Tiruviviliyam* has been accepted as an adequate translation because it is the first Tamil version of the Bible that Catholic Tamils have wide access to.

In December 1997, the 'High Power Committee' met once again to review the translation and the possibility of further revising and correcting the *Tiruviviliyam*. However, nothing seems to have come of it and the Bible Society, meanwhile, has started another revision of the *Union Version* in order to publish an edition without its present grammatical errors.

In comparison with the two previous centuries, twentieth-century Tamil Bible translation projects saw two important changes: the inclusion of Protestant Tamils in the translation process and a greater impact of Protestant Tamil response on the reception of twentieth-century versions. Greater Tamil participation went parallel with the general withdrawal of missionary societies from Independent India, which meant that Tamils, both Catholic and Protestant, have assumed responsibility for leading the Church in the Tamil areas.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the nearly 300-year history of literary translations and writings in Tamil by Catholic and Protestant missionaries. The first section dealt with the arrival of missionaries in Tamil-speaking areas and the introduction of new literary practices into Tamil culture. A synoptic history of missionary contact with the Tamil language from the seventeenth century onwards was given to indicate the impact on the development of the language. In their attempt to learn Tamil for proselytising, both Catholic and Protestant missionaries initiated a series of changes: these included the compiling of dictionaries and grammars, reforming the Tamil script, the introduction of discursive literary prose besides composing and translating into Tamil. Another important factor to impact Tamil literary practice was the introduction of print by the missionaries. This engagement with the Tamil language on the part of missionaries had

an impact both on Bible translation and in the development of the Tamil language in general, as will become apparent in discussions of Protestant terms in Chapter 3. This section concluded that although Catholic missionaries did not translate the Bible, their work in Tamil had a great impact on the language and style of Protestant translations of the Bible.

The second section concentrated on six Tamil translations of the Bible. Important translations in three historical periods were identified and discussed separately to indicate the shifts in material circumstances and translation practice that impacted each translation. The first period saw German Lutheran missionaries in the eighteenth century, translating on their own with help from Tamils and fellow-missionaries. Ziegenbalg relied extensively on Catholic terminology; however, with Fabricius, there was a move to modify such terms to give them a Protestant slant. It is impossible to ascertain the nature and extent of the assistance rendered by Tamils to the process of translation. The two translations of the nineteenth century, by Rhenius and the BFBS Revision Committee, were no longer individual efforts but a result of committees working together. Of the two, the *Union Version*, achieved the function of the standard Tamil version as intended. The two important changes of the twentieth-century translations were that Protestant Tamils were part of translation committees and that the translation committees had to take into consideration the response of the Protestant Tamil community. In all the three periods, it is impossible to ascertain the exact quantity and nature of readership. No definite statistics are available on how many copies were sold and how many Tamils read these translated Bibles. Further, it was impossible to ascertain in concrete terms the percentage of readers belonging to different religious affiliations and caste or class groupings or what impact these might have had on the process of translation. The attitude taken by the different translators indicate that the intended audience of the eighteenth-century versions was not Protestant Tamils; however, the audience of the nineteenth and twentieth-century translations were increasingly Protestant Tamils. Discussions on the issues of translation, therefore, mainly addressed the needs of the community. Thus, from the nineteenth century, the translated Bible became more a commodity of and for the Protestant Tamil community.

Notes

¹ Rajamanickam derives his information from J.C. Houpert: *A South India Mission*, Trichinopoly, 1937.

² Some Protestant histories, on the other hand, claim that the first Tamil book was *Symbolium Apostolorum* or the *Apostle's Creed*, printed in Halle in 1710 (1712, according to Lehmann). This was followed, according to these accounts, by *Theological Thetica*, *Luther's Smaller Catechism*, the *Tamil Hymnbook* etc.

³ The *Tirukkural* written between 400-500 A.D. by Tiruvaluvar, is the best known, and most quoted and translated of Tamil literary works. It consists of 1330 couplets on the themes of virtue, wealth and power, and desire and is thought, in general, to reflect the Jain doctrines and moral code. However, every religious group in the Tamil-speaking area has claimed it at one time or the other although it is accepted as a secular, ethical work.

⁴ This is evident in the defense of print expressed in several Protestant missionary documents.

⁵ It is unclear whether these were Tamil or European catechists but since catechists were generally Tamil appointed to work under European missionaries, it seems safe to assume that these catechists were Tamil.

⁶ There seems to have been doubt regarding Fabricius until the early nineteenth century amongst Europeans: for instance, a Rev. M. Thompson wrote, "[i]n answer to your question, did Fabricius translate and print the Old Testament, or any part of it? I am happy to tell you (considering his universally acknowledged talents, as a Tamil scholar) he translated the whole" (Letter, quoted in Martyn 1811).

⁷ Proceedings of a meeeting of the Editorial Sub-committee, held at the C.M.S. house, Vepery, August 18, 1917.

⁸ Extracts from the Minutes of the Meeting of the Madras Auxiliary Committee on Tamil Bible Revision, April 10, 1918.

⁹ The 'High Power Committee' comprised leaders sent by the different Protestant and Catholic denominations to represent each. They were not translators but had voting power that could sway important translation decisions.

Chapter Two: Nineteenth-century Debates on translating the Bible in India

The understanding that the spread of Christian ‘truth and Scriptures’ in India (as elsewhere outside Europe) depended on the excellence of the vernacular versions¹ encouraged theoretical debates on language, translation, and religious terminology to take place in nineteenth-century India. This chapter discusses the several views on translation, in India in the nineteenth century, expressed on various occasions, paralleling the history of the translation of different bodies of literatures either into or out of Indian languages. Besides the translators, a wide network of individuals and organisations were involved in the debate, commenting either on a particular translation, or on the general principles along which translations ought to be conducted. Amongst these debates, discussions between missionaries on how the Bible and companion pieces of Christian literature were to be translated dominated the field.

While only a few missionaries were involved in the actual process of translating the Bible into several Indian languages in the nineteenth century, others who were working in mission areas were drawn into the debate and contributed in building up a collective notion of how Bible translation should proceed in India. This, on occasion, included comments and observations from some members of the Indian clergy. The result was not a homogenous and finished set of rules or procedures to be followed by Bible translators. Rather, there were frequent contradictions, disagreements, contrary experiences, and criticisms. These points of concurrence and conflict point to the matrix of assumptions, biases—linguistic and otherwise—and controversies that influenced Bible translation in the nineteenth century and after.

This chapter examines these discussions on the problems of translating the Bible in India in order to provide a conceptual basis for the analysis of the Tamil Bible in translation and the key Protestant Tamil terms to be discussed in chapters 3 and 4. The chapter points out that the terms of the debate were influenced by the two primary aims of the Protestant missionaries—one, to assimilate the Bible through translation into the language cultures of India; and two, as a result of this, to create a Protestant identity for their converts. Discussion on the specifics of translation thus focused on what linguistic and literary strategies were to be followed in order to arrive at standard translations, which in turn were expected to establish a uniform Protestant readership.

I. Importance of the nineteenth-century debates on Bible translation

Although the history of Bible translation and discussions on the nature of biblical translation in India go back to the early eighteenth century, this chapter confines itself

mainly to the nineteenth century for several reasons. First, nineteenth-century debates on Bible translation are important because attempts to understand Bible translation from within the context of missions in colonial India became 'theory' for the century to follow. That is, principles for translating the Bible into Indian languages outlined in the twentieth century were drawn from established nineteenth-century precedents. Thus, notions of correct translation formulated in missionary circles in the nineteenth century continue to inform mainstream assumptions and attitudes within Bible translation circles in India at present. Several problems of translation, however, have not been satisfactorily answered, hence the continuation of the debate into the twenty-first century. Other issues that seemed temporarily resolved had to be re-opened in later periods because of changes in historical, sociological, and political circumstances in India that have affected the translation and distribution of Bibles in Indian languages. Thus, analysing the history of ideas behind Bible translation is crucial to an understanding of the way Bible translation is perceived and validated in the present. That history also provides the context within which Bible translation in India took on a formative role in the creation and defining of religious identities.

Second, the beginning of the nineteenth century showed a shift in the practice of Bible translation in India. Before the 1800s Bible translation was carried on within particular mission societies, and criticism from other societies was not viewed as constructive but as a threat to the doctrines of the society in question. However, there was a perceptible change from the early nineteenth century onwards after the entry of two societies of primary importance to the history of Bible translation in India. The first of those was the Baptist Society, which was established in Serampore, in Bengal in 1793. The second was the British and Foreign Bible Society, which opened its first Indian auxiliaries in Calcutta (1811) and Madras (1820). Both societies were actively involved in the translation of the Bible into as many Indian languages as was possible at the time: the former was the first society to start translating into the languages of northern and eastern India, and the latter the first to coordinate and organise Bible translation and revisions all over India. Through its auxiliaries, the BFBS attempted to institutionalise the task of Bible translation in the major Indian languages. Whereas earlier, Bible translators had worked in comparative isolation with occasional help or comments from colleagues, Bible translations in the nineteenth century were mostly group efforts at translation by committees appointed by the BFBS. By the mid-nineteenth century, the BFBS had established a network that linked translators and their readers, translations and responses to them, and production and finance more formally than in earlier centuries when these were left to individual interest and enterprise. The BFBS very quickly became a nodal point that coordinated with all other Protestant mission societies whereby they drew upon the financial and human

resources of these societies and offered in return the translated Bible to be distributed in their mission fields. Equally important, the BFBS also initiated debate on Bible translations that later developed into formal rules and guidelines for Bible translators, revisers and editors.

Third, nineteenth-century debates on Bible translation are important because it was then for the first time that the Bible was translated almost simultaneously into several Indian languages, thus making a comparative study possible. Until the end of the eighteenth century, Tamil was the only Indian language into which the Bible had been translated and so any discussion prior to the nineteenth century was confined to the Tamil language and problems specific to its translation.

Fourth, discussions on issues of Bible translation were more public in the nineteenth century: the space for debate was no longer private diaries or letters written to mission headquarters but religious and secular journals, which began to be published in India from the nineteenth century onwards. Translators of the eighteenth century left behind letters and personal journals, which provided some information on the rationale behind their choice in terminology, but the practical problems of printing the Tamil Bible occupied more space in their narratives. This is not to suggest that the eighteenth-century translators were not aware of the complexities involved in presenting Christian discourse in the Tamil language or that they lacked theoretical insight. Ziegenbalg, for example, was a self-conscious translator, leaving detailed information as to how he acquired the Tamil language, his reactions to existing Roman Catholic translations, and how he gained knowledge of the Hindu religious system. He exchanged letters with Brahmins in order to ascertain their religious concepts so that he, in turn, would know how to express Protestant concepts to them. However, equal or more space was given to the practical problems he faced in producing the first Tamil New Testament, and his theoretical perceptions have to be pieced together from the entire body of information he left behind. Although Hermann Francke, in Germany, printed such translation experiences of eighteenth-century German Lutheran missionaries in the *Halleschen Berichte* (from 1708 to 1775), these were circulated mainly in Europe as evidence of the advance of Christianity and mission in South India and to elicit further and regular financial support. Hence, they were not the means by which a wide debate on the issues of translation was carried out in India.

On the contrary, there was a wide and extensive exchange of ideas in India in the nineteenth century, through the use of print media, both religious and secular, such as journals, pamphlets, reviews of and introductions to translated works. Most of these were printed and circulated in India, thus initiating dialogue in missionary circles within

India. As in the previous century, copies of missionary journals and annual reports were also sent to mission headquarters for circulation in England as proof of monetary donations well spent. Besides this purpose, these reports kept dialogue open between interested members in England and those in India. Some of the journals that actively participated in and encouraged this debate were *The Harvest Field* (published by the Wesleyan Methodist Society), the *Indian Evangelical Review*, the *Calcutta Christian Observer*, *The Ceylon Friend*, *The Church Missionary Intelligencer*, and the *Madras Christian College Magazine*. The 1898 October and November issues of *The Harvest Field*, for instance, carried articles constituting a 'symposium' on Bible Revision, which demonstrate the wide interest that was taken in the issues of Bible translation:

It was suggested by the Committee of the South India Missionary Association that the question of Bible Revision in relation to the Dravidian languages, especially Tamil should be discussed in the pages of the HARVEST FIELD. In accordance with this suggestion we sent out to representative missionaries, working in the field covered by the Dravidian tongues, a set of questions to be answered. [...] The questions asked were the following: 1. To what extent can common principles of translation and common terminology be usefully aimed at in the various Dravidian versions? 2. What is the best method of revising—the one man method? The committee method? Or what combination? By whom should the reviser or revisers be appointed? 3. How far should the general Christian public be consulted in the revision? 4. Is the time come for revising the Tamil version? If so, how should it be done? ("Bible Revision, A Symposium" 1898: 361-62).

Besides discussion in Protestant missionary journals, some missionary translators wrote formal essays regarding the theoretical aspects of Bible translation. For instance, C.T.E. Rhenius's "Essay on the Principles of Translating the Holy Scriptures" was printed in 1827. Similarly, the Serampore Brethren printed the principles of translation they followed and related debates in the form of Memoirs concerning translation from 1808 onwards. Further, there were the circular letters sent out by the Auxiliaries of the BFBS, its Annual Reports and histories that functioned either to initiate discussion or to report the various opinions received from different parts of the country, thus providing a space in which the members of the editorial committees of the different languages could express their opinions or respond to those presented.

Lastly, these debates were the context within which certain translations in each Indian language first began to be standardised. Presented as the result of wide-scale representation and agreement of all denominations of the Protestant Church, these translations became standard versions adopted by almost the entire Protestant community. This occurred almost uniformly towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century in each Indian language translation. The processes of canonisation were so strong that by the end of the nineteenth century, a particular translation in virtually all of the major Indian languages had gained the status of an 'original' text for the Protestant

community belonging to that language area. In some instances, as in the case of the Tamil Bible, the power of the canonised version was so strong that subsequent translations did not find acceptance amongst Protestant Tamils.

II. Competing Scriptures: the Bible, the Vedas and the Koran

The Bible, from the early nineteenth century, was mostly introduced to its Indian audience within the rhetorical discourse of 'true' and 'false' scriptures. In the nineteenth century, missionary literature and religious tracts were published in each Indian language the Bible was translated into, proposing to give rational proof that the Bible was the true 'Veda'; that it must logically replace the Hindu Scriptures; and that in spite of its appearance of being multiple or split across languages, it was ultimately one. The Koran, with its close proximity to the Bible, was shown to be deceitful in its attempt to denigrate the Bible as false. Accompanying the translated Bible were tracts with titles such as *Tēyvam* (God, 1901), '*The Names of God*' (1897), '*Cāstiram*' (1897), '*The Koran*' (1897), '*The Guru*' (1896), '*Mantiram*' (1896) and so on, which sought to prove the superior and infallible nature of the Bible over all Hindu scriptures (the Vedas, the Gita, and the Tamil *Tēvāram*) and the Koran. These tracts, published as part of the 'Bazaar Book Series,' attempted to present the contrast between Christianity on the one hand, and Hinduism and Islam on the other, by a point-by-point examination and refutation of the tenets of the respective religions. Most tracts claimed to present 'facts' for the readers' attention and invited the readers to use their reason and judgement to discern for themselves right from wrong and to recognize that there was only one true scripture in the world. The scientific rationality of the Europeans was opposed to the supposedly mythical claims of the Vedas: "White people have been to all parts of the globe and can prove that there is no such mountain or tree ..." (*Cāstiram* 1897: 15 [my translation]). In some cases, the tracts attempted to prove their point by quoting from Hindu Scriptures to expose the internal contradictions which belied the authenticity of the *Shastras*: for instance, the tract '*Cāstiram*' quoted the several accounts of how the Four Vedas came into existence only to expose the contradictions between the stories, thus revealing how difficult it was to accept any one as an adequate explanation (*Cāstiram* 1897: 6-11). Preaching in the bazaars, which often accompanied tract distribution, also addressed the issue of false scriptures. William Carey (1761-1834), a Baptist missionary in Serampore responsible for the translation of the Bible into Bengali and several other Indian languages, gave an account of an exchange with an Indian interlocutor on the subject in one of his letters:

After preaching and prayer, one man said God had given one Shastri to them, and another to us—I observed that their Shastris were so very different from each other that if one God had given them both he must be a double-tongued

being, which was a very improper idea of God (Carey, Letter to Sutcliff, November 27, 1800).

In other instances, the tracts quoted from other literary traditions of that language to criticize the *Shastras*, for example, the Tamil tract entitled *God* quoted Tiruvalluvar² on adultery—one who desires his neighbour's wife is a greater fool than all other sinners—as an indictment coming from indigenous ethical literature on Brahma's incestuous desire for his daughter, Saraswati.³

Further, in the early-nineteenth century, Francis Whyte Ellis brought to light the remarkable instance of an attempt to malign the Vedas through the use of translation in an article published in the *Asiatick Researches* in 1822. Ellis discovered and wrote about a "modern imitation" of the Vedas, which was printed in Paris in 1772 under the title *L'Ezour Vedam*. Attributed to the Jesuit Missionaries in Madurai, and specifically to Robert De Nobili, this text pretended to be one of the four Vedas by giving the Sanskrit and the French on facing pages "to give ... the appearance of originals with translations annexed" (Ellis 1822: 4).⁴ On examining the original manuscript, Ellis discovered that the text was designed to "refute the doctrines of the *Puranas* and to lead indirectly to the introduction of Christianity" (Ellis 1822: 3-4). Ellis quoted some lines from the text, giving his own English translation, to illustrate his point:

Brahma is not the eternal God and certainly not an incarnation of him.
Nor is he the creator of the world, he is merely a human being.
And as thou art, so is he, there is no difference whatsoever.
Creation, destruction and preservation, these caused HE, the self-ruling Lord.
To him there is no incarnation, nor the contact of quality and the rest.
Nor are marriage, women or a peculiar heaven in any way known to him.
Therefore, quitting delusion, do reverence to the Supreme (Ellis 1822: 34-5).

The "pseudo-Vedas," since the text was only feigning translation, as Ellis called the manuscripts (he discovered that there existed three unpublished manuscripts corresponding to the rest of the Vedas), were different from their originals in substance, arrangement and style. His inference was that the 'forgeries' were composed in an attempt to insinuate against the tenets of the Vedas:

The whole scope of these writings may be inferred from this extract: the intention is evidently to destroy the existing belief, without regarding consequences or caring whether a blank be substituted for it or not. To the doctrine here taught, as preparatory to a system of deism, nothing can be objected; but, after the teacher has succeeded in convincing his pupil that the deity never was incarnated, how is he to instruct him in the mysteries of the Christian faith? (Ellis 1822: footnote 35)

Another twist to the translation of religious texts in the nineteenth century is that the Bible was translated to reveal the 'truth,' while the Hindu scriptures were translated to expose the lies and distortions of truth, the perversion of the idea of God and to

enlighten "the poor people who are held by their chains of implicit faith in the grossest of lies" (Carey, Letter to Sutcliff, March 17, 1802). William Carey's attitude to translating the Hindu scriptures was shared by many other Protestant missionaries. Ziegenbalg was one of the earliest Protestant missionaries to use translation to point out flaws in Islam: he attacked the absurdities of Mahomet "that affront Common sense and trample Reason [...] All this I shew'd them out of their own Writings translated into the *Malabarian [Tamil] Tongue*" (Ziegenbalg 1719: 229-30). Thus, translation functioned both to propagate the Bible as well as to attack the sacred literatures of other religions.

The nineteenth-century tracts consistently referred to the Vedas as 'your scriptures,' while the Bible was 'the true scriptures' or the *Christ-Vētam*. A series of contrasts was presented between the claims made by the true scriptures and the false: the false contained nothing but superstitions, fables and impure stories that the missionaries claimed were too embarrassing to quote, while the true scriptures told its readers of historical facts and truths about God and His relationship with the human world. While the Hindu and Muslim scriptures were man-made, the Christian ones were God-given; hence, the Vedas were useless—they were available only to a select portion of society, were written in difficult verse so that the common people could neither read nor comprehend it, and lead readers to unending doubt. The Bible, in contrast, was in language easily understood, could be read by anybody, translated into any language in the world and had travelled to all the nations (God 1901: 22). The Hindu scriptures were compared to a forest in which one could get lost, to poison, to a disease and a false light: the Christian scriptures, however, showed the way to human salvation, were a life-giving potion, a medicine, and compared to the light of a home.

These strategies used by Protestant missionaries to validate the Bible over and above all other scriptures shaped Protestant Indian attitudes to sacred texts. Since the majority of Protestant converts would have had no access to Hindu scriptures, there were no means by which they could either confirm or reject the claims of the missionaries independently. Inaccessibility and ignorance of other scriptures contributed to the negative attitude towards alternative scripture traditions that developed amongst Protestant converts. Thus, having access only to the Bible ensured that popular Protestant piety in India predominantly viewed the Bible as the only scripture worth reading.

Tract Societies were formed in order to facilitate the printing and distribution of these tracts, often working closely with the BFBS and its translators. C.T.E. Rhenius was one of the founding members of The Madras Religious Tract and Book Society (hereafter MRTBS), at whose suggestion the first tract in Tamil was prepared (MRTBS

1869). In its Annual Reports, the Society gave responses from those who had had opportunity to observe how effective the tracts were. Most of them asked for tracts written in a better style to suit the ‘Hindu mind,’ that is, in a more popular style, in poetic and simple Tamil, which avoided Sanskrit terms. These suggestions echoed the concerns of the Bible translation debates. The Hindu recipients of these tracts were reported as having mixed responses. Some were offended, while others appreciated these methods. Rev. R. Handman, missionary in Trichinopoly (1870), wrote:

The tone of some Tracts (even of those otherwise very ably written) is rather offensive to Hindus, sometimes more ridiculing the fallacies of Hinduism than showing pity with that misled nation. The consequence is that many educated Hindus show themselves rather disgusted with those Tracts, and become exasperated when we read them before them (MRTBS 1871: 33).

However, a Colporteur's⁵ report from Nagercoil described an admiring Hindu: .. .

At the last Mandacaud festival, I had a large sale of religious tracts. The words of a rich and influential Sudra...were very striking. To the people around he expiated on the good that has resulted to the country from Christianity, and remarked that while the Gurus of other religions zealously guarded their sacred books from public view, and hid them like counterfeit coins, Protestants circulated their Bible and other religious books, fearless of opposition or refutation, which itself was a strong testimony to their truth. (MRTBS 1878: 8).

But, whether offensive or otherwise, the tracts seemed to have been effective in creating an interest and preparing the way for the Bible. Carey had written at the beginning of the century that the tracts “did tend to keep up, and even to produce a spirit of enquiry among the Hindoos” (Carey, Letter to Sutcliff, March 8, 1809). Likewise, Rev. Ruttonji Nowroji of Aurangabad wrote (1881): “I have invariably found that the little tracts prepare the way for the Scriptures. It is the tracts which create a desire for the reading of the Word of God. The Mahomedans here would not at first come near us; but since the tracts have been circulated they attend our preaching...” (MRTBS 1882: 13).

The MRTBS also started other print literature, such as popular Christian magazines: “In February 1832, it was agreed that a Quarterly Tamil Magazine should be established, and that it should advocate no particular human system of religion, but aim at the defence and propagation of truth...” (MRTBS 1869: 6). Another suggestion was that the missionaries should adopt an effective method from the Hindus, that is, publish tracts with popular lyrics adapted to convey the Gospel message that could be sung at various gatherings. “The attention of missionaries is invited to this mode of disseminating truth. In all parts of the country, groups may be seen listening to recitals from the Ramayana. The people, accustomed to this, will readily give a hearing to a far nobler theme” (MRTBS 1880: 1). Further, several wrote suggesting that more ‘native

Christians' should be writing the tracts than Europeans, as the former would be better able to gauge what would interest the Indians. Rev. C.S. Kohloff of Erungalore claimed, "I have always found as a rule that the tracts composed by educated Natives have been the most telling among the Hindus. Though their composition may be in several points inferior to those of European Missionaries, they are more suited to the ideas and feeling of the Natives than the superior compositions of foreigners" (*MRTBS* 1869: 32). Many others suggested that the poems of Vedanayaka Sastri, a Tamil Christian poet, be printed as tracts: "The 'Blind Way' is the only Tract I have known to be popular, solely on account of the quotations from Native Poets which it contains" (*MRTBS* 1871: 35).

Voces raised in Europe against the indiscriminate translation of the Bible into various Indian languages were answered with the rejoinder that the Bible had the power to be effective by itself. Various anecdotes were given as proof that when the Bible or portions of it were distributed amongst the Hindus along with tracts, it led to a change in religious persuasion. As Buchanan remarked, the Scriptures cannot remain a "dead letter," since when they were translated they invited inquiry and caused discussion (Buchanan 1811: 43). Besides, according to the Baptist translators at Serampore, with the Scriptures in their hands, even Protestant Indians would be able to appeal to their neighbours in the most powerful manner, demonstrating to them that their faith was not without foundation. This consideration was strengthened by the fact that a deep reverence for writings deemed sacred was a prevalent feeling throughout India. Any writings recommended to Indians as divine attached to themselves a strong degree of veneration (*Seventh Memoir* 1821: 17).

III. The Terms of the Debate

Several of the theoretical questions on Bible translation debated in nineteenth-century India had already been under discussion for many centuries in Europe but acquired further dimensions in the Indian context. Some of the binary opposites between which the debates swung were: 'transference versus translation,' 'coining words versus using existing terminology,' 'literal or faithful versus idiomatic or free,' 'the original and its translation,' 'foreign versus native translator' 'standard and multiple versions.' Further, 'misrepresentation,' 'mistranslation,' and 'uniformity' were terms employed in the translation debate to fix the parameters of assimilation through biblical translation. However, these terms from the translation debate were discussed in the context of introducing Christianity and the Bible in opposition to the religious systems that Indians already followed. This important function envisaged for the Bible put added pressure on the translators to arrive at 'correct' methods of translation that would keep the Bible

distinct from the existing scriptures available to Indians and yet not alien, that is, a text that was recognizable as scripture.

The question of how religious or technical terms ought to be translated from one language into another was a source of much controversy. In order to translate ideas, terms had to be translated and most religious terms available to translators in India were ones that conveyed the ideas of other religions. The general opinion as an article entitled 'The Revision of the Vernacular Versions,' suggested was that "Christian thoughts cannot buy ready-made clothes at Hindu stores" ("Revision" 1899: 138). It was also recognized that some of the best religious terms were those employed by the Hindus with peculiar Hindu meaning. But for this very reason such terms were considered 'unsafe' for use in the Bible (Wenger 1877: 8). Those who recommended the use of Hindu terms warned that it was also imperative to know the exact meaning and value of terms and the current coin of Hindu thought (An Open Letter, 1889: 6). They suggested that Hindu terminology could be adopted if it could be "re-baptised into our holy faith" because "it is not words that give value to ideas but ideas that give value to words" (Jones 1895: 50). The choice of one over the other depended on the translator's opinion of whether the Bible was to be made familiar to its readers or not. Translation into an existing term meant that the Bible would be more familiar to the target reader with the risk of being confused with the previous meaning of the reused term. However, others felt that Bible translators who wanted to express truth and be faithful to the original could not avoid strangeness. This was recommended even if it meant that a Hindu would be repelled by the strangeness of the translation. The editor of *The Harvest Field* gave two reasons in support: one, the Bible according to him is not just a literary production but contains a religion; and two, the reader who was repelled by any uncouth phrases was unworthy to realise the new ideas conveyed by them. As proof, he gave the example of the *Gita* translated into English, where he points out that the translation could not avoid sounding foreign because of the presence of technical Sanskrit terms but this was better than Vedantic ideas disguised in English masks ("Revision" 1899: 138).

Further, there was discussion on whether the Indian languages had an adequate vocabulary and standard to make them capable of receiving the Bible. Hindi, according to a missionary writing to the *Church Missionary Intelligencer* (1897),

offers special difficulty as a medium for the expression of Biblical truth. Hindi is the speech of a people to whom pantheism in some form is as natural as Calvinism is supposed to be to a Scotsman. We have no word in Hindi for 'person,' none for 'matter,' as distinct from 'spirit.' The word for 'omnipresence' suggests rather universal pervasion than what we mean by presence. There is often difficulty in finding exact words even for moral ideas. ... Neither is there

any word which connotes the same thought as our word 'ought,' so that, naturally, Hindi has no word for 'conscience' ("Indian Notes" 1897: 910).

Greenfield, while defending the Serampore Maratta Version, pointed out the shortcomings of the Marathi to support Bible translation:

In translating...from the copious language of the Greeks, or the ruder language of the Hebrews, innumerable words and phrases must occur which have no corresponding term in Marat'ha, but without which the peculiar tenets and doctrines of the Christian religion cannot be explained (Greenfield 1830: 62).

Unfortunately, lack of a biblical lexicon was cited as proof of the lack of conceptual and moral values, which needed to be written into these languages and cultures (Sugirtharajah 2001: 65). Although some languages, such as Bengali, were declared sufficiently developed to be able to express biblical ideas, there was always the need to stretch, bend and 'perfect' these languages "as a medium for the expression of Christian truth."⁶

Six main points of the Protestant missionary discourse on translation are discussed below. Each debated point reveals that the primary object was to better assimilate the translated Bible into Indian culture and simultaneously, to mould a Protestant identity through the translated Bible. Although each discussant held a different opinion on how this objective was to be achieved, there was consensus on the point that standard versions, which used standard terminology, were required in each language translation. Protestant missionaries thought that this would both unite Protestant converts of all denominations and create a suitable environment for a uniform Protestant identity. These same points were discussed again in the twentieth century citing the nineteenth century as precedent. In most cases the debate remained unresolved because of social and political changes at different historical periods.

1. Coining Terms versus Use of Existing Terminology

One of the most important and contentious debates on translating the Bible in India was whether to appropriate existing religious terminology or coin new terms. This was a particular problem in the Indian context because most of the Indian languages already possessed an elaborate religious vocabulary. Using existing terminology meant that missionaries were not in full control of the signified meanings. However, invented terms could be rendered ineffective by not carrying sufficient meaning. Moreover, it was feared that they would be in competition with existing terminology to their detriment. For instance, Mr. Rice, one of those who entered the debate presented the choice available to the translator: one, use one of several terms that seem to approximate meaning on the surface; second, find an obsolete word with the same

general sense but short of fullness and strength; three, coin a word etymologically correct but void of force and meaning until charged with meaning by association and use; four, turn away from immediately available words to little known words or coin new ones which will not express the original meaning initially but will express that meaning by association and use ("Bible Revision, A Symposium" 1898: 445).

In order to narrow the possibilities, Rev. Slater suggested that the etymological definition, which was indispensable, was always to be kept in mind before the choice was made. However, he recognized that religious terms would always carry not only the etymological meanings but also the meanings that the religious life and knowledge of the people put into them (Slater 1875: 45). An example that amply illustrated this point was the controversy over the translation of the term 'sacrifice' into the Indian languages. The early translators of almost all the Indian languages chose the term *pali* to denote Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Slater criticised the Catholic missionaries who, according to him, "took the word *bali*,...and introduced it into the Bible as a fit vehicle for conveying the true idea of Scripture sacrifice instituted by and offered to the living God" without discriminating that it was a word "steeped in the vilest associations—a word solely and inseparably connected, as a slain offering, with the worship of demons or of the bloodthirsty Kali..." (Slater 1875: 39). He further observed that instead of the idea of Christ's sacrifice as "the highest and benignest revelation of Divine love" they had used a term, "which d[id] not express a vestige of the one only elevating idea of sacrifice, ... but simply enmity, terror, cruelty, pain, and death, in which the God of the Bible takes no pleasure, --being nothing but a bribe of blood offered to ward off a dreaded, evil influence!" (Slater 1875: 42).

He posed a question relevant to the debate: "It is of no avail to say that those who use the word in a Christian sense do not associate it thus. We have *put* the meaning of 'sacrifice' into it; and many besides ourselves, if asked what it means, give what we mean by it. ...The question is, what do *the people* universally understand when the word is used?" (Slater 1875: 42 [emphasis in original]) Thus, Slater pointed out the disjunction that often existed between the missionary use of a term and what connotations it held for their audience. He felt it best to avoid such terms with 'degrading' associations even though "Christianity has, no doubt, the power to purify and ennoble" them (Slater 1875: 45). However, in another issue of the same journal, a different missionary mentioned the controversy over the use of the word *pali* giving an extract from a German missionary's letter in South India which suggested that inappropriate terms could acquire 'appropriate' meanings: "None of the twenty catechists saw anything wrong in the use of the word; the reason being that they all grew up in the church, reading the word *bali* in the Bible from childhood, and perhaps

have even been taught so in the seminary" ("Notes and Intelligence" 1874: 514). These conflicting reports point clearly to the fact that once a term was used in a translation, the missionary translators had very little control over the way it was absorbed into the Protestant convert's vocabulary. This increased missionary anxieties over language use and translation strategies.

Further, the terms most discussed were those seen as controversial because of their affinity to Hindu or Muslim practices or belief systems thus strongly suggesting non-Protestant meanings. Even when terms were appropriated, either a prefix or suffix (usually from the Sanskrit) was added to create a superficial change in meaning. Some twentieth-century Indian theologians have chosen to see this as a revolutionary effect of Christianity on language where the pioneer missionaries took over Sanskrit terms, emptied them of the old context and endeavoured to fill them with distinctly Christian meaning (Rajarigam 1958: 13). However, since many such terms continued an uneasy relationship with their 'meanings' in circulation, it is difficult to speak of the "revolutionary effects" of Christianity. These words, continued to convey pre-Christian connotations to the non-Christians because of which Protestant meanings of terms began to exist in parallel with non-Protestant connotations. In an article entitled 'The Name of our Lord in Hindi and Urdu,' by someone referred to as T.S.W., D. Mohan was quoted observing, "Nearly all our theological terms are of heathen origin and are used in Hindu writing in senses far different from those in which we employ them" (T.S.W. 1875: 497). That such an overlap would create confusion to the detriment of the new entrants in the religious arena was obvious. This problem was circumvented to an extent by the kind of words that were chosen from the existing vocabulary: the translators took care to pick either those that did not refer directly to Hindu ritual practices or those that were not widely used. Over a period of time, Protestant meanings accrued to some terms and came to be regarded as purely 'Protestant terms' within the Protestant community.

On the whole, although using existing terminology produced complicated results, this was preferred to coining entirely new terms for Protestant use. Protestant missionaries realized that in practice existing terms conveyed far more to their audience than fresh terms.

2. Transference versus Translation of Terms

Related to the first point was the issue whether terms from the original Hebrew and Greek should be transferred or translated into the Indian languages. There was concern that while transferred terms may be completely meaningless to the Indian reader, there was danger of translated terms being confused with known religious

terms. Transliteration of proper names emphasized the foreign nature of Christianity in India (Tisdall 1906: 737). Protestant translators wrestled over the correct strategy for rendering biblical proper names. Catholic missionaries had translated the meaning of names as far as possible, which was usually rejected by the Protestants. But when it came to finding the right term for 'YHWH,' there was much controversy over whether the name should be retained in transliteration or its meaning translated. The problem was compounded by the fact that no one knew what the correct form of the term was for transliteration; however, translating the meaning 'I AM,' it was felt, did not give the term the distinction of a proper name.

The difficulty about naming the 'Bible' was another such challenging instance: transferring the original Greek conveyed no meaning, and a literal translation that suggested a holy book lacked force. However, a culture-specific translation of the title would suggest that the Bible was merely one of the many scriptures available to Indians. Thus, in most Indian languages, the Bible was translated with either the term '*shāstra*' or '*vēta*' as part of the title, with added terms that suggested not just holiness but truth. In Hindi, it was called the *dharma-shāstra*, in Kannada, *satya-vētavu*, in Tamil, *paricutta-vētākamam*. The latest Tamil version has attempted to break that tradition and has decided on a transliteration of the Greek *biblos*, which in Tamil is '*viviliyam*,' but have added '*tiru*' to denote that it is a 'holy' book. The average Tamil Christian, however, is hardly able to make the immediate connection with the Greek. Most commentators suggested that translation, if a suitable word could be found, would be the best as also the more 'honest' option. Substitution with target language words only led to false meaning and ideas.

These questions of coining, transferring or translating terms have resurfaced whenever discussions of existing translations have taken place for revision. Since language is one of the markers of identity, it was thought desirable that new converts to Christianity should express themselves in a language distinct from their previous social and religious affiliations. This was seen as important because a rejection of previously used religious vocabulary, in missionary opinion, implied a rejection of older beliefs, scriptures and ritual practices. Such needs were especially felt in regions where a new faith tried to take root amidst complex and established religious traditions. Both Catholic and Protestant missionary translators of the seventeenth and eighteenth century had attempted to create a vocabulary that would express central Christian principles without recalling previous connotations from other religious discourses. This distaste for terms connected to specific ritual practices of the worship of images continued into the nineteenth century. For instance, Slater felt that it was better to have "a word imperfectly understood, and train the mind of the people to put your meaning—

the meaning of the Bible—as much as possible into it, than continue to use one on which the most revolting meaning is indelibly stamped" (Slater 1875: 45). Nevertheless, however careful the translators were, they found it quite difficult to avoid these 'inappropriate' terms entirely: these gradually become a part of the vocabulary of the Indian Christian.

When such terms were discussed during revisions in the twentieth century, opinion continued to be divided. Some critics felt that it was not a wise thing to disturb too easily the terms and names, which had survived a century and a half's struggle for existence and had, by successive translations and revisions, endeared themselves to the Christian community (Jones 1895: 50). Thus, familiarity of a term was given much importance by revisers: the longer a term had been in circulation, the more meaning and authority it was deemed to have acquired. However, Rev. W. Goudie's opinion was that with regard to the Native Church it was wiser to correct wrong or inappropriate terms early than to allow faulty terms to grow 'venerable' and then attempt to change them ("Bible Revision, A Symposium" 1898: 450). Those in the twentieth century who continued to insist on changing such 'inappropriate' terms felt that this should be done so that a non-Christian being introduced to Christianity would not be confused or offended by the Bible. In many Indian-language revisions, although biblical scholars in the twentieth century were unhappy about the use of certain terms in the translated Bible, they were reluctant to change or were prevented from changing them to more appropriate ones because of the new and strong meanings that these terms had acquired within the Protestant community. The result of the lack of resolution on this point has meant that often when Indian languages have been 'modernised' in the twentieth century (which included the introduction of new words, such as scientific and technical terms for instance), Protestant usage has remained old-fashioned and conservative.

3. Idiomatic versus literal translation

The merit of an idiomatic over a literal translation was another important debated point. The term 'faithful' was also often contrasted with 'idiomatic.' Often, idiomatic was treated as synonymous with 'free.' Although most missionaries felt that the Bible in each language ought to be close to the idiom of the language in question, their recommendations usually came attached with warnings against too idiomatic a rendering. It was feared that an idiomatic translation that paid more attention to the target language and text might be more willing to adapt and experiment with the source text. Such translations were viewed with suspicion as they were seen as taking liberties with God's word. Faithfulness was regarded as the first and highest accomplishment

indispensable to any translation but especially to the translation of the word of God (A.M. 1866). Hinton, in a letter to the President of BFBS, suggested that not being faithful was an attempt to please humans rather than God (Hinton 1838: 66). An article titled, 'Bible Translation,' written for *The Friend* considered faithfulness an absolute essential for Bible translation:

In the rendering of any other work this would not be so important; since it is quite conceivable that the so-called translation might be of more value than the original. But all who believe that the Bible is the Word of God will acknowledge that in a translation of that Book of books a faithful rendering of the original is an absolute necessity; the absence of it being fatal to the character of a version ("Bible Translation" 1870: 113).

However, the article also recognized that the faithfulness of a version could only be decided comparatively. Faithfulness of both 'sentiment and form' were emphasized as necessary, that is, the style was to suit the reader as the original suited its readers: according to Wenger, "...the style should...be such that the readers may, if possible, forget that they are perusing a foreign book, and receive the impression that it is a work originally written in their own tongue" (Wenger 1876: 16). There was greater emphasis on producing a faithful translation because recent converts were thought lacking the discernment their European Christian counterparts had. New converts, "destitute of the means of forming a correct judgement of [their] own" (*Brief Narrative* 1870: 117), were in danger of being easily misled. A Memorial of the Baptist Union claimed that, "[a] regard to fidelity of translation must indeed be considered absolutely indispensable in every attempt to circulate the Scriptures among heathen nations...any endeavour to conceal the truth, much more to pervert it, is a crime which God has especially threatened to punish" (*Bible Translation Society* 1840: 26-7). Goudie even suggested that rendering the original with exactness was so important that whether a sentence would have meaning to the Hindu (because of lack of historical basis of doctrine) was a secondary question ("Bible Revision, A Symposium" 1898: 443).

Yet, the translation had to be idiomatic enough to communicate the 'real' meaning of God's word. A too literal translation could produce a text that might convey merely the surface meaning of the words and not all the levels of interpretation, allegory and ambiguity, which could be read into the biblical text as part of God's divine scheme of communicating with humans: "...what is called the most literal version will, in fact, convey frequently the least correct idea of the original" (*Bible Translation Society* 1840: 64). Fabricius's Old Testament in Tamil, for instance had to be revised because it was considered "more literal but more obscure" (*Contributions* 1854: 9). Other attempts, such as Rhenius's Tamil translation of the New Testament, were picked out as examples of an idiomatic translation and rejected as too free a rendering of the original.

However, Rhenius's argument in his essay on translation was that a version, which strictly adhered to the letter of the originals, could not be called a faithful translation because it gave "the *letter* but not the *sense*" (Rhenius 1899: 5). Neither was he in favour of paraphrasing the original. He thought that literal translations into "uncultivated" languages (according to him, those that had no grammars, dictionaries or writings by which their idiom was fixed and regulated) would not be at a disadvantage; "[b]ut in languages which are already cultivated, and the idioms of which are fixed by grammars and classical works, such as the Sanscrit, the Tamil, &c., the case is very different. A literal translation into these would convey ideas in forms very different from those in common use, and would accordingly be of little service to the people..." (Rhenius 1899: 5). Rhenius's theory on translation was based on a hierarchy of languages, which assumed that languages with a limited literary output, had no established idioms recognized by its speakers:

Recognizing the dangers and advantages of both sides of the argument, most Protestant missionaries refrained from recommending one solely over the other. For instance, when a draft version of a Tamil translation was circulated for comment, it was reported that "It was submitted to the criticism of friends and foes; and all, competent to judge, were by this circular, invited to afford the Central Committee their judgement as to the "*fidelity, perspicuity and idiomatic purity* of the new edition of the Scriptures" (*Brief Narrative* 1870: 48). In the history of the Tamil Bible, the translators of the nineteenth century attempted to walk the tightrope between the 'faithfulness' of the Fabricius translation and the 'idiomatic' translation of Rhenius. A letter from the Editorial Superintendent in 1869 stated: "...there are some passages where wealth of idiom must be sacrificed so as to ensure fidelity." The Tamil translating Committee stated in 1852 that "it will perhaps be considered as no inconsiderable attainment if the Committee should be enabled to give a substantially faithful translation of the Holy Scriptures, and more intelligible to the natives of the country, than the present, without pretending to produce a version, to which some exceptions will not be taken" (*Brief Narrative* 1870: 58).

The issue of interpreting ambiguous passages of the Bible complicated this debate. The common understanding was that 'interpretation' by the human translator interfered with God's word. Yet translation was not possible without interpretation, as William Hooper—one of the Hindi Bible translators—realised. When his translation committee tried not to interpret ambiguous passages in favour of a literal translation, they found that the result was not faithful: "We began, indeed, by introducing ambiguities corresponding to those in the original wherever we could. But if I remember aright, in every case we sooner or later found that our ambiguous rendering either gave no

meaning at all, or rather suggested the less probable meaning" (Hooper 1902: 27). Apparently this principle was abandoned in the Urdu translation project as well.

'Faithful' and 'idiomatic,' often seen as binary opposites in translation circles, were emphasized as equally indispensable in Bible translation on the grounds that the converts should not be misled. However, none of the translators were able to present the right ratio for the combination, or even how it was to be achieved. This was because the faithful versus idiomatic dichotomy was premised on the assumption that the source text and language as well as the target text and language were stable signifiers of meaning. It is only when meaning can be fixed to a text that the faithful transfer of that meaning can even be entertained. The Missionary translators were operating with theoretical assumptions about the way languages related to reality and meaning, which when put in practice eluded the kind of fixity they were looking for. In any case, experimentation in one direction or the other in religious translation was usually frowned upon and often labelled as 'mistranslation.' It is clear from the reports and discussions that the fear of mistranslation haunted the missionary translators of the Bible.

4. Literary versus Common Language Translation

The literary versus common language debate was not easily resolved either. This debate was especially relevant in the case of South Indian languages because of the wide difference between their literary and common styles. This prompted discussions on the aim of translating the Bible: was the translated Bible for the Church or for the 'unbeliever' yet to be converted; was it intended only for liturgical purposes, as part of church services or for popular use; whether the language of the Bible should satisfy the literate Brahmin, or be accessible to the semi-literate. Though most were aware that it was "not possible to combine both in one translation" ("Editorial Notes" 1898: 480), each emphasized the importance of one over the other according to the sections of society they gave importance to. Thus, those who supported the notion of the Bible being a book for the common people saw the use of common language as important: the affectation and pedantry of literary language was to be secondary as it would not be intelligible to the mass of the population and a Bible that was unintelligible to them was only half translated (*Bible Translation* 1870: 114). Drawing an important (but flawed) comparison with the situation of the illiterate Hindu, that is, that the average Hindu was ignorant of his or her scriptures because of its high poetic form, N. Gnanaprakasham suggested that the Bible should be different. The editor of *The Harvest Field* suggested that true literature must speak from the mouth of the people; otherwise it was only learned jargon. The justification for the use of common language

was that the “The Bible appeals to a far nobler instinct than the merely literary; it will only unfold its beauty and truth to desperate earnestness and heart-hunger” (“Revision of Vernacular Versions” 1899: 139). At the same time, it was considered futile to attempt a translation of the whole Bible in the language of the illiterate (“Bible Revision, A Symposium” 1898: 451). One possible solution was to translate different books of the Bible in different styles, so that the historical and narrative portions were in simple language but the doctrinal portions in high, classical styles (“Revision of Vernacular Versions” 1899: 141).

The important question that the missionaries debated was whether the translated Bible was to be used as a medium for conversion. In most cases, there was consensus that the translated Bible, by itself, could achieve greater numbers of converts than organised preaching and church activities. However, missionary societies were divided over whom they wished to convert first—the high or the low castes. In the history of Tamil Bible translations, choosing the former required a highly literary translation, and the latter, a translation in the more ordinary, non-poetic Tamil. Rejecting both registers, Rhenius recommended the use of “the middle language” in Tamil translations. By this he implied “a pure and grammatical style” using “proper terms in common use” (Rhenius 1899: 43-5). However, there was little consensus amongst the translators or Protestant Tamils as to what was “proper” and “common.” In Bengali, the Bible was seen as an instrument for bringing the sophisticated level of Bengali within reach of the common people. The situation regarding Urdu was different. The revisers of the Urdu New Testament did not hesitate in their decision to “conform to standards of literary purity” because of the difference they perceived between Urdu and most other Indian languages. The revisers gave an interesting explanation:

Here Urdu Revisers are in a happier position than some of their brethren who deal with other Indian tongues, the literature of which has been manipulated by a priesthood after archaic and unnatural models. Though Urdu has a definite religious colouring, yet it had its origin in the needs created by the amalgamation of races in an organised empire; and so it has been moulded not by the policy of a priesthood, but by the needs of a people (Weitbrecht 1900: 29).

Opinion amongst the Protestant Tamils, however, was not usually divided between the use of literary and common Tamil. In fact, most of the evidence points to the fact that they supported the use of literary Tamil for Bible translation. Difficulty arose when Protestant Tamils insisted paradoxically that the level of Tamil in a particular version they supported was literary but could be understood by all Tamil castes and regions. For instance, in the 1750s, when a large body of Tamils had been asked to judge whether De Melho’s version of the New Testament (1759) would be understood by the “common people” they pronounced it “intelligible to all” (*Letter* 1850: 11-12; Chitty

1859: 75). In the early nineteenth century, Vedanayaka Sastri (1825), argued exactly the same in favour of Fabricius's Version: that it was translated into a literary Tamil but could be understood by the lowest Tamil castes.⁷ Protestant Tamils in Ceylon during the same period were highly critical of Fabricius's Version but argued for De Melho's translation on the same grounds. In a letter to the Bishop of Colombo (1850), the Protestant Tamils of Colombo referred to De Melho's translation as superior to others because "the language in which it is written is simple, correct, and dignified, well suited to the gravity of the subjects of the Divine Word" (*Letter* 1850: 19). This trend continued in the second half of the nineteenth century. The essay, 'The Revision of the Vernacular Version' (1899) gave the opinion of two Tamils. S. Gnanamuttu thought that the style of the Bible was very different from Tamil literary works and since the Bible was for the scholar it should have the desired standard: "The Hindus very naturally speak contemptuously of the Tamil style of the Scriptures, as it is utterly unlike that of their religious or devotional works. It is very desirable to introduce a change in the style from simple and ordinary to literary and classical" ("Revision of Vernacular Versions," 1899: 140). Very few Protestant Tamils thought like N. Gnanaprakasham that the Bible was for the people and therefore should be simple and idiomatic, as a simpler style was better for the uneducated ("Revision of Vernacular Versions" 1899: 141).

It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that the translators of the *Tiruviviliyam* decided on the principle of translating into the "common language." The *Tiruviviliyam*, specifically addressed the problem of language register. However, in spite of its claim of using 'common' Tamil, the general opinion is that parts of the translation use very high, literary Tamil. Unfortunately, the translators of the *Tiruviviliyam* had assumed that *taṇittamil* was 'common' to all classes, regions and social levels of Tamils. But this was not the case and this point continues to be debated amongst Protestant Tamils today.

A motivating factor for the use of common or easier levels of Tamil could have been to distinguish the Bible from the other scriptures available in Tamil society. After all, only the priestly castes in India could claim the right to read and understand the Hindu scriptures and those reading the Koran had to acquire Arabic. In contrast, the Bible was supposed to be scripture made available to all castes and classes. However, in languages like Tamil, the value attached to the higher or literary Tamil was so great that it would have been difficult for the translated Bible to acquire status in Tamil culture by using low, popular forms of Tamil.

5. The Original and the Translated Texts

Attitudes to the 'original' texts of the Bible were ambiguous. Bible translators were particularly vulnerable in the nineteenth century because the 'Textus Receptus,' until then considered the 'original,' was proven to be a corrupt version of older manuscripts recently discovered. As Rev. Sharrock warned, "it is a very critical time in the history of the Bible, and that while this crisis lasts it is a most inopportune time for our revisions" (Sharrock 1899: 39). As a result of this uncertainty about the Hebrew and Greek originals, most discussion in India on the relationship between the original and its translation focused on the King James' Version as textual referent for Indian language translations. Perhaps, another reason for this was the lack of sufficient numbers of missionaries in India who had a thorough knowledge of Greek and Hebrew which would have made it difficult for any kind of valuable reference to the 'original.'

However, given this background of uncertainty regarding the original texts, Protestant missionaries continued to insist on the responsibility of the translator to "get the precise meaning" of the original and "to express it exactly" in the target language. The translation could also not be more emphatic than the original as this would be "a misrepresentation of the mind of God, as revealed in His word" (*Seventh Memoir* 1821: 29). Translators were not at liberty to leave anything untranslated either. The question of interpreting ambiguous passages also rose in this context. Until the nineteenth century, missionaries had taken the help of other language translations such as Luther's German version or the Portuguese translation in interpreting the Testaments in the original languages. When the Roman Catholics began translating the New Testament in the mid-nineteenth century, they used the Latin Vulgate as the original (Dibb 1873: 119). However, from the beginning of the nineteenth century Protestant missionaries began referring increasingly to the English Bible. Not all translators were comfortable with this practice. Rhenius raised objections when asked to use the King James' Version as a standard for the Tamil Bible:

I attended two meetings of the general Committee; and was sorry to find that in fact they wish to adopt the English as the standard according to which a translation should be made. Against this I, as well as the Translation Committee, protested, as the originals ought to be our standard; and the question ought to be, not whether a translation agrees with the English, but whether it agrees with the original... (Rhenius 1841: 255-56).

By mid century, using the King James' Version of the English Bible as the primary standard of reference became standard practice amongst Protestant translators. This meant that contested passages or terms with ambiguous meaning were translated in accordance with the interpretation of the English translation rather than the Greek and Hebrew originals. For instance, the Committee in charge of revising Fabricius's Version

of the Old Testament in the nineteenth century deliberately chose to follow the English Bible above all other translations:

...in those cases in which we found that different versions adopted different renderings, and that critics and lexicographers differed in opinion, especially where the word was one that occurred nowhere else in the Bible, we believed that our safest and wisest course...was to follow the meaning adopted by the English... (*Revision* 1869: 12).

This decision was taken in spite of the acknowledgement that Fabricius's translation was often closer to the Hebrew than the English rendering:

It was evident that Fabricius had followed neither the German nor the English, but had translated direct from the Hebrew, ...though Fabricius's renderings seemed in many instances to be preferable to the English, being more in accordance with the ancient versions, or with the best modern critical versions, or with both, yet it did not appear to us to be right to accept any variation from the English without examination (*Revision* 1869: 11).

According to the committee of Tamil translators in the nineteenth century, the English Bible was a useful precedent because it had combined strict accuracy with the correct style for popular use:

The degree in which our Authorized English Version has succeeded in solving this difficult problem is one of its chief excellences, and by constantly keeping that version before us as an example of a translation which is at once accurate and rhythmical, which is neither too free to be accepted as a trustworthy guide to the meaning of the original, nor too literal to be suitable for reading in church and for popular use, we trust that we may have succeeded in some degree in imbibing its spirit (*Revision* 1869: 7).

This, however, had not been the opinion in seventeenth-century England and scholars such as David Norton (1993) have documented the controversy about accepting the language and style of the King James' Version. By the nineteenth-century, this opinion had changed in favour of the King James' Version, which became the authoritative translation to be used in all the British colonies.

In fact, the English Version was invested with so much authority that it began to replace the importance and position of the originals themselves. For instance, Rev. Andrew, missionary in Tamilnadu, gave a few principles of revision, one of them being, "[t]here should be strict fidelity to the original; that is, to the text chosen as the original. In this case, it would be the text of the English Revision Committees" ("Bible Revision, A Symposium" 1898: 455). This practice had significant repercussions, since virtually every language in India has a nineteenth-century version based on the King James' Version that is popularly known as 'the authorised version'. This, in turn, has been given the status of the 'original' in each language and thus, a text that could not be changed through revisions or retranslations. When the question of revision came up,

the institutions that controlled the translation of the Bible—the Bible Society, the Mission Societies, the Protestant Church in India—were wary of allowing revision: “To the unlearned, the version to which they are accustomed, stands in the place of an original; and to injure their opinion of its authenticity, is to shake their confidence in the Word of God itself” (Vansittart 1812: 17). Especially in the twentieth century, even when the clergy acknowledged that each such translation was outdated and needed revision, the laity resisted the publishing of modern revisions. Connected with the missionary translators of the past and bolstered by their proximity to the English Version, these ‘standard’ nineteenth century translations of the Bible Society continue to exist in the popular imagination as the original word of God. This, one of the aims of Bower and his committee, was apparently realised.

From this history, it is clear that the ‘original,’ within the discourse of institutionalised religion, can never be displaced entirely: it is usually replaced by a translation, which is given the same status as the original. The process by which a translated religious text becomes the original points to how important the concept of ‘the original’ is within religious translation. This, for instance, is apparent in the difference in reception between the *Union Version* (1871) and the *Tiruviviliyam* (1995), where the former continues to be favoured because of its closeness to the King James’ Version and the latter rejected because of its difference from the English and its closeness to the revised original texts.

6. Taking Native Help: foreign or ‘native’ translators?

The foreign-versus-native translator debate moved through a somewhat predictable pattern. Before the nineteenth century, in spite of evidence that most missionaries took the help of ‘native’ language experts or pundits, there was no question of a debate on whether Indians should be allowed to translate the Bible. The translation of the Bible was to be under the firm control of the missionaries. However, this changed gradually and by the end of the twentieth century, with the increasing control of the church by Indians, Indians formed Bible Society translation committees or attempted to translate the Bible independently.

Early missionary reports limited the contribution of Indians to correcting mistakes in grammar or syntax. Apart from their own apprehensions of the result of a translation purely by Indians, Protestant missionaries feared criticism from the “Christian Public” in Europe that was quick to condemn any translation based on reports from India that Indians had had a large part in its translation. This attitude continued into the nineteenth century: for instance, Carey defended his use of Indians in translation work to Sutcliff:

It is perhaps necessary to obviate the objections founded on our employing natives to assist us, which represents it as if no advantage could be obtained from employing a 'Wicked Brahman'. [...] we never print a sentence without examining it and seeing it through and through. ... We do employ natives, and avail ourselves of all the help we can, but we never give up our judgement, in any Language, nor ever intend to do so (Carey, letter to Sutcliff, May 4, 1808).

Not only was the translation work done by Indians well monitored by his team of missionaries, Carey also accused his detractors of using ill-informed Indians to judge his translations (Carey, letter to Sutcliff, May 11, 1810). However, there was a parallel tendency that blamed inappropriately translated terms on Indians. Slater, critical of the use of the term *pali* remarked, "Many terms...have no doubt been unsatisfactorily translated through the misguidance of pandits and munshis, arising from their very natural inability to grasp the Christian idea and sentiment... We are aware that the Brahmists [Brahmins] of India, as a class, are not slow to pervert...and sometimes wilfully, our Christian terms and sentiments..." (Slater 1875: 40, 47). It was not just the European public that was critical of help from the Hindus. In the early nineteenth century, Protestant Tamils attacked Rhenius's efforts on the grounds that he had used ignorant, 'heathen' pundits to help him in the revision of Fabricius's Version. Vedanayaka Sastri (1820, 1828) accused the "heathen munshis" (he included both Hindu and Catholic Tamils in this category), who had helped Rhenius, of perverting the scriptures by using blasphemous and corrupt Tamil. Sastri clearly viewed the Hindu pundits as religious rivals who would take every opportunity to ridicule the Protestants by defacing their scriptures. In the twentieth century, Protestant Tamils have accused Arumuga Navalar of having had a similar negative influence on the *Union Version*.

The question is, how constructive the Indian pundits were as translators. Indians had to be taught western principles of translation. In the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the memoirs of the Serampore Missionaries mentioned teaching Indians what translation meant in the western sense of the term. A number of "learned Natives" were now trained and accustomed to the work of Translation: "They...have now acquired a pretty clear idea of Translation as consisting, not in the exchange of a number of words for an equal number in another language, but in transfusing into one precisely the ideas expressed in another" (Seventh Memoir 1821: 25). The memoirs also recommended the training in the original languages (that is, Hebrew and Greek) of 'Native Christian Youth,' who had knowledge of both Sanskrit and the Bible from their infancy, so that they could continue the work of translation.

As the nineteenth century progressed, there were increasing instances of recommendations to consult as many 'natives' as possible in official reports and minutes of editorial committee meetings. By the end of the century, it was unthinkable

that a single European missionary with the assistance of his *munshi* or pundit, should be entrusted with the translation or revision of the Bible in an Indian language ("Bible Revision, A Symposium" 1898: 452). Nevertheless, caution that the 'indigenous scholars' should not be trusted implicitly was always present. As Goudie warned, "The attempt to test a translation by its lucidity to an intelligent person who has no previous knowledge of the subject is both idle and mischievous" ("Bible Revision, A Symposium" 1898: 446). Help rendered by the Hindus became more acceptable but with continued reservations: as W. Hooper proposed, they could be used as 'Expert Assessors' but they could not be given a vote on the rendering of God's Holy Word ("Revision of Vernacular Versions" 1899: 139).

Indian scholarship and assistance became more acceptable by the end of the nineteenth century because the 'natives' now consulted were no longer Hindus but Christian converts who were literate and trained in biblical literature. J.P. Jones, writing in support of revising the Tamil Bible, for instance, stated that, "reliable scholarship among our native brethren has made remarkable progress during the last quarter of a century; ... not a few of them could now be found who would be of substantial assistance to the committee in the preparation of a revision which would be more idiomatic and fluent than the present version..." (Jones 1895: 43). Thus, by the late nineteenth century, it was possible for correspondents writing to the Bible Society to look forward to a future when Indians would be able to translate for themselves. This was seen as not only positive, that is, as a sign of the maturity of Indian Christianity, but as possibly producing a better translation than any by a non-native speaker of the language. However, the question was how competent Indian Christians were in judging the correct terminology for the Bible. They were often so entrenched in the Protestant discourse within which they had been socialised by missionary culture that they were no longer in touch with the linguistic developments of their languages. Protestant missionaries were grateful when they found the odd exception. For instance, the Hindi Bible revisers were appreciative of having the help of a Mr. Premchand: "Though of Christian parentage, he had not suffered his Hindi to become denationalised, but retained a pure style, and had an extensive and accurate acquaintance with Hindi literature" (Hooper 1902: 17).

While most of the debates were repeated with very little difference in the twentieth century, the one change that did occur was that Indians had greater control over the translation of their own Bibles—that is, by demanding revisions when they felt the need, in the capacity of translators in the translation committees and as informed critics of the translations. A letter from the London headquarters to the Madras Auxiliary early in the century stated:

We are glad to see the recommendation of the need for Indian representation in any future work. I suppose the Representative Council of Missionaries only includes British and American Missionaries at the present time. We should like to know, however, whether any Indians support their resolution. In fact we should be very much helped by the opinions of Tamil Christians on this whole question [of revision] (Letter to Organe, June 24, 1915).

It was only in the second half of the twentieth century that this participation was possible in most Indian languages. The first Protestant Tamil translation committee was the one that produced the *Tiruviviliyam* (1995). However, one of the reasons given by Protestant Tamils for the rejection of this translation was the popular belief that these Tamil translators were not as capable as the missionary translators had been. This belief in the authority and sanctity of what the missionaries produced complicates the foreign/native equation between translators in the missionary and colonial context.

It is important to note that 'native' translators, scholars and language pundits have been a part of the missionary translation project from the very beginning. Unfortunately, there are no accurate records of the extent of help they rendered. In spite of a general tendency to erase their presence from most records of translation projects, and very little direct evidence of what those language assistants themselves thought, they continue to disturb translation narratives as the 'Other' of the missionary translators.

IV. The pressures on the translation debate: standard versions, uniformity, and assimilation

One of the primary aims in missionary circles was to achieve uniformity in and through Bible translation. 'Uniformity' and 'standardization' were two linked concerns that underlay the translation debate. Uniformity of two kinds were aimed for: one, uniformity of vocabulary and style within a single language translation that would qualify it as a 'standard' translation; and two, uniformity of Christian terminology across several or all language groups in India. The result translators hoped for was the creation of a homogenous Protestant readership with a distinct and standard Protestant identity.

Institutions, such as the British and Foreign Bible Society, played an important role in creating conditions under which one kind of translation was encouraged over others: it emphasized standard versions and uniformity of language use as the means for the assimilation of Protestant converts. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the BFBS set up criteria for evaluating what qualified as good translation, or conversely, what qualified as mistranslation. However, these criteria did not take into account the cultural expectations that their readers brought to the translated Bible—whether regarding terminology, genre or conventions of expressing devotion. This meant that

there was a disjunction between the efforts of the Bible Society to assimilate Protestant Christianity at the institutional level and the assimilative devices used by Protestant converts at the level of popular piety.

A. Institutional pressure for creating standard versions

The primary agency responsible for creating interest in uniformity and standardisation was the BFBS. The Society, founded in 1805 in England to remove the shortage of Bibles in Wales and other parts of Britain, rapidly expanded by establishing 'Foreign Auxiliaries' all over the world in the following decades. Within a short period of time, the Society claimed that it was the largest distributor of 'authorised' versions of the Bible in languages and dialects in which the Bible had never been printed earlier. Amidst controversy, and on occasion, severe criticism in England of the Society's aims and methodology, contemporary reports and histories published by the BFBS represented it as a success and as vital to missions.⁸

From the nineteenth century onwards, it was difficult to separate the history of Bible translation from that of the Bible Society itself. Though there were some modest claims to being a 'handmaiden' to other missionary societies, it more frequently projected itself as the pillar that supported the rest of the missionary enterprise. It did not 'send' missionaries to the field but recruited missionaries from their stations to participate in the process of translation. The immense power and institutional authority it gained, partly by a process of self-authentication, meant that almost all attempts to translate or revise the Bible anywhere in the world had to have the approval of the BFBS first. This implied that key components of the processes of translation were under the direct or indirect control of the BFBS. From material concerns (of providing printing infrastructure and finance for a translation project) to the ideological (into which languages the Bible would be translated and when, who would translate, the principles of translation to be followed, and what was an acceptable translation), the BFBS has dominated almost the entire field of Bible translation for the last two hundred years. It appointed translation committees, often financed the entire project in a certain language, provided resources such as libraries equipped with source texts and language dictionaries, prescribed certain guiding principles and rules to follow. It also controlled the time within which a translation project was to be completed, coordinated opinion, requests and response from different Protestant denominations, printed the translation, distributed the version widely through an elaborate system of 'agents' and 'colporteurs,' and sold it at a very low price.

The Bible Society enjoyed such success because of certain decisions it took regarding Bible translation. In order to survive as an institution within the context of

constant Protestant infighting, it made uniform and standard versions a part of its manifesto. A ‘standard’ translation, if such a version could be agreed upon, would make both the translation and its publishers acceptable to all Protestant denominations. Printing the Bible unaccompanied by exegetical notes was a strategy to achieve this. It effectively cut short doctrinal disputes over the text of the Scriptures. It enabled the presentation of the Bible as unmediated Word of God in keeping with the Protestant emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the Scripture for human comprehension. Such a Bible was also more acceptable to most Protestant denominations in the mission field, as the mass-produced ‘standard’ text suited the needs of all Protestant sects without highlighting the confusing doctrinal controversies to new converts. Henry Martyn, in a sermon he preached in Calcutta in 1811 to “promote the objects of the British and Foreign Bible Society,” assured his audience that one of the most important principles according to him was the Society’s decision to print only the text of the Bible. “You may be assured,” he claimed, “that they will not depart from this rule, because the very existence of the Society depends upon their adherence to it. The certainty that nothing will be given but the Bible, and that without note or comment, is the only principle, upon which Christians of all denominations will unite in it, or could do so legitimately” (Martyn 1811: 15).

Another decision of the Bible Society, which had far-reaching effects on the translated Bible in India, was the recommendation of the ‘original’ source text to be used for translation. Of the many translations available, the BFBS was determined to use the English King James’ Version as a standard of reference. As mentioned earlier, from the nineteenth century, the English King James’ Version gradually began to replace the importance and position even of the Greek and Hebrew ‘originals.’ The BFBS usually attempted to gain the support of all the missionary societies working in an area, by establishing consensus and acceptance that the finished translation was a ‘standard’ version, that is, the result of standard procedures of translation, which established a standard Christian terminology in the particular language. As a result these versions came to be known as the ‘authorised’ or even the ‘King James Version’ in that language with the accompanying authority and sanctity which has been difficult to dislodge subsequently. The Society marketed its Bibles as uniquely coherent, self-referential and sanitised of undesirable cultural elements.

The project of uniformity and standardisation taken up by the BFBS seems to have succeeded because it worked in conjunction with other secular and political projects of the British Empire. The establishment of standardised higher education in the nineteenth century, or the introduction of print media, for instance, created a class of literate Indians who were equipped both to function in the processes of imperial

government and to participate in Protestant culture if they so desired. It seems that the BFBS established an 'empire' based on the Bible within, and equal to, the Empire. What lay behind the BFBS's resourcefulness in coordinating translation committees, mobilising financial aid, providing paper and printing facilities in order to disseminate the Bible around the globe, was the mediation of imperial culture and authority to peoples who were actual or potential imperial subjects. As a sign of success of this project, translated Bibles were displayed in the Bible Society stall at the Great Exhibition of 1851 as one of the many exotic artefacts of Empire. Further, translation and empire were clearly connected in the language used to represent the successful spread of translated Bibles—often it was the language of empire—of conquering (through the Word) and of establishing a kingdom (of God).

... Interestingly, both empires were justified by referring to the other: India, for example, was 'given' to the British by God so that the Bible could be taken there and the Bible, when translated and distributed in the colonies, would bring greater 'blessings' to the British nation. In the words of a nineteenth-century missionary, "It is worthy of notice...that the time in which the Lord began to bless his servants, was that in which *his holy word began to be published in the languages of the natives*" (Brief Review 1794-1834: 57 [emphasis in original]). The Society's rationale for its existence was that making the "light of the gospel" available to India (or Asia) was the means by which the British nation could pay back its debt to them. Conversely, the pre-eminence of Britain amongst its European rivals was a God-given opportunity for the dissemination of the Bible: "Her generals and admirals have caused the thunder of her power to be heard throughout the earth; now her ministers of religion perform their part, and endeavour to fulfil the high destinies of heaven in favour of their country" (Martyn 1811: 35).

The projects of Empire and the BFBS seem to collude in their interest in creating a homogenous Protestant audience. However, this line of argument was given more by the Protestant missionaries (Alexander Duff, Henry Martyn etc.) than the British Government to justify the importance of their function in the colonies. For them, producing and distributing 'standard' versions that united all subjects under the banner of the Protestant faith was a service rendered to both God and King.

1. Uniformity and Unity: the case for standard Protestant versions

From the mid-nineteenth century onwards, a 'standard' version in each Indian language was seen as essential for achieving interdenominational unity among Protestants speaking each language. This need arose because, by then, each language had more than one translation of the Bible. True of most Indian language translations, this was

particularly noticeable in the history of Tamil Bible revision: one of the important justifications given for starting each revision of existing translations was the need for a single Tamil Bible for all Tamil denominations. The simultaneous use of several Tamil translations was often referred to as an 'evil' that must be overcome by the establishment of a standard version. The Madras Committee was reported as thinking that no considerations should weigh against a hopeful progress of labours, "that propose to furnish a population of 11 millions with a standard version of the Holy Scriptures and so to remove what is at present a serious evil, the use of various versions in the congregations of Tamil Christians" (Rev. E.E. Jenkins, Letter, 1860). One of the Tamil Translation Committee members, E. Sargent, supported work on the new standard Tamil version: "It would be a sad pity to break off as it were midway a work of so much promise, and it would be a wrong to our Native Church here to increase the evil which we intended to remove, by adding to the many other Versions now in use, instead of offering a complete version which would take the place of all others." One Bible for all churches would imply unity between all missionary societies and a united church in each language area. The Revision Committee of the *Union Version* (1869) justified revising the existing Tamil versions by claiming to unite all the Protestant denominations of the Tamil church:

...considering the evils arising from the existence and use amongst Tamil Christians of a variety of versions of the Tamil New Testament, it was felt by all who were interested ... in the spiritual welfare of the Tamil people, that it was in the highest degree desirable to make another effort, ... to secure to the Tamil people the advantage of a version of the New Testament which should be worthy of being accepted by all, and which should tend, if possible, to bind together all religious communities in the Tamil country, however they might differ in other particularities, by the bond of a common record and standard of faith, expressed in a common speech (*Revision 1869*: 2-3).

More importantly, one translation also proved the existence of one God and one voice speaking to all readers of the holy text, and one religion. Weitbrecht, writing on translating the New Testament into Urdu, gave two reasons why the standardisation of Bible versions was important: one, it would be a stumbling-block to Indians many of whom could read more than one language and therefore could compare one version against another; two, it would prevent attacks from non-Christians, like the Mohammadan opponents who are "constantly on the watch for evidence to prove the corruption of our Scriptures" (Weitbrecht 1900: 26). Two years after the publication of the *Union Version*, Ashton Dibb wrote:

It has often been cast in the teeth of Protestant Missions that the Protestant Church presents to the native mind such a variety of sects, so many divisions, so many sub-divisions, and so much mutual opposition, that it cannot discover which among us has the true religion. To all this it is the common and obvious answer that the Bible is the point of union (Dibb 1873: 123).

It was significant that the nineteenth-century Tamil version was referred to as the ‘Union’ Version in Protestant Tamil circles, reinforcing the idea of a united Protestant Tamil community.

To augment this unity, standardisation in Bible translations went together with other attempts at standardisation in each language area—of church organisation, of the liturgy, and of the hymnbook. An instance of the last was the circular sent to missionaries by the Madras Religious Tract Society in 1874, soon after the publication of the *Union Version*, asking for their opinion on the proposal to publish a common hymnbook for all the Tamil churches:

While there are advantages in Hymn Books prepared for special fields, there are other considerations which seem to show the desirableness of having a common Hymn Book, as far as possible, for all the Missions. The following reasons may be adduced in favour of the latter course:

1. As with a Union Version of the Scriptures, a Hymn Book, compiled by the most competent men in the Tamil country, may be expected to be superior, on the whole, to one prepared by a single Mission.
2. A common Hymn Book would tend to unite the different bodies of Native Christians, and make them feel more their oneness in the Gospel (*MRTBS* 1875: 34).

Almost all the responses supported this scheme. Rev. Barnes, from Madurai, wrote a typical response: “Wherever I go, now that I am in Madras, I meet an unpleasant variety in Hymn Books both in churches and households. Of course, union in this direction, if accomplished, would prove a great boon to the Church of Southern India” (*MRTBS* 1875: 35).

Clearly, the standard version of the Tamil Bible was to unite all Protestant Tamils under one banner: one God, one Bible, and one Church, which would create one Protestant identity. However, the Lutheran churches refused to accept the *Union Version* and continued to use Fabricius’s Version until the twentieth century. In spite of this, the *Union Version* is still considered the standard Tamil version by a majority of Protestant Tamils. Nevertheless, the fact that the Tamil Bible continued to be extensively revised (*Revised Version* (1956), Common Language New Testament (1975), and the *Tiruviviliyam* (1995) after the publication of the *Union Version* indicates that the desired unity was not achieved for long. Other extra-linguistic factors, such as Tamil social and cultural movements, worked either in conjunction or in competition with the Protestant missionary translation project. These will be discussed in the following sections.

2. Uniformity and Unity: the case for a standard Protestant terminology

An extension of the desire to produce a standard version in each language was to agree upon and fix linguistic standards for all Indian language translations. This ranged from adopting common principles of revision to a common terminology for the fundamental terms of Protestant teaching ("Bible Revision, A Symposium" 1898: 454-55). Most revision committees gave 'uniformity of rendering' as one of the important principles that guided them but spent more time on disputing the rendering of terms that were considered essential for establishing a standard Protestant terminology.

The intention was to use Sanskrit as a basis to formulate a standard terminology for all Indian languages. An Editorial of *The Harvest Field* (December 1898), pointed out that it was necessary to look at the question of Bible revision from a wider standpoint than the individual version. Even if all the Indian languages could not be brought under one standard, it suggested that since Indian language groups shared many characteristics in common, it would be "possible to determine some of the terminology and also of the idiom of several languages at the same time." The four Dravidian languages were an example of such a group where common terminology could be developed. However, around the mid-nineteenth century, Robert Caldwell had proposed the theory that Tamil (along with the other three Dravidian languages) had a separate foundation and lineage from those Indian languages that derived from Sanskrit. The translation committees of the Tentative Version and the *Union Version* had fought over which translation was more acceptable on the basis of the greater proportion of Sanskrit used. It is apparent that there were two parallel but opposing moves within missionary handling of Indian languages, which threatened the uniformity they strove for. On the one hand, Protestant missionaries were arguing for a standard Protestant terminology in all Indian languages based on the Sanskrit language, but on the other hand, missionary scholars of South Indian languages were pointing out that the linguistic roots of Tamil were not of Sanskrit origin.

In answer to the call for a standard terminology, there were several efforts from the nineteenth century to compile lists of biblical terminology in the major Indian languages to ensure that a standard Protestant vocabulary developed across the languages. John Murdoch's *Renderings of Scriptural Terms in the Principal Languages of India* (1876), listed important terms from Hebrew, Greek and the English and their equivalents in ten Indian languages. Murdoch acknowledged in the Preface that this attempt at standardisation might not end in complete success: "Complete uniformity of rendering is impossible, for in most cases the original terms and those in the vernacular are not exactly synonymous. Still, there might be greater uniformity than at present" (Murdoch,

1876: n.p.). This effort continued till the end of the nineteenth century. The Madras Missionary Conference of December 1902 reported:

Many will be interested in the recommendation made that a list of biblical terms should be drawn up which have no equivalent in the Indian languages, and which convey no meaning to the ordinary Indian reader, such as Pharisee, Passover, Sabbath, &c.; and that this list in English, with brief explanations also in English, should be submitted to the Bible Society for sanction in order that a vernacular translation of these terms may be added to the various Indian versions (Weitbrecht 1903: 493).

The effort to standardise Protestant terms across languages was made once again in the twentieth century. Unlike the nineteenth century where the point had been to fix a standard terminology, the twentieth-century effort was to gauge how successful the process of standardisation had been in practical terms. Therefore, the focus was on terms that had either acquired Protestant meaning or those that were still confused with non-Protestant usage. In 1957, J.M.S. Hooper compiled a 'comparative word list' for Greek New Testament terms in sixteen Indian languages. The aim was "to select words which have undergone a change in meaning through being used to represent Christian ideas, or which present special problems of translation against the background of Hindu or Muslim thought" (Hooper 1957: vii). Believed to be of interest and value to all who were concerned with accurate translation, Hooper's Introduction stated that "[f]ew more important services can be rendered to the Indian Church than thus to help it to an accurate understanding and careful use of its biblical terminology" (Hooper 1957: vii). This was thus a follow-up programme to ensure that existing biblical terminology was used appropriately.

However, a few missionaries questioned whether a standard terminology was at all possible. Wilhelm Dilger, Chairman of the Malayalam Bible Revision Committee stated:

I am not sanguine as to the possibility of adopting a common terminology for all Dravidian languages. There may be a number of terms that can be used in most or all of these languages, because most of the technical terms have to be drawn from Sanskrit. But it is a well-known fact that Sanskrit words acquire different shades of meaning as they come to be used in different Dravidian languages ("Bible Revision, A Symposium" 1898: 451).

Similarly, although Goudie believed that good might result from the study of comparative terminology in the Dravidian languages, it "would be a great pity to impose any restriction on the free and full use in each language of its own resources" ("Bible Revision, A Symposium" 1898: 447). Such observations provide evidence that in spite of all attempts at standardisation, language use evaded the fixing of meaning. Dilger and Goudie's opinion addressed the important fact that the relationship between Sanskrit and the other Indian languages was not static. This was especially the case

with Tamil, where in the twentieth century, the 'Pure Tamil Movement' sought to arrest language flow from Sanskrit to Tamil.

A further type of standardisation under discussion in the nineteenth century was that of Romanising Indian languages so that missionaries sent to any part of India would be able at least to read the Bible in the language before gaining fluency in it. This idea was discussed quite seriously⁹ and some books of the Bible were printed using the Roman script for different Indian languages. However, the project never became a full-fledged one because its proponents were defeated by the variants in vowels that each language possessed, making the standardisation of script almost impossible. There was also talk of 'uprooting' all existing Indian languages to replace them with English—to facilitate government and conversion. Although both such attempts to control indigenous languages were successful in other cultures, for instance, in Spanish colonies in South America or some British colonies in Africa, most Indian languages by virtue of having a strong written literary tradition posed some resistance to standardisation through the imposition of the English language and the Roman script.

Protestant missionaries encouraged the idea that uniformity could forge connections not only within India but also with a wider Protestant community outside the country. The reaction of Nehemiah Goreh, an Indian clergyman, suggests that some Indian Protestants were beginning to desire this connection with Protestants in other countries. When the appropriate title for Christ was discussed during revisions of the Urdu and Hindi Bibles in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Goreh claimed he preferred using *Yesu Krist* to *yeshu*, as it was "adopted by the whole Christian body throughout the whole world, and why should we Indians, or rather the natives of the North-west Province only, differ from all Christians in this respect?" (T.S.W. 1875: 502)

This aim to create a set of terms that would be instantly recognized as Protestant across all the major Indian languages was never a complete success. Although Protestant missionary translations had a huge impact on the different languages, there were other factors that governed the development of each language. Language movement within Tamil in the twentieth century, as mentioned earlier, was governed by political and social developments that attempted to reorganise the relationship between the Tamil language and its community of speakers around issues of race, caste and religion. This change was politicised through the 'Pure Tamil Movement,' which from the 1930s sought to 'cleanse' Tamil of Sanskrit influence. This meant that the sanskritised Tamil terminology of the *Union Version* was no longer the politically correct terminology for the twentieth century. Groups within the Protestant Tamil community

have attempted to create an alternative standard of Protestant terminology. Paradoxically however, dominant sections within the Protestant Tamil community have resisted all attempts to revise the terminology of the *Union Version* to suit the new political climate. They cite Protestant Tamil tradition as a strong factor for the preservation of the archaic nineteenth-century terminology.

3. Uniformity and Unity: the case for a standard Protestant audience

Religious conversion was not the only effect that the translated Bible was expected to produce. It was also supposed to begin a larger civilizing process that was later perfected by the missionary. The histories of the BFBS are packed with instances that proved the civilizing effects of the Bible, some narrated by the missionaries and others reportedly by the newly 'civilized' proselytes. A converted Hottentot welcomed the civilizing effects on his tribe:

When the Bible came amongst us we were naked; we lived in caves and on the tops of the mountains; we had no clothes, we painted our bodies....At first we were surprised to hear the truths of the Bible. The Bible charmed us out of the caves, and from the tops of the mountains. The Bible made us throw away all our old customs and practices, and we lived among civilized men. We are tame men now (Browne 1859: 246).

Similarly, Rev. Ellis working in the South Sea Islands claimed, "Time would fail to tell the change the Bible has produced in the islands of the Southern Sea: the verdant landscape, once lovely in romantic wildness, often now appears a cultivated garden...and the wanton, roving, idle Native, has become a decent, steady, and industrious member of society" (Browne 1859: 442).

Likewise, a missionary working in South India, wrote to the Society: "the moral conduct, upright dealing and decent dress, of the native Protestants of Tanjore, demonstrate the powerful influence and peculiar excellence of the Christian religion. It ought, however, to be observed, that the Bible, when the reading of it becomes general, has nearly the same effect on the poor of every place" (Buchanan 1811: 58). The Calcutta Auxiliary Bible Society, in its history of Bible translation in India, quoted a missionary in South India to justify the Bible Society's role in circulating the Bible: the contrast between "the mental state and conduct, both of those who have not received the Word of God and are comparatively ignorant of it, and of those who have received it" was plain (*Contributions* 1854: 6). Thus, the translated Bible, while translating souls from a 'heathen' to a 'godly' state, also translated their depraved minds, morals and bodily conditions to superior levels of existence.

Moreover, regardless of the historical and cultural specificity of each individual's past, the convert was encouraged to fit into the universalised category of a 'Protestant.'

As Sue Zemka has argued: "The Bible Society based and justified its existence on the belief that the exposure to Holy Scriptures created an abstract Christian subject with similar attributes of behaviour and belief regardless of cultural conditions, material environment, or pre-existing religious beliefs" (Zemka 1991: 104). The aim was to remove local cultural practices, deemed as 'heathen,' and replace them with Protestant ethics and values. The Protestant register of the languages used in the translated Bibles was meant to provide the convert with a distinct vocabulary to express this move towards the Protestant faith.

However, there is ample evidence that converted Protestants attempted to re-interpret Protestant Christianity to suit their own cultural contexts. These instances often became points of contention between them and the Protestant missionaries who were wary of 'misinterpretations'—either of the Bible or Protestant doctrines and practices. Carey had to curb what he considered an over-imaginative interpretation of the Bible, which he presented as an opposition between the 'fancy' of the Eastern imagination and the rational truth of his own interpretation of the Bible:

Gokool told me a religious dream.... As I fear his mind is naturally very susceptible of an enthusiastic turn—I warned him against regarding dreams and told him that Satan would try to ruin the Faith he had embraced; and that it would be very unsafe to deviate at all from the Word of God (Carey, Letter to Sutcliff, November 27, 1800).

More serious than this were several organised nineteenth-century attempts by Protestant converts to form alternative churches. Kaj Baago (1969) writes of three such indigenous movements: 'The Hindu Church of the Lord Jesus' started in Tinnevelly in 1858; the National Church started in Madras in 1886; and 'the Calcutta Christo Samaj, founded in 1887. All three were first attempts to create united, indigenous churches based on a re-interpretation of Protestant doctrine, which incorporated modified Hindu customs and ritual practices. Baago points out that although none of these movements were wide-spread, they considerably influenced Protestant Indian attitudes to Indian culture and religion (Baago 1969: 11).

It is true, however, that large sections of the Protestant community in India did assimilate Protestant missionary interpretations and cultural practices. In the specific case of the Protestant Tamil community, it can be argued that some sections of the community colluded with this missionary project because it was in their interest to do so. Upwardly mobile low caste groups, such as the *Nadars*, who had converted in large numbers to the Protestant faith in the second half of the nineteenth century, found that the missionary programme enabled them to climb the social ladder through literacy, education and government jobs.¹⁰ In contrast, Protestants belonging to higher caste

groups, such as the *Vellala* caste, were reluctant to give up cultural practices that signalled their high status in Tamil society and resisted the Protestant mission to ‘civilise’ them according to Western cultural codes. Hardgrave’s research proved that the “Vellala lost status by conversion, but the Nadar gained status, rising above his former position” (Hardgrave 1969: 90). It is possible to say then that social and political imperatives within Tamil society at times worked in conjunction with the Protestant project to translate and civilise; thus, sections of the Protestant Tamil community have functioned as a ‘standard’ audience for the translated Bible.

Conclusion

Missionary assumptions about religious language, religious texts, and their translation were under constant and tremendous pressure in the nineteenth century to address cultural differences that refused to be straitjacketed into a set of ‘rules and guidelines for Bible translators.’ It is clear from the tension of the recorded experiences of translation and revision committees that it was not possible to arrive at a universal, fixed standard for translating the Bible. This was an obvious problem given the extent and complex nature of translating the Bible into all the existing languages of the world. However, the attempt to construct contradictory experiences into a ‘theory’ that acknowledged few exceptions points beyond the anxieties of the project of translation to the larger tensions and anxieties of the Protestant mission itself. There was either a direct or an implied relation between the problems of translating the Bible and other socio-religious and socio-political concerns, such as, the unity of the Church, the future of the Christian community in India, the relationship between Hindus and Christians in India, which underpinned the anxieties of the missionary enterprise. For the missionary translators, the act of translating the Bible functioned as a medium for defending Christianity and mission from both the attacks of Western rationalists and sceptics, as well as the superstition and false beliefs of the East. On the one hand, that the Bible could be translated into any language without loss of meaning served as proof of its divine nature. Slater, for instance, asserted “we should ever bear in mind that no contradictions are to be found between the authoritative teaching of revelation and the deliverances of reason and conscience” (Slater 1875: 54). On the other hand, the translated Bible could disperse the irrationality and darkness of the East: Ziegenbalg set up this contrast between the “plain Truth of the Gospel of Christ” and the vain ignorance that informed the “frivolous Disputes” of poetical Wits very soon after his arrival in Tranquebar (Ziegenbalg 1718: 13).

However, although the translation of the Bible has been represented (by the narratives of Christian empire) and read by others in the present (such as, Sue Zemka 1991) as a monolithic and hegemonic imposition of missionary ideology on passive and

silent, receiving cultures, there were several opposing movements from the latter that interrogated the ‘macropolitics’ of the Empire and missionary translation projects. Nevertheless, some sections of Protestant converts did collude with the ‘civilizing’ project of Protestant missions in order to enhance their social status, which contributed to the optimistic claims regarding the success of mission. While this chapter has highlighted the institutional efforts at assimilating Protestant Christianity, the following chapters will examine the interrogating responses from Protestant converts in greater detail.

Notes

¹ 'Bible Revision with Special Reference to Tamil, A Symposium,' *The Harvest Field* 9 (1898): 456.

² See Chapter 2, note 5.

³ Hindu goddess of wisdom, said to have been born of the god Brahma. According to the *Matsya-purāṇa*, Brahma later desired and mated with her (Kinsley 1986).

⁴ To Ellis, the French version, however, appeared to be a translation of a Bengali manuscript.

⁵ A distributor, usually Indian, employed by the Bible Society to promote the Bible and Christian tracts both through sales and preaching.

⁶ Preface to *Kiristhava Siddāntham: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine*, Trans. A. Arul Thangaiya, Madras: SPCK, 1939. iii

⁷ See chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion of Vedanayaka Sastri's on the revision of Fabricius's Version.

⁸ Histories written by Browne (1859) and Canton (1904), Dudley's *Analysis of the System of the Bible Society* (1821), the Bible Society Annual Reports, to name just a few.

⁹ For instance, Trevelyan, 1836; Yates et al., 1834.

¹⁰ Hardgrave points out that, "Perhaps more than any other community in Tamilnad, the Nadars recognized the importance of education for social uplift. Education was stressed by the missionaries among the Nadars converts in Tinnevelly District, and in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Church Missionary Society established elementary and high schools throughout the southern districts, and several important colleges ... The Hindus were at first less responsive to education..." (Hardgrave 1969: 145).

Chapter Three: The debated terms

The following exchange between an eighteenth-century Danish missionary in South India and some ‘heathens’ who visited him encapsulates excellently the central problem of the Protestant missionary’s use of religious language that this chapter addresses:

[*Tamil*.] ...you may rail and inveigh, as much as you please, against our Books; yet, for what I can find, your Books have no Letters, but ours; and no Words, but what are borrow’d from our Books, and from our Language.

[*Danish missionary*.] ‘Tis very true ... that I make use of your Words and Characters, in order to make myself intelligible to you, when I make known to you the Mysteries of Salvation, which I have not borrow’d from your Writings, but from the written Word of God: For tho’ your Words are very good, yet what you mean by them is Falshood [sic] and Vanity (Ziegenbalg 1719: 243).

This encounter points to the struggle over language and meaning that was fundamental to the translation project undertaken by Protestant missionaries. The only way the missionaries could use existing religious vocabulary in Tamil was by redefining what the terms signified: the old meanings were declared “false” and new, “true” meanings were then attributed to them. In order for this to work, and so that an appropriate Protestant terminology in Tamil could be created, a parallel process of “emptying” existing patterns of religious rituals and belief structures was also envisaged. For instance, an article published in *The Harvest Field* (1862) suggested that, “[i]n the case of many a Hindu the first thing to be done is to empty him. His head is crammed with loads of learned lumber, and his heart is the birth place of vices” (*A Hindu’s Conversion* 1862: 266). Once this process of emptying both the Tamil language and its users of culture-specific meanings was complete, they had to be substituted with carefully constructed alternatives. This meant the demarcation of a series of cultural meanings as either Protestant or non-Protestant by the Protestant missionaries.

The selection or creation of terms by the missionary translators reveals how such an oppositional view governed the language choices made. Their concern was twofold: one, that there should be parity between the religious vocabulary and concepts thought to be fundamental to Protestant belief; two, that new converts to Protestant Christianity should indicate their new religious belief through language use. Protestant missionaries believed that both changes could be achieved if Protestant vocabulary could be disassociated from the beliefs, scriptures and ritual practices associated with the religious affiliations that they sought to replace. This newly created Protestant vocabulary would serve to mark converts as Protestant. However, such an entirely new religious vocabulary faced the risk of being unfamiliar or even meaningless to their Tamil recipients thus alienating them from the very religious system that the vocabulary

was created to support. This chapter demonstrates this fundamental paradox that problematised the missionary translators' task of assimilating the Protestant faith into Tamil culture: how were they to communicate difference while using the same language?

Rivalry between religions expressed through conflict over language use was not peculiar to the requirements of Christianity in India. In the multi-religious and sectarian context of Tamil society there has been a long history of antagonism between different religions, for instance, between Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism; and between sects within one religion, such as the intense rivalry between the Śaivite and Vaiśnavite sects of Hinduism. Incorporation and appropriation were not benevolent gestures but indicated annihilative moves. In a discussion on the manifestation of sectarian tension, Viswanathan cites Dehejia's illustration through a study of Tamil religious art that the patterns of appropriation and borrowing of Vaiśnavite features in Śaivite art contest the assumption that contention between two religious communities will lead to the total destruction of features of the rival religious system. (Viswanathan 1998: 154). Instead, repositioning the art forms, (and in this instance, the vocabulary) of a competing religious system, if successfully achieved, could lead to a greater appropriation of the rival faith.

Further, the interrelatedness of language choice, literary culture and religious identity in the struggle for primacy amongst Tamil religious sects is obvious. For instance, in her study of Buddhist literature in Tamil from approximately the sixth to the eleventh centuries CE, Anne Monius examines how in the literary culture of early medieval South India, language choice, particularly in relation to religious identity, became an issue of tremendous and self-conscious concern to a variety of sectarian communities, including Buddhist and Śaivite poets. Of relevance to the study of Christian usages of Tamil in later periods of Tamil history is her contention that the "Tamil language emerges as a basic means of articulating religious, cultural, and political orientation, as a highly valued indicator of cultural and religious identity, arguably remaining so into the modern era" (Monius 2001: 84). In particular, one of the ways by which language could be used to articulate religious identity in Tamil society was through the names of sectarian gods. That is, to be able to declare oneself as a follower of a certain religious sect meant that one had to be able to name a particular deity as one's own particular God. In the process of naming, the adherent was expressing the attributes special to his or her own deity thus presenting the associated religious system as superior to all others. As Gauri Viswanathan points out, "As rival sects of brahmanical Hinduism, Shaivism and Vaishnavism have long struggled to claim the terms of defining godhead, worship, ritual and community" (Viswanathan

1998: 154). This is evident in the wide choice of religious terminology that was available in Tamil for all those who wanted to express themselves on sacred subjects. Thus, Protestant missionary focus on the language that would be used by their proselytes was fitting within this context of competing religious systems.

By the time the earliest translations of Christian texts into Tamil occurred in the sixteenth century, religious terminology in Tamil was a mixture of Tamil and Sanskrit. Chengalvaraya Pillai claims, "It was the Jains that first began to use, to any large extent, the bilingual style in writing their religious works," that is, the "mongrel sort of diction" known as the '*Manipravālam* style,' "which is pleasing neither to the purely Tamil nor the purely Sanskrit ear" (Pillai 1928: 22-23). Using this mix of vocabulary, known as the *manipravāla* (literally, a mixture of pearls and coral) as a base to work on, missionary translators attempted to put together a set of terms, which would assimilate Catholic and Protestant religious systems into Tamil culture. Many of these terms were a result of combining two or three terms or roots of terms to form new compounds. It is apparent from the linguistic practices of the missionary translators that they believed using existing terms in new combinations would help erase explicit Hindu associations. Further, they assumed that if these combinations were a result of terms that had Sanskrit roots they would gain both acceptance and respectability quicker. Although this strategy worked to build a Protestant vocabulary in time, these compound terms have also been the most criticised as an unnatural use of Tamil, and therefore, as "Christian Tamil."

Protestant Tamil terminology from its earliest inception to the present can be categorised into four types. The first comprised simple transliterations from the original Hebrew, Greek or Latin and Portuguese. For instance, the Portuguese '*cruz*' (cross) became *kurucu*, '*confesso*' became *konfessiyo*; the Latin '*Spiritus Sanctum*' (the Holy Spirit), transliterated as *icpiritu cantu*; and from the Greek, '*ekklesiastes*' was converted to *ekkilēciya*, and '*apostolos*,' to *apōstalar* in Tamil. Some of these were later changed: *paricutta ātma* (the Holy Spirit), for instance, was a translation of *icpiritu cantu* and *piracaniki* (preacher) a translation of *ekklesiastes*, but others such as *apōstalar* continue to be used today. These terms were initially transliterated by Catholic missionaries because there were no parallels found in Tamil culture that could express the same ideas. However, these transliterations, because they did not readily fall into the Tamil writing system (as the sequence of sounds were alien to Tamil writing) did not take the assimilation of Christianity far. Instead, they signalled the foreignness of Christian beliefs and practices. Protestant translators later translated most terms in this category into Tamil.

The second category comprised Sanskrit terms that existed in Tamil forms which were often further modified: *jepam* (prayer), the Tamilised word formed from the Sanskrit root *japa* (to utter mantras) was further adapted to *cepam* in order to disassociate it as far as possible from its Hindu character of mystical chanting; *cepam* now functions to denote solely Protestant forms of saying prayers. Likewise, De Nobili in the seventeenth century, modified *pūcāi* (ritual worship), the Tamil form of the Sanskrit *puja*, to *tēvapūcāi* (worship of God), supposedly to mark a distinction between Hindu and Catholic worship. These terms, which were modified from existing terminology, helped the assimilation of Christianity at a lexical level. However, because relatively similar terms were being stretched to convey dissimilar ideas and practices, the assimilation of Catholic and Protestant cultures was difficult. The modified terms required explication that pointed out the subtle differences in meaning and usage between similar terms. As a result, although these terms became a part of Protestant terminology in time, the appropriateness of some terms in this category are still debated.

In the third category were new words generated by combining two or more Sanskrit terms that gave a literal meaning of the original words or compounds: for instance, 'gospel' was translated as *cūvicēśam*, a literal rendering of the Greek meaning, 'good' (*cu*) and 'news' (*vicēśam*). In spite of the Tamil word *cunnattu* used by Tamil Muslims for circumcision, the compound *virutta-cētaṇam* was coined to denote circumcision—*virutta* (circle) and *cētaṇam* (to cut), which is unintelligible to non-Christian Tamils. Except for a few difficult combinations, most of the terms in this category were understood since they were simple and literal translations of the original. These new combinations helped to convey the Catholic or Protestant ideas intended more accurately because the roots of the two terms in combination were already familiar. This meant that these lexical inventions could construct new meanings rather than replace old ones. However, there were instances when they were still not perfectly adequate because the final signified had still to be explained: for instance, the surface meaning of the term *tēvakumāran* (Son of God), a combination of *tēva* (god) and *kumāran* (son), would be perfectly clear to a Tamil audience; however, they would have to be informed that in the Protestant context, the term *tēvakumāran* indicated not just the son of any god (e.g. Murukan, the son of Siva, identified as Kumāran) but that it indicated the title 'Son of God,' specific to Jesus Christ. Thus, although this category gave the impression of most successfully assimilating Christian ideas, the terms were still unstable in practice.

Terms that already existed in the Sanskrit and Tamil religious vocabulary and reused in the Protestant context without any changes formed a fourth category. These

terms, however, were assigned new, Protestant meaning. *Kaṭavuḷ* and *pali* are two prominent examples in this category. Another interesting example is the way ‘Satan’ (literally, ‘adversary’) was denoted by a similar Tamil term, *cāttāṇ*, which was the name of a popular Hindu deity in rural Tamil- and Malayalam-speaking areas. The ease with which the meaning of the word was translated literally from ‘god’ to ‘demon’ shows the double purpose it served the missionary translators—a convenient means of repressing older beliefs by presenting them as evil. This fourth category of terms posed no problems at the linguistic level. However, these terms required the emptying of old meanings most so that new connotations could be ascribed to them; or, the old meanings were now meant to refer to a new Protestant signified. Thus, this category of terms bore the burden of semantic rather than lexical changes and provided the most powerful challenge to Christian concepts, as the discussion on *kaṭavuḷ* and *pali* later in this chapter will demonstrate.

All the terms above came into use because of either the rejection of existing terms or the meanings of existing religious terms: in the first instance, new words had to be invented and in the second, old terms had to be invested with Christian meaning. Thus, there was a continuous process of emptying and rejection of previously used religious terminology, accompanied by efforts to find linguistic parity to make the transition from one religious belief to another possible. The following section discusses key terms from Protestant Tamil vocabulary, all of which fit into one of the four categories mentioned above, in order to arrive at an idea of why some terms were assimilated immediately for Protestant use, whereas others were modified or changed repeatedly. The complexity of these processes reveals the extra-linguistic factors that often impinged on the use of terms.

I. The key Terms

This section discusses a few key terms of the long list of terms created as a result of Bible translation, analysing the reasons for their adoption or invention, and whether they were a success with the Tamil audiences. Each section also reviews alternative terms that were available and why the translators did not use them. The first set of words relate to terms denoting god, that is, the three persons of the Christian Trinity—the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. The second set of words concern the naming of the Bible and its books. The third group of words discussed are soteriological terms and terms denoting ritual and worship developed for Protestant use.

A. Terms for God

1. Theos or Elohim:

The Tamil term for ‘God’ saw the most dramatic changes in the translations under study. The four terms used were entirely different from each other: *carvēcuvaran*, *parāparan*, *tēvan*, and *kaṭavu*. These changes occurred because it was felt that each term was ambivalent and did not distinguish the differences in the idea of God well enough.

a. *Caruvecuvaran* —The term is a compound of two Sanskrit terms: *carva* (all) and *īcvara* (lord). *īcvara* derived from the Sanskrit ‘īs,’ which originally could have meant ‘to possess,’ was therefore used to denote a king. However, the term later evolved in meaning and *īcvara* is now predominantly used as a term to signify ‘God.’ The term received its religious significance in the Upanishads and from there it has been taken over by Śaivites and Vaiśnavites. In Vaiśnava literature, *īsvara* is often used in the form of *Caruvēcuvara*: ‘ōm caruvēcuvaraya namah, that is ‘ōm, hail to *caruvēcuvara*, the ruler of all’ (Tiliander 1974: 86, 88). However, this term is less commonly used by Vaiśnavites in South India. The Śaivites in South India, on the other hand, use *īcvara* for their lord. A temple dedicated to Siva is usually called *īcuran koyil* (temple of *īcuran*) but one dedicated to Viśnu, *perumāl koil* (temple of Visnu). *Paramēcvara* (lord above all) was another related term that could have been used but was rejected because of its greater prominence in Śaivite literature. It seems that the followers of each Hindu sect used the term to denote their particular deity as superior to the other two in the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Viśnu and Siva.

Ziegenbalg’s use of *caruvēcuvaran* (he spelt it *carvēcuvaran*) in his eighteenth-century translation of the Bible can be traced back to the writings of Nobili. Nobili disapproved of Henriquez’s choice of *tāmpiran* in *Tāmpiran Vanakkam*, perhaps because Śaivite leaders addressed each other by this name in spite of its divine meaning (Tiliander 1974: 119). Instead, he chose *caruvēcuvaran* to denote God. Interestingly, he first used ‘*civan*’ but rejected it when he realised that it meant not only ‘*civam*,’ that is, goodness, but was the proper name of a Hindu deity as well. Tiliander speculates that Nobili must have been aware of the limitations of the *īcvara*-term as expressing not the Absolute Being but its manifestation. However, Nobili added the prefix *carva* to *īcvara*, to denote the Divine in his almighty sovereignty, and as a God above all Gods. Though three terms, *parāparavastu*, *kaṭavu*, and *caruvēcuvaran*, appeared in his sermons, he chose the last to suggest the uniqueness of the Christian God. In one of his sermons he gave his reasoning for using the term *caruvēcuvaran*:

When we hereafter take up for investigation whether God is one or many, the fact that he is one we will prove by his name, and the reason for his name. For the meaning of the name *Sarvēsuran* is 'the Lord over everything' (*ellātukkum karttar*). Therefore it must be said that there is none greater than and none equal to *Sarvēsuran*, and that 'he alone' (*avaroruvarē*) is God. And that implies that 'everything is subjected to him' (*ellām avarukku kil*) and he is 'above everything' (*ellāvatrukkum mēl*), and no other substance (*vastu*) can be equal to him or above him. In this way we cannot speak of several *sarvēsuran*, but we have to state that he is one (*orē*) *Sarvēsuran*.¹

Although Ziegenbalg was aware of the connection of the term with Siva, he seemed to have believed in the idea of 'primitive monotheism' according to which polytheism appears as a result of devolution in religion; and thus, he adopted it for Protestant use.

Caruvēcuvaraṇ became the term for God in both Roman Catholic and Lutheran churches in Tamilnadu because of Nobili and Ziegenbalg. The term continued to be used until it was replaced by *parāparan* in the mid-eighteenth-century Lutheran translations. The reason for the rejection of *caruvēcuvaraṇ* seems to have been a general Protestant understanding that it was associated with Siva. For instance, Abbé Dubois, a Catholic missionary at the Pondicherry Mission from 1792 to 1823, referred to the discomfort Protestant missionaries felt with the use of the term. Writing that his attendants used to tell people that he was the priest of all those castes who had embraced the religion of *caruvēcuvaraṇ*, he mentioned in a footnote that it was a term which Native Christians used to express God, and that Protestant missionaries had objected to the use of the word because it was one of the titles of the Hindu God Siva.² Later in the nineteenth century, Winslow in his *Tamil and English Dictionary* (1862) gave "The Supreme Being" as the meaning for *caruvēcuvaraṇ*; but under *īcvaraṇ*, he pointed out that it commonly referred to Siva and *caruvēcuvaraṇ* to Siva as "the Lord of the Universe." It is clear that after Ziegenbalg, Protestant opinion was largely against the use of *caruvēcuvaraṇ* in the Tamil Bible.

Caruvēcuvaraṇ, however, continued to be used in other Christian literature, such as, in hymns composed by Protestant Tamils. The Protestant Tamil poet Vedanayaka Sastri used the term in his hymns quite frequently. One of the reasons for the acceptance of this term outside the Bible was that it did not occupy as conspicuous a place in Hindu literature as other related terms such as *paramēcvara*. Other language translations, however, used *īcvara*—the Assamese used *īshoor*, the Bengali *īsvār*, and the Oriya Bible used *īsvāra*. Likewise, there seemed to have been no hesitation in using *paramesvara* in the Hindi Bible, as it was not seen as having strong Hindu cultic associations in North India. On the other hand, it was hard to find *caruvēcuvaraṇ* in Siva-centred Tamil literature and it was only one of the thousand names for Viśnu.

Some missionaries in the twentieth century did not reject the use of *īcvara* altogether. Tiliander suggests that the term *īcvara* would be more appropriate if used for 'Christ' rather than Elohim or Theos. Others, such as Boyd, a missionary in South India in the twentieth century, also thought the term *īcvara* more appropriate for 'Christ' and Brahma for 'God' (Boyd 1969: 233, 241). However, apart from its recurrence in Protestant hymns and poetry, *īcvara* is not a term that is commonly used in Protestant Tamil circles at present.

Caruvēcuvaran falls into the third category of terms discussed above—terms resulting from the combination of two independent terms with Sanskrit roots. However, the combination already existed and denoted Siva as God, thus signifying two separate deities at the same time. This meant that the new Protestant meaning had to be clarified through teaching as Ziegenbalg reported: "his Name is not *Tschiven* [Siva], but *Saruwesuren* (God;) he never had a Wife...but he had a son...[who came to the world to save....]" (Ziegenbalg 1719: 85). This is a clear example of re-naming or attributing a new referent to the name. Parity in terms and meaning was considered an impediment in the assimilation of Protestant Christianity not because the Protestant God appeared very different from the Hindu deity but because the term brought him too close to the Hindu concept. Thus, the greater part of Protestant missionary opinion in the latter half of the eighteenth century wanted a change in terminology to highlight the idea of the Protestant God as unique.

b. *Parāparan*— A compound of two Sanskrit terms *parā* (remote or celestial) and *param* (heavenly), it referred to God as transcendental Being beyond reach. Both *parā* and *parama* can be used as attributes to the Supreme, for example, *paramātman* that is, 'the supreme soul.' When Fabricius began a revision of Ziegenbalg's version in mid-eighteenth century, there had already been discontent with *caruvēcuvaran*, and several discussions had taken place amongst Protestant missionaries over the close Hindu cultic association of the term *caruvēcuvaran*. Christopher Walther, one of the Tranquebar missionaries who followed Ziegenbalg, suggested *parāparan* instead. It seems that Ziegenbalg was aware of the term *parāparan*. Nobili had used it in one of his sermons to refer to the Christian Trinity: "*Tirittuvamāna parāparanākiya ieka sarvēsuranānavar*" (the Supreme God who is a Trinity). He also used *parāparavastu*, explaining the term in the preface to *Dūsanattikāram* as '*Mutalāna unnata vastu*', that is, 'the original sublime substance' (Tiliander 1974: 130). Ziegenbalg had been informed by a Hindu ascetic that they "expressively" called their God, "*Barābarawastuwāgira Saruwēsuren*; that is, the Supreme Independent Being, Lord of all" (Ziegenbalg 1719: 166). Besides, Ziegenbalg had found the term *parāparavastu* in

his study of Hindu literature. In *Malabarisches Heidentum*, he wrote that the Hindus recognized that a divine being existed by whom everything was created: "Such a supreme being...they call Barābaravastu, a name which can be read here and there in their books and can be heard in their discussions" (quoted in Tiliander 1974: 126). Though Ziegenbalg used *parāparavastuvānavar* in the title pages of the Old Testament (1723, 1726, 1727), he did not use it in the text of the Bible.

Walther, on the other hand, dissatisfied with *caruvēcuvaran* because of its close association with Siva may have thought that *parāparavastu* was a more suitable term, which combined several appropriate attributes. Notes in Walther's unpublished notebook show the missionary was assessing the various meanings of *parāparan*: he understood *param* as a being which certainly exists but does not have shape or body in a way that can be perceived with the senses; and *aparam* as that which cannot be perceived with the intellect.³ Translations of St Matthew and *Historia Passionis* published in Tranquebar in 1739 and 1740 use the term *parāparan*. Tiliander argues that since the dates of publication coincide with Walther's term in Tranquebar and since he had pressed for Bible revision, he may have been responsible for the introduction of the word. Lehmann credits Walther for making this term familiar among Protestant Tamils. By the 1740s when Tamil catechists first began writing letters to August Francke in Halle, they used *parāparan* and *caruvēcuvaran* interchangeably.⁴ This is evidence that *parāparan* was introduced in the first half of the eighteenth century in Lutheran churches in place of *caruvēcuvaran*. By the 1750s, *parāparan* was used almost exclusively. A letter addressed to the Tamil people, written to prove that the Protestant God was the only true one, by the Danish missionaries in 1755 used only *parāparan* (*Tamil cātiyārukkelutina nirupam* 1755). Since Fabricius's revision of the New Testament was printed only in 1758 and his Old Testament in 1776, both these instances confirm that the term *parāparan* had already been in use among Protestant Tamils before the publication of his revisions.

Fabricius seems to have concurred with Walther's opinion on the appropriateness of using *parāparan* in the Tamil Bible. Of all the terms for God in his dictionary, he gave only *parāparan* and *parāparavastu* the meaning: "God Almighty, the Supreme being."⁵ Fabricius analysed *parāparam* as *para—apara*: 'remote' and 'not-remote.' That gives to *parāparan*, according to Tiliander, "the meaning of God as being at the same time transcendent and immanent, beyond reach and yet approachable, hidden and yet revealed" (Tiliander 1974: 127-28). This synthesis of two incompatible features in the nature of the divine was used in Hindu literature, including Saiva Siddhanta literature, where besides attention to the transcendent, there was a clear consciousness of the

double meaning of the deity. This placed the terms *parāparam* and *parāparavastu* in a similar position to *caruvēcuvaran*—they already signified a relationship with another specific deity, and thus needed to be modified for Protestant use.

Usually found as a neuter noun in Hindu literature, *parāparam* was changed into the masculine singular by the Bible translators, apparently to signify a personal God. Fabricius was the first to introduce the term into the Bible, and he used it in all the places where 'God' had been used in English. At some points he used *karttarākiya parāparan* (God who is Lord) for Jehovah in Isaiah 12:2, 26:4 (Old Testament 1898). This usage, however, may have caused some confusion, as Rhenius experienced later. When visiting schools in 1819, he reported, "I was surrounded by the boys, one or two of whom asked me, with great anxiety, whether the words *Parābaraṇ* and *Kartā* [Creator God], were used as synonymous terms" (Rhenius 1841: 183). Nonetheless, the term *parāparan* proved a greater success in Lutheran circles, having found its way into liturgical and devotional works from Fabricius's Bible. But the word was not restricted to the Lutherans. In the Tamil translation of the Anglican *Book of Common Prayer* some prayers began with *parāparanē*, a usage that survived from the time when the Anglicans took over Lutheran congregations at the dissolution of the Tranquebar Mission. *Parāparan*, however, was not generally used in connection with a singular person in the Trinity.

As the nineteenth century progressed, however, Protestant missionaries' opinion outside Lutheran circles started leaning away from the use of the term. Winslow (1862) gave three possible derivations for *parāparam*: *para* (*sakti*) + *param* (Siva); *para* (first) + *aparam* (last), that is, the beginning and the end; and, a derivation from the Sanskrit superlative, *parātparam*, that is, "The Most High, the Supreme Being." His meaning for the term was: "Deity as composed of male and female principles, or as managing, controlling, performing operations, for the benefit of souls, by means of the female energy, as in creation." He gave a separate entry for *parāparavastu* and *parāparan*, with "The Supreme Deity" as its meaning and *kaṭavuḷ* as synonym. But an accompanying note clarifies that "[t]hough this word is used by Christians for the true God, it is not unexceptionable." Rottler's description for *parāparam* in his *Dictionary of the Tamil and English Languages*, (1834) was that "the usual derivation of this word is from *param*, the *m* is elided and *aparam*, the two short letters being united by Sandhi into *parābaram*, the Most High or Supreme." Although the meaning of *parāparan*, according to him, was "the same as *kaṭavul*, God," he distinguished *parāparan* as Christian usage:

This word, with a masculine termination, has the prevailing usage among Christians: but the best Tamil authorities sanction the usage of the neuter *parābaram*, which leaves no idea of a Sacti, or female energy, or negative power. Besides *parābaran* is not a fit rendering for *deos*, but best expresses the idea of the Eternal, or the Most High.

Although aware that the term circulated in Christian usage, both these nineteenth-century lexicographers were quite clear that it was not an entirely appropriate term for the Protestant God. This time, the connotation of a female supernatural power inherent in the concept of *parāparan*, was given to justify the rejection of the term. Although it is likely that the power of this connotation was not strong enough to pose a threat, such an attempt at justification highlights missionary fears that the centrality of the Protestant male God may be dislodged by the evocation of the female principle associated by them with ‘pagan’ forms of worship.

However, the term *parāparan* continued to be popular among the Tamil Lutheran churches. In the nineteenth century, the Lutheran churches opposed BFBS’s revision of the Tamil Bible, and refused to adopt it after its publication, giving the change from *parāparan* to *tēvan* as one of the reasons. It was only in the twentieth century that the Lutherans showed a willingness to give up *parāparan* in favour of *kaṭavuḷ*. In the second half of the twentieth century, although *parāparan* carried on as the official term used in church services along with *kaṭavuḷ*, Lutheran congregations in general used the term *tēvan*.

c. *Tēvan*—*Tēvan* derives from the Sanskrit root *Div*. The primary meaning of *div* is ‘shining.’ *Div* has also the double meaning of ‘heaven’ or ‘day.’ Tiliander, observing that the recurrence of the root *div* in Indo-European languages was notable, remarked: “The widespread appearance of the word for a divine Being with the root here mentioned has lead scholars to assume a common Indo-European deity for whom the philologists have fixed a name like *Deiuos*, ‘visible,’ in Skt. [Sanskrit] *Dyauspiter* (Father *Dyaus*), Lat. *Diespiter* (*Jupiter*), Greek *Zeus* (Gen. Form *dios*, from *diros*)” (Tiliander 1974: 74-75). In the Gita, the term was mostly used in its polytheistic sense: the devas were subordinate beings to the supreme deity and were inferior gods grouped together with the demons. A commentator of the *Tiruvacakam*,⁶ however, explained the word *tēvan* (the Tamil form of *deva*) by deriving the word from *tē*, which he explained as ‘sweetness,’ thus resulting in *tēvan* as ‘the delightful one.’ It seems that the commentator was able to play with the meaning of the term because of the lack of different letters for ‘t’ and ‘d’ in Tamil (Tiliander 1974: 77, 78). The Sanskrit term *div* is the more accepted root of *tēvan*.

There had been considerable hesitation over the use of ‘*deva*’ in Christian translations from the very beginning. Most Indian language translations of the Bible have tried to avoid it, especially so in Tamil, as it was usually used in the plural to refer to the entire pantheon of Hindu Gods or to minor deities. For instance, the Hindi Bible preferred *paramesvarā*, since *mahādev* was used as a direct epithet for Siva in the North. One of the few translations to use *dev* was the Marathi Bible until it was introduced into the ‘Tentative Version’ of the Tamil Bible by Percival’s Committee in 1850 and subsequently taken up by the BFBS Revision Committee for the Tamil Bible headed by Henry Bower in the mid-nineteenth century. Kulendran observes that occasionally when *tevā* occurred in Hindu usage to refer to an almighty god, it was with some term added to it. He gives the example of Tirunavukkarusu’s use in the *Tēvāram*: he referred to Sivan as “*tevāti tēvan*” that is, Siva was god above all the other Gods. Manikkavasar, likewise, used “*tēva-tēvan*” in *Tiruvācakam* (Kulendran 1967: 132, 133). It is clear from this evidence of Hindu usage that the term *tevā* on its own was not considered adequate to refer to a Supreme God. Instead, it had to be qualified by combining a term that added to its value. Thus, the term worked more as an adjective that suggested the divine aspect of the subject noun rather than as an independent noun.

Although the term was not sectarian, its polytheistic character had stood in the way of Protestant use until the nineteenth century. Somewhat similar to Hindu practice, the early translators used the Tamilised ‘*tēvan*’ in various compounds along with the principal title for God: for example, Fabricius introduced ‘*tēvatuti*’ (praise of God), ‘*tēvacamātānam*’ (the peace of God), ‘*tēvatūtan*’ (messenger of God) and so on. Both Nobili and the later Protestants usually used the term independently to refer to ‘false gods,’ the Hindu deities being among them: that is, such gods were ‘*poyyāna tēvarkal*’ (false gods). The letter (1755) written by the Danish missionaries to the Tamil people, clearly differentiated between *parāparan*, the Protestant God, and the false *tēvarkal* (gods) and *tēvika!* (goddesses), which were to be rejected. In his dictionary, Fabricius differentiated the singular from the plural: for *tēvan* and *teyvam*, he gave “God” and “the Godhead” but for *tēvar* and *tēvarkal*, “the gods of the heathen.” By contrast, he glossed *kaṭavu!* as “the Lord, God.” Rhenius too, used *parāparan* mainly for the Protestant God and *tēvar* for ‘false gods.’ Winslow’s *Dictionary* published a few years before work on the *Union Version* began did not attribute any Christian significance to the term *tēvan* but merely gave the meaning “a deity, a god, a divine being, *kaṭavu!*;” and as a title given to a caste. On the other hand, all the compound terms coined by missionaries of the previous centuries such as, *tēvakumāran* (Son of God) *tēvacikirutam*, (that which belongs to God), *tēvamāta* (the Virgin Mary), *tēvavacikaram*

(transubstantiation), *tēvavelippatuttal* (divine revelation), *tēvācanam* (the throne of God), were marked as Christian (that is, Protestant) or Roman Catholic usage. Rottler provided three primary meanings for *tēvan*: a God, a king, and a title given to certain tribes or a titular name added to the proper names of feudal chieftains. Under *tēvar* [*tēvarka!* in modern usage] in the plural, he gave "the gods of the heathen" and mentioned the names of five gods according to the Saiva *akamās*.⁷ In a long list of derivatives and compounds he mentioned only a couple of compounds with 'dev' that were in Christian usage. It is thus clear that contemporary missionary scholars of Tamil did not attribute any special significance to the term on etymological grounds.

Henry Bower, who headed the revision committee of the *Union Version*, himself showed a similar preference for *parāparan*. He had compiled a *Biblical and Theological Dictionary* (Tamil title, *Vēta Akarāti*, 1841) prior to his appointment as the chief reviser of the Tamil Bible. The Preface stated that the purpose of the dictionary was to enable Tamil Christians, both clergy and laity, to understand biblical terms and teachings (Bower 1841: 3). Based on Fabricius's version, he defined both the terms *parāparan* and *tēvan*. From the annotation and space devoted to each, *parāparan* was clearly given precedence as a Christian term over *tēvan*. The entry for *tēvan* started with a series of phrases: "Common name for god. True god. God of Gods. False god. Idol." *Tēvar* in the plural was associated with the names of five Hindu gods: "Brahma, Visnu, Urritiran, Mahesuran, Sadasivan." There was also mention of the term collectively referring to the entire Hindu pantheon: thirty-three crore⁸ gods formed or born of thirty-three main gods. Satan was the '*tēvan*' of the world. Lords, judges and other elderly were also called gods. And last, the stomach was the preoccupation, and thus the *tēvan*, of those who sought carnal or worldly pleasures (Bower 1841: 345 [my translation]).

While Bower associated such overtones of Hindu meaning with *tēvan*, the six-page entry for *parāparan* began with a series of positive attributes that the missionaries were claiming exclusively for the Protestant God: a being who was "Omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. With no beginning or end. Unchanging. Self-begotten. Complete. Holy. Just. Reason. Truth. Love. Mercy. Creator and Preserver. One who is life and intelligence; Incomparable and Eternal" (Bower 1841: 389-95 [my translation]). Next, he attempted to prove the existence of God—that God was the creator and preserver of the universe, and that God was one. When there was a reference to idols, the term used was *tēvan*. As further preference for the term, he mentioned that the *cattiyavētam*, or the Bible, declared that *parāparan* was the only true God. There is no

indication in the entire passage on *parāparan* that it was dissatisfactory or lacking in its ability to represent the Christian concept of divinity.

Given this history, it is surprising that the translators of the *Union Version* adopted *tēvan* for prominent use. Probably the attraction of the word lay in the fact that it could not directly be connected with any specific Hindu God, something that could not be said for either *caruvēcuvaraṇ* or *parāparan*. It was for the first time that the translators did not feel the need to lend some weight to the term for God by adding prefixes or suffixes to it; an ironic contrast to the Hindu practice, pointed out earlier, of using the term only as part of a compound when referring to a supreme deity.

Bower, along with his committee, chose to follow Percival in replacing *parāparan* with *tēvan*. He quoted others in his *Vocabulary of English and Tamil Comprehending Terms Relating to Christian Theology* (1852) stating that 'God' in any language should be such as in enunciating the proposition, 'God is one.' *Deus unus* should convey a marked denial of the polytheistic proposition *Dii plures sunt* (Bower 1852: 8). Yet, *tēvan* derived from a term that was generally and primarily understood in the plural in its original Hindu context. Of all the terms discussed for God so far, *tēvan* seems the most inappropriate to represent the Christian God as one, unified, Supreme Being: a primary concern of the missionaries all along. A possible explanation is that other considerations acquired greater importance during the translation of this version. As mentioned in Chapter 2, uniformity in translated terms across the Indian languages was a primary concern in the nineteenth century. *Tēvan*, with its close resemblance to the Latin *Deus* and the Greek *Theos*, as well as having a Sanskrit root common to all Indian languages, satisfied the requirements of uniformity more than any other Tamil term. Bower apparently later argued in favour of *tēvan* along these lines:

In the new version the word Devan has been adopted, a word common to Sanskrit and all the Indian languages; and in using it we do not translate, but simply transliterate the Greek *Theos*, and the Latin *Deus*. The equivalent in Tamil for the Saxon word God would certainly be kadavul which in sound and signification is similar; for the meaning of kadavul is good. But this term is peculiar only to Tamil; whereas Devan (derived from a Sanskrit word signifying light) is common to all the Indian languages.⁹

In spite of Bower's justification to the contrary, Tiliander concluded: "The Lat. Deus could hardly have influenced the choice" (Tiliander 1974: 85). However, this appears to have been a strong motivating factor as it was confirmed by Bower's contemporaries who approved of the choice for the same reasons as he. Ashton Dibb, writing two years after the publication of the *Union Version*, gave the choice of *tēvan* as one of the reasons for the valuable contribution the version made: "...it introduced that Tamil word

for God which is most simple, most suitable to all connexions, and most likely to meet with general adoption" (Dibb 1873: 118). Rev. Carr, a secretary of the Zenana Bible and Medical Mission, echoed this view in the twentieth century. He supported one of the important reasons for Bower's Committee's choice of *tēvan* over others, that it had links with the Greek *Theos* and the Latin *Deus* (Carr, Letter to Kilgour, 1929). Such reasoning suggests that a reverse process was initiated with the use of *tēvan*: the emphasis was not on assimilating Protestant Christianity into Tamil culture but adapting elements within Tamil culture to establish links with a universal Protestant Christianity.

There was some opposition to the change from *parāparan* to *tēvan*, especially within the Lutheran denomination. The earliest evidence comes from Vedanayaka Sastri's essay titled *Pututtiruttalin cōtanai* (the ordeal of the new corrections, no date), written against the revision of Fabricius's Version, in the first half of the nineteenth century. While on the whole Sastri was critical of what he saw as substituting terms with their synonyms for the sake of change, his criticism of the shift from *parāparan* to *tēvan* is particularly significant. In his discussion of the corrections to the first chapter of Genesis, Sastri condemned the use of *tēvan* in the place of the "glorious" term *parāparan*. His reasons were: *tēvan* was a common noun which could be used to refer to all the gods of the 'heathen' who claimed to have thirty-three million gods; each sect and caste had its own particular tutelary head or "*tēvan*"; and last, Fabricius had used *tēvan* where the heathens referred to the Christian God (*parāparan*) without respect. Sastri thought *tēvan* and *tāmpiran* comparable terms: both could be used to denote God but had customarily become titles to denote social status in South India. The former was a title name for the maravar caste and the latter had become the traditional term for temple priests. *Tāmpiran* was also used to refer to Malayali kings. However, neither *caruvēcuvaraṇ* nor *parāparan* had been used as personal titles. Sastri approved of the Catholic use of *caruvēcuvaraṇ* as an equally inspired term, though he thought *parāparan* the superior of the two. Significantly, he concluded his condemnation of the revisers' use of *tēvan* in the Bible as a grievous sin for its resemblance to "heathen" usage. Sastri's arguments against *tēvan* continued to be offered by the Tamil Lutheran Church as reason for not accepting the term in place of *parāparan*.

Sarojini Packiamuthu claims that some sections of Protestant Tamils found it difficult to initially relate the word *tēvan* with the larger meaning of the foremost God that had been forced upon it (Packiamuthu 2000: 204). There is a popular belief amongst Protestant Tamils today that this term was brought into the Tamil Bible on the advice of the Jaffna Saiva Siddhantist, Arumuga Navalar, who assisted Percival, out of

a malicious intent that the Protestant God should come to be known not as the supreme God but merely as one of the many gods that the Hindus believed in. This rumour continues to circulate today: several Protestant clergymen I interviewed who were against the use of *tēvan* gave this story to explain the appearance of the term in the Tamil Bible as a historical fact. They saw it as one man's hatred for Christianity manifested in the introduction of an inappropriate term for the Christian concept of a supreme deity. This is convenient since they hesitate to censure missionary translators for 'errors' in translation. However, both Kulendran and Packiamuthu in their histories of the Tamil Bible refute this account on the grounds that Navalar did not translate the Bible on his own and he was under the authority of Percival and his Committee. Thus, they place responsibility for the use of *tēvan* on all the nineteenth-century missionaries based both in Sri Lanka and Tamilnadu who were involved in the translation process (Kulendran, 1967: 133-34; Packiamuthu 2000: 203-7). Kulendran also criticises the confident belief of the missionaries (that a new meaning could be infused into a pre-existing term) as dangerous, especially in the instance of Tamil as it possesses several grammars that control the direction in which the language can move (Kulendran 1967: 135). Kulendran's criticism of missionary strategy is accurate. The missionary translators found that in practice, such terms continued to be used in their old contexts and with their old meanings intact. *Tēvan* is unfamiliar to Hindu Tamils who continue to use it in its plural sense, nor is there general awareness amongst them that it is a Protestant Tamil term for the Protestant God. Thus, old meanings challenge the new, resulting in an uneasy tension in usage.

In a remarkable turn of events, however, *tēvan* has become the most widely accepted term in Protestant Tamil circles. Once the *Union Version* became the standard Tamil Bible, *tēvan* acquired legitimacy as the standard Protestant term for God. The version has even been nicknamed the '*tēvan* Bible.' Although the official Lutheran Church Bible continued to be Fabricius's version, the *Union Version* penetrated Lutheran homes on the back of the controversy over the *Revised Version* in the middle of the twentieth century. Thus, *tēvan* has entered the devotional language of prayers, sermons and hymns on a far wider scale than previous terms used in the Tamil Bible. At present, the majority Protestant Tamil opinion is that *tēvan* is the particular and unique term for the Protestant God unlike the alternatives that were used by all other religious groups in Tamil society.

One of the reasons for the comparatively easy establishment of the term in Protestant usage could be the spread of literacy especially amongst Protestant Tamil converts in the second half of the nineteenth century. Unlike the previous century where literacy and the reading of the Bible were confined to the few Tamil catechists,

Protestant congregations in the nineteenth century were moving towards becoming a reading audience. Where earlier, the laity depended largely on the authority of the clergy and a memory created out of aural effect, with the increase in literacy there was a shift towards the primacy of the biblical text as the authoritative basis of truth. It seems that eighteenth-century Protestant Tamils did not find the change from *caruvēcuvaran* to *parāparan* within the span of one generation a point for critical dissent. There is no surviving evidence of opposition or conflict as a result of the change from *caruvēcuvaran* to *parāparan* in the Lutheran churches. However, the first signs of protest emerge from the beginning of the nineteenth century with the few literate Protestant Tamils, mainly from the Lutheran church, raising objections to the replacement of Fabricius's *parāparan* by *tēvan*. Emerging literacy among Protestant Tamils reveals evidence of increased attachment to a term in use. However, since their number was not large at the beginning of the century, the nineteenth-century missionary translators could override their criticism.

In contrast, the publication of the *Union Version* in 1871 coincided with a period of increased literacy in the Tamil Protestant churches. Although Protestant mission schools had been open since the first decades of the eighteenth century, there was no established policy for education until the nineteenth century. Until the Educational Despatch of 1854, there was controversy about who was responsible for and what should comprise the education of natives: mission or government; the inclusion of religious teaching; and the introduction of English Literature into the school curriculum. Gafe points out that all policies discussed and framed previously tended to favour governmental support for high-level education benefiting the elite at the cost of universal education. However, the 'grant-in-aid' system proposed by the Educational Despatch left wide scope for private and missionary enterprise particularly at the lower levels (Gafe 1990: 194). Besides, the second half of the nineteenth century also saw the establishment of several institutions of higher education. The Indian university system was formally instituted on the pattern of London University in 1857, which meant the opening of the universities of Madras, Calcutta and Bombay. Presidency College in Madras was instituted in 1840. The Madras Medical College (which was started as a Medical school in 1835) gained its present status in 1850 and its first batch of students graduated in 1852. Similarly, Madras Christian College (at first, the Central Institution) was affiliated to Madras University in 1865, and the Sarah Tucker Institutions were established in 1858 with branches all over Tirunelveli District. In response to these Protestant institutions, the Catholics and Hindus opened rival colleges during the same period: for instance, St. Joseph's College, affiliated to Madras University from 1866; St. John's College in Palayamkottai in 1880; the Jaffna Hindu College instituted by the Saiva Samaya Paripalana Sabhai in the 1890s. The

Pachiayappa's Schools, which began with a body of Hindu Trustees opening a school in Madras's Black Town in 1842, was the "first example of intelligent natives of various castes combining to aid the cause of popular instruction" (Satthianadhan, 1894: cxx). Around 1900, Christians were, after the Brahmins, the most highly educated community and according to the 1901 *Census of India*, in the Madras Presidency, about 14% of the Christian population was literate over against 6% of the Hindu population and 7% of the Muslim population (Grafe 1990: 200).

This increased literacy among Protestant Tamils helped to establish the *Union Version* as the first version that was bought and read in the homes as part of family and private devotion. The movement of the Bible from the church to the home meant that this translation became the first version that was known intimately and at a personal level by Protestant Tamil individuals. An important component of this personal devotion was the memorising of passages from the Bible. Memory, now created from the reading of a written text, helped to entrench *tēvan* on a mass level, a previously unknown phenomenon in Protestant Tamil society. *Tēvan* was, subsequently, successfully established as the primary Protestant term for God.

While *tēvan* is definitely a part of the written tradition of Protestant Tamil literature, the term has not become as much a part of the oral vocabulary or tradition of Protestant Tamils. Instead, as Packiamuthu points out, Protestants use *āñjavar* (lord), *kaṭavuḷ* (God), *cāmi* (master) and *tēyvam* (God), which are terms commonly found in Tamil Hindu speech patterns.¹⁰ However, lay Protestant Tamils do use *tēvan* in other non-formal written forms such as personal letters. That after a hundred and fifty years of its introduction *tēvan* has not become an integral part of the spoken vocabulary of Protestant Tamils but remains largely confined to their written tradition, Packiamuthu sees as evidence of the 'failure' of the term in the ultimate analysis (Packiamuthu 2000: 207). Although there is much in favour of this argument, the strong and continued opposition to the use of the term *kaṭavuḷ* in twentieth-century Tamil translations of the Bible undermines Packiamuthu's conclusion. While *kaṭavuḷ* exists in the speech patterns of Protestant Tamils, the community would like to keep the term out of the formal written text. The case with *tēvan* is opposite. There is still a deep attachment to *tēvan* as the standard Protestant term for God in the formal context of the translated Bible. Almost all lay Protestants I interviewed were in favour of *tēvan* as a term that specifically denoted the Protestant deity. This was often expressed as, "it is a term for our God"; thus, demonstrating the strong identification with the use of the term. Even those who were informed of the negative connotations of the term continued to insist that only this term served to mark Protestant identity as distinct. The combination of

factors given earlier, which enabled *tēvan* to be established as the Tamil equivalent for the supreme Protestant God, has also contributed to the opposition to *kaṭavu*.

d. *Katavu*—This term was introduced to the Tamil Bible for the first time in the early twentieth century. Of the terms for god discussed so far, it is the only one that is of Tamil origin. The Tamil root *kata*, that is, ‘to pass over,’ means both to pass over from one place to another and to surpass or transcend human speech, mind and existence. The root *u* means ‘existence.’ Together, the two roots combine to make ‘transcendent existence.’ *Kaṭavu* stands for a personal being in its highest form, which transcends all other existence. In the eighteenth century, Beschi had given *Deus* as the equivalent for *Kaṭavu*. Winslow’s explanation for the term was: “*kata*, surpassing, or *kaṭam*, bounded in, or by whom all are bound, the all-comprehensive being by whom universal nature is bounded.” While giving the primary meaning of the term as “the deity, the Supreme Being,” in a note he drew attention to the fact that “[s]ome philologists identify this word with the Anglo-Saxon word, *God*.” The term refers to a monotheistic deity. Tiliander gives instances from Hindu sacred literature where *kaṭavu* was named the Ancient one and the Old one, suggesting the idea of *kaṭavu* as being far remote in time. Further, Siva as *kaṭavu* operated in the creation and preservation of the universe as well as in its dissolution. *Kaṭavu* was not used merely as an epithet for Siva but as a proper noun expressing the uniqueness of Siva, as being separated both from the *Trimurti* and the whole host of *tēvas*, and as the only real God.¹¹

When the process of revising the Tamil Bible was underway in the early twentieth century, there was much discussion on the comparative merits of the terms *tēvan* and *kaṭavu*. After two days of discussion on the terms, the Executive and Consultative Committees decided that *kaṭavu* “shall be used wherever *Theos* denotes the One Supreme God.” This decision was momentous for the history of the Tamil Bible. The monotheistic characteristic of *kaṭavu* along with the fact that it was also unique to the Tamil language made its use seem appropriate to many scholars at the beginning of the twentieth century. An added advantage was that the term was familiar to all Tamils, both Protestant and non-Protestant. However, this decision to use *kaṭavu* gave rise to the longest controversy in the history of the Bible in Tamil translation.

Since one of the main reasons for opposition to the Bible revision project begun in the early twentieth century was the rejection of *tēvan* in favour of *kaṭavu*, the meaning of the term was reviewed and discussed in detail both before and after the publication of the two twentieth-century translations. The opposition in Protestant Tamil circles to the use of *kaṭavu* had reached such proportions that the BFBS editors in London

became concerned about the success of the translation. Kilgour, in charge of the London Editorial Sub-Committee at the time, wrote to Organe, Secretary of the MABS (Letter, August 5, 1926), that the London Office was investigating the merits of the change from *tēvan* to *kaṭavuḷ* independent of the Madras Auxiliary as it was concerned about the controversy that had arisen. The Committee wanted to know the history of the translation of the terms for God in Tamil, the meaning and usage of *kaṭavuḷ* and “what the ordinary Tamil peasant uses in prayer—Christian and non-Christian” (Kilgour, Letter to Organe, September 16, 1926).

In response, Professor A.S. Geden, a former Wesleyan Missionary in Madras, spoke of his experience at the end of the nineteenth century. According to him, *kaṭavuḷ* was then the word used by the common people with whom he came in contact and *tēvan* was looked on rather as the word of the missionaries (Kilgour, Letter to Organe, February 10, 1927). Geden’s letter further mentions that *tēvan* was an ordinary Sanskrit term not native to any Dravidian language, “though it would be understood by any educated man. In my time in India it would have to be explained and taught to the villager” (February 12, 1927). Geden also informed Kilgour, that *kaṭavuḷ* was already used by Tamils commonly, thus reassuring the London office that it was not an alien term that was being introduced into the Tamil Bible (Kilgour, Letter to Lawrence, May 19, 1927). Professor J.D. Asirvadam of Madras Christian College pointed out to Kilgour in 1924 that neither of the terms used in both versions of the Tamil Bible (Fabricius’s and the *Union Version*) were in common use: “The one version uses a word [*parāparan*] meaning ‘Highest,’ ‘Almighty,’ and the other uses the Sanskrit word ‘Dēvan,’ which to the ordinary Tamil only suggests the idea of ‘clear,’ ‘shining,’ and can be used of ‘gods’ rather than ‘God.’ The ordinary word used by the Tamil speaker is *kadavuḷ*.¹² Both Geden and Asirvadam’s analyses provided further proof of the constructed nature of the Protestant terms in the Tamil Bible in contrast to the general use of *kaṭavuḷ* in Tamil society.

Similarly, in the 1920s, Paul Lawrence, a Tamil working for the MABS and a convert from Hinduism, sent Kilgour ‘Notes on the translation of the word God (*Theos*) in the Tamil language,’ in which he observed, “The common Hindu villager when he prays uses all these words (*swāmy*, Āndavan, *Bhagavān*, *Tswaran*, *Para Brahman*, *Dēvan*, *Mahā Dēvan*, *Sarwa Tswaran*, *Kadavaul*) pronouncing most of them in a string. To him all these are interchangeable and he considers that they all apply to the one God. When he grows to be specially religious then he restricts himself to the use of words peculiar to his [sect]. ... *Swāmy*, *āndavan* and *kadavuḷ* are used by all.”¹³ Lawrence pointed out that *tēvan*, when commonly used for God, had its limitations:

"This has also the male and female form as *Dēvan* and *Dēvi*. In Vedic times, the word was much used but latterly this has added to itself such a variety of meanings, that it cannot be used to denote the one God. (It was never used for it, except inside the Christian Church). The Śaivites use the word more than any other among the Hindus." His notes on *kaṭavuḷ*, supported the decision of the Consultative Committee:

The word *kadavul* has been lying idle all this time; it was a Dravidian word to begin with and the Brahmanical philosophers were not evidently quite particular to use this word and further it would not have been understood outside Dravidian India. That might have been the reason why the word was left alone: *kadavul* has been used here and there and in Dravidian homes in speaking of God and when praying to Him. So far it has not taken any of the shades of meaning. Hence the Consultative Committee felt that the word is capable of holding the Christian conception of God.¹⁴

Kilgour's attempts to analyse the merits of using *kaṭavuḷ* in the *Revised Version* reveals to what extent the acceptance of the new translation depended on using the appropriate term for God. The translator's responsibility was seen as weightier when it concerned the translation of religious scriptures:

Mr. Paul was very strongly in favour of the new word which, he said, was used in Hindu philosophy and expressed very fully our Christian idea of God. [...] Even your reply did not convince us that in Tamil, the earliest language in India to have any translation of the Scripture, ... it was wise to make a change in such an important word after more than a century of its use.... We can quite conceive that such a radical change might wreck what otherwise might be a very acceptable translation. If, as Mr. Paul says, the word is so distinctly connected with Hindu thought, I wonder whether it is wise to use it now in a part of the country which is not merely Hindu. It was also pointed out that the word formerly used '*Dēva*' even though it is connected with Sanskrit conveyed the thought of 'God' not only in all other parts of India where in some form it has been accepted by the Christians as well as by those of other religions but also in all tongues European and others which have some form of the Latin word '*Deus*' (Kilgour, letter to Organe, August 5, 1926).

Kilgour's concluding sentence adds further evidence that the nineteenth-century decision to use *tēvan* had been influenced by the desire for uniformity across all Indian languages and a connection with European languages. However, Kilgour was later informed that *tēvan* had been in use in the Tamil Bible and amongst Protestant Tamils only since 1864, which made the change to *kaṭavuḷ* less drastic (Letter to Organe, February 10, 1927). The rationale was that if a term had not been in use for very long, it would be easier to substitute it with another. But contemporary evidence in the Bible Society files for the 1930s reveals that many Protestant Tamils already strongly identified *tēvan* as the Protestant term for God.

A.C. Clayton, a missionary in Tamilnadu in the twentieth century, provided a further dimension to defining *kaṭavuḷ*. In his 'Note on 'kadavul'' he sent to the London

Committee he mentioned that the term had two “similar roots” with two meanings. First, “kata’ means what crosses over, gets beyond, extends far” thus, if *kaṭavuḷ* is derived from it, “it means ‘The One transcending bounds’”; and second, “‘kata’ also means ‘ought to be,’ ‘due’ and therefore would mean the One who “personifies duty, what ought to be.” He further observed, “In any case ‘katavul’ is the highest and purest word in Tamil for The Deity. The commentators on the ‘Kural,’ the ancient Tamil classic uses ‘katavul’ and so does the commentator on the almost equally famous ‘Naladiyar: ‘He who preserves the Preserver of created Things’ is called Katavul’ (see Pope’s Tiruvacagam p. 19).”¹⁵ According to Clayton, ‘*kaṭavuḷ*’ was used for the Supreme God in ordinary popular usage. He pointed to another great advantage—that the term had no female form whereas both *parāparan* and *tēvan* had female forms in *parāparai* and *tēvi*. He ended by emphasizing that *tēvan* “is a word that is associated with the idea of many gods, goddesses and godlings. It is a word that has lost prestige. It is the right word for ‘the unknown god’ in Acts 17:29 or for ‘the gods’ at Lystra in Acts 14:11. But it is a poor and unsatisfactory rendering of ‘God who made the world’ in Acts 17:24, where ‘*kadavuḷ*’ is the right word” (note 15). The analyses provided by the different sources above demonstrate that when viewed from an etymological point of view, the term *kaṭavuḷ* was more appropriate for Protestant use than *tēvan*. This opinion was shared by the two translation committees of the twentieth century.

Organe was optimistic about the change especially because the revision committee had seemed to arrive at the change with consensus: “It is a serious change but from the unanimity of the decision and from information I have gathered in the course of my experience I should say that it is not likely to lead to any further disturbance as the pure Tamil word *kaṭavuḷ* is more generally used and more popular than the Sanskrit word *Dēvan*” (Letter, December 9, 1929). Paul Lawrence, who was closely involved with the revision of the Tamil Bible, was confident that the revision would succeed: “From the various sources with which I come in contact because of the nature of work I am engaged in at present, I know that the revision is looked upon favourably. Even conservative minded old Christian people approve of the style.” He echoed Organe in saying: “The fact is this...that the Consultative Committee, representing all the Churches and holding office as elected representatives of their various denominations, have agreed upon these changes! The Tamil people realise the importance of having and using such a word as *kadavuḷ* for ‘God’” (Letter to Kilgour, November 4, 1926).

However, in spite of this research and the several reassurances from various quarters, severe criticism of the use of *kaṭavuḷ* was expressed when drafts revisions were circulated. As the discussion below illustrates, the Protestant Tamil community

was not deeply concerned with the comparative merits of the roots of the terms. A few Protestant Tamils, who sent their comments to the Bible Society, wrote that though the revision was an improvement on the existing translation, they doubted "the wisdom of rendering God by *kadavu*" and preferred *tēvan*.¹⁶ There were some missionaries who shared their view. Rev. Carr, "strongly dissent[ed] from the substitution of the impersonal *kadavul* for the word *devan* now in use." He thought it true that the Hindu idea of God was impersonal and the personal *tēvan* was not used in Tamil classics, but that was where the Christian message could be presented as different:

But through our Christian message we have to introduce to India the personal; and the old translators were quite well aware when they adopted devan that it is not in accord with the terminology most commonly in use in Tamil literature... Why should we at this stage introduce another word, well known to, but discarded by, the old translators—a word which does not convey what the Christian message wishes to convey? (Carr, Letter to Kilgour, 1929)

Kilgour, by then persuaded that *kaṭavuḷ* was acceptable, informed Carr that there was a "distinct difference of opinion in the field especially among the Indian Christians"; and that "We of the Bible Society are always anxious that the opinions of those speaking their mother tongue should have full weight in the various versions" (Letter, May 14, 1929). So, in an interesting turn of events, Kilgour presented the change as a result of a desire expressed on the part of all Protestant Tamil readers of the revised Bible.

Opposition to the use of *kaṭavuḷ*, which began during the course of the revision, continued until well after the publication of the *Revised Version* in 1956. The Bible Society has had to stop the publication of this version. Protestant Tamil congregations, with the exception of a few Lutheran churches and seminaries who continued to use the *Revised Version*, did not accept the use of *kaṭavuḷ*. At present the *Revised Version* is used only in a few theological colleges and seminaries as an example of an academic [?] and the most literal Tamil translation extant.

It is significant that in spite of the failure of the *Revised Version*, the Translation Committee that produced the *Tiruviviliyam* in 1995 decided on *kaṭavuḷ* instead of *tēvan* a second time. This renewed opposition among Protestant Tamils. Their main reasons for dissent has been that *tēvan* had by then been established as the Protestant term for God and to them *kaṭavuḷ* seemed a Hindu term which they preferred to avoid. The Protestant clergy too has made only desultory attempts to use *kaṭavuḷ* as part of the liturgy, prayers and sermons. Tiliander's confidence of the mid 1970s has not been borne out: "In later Christian poetry the term is very sparingly found. Even Vedanayaga Sastriar leaves us disappointed. But once stamped with authority of the Bible

translations and with the support of the Dravidian movement the term is sure to gain ground" (Tiliander 1974: 136).

Two related factors are worth considering in an analysis of the use and reception of '*kaṭavuḷ*' in the twentieth century. Both the *Revised Version* and the *Tiruviviliyam* had a far greater number of Protestant Tamils than European missionaries on their revision committees than ever before. This meant that for the first time Protestant Tamil translators were in a position to introduce terminology that they thought better expressed their concerns and affiliations than the missionaries. Secondly, the appearance of *kaṭavuḷ* mainly in twentieth-century discussions on translating the Tamil Bible coincided with the 'Pure Tamil (or *tanittamil*) Movement.' As mentioned in the Introduction, one of the fundamental concerns of the movement was developing a conscious programme for the eradication of Sanskrit terms and roots from the Tamil language and replacing them with 'pure' Tamil words. By adopting *kaṭavuḷ* as the principal term for God in the Bible, the translators were indicating that the previous terms used in the Tamil Bible had not succeeded in fully assimilating Protestant Tamils within Tamil culture. Those who supported the use of *kaṭavuḷ* were sympathetic to the political and social movements that swept through Tamilnadu during most of the twentieth century. Equally, those who refused to accept this term were signalling their distance from these movements. The latter comprised mainly urban, middle class sections of the Protestant Tamil community who were oriented towards the social privileges of functioning in English rather than the social and political concerns of the *tanittamil* Movement.

In conclusion, a brief comparison of the four terms for God, *caruvēcuvaran*, *parāparan*, *tēvan*, and *kaṭavuḷ* reveals that they belong to three of the four categories enumerated at the beginning of this chapter. The translators decided on translation rather than transliteration. *Caruvēcuvaran* was the result of combining two terms, *parāparan* and *tēvan* were modifications of existing terms, and *kaṭavuḷ* was used without any change. Of the four, *kaṭavuḷ* is the closest to the Protestant term for God but also the least accepted by most Protestant Tamils. This paradox suggests that the community understands lexical changes, however minor, as a signal of difference. Thus, while they fear that using *kaṭavuḷ* would blur the lines between Protestant and non-Protestant, the use of the slightly modified *tēvan* (whatever its original connotation in the Hindu context may have been), served to represent a unique Protestant Tamil identity.

2. Terms for the Three persons of the Christian Trinity:

The translators used different strategies to express the three Persons of the Christian Trinity: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Finding that there was a Hindu parallel to the concept of Trinity in Brahma, Viśnu and Siva, the missionaries took care to emphasize that the two concepts were not analogous. They struggled to explain the difference in the two concepts, since their Hindu audiences were quick to make the link between the two. They mostly stressed difference by emphasizing the ultimate oneness of the Christian Trinity. At other points, the similarity was used to refute Christian teaching by unconvinced Hindus, as is apparent in the argument posed by one of Ziegenbalg's Hindu contenders:

I find [...] that you with subtil Ways or arguing, can make a *Trinity* consistent with *Unity*; and if your *Explication* is Absolutely necessary to make others understand what you mean, pray, allow us the same advantage of explaining the Doctrine of our Religion ... *Our Plurality* does not destroy the *Unity* of God, no more than your *Trinity* does (Ziegenbalg 1719: 129-30).

It is clear from encounters such as these how difficult it was for the missionaries to indicate difference especially when somewhat parallel concepts existed. This made it possible for the Hindu who argued with Ziegenbalg that there was no difference between the plurality of Hindu gods and the Trinity that the Christians preached. Thus, the missionaries found justifying the concept of the oneness of the Trinity particularly challenging. The translators used both translation and transliteration to convey in Tamil the names of the three Persons of the Trinity—YHWH (the Father), Jesus Christ (the Son) and the Holy Spirit.

a. YHWH—The main point of discussion was whether the term should be transliterated or translated. Many felt that since the tetragrammaton was not the name of God, it should be translated as closely as possible to convey the meaning of the ‘Existing’ or ‘Eternal One’ (Tisdall 1906: 738). Tisdall’s reasoning was that “a *translation* ... seems to be required, if certain passages at least are to have any clear significance for the modern reader” (Tisdall 1906: 735). Wenger, in his essay on Bible translation in India, agreed that though the term Jehovah (the Anglicised form of YHWH) presented the greatest perplexity, it had to be translated and not transliterated. In his opinion, using the name would represent ‘God’ as the national divinity of the Jews and thus circumscribed by geographical limits, “very much in the same way in which Rama [wa]s considered as the special deity of the Hindus of Northern India” (Wenger 1876: 6). He also thought that the meaning of the term was significant for people to know and that there would be dispute over whether to transliterate Jehovah or YHWH. The translated term should therefore contain three important connotations: it should express the essential meaning of Jehovah; it should be recognized as closely related to the ‘Lord’

of the New Testament; and it should be a proper name. His answer for the Bengali Bible was ‘*sada-prabhu*’ which approximates ‘Ever-lord’ or ‘Ever-existing.’ According to him, *dēva* might be the right term in southern and western India, but definitely not in Bengali (Wenger 1876: 5-8).

In the Tamil versions of the Old Testament, YHWH was usually translated as *karttar* to denote a creator-god. It is derived from the Sanskrit root *kr*, which means to create or make. The term was used in the *Bhagavad Gita* in chapter 18 to refer to the five factors underlying all actions. But the term was transferred from the philosophical sphere to the theological when Viṣṇu was referred to as the creator of all the empirical world, where Viṣṇu as creator was completely independent of his creation. The term has also been used to refer to Brahma and Siva. In Śaivite literature, it was used as *kāraṇakartta*, in the sense of an agent who was the cause of a certain action. The term *karttar* was used for the first time in the Ave Maria in Henriquez’s *Tāmbiran Vāṇakkam* (1577) to denote ‘The Lord is with thee:’ *karttar unniṭattilē*. Nobili used the term *karttar* in place of *caruvēcuvaraṇ* at times. He also used *karttar* for Christ to denote his two-fold nature, the divine and the human— *caruvēcuranum manusarum ontrāy irukkira karttarānavar*, (the Lord who is God and man in man). Ziegenbalg continued the usage though he was more consistent with using *karttar* for YHWH and *āṇṭavar* for *Kyrios* (Lord). He spelt the term a little differently however, as *kattar*. Both the Fabricius and Union Versions that followed used *karttar* for YHWH, and both *karttar* and *āṇṭavar* for *Kyrios*. It was Larsen, the chief reviser of the *Revised Version*, who broke this pattern and used *āṇṭavar* constantly for *Kyrios* and introduced ‘Jehovah’ (*yakōvā* in Tamil) for YHWH. The decision was taken when the Consultative Committee met in the 1920s, and the Madras Auxiliary Secretary’s letter reveals that the support for the transliteration of YHWH was unexpected:

I was rather surprised at the decision to transliterate the Tetragrammaton throughout the Old Testament instead of using the word *karttar*, as in the two current versions, or some better Tamil terms. But a considerable majority proved to be in favour of transliteration, which will bring the version into accord with the Telugu and Kanarese translations (Organe, Letter to Kilgour, April 7, 1927).

Kilgour’s response to this decision was cautious, warning that “[t]his is one of the questions on which there is always much difference of opinion.... The introduction of the word Jehovah may add another difficulty to the general acceptability of this revision” (Letter to Organe, October 19, 1932). Extracts from the Minutes of the Madras Auxiliary Committee Meeting, April 19, 1933 reveal that the rationale behind the change may once again have been the desire for uniformity with other Indian language translations: “The Sub-Committee support the decision of the Revision Committee to

retain the word *Jehovah* [yakōvā] as the rendering of the Divine name throughout the Old Testament, thus making the Tamil version uniform with the Telugu, Malayalam and Kanarese versions" (Minutes, 1933). However, this term was discussed again in subsequent meetings demonstrating the disquiet regarding the use of 'Jehovah.' Organe's letter of August 19, 1936 suggests that anxiety about the usage had been felt for more than ten years:

The rendering of the Divine Name in the Revised Tamil Old Testament was debated at length more than once in the Revision Committee. ... But it will be a long time before Tamil readers get used to this change and we anticipate further agitation for reversion to a Tamil word.

The Editorial Extracts from the Madras Committee Minutes, August 4, 1936 recorded the Bishop of Tranquebar representing criticism from Lutheran circles. In view of the strong objection raised against the introduction of the word from them, he hoped that at "some time this word will be changed" (Organe, Letter to Smith, August 19, 1936). Rev. H. Fryholm, a Lutheran missionary, sent his comments on the inappropriateness of the use of 'Jehovah' to the Revision Committee. In 'The Name Jehovah in the Revised Tamil Old Testament,' (1932) he claimed,

Whenever I read the revised Psalms to Christians (in a mass-movement area in Coimbatore District they would scarcely have heard this name of God before) and still more to Hindus, I am sure to substitute the word Karttar or Andavar wherever I meet the word Jehovah in order not to have to interrupt the reading by explaining to them that this is a name for God.¹⁷

Even those who supported this version in general found the use of Jehovah an impediment. For instance, Rev. H.A. Popley and others who were eager to popularise the *Revised Version* wanted an edition of the Psalms for liturgical use with *karttar* instead of Jehovah.

By 1939, opposition to the transliteration had built up enough to reverse the previous resolutions of the Revision Committee. The Bishop of Tirunelveli's draft letter of 1939 conveys the complete turn around in the Committee's opinion:

the members of the Executive Committee are unanimous in their opinion that the use of the name Jehovah is undesirable as a translation of the Sacred Name and a hindrance to the general use of the Revised Version, and that either Andavar or karttar printed in special type where the tetragrammaton is used in the Hebrew may be used.¹⁸

The draft suggested that once again the heads of the different churches should ascertain the opinion of the Tamil churches as to whether it would be "deemed better not to disturb the usage which has been hallowed by the lapse of time in both Fabricius and the Union Version" (note 17). The first confirmation of the decision to revert to

karttar occurs in C.H.Monahan's report as the Chairman of the Committee. According to him, since

[c]riticism of the version has been chiefly directed against the use of the word Jehovah (in its Tamil form) instead of the word for lord which had found a place both in the Fabricius and the Bower Versions of the Scriptures, ... Karttar has been restored in place of Jehovah, but in the New Testament 'Andavar' has been used frequently of our Lord Jesus Christ, though in quotations from the Old Testament 'Kyrios' is always rendered by 'Karttar' (January 31, 1942).

The change from *karttar* occurred in the *Tiruviviliyam* though, once again, it was not in favour of Jehovah. In general, the *Tiruviviliyam* used *āntavar* wherever the *Union Version* had *karttar*. The *Tiruviviliyam* also replaced the few exceptional instances in the *Union Version* where Jehovah was used with 'āntavar' (Ex. 6:3; Ps. 83:17; Isaiah 12:2; 26:4; Judges 6:24). In the instances where the specific meanings of JHWH were given, it rendered a closer transliteration of 'yāvē' (Jeremiah 23: 6, 33:16).

The lack of support for transliterating Jehovah reveals a fear of making the Bible unfamiliar to its Tamil audience. Lamin Sanneh, in *Translating the Message*, argued, "...a term for God is especially crucial, as a borrowed term implies that God is alien, unconnected with the people's past, while a term from the people's own tradition means that God has been present, even if people knew God less perfectly before they could read the Bible" (Sanneh 1989: 199). The clear preference for the translated Tamil terms of *karttar* and *āntavar*, but with a new, Christian meaning illustrates the success of a familiar term over and above a foreign one. This indicates that the use of a familiar term led to the greater assimilation of an unfamiliar concept. However, curiously, the opposite is the case with the next term.

b. Jesus Christ—In this instance the problem was not that of translating but of how best to transliterate Jesus into /yēsu and Christ into *kiristu*. There is no recorded evidence of suggestions that the name 'Jesus' should be avoided and translated instead. Wenger, a nineteenth-century missionary in India, warns that while transliterating Christ, care should be taken that it could readily be distinguished from Krṣṇā (Wenger 1876: 5). This problem was addressed in other Indian language translations besides Tamil. In Urdu for instance, using *Isa*, the Arabic form used in Islamic references to Christ, was seen as problematic because they did not acknowledge Christ as the 'Son of God' but only as one of the Prophets. Thus, *Isa* in the Urdu Bible might have conveyed that the Bible agreed with the Islamic perspective on Christ. Instead, the Urdu Bible used 'Yisu.' Others thought that using the correct form of the name established important links. As mentioned earlier, Nehemiah Goreh, a Protestant Marathi clergyman in the third quarter of the nineteenth century preferred to use 'Yesu Krist' to 'yeshu,' as he felt that

Protestants from the North-West provinces of India should not differ from all other Christians in that respect. However, as one missionary wrote: "The name of our Lord is not the same in any two languages of Europe; it is hardly to be hoped that but one, or even two forms of it, will suffice for this land; but I believe that there are abundant grounds for thinking that '*Isa Masih*' and '*Yisu Khrisht*' will live as the most generally received form of the name among the Muhammadan and Hindu peoples respectively" (T.S.W. 1875: 498).

This concern about finding the right transliterated term for the proper name, Jesus Christ, was in contrast to the debate on finding an equivalent for YHWH discussed above. Although both were proper names for God, YHWH was translated on the grounds that it would otherwise sound alien but 'Jesus Christ' (equally alien to Tamil culture) was transliterated as closely as possibly. This difference in emphasis suggests the possibility that the translators did not want to present YHWH as the specific God of the Jews; translating the meaning of YHWH would convey the impression of a universal God, not specific to any culture or race. However 'Jesus' already a modification of the Hebrew 'Yahushua' (to *Iesous* in Greek, and to *Yesus* in Latin, and finally to 'Jesus' in English), was no longer considered a specifically Hebrew name. The difference between the anglicised 'Jesus' and the Hebrew 'Yahushua' signal the distance of the name 'Jesus' from semitic culture—it made him a universal saviour. Christ, on the other hand was a title that meant 'the anointed one.' Thus, together the name was supposed to assume a universal significance. Transliterating the proper name 'Jesus Christ' was, therefore, not a problem.

Besides this, translators have worried about the appropriate term for 'Son of God' or the 'Incarnation of God.' *Tēvakumāran*, *tēvacutan*, and *tēvaputtiran* (all, son of God) were some possibilities mentioned by Bower (Bower 1852: 17). The most popular term has been *Tēvakumāran*. However, in the twentieth century, several missionaries and some Protestant Indians have suggested that the term *īsvara* would be appropriate for denoting Christ as Lord and the term *avatārā* for Christ as incarnation. Tiliander notes that Christ occupies the same position in Christian theology as *īsvara* in Hindu thought: that is, as *īsvara* is the nexus between Brahman and the empirical world, so Christ is the mediator between God and humanity (Tiliander 1974: 103). The close association of the idea of *avatārā* with *īsvara* in Hindu literature has been considered suitable for Christ as incarnation of God. Nobili first introduced the term *maṇuca avatāram* or 'human form' to refer to Christ. He did so in spite of knowing that it might lead to confusion between the incarnation of Christ and the many avatars of Viśnu. To circumvent the problem, he tried to define his use of avatar as an incarnation that referred to a real human existence consisting of body and soul. Further, he used *tēva-*

avatars to distinguish the Hindu avatars from *manuca*-avatar for Christ.¹⁹ Tiliander notes that Nobili seems to have failed to see the cosmological implications in the various myths describing avatars in human and animal forms and that the avatar of Viśnu as Krṣṇā offers a close comparison with Christ's (Tiliander 1974: 96). In spite of this, the Lutheran missionaries at Tranquebar, adopted *avatārā* and it occurred in Ziegenbalg's translations of hymns²⁰ and on the title page of the translated St. Matthew's Gospel of 1739.

The term *avatārā* was generally accepted among Protestant missionaries as one familiar to Hindus, as well as conveying best the relationship between God and Christ as his human incarnation. However, Protestant translators did not use the term in the Tamil Bible. The main question raised by the use of the term *avatārā* was how far it could convey the biblical meaning of incarnation with reference to Christ. Once again, the parity in the concept of incarnation between the Christian and Hindu belief systems meant that confusion or misunderstanding could arise. Thus, the Bible translators preferred a translation of the expression Christ 'become flesh:' *mamicamānār*. There was much discussion on the first chapter of John's Gospel, which presents Christ as 'word made flesh.' A series of articles on the translation of the Tamil Bible in the *Madras Observer* in 1865 exchanged between two individuals who signed themselves 'Vindex' and 'A.M.', focussed on the translation of Christ as 'flesh.' While the New Testament was interpreted as using the term metaphorically and in abstract, a problem arose because the Tamil word for flesh could not be used in an abstract sense but only literally. The predominant meaning of *māmicam* as flesh or meat consumed by lower castes, further complicated the issue. 'A.M.' stated that he had tested the biblical passage with those terms on a Tamil Hindu who did not understand the meaning intended. The term 'flesh' could be translated as either *māmicam* or *carīram*. Bower chose *māmicam*, which has been criticised as crude. But he quoted C.P. Brown's remarks to justify his choice: "The literal word is doubtless strange to the Indian ear as it was to the ears of the Greeks and Romans; yet we find that the apostles did not reject this Hebraism, nor can a translator evade it" (Bower 1852: 7). *Māmicam* was changed to *manītar* (human) in the *Tiruviviliyam*.

Several Catholic and Protestant Indians, however, have supported the use of *avatārā* in Bible translation. A.J. Appasamy (1891-1976) and V. Chakkrai (1880-1958), Protestant Tamils both of whom were 'rethinking' Christianity in the twentieth century did not hesitate to speak of Christ as *avatārā*, preferring the term because of its ability to make clear to Hindus the nature and mission of Christ; at the same time, they also emphasized the uniqueness of Christ as *avatārā*. That is, they wanted to differentiate Christ as the one and only Christian *avatārā* from the many Hindu

avatārās. Similarly, Raymond Pannikar (1918-), an Indian Catholic, has argued that the *īsvarā* in Hinduism was fully revealed in the Christ of Christianity. Pannikar learnt the Vedanta and the Bible simultaneously and attempted to find a synthesis of the two systems, which enabled him to argue for a syncretism of the two religions, where Hinduism was transformed into the higher sphere of Christianity (Boyd 1969: 222-26). However, this led to further debate in the twentieth century on the suitability of the term. E. W. Thompson, for instance wrote:

The term *avatar* is employed by the Hindus in an indeterminate sense. It may denote any appearance of God. For this reason it is a word which must be used by Christians with care and caution and with clear definition. When they [Christians] speak of the Incarnation, they mean that God's very self dwelt among men in a sense real human body with a complete human nature (Thompson 1956:88).

Such misgivings meant that *avatārā* was rejected by all twentieth century translations as well and never used in the Tamil Bible in spite of aptly describing the concept of incarnation. Protestant avoidance of the term *avatārā* is another instance of a parallel Hindu concept perceived as a threat to Protestant meaning.

Christ as 'Word' or 'Logos' could be rendered by several Tamil equivalents, and so there were alternatives to the literal and awkward *vārttai* chosen by the *Union Version*. Bower mentioned *Vāk* (word), *Buddhi* (wisdom) and *Om* (mystic name of deity) as other possibilities but gave reasons as to why they were not entirely acceptable. *Vāk* (also, goddess of speech), though the best word, was objectionable as being of the feminine gender, involving possibly some idea of a *sakti* (energy) of the Deity (Bower 1852: 11). Bower rejected *Buddhi* or wisdom because "the derivation of the Buddhi, as the first born from the Divine essence in the Sankhya Cosmogony, would make this an appropriate word, but that it may be considered unsafe in matters of this nature, to render St. John's term by any other than that by which the word of God in its more earthly meaning is designated" (Bower 1852: 11). The *Tiruviviliyam* changed the reference to Logos from *vārttai* to *vākku*.

The other Tamil terms used for Christ are *karttar*, *āṇṭavar* (lord), *nātan̄* (lord), *kuru* (spiritual teacher) and *cāmi* (master). Of these, the last three are not used in the Bible but in the wider Christian literature of hymns, prayers, liturgy and sermons. *Karttar* and *āṇṭavar* were used prominently in Bible translations from the very beginning and often interchangeably for both YHWH and Christ. When there was an attempt on the part of the Revision Committee for the *Revised Version* to differentiate between the two terms by using different terms there was opposition from Protestant Tamils:

The word *karttar* (Lord—Greek: Kurios) is used in the *Union Version* both for God the Father and God the Son, but in the *Revised Version* the word is exclusively

applied to God the Father, while the term andavar (Master) or dasan (disciple) is substituted for karttar when the reference is to God the Son, thus reducing Christi to an inferior status (Jesudian 1945: 57).

It is significant to note that *karttar* and *āntavar* were terms not used by Tamil Śaivites, whereas the other terms mentioned above (*cāmi*, *nātan*) were frequently used by Śaivites both in literature and in popular expressions to refer to the Hindu gods. This was probably the reason why the latter were kept out of the Bible and occur only in non-biblical Protestant literature.

Further, it is significant that out of all the terms for 'god' the only one to be transliterated was the name 'Jesus Christ.' Terms to denote his lordship, such as *āntavar*, *nātan* and *cāmi* were usually added to the name in popular usage to distinguish the name as divine. Furthermore, these terms also assisted in the assimilation of the name 'Jesus Christ,' signalling that a spiritual lord, master or teacher was being referred to.

c. The Holy Spirit—As mentioned earlier, Catholic missionaries first represented the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Christian Trinity, in Tamil by transliterating the Latin *Spiritus Sanctus* as *icpiritu cantu*. Ziegenbalg borrowed the Catholic term for his New Testament. This was however changed to a translated term from Fabricius's version onwards. The terms 'Holy Spirit' or 'Holy Ghost' were translated as *paricutta āvi*, a term that used Sanskrit root for *cutta* (pure) to denote 'holy' and *āvi* for 'spirit.' This term was used until the *Union Version*. However, the *Revised Version* introduced a new translated term based on Tamil roots: *tūya āvi* where *tūya* is the Tamil term for holy and *āvi* for spirit. In this instance, the change from *paricutta āvi* to *tūya āvi* was not because there was dissatisfaction with the conceptual make-up of the first phrase. The only difference was that *tūya āvi* was a translation with Tamil rather than Sanskrit roots.

This is another instance of transliteration (*icpiritu cantu*) being rejected. Instead, translating the term using Tamil words already in circulation served the purpose better.²¹ Both phrases, *paricutta āvi* and *tūya āvi*, have been accepted as having their own special Christian meaning and are used in parallel in the Tamil churches at present. One of the reasons for the lack of controversy over this term is the absence of an equivalent concept in the Hindu belief system: thus, there was no need to either compete with or erase existing religious notions. The uncomplicated translation history of this term works as counterpoint to some of the terms discussed above where the main concern had been how best Protestant concepts of God and holiness could be represented as different from Hindu ideas.

The frequent changes in the translation of the term for God and the dominant space it occupied in discussions on Bible translation show how crucial it was to find the ‘right’ term. In William Smalley’s (1991) analysis of translating the term for ‘god’, whether a term was borrowed from the original language or translated using an indigenous term implied a difference between those who believed that indigenous religious terms will “distort” the message of the Bible and those that believed Christianity will be the “richer” by such borrowings (Smalley 1991: 91-2). Both positions assumed, however, that there was a fixed and essential Christian message; that it could be conveyed through translation or transliteration; and therefore the main concern about the relationship between translation and Protestant Christianity was whether the translator or translation altered that message in any way. Such attitudes did not take into account the fact that the ‘original’ could be interpreted in more than one way, that translation often highlighted the possibility of multiple interpretations, and that the processes of translation brought inevitable change to the original text and context.

Dispensing with the role of the reader in the translation process further sustained this position. Lamin Sanneh (1989) suggests that God is rooted in a people’s past through their God’s name. In the case of the Tamil language and culture, a wide choice of terms for God already existed. If such a vital connection is to be accepted between the name of the deity and the deity’s place in a people’s past, then the extensive search for the appropriate name by the translators of the Tamil Bible is justified. The translators had to purge existing beliefs in gods/goddesses (and their names) from the Protestant Tamil’s past and replace the old with a new name to worship. Further, the new terms had to be powerful enough in the religious imagination of the people to create a new ‘memory’ capable of eclipsing the past. Identifying appropriate terms, thus, was not the only task but most terms had to be monitored constantly to gauge whether appropriate Protestant concepts had become attached to them.

Several terms, such as, *tēvan*, *āntavar* and *karttar*, circulate in Protestant Tamil circles as specifically Protestant terms for a Protestant God. It is significant that except for the transliteration of Jesus Christ, all other terms that have developed into Protestant use are translations using a combination of Tamil and Sanskrit terms. Thus, the terms that proved most effective for Protestant Tamils were those that had roots, meaning and religious implications in the religious culture of their past. However, as shown in each instance, for this very reason these terms posed problems and created controversy. When such terms already belonging to the Hindu vocabulary were requisitioned for Protestant use, they pointed to a parallel concept, practice or context. They, thus, became sites for conflict because Protestant translators wanted to use the terms but desired to erase from them an entire network of associations. The best example of such

a term is *tēvan*: the intention was to remove all traces of plurality attached to the word and use it instead within a monotheistic system. In contrast, terms that did not denote a parallel concept in the Hindu system, such as *paricutta āvi*, did not raise controversy. This further complicated the task of assimilating Protestant Christianity in Tamil culture, since the terms that most enabled assimilation also most challenged the boundaries that the translators sought to fix between religions.

B. Terms for the Bible and its books:

The titles for the Tamil Bible and some of its books have also changed considerably from one translation to the other. Finding the appropriate title for the Bible in Tamil was a pressing requirement since the Bible had to compete with other religious scriptures available in Tamil society. As argued in Chapter 2, the choice was influenced by the need to suggest that the Bible was superior because it was the only scripture that contained absolute and verifiable Truth that presented a factual history of humankind as opposed to the supposed fables and myths of the other religions. Yet, it was important that readers recognized the text as scripture and so the title had to be familiar enough to suggest its sacred contents. The Protestant strategies used to address this double necessity also shaped popular Protestant Tamil views of the Bible in relation to other scriptures: all other sacred texts were false and the Bible was the only true Veda. The several changes in usage, similar to the translation of the terms for God, indicate the difficulties in assimilating the Tamil Bible into Tamil culture, which already possessed strong scriptural traditions of several religious systems.

The Protestant translators relied mostly on the two main terms connected with Hindu scriptures—*vētam* and *ākamam*. *Veda* (transmitted knowledge or wisdom), from the Sanskrit root *vid*, meaning to see or perceive, is a comprehensive term for authoritative and sacred Hindu literature. The *ākamarikāl* (plural of *ākamam*) are considered sacred literature by Tamil Śaivites, making this an important term in Tamil sacred vocabulary. An obvious alternative available to the translators was the Sanskrit term *śāstra*, derived from the root ‘śās’ which means ‘to inform’ or ‘instruct.’ Apart from its meaning as authoritative religious text, it also refers to law and science—medicine, astronomy or geometry for instance—in general. Though *śāstra* does not occur in any Tamil titles for the Bible it forms a prominent part of the compound for the Hindi and Marathi Bibles. The title of the Hindi Bible is *dharma-śāstra*, a term usually used to refer to religious and civic (especially Hindu) law. The Marathi title is *pavitra śāstra*, where *pavitra* means ‘holy.’

The Tamil Bible, on the other hand, has developed compounds using the terms *vētam* and *ākamam* in different combinations. A look at the way the missionaries

defined this term clarifies why these two terms were thought suitable for the Bible. Fabricius defined *vētam* as “a system of a religious doctrine; a religion” and did not mention the four Hindu Vedas at all. However, he defined the next entry, *vētāpusṭtakam*, as “the book wherein the law of religion is revealed, the holy bible.” Similarly, *ākamam*, according to him, referred in general terms to, “a law-book, a book of morals”; he gave no indication of the existence of the body of Śaivite literature which were termed *akamam*.²² Fabricius’s dictionary gave the misleading impression that the Bible was the only book or *vēta* where the “law of religion was revealed.” Winslow and Rottler’s dictionary entries were more accurate. *Vētam*, according to Rottler was “the generic term for the books, or writings, deemed sacred by the *Hindus*: said to have been delivered by *Brahma*, but compiled from tradition by *Vyasa*.” He followed this with the names of the four Vedas and brief descriptions of what they contained. He also mentioned *vētāpusṭtakam* or *pusttakam* as a term of “Christian usage, the Bible.” By entering such compound terms as specifically Christian, Rottler highlighted the difference in language use between Protestants and Hindus. In contrast to Protestant usage, Catholic missionaries in South India, who did not translate the Bible, used the term *vēta* quite differently. De Nobili, for instance, had used the term to refer to religion rather than to scripture. Hence, his term for Christianity was *tēva vētam* (divine religion).

Since *vētam* referred both to a system of religion and a religious book, it was considered a general term that was safe to use as part of the title for the Tamil Bible. The first title for the Tamil New Testament was: *Vētāpōsttakam* and the 1714 edition of the four Gospels and Acts was called *Ancuvētāpōsttakam*, literally, ‘the book of the five Vedas.’ The addition of ‘*pōsttakam*’ may have been an effort to translate the Greek *biblos*, as well as to signal difference from other existing Hindu Vedas. The title *Vētāpusṭtakam* was in use among Tamil Protestants until the early nineteenth century; Vedanayaka Sastri used this term to refer to the Bible in his pamphlets written in criticism of Rhenius’s revisions in the 1820s and 30s. The Tamil title of the *Union Version* was changed to *Cattiyā Vētam* (true Veda). This title indicated that the book was scripture similar to the Vedas, however, it was the true or real Veda. According to Packiamuttu (2000), Arumuga Navalar had objected to the use of *Veda* for the Bible as the term referred exclusively to the four Vedas. To use the term for any other sacred writing was inappropriate for Navalar. The committee had overruled him and justified their choice on the grounds that the prefix indicated the difference between the two scriptures. The use of the term *vētam*, which refers to scriptural parallels in other religious traditions, should have created confusion or misunderstanding for Protestant Tamils, as in the case of other terms discussed above. However, the use of *vētam* was a success amongst Protestant Tamils. This success, in spite of the parity in concept,

was due to the shift in the relationship between Protestant Tamils and scripture. Protestant Tamils, many of whom were from lower caste Hindu social background, had had no access to the Hindu *Vedas*. Unlike other religious concepts or practices, where Protestant converts were required to make adjustments in understanding or attitude, the concept of the Bible as *Veda* did not represent a radical change. Since the Bible was the first sacred text they were actively encouraged to read and comprehend, it was easy for them to accept it as scripture or *vētam*. With added prefixes that denoted its holy and truth status, there was little difficulty in the assimilation of this title of the Bible for Protestant Tamils.

In the Tamil title of the *Revised Version*, the Tamilised forms of the Sanskrit terms *vētam* and *ākamam* (representing two kinds of Hindu scriptures, the Sanskritic and the Tamil) were both used. The terms when combined formed *Vētākamam* in Tamil, as if to suggest that the Bible encompassed the scope of the *Vētās* and *Ākamās* and its contents could replace both. The full title of this version was *Paricutta Vētākamam*, where the term *paricutta* (of high purity) reiterated its holy character. Although the *Revised Version* was not popular, twentieth-century reprints of the *Union Version* adopted its title: thus, present editions of the *Union Version* are titled *Paricutta Vētākamam*.

The 1995 version, however, in its agenda to use Tamil terms, developed *Tiruviviliyam* as a title for the Bible. The decision to transliterate the Greek *biblos* as the Tamil *viviliyam*, in conjunction with *tiru* (holy), resulted in the title *Tiruviviliyam*, which was not very familiar to Tamils, either Protestant or non-Protestant, as a title for the Bible. The Madras University Tamil Lexicon, however, has entered *viviliya-nūl* (book) for the Bible but has no separate entry for *vētākamam* or *vētappoštakam* as terms in Christian usage. The term *viviliyanūl* was first used as an official subtitle for the Bible by the *Revised Version*. An alternative the Revision Committee could have used was the Tamil term *tirumarai* (holy book), which though in use amongst some Protestant Tamil theologians,²³ was rejected as a title for the Bible on etymological grounds. The term *marai* means 'that which is secret or hidden' and is a Tamil term for the Śaivite sacred texts and the *Vedas*. Unwilling to convey the impression that the message of the Bible was concealed and available only to a select few, the way the *Vedas* were traditionally understood to be, the translation committee rejected this term. Perhaps the decision to use '*Tiruviviliyam*' also arose from a desire to stop the competitive comparison of the Bible with Hindu scriptures. For instance, Thomas Thangaraj, a Protestant Tamil theologian, supports the use of *viviliyam* because the "Vedas do refer to the Hindu *Vedas* and, therefore, if one respects the integrity of the Hindu religious tradition, one should refrain from using *Veda* for the Bible" (Thangaraj

1999: 141). Thangaraj also comments that the use of *viviliyam* "fits well with the growing concern among biblical scholars in India to engage in Biblical hermeneutics in a multi-scriptural context. In this situation, one needs to affirm the particularity of each scripture, and using the word *viviliyam* affirms the uniqueness of Christian Scriptures while respecting the integrity of the Hindu scriptural tradition" (Thangaraj 1999: 142). In any case, while most of the previous titles had presented the Bible in familiar, universal terms, the recent title defamiliarized the Bible, identifying it as the book of a specific religious system.

The early translations of the Bible also had descriptive sub-titles that indicated the sacred subject of the book to the potential reader. Ziegenbalg gave very elaborate subtitles to his translations that informed the reader in detail of what to expect. For instance, the title page of his *Añcuvētāposttakam* (Gospels and Acts, 1714) summarised the contents of the five books, beginning with *cūtanākiya caruvēcuranāyirukkira yēcukkirištta nātarānavar inta pūlokattil manusanāyp pirantta viceśāṅkaļaiyum*, that is, [it is a book that reveals] 'the news of the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ, who is also Son and God, into this world as man.' His titles for each part of the Old Testament (published in six parts between 1714 and 1728) were equally descriptive about the nature and abilities of an all-powerful God. He also indicated the sacred nature of the published book by adding that the book contained knowledge, which Moses had heard directly from the holy mouth of God (*mōce yenkiravar caruvēcuranūtaiya tiru vāyile niṇtru kēṭṭa nāyaṅka!*). These descriptive titles signalled the entry of a new text into Tamil culture by providing details of a new God, miraculous acts and introducing a contextualising framework within which the translation was to be read.

Similarly, the title page of the 1847 Version with the Old Testament translated by Fabricius and the New Testament by Rhenius had the following title: *cattiyavētam: itile manītar iratccikkapatumpatikkāka carvalōka tayāpararāna kaṭavuļ aruliceyta paṭalaiya yērpatum putiya yērpātum*. In English: "The true Vedam: in it are the Old and New Testaments given by the grace of God who is the benefactor of the whole world, for the salvation of mankind." The title page of the New Testament of the *Union Version*, (1880 edition) was similarly descriptive: '*karttarum ulaka iratccakarumākiya iyēcu kiristuvānavar aruliceyta putiya yērpātu*' ("The New Testament given by the grace of Jesus Christ, Lord and Saviour of the world." The recurrence of 'world' or the 'whole world' in the titles signals the desire of the translators to emphasize the universal nature of the biblical message. It could be argued that long and descriptive titles were the norm until the beginning of the twentieth century and that the translators of the

Tamil Bibles merely followed that practice. However, the corresponding English title pages for the same nineteenth-century editions were brief. The English title page for the 1847 Version mentioned above was: "The Holy Bible in Tamil: the Old Testament translated from the original by Rev. J.P. Fabricius; the New Testament by the Rev. C.T.E. Rhenius." This indicates that these Tamil sub-titles had a specific purpose: they were used to emphasize the superiority as well as the universal character of both the translated scripture and the God it professed.

The title pages of twentieth-century versions and editions of older translations, however, were brief. Although the shift to shorter titles in twentieth-century print occurred generally it can also be argued that the Tamil Bible now more familiar as one of the religious texts available in Tamil society had no further need for a title that advertised its sacred contents. Twentieth-century sub-titles usually pointed to its translated nature, that it was a work translated from the original Hebrew and Greek languages. There is an important addition to the title of the *Tiruviviliyam*: its subtitle (*potu molipeyarppu*, that is, common translation) draws attention to the use of "common Tamil" as one of the main aims of the version. This emphasis on the register of the target Tamil language used is significantly different from previous emphases on the subject of the translated Bible.

The terms used to translate the titles of several books of the Bible also reveal the translators' desire to monitor the interpretation of their contents. Ziegenbalg and Fabricius used *ākamam* in some titles of individual books of the Old Testament. The books of the Pentateuch, for instance, were titled, the '*ākamam*' written by Moses and were numbered as the first or second *ākamam*. This continued to be the practice until the translators of the *Union Version* attempted to translate the titles and to add the term *ākamam* to them. Its first book was titled *ātiyākamam*, for instance, suggesting that it was the first ('*āti*') book (*ākamam*) in the chronology. The rest of the books of the Pentateuch were named: *yāttirākamam* (the book of the journey), *lēviyarākamam* (the book of the Levites), *en̄nākamam* (the book of numbers), and *upākamam* (book of Deuteronomy; originally, secondary Śaivite *ākamas*, said to be 207 in number). The books of the Chronicles were similarly *naļākamam* (where *nāl* refers to 'time' or 'days'). In contrast, the translators of the *Tiruviviliyam* made a point of avoiding *ākamam* in preference for Tamil terms and gave titles that mainly translated meanings of the originals. For instance, the first five books of the Old Testament were titled: *toṭakanūl* (the first book), *viṭutalai payaṇam* (journey of liberation), *lēviyar* (the Levites), *en̄nikkai* (numbers) and *inai cattam* (law). These titles did not merely replace Sanskrit with Tamil terms but encouraged a different reading: for instance, the translation of Exodus as 'Journey of liberation' points to the political leanings toward Liberation Theology,²⁴

which has influenced Protestant Tamil theology in the second half of the twentieth century.

With regards to other books of the Old Testament, the Bible translators also used titles to discipline the reading of certain books. Fabricius used an elaborate title for the Psalms derived from Sanskrit roots: *nāna caṅkītāṅkalin pustakam* [the book of wisdom songs]. He probably added the term *nāna*, (wisdom) to suggest their difference from songs of other religious traditions and secular songs. This was shortened to *caṅkītāṅka!* [songs] in the *Union Version*. The *Tiruviviliyam*, in keeping with its emphasis on Tamil terms, titled the book *tirupāṭalka!* (holy songs). One Old Testament book that needed particular attention was the Song of Solomon. Ziegenbalg translated the title with adjectives, such as *makā unnitamāna* (an exceedingly elevated nature), that suggested that the songs were of an irreproachable nature. Likewise, the *Union Version* used *unnata pāṭtu* (songs of an elevated nature) suggesting that the contents of the book were of a high moral nature. Both ‘*makā*’ and ‘*unnata*’ being Sanskrit terms added further stature to the titles. In contrast, the translators of the *Tiruviviliyam* have used *inimai miku pāṭal* (songs of pleasure or delight), Tamil terms which do not veil the genre of the book, that is, a collection of love songs. However, in the introduction to the book, the translators clarify that the accepted interpretation was that these songs of love were an allegory for God’s love for his people and Christ’s for his Church.²⁵ Thus, this translation still attempts to direct the reader’s interpretative role towards a more accepted direction.

Translations for the term ‘gospel’ have varied in different Bible versions. Ziegenbalg, following De Nobili called the gospels *cuvicēśam*, that is, a translation of ‘good news’ using two Sanskrit terms *cu* (good) and *vicēśam* (news). This was changed marginally to *cuvicēśam* in Fabricius and the *Union Version*. Although the *Revised Version* attempted to use as many Tamil terms as possible, the report of the Revision Committee stated that there was no change to the titles of the four Gospels: “There was no difference of opinion at all that *suvisesham*, shall be retained in the names of the books.”²⁶ It was felt that they could not change the Tamil term *cuvicēśam*, which had been in use for two centuries especially since the Gospels had primary status as the books that revealed the life of Christ. The fear of ‘confusing’ or upsetting their Protestant audience was a reason for the conservative decision. The *Tiruviviliyam*, however, changed the title to *narcēyti*, also a translation of ‘good news’ but a compound using Tamil terms. By the time this change was introduced in the Tamil Bible, *narcēyti* had already been in use for a few decades amongst Protestant Tamil

preachers and theologians committed to the use of *tanittamil*. Hence, the translators felt that the alteration would not cause much controversy.

The above analysis indicates that the terms used to translate the titles of Bible and its books had as important a function in the assimilation of Protestant Christianity as the terms for God. Once more, the main concern was that the parity in concepts that existed between Protestant Christianity and the other religious systems should not lead to either confusion or dilution of the Protestant message. This concern meant that although the same terms were used to define Protestant scriptures, the translators wanted to replace the old with new meanings. The use of terms such as *vētam* and *ākamam* were efforts to appropriate the sacred value attached to the Vedas and Śaivite scriptures. Such decisions reveal the strained nature of the assimilative strategies employed since they expose the paradox of aiming for acceptance within the normative codes of a receiving culture: not by emphasizing similarity but by emphasizing difference. This initial strategy changed with the use of *Tiruviviliyam* in the twentieth century, where the title indicated that the Bible was one of the sacred texts rather than the only scripture that replaced all others. Despite this contradiction in terms, Protestant Tamils by the late-twentieth century did identify the use of *vētam* as an appropriate term for the Bible. Since the Hindu Vedas and the Śaivite *ākamam* were not available to all members of Tamil society, they had not been a part of their religious experience. In contrast, the Bible and its message, highlighted as freely accessible to all literates, became the first scripture to be bought and read by the non-priestly castes of Tamil society. It is this factor that enabled the absorption of these terms for Protestant worship.

C. Ritual and soteriological terms:

This section analyses a group of terms that did not change from one translation to another in spite of controversial theological interpretations regarding the terms used. Most of these terms were changed only in the *Tiruviviliyam*, in order to replace Sanskrit with Tamil terms. The five terms discussed are Tamil terms for sacrifice, salvation, baptism, and for prayer and worship. Although the use of these terms by Hindus was a concern, disagreement regarding them arose mainly as a result of the conflicting theological interpretations between different Christian denominations, that is, between Catholic and Protestant or between the Baptists and other Protestant denominations. The Catholic practice, on the whole, was to draw similarities between Hindu and Catholic ritual practices, and achieve assimilation thereby. Protestant practice, on the other hand, was to stress the differences between apparently similar practices. As a result, Protestant translators have distanced themselves from both Hindu and Catholic

practices as equally "heathen" or "idolatrous." This has meant that Protestant efforts at assimilation were further complicated, since it put pressure on them to find a different route towards assimilation that indicated Protestant uniqueness in the face of Hindu and Catholic similarities.

1. *Pali* (sacrifice)—The difficulty of conveying the idea of Christ's sacrifice of his life as the basis for the salvation of humankind generated much debate especially in the nineteenth century, as mentioned in Chapter 2. The earliest Catholic and Protestant translations used *pali*,²⁷ a term Sanskrit in origin, in most Indian language translations, including Tamil. Protestant critics of the term accused the Catholics of adopting it at first without regarding the original meaning of the word. It was strongly criticised by some as "abhorrent to our true idea of sacrifice," suggesting instead the fury and vindictiveness of the Divine Being (Slater 1875: 51). These missionaries differentiated the Christian idea of sacrifice from the Hindu concept. It was noted in the nineteenth century that Hindu practices emphasised slaying as blood sacrifice to demons and lesser gods and was man's gift to appease the divine being. Hindus did not use *pali* to refer to any form of sacrifice to one of their principal Gods. For instance, Monier-Williams's *Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (1872) defines the term as a "propitiatory oblation (esp. an offering of portions of food...to certain gods, semi-divine beings, household divinities, spirits, men, birds, other animals and all creatures including lifeless objects;)." Rottler's entry under *pali*, was likewise, "an animal, or its flesh offered to Durga" and *narpali* [human sacrifice] "a human sacrifice to Cali." On the other hand, the Christian idea was understood as a sacred sacrifice and God's benign gift to humankind. The abominable associations of the term, according to Slater, gave a false conception of the nature of sacrifice where, by a bloody present, "he is able to effect a change in the angry mind of deity or demon" (Slater 1875: 40). In his opinion, this would give even the more enlightened Hindus an idea of Christian sacrifice far inferior to that which they had received from their own sacred books. A brief reference to the controversy on the use of *pali* in the Bible in *The Indian Evangelical Review* (1874) emphasized how different the Christian notion of sacrifice was supposed to be from the brahmanical understanding of the term *pali*:

After this explanation of *bali*, feeding the hungry *rakshasas* and *bhutas* in order to draw their attention away from their real god and his processions, I tried to find out whether this is the general meaning of *bali* among the heathen, and I am certain that it only means offerings to Kali in any form, or to *rakshasas* or *bhutas*, and can never be compared with or used for the sacrifice of Christ. I only wonder how this abominable word could stand so long in the Bible, and be used by missionaries and native helpers. These latter ought to have found it out (From 'Notes and Intelligence' 1874: 515).

Some translators had however felt that using the term *pali* was appropriate because the sacrifice of Christ was "a blood-offering." Slater gave another reason why *pali* may have been used: "...the early missionaries who came to this country held views of expiation, in connection with the Christian atonement ... they fell in more with the pagan view of expiation found in India and in other heathen lands, ...than what is now held to be the Scriptural view of Christian propitiation" (Slater 1875: 39). Slater wrote in dismay of a 'native missionary' who distinctly asserted that he preferred *pali* because it conveyed the idea that the sacrifice of Christ appeased the wrath of God. Although it was claimed that the term has been given a different meaning in Christian usage, Slater believed that people would bring to the term negative associations in their mind. Besides, copies of the Bible read without the help of Christian preachers would encourage such misleading ideas.

The alternatives available to the translators were *yajna* or *yagya* (both of which mean an 'act of worship,' 'devotion,' 'offering' or 'sacrifice'), also Sanskrit in origin, which Slater felt better expressed the sacredness of Christian sacrifice. Slater cited from Rev. Kittel's *Tract on Sacrifice* to support his argument that *yajna*, being the one word to denote ancient religious sacrifice among the Aryans to which great sacredness was attributed, served the Christian idea much better. *Yajna* comes from the Sanskrit root 'to worship,' that is, a sacrificial rite as an act of worship offered to a principal God. Winslow's entries for the two terms *pali* and *yajna* suggested the difference in usage. While the former term was explained as "Sacrifice of an animal, regarded as food for a ferocious deity, either propitiatory or to obtain favours," the latter is glossed simply as "a sacrifice" and "an oblation." Slater distinguished this term mentioned in the Vedas and "regarded by true Hindus as a divine institution" from the "heathen bali," a childish present to pacify a fury (Slater, 1875: 43). He concluded: "And when it is added that by means of the *yajna* the sacrificers wanted 'to obtain heaven,' and that they sacrificed 'by faith,' we think it is not difficult to see which word, *pali* or *yajna*, connects itself most nearly with Christian thought and truth, and commends itself most to Christian sentiment and conviction" (Slater 1875: 44).

Clearly, Slater's concern was twofold. First, that the language used by Protestant Indians should reveal the difference between Christianity and Hinduism. Slater's second concern was that Indians should not associate Protestant Christianity with what were considered as lower elements in Hinduism. Missionaries often colluded with the established hierarchies within Hinduism and co-opted elements, usually aspects considered superior in Hinduism, in order to represent Christianity or to present Christianity as the ultimate fulfilment of Hinduism.²⁸ The conflict over the use of *pali* is an instance of how the translator's choice of just one term could make the balance of

power between the different religious systems in India vulnerable to destabilization: thus, "etymological definition, though trifling when a word's imported meaning is sure, becomes indispensable when the meaning is unfixed, as in the case before us, where the Christian and heathen ideas of sacrifice, as popularly held, so widely differ" (Slater 1875: 45).

A reference to the popular use of the term *pali* in Protestant circles in nineteenth-century South India presented an interesting counterpoint to such missionary anxieties. In the course of instructing their catechists, missionaries working in the Canara district reported the following in 1873:

...among other things, we objected strongly to the use of the word *bali* for the sacrifice of Christ, contending that it means only and exclusively an offering to *kali*, or to *rakshasas* or demons. None of the twenty catechists saw anything wrong in the use of the word; the reason being that they all grew up in the church, reading the word *bali* in the Bible from childhood, and perhaps have even been taught so in the seminary. We proposed the word *yajna*, and requested our catechists to make it a point of study during next year, to learn to understand the meaning of the word *bali*, as the heathen understand it and report about it next time we meet. I do not think that our advice has as yet done much good, as I hear again and again preached *bali* ('Notes and Intelligence' 1874: 514).

It is apparent that by at least the late nineteenth century, *pali* was understood by Protestant Indians within a Christian context and there were no residual associations with Hindu practices in their minds. This term is a good example of a successful reworking of the original meaning. The continuous use of the term in all the versions of the Tamil Bible—Fabricius used *pali* in his Old Testament (1898); Rhenius's revision of 1844 also uses *pali* in the Old Testament and generally for Christ's sacrifice in the New Testament except once when he uses *atikkappattār* (that is, 'was beaten,' I Cor 5:7); the *Union Version*, *Revised Version* and the *Tiruviviliyam* all use *pali*—is further evidence of how far it has been assimilated into Protestant usage in Tamil. Although the term was used without any additions or modifications, it conveyed a different meaning of sacrifice (in nature and purpose) to Protestant Tamils.

2. *Iratcippu* (salvation)—The Protestant term for 'salvation' in Tamil has been *iratcippu*. Fabricius introduced it into the Tamil Bible. This has often been criticised as inadequate because of its immediate connotation of protection rather than redemption or salvation. Further, there was overlap with Hindu usage of wishing for God's protection. Taking it from the Sanskrit root *raks*, that is, to protect or guard, Fabricius differentiated between Hindu usage as God rescuing man from physical danger and Christian usage as God rescuing man from sin (Tiliander 1974: 173). The alternative to *iratcippu* was the Hindu term for salvation, *mōkṣa*, used by the Catholics. Ziegenbalg followed Catholic usage when he translated the Bible. However, most Protestant translators rejected *mōkṣa* on

the grounds that the Christian notion of salvation was entirely different from the Hindu. Winslow's entry for *iratcakam* was general—"preservation, protection, salvation, deliverance from evil"—as compared to the note on *mōksam*: "Heaven, eternal bliss, endless felicity, everlasting happiness, liberation from the body, release from transmigration, ...absorption." Winslow obviously associated *mōksam* with the Hindu understanding of salvation as the soul's release from transmigration. Rottler's explanation was close to Winslow's but made a more direct reference to the Hindu context in which the term was understood: "liberation from the body, and from transmigration; release *in general*; according to the *advaitas* absorption into the divine essence; *in adopted usage heaven*." Since the Protestant missionaries thought that using *mōksa* would give a false idea of the Protestant concept of salvation, they only used it in conjunction with other terms: such as, *mōtca irācciyam* for 'kingdom of heaven' or, *mōtcañandam* for heavenly joy used by the Lutheran Tamil liturgy and hymnbook and the Catholic translation of the Bible from Pondicherry.

A Tamil alternative to *iratcippu* is *mītpu*, which means to release or redeem from debt or slavery. Clayton's *Tamil Bible Dictionary* (1923) attempted to shift usage from *iratcippu* to *mītpu*: *iratcippu* was defined briefly as a term commonly used to denote *mītpu* or redemption by God but the several connotations of the term were discussed in detail under *mītpu*. In spite of changing opinion in the twentieth century that *mītpu* was better than *iratcippu*, the *Revised Version* continued to use *iratcippu*, and it was the *Tiruviviliyam* that finally moved to *mītpu*. The Tamil root of *mītpu* is *mīl*, which expresses the important aspect of redemption. Its secular meaning of redeeming or releasing from debt or slavery was used in the biblical context for Christ redeeming humankind from slavery to Satan and sin. This—translating the Protestant notion of salvation—is an example of the difficulty of translating a concept that existed in other religions with different emphases. Even though *iratcippu* could not etymologically convey the full connotation of the Christian notion of salvation, it was preferred to *mōksa*, which might have suggested an alternative means and mode of salvation to the one intended.

Neither *iratcippu* nor *mītpu* were changed lexically for Protestant use. They were invested with new meaning instead. The change from *iratcippu* to *mītpu* was mainly a change from Sanskrit to Tamil terms. However, both terms were far removed in connotation from the Hindu term *mōksa* preferred by the Catholics.

3. Ñānasnānam (baptism)—Translating the term 'baptism' was controversial mainly due to doctrinal differences between the Baptists and the other Protestant missionary

groups. At one point in the nineteenth century, it was serious enough to threaten the stability of the Bible Society with a split amongst its supporters. The problem centred on the interpretation of the term as meaning either “immersion in water” or the “sprinkling of water,” with the Baptists choosing the former. In various Indian languages, translators preferred to transliterate the term to avoid controversy, so for instance, the term *baptisma* was used in the Hindi Bible. The Tamil Bible translators decided on the Sanskrit term *snānam* (to bathe) as the most appropriate because it was a generic term for all types of washing or bathing, and could thus mean either immersion in or sprinkling of water besides being a term familiar to Tamils. However, the prefix *ñāna* was added to the term to imply that the result of this ritual bathing would be the gaining of wisdom. The early Danish missionaries had to differentiate between the Hindu rituals of purification which were understood literally as purifying the soul from the Protestant ritual which was a symbolic act of purification: “I intimated, that the Use of *Baptism* or sprinkling of Water among *Christians*, for the washing away of *Original Sin*, was *only* symbolic, representing unto our Faith the precious Blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, which purifieth the Conscience ...not that Water, properly and materially speaking, can wash away our Sins, and purifie our immaterial Spirits” (Ziegenbalg 1719: 218-19). *Ñānasnānam* gradually gained currency as a Protestant Tamil term.

Fabricius did not distinguish the term as Christian in his dictionary and gave the meaning as, “the holy baptism, the washing of regeneration.” Winslow marked the term as Christian usage and gave baptism as the meaning. Under *snānam*, he gave “bathing, ablution” and in a note he elaborated on the seven kinds of *snānam* or purification counted by brahmans, after which he differentiated *ñānasnānam* as a term of Christian usage. Rottler, too, mentioned that the term was Christian and added “spiritual-washing” besides the ritual washing of baptism. Like Winslow, Rottler also gave the seven types of purification for the Brahman. Bower mentioned *jalasamsara* [purifying rite with water] and *jala Bishcah* [consecrating with water] as alternatives; however, neither were used in his version (Bower 1852: 16). The *Revised Version* retained *ñānasnānam* in spite of both *ñāna* and *snānam* being Sanskrit terms. Discussion on the term indicates why *ñānasnānam* was used: “After some discussion about the relative merit of *ñānasnānam* and *snanathitchei* the general mind of the Committee was that in order to avoid the danger of possible controversies, where no question of doctrine were meant to be touched, the term *gnānasnānam* should be retained.”²⁹ When Tamils began compiling dictionaries in the twentieth century, the term *ñānasnānam* continued to appear as a Christian term. For instance, in P.Sankaranarayana’s *An English-Tamil Etymological Dictionary* (1911), the entry for

'baptism' was that it was an act of ritual specific to the Christian religion. The Tamil equivalent given was *camackāram*, which was understood to be a series of purifying rites or ceremonies performed to a Brahman from conception to marriage. This is a clear example of a Tamil word coined by the missionary translators seen as Christian with a somewhat incompatible parallel. *Nānasnānam* was recognized as a Christian term by the Madras University Tamil Lexicon and was defined as an important cleansing ritual performed to enter the Christian religion. The *Tiruviviliyam* used a completely different term, again from Tamil roots—*tiru muluku*—where 'tiru' is holy and 'muluku,' dipping. *Tiru muluku* leans more towards immersion than sprinkling of water so it is surprising that all the denominations represented in the committee translating this version agreed to its use. In this translation there was a desire to avoid demarcation of some terms as peculiar to the Christian religion as well as replace Sanskrit with Tamil terms. However, the new term was coined by putting two roots together in a way similar to *nānasnānam* except that it used Tamil roots instead of Sanskrit. Not commonly used outside Christian circles, it is probable that '*tirumuluku*' will also come to be known as a specifically Christian term.

Both terms were invented for Catholic and Protestant use; they were effective because the concept of ritual cleansing was familiar to Tamil culture. This parity in religious ritual and concept had potential to undermine the Christian notion of baptism. Thus, although the actual performance of the rite was a visible reminder of similar acts of cleansing that were important to other religious traditions, the Protestants were careful to emphasize that the cleansing was symbolic. The two terms *nānasnānam* and *tirumuluku* worked because they were not terms in use that were ascribed new meanings but the result of new combinations that hinted at the difference in cultural practice.

4. Cepam (prayer)—The Tamil Catholic and Protestant traditions use two very different terms to denote Christian prayer. The term commonly understood for prayer among Protestant Tamils is *ceparam*. The earliest terms used by Roman Catholics for prayer were *vāṇakkam* and *mantiram*. De Nobili moved from Henriquez' use of *vāṇakkam* (reverence, submission, worship) in his translation of *Doctrina Christam* to *mantiram*. For instance, he named the Lord's Prayer, *paramāntala mantiram*; Ave maria, *piriyatatta mantiram*; and the Apostolic Creed, *vicuvāca mantiram*. The Madras University Tamil Lexicon defines *mantiram* as thought, opinion, deliberation as well as "Vedic hymn, sacrificial formula, portion of the Veda containing the texts called R̄g or Yajus or Saman." It could also refer to a "sacred formula of invocation to a deity, as pancaksara and astaksara." These invocative and praise hymns later came to be used as mystical formulas accompanying sacrifices or other acts of worship. The

Sivamantram, in the *Tirumantram*,³⁰ for instance, is mentioned as a mystical formula that enabled one who utters the *mantiram* to become one with Siva (Tiliander 1974: 282). This characteristic of the *mantiram* as utterance of devotion in the form of formulated prayer seems to have corresponded with the Roman Catholic practice of the formal repetition of prayers and the reciting of the rosary. Though Protestants were dismissive of both Hindu and Catholic practices, it is possible that the latter's adoption of the term was an effort at assimilation through adaptation. The Roman Catholic catechism continued to use *mantiram* until the twentieth century.

Although Ziegenbalg used *mantiram* for the Lord's Prayer and the Confessional Prayer, the term disappeared from the Lutheran catechism and Protestant circles soon after. The term adopted in its place was *cepam*. The root of the Tamil term *cepam* lies in the Sanskrit 'japa' which means to utter a mantra. *Japa* usually occurs in the Tamil form *jepam* in Tamil theistic literature.³¹ *Jepam* was modified to *cepam* for Christian usage. Letters written by Tamil Lutheran catechists from 1748 onwards use only the term *cepam* whenever they refer to prayers. *Luther's Smaller Catechism in Tamil* published by the Lutheran Mission from the late eighteenth century onwards, for instance, uses 'karttarutaiya cepam' for the Lord's Prayer.³² Fabricius's definitions of *mantiram* and *cepam* reveal the way the terms came to be distinguished in Protestant circles. He defines *mantiram* as "a form of prayers; a form of conjuring or exorcising." By the nineteenth century, Winslow and Rottler classify *cepam* as a Christian term. *Mantiram* in both their dictionaries is defined as a section of the Vedas including prayers and hymns and as a mystical verse, a prayer, or form of exorcism. Rottler defines *cepam*, alternatively, as a term referring mainly to Christian practices of worship:

It is proper to note, that the word sebam, with its derivatives, originally and properly relates to private or personal prayer, ... in an indistinct, or inaudible, manner to any person near or around; and the doing so may be in the house, or temple. Any audible utterance by a Brahman while performing public ceremonies is termed archannai. The accommodated or adopted use of the word sebam, and its derivatives, among Christians relates to private, domestic, or public prayer, either mentally, in a low tone, or in a loud voice; and, by a further accommodation, to a written, or printed, formulary of prayer. In addressing *Hindus*, the original meaning must be kept in mind; the other, and accommodated uses, are become quite familiar to native Christians.

Rejecting *cepam* for its Sanskrit root, the *Tiruviviliyam* used *vēntugal* (to 'request' or 'pray') as the main term. This translation often used *iṟai vēntal* (where *iṟai* refers to 'God') as the 'pure Tamil' term for 'prayer.' This term does not occur in the Tamil Lexicon, suggesting that it is not in common use. *Cepam* continues to be the dominant term in expressions of Protestant Tamil popular piety.

5. *Ārātanai/Pūcāi* (worship)—Again, in the case of terms for ‘worship,’ the Protestants have avoided the term used by the Catholics. While the Catholic missionaries used *pūcāi* for their central act of worship, the Protestant adopted *ārātanai* to describe Protestant worship. *Pūcāi* comes from the Sankrit root ‘*pū*’ which implies an act of homage to a deity or an honoured guest but usually includes the ritual preparation of idols for worship. Fabricius made this distinction in his dictionary, for example, between *pūcāi*, “an offering or sacrifice to idols” and *ārātanai*, “divine service and worship.” Protestant denominations rejected *pūcāi* both to differentiate themselves from Hindu worship, which they understood mainly as the worship of images, as well as from the visually elaborate liturgical practices of the Catholic Church. The Catholics, however, had adopted it considering it “a step in the direction of accommodation, an effort to make the converts from Hinduism feel more at home in the new cult, when the old name is there” (Tiliander 1974: 281). In his letter to a W.J. Esq. in Mysore, Abbé Dubois compares Catholic and Protestant forms of worship to justify the Catholic practice of accommodation: “...the Protestant religion being too simple in its worship to attract the attention of the Hindoo: as it has no show, no pomp, no outward ceremonies capable of making a strong impression on the senses, it was of course disliked by a quite sensual people, and has never had any considerable success” (Dubois 1823: 10). In contrast, he presents Catholic worship as a type of ‘*pūja*’ that would appeal to Hindu sensibility:

If any of the several modes of Christian worship were calculated to make an impression and gain ground in the country, it is no doubt the Catholic form which you Protestants call an idolatry in disguise: it has a *Pooga*, or sacrifice: (the mass is termed by the Hindoos *Pooga* literally, sacrifice;) it has processions, images, statues, *tirtan* or holy water, fasts, *tittys* or feasts, and prayers for the dead, invocation of saints, &c., all which practices bear more or less resemblance to those in use among the Hindoos (Dubois 1823: 10).

Protestant rejection of *pūcāi* was meant to censure such ritualistic worship of images. Instead, they favoured *ārātanai* as a term that meant worship and adoration in a general sense. This distinction between Catholic and Protestant usage has been maintained very clearly till the present.

The history of the use of the five terms discussed in this section indicates that they became a part of Protestant Tamil vocabulary with relative ease and were not changed frequently. They were replaced by other terms in the *Tiruvivillyam* only to substitute Sanskrit with Tamil terms. All five point to Protestant meanings similar in concept (in varying degrees) to those in the Hindu belief system. Of these, *pali* posed the most difficulty because the Protestant translators wanted to avoid reference to a parallel ritual. It was feared that the similarity indicated by the term associated Christ’s sacrifice

with the ritual practices of lower forms of Hinduism, thus lowering the ritual status of Christianity within Tamil culture. In spite of this, however, the term continued to be used in every Tamil translation of the Bible (not abandoned even in favour of a Tamil term), thus demonstrating the power of familiarity and tradition over etymology and lexical interpretation. The other four terms also indicated similarity with non-Protestant religious traditions but were not as contentious because they were not seen as lowering the status of Protestant Christianity within the Tamil ritual hierarchy. Further, the history of the terms points to differences in theological interpretation and assimilative strategies. First, the Protestant translators wanted to avoid confusion not only with parallels in Hindu concepts and practices but also with Catholic interpretations of Christian concepts. And second, the Protestants rejected the strategies of assimilation developed by their Catholic rivals. Thus, Catholic use of terms such as *mōkṣa*, *pūcāi* and *mantiram* was seen by Protestants as dangerously close to parallel Hindu concepts. This required the Protestants to rework alternative terms that did not encode either Catholic or Hindu concepts and practices as powerfully. These terms demonstrate further the paradox within Protestant assimilative moves, which sought to maintain boundaries of difference in the presence of analogous ritual traditions.

Conclusions

Our Committee were also somewhat surprised at this late date at the suggestion of altering such words as those used for 'God,' 'Faith,' 'hope,' and 'love.' Surely when we remember that the first translation into Tamil is two hundred and nine years old the Christian Church must certainly have come to have the generally accepted terms for religious words like these! (Kilgour, Letter to Organe, January 24, 1924)

This remark from the Editorial Superintendent of the Bible Society headquarters in London to the Secretary of MABS in 1924 is a comment on just how difficult it has been for the Protestant Tamil Church to arrive at a consensus on terms considered 'right' and 'Christian.' General acceptance was not easily or always achieved. The notion of the 'untranslatable' becomes more visible in the context of religious discourse, where what is considered most fundamental to a particular religious system is seen as almost impossible to translate. In an interesting parallel of religious translations in medieval Tamil society, Anne Monius points to a curious gap in the translations of Buddhist texts into Tamil:

Yet for all of the technical phrases translated or transliterated into Tamil in the chapters on logic and interdependent origination, the Manimekalai surprisingly lacks translations of those Pali and Sanskrit terms specifically used to describe enlightenment, salvation, renunciation, and the various Buddhist paths leading to liberation (Monius 2001: 79).

Concepts considered fundamental to Buddhism were perhaps not translated because the Buddhist translators believed that it was not possible to find equivalents in Tamil that could convey the exact meaning of the original. Protestant translators of the Bible, however, drawing from Western notions of translation, laboured under the notion that equivalents must be created if they did not exist. This was further fuelled by the Protestant belief that the Bible contained a special quality that allowed its complete translation from one language to another. However, from the above discussion of the terms used in the various versions of the Tamil Bible, it is clear that some terms proved more difficult to translate because equivalent concepts did exist between religious systems. For instance, finding the right term to denote 'God' was the most difficult and has resulted in maximum controversy. Further, the most challenging cases were those where there were similar concepts in Hinduism but were considered false or misleading by the translators. Hence, those terms that had to represent ideas labelled uniquely Christian, or even sometimes uniquely Protestant, proved most awkward to translate. The terms available to the translators of the Bible were so culture-specific (such as *avatārā* or *mōkṣa*) that their main effort was concentrated on redefining linguistic terms to suit different ideological requirements.

The terms discussed in this chapter fit mainly into three of the four categories of translation mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. The translators did not create most of the terms. The early transliterations were usually translated later; thus, barring a few, they did not survive as part of Protestant Tamil vocabulary. Although the introduction of new terms was discussed as a possibility, in practice, most terms that they used were those that already existed in one form or another as part of Tamil religious vocabulary. A majority of them had Sanskrit roots but were used in their Tamil forms with minor modifications to suggest difference from previous usage by Hindus: *caruvēcuvaran*, *parāparan*, *tēvan*, *cepam* are those that belong to this first category. The second set of terms, such as *pali*, *iratccippu*, *mītpu* and *kaṭavuḷ* were used without any lexical changes. Terms in these first two categories were assigned new meanings that required explanation by Protestant preachers to differentiate Protestant from non-Protestant usage. In the third category were terms that were the result of combining two independent Sanskrit or Tamil terms: terms such as *paricutta āvi*, *vētākamam*, *cūvicēsam*, *narcēyti*, *ñānasnānam* and *tiru muļuku* were those that became part of the Protestant Tamil vocabulary without much difficulty. Since these were the result of new combinations of terms, they did not have pre-existing meaning that needed to be replaced by Protestant sense. This meant that these did not have to compete with a set of parallel meanings that had to be replaced. Thus, terms (of the first two categories)

that underwent semantic rather than lexical changes have posed greater difficulty than those (terms belonging to the third category) whose lexical make-up was reconstituted.

The terms that underwent semantic shifts continued to exist in parallel in non-Protestant Tamil discourse. That such an overlap would create confusion to the detriment of the new religion seeking entry into Tamil society is obvious. The missionaries were aware of this complication. Writing in 1906, nearly two hundred years after the first translations of the Bible into Tamil, Tisdall complained: "...we often find that the terms we should otherwise naturally adopt in translating Biblical words into other tongues have already obtained secondary meanings or are used in a heathen connexion and hence their adoption may convey absolutely false teaching" (Tisdall 1906: 735). Requisitioning the vocabulary of competing religious systems meant that the dangers of confusion or cross-over of concepts was a continued threat. Despite such fears, the translators were not able to formulate an alternative strategy by which they could achieve complete parity between Protestant meanings and Tamil terms; with a few exceptions, neither were they able to reserve terms as exclusively Protestant in any recognizable form. Incorporation and appropriation were thus not wholly successful assimilative strategies. Instead, they revealed the continued parity of concepts between Protestant Christianity and other religious traditions in Tamil society.

The semantic and lexical decisions that Protestant translators of the Tamil Bible took indicate that they were influenced by at least one of three interrelated factors. First, missionary understanding of non-Christian religious practices as 'unchristian' and demoniac determined the kind of terms chosen or invented. A primary concern was that of cleansing Tamil religious vocabulary of association with polytheism. However, as a late nineteenth-century missionary recognized, this has meant that "... in successfully avoiding any suspicious connection with Hinduism they have been again and again driven to use terms which are either devoid of all religious signification whatsoever, or which at least effectually veil the real meaning of the doctrine indicated to all outside the Christian community" (Haigh 1894: 655). In general, the Protestant translators found difficulty in separating the *forms* of devotion, such as expressions of Hindu piety and Hindu ceremony, from the *objects* of devotion (the Protestant belief in a Trinitarian God). Conflating the two meant that those forms of devotion, which could have been suitably employed to represent Christian elements, were rejected. Protestant translators hesitated to use even those elements from Hindu cultic practices that were congruent with the Christian faith. This effort to divorce Protestant Christianity from all existing religious practices has complicated the defining of religious identity for Tamil Protestants. Lamin Sanneh contends that historically it was resistance to the prospect of being swallowed by *advaita* Hinduism that was the reason for clinging

tenaciously to Western cultural forms as insurance for a separate identity (Sanneh 1989: 104). As a result, the present generation of Tamil Protestants has inherited, along with a Protestant Tamil vocabulary, an uneasy religious and social identity. At present one of the critical debates in Protestant Tamil circles is the “inculturation” or assimilation of Protestant Christianity in Tamil society. Coming full circle, this debate has influenced the need to review Protestant Tamil vocabulary in the Bible as well as other Protestant literature.

Second, the rivalry and doctrinal disagreements between different Christian sects have also played a part in the development of contrary strategies of assimilation. Of these the hostility between the Catholic and Protestant missionary societies has had a prominent role in affecting linguistic choice. Ziegenbalg adopted much Catholic usage although he disagreed with Catholic teachings. He admitted in a letter dated December 22, 1710: “I have to confess that several books of the Papist missionaries, who have been on this coast for a long time, have quite a good style, but they present also so many human trifles and erroneous teachings that I thought it worth the trouble to go through them carefully and to free them so completely from such dangerous errors that they can be retained because of their style....” (Rajamanickam 1999: 49). Ziegenbalg’s Catholic biblical terminology filtered down to the translations that followed but were modified by later Protestant translators. *Carvēcvaraṇ*, *mantiram* and *mōkṣa* are examples of terms that were adopted by Ziegenbalg but changed by later Protestant translators to *parāparan*, *cepam*, and *iratciippu*. The rejection of *pūcai* and *avatārā* altogether is a further example of Protestant divergence from Catholic opinion.

Unlike the Protestants, the Catholic missionaries were more open to adopting Hindu forms of devotion as long as the objects of devotion were only the Catholic deities and saints. Catholic missionaries, as Zupanov points out, even mimed Hindu culture in order to transform it: for instance, Nobili did not hesitate to adopt indigenous models of leadership (kingly, Brahmanical and ascetic) closest in form and performance to that of the Jesuit missionary, to present himself as an aristocratic Brahman who had renounced the world (Zupanov 1999: 208, 209). The Catholic assimilative policy, embodied in Nobili’s strategies, “was to change the *finis* (an end, a goal) of a given social custom or expression....turning every ‘pagan’ custom into Christian practice” (Zupanov 1999: 219). Catholic missionaries who later came to India remained convinced that the Catholic method of accommodating Hindu practices was the most likely to lead to success. Dubois, for example, claimed:

...if any form of Christianity were to make an impression and gain ground in the country, it is undoubtedly the Catholic mode of worship, whose external pomp and shew appear so well suited to the genius and dispositions of the natives; and that

when the Catholic religion has failed to produce its effects, and its interests are become quite desperate, no other sect can flatter itself even with the remotest hopes of establishing its system:.. (Dubois 1823:13).

Catholics and Protestants agreed on the “disposition of the natives” and only differed in their understanding of the strategies required to circumvent it. The Catholics believed that presenting Catholicism as comfortingly similar to existing religious beliefs would suit the natural inclinations of the Tamils. However, the fear that Protestant Christianity would be diluted or reinterpreted to an unrecognisable mongrel religion encouraged Protestants to represent Protestantism as a binary opposite to previously held beliefs. Further, there was also a difference of opinion amongst Protestant denominations: a good example is the disagreement over the appropriate term for baptism discussed earlier. The Tamil Lutheran Church’s refusal to give up *parāparan* for *tēvan* when all the other Protestants united provides a further instance.

This second factor of rivalry within Christian missions in Tamilnadu, renders the first, of antagonism between Christian missions and the Hindu systems of belief, more complex by making further visible the many-layered and conflicting attitudes of Christian missionaries to Hindu beliefs. That is, the rivalry between the two Christian denominations points to the complex patterns of antagonism in the interface between Christianity and South Indian Hinduism, rather than a straightforward confrontation between two monolithic and uniform religious systems. Just as much as there was tension between the different Hindu sects, there was friction between various Christian denominations. Thus, terms were selected or invented in opposition not only to Hindu beliefs but also to other Christian interpretations of the Bible; as a result, the usage and interpretation of some terms tended to be closer to their original Hindu meanings than others. The split of Tamil Christian vocabulary between the various Christian denominations worked counter to one of the main missionary concerns of the nineteenth century: establishing a uniform and standard Christian faith amongst Tamils, and if possible for all Indians.

The third factor, which influenced the Protestant translators’ choice, was the long tradition of antagonism between Sanskrit and Tamil. The Tamil in use in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when the Bible first began to be translated, contained a high degree of Sanskrit terms. The Catholics relied heavily on Sanskrit because they saw Sanskrit as the Latin of India, a special, technical and divinely inspired language (Zupanov 1999: 238). Also, Catholic missionaries such as Nobili learnt Tamil mainly from high-caste Tamils and consciously attempted to articulate Christian ideas in a highly Sanskritised Tamil in order to maintain an elevated religious status in Tamil society. Early Protestant borrowing from this terminology thus contained

a great proportion of Sanskrit. Use of Sanskrit terminology in the Bible seems to have continued into the nineteenth century without much questioning until the point was raised in the dispute between the Madras and Jaffna Auxiliaries of the Bible Society. Both accused the other of promoting versions of the Tamil Bible that contained too many Sanskrit terms. Despite this, their combined effort of 1871 contained a high proportion of Sanskrit. The concern with replacing Sanskrit with Tamil terms became greater when the revision process began in the early twentieth century. The *Revised Version* was the first to initiate a move towards using Tamil terms. The *Tiruviviliyam* continued that concern and at times went further than the *Revised Version*. However, it is both these versions that have faced the most opposition, both while the revisions were going on and after the publication of the translations. An important reason for this opposition has been the replacement of old Sanskrit terms with new Tamil terms derived from Dravidian roots. So, for instance, one of the main reasons for opposition to the last two versions was the use of the Tamil term *kaṭavuḷ* instead of the Sanskrit term *tēvan* for 'God.' Protestant Tamil reaction ranged from vitriolic threats to burn or ban the version, to attempts to reason on religious grounds, that is, replacing Sanskrit words had no spiritual advantage but only posed a threat to the consistency of the Bible.³³ Since the move towards the use of *tanittamil* came out of a political movement in Tamilnadu and has remained associated with it, general Protestant Tamil opinion has expressed its desire to keep politics and religion separate, manifested in their desire to keep a politically charged Tamil out of the Bible.

It is possible to argue that because of the important shift in the political concerns of twentieth-century Protestant Tamil translators their strategies for assimilating Protestant Christianity differed from those in the previous centuries. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, general opinion amongst missionary translators favoured the use of Sanskrit-based Tamil terminology because they believed that that would confer sacred status on the translated Bible, which would also be a means for establishing parity across all Indian language translations. Further, Protestant Christianity would be assimilated to Tamil 'high' culture, and yet maintain a distinct identity. Increased literacy as a result of the expansion of education in the latter half of the nineteenth century ensured that upwardly mobile sections of the Protestant Tamil community identified with this alliance between Protestant Christianity and Tamil 'high' culture. However, with the political changes of the twentieth century, Protestant Tamil translators have attempted assimilation with 'low' (but 'pure') Tamil culture symbolised by the use of *tanittamil*. However, this change in assimilative strategy in the twentieth century was not welcomed by the entire community, hence the rejection of 'pure Tamil' Protestant terminology in favour of the Sanskrit-based Protestant Tamil vocabulary of

the nineteenth century. The upwardly mobile sections of the nineteenth-century Protestant Tamil community, which had become economically and socially dominant within the community in the twentieth century, saw no advantage in realigning themselves with a new set of terms after several decades of viewing Sanskrit-based Protestant Tamil terminology as linked with their Protestant Tamil identity.

The Protestant translators' belief in the cultural transparency of the Bible and its mobility across cultures was at odds with their translation experience. The linguistic and cultural differences they encountered in practice revealed the Bible as a culturally relative text that was vulnerable to contesting interpretations. Bible translators in Tamilnadu were aware, as elsewhere in colonised societies, that they were shaping religious identities through the religious language that they were formulating to present the Bible. The translators' inability to gain complete control over language was apparent even as they claimed that the Bible could be revealed in any language. On the other side of the unstable and unfixed text of the Bible, Protestant Tamils have been contesting their right to control language by rejecting, assimilating, appropriating or reinterpreting Protestant Tamil vocabulary. This engagement with their religious language provides, as the next chapter illustrates, a point of entry for an analysis of the way Protestant Tamils define their religious identity within the context of Tamil religious and literary cultures.

Notes

- ¹ Robert De Nobili, *26 Sermons*, Sermon II:1, quoted from Tiliander, p. 92
- ² Quoted in Tiliander 1974: 93.
- ³ Walther, Christopher, Unpublished Notebooks, Archiv der Franckeschen Stiftungen, Halle IIC 10 p. 59.
- ⁴ Unpublished letters from the catechists Aaron, Diogo, Ambrosio and Rayanaikken addressed to August Francke in Halle between 1743 and 1756. Archiv der Franckeschen Stiftungen, Halle.
- ⁵ Fabricius, J. P. *A Dictionary: Malabar and English*. Interestingly, *caṛvēcvaraṇ* is the only term for God of the four discussed in this chapter that is not included in the dictionary. This exclusion suggests how far Fabricius was from Ziegenbalg's conception of an appropriate equivalent to denote the Protestant God.
- ⁶ *Tiruvācakam* [the Holy Verses] composed by Manikkavacakar (circa 9th century) is the most popular of the medieval Śaivite bhakti tradition.
- ⁷ According to the Saiva agamas, and other Saiva books, which depart from the earlier Hindu system, five are mentioned: Brahma, Vishnu, Rudra, Mayesvara, and Sada Siva.
- ⁸ One crore equals a hundred thousand.
- ⁹ Paul Lawrence, 'Notes on the changes in the Tamil text of St. Matthew Chapter IX,' November 4, 1926 (BFBS Tamil file No. 4: 1926-1928) and BFBS Editorial Sub-Committee Minute Cards, Vol. 8, October 10 1926, pp. 29-30, Bible Society Archives, Cambridge University Library.
- ¹⁰ For instance, although Rhenius retained Fabricius's use of *parīparaṇ* in his revision, his *Memoirs* indicates his use of 'cam' when in conversation with both Protestant and non-Protestant Tamils.
- ¹¹ See Tiliander's discussion of the use of *kaṭavuḷ* in *Tiruvācakam* III, 13—19, pp. 133-34
- ¹² Asirvadam, Interview, February 5, 1924 (BFBS Tamil file No. 3: 1923-1926).
- ¹³ BFBS Tamil file No. 3: 1923-1926.
- ¹⁴ Paul Lawrence, 'Notes on the Translation of the Word God (Theos) in the Tamil Language,' MSS, 1926 (BFBS Tamil file No. 3: 1923-1926).
- ¹⁵ (BFBS Tamil file No. 4: 1926-1928).
- ¹⁶ Rev. Devapirium and Mr Devanesam in 'Revised Tamil St. Matthew: Opinions Received from Indians,' MSS (BFBS Tamil file No. 3: 1923-1926).
- ¹⁷ H. Frykholm, 'The Name Jehovah in the Revised Tamil Old Testament,' 1932 (BFBS Tamil file No. 5: 1929-1933).
- ¹⁸ Attached to Minutes of Madras Auxiliary Committee Meeting, March 27, 1939 (BFBS Tamil file No. 6: 1933-54).
- ¹⁹ Nobili, *Kurippidam*. (1965) quoted by Tiliander 1974: 95.
- ²⁰ Ziegenbalg, *Hymnologia Tamulica*, Tranquebar (5th edition, 1723) Hymn no. 21, verse 4.
- ²¹ An interesting contrast is the case of Tagalog translations by Spanish missionaries in the Philippines who left key terms such as *Espritu Santo*, *Dios* and *Cruz* untranslated. Rafael comments that the missionaries were convinced that there were no equivalents in Tagalog and so left them untranslated in order "to maintain the 'purity' of the concepts that these words conveyed..." (Rafael 1988: 29).
- ²² In contrast, the Tamil Lexicon defines ākamam not only as sastras and scripture but as "scripture believed to be revealed by God and peculiar to Śaivism, Vaiśnavism, Saktism or Jainism."
- ²³ This term was used by Tamil theologians and at seminaries (such as Tamil Theological Seminary) in the 1970s as a useful Tamil term that avoided Sanskrit roots.

²⁴ Liberation Theology began as a movement within the Latin American Catholic Church in the 1960s as a response to social oppression. Deriving from Marxism, it now includes Latin American, Black and Feminist liberation theologies that seek to radically reinterpret Christian scripture and orthodox theologies with a view to a revolutionary transformation of society.

²⁵ In comparison, the Hindi Bible uses *shresth git* (songs of excellence) as a title but the Urdu translation for the same is *Ghazal-ul-Ghazalaat* (where ghazal refers to song of an amorous nature).

²⁶ Report of the Committee on their discussion of terms for the Revised Version (BFBS Tamil file No. 3: 1923-1926): 6.

²⁷ Since the Tamil has no letter that corresponds with 'b' the Tamil letter 'p' is always used for it and thus the Roman letter 'p' is used to denote it in the modern system of transliteration. In the nineteenth century, however, it was common practise to use the Roman 'b' rather than the 'p.'

²⁸ Catholic missionaries first adopted the strategy of using the hierarchies that existed in Hindu society to their advantage. Nobili was one of the first to align himself with the brahmanical caste to attract status within Tamil culture for the Catholic mission (Rajamanickam, 1999; Zupanov, 1999).

²⁹ Report of the Committee on their discussion of terms for the Revised Version (BFBS Tamil file No. 3: 1923-1926): 6.

³⁰ A treatise on Saiva Siddhanta philosophy by Tirumūlanāyanār.

³¹ Tiliander gives a translation from Tayumanavar: "All my speech is jebam, all my thinking a matchless meditation on thee. This I have understood, O thou Most High" (Tiliander 1974: 284).

³² *Luther's Smaller Catechism in Tamil* was first printed in 1713 by Ziegenbalg and revised several times in the eighteenth century and printed in 1798.

³³ Letters of Walter Jeyabalan and Packiaraj to the Bible Society of India.

Chapter Four: Protestant Tamil Responses to Bible translation

The great mass of the Indian readers, both mission workers and others, simply accept what is put before them.

(Editorial Superintendent, British and Foreign Bible Society, 1928)¹

Missionary sources on the subject of Tamil Bible translation, until the end of the nineteenth century, conveyed an impression largely of a missionary coalition of translators producing a finished piece of translation, handed over to a passive but grateful Protestant Tamil readership. However, sources outside Bible Society and missionary records² suggest that Protestant Tamils responded to the translated Bible in various ways, both implicit and explicit. These responses were not, however, in any way homogenous or unified either in support of or against a particular translation; neither were the responses always a coherent and deliberate resistance to the authority and culture of the missionary agency. The two important points of conflict have been over Protestant Tamil terminology and the use of genre to express Protestant Tamil piety. This chapter analyses how religious and social conflicts as well as denominational rivalry between the different mission societies in the Tamil area, defined Protestant Tamil response to the question of terminology and the use of genre.

The terms from Tamil religious vocabulary discussed in the previous chapter were available as much to Protestant Tamils as to Protestant missionaries. The writings of both, which resulted in a substantial body of Tamil Christian literature, reveal that choice of terminology has played a significant part in what has been accepted as Christian at different points in the history of Protestant Christianity in Tamilnadu. Language choice has also determined how Protestant Christianity was translated as one of the religious faiths available to Tamil society and how it interacted with the other belief systems. Similarly, both prose and poetical genres were alternatives available to both Protestant missionaries and Protestant Tamils. As the chapter demonstrates, Protestant missionaries consistently chose prose above verse (despite knowing the importance the latter had in Tamil literary culture), whereas Protestant Tamils have preferred Tamil poetic genres for the expression of Protestant devotion. By analysing the discussions and confrontations between these two sets of choices, the chapter illustrates that it was not merely the literary that was at stake but the religious and cultural identity of an emergent Protestant community.

The differences in language choice made by Protestant Tamils and missionaries reveal points of tension between the two, and make possible an oppositional reading of Protestant Tamil responses. Unfortunately, there is little surviving evidence from the eighteenth century of Protestant Tamil opinion on language use, choice of vocabulary

or the style of a new version of the Tamil Bible. The Lutheran missionaries involved in Bible translation did not leave any record of the response of their laity or catechists. The few surviving letters written by Tamil catechists to August Francke were formal pieces of writing meant to display their devotion and loyalty to their new faith; the exception is when they report tension between members of different castes who had been converted into the Lutheran fold. But they contain no comment on missionary language use. However, within a hundred years of a Protestant Tamil vocabulary becoming visible as belonging to a distinct Protestant discourse, there were references to it as "missionary Tamil." As early as 1825, a letter written by a Protestant Tamil priest, Vicuvaca Nadan, solicits the support of "his fellow Native Priests and Superiors" for the revision of the existing Tamil Bible in order to remove the "missionary Tamil" used in it.³ This label continues to be used, somewhat disparagingly, along with others, such as, "padre" or "Christian Tamil," among Protestant Tamils even today to identify the terms peculiar to Protestant Tamil use. The discussion that follows traces Protestant Tamil attitudes to this "Christian Tamil" in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In the case of the use of poetic genres, there is evidence of a long tradition from before the eighteenth century of Catholic use of popular verse for expressing Christian devotion. Before and well into the eighteenth century, Christianity existed in the Tamil and Malayalam speaking areas of South India at a popular devotional level. Susan Bayly (1989) presents an historical case for the existence of Christian worship in terms of cult worship of religious figures such as saints, gurus, pirs and individual missionaries, which ran parallel to the worship of Hindu cult figures. The patronage provided by South Indian rulers who perceived Christian shrines, symbols and personalities as repositories of power, helped in the latter's assimilation into the local religious landscape. She says: "Christianity here was a variant of broader patterns of Tamil worship, self-conscious of separateness but wholly assimilated into the world of the pir, the pattavan and the indigenous power divinity" (Bayly 1989: 384). Further, she argues that the sacred landscape of the three religions intersected on the ground of devotional expression through the mode of bhakti. Such an interweaving of Hindu and Christian traditions was built on the scriptural and literary context provided by missionaries such as Nobili and Beschi. By the beginning of the eighteenth century the Jesuits were circulating a rich array of biographical and devotional lore in which Christian hagiographical themes were recast in forms which derived from Tamil ballads, epics, and popular cult (Bayly 1989: 391-399). However, according to Bayly, this began to decline from the popular level with the onset of the nineteenth century: "...like Hinduism, South Indian Islam and Christianity were becoming increasingly formalised in the period of British rule..." (Bayly 1989: 429). Despite this process, it is

possible to trace links between what occurred before the nineteenth century and the developments in the nineteenth century. One such link is Protestant Tamil use of bhakti as a means to articulate Protestant devotion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This chapter analyses the use of the bhakti literary tradition by Protestant Tamil poets as an assimilative strategy employed by Protestant Tamils to define their religious identity.

However, there is a cyclic relationship between language and genre use and religious identity: the kind of Tamil used and the Protestant literature produced in it helped to articulate a certain identity; but equally, the desire for a certain kind of identity influenced the type of language or genre used to produce Protestant Tamil literature. At different points in the history of Protestant Tamils, there has been either confrontation or collusion between the creation of identities, the emergence of identities and the articulation of those identities. The two terms 'creation' and 'emergence' are used to loosely represent the two groups, Protestant missionaries and Tamils, involved in the processes and to make a distinction between them. Protestant missionaries were consciously attempting to create the ideal Protestant Tamil, while Protestant Tamils were expressing an emerging awareness of belonging to a distinct religious community through their choices regarding language and genre. Although both efforts were attempts at assimilating Protestant Christianity with Tamil culture, the nature and degree of assimilation sought differed. For the most part, Protestant Tamils exploited non-Protestant forms of devotion (rejected by Protestant missionaries) that were a part of Tamil literary and religious culture in order to express Protestant Tamil piety. This led to confrontation between Protestant missionaries and Protestant Tamils as well as to conflict between different sections of the Protestant Tamil community who desired assimilation with compatible aspects of Tamil culture.

This chapter aims to foreground and analyse the various levels of response to language and genre use that were registered at different points in the translation history of the Tamil Bible. In order to do so, the focus will be on two phases of Protestant Tamil response in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Two kinds of nineteenth-century responses will be discussed: first, the protest against Rhenius's revision of the Tamil Bible in the early nineteenth century led by the Evangelical congregations of Tanjore; and second, the use of Tamil religious terminology and literary style in the devotional poetry and writings of two Protestant Tamil poets of the nineteenth century Vedanayaka Sastri (1774-1864) and H. A. Krishna Pillai (1827-1900). Similarly, Protestant Tamil responses in the twentieth century occur in two parallel phases: first, individual attempts to translate the Bible outside the official

framework of the Bible Society; and second, the articulation of widespread discontent with the revisions of the Tamil Bible in the twentieth century.

I. Nineteenth-century Protestant Tamil responses: polemics and poets

A. Protest against Rhenius's revision of the Tamil Bible

While Protestant Tamil response to the translation and revision of the Tamil Bible was widely articulated only in the twentieth century, some reactions to the translated Bible began to manifest from the early nineteenth century. Most responses that have survived are from the first half of the nineteenth century where we have evidence of disagreement between Protestant Tamils and missionary translators as well as amongst Protestant Tamils as to what constituted the best Tamil version of the Bible. This section examines the controversy that began as a result of the appointment of Rhenius by the BFBS in 1814 to revise Fabricius's translation of the Old and revision of the New Testaments. Letters and petitions of protest from the Tanjore Evangelical congregations have survived. Conflict was at a height around 1825 when Rhenius's revision committee printed parts of the revised New Testament and circulated them for opinion. In spite of opposition, his New Testament was published in 1833 and the entire revised Bible in 1840 by the BFBS. There is no surviving evidence of Rhenius's revision committee considering or recording criticism from any Protestant Tamil groups. As Sastri, one of those responding to Rhenius's Bible revisions, claimed:

...I the general Poet of all the congregations examined and found in one page 10 or 20 and many more mistakes and with great sorrow wrote the first book *Wedaviantchiapatram* against their corrections [of the Tamil Bible] and sent it to the Revd Mr Haubroe... I earnestly begged him to consider that this deed was not good and that it was a great obstacle and infinite injury to Christianity[.] he did not regard it, but rejected my advice...⁴

Protestant Tamil dissent has survived through unpublished manuscript versions of pamphlets and petitions written by Vedanayaka Sastri, some composed by him on behalf of the Tanjore Evangelical Church. In *Sādipēdaga sambāveney* (hereafter SS) or 'Dialogue on the Distinction of Caste,' written in both Tamil and in English in 1828, Sastri named his other texts in which "the unnatural language and confusions" of Bible revision were dealt with: "They have been shewn in our books viz. *Vēdaviatchiapatram*, *Kuttravilackam*, *Puduthiruthalin Kūkural* and *Pudutiruthalin Chōdeney*." Except *kuttravilakam*, these have survived as manuscript copies. He stated in both SS and *Pututtiruttalin cōtanai* that *Vētaviātcia patram* was the first he wrote, followed by the others when the missionaries ignored it. The English preface to *Vētaviātcia patram* (hereafter VP) reveals that it was written in 1820 along with its companion piece *Kuttravilakam* to "expose an unjust correction and to protect the holy

religion." *Pututtiruttalin Kūkural* (English title, 'Noise of New Corrections,' hereafter *PK*) was written jointly by the congregation of the Tanjore Evangelical Church in 1825 in response to a letter written to them by Vicuvaca Nadan, 'a Native Priest at Combaconum' dated September 3, 1823. Written in Tamil (with an English Preface), in eight chapters, *PK* is a detailed refutation of every accusation or claim made by Vicuvaca Nadan in support of Rhenius's revisions and ends with a detailed textual analysis of the differences in translation of the Lord's Prayer in the two versions (i.e., Fabricius and Rhenius). After *PK*, Sastri wrote *Pututtiruttalin cōtanai* ('tribulation of the new corrections,' hereafter *PC*). The pamphlet written in Tamil, may have had a preface and been dated originally, but is now missing. The main body of the pamphlet is a close textual analysis of the first chapters of the book of Genesis and the Gospel of Matthew in the two existing Bible versions, by which he attempted to prove that Fabricius's translation was superior to Rhenius's revision. To this, Sastri appended letters of petition written by the congregations of Madras and Tanjore to the 'new missionaries who have created the new revision' (dated, 1819 and 1827) and a letter addressed to Sastri from a John Devasahayam (dated 1833).

Interestingly, Sastri combined the issue of Bible translation with other differences that he and his fellow Evangelical congregations had with the missionaries regarding observing caste distinctions in the church. In *SS* and *Sāditeratoo* ('Explaining Caste'), the English Preface to a collection of documents entitled *Jāti-tiruttalin payittiyyam* ('The Foolishness of Amending Caste'), Sastri focused on controversial issues of caste between the congregations and missionaries of the Tanjore Evangelical Church. But while doing so, he connected the caste dispute with the controversy over Bible revision. In his mind, at least, the two were linked as "cruelties" imposed by the missionaries on the Protestant Tamil congregations.

Sastri and the Tanjore Evangelicals launched a critique of the Bible revision carried out by those they dubbed the "junior" or "new missionaries." Their targets were mainly Rhenius and Haubroe, but included others assisting them. In contrast were those referred to as the "previous missionaries," which mainly referred to Ziegenbalg and Fabricius. Their arguments, in brief, were that Fabricius's translation was excellent; that the present efforts at revision only corrupted the previous translation; and that the revision was an imposition by the missionaries on Protestant Tamils who had not demanded a revision of the Tamil Bible they used. Significantly, their quarrel was not with theological or denominational differences or conflicting doctrinal interpretations of the biblical text. The focal point of their argument was the use of Tamil language, that is, whether the appropriate register of Tamil was being used for Bible translation. This concern of Sastri and his fellow protesters with the use of the Tamil language indicates

their self-consciousness regarding the status of the Protestant Tamil community within Tamil society.

Three main arguments were offered in support of Fabricius: first, that Fabricius's knowledge of Tamil was superior to that of Rhenius; second, that Fabricius had help from the 'right' Tamil scholars; and third, that Fabricius used literary Tamil, whereas Rhenius did not. First, in order to prove that Fabricius's translation needed no revision, Sastri attempted to prove that Fabricius's knowledge of Tamil was superior to that of Rhenius. In SS, he claimed that Fabricius knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, and Tamil philology had resulted in a Scriptures that "could be plainly understood by the learned and unlearned and put ... in a most agreeable Tamil, expressing them by most delightful and sweet words rejoicing and edifying the mind like the joys of the garden of Eden and the gladness of the city of God the new Jerusalem..." (SS, 1828). Likewise, in both *PK* and *PC*, he repeatedly emphasized that Fabricius and others before him translated according to rules of Tamil grammar and literary tradition, and followed principles of word conjunctions. Sastri's answer to aspersions on Fabricius's knowledge of Tamil was that he learnt Tamil from *tampirans* or learned scholars and by studying various Hindu scriptures. As further proof he claimed that the "previous missionaries" were able to write Tamil dictionaries and grammars only because they had studied the *Nannūl*⁵ (*PK*, 1825).

In Sastri's opinion, Rhenius's accomplishments fell far short of the standards set by Fabricius. Rhenius,

before he could learn accurately the Tamil for at least ten years fondly persuaded himself that he was a perfect scholar in Tamil, ... and changed quite another way the 1st Book of Moses, the Gospels, Epistles, the Common prayer and hymn Book. These he altered so materially that they are now neither Eleckanam [grammatical] nor common Tamil both dialects being mixed and spoiled... (SS, 1828).

The new revision was completed in a hurry, using a Tamil that Sastri thought was neither grammatically correct, nor commonly used everywhere (*PK*, 1825). He referred to the revisers as those who under the guise of friendship, had pretended to revise the Bible as an act of goodwill but instead had only spoilt and destroyed their entire Bible and prayers (*PK*, 1825). By referring to the revision project as Rhenius's "meddling" with Fabricius's "golden" version of the Tamil Bible, Sastri implied the linguistic superiority of the latter over any attempts at revision. Further, Sastri's attempt to prove the superiority of Fabricius's skill as a translator by focussing specifically on his knowledge of Tamil indicates the premium placed on the use of Tamil in the religious context.

The second claim that Sastri made was that while the “previous missionaries” took the help of the right Tamil scholars to translate the Bible, the “junior missionaries” were assisted by wrong scholars, that is, “heathen munshis” who were against the Bible. The critics of Fabricius alleged exactly the opposite: Vicuvaca Nadan accused the missionaries who translated previously of not having used appropriate teachers (*sastris*) but of having sought the help of those who had no knowledge of the Tamil *castras*. In answer, Sastri in *PK* quoted passages from Ziegenbalg and Gruendler’s Preface to the Tamil Bible of 1717⁶ to prove that the missionaries had made considerable efforts to learn Tamil and from the right sources: that they had learnt Tamil from Tamil books and palmleaf manuscripts and after they had studied the books and manners of the people of the country, had decided to translate the Bible into Tamil. Later in the pamphlet, however, he acknowledged that the early Tamil books printed by Protestant missionaries might not have been entirely accurate but that Fabricius’s Tamil was faultless. Sastri explained this by claiming that Ziegenbalg did not have adequate help but that as Christianity spread in Tranquebar and Madras “learning and wisdom” increased and many Tamil scholars arose (*PK*, 1825). What he seems to be implying is that by the time Fabricius began translating the Bible, the spread of Christianity and mission schools had produced Tamil scholars who were also Protestants and could therefore help in the process of Bible translation better than Hindu Tamil scholars. In *SS*, Sastri accused Rhenius and Haubroe of paying considerable sums to “the heathen moonshees who blasphemed Christ, and thus frustrated the endeavours of the ancient Missionaries through the heathen Moonshees” (*SS*, 1828). The present revisers rendered the work of the previous missionaries,

detestable and inelegant, believing even the heathen Moonshees words, who jested with and imposed on them on account of their ignorance in Tamil, and filled them with words not only ungrammatical, unmeaning and unsystematical, but also irreligious, perverting the Word of God, and blasphemous, and made those books to be laughed at by all who hear them uttering them and mixing in them all the Cutchery [mixed] Tamil and Gentoo [Telugu] words (*SS*, 1828).

Sastri further claimed that these heathen *munshis* deceived the Europeans with their eloquence and art; however, their skills had been used to write books that were “entirely corrupting,” which made them unsuitable for the translation of the Bible (*SS*, 1828). Again in *PC*, he asserted that the present missionaries had placed the holy scriptures in the hands of ‘heathen’ *munshis* who knew neither *parāparan* (that is, the Protestant God) nor the missionaries. In the Tamil preface to *VP*, Sastri condemned the new missionaries for seeking assistance not from “God’s people” that is, Protestant Tamils but from those who “worship images.” In his English preface to *VP*, Sastri continued his attack of the Hindu Tamil scholars involved in Bible translation:

The Heathen Poets, ... ridiculing thro' their ignorance the most respectable translation of the late Rev. Mr. Fabricius, thought that they could write more elegantly, and mixed their worldly ideas with the Divine truth. And thus they have entirely corrupted the Holy Scriptures, put them in Cutchery and Telunga [=Telugu] Tamul and filled them with many words which are against religious language and the very principles of Grammar (VP, 1820).

Sastri's criticism gained substance by the fact that there were Protestant Tamils who could have adequately fulfilled the role of Tamil scholar to aid the missionary translators. Sastri himself would have been quite suitable for the task and so would the poet H. A. Krishna Pillai. Both missionaries and Protestant Tamils acknowledged that Sastri and Krishna Pillai had excellent command of the Tamil language, including its high literary style, along with a good grasp of the basic tenets of Christianity. However, it is significant that Sastri was not invited to help in any of the Bible translation projects either at a formal or informal level. Although Krishna Pillai was appointed Tamil *munshi* to Henry Bower to assist him in revising the Tamil translation of the Bible in 1858, this appointment lasted only for three weeks and he noted later that not a day's work was done during this time.⁷ In 1861, however, Krishna Pillai's brother Muttaiya Pillai, competed for the position of 'Tamil Referee' for the Bible translation committee headed by Henry Bower and was acknowledged by the committee's report as a 'native referee' who had thorough knowledge of Tamil and practical experience in the work of translation (Revision, 1869: 13).

The difference in positions between Sastri and Vicuvaca Nadan was that Sastri emphasized the importance of assistance from Protestant Tamil scholars whereas Vicuvaca Nadan stressed Tamil scholarship above the religious persuasion of the assisting scholars. Sastri's bias in favour of Protestant scholars of Tamil can be explained by his assumption that the primary target readership of the Tamil Bible was Protestant Tamils. For him then, only Protestants could interpret and translate the Bible accurately for other Protestants. It is clear from Sastri's accusations that he viewed Hindu Tamil scholars as opponents to Protestant Tamils, who would take advantage of the missionaries' lack of Tamil scholarship to corrupt language use in the Tamil Bible. However, it was not only Hindu scholars he saw as adversaries since he often bracketed the Catholics (usually referred to as 'Papists' by Sastri) with the 'heathen moonshees': in a long diatribe against the barbarous use of Tamil in the revisions he referred to "the help of heathen moonshees and Papists who are enemies to the Christian religion and quite ignorant of its Mysteries and thus frustrated the intention and labours of the Honorable Societies..." (SS, 1828). Nonetheless, Sastri thought that the Catholic missionaries' attitude to language and translation was better than the present project. It is significant that although he thought the eloquent use of

literary Tamil important in Bible translation, he distrusted the eloquence of Hindu and Catholic scholars as one that corrupted or distorted the Protestant Bible.

The third important opposition that Sastri set up was the use of 'pure' Tamil versus what he called 'cutchery' Tamil, a term he used to indicate a mixture of Telugu and Tamil, replete with colloquialisms, region specific words and the Tamil spoken by lower castes. For want of "mature knowledge of the Tamil language," Sastri maintained, the new missionaries "changed the translations of our invaluable Bible etc into Cutchery Tamil, Telingu Tamil and a comical and barbarous language" (SS, 1828). In *PK*, he contended that the mixing of high and low, old and new words did not make a work dear to the learned. He rhetorically questioned whether they (he presumed to speak for the entire Protestant Tamil community) could reject their golden version in favour of a version using a mixture of Tamil, Telugu and Cutchery Tamil, which was hateful to their souls.

When Sastri analysed the merits of one word over another, he opposed '*ilakkana col*,' that is, grammatically correct words to '*valaka col*,' that is, colloquial, 'customary' or regional Tamil words. In *PK*, for instance, he picked out 46 words from the first chapter of Fabricius's Gospel of Matthew to point out that they were all literary words used according to grammatical rules. He pointed out that all the 46 were found in dictionaries and *nikanṭukal*,⁸ and were neither colloquial, nor words of an 'ugly, improper' nature, spoken by lower castes or hunter tribes of the forests and mountains. Nor were they the babbling of foreigners who could not speak the language. The new revisions, according to Sastri, used colloquial Tamil, destroyed the meaning, sweetness and grammar of the original texts found in the previous translations. Likewise, in *PC*, Sastri claimed that the new revisions had made the earlier translations defective (*palutu*, the Tamil word used also means rotten, ruin, a lie) and had completely spoilt them. It is important to mention at this point that Sastri also compared the use of terms in the Tamil Bible with Catholic, Hindu and Muslim usage. For instance, he objected to the change from *nāmam* (name) to *tiru nāmam* (holy name) in the Lord's Prayer because the latter was used to refer to the mark worn by Vaiśnavites on their foreheads. It is significant that in his criticism of the older translations, Vicuvaca Nadan had made the same accusation against previous translators: they had used ungrammatical Tamil according to him, which was being corrected by the present revisers.

However, the one point both Sastri and Vicuvaca Nadan seem agreed upon was that a recognizably different kind of language use had developed among Protestant Tamils as a result of missionary translations and writings: the 'missionary Tamil'. In his

letter, Vicuvaca Nadan claimed that the present missionaries were revising the earlier translations in order to correct the peculiarities of 'missionary Tamil'. Sastri, while acknowledging that the term had been used to refer to the Tamil used in the existing translations of the Bible, attributed it to the jealous attempts by 'heathens,' Catholics and 'other' people to defile the Protestant scriptures. He pointed out that because the 'white man' had brought their religion to them, they were despised as those who followed the 'white man's religion' or the 'padre's (missionary) religion.' It is significant that Sastri only expressed disdain at such name-calling but did not claim that such a difference in language use did not exist. He categorically stated in *PK* that Protestant Tamils would not forsake the true Veda (that is, the Bible) only because they were unable to bear the ridicule of its being termed the white man's Veda. He was thereby claiming status for Protestant Christianity in spite of admitting irregularities in the use of the Tamil language.

Sastri's conclusions as to which translation was acceptable were a result of using the method of comparison, by judging a translation's effect on its readers, and by making claims on behalf of custom and tradition. First, his method of comparing translations was in keeping with the usual standards his contemporary western scholars used. Like them, he analysed which of the translations 'slipped' from the meaning intended in the original. He pointed out that Fabricius had translated keeping the 'sense' of the original in mind rather than translating literally. In his opinion, the revisers were unable to achieve the same. Sastri arrived at this conclusion by using the analytic tool of comparing several translated versions since none of the Protestant Tamils knew the original languages to study the difference between the original and the Tamil translation. He compared versions at two levels: first, he juxtaposed several Tamil translations to check whether the 'sense' in all of them remained the same; and second, he compared the Tamil translations with the English version to see if there were any discrepancies between the two. For instance, in *PK* he pointed out that though the Tamil Gospels of Tranquebar (1758), Colombo (1754) and Madras (1771)⁹ were translated by different missionaries at different times and places, there were differences only in the use of words but not in the sense they conveyed. This proof, according to him, made Protestant Tamils witness to the fact that the previous missionaries had translated without deviating from the sense of the original. While providing close textual analysis to support his points, he often highlighted discrepancies between the English and the Tamil revision. Analysing the differences in the 'Lord's Prayer' in the old and new Tamil versions in the second half of *PK*, he compared the latest revision with not only previous Tamil Protestant and Catholic versions from Tamilnadu and Ceylon, but also pointed out that the Prayer as translated in the English, German, Portuguese and Dutch versions matched the older

Tamil translations but not the new. Significantly, he brought up the question of the validity of the English ‘Authorized Version’ by suggesting that the revisers were actually jeopardising its authority by not translating the Tamil version according to it. Further, by asking whether the English (he included the government, the Bible Society and other persons of importance) would have been happy to accept such tampering with their ‘Lord’s Prayer,’ Sastri put himself and Protestant Tamils on a par with the English in making choices over the language and translation of religion for their community. Ironically, the missionaries who increasingly gave the English version an almost equivalent status to the original biblical texts found themselves judged by the same standards.

Another route by which he approached the problem of evaluation was by referring to a target readership. Unlike the missionaries who rather futilely attempted to balance the needs of a Christian and non-Christian audiences through a single translation, Sastri concentrated on the needs of the various sections of the Protestant Tamil community alone. In fact, he dismissed the judgement of ‘heathen’ readers who would not know the difference between previous and present translations or good and bad texts, thus rendering their opinion of no account for evaluation. On the other hand, those brought up within a Protestant tradition, according to Sastri, would be able to recognize the superiority of one text over the other (*PK*, 1825). He seems to argue for a Protestant Bible exclusively for Protestant Tamils. While taking Protestant Tamil readership into account he covered several angles: the social position of the reader within Tamil caste hierarchy; the extent of literacy or lack of it; and dominant patterns of custom and tradition within the Protestant Tamil community.

Although Sastri did not name the high castes to which some Protestant Tamils belonged, it is clear that he positioned himself and his fellow-petitioners with them. He named some of the low caste groups (*pallar*, *pariar*, *shānār*, *cakkiliyar*) as well as some hunting tribes who were part of the Protestant Tamil community. Sastri’s understanding of the role and importance of the caste position of the Protestant Tamil readers was ambiguous and at times even contradictory. On the one hand, he thought that the Bible had to be translated into a Tamil equally accessible to Protestant Tamils of all castes. He claimed that this was what Fabricius had achieved but was lacking in the recent revisions. Fabricius had, according to Sastri, used a level of Tamil that satisfied the literate high castes as well as the semi-literate low castes. It is difficult, however, to see how a version that used the high Tamil (generally unfamiliar to the lower castes) could possibly be accessible to them. His conviction that the non-literary, lower forms of Tamil spoken by lower castes should be kept out of the Tamil Bible stemmed from a desire to check censure from rival religious groups. At the same time,

at several points in his pamphlets, he asserted that those belonging to the lower castes were illiterate and therefore unable to understand or judge the merits of Tamil texts for themselves. Sastri dismissed Vicuvaca Nadan's claims that the revisions had been given not only to those with sense (that is, the literate) but those without sense (the illiterate), and thus spread Christianity further.

Sastri's attack on a translation because it was inaccessible to lower castes does not stand since he thought them incapable of critical analysis in any case. What Sastri and his fellow-protestors resented most was that the missionaries were forcing a revision on them. Worse still, the missionaries were using the mission schools to propagate the unwelcome revisions among their youth:

And when they found that these their unjust translations were not liked by any one, they not only introduced them into all the Schools and forcibly made it a rule that these books alone should be learned, but also have thus brought it about, that none of the true and well translated religious books are to be had among the poor Tamil Christians (SS, 1828).

As mentioned earlier, the third important element in Sastri's discussion of the reader's expectation was the part played by custom and tradition. In his textual analyses of passages in both *PK* and *PC*, Sastri pointed out that various terms introduced by the revisers were not customarily in use in all Tamil regions. Or, he pointed out that the customary understanding of a certain term could be in conflict with its dictionary meaning: he claimed that *kerpavati* used by Fabricius was the customary term used to refer to a pregnant woman; *karpavati*, used in the revision instead was a colloquial reference to *ganja* (Indian hemp) and in some places used to refer to women who had become sexually familiar with ascetics. Thus, when applied to the Virgin Mary's conception through the Holy Spirit it became a term of insult rather than respect. It is questionable, however, whether Fabricius was aware of this colloquial usage and deliberately favoured one spelling over the other.

Sastri also used the argument of 'custom' for translations that Protestant Tamils were accustomed to. The earlier translations had become accepted and customary versions for the present generation of Protestant Tamils. In SS, Sastri defended the earlier translations: "These books were accepted by all the congregations and its Missionaries with the greatest esteem and are read and used by us, our fathers and our children..." (SS, 1828). Further, Sastri saw the revision of Fabricius's version, which had been used in all the churches for approximately eighty years, as an act of dishonouring the previous translators (*PK*, 1825). Fabricius's had been a single, uniform version accepted by all the Tamil churches for several years. In his opinion, the revisers were

...like a man who destroyed a stone house and built a Cottage [...] they hurted [sic] and destroyed all their [the previous translator's] works, which are so highly esteemed by all the Congregations ... under the pretence that they would revise the Bible ... which had been perfectly done and translated by the former Missionaries... (SS, 1828).

Sastri feared that the substandard Tamil used by the revisers would spread among Protestant Tamils through the mission schools. Significantly, he connected the erasure of Fabricius's Tamil with the erasure of the missionaries from the collective memory of the community:

...by introducing them, forcibly in the Congregations and Schools making the children from their infancy to practise this new Tamil, they trusted their intention would be accomplished within 20 years, and took away therefore, the precious translations of the ancient Missionaries from the use of all schools, and made them not only to forget them entirely, but endeavoured to eradicate the remembrance of the former Missionaries from our minds and that of our children (SS, 1828).

Thus, one of Sastri's concerns was that a tradition established for more than a hundred years was being threatened. Though his emphasis there was on the loss of a textual tradition, elsewhere he connected this with the loss of other church traditions and rituals, which had been established by the Lutheran missionaries and which were now being changed by Anglican missionaries. This connection is apparent when in SS he claimed:

I venture to say that as in the time of old when the wickedness increased amongst the people, and they began to build the tower of Babel, God did confound their languages, so when the Christians were ungrateful for the kindness and benefactions of their late Missionaries, God did send the Junior Missionaries as a whip for us to upset all our religious books, divine songs, the gladness of the holy festivals of the Lord, and the reasonable pleasure, suitable to enjoy at Marriages, Baptisms and other joyful days of the Congregation and abolish the urbanity of the Country which is the rank of Caste... (SS, 1828).

The repeated opposition of past and present, previous and recent in the arguments of the pamphlets under discussion highlight how the experiments and at times tentative strategies employed by previous missionaries were now being conferred a quasi-sacred status, as part of a received tradition, by some dominant groups amongst Protestant Tamils.

By the same token, any competing translation that threatened the special place a previous biblical version had in the community also threatened the social standing of the entire community. Sastri's many references to how other religious groups, both Christian and non-Christian, would react to the revised versions of the Tamil Bible reveal an anxiety about the status of the Protestant Tamil community. For instance, he feared that because Rhenius had distributed his revisions, "every where, these two kind of books being put in use for the Congregation and schools gives room to the

Unitarians and Papists to laugh, and to alledge [sic] that our Religion [...] differs one from another, and caused an inexpressible confusion in religion among [...] the people" (SS, 1828). This meant that the prestige of the Protestant Tamil community was brought into question. In *PK* he warned that Protestant Tamils should be aware that "Papist scholars could hardly refrain from ridiculing them when they see books translated in several different ways" (*PK*, 1825). When he objected to the use of terms that he thought questioned the human incarnation of Christ in *PC*, he showed concern about Catholic accusations that the Protestants were denying the divine nature of Christ. Thus, on the one hand, Hindu scholars could not be trusted to provide accurate translations for biblical passages, perhaps even deliberately mistranslate in order to undermine the authority of the Bible. On the other hand, he was conscious of the rival gaze of the Catholics waiting to denounce Protestant methods as crude and ineffective. Revising a well-established and satisfactory Tamil translation provided the perfect occasion in Sastri's eyes for either rival religious party to attack or humiliate Protestant Tamils.

The rationale behind the protest launched by Sastri and other Lutheran Evangelical Tamils against the revision of Fabricius's version is clearer when placed within the political and cultural context of late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Tanjore. Tanjore was ruled in succession by non-Tamil linguistic and cultural dynasties, that is, the Telugu Nayaks, the Marathas and then the British and thus, was in a period of transition. The influences brought in by them, however, were interacting with the Tamil religious and literary discourses that went back to an earlier period. Sastri and his contemporaries were highly conscious of the kind of Tamil in use in the Bible at a time when there were linguistic influences from Telugu and Marathi (besides Sanskrit) on Tamil. Sastri made a claim for Fabricius's use of a 'pure' Tamil by pointing out that it was the reviser, Rhenius, who was using a Tamil mixed with gentoo (i.e. Telugu) and Marathi words. According to him, Rhenius's improper use of Tamil corrupted both the Protestant religion and the Tamil language. In this context, he could posit the more Sanskrit-based 'missionary Tamil' of Fabricius as 'pure' Tamil against the 'cutchery' Tamil of Rhenius. For Sastri, 'pure' Tamil was one that included Sanskrit terms but not words from other regional languages (this definition of 'pure' Tamil was to change in the twentieth century where the presence of Sanskrit terminology made Tamil 'impure'). Sastri, by arguing that Fabricius's version used a pure Tamil and was thus a "golden Version," could overcome criticism from rival religious detractors such as Catholics and Hindus. Most importantly, Sastri and his fellow Lutheran Evangelicals' insistence on the importance of using 'pure' Tamil for their scriptures was an avenue by which they could lay claims to a better status for their religious community.

B. Nineteenth-Century Protestant Tamil poetry (Vedanayaka Sastri and H.A. Krishna Pillai)

This section is concerned primarily with the body of devotional songs that the Protestant Tamil church possesses. Protestant devotional songs in Tamil consist of two kinds: English and German hymns translated into Tamil by the missionaries and Tamil lyrics composed by Protestant Tamils. The translated hymns appeared from the early eighteenth century, and there is evidence of original compositions from the same period subsequently growing in number through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. An analysis of poetry and devotional songs composed by Protestant Tamils provides a counterpoint to the history of debates and protests regarding the Bible in Tamil translation. Further, this section examines the importance of genre for Protestant Tamil translations: Protestant Tamil preference for poetic genres from the Tamil literary tradition in order to translate Protestant Christianity signal the choice of alternative routes for the assimilation of Protestant Tamils into Tamil culture.

A brief history of the hymn in translation highlights the importance placed on them by missionaries as part of Protestant worship for Tamils. The first book of translated hymns published was in 1708 by Ziegenbalg, preceding the publication of his New Testament in 1714-15. He had started translating German hymns into Tamil in 1707 and by the time a second edition of the hymnbook was printed in 1715, he had translated forty-eight hymns into Tamil. The Bible translators who followed him, Schultze and Fabricius, continued to add to this collection in subsequent decades until there was a sizeable collection of hymns in the Tamil language. Thus, the earliest Bible translators were also translators of hymns. Sastri praised Farbicius's translations: "Besides he translated the divine songs i.e. Hymns so nicely and rhythmically as could scarcely have been done by sastrees and Poets, the most eloquent and learned, ..." (SS, 1828). Fabricius was exceptional as besides translating he began composing Tamil hymns in the second half of the eighteenth century.¹⁰ By the late eighteenth century, the Lutheran church in Tamilnadu had at least 300 Tamil hymns. In the nineteenth century, the Christian Literature Society published several such collections of hymns translated mainly from the German and English. Towards the end of the century, the MRTBS initiated debate on the kinds of hymns that should be published in the hymnbook, almost mirroring the debates on Bible translation that took place around the same time in South India. It is apparent that the hymns played the vital role of support literature to the Bible, reinforcing the Protestant concepts that the Protestant Tamil community was to be founded on.

Besides this body of translated hymns, a parallel tradition of Protestant Tamil songs evolved. The earliest of these songs developed from folk music and were popular among Catholic fisher-folk converts.¹¹ Protestant missionaries, Ziegenbalg included, also used folk songs to reach Tamils in the Tranquebar area. Theodore Baskaran (1986) writing on Christian folk songs in Tamilnadu believes that, "...in the cultural life of the converts, these folk songs acted as the much needed thread of continuity. To the evangelists and teachers, looking for a medium to communicate with the rural folks, these colloquial forms, with their simple and easy to learn tunes came in handy" (Baskaran 1986: 86). Evidence of early compositions by Protestant Tamils comes from manuscripts collected by James Hough in the nineteenth century of songs composed by Ganapathy Vathiyar, one of Ziegenbalg's converts, who wrote the story of Christ and other biblical episodes in song which were then used in Tranquebar to attract crowds as a prelude to street preaching (Baskaran 1986: 86). By the late eighteenth century, hymns composed by Protestant Tamils began to be sung as part of church worship. Sastri's documents reveal that devotional songs composed by himself and other Protestant Tamils were sung by Tanjore congregations: he mentions Rahel Naick, Gabriel catechist and Raphael Naick, three generations of a family who "have made tolerable and various Pathams [a kind of musical composition] and Pulembles [song of lamentation] according to Tamil tunes."¹² Songs composed by Catholics¹³ were also available to Protestant Tamils but usually not encouraged: "We did not at all make use of Popish songs on such occasions: for though part of them are of an excellent metre and systematical structure, yet they contain many errors with regard to the principles of Religion" (*Pandegey Perasdābam*, 1829). He also referred to Tamil catechists and priests in Tranquebar, Madras, Palavehncaudoo and Palayamcottai, who had composed songs which had become part of Protestant worship: "The ancient Missionaries who came to these places, having approved of those songs made them to be practised and continued to this day in every place for in all these places not only Pathams were sung at the conclusion of the divine service at all the festivals but also Pulembels were sung at the seven Sundays in Lent" (*Pandegey Perasdābam*, 1829). Although devotional folk songs have not usually been included in church hymnals, they have continued to be sung at festive occasions and have influenced the style and form of hymns composed for church worship. Sastri himself composed hymns using both folk forms such as the *kummi* and *kuravanci*, as well as classical forms of Tamil music.

It is only in the middle of the nineteenth century, however, that songs composed by Protestant Tamils began to be printed as part of the church hymnals of various mission societies. The organisation of these hymnals reveals a bias in favour of the translated European hymns over Tamil hymns: the hymn books for example were divided into

two sections, the first section titled ‘hymns’ comprised translated hymns and the second section, containing original Tamil compositions, was titled ‘lyrics.’ Usually, lyrics were half the number of hymns. The Tamil titles for the two sections were, *pāmālai* (garland of hymns) and *kīrtanai* [see end of paragraph] and remain the same in the present church hymnal of the Church of South India. In the 1870s, the MRTBS planned a common hymnbook for all churches in the Tamil area: a “Union Tamil Hymn Book” to complement the ‘Union Version’ of the Bible. Most missionaries writing in response to an appeal for suggestions acknowledged that Tamil hymns were more popular than European ones but often advised that the collection should include only one third or half the number of translated hymns.¹⁴ Instead of encouraging the composing of hymns in Tamil metre and tunes, there were some who suggested that Tamil poets should learn to compose in western tunes and metre: “...some well educated native Christians with a turn for poetry should be let into the mysteries of English metre and accent, and be asked to compose new hymns.” (MRTBS 1875: 43). Baskaran’s research into Christian folk songs reveals that in the last few decades of the nineteenth century, a large number of song and ballad books on various themes, including Christian, were published. He found that the format of the Christian songbooks was very similar to that of Hindu devotional songs and the manner in which they were printed: “The words *Yesu thunai* (Jesus helps) were printed on top of the opening page, in the place of *Pillaiyar suzhi* (the sign of Ganesa). A small picture of a cross, flanked by two kneeling angels, was printed below this sentence” (Baskaran 1986: 88). These books were priced very low and were popular enough to make their publication a viable commercial proposition for presses such as the Albion and the Arch. Sosaiyappan Press in Madras. However, what has survived as part of mainstream Protestant Tamil hymns sung in worship services are the *kīrtanai*, that is, songs written by Sastri in a new genre that was developed and perfected in Tanjore in the eighteenth century (Peterson 2002, 2003).

While songs composed by Tamils drew from the musical and poetical traditions of Tamil culture, the hymns translated directly from European hymns followed in Tamil, the rhythm, metre and tune of the original. The translations of German and English hymns were written in a rhythmic Tamil prose that was sometimes lineated in a manner resembling poetry, but as Peterson (2003) points out, they did not conform to the metrical, prosodic or musical criteria of a Tamil song. These were sung to European melodies. There were no attempts at rhyme through alliteration and assonance, fundamental elements in Tamil verse. Instead, there were frequent attempts at giving end-rhyme to the hymns though this was unnatural to Tamil poetry. Often words were either split ungrammatically for the sake of fitting a particular metre or tune; or, vowels were lengthened, thus distorting the meaning of the word.

Selvamony in his essay on Protestant hymns translated into Tamil, for example, points out the abnormal lengthening of Tamil words in the translation of the hymn ‘Rock of ages cleft for me’: the first line, *Pilavunta malaiya* is lengthened to *pi: lavu: nta ma...laiya* (Selvamony 1999: 364). In other instances, there are “unnatural abbreviations of sounds”: *nittyar* for *nittiyar*, *kritam* for *kiritam*, *caryan* for *cūriyan* (Selvamony 1999: 364). These hymns were constrained by the western musical tradition of clean-cut notes instead of the open-ended notes generally followed by the Indian style of singing. Further, western musical instruments such as the organ or piano mostly accompanied the hymns thus, moulding congregational singing to patterns that were unnatural to Tamil poetry or singing. Even Sastri, who otherwise greatly admired Fabricius’s translations, rewrote his translated hymns in the nineteenth century so that they fit Tamil poetic conventions better.

A few missionaries, who recognized the power of Tamil poetry and music in strengthening the Protestant Tamil church, advocated the use of Tamil songs rather than translated ones. Rev. Jones, wrote in 1895,

It should be remembered that a century and less ago the attitude of Christian scholars in India towards a strictly Hindu terminology was practically the same as their attitude towards Hindu music. To touch and use either was pollution. The consequence, in the case of native music, was that no mission deigned to use it. It was all western music—heavy, clumsy and utterly foreign to the life and spirit of the people (Jones 1895: 50).

Comparing the translated hymns to the beauty of Tamil hymns, Francis Kingsbury remarked: ...how ridiculous it looks that Tamil churches should be singing hymns which are in German and English metres and which are such poor translations of the originals. ... But surely there are Tamil scholars today who can translate such hymns in Tamil metres (Kingsbury 1927: 166).

H.A. Popley, another missionary in the early twentieth century, who was engaged in what he termed “musical evangelism,” wanted to see Christian gospel linked to expressions of “India’s religious devotion” because,

For depth of feeling, power of appeal and beauty of expression, there is very little in Tamil Christian literature to compare with the wonderful devotional literature of the Saivites and Vaishnavites of South India. The best of our Tamil Christian literature has drunk deep of these Hindu works and is often consciously modelled upon them” (Popley and Stephen 1914: 3).

Vedanayaka Sastri and H.A. Krishna Pillai, two Protestant Tamil poets of the nineteenth century, did just that: their poetry was an attempt to combine Christian concepts with Hindu modes of expressing devotion and the Tamil literary tradition. The two Tamil poets chose a different path to provide an alternative to mainstream

missionary translations of the Bible and hymns. That is, they used an alternative vocabulary, style and literary tradition to what the missionaries recommended as 'Christian.' They also chose not to use the 'Christian' or 'missionary Tamil' of the Protestant Tamil Bible. In the context of the lack of involvement of Protestant Tamils in the project of Bible translation, though presumably they were the primary readers of the translated Bible, Sastri and Krishna Pillai chose elements from the Tamil religious and literary traditions that they felt enabled them to better negotiate a place for Tamil Protestants within contemporary Tamil culture.

The writings of the two poets reveal appreciation of the reality that in the religiously diverse world of Tamil society, Tamil literary culture had a long history of being a medium for the defining of religious identity. They appropriated elements from what was then dominant and useful in Tamil culture: the bhakti or devotional poetry written by Tamil Śaivite and Vaiśnavite poet-saints from the sixth century onwards. This devotional poetry in Tamil was composed contemporaneously with Buddhist and Jain literature for some time. The bhakti poetry of the Śaivite sect is a large body of heterogeneous literature held by tradition to have been produced by sixty-three *nāyanmārs* [Tamil Śaivite saints] and is known as *Tirumarai*, that is, the 'Holy Book.' The bhakti poetry of the Vaiśnava sect is believed to have been composed by twelve ālvārs [Vaiśnava saints] and two other poets. According to Zvelebil, the earliest of these poet-saints, Poykai, Putam and Pey, probably belonged to 650-700 CE. Manikkavacakar's *Tiruvācakam* [the Holy Verses; circa 9th century] is the most popular of the Śaivite bhakti tradition and its Vaiśnavite counterpart is *Tiruvāymoli* [the Holy word] by Nammalvar. The tradition of Tamil bhakti poetry has continued to the present, with its second significant phase occurring in the nineteenth century as a result of another 'revival' within Hinduism, attributed to its encounter with Western Christianity. Distinguishing between the reception of pre-devotional and devotional literature, Zvelebil comments on the popular consumption of the latter: "...bhakti-inspired, religious-philosophical hymns are consumed and appreciated as ideology, as living religion, as ritual texts and prayers for temple and home" at a popular level (Zvelebil, 1974: 89).

The historical context behind the rise of the bhakti tradition will clarify why it became a powerful instrument for Protestant poets as well. Much bhakti poetry was written in a competitive vein, as Snell argues, "in which the superiority of one sect, tradition or lineage over another [was] strongly asserted" as offering a uniquely correct perception of divine truth (Callewaert and Snell 1994: 5,6). Most histories of Tamil literature present the encounter between Buddhism and Jainism on the one hand, and medieval Tamil Śaiva philosophy, Śaiva Siddhantism, in confrontational terms: as a

Hindu revival after the threat posed by the two heterodox faiths. However, the conflict was both intra-sectarian as between Tamil Śaivism and Vaiśnavism and the Sanskritic tradition of Vedantic Hinduism, or inter-sectarian such as between Tamil Śaivism and their Buddhist and Jain rivals in medieval Tamil culture. In the first instance, it is significant that much medieval Śaivite bhakti poetry was canonised as the 'fifth Veda' thus giving it equal status with the four Sanskrit ones. This also meant that these poems were recited as part of the ritual of temple worship. In the nineteenth century, medieval Tamil bhakti poetry was employed by non-brahmin high castes to assert a Tamil, non-brahmin identity over brahmanic Hinduism emphasized in the Sanskrit tradition. In the second instance, the Tamil bhakti movement developed in reaction against the Buddhist and Jain religious traditions that had entered Tamil culture from approximately the fourth century. Bhakti poetry became a means to reassert a Tamil Śaivite or Vaiśnavite identity and proved successful in suppressing rival religious movements. In this context, an important point to consider is that even when there was an interchange of ideas between two religious sects, they were often presented as exclusive to one sect: for instance, Richard Davis (in *Open Boundaries*, edited by Cort, 1998) suggests that Tamil bhakti poetry was the result of Śaiva Siddhanta's borrowing and reformulation of the Buddhist and Jain notions of piety and devotion.

Further, Tamil religious communities have claimed superior status by their use of a particular genre for expressing religious devotion: "[w]riting a counter-poem in a shared genre was one way to declare equal or superior status in relation to the rival sect, and a good way to subvert the influence or challenge the authority of the rival's text" (Peterson 2003: 42). Sastri and Krishna Pillai, by engaging with Tamil poetic genres of devotion, were making way for the participation of the Protestant Tamil community within this network of religious rivalry.

As a devotional movement in Hinduism, bhakti emphasized an intense emotional attachment and love of a devotee towards his/her personal God. The literature that was produced as a result of this movement expressed not only this devotion but became the medium of contact between the devotee and god. A bhakti poem became a context for direct religious experience. Norman Cutler argues, "Bhakti poems transmute the poet's experience into the devotee-audience's experience, and in this way the audience is brought into the kind of close proximity to divinity that distinguishes the saints from ordinary mortals. The blurring of the boundary between saint and god and between devotee and saint is basic to the poetics of bhakti" (Cutler 1987: 112). Thus, all those who participate in the ritual performance of the saints' poem re-enact the saints' experience of communion with the deity (Cutler 1987: 113). The relationship between the devotee and God is based on the analogy of human

relationships, that of master-servant, parent-child, woman and her beloved, which placed the devotee in a subordinate position. One of the characteristic features of bhakti poetry was that it became popular because it was open to all castes, classes and gender.

Sastri and Krishna Pillai were both from the Vellala caste, which was the highest non-brahmin Tamil caste and the chief upholder of both the Śaivite and Vaiśnavite bhakti traditions. Thus, they came to Christianity with strong links with the bhakti tradition of devotion and poetry. Sastri, the son of a Śaivite Vellala who had converted first to Catholicism and in 1785 to the Evangelical church of the German missionaries, was given traditional Tamil schooling in his early years (Jnanadikkam 1899). Though he was placed under Schwartz (1726-98) for instruction when he was eleven years, he spent the next four years in Tanjore, which in the eighteenth century was an important centre of Tamil and South Indian literature and arts. Krishna Pillai, as a Vaiśnavite Vellala before his conversion in 1857, was brought up on Kamban's Ramayana and the hymns of the Alvars and the Sri Vaiśnava theology that "the true bhakta is one who takes refuge in Narayana alone as the Lord who bestows both release (mokṣa) from finite existence (samsara) and worldly fruits" (Hudson 1970: 34). The literary choices that Sastri and Krishna Pillai made as Protestants were directly influenced by the religious conventions they shared with Tamil Hindus and they created a body of Protestant Tamil poetry that combined those religious and literary conventions with their Protestant belief and devotion. They found that Tamil bhakti devotion went well with the German Pietist emphasis on hymns and music as part of Protestant devotion introduced by the German missionaries into the Tamil church. They thus spoke in familiar terms to their Tamil audiences. I will discuss three such choices that were available to both missionary translators and the Tamil Protestant poets and the reasons why they differed in their choice. The first is the choice between poetry and prose, second, in their use of religious terminology and third, their use of poetic images of devotion.

Protestant missionaries were aware that most Hindu scriptures were in verse. It was also a well-known fact that there was an especially close relationship between religious expression and poetry in Hindu culture. When Hindu scriptures were translated creatively into other Indian languages, they were translated into verse. A well-known Tamil example would be Kamban's Tamil version of Valmiki's Ramayana. Robert Caldwell Jr., in an essay titled, 'Popular Tamil Poetry' (1872) pointed to the wide appeal of Kambar's Ramayana: though it was an elaborate poem in highly polished diction, it was the most popular poem amongst Tamil Hindus as it was sung almost daily on the streets by wandering minstrels (Caldwell, 1872). Popley quotes

G.U. Pope (1820-1908), a Protestant missionary and Tamil scholar of the nineteenth century, as having said that the Śaivites led the way in the propagation of their system by means of popular songs. Several nineteenth-century missionaries wrote to the MRTBS that tracts in verse were more appropriate in reaching Hindus than prose ones. Reverend S. Winfred suggested, "...Handbills may be prepared, not only in prose, but also in poetry of simple style, ... I think Handbills in poetry will be more acceptable to the Hindus than those in prose" (MRTBS, 1869: 23). The Annual Report of the MRTBS for 1879 mentions the publication of a new tract titled 'The Everlasting Way,' drawing attention to its success due to its use of poetry, and compares it with recitals from the Ramayana:

It contains a selection of popular lyrics, well adapted to convey a good idea of the Gospel message. It has been sung, with much effect, at various gatherings. The attention of missionaries is invited to this mode of disseminating truth. In all parts of the country, groups may be seen listening to recitals from the Ramayana. The people, accustomed to this, will readily give a hearing to a far nobler theme (MRTBS, 1880: 1).

Thus, the effectiveness of the Ramayana in verse in a pre-print culture, where recitation and hearing played vital roles in creating memory, reveals the important place poetry has had in the religious culture in most parts of India.

Likewise, Rhenius observed that popular commentary on Hindu gods and goddesses was provided in song: he wrote of "two men [who] stood before a large sheet of paper, about six feet long and three wide, full of pictures of the gods and their exploits, which they were pointing out to the people, explaining them by singing a commentary on them" (Rhenius 1841: 577). Moreover, he referred to popular Protestant efforts at translating the gospel into Tamil verse: "One of the schoolmasters brought a specimen of the gospel in Tamul verse, such as the people are accustomed to in their writings" (Rhenius 1841: 159). The significance of verse in Tamil religious culture was certainly apparent to most Protestant missionaries.

In spite of these observations and comparisons, Protestant missionaries chose not to translate the Bible into verse. Even the obviously poetical books such as the Psalms and Song of Solomon were not translated into Tamil verse until the mid-twentieth century. The only effort at giving a poetical equivalent to the Bible was made by Beschi, the eighteenth-century Catholic missionary who wrote the epic *Tēmpāvāni*, which retold the biblical narrative with Christ, the Virgin Mary and Joseph resembling heroes from the Tamil Ramayana. Beschi was given the title '*Vīramāmuṇivar*' (Heroic Devotee) by his Tamil admirers, thus, comparing his efforts with other devotional or bhakti writers. Caldwell, for instance, pointed out Beschi's contribution in a footnote in

his essay on popular Tamil poetry, "The aim of the great Italian was to supplant the Ramayanam in a measure. He wished to present to Christian natives a poem which would be to them what the Ramayanam was to other Hindu religionists" (Caldwell 1872:197). Abbé Dubois had recognized much earlier in the nineteenth century that there was a need to translate the Bible into verse to make it more effective in India:

In fact, a translation of the Holy Scriptures, in order to awaken the curiosity, and fix the attention of the learned Hindoo, at least as a literary production, ought to be on a level with the Indian performances of the same kind among them, and be composed in fine poetry, a flowery style, and a high stream of eloquence, this being universally the mode in which all Indian performances of any worth are written. As long as the versions are executed in the low style in which we find these, you may rest assured that they will only excite contempt, and tend to increase the aversion already entertained by the natives against the Christian religion (Dubois 1823: 22).

Protestant missionaries, curiously, ignored such observations and their own awareness that if the Bible was to displace the Ramayana or other equivalent Hindu scriptures, it would do so more effectively if it was a verse translation. In spite of the wide debate on almost every aspect of translating the Bible that occurred amongst nineteenth-century Protestant missionaries in India, it is significant that there is silence on the issue of form. The translation committee of the *Tiruviviliyam* in the 1980s was the first to discuss the translation strategies for poetry as a separate issue: in a document on 'Translating the Poetry of the Bible' they state that in order to effectively communicate the message of the original document they must pay attention not only to the content but to "the *form* in which the original message was conveyed." Until then, the premium based on 'faithful' translations seems to have foreclosed even imagining the possibility of the entire Bible in verse translation. Another reason for preferring prose to poetry may have been the suspicion of Tamil poetry felt by Protestant missionaries from the very beginning. Ziegenbalg, for instance, was the first to criticise the effects of Tamil religious poetry, as "Poetical Fiction" that thwarted all the attributes of the Supreme Being, which was "destructive of good Morals in all the Youth" (Ziegenbalg 1719: 210). On the other hand, perhaps the aim of Protestant missionaries was to present the Bible as radically different from all other available scriptures in Tamil Society. A further reason may have been that since the Bible was presented as scripture meant for all, it could not be translated into the high style of Tamil poetry; this would have made it inaccessible to all those who were not highly educated in Tamil literature.

Sastri and Krishna Pillai, on the other hand, wrote mainly in verse. Though Sastri wrote several prose tracts he is remembered for his poetical compositions of which there are 500 devotional songs alone. Of a total of 120 Tamil works, the majority are in

verse. He used various Tamil verse forms: the *pirapantam*, *antāti*, *kuravanci*, *kummi* and *kīrtanai*. He composed an alternative liturgy in Tamil for use in the church and for personal devotion: a combination of prayers and hymns for the morning and evening, called *Jepamālei*. He used his most elaborate dramatic composition in verse, *Bethlehem Kuravanci*, as a platform to describe the histories of the Bible and the spread of Christianity, and a new cosmology in place of the Hindu cosmology. He even composed polemical works, such as *Cāstirakummi*—an attack on Śaivism, in verse. *Kuruṭṭu vali* (Blind Way), a tract that he wrote to explain Christianity to non-Christians, was also in verse. During discussion on the appropriate tracts to be printed, there were several suggestions from Protestant Tamil clergy that one of his poems printed as a tract would be more effective than the prose tracts in print. For instance, John Nullathumby, a Protestant Tamil clergyman asserted in 1874:

It would be much better to print Vedanayaga Shastriar's poems. ... As I have long experience in this Zillah, I know very well that people of this part of the country are more attached to his writings. If the different parts of the Jebamalei were printed separately, I hope they would prove of great advantage to the spread of the Gospel (MRTBS, 1880: 29).

Many of his songs or *kīrtanais* continue to figure prominently in Tamil Church hymnals today. As Peterson observes, Sastri was able to give Tamil congregations what the missionaries had not: “a body of comprehensive, wide-ranging, original sacred poetry in Tamil idioms which in their eyes surpassed the religious literature of the Hindus, especially the Saiva and Vaisnava Vellalas” (Peterson 2002: 16).

Krishna Pillai is best known for his poetic works *Irakshanya yātrikam* (Journey of Salvation) which began to be serialised in *Narpōtakam* (“Friendly Instructor”) a Protestant Tamil monthly, from April 1878 and was published complete in 1894; *Irakshanya manōharam* (The Delight of Salvation) comprising thirty-four poems with 566 verses was published by the Madras Christian Literature Society in 1897; *Irakshanyaṇupūti* (Experience of Salvation) written between 1875 and 1887 in forty verses; and hymns for worship in the mornings and evenings. *Irakshanya yātrikam*, his epic of 3,800 verses, was a verse translation of Bunyan’s *The Pilgrim’s Progress*. The narrative presents in the Tamil epic style a translation of Bunyan’s text. Krishna Pillai was able to sustain two Christian themes: the allegory of the soul’s journey to salvation and the narration of the biblical stories of creation, the fall of man, and the life, death, atonement and resurrection of Christ. Yet, as Dennis Hudson points out, the mythic framework of Krishna Pillai’s epic reveals continuity with the Hindu Vaiśnava tradition, combining Kamban’s Ramayana and the Vaiśnava *purānas* (Hudson 1970: 483). In the first two books, there are distinct parallels in his treatment of Christ and Kamban’s depiction of Rama: Christ’s passion parallels the tragic significance of Rama exiled;

Christ's entrance into the Garden of Gethsemane is patterned on Kamban's scene of Rama entering the forest; and the loss felt by the followers of Christ and by the populace of Ayodhya at the loss of their respective leaders. The third, fourth and fifth books follow *The Pilgrim's Progress* more closely, where Christian's battle with Satan recalls Rama's battle with Ravana and 'Vanity Fair,' which becomes 'maya puri,' echoes Ravana's capital 'Lanka puri.' This allowed Krishna Pillai to sustain a parallel dualism of God's heaven and Satan's kingdom to that of Ayodhya and Lanka (Hudson 1970: 482-86).

The important point to be kept in mind is that Tamil translations of *The Pilgrim's Progress* already existed in print when Krishna Pillai chose to compose *Irakshanya yātrikam*. According to Murdoch's *Classified Catalogue of Tamil Christian Literature* (1901), the first Tamil translation of *Pilgrim's Progress* (*Oru paratēci yon pun̄niyan carittiram*) was printed in Vepery in 1793.¹⁵ In fact, one of the four books given him, which lead to his eventual conversion, was *Paratēciyin Mōksha Pirayānam*, the complete *Pilgrim's Progress* in Tamil prose published in 1853 (Hudson 1970: 258). Krishna Pillai did not have a good command of the English language and so relied on the prose translation of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in Tamil to compose his verse. His introduction of verse and other poetic and religious literary traditions from existing Tamil sacred literature, reveal that the existing translations had proved unsatisfactory. By converting prose into verse, Krishna Pillai was filling what he saw as a lacuna in the available literary culture of Protestant Tamils. Thus, though the two poets revealed a fundamental change in the religious content of their poetry, significantly, they employed the literary form of their former religious allegiance—that is, formal elements from Hindu bhakti and epic literature.

The second choice the two poets exercised was in their preference of religious terminology. As shown in the previous chapter, Protestant missionaries thought that since some of the 'best' Tamil religious terms were those employed by the Hindus with particular Hindu meanings such terms were 'unsafe' for use in the Bible (Wenger 1877: 8). The two Tamil poets on the other hand, and other Catholic and Protestant poets like them, were quite comfortable in their usage of 'Hindu' terminology. Though they avoided proper nouns such as the names of Hindu gods or their special places of abode, for instance, they were quite free with terms that described the attributes of God. It is significant that none of the words they included in their poetry with reference to Jesus Christ or Yahweh figured in missionary translations of the Tamil Bible. These terms were: *īsvarā* (God), *perumān* (God, usually used for Viśnu), *nātar* (lord), *cimaya carkuru* (the True Guru who embodies Pure Intelligence), *tayā-paran* (the all-Merciful), *caccittāṇanta* (see below). The terms they used to refer specifically to Christ

were *cāmi*, and compounds such as *cuntara Kiristēcu cāmi* (Lord Jesus Christ the beautiful); *Puṇṇiya Kiristēcu cāmi* (the holy Lord Jesus Christ); *ñāna-kumāraṇ* (Son of Wisdom); *tiyākēcan* (the Lord of Renunciation), *jakat-kuru* (the teacher of the whole world); *aruḷnāyakan* (the Lord of grace); and *āntarnāyakam* (Lord of the celestials). The characteristics of God were described by phrases such as *āti antam naṭu illāta tarparan* (the Supreme Being who has no beginning, middle or end), *paranjōti* (Supreme Light), *kirupākaran* (God as the fountain of mercy), *tayānītiyē* (God who is filled with mercy and justice) which were terms used by Hindu Tamil poets in their religious poetry. Protestant missionaries occasionally used some of these terms in translated hymns but were careful to keep them out of the Bible. Of these, I will elaborate on two terms to clarify the difference in attitudes between the Bible translators and the Tamil poets.

Caccittānantā, a compound of three Sanskrit terms, refers to Brahman as *sat* (reality), *chit* (consciousness or knowledge), and *ānandā* (joy). It is not used in any version of the Tamil Bible though it is a religious term that continues to be widely popular all over India. However, both Sastri and Krishna Pillai adapted the term generally used to refer to the triple aspect of God in Hinduism to suit the Christian theology of Trinity. By “introducing the term Sachidanandan urtti [power, energy] Sastri imparts all attributes that were given to God earlier by the Saivites” (Israel 1980: 118). Krishna Pillai has sung a lyric with *caccittānantā* as the main theme. This lyric, according to A.J. Appasamy, has become a favourite in the Tamil Church and is given first place in Tamil lyric books (Appasamy 1966: 79). The first six lines from stanza 1 of Appasamy’s translation of the hymn show how Krishna Pillai used the term:

Thou art *Cat!*
 Thou art Immaculate!
 Thou are beyond compare!
 Thou art *Cit!*
 Thou art *Ananta!*
 Thou glorious Trinity!

Both poets use the term to show that its definition reaches its ‘finalé’ in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity in a more meaningful way than any other.

Brahma is called *Vētanāyakan* as the origin and protector of the four Vedas. *Nāyakan* is also a name given to Siva: for instance, he is called *nayanārikal mūntrutaya nāyakan* or ‘the lord with the three eyes.’ Perhaps this was one of the reasons why ‘*Vētanayakan*’ was not used in the Bible. However, it was used in Christian poetry in different forms. Krishna Pillai referred to Christ in *Irakshanya manoharam* as *arumaināyakan* i.e. ‘the precious Lord’ (29:5). Sastri used expressions

typical of Hindu poetry in his hymns: *vētanāyakanē tayā tēvātināyakanē*, (Lord of the Vedas, gracious God, Lord of lords). Vedanayaka Pillai (1826-1889), a Tamil Catholic poet, addressed Virgin Mary as *periya nāyakiyanaiyē*, that is, ‘great mother *nāyaki*’ though *nāyaki* was one of the Hindu goddess Parvati’s names. Sastri and Vedanayaka Pillai, who shared the name ‘Vētanayakam,’ adopted the practice of bringing their name into their poetry, thus playing on references to themselves as well as Christ: ‘Teacher (of the Vēta or Bible) who abides on the tongue of Vēdanayagan’¹⁶ is an example. Sastri was in the habit of including his name in the closing verse of many of his hymns as part of the act of devotion, which became a bone of contention between him and the missionaries in the 1850s.

The third choice that the two poets made was in their use of imagery from bhakti literature. The poets borrowed images from Śaivite and Vaiśnavite bhakti poetry to describe their devotion to and relationship with Christ. Thus, besides religious terminology, they drew on the religious conventions that were a part of Tamil bhakti tradition. Krishna Pillai’s physical description of Christ recalls descriptions of Hindu gods:

The Sun of flawless Righteousness
That sheds forth its glowing beams;
The purest Gold in shining light;
The Gem of beauty indescribable;
He who is like to gleaming Pearls:
The lamp that burns untrimmed:
He who glows as does the Ruby—
'Tis He I see upon the Cross.

Irakshanya Yātrikam (I.10 [Trans. E.E. White])

On the night of his conversion, Krishna Pillai wrote his first lines as a Protestant poet: “O Sea of Grace,/O Sun that dispels the works of Darkness,/.../I offer my heart to only you,/ The form of Dharma.”¹⁷ Hudson points out that Krishna Pillai’s praise, “in no way indicates the name of the Lord in whom he has taken refuge; and the final epithet, *dharma-murti* (the form of Dharma), recalls to mind the figure of Rama, who embodied Dharma on earth” (Hudson 1970: 260).

Such echoes from Hindu religious poetry occurred in the poetry of other Christian poets besides Sastri and Krishna Pillai. Simon Casie Chitty, for instance, gave the example of Inbakavi (d. 1835), a Catholic, who composed verse on Christ in imitation of poetry on Siva in imitation of one addressed to Siva by Tayumanavar (Chitty 1859: 28-9). Chitty recorded an anecdote about Inbakavi that revealed the ease with which Christian poets could use Hindu imagery for Christian purpose:

One day when he was drunk, and attending the feast in the Hindu temple at Nellore as a spectator, he hymned the praises of Skanda [or Murukan, son of Siva] in an ode with chorus, '*Skanda of Nellore has mounted his vehicle, the peacock, yea he has mounted his vehicle, the peacock,*' but in his sober moments feeling compunction for it, he instantly composed another ode commemorating the crucifixion of our Lord, the chorus of which is as follows: '*Lord Jesus has enthroned himself, yea he has enthroned himself on the Cross*' (Chitty, 1859: 28).

Sastri and Krishna Pillai also use the highest point of mystical union in Saiva Siddhanta and bhakti literature: known as *tātalai*, that is, the union of *tāl* (feet) and *talai* (head), it signifies the close and intimate contact between the feet of the lord and the head of his devotee. Dayanandan Francis (1987) thinks that the grammatical union of the two terms is meant to reflect the mystical union between the *bhakta* (devotee) and his/her lord (Francis 1987: 35). For instance, Campantar (c. 570-670 A.D.) in *Piramapuram (Cirkāli)* wrote, "I beg you, good heart,/ if you seek release,/ think only of my Lord's holy feet" (Peterson 1989: 255). Likewise, Tirumular (a medieval Śaivite Saint) in the *Tirumantiram*, a collection of poems and mantras on Siva, composed: "He came down from Heaven, clothed in body, Karma to watch,/ Stretched forth His cool Feet of Grace, planting them firm on my head" (No. 113, Trans. Natrajan 1979). Krishna Pillai, expressed his desire for taking refuge at the feet of Christ, where previously it would have been at the feet of Narayana: "Thou has brought me under thy flowery feet./ Thou hast given me measureless grace" (*Irakshanya Yātrikam*, I.15 [Trans. E.E. White]).

An interesting contrast to the use of this imagery by the two poets is Ziegenbalg's rejection of the same in the previous century. In *Propagation of the Gospel in the East* (1718) Ziegenbalg recorded an encounter with his Tamil teacher over the best way of translating a passage: "When lately in the abovesaid Translation of the Christian Principles, a passage happened to be, shewing how we might become Children and Friends of God, our School-master [was] startled to so bold a saying, and offered to put in, instead of that Expression, that God might allow us to kiss his Feet" (Ziegenbalg 1718: 56). It is clear that the Tamil's reaction arose from Hindu Tamil devotional culture and that his suggestion for translation was a cultural rather than a literal equivalent. It is also clear from the rest of the passage that Ziegenbalg chose not to follow his Tamil teacher's suggestion. The recurrence of this image of devotion in Protestant Tamil poetry suggests that it has as important a place in Protestant as Hindu devotion. Further, the use of this image by the two poets suggests that for them, the literary conventions from non-Christian devotional literature did not conflict with their Protestant expression of devotion to Christ.

At the same time, however, Sastri and Krishna Pillai challenged such bhakti devotional conventions in their use. While Hindu bhakti poets exalted the sacred form of their gods in temples, the Protestant poets exalted the image of Christ hanging on the cross. Dayanandan Francis (1992) points out that they "...endeavour[ed] to bring out in clear terms the various ways in which Christ challenges and transforms certain religio-cultural elements of Hindu *bhakti* poetry" (Francis 1992: 158). That is, though Krishna Pillai, for instance, used some of the conventional metaphors of bhakti devotion when comparing Christ to gold, rubies, pearls, the nectar of fruit etc., he was paradoxically referring to Christ's bleeding and torn body hanging on the cross: that is, he not only exalted Christ's physical humiliation but also exulted in his apparent disgrace because his death signified a saving power. Sugirtharajah points to another instance of Krishna Pillai's reworking of literary conventions from Tamil poetry: in *Irakshanya yātrikam*, Krishna Pillai compared the practice resorted to by Tamil lovers in Cankam literature,¹⁸ where the lover, as evidence of his love for his beloved, rides screaming with blood on a thorny cart made out of a Palmyra trunk, to the death of Christ, with his head crowned with thorns, hanging on the cross (Sugirtharajah 1999: 99). Likewise, Sastri's presentation of Christ may have verbal echoes of a contemporary poet, Thiagaraja's (1767-1847)¹⁹ descriptions of Rama. However, while Thiagaraja concentrated on the noble birth and excellent qualities of Rama, Sastri focused attention on Christ as the destroyer of sin and the source of eternal life (Francis 1992: 161).

While describing their relationship with God in terms of a child to its parent, the poets refer to God as both father and mother providing for their child. God was sometimes the comforting mother for them. Krishna Pillai showed continuity with his Vaiśnavite *bhakti* tradition in his portrayal of the soul of the devotee as a woman lamenting her separation from her lover, Christ. In the *Irakshanya manōkaram*, there is a lyric in which he spoke of the Christian Church as the bride of Christ longing for a vision of Christ. Thus, Krishna Pillai found the means to combine elements of Christian mysticism with parallel conventions in *bhakti* poetry to describe the relationship between the Protestant God and Protestant Tamil devotees.

A brief mention of how well received Sastri and Krishna Pillai were by their wider Protestant Tamil community points further to the significant role played by their poetry. Fellow Protestant Tamils recognized both poets for their poetical talents during their lifetimes. The works of both were published, while Sastri held public performances of his songs and drama. King Serfoji II of Tanjore appointed Sastri court poet in 1829. Further, the congregations of Tanjore, Madras, Palayamcottai and Madurai publicly awarded Sastri several testimonials for his contribution to Tamil Protestant literature.²⁰

The Tanjore and Tranquebar Protestant Tamil communities had awarded him the title ‘cūvicēsha kavirāyar’ or the ‘Evangelical Poet’ in 1808. The Tamil congregation at Vepery felicitated him with a title ('Njanadeeba Cave Royer' that is, “the poet who is the light of wisdom”), several ceremonial honours and a testimonial signed by forty members of the congregation in 1809 (Devanesan 1956: 32). In 1815, Sastri was given another title by the congregations in Tiruchirappalli after he had presented *cāctira kummi* (a satire on the superstitions of the Hindus): “vedasāstri” or Doctor of Scripture. Devanesan writes that the congregation of Tanjore bestowed a “perpetual agreement” on Sastri and his descendants in 1815” (Devanesan 1956: 43).

The members of the congregations who signed these testimonials held important positions in both the Tanjore Palace administration and European missionary and colonial jurisdictions: they included judges, interpreters, catechists, school teachers and clerks. Peterson rightly argues that the testimonials are an important source for our understanding of the congregations’ idea of what constituted Evangelical poetry in Tamil: “Each of the testimonials was signed by leaders and members of the local congregation, indicating that ... the Tamil congregations were the real patrons and audience of Sastri’s works” (Peterson 2003: 30). The patronage of the congregations reveal that they saw Sastri’s poetry as a body of Protestant Tamil literature that successfully combined Tamil literary traditions with their Protestant faith. The Madras congregation recognized that Sastri had succeeded in his attempts to expound Christian doctrine in verse that outshone “all worldly poets” since it was written “according to the grammatical and poetical prosodical rules” (Gnanadickam 1987: 105). Their praise reveals how his poetry had proved advantageous to the community: “we are very much honoured and praised before the pagans, which is a great advantage to our children” (Gnanadickam 1987: 105).

Clearly, the Protestant community identified with his poetry because it satisfied a lack felt regarding existing Protestant Tamil literature made available by the missionaries. By conferring elaborate public awards and titles on him, they were participating in the old Tamil literary tradition of felicitating a learned poet, thereby simultaneously competing with other religious communities in Tamil culture. The testimonial from the Trichinopoly congregation decided to “honour him with another new name because he excelled in knowledge all the Hindoos who were well versed through all India” (Gnanadickam 1987: 107). Sastri’s own self-image was a combination of the Śaivite bhakti poets and David the Psalmist. He signed himself as the ‘Evangelical Poet of Tanjore.’ As Peterson comments, the testimonials reveal that Protestant Tamil poetry had to rival, if not surpass, the devotional and sacred poetry of other religious communities and sects as well as achieve the standards of learned

poetry of the sort produced by Tamil scholar-poets: “In sum, the testimonials affirm that, in the early nineteenth century, the cultural identity of a Tamil religious community was intimately linked with its possession of a body of poetic works that shared in the common discourses of secular and sacred poetry in Tamil” (Peterson 2003: 32).

Thus, both Sastri and Krishna Pillai and their Protestant audiences were aware that they were ‘speaking’ their new religious persuasion to their non-Christian, fellow-Tamils in the language and traditions of Tamil religious culture. Both poets were able to make the leap from the prose translations of the Bible and other Protestant literature to the poetic tradition of sacred literature that they and their fellow Protestant Tamils required in order to establish a place for themselves in the existing patterns of rivalry between various religious factions.

However, some elements in the bhakti tradition may have seemed to missionaries as a potential threat to the balance of power in the devotee-deity relationship in the Christian paradigm. In bhakti tradition, “devotion engenders divinity in the devotee; thus the perfected devotee or saint is treated as a divine being” (Cutler 1987: 51). The devotee’s experience of the hymns gains such importance that it may seem to take precedence over the importance due to the divine object of devotion. Conflict arose between some missionaries and Sastri over this point in 1858. Pope, an eminent Tamil scholar, thought that naming oneself in the context of church worship went against the ideal of glorifying none but God (Peterson 2003: 50). Sastri was asked to remove from his hymns all verses that carried his name. His hymns included in published anthologies were printed without his signature verse. He protested, defending his practice as part of an ancient Tamil tradition of sacred poetry, intended to express and celebrate the devotee’s devotion to his God, with no connotation of self-aggrandisement (Peterson 2003: 51).

Further, the intense emotion that is part of bhakti devotion was viewed with suspicion by mainstream missionary culture in South India. J.P. Jones, one such missionary at the end of the nineteenth century, for instance, had misgivings about the act of faith that was exalted by bhakti, such that it acquired mystical potency. He thought Protestant Tamils “need to be weaned from this false view of faith, or piety...” (Jones 1900: 52). Bhakti’s emphasis on the sufficiency and power of emotion seemed dangerous to missionaries who had had their own skirmishes with dissenting groups in eighteenth-and nineteenth-century England against their religious ‘fervour and enthusiasm’. “The ... paradigm of the visceral experience of God [in bhakti], of unmediated relationship with him and of the ability to give spontaneous, dramatic expression to emotional love” (Peterson 1994: 224), when transferred into the

Christian framework hints at the displacement of the authority of the church and clergy. Thus, the 'rational' missionary viewed the emotional and highly-strung 'native' at times with indulgence and at others with suspicion. Likewise, the emotionally charged poetry produced by the Tamils would have seemed inappropriate in comparison with the rational prose of the Bible.

This was also why Rhenius sought to diminish the festival calendar and to reduce the sensual aspects of celebration. A further point of contention between the missionaries and Protestant Tamils was the use of Tamil instruments to accompany the singing of their songs. Instruments such as bells, hand cymbals, horns and drums used in Saiva temples were considered too 'heathen' for the church. In their place, the piano, organ, violin, guitar and harp were the approved instruments. Sastri complained against Rhenius's bias:

He not only forbids us obstinately to use any decent instruments even Cymbal with our songs saying that it is heathenism, but also used what device soever he can in order that we ourselves may put an end to the Tamil singing. Hence he spoiled the pleasures of the Tamilians (*Saditeratoo*, 1829).

The missionaries continued to condemn Tamil singing on 'feast days' and at weddings though the Tamil congregations toned down their use of instruments to small cymbals. Hudson's analysis makes the connection between the dispute over Bible translation and the struggle over the observance of religious festivals in the Tamil style:

In Malabarian terms, the 'Junior Missionaries' were not comfortable with a full use of the body's five sense organs (*indriya, pori*) in the act of worship, and stressed instead the sixth one, the mind (*manas*). As Sastri's document reveals, a new Bible translation implied much more than merely new words; it implied a different 'language of the body.' The 'body language' used by those who followed the Fabricius translation was one the 'new missionaries' judged to be suitable for the worship of Siva or Visnu in a 'pagan' temple, or for worship in a 'heretical' Catholic church, but not for worship in a Protestant assembly (Hudson 2000: 150-51).

More specifically, the metaphor of erotic love in bhakti poetry, "the dark, dangerous side of the sacred as erotic" (Peterson 1994: 224) would have been considered inappropriate to Christian devotion. Since bhakti poetry was part of the temple ritual of worship and sometimes performed by the devadasis (female temple dancers), it was unfavourably connected to notions about licentious sexual acts allowed by Hindu temple practices. This poetry was considered unsuitable for Christian use. Sastri often held public performances of his compositions using professional singers outside churches in imitation of temple performances. However, aware of criticism, he introduced changes such as using male singers instead (Peterson 2003: 48). Both poets avoided explicit sexual connotations in their poetry and Protestant literary critics from the nineteenth century onwards took care to point out that there are no unseemly

sexual references in Protestant Tamil poetry even though they followed bhakti patterns of devotion. In spite of this, according to the new rules imposed by the SPG, in the 1820s, the Tamil congregations had to refrain from singing hymns in the Tamil performance forms since the modes and effects of these forms were considered too sensuous and too close to heathen models, to be fit for use in a true Christian church.

The several instances of public felicitation of Sastri by Protestant Tamil congregations, in contrast to missionary disapproval, suggest that Sastri and his poetry became sites of contest between the missionaries and the Protestant Tamil congregations. It is clear that for these congregations, Sastri and Krishna Pillai's poetry effectively represented their religious identity as a Protestant community. Their poetry, rising out of the context of Tamil literary and religious traditions, kept the community both in touch with their Tamil cultural past and yet distinct from Hindu beliefs and practices in ways that the translated Bible and hymns could not do. It is through their poetry that the Protestant Tamil community was in dialogue with the Hindu communities on the one hand and the Protestant missionaries on the other. Their translation of Protestant Christianity using Tamil literary traditions signalled to the missionaries the lack felt in formal missionary translations of the Bible and hymns. Simultaneously, they were also able to represent their new religious conviction to the other religious communities in Tamil society by using traditional means available to religious sects to announce their superiority over others. Further, while literary language and aesthetics of the poems point to the local, the trans-regional themes of biblical and Christian history kept the Tamil Protestants connected to Protestant communities outside Tamil society.

In the highly sophisticated literary culture of Tamil society, religious poetry had become a powerful instrument with which to express religious identity throughout a long history of religious rivalry. Assailing the literary quality of Tamil had figured largely in earlier conflicts between Saiva, Buddhist and Jain sects. Inability to speak or sing good Tamil had been used to 'expose' the perceived foreignness of Buddhist and Jain poets in medieval Tamil society as it was brought up again at the entry of Protestant Christianity into Tamil society in the eighteenth century. The ability to use pure, grammatical Tamil was viewed as an indication of knowing the true God. In this context, the Tamil Protestant congregations, by formally recognizing the contributions of Sastri and Krishna Pillai, showed awareness of the importance of possessing an original body of sacred poetry that could surpass the religious poetry of rival religious communities. Above all, the body of Protestant poetry written by Tamils indicates the desire to formulate their identity on their own terms.

Before ending this section on nineteenth-century Protestant Tamil hymns and devotional songs, it would be worthwhile to mention that this body of poetic literature has been criticised in the second half of the twentieth century by sections of the Protestant Tamil community. Those who have actively engaged with dalit²¹ culture within the Protestant Tamil community have pointed out that Sastri and Krishna Pillai's poetry followed elitist Tamil aesthetics and literary conventions in order to assimilate Protestant Christianity. This made their poetry alien to the 'low' folk culture of Protestant Tamil dalits. In opposition to Sastri's *kirtanai*, Theophilus Appavoo, a twentieth-century Dalit theologian, has attempted to incorporate Tamil folk music and elements of rural culture into Protestant Tamil church culture. Appavoo suggests a counter-assimilative strategy, one that rejects the upper-caste culture that was encoded in the Protestant Tamil poetry written in the classical style. He argues that Carnatic music is an individual art that does not facilitate community participation, unity, or protest to change society; and that it cannot encode anger effectively but instead pacifies. He further says, that the key to the difficulty of its transmission is its nature as a performance art controlled by class and caste elites.²² Instead, Appavoo, has attempted to break the cultural hegemony of Protestant Tamil elites by designing an alternative Christian liturgy that draws on Tamil folk musical and worship traditions in order to make Protestant Christianity more accessible to the lower caste groups (Sherinian 2002). Thus, the Protestant Tamil identity based on Vellala caste politics of the nineteenth century was no longer acceptable to large sections of the Protestant Tamil community in the twentieth century.

II. Twentieth-century Protestant Tamil responses: translators and readers

Bible translation as well as Protestant Tamil response to the translation of the Bible in Tamil entered a new phase with the beginning of the twentieth century. The 'Dravidian movement' (1905-1944), an important political movement in Tamilnadu, affected both processes significantly. Its roots went back to the nineteenth century and beyond but gathered political momentum in the first decades of the twentieth century. It became a full-fledged political movement by the 1940s. A multifaceted movement, it attacked the several areas—political, religious, social and cultural—of Tamil society, as it existed then. The ideological drive of the movement was lost by the 1980s.

First, the political thrust of the Dravidian Movement was to fight the near monopoly by English-educated Tamil Brahmins over the public administration of the Madras Presidency. The movement sought to mobilize Tamils on an ethnic basis and initiated a Tamil nationalism of non-brahmin Tamils in order to counter the social, political and ideological hegemony of the Tamil Brahmins in South India; it also spoke against what

it saw as the caste-based elitism of the Indian National Congress Party and of the prevailing discourse of Indian nationalism. The political manifestations of the Dravidian Movement have been in the formation of the Justice Party in 1916-17, which was reorganised in 1944 as the Dravida Kazhagam (Dravida Party); a split in the Dravida Kazhagam in 1949 led to the formation of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (Party for the Progress of Dravidians), which came to power in 1967.

In the second sphere of contention, the religious and social, the attack was directed against Brahmanism. From the 1880s onward non-Brahmin Tamil scholars attempted to show that Śaivism was the distinctive Dravidian religious system and that the Saiva Siddhanta philosophy was superior to the teachings of the Vedas (Arooran 1980: 20). However, by the 1920s, prominent ideologues of the Movement, such as E.V. Ramaswami Naicker (1879-1973), extended the critique of brahmanical Hinduism to Tamil Śaivism thus, moving ultimately to an anti-religious and atheistic position. In order to mobilise Tamil consciousness against the social dominance of the brahmanical castes, E.V. Ramaswami (Periyar), started the '*cuya mariyātai iyakkam*' or the 'Self-Respect Movement' in 1925, which was committed to social reform: "As a social reform movement the Self-Respect Movement aimed at a casteless society and towards its realisation it began to criticise and condemn caste and its associated institutions such as religion, rituals and traditions" (Arooran 1980: 159). The first Provincial Self-Respect Conference held at Chingleput, near Madras in 1929 ratified the many objectives which were part of the movement from the beginning: "...its strong egalitarian bias and its determination to boycott Brahmin priests, ... and above all its devotion to what it considered to be Dravidian civilization" (Irschick 1969: 341).

Thus, the third prominent thrust of the Dravidian Movement was to create an awareness and pride in Tamil culture. The study of Tamil history, literature and most importantly, Tamil language began to be promoted actively in the 1920s. Again, the roots of this mobilization lay in the second half of the nineteenth century, when "neo-Śaivism" along with the idea of Śaivism as the true and original religion of all non-brahmin Tamils also promoted Tamil Śaivite literature; pride in Tamil as a classical language; and a rejection of Sanskrit as a divine language (Ramaswamy 1998: 25). Between 1880 and 1920, C.W. Damodaran Pillai (1832-1901) and U.V. Swaminatha Aiyar (1855-1942) played an important role in editing and publishing Tamil classics, leading to a resurgence of interest in Tamil literature and language and to what Arooran calls a 'Tamil Renaissance' (Arooran 1980). The Dravidian Movement harnessed this interest to encourage a distinct 'Tamil identity' for non-brahmin Tamils based on the use of a "pure" Tamil language. An important movement that was born as a result was the *tanittamil iyakkam* or the 'Pure Tamil Movement' that sought to

eradicate all words thought to be of Sanskrit origin. Through the 'Pure Tamil Movement,' Maraimalai Adigal (1876-1950) institutionalised the resentment against the influx of Sanskrit words (Annamalai 1979: 41). Gathering momentum through the 1930s and 40s, the movement was at its peak when it was able to mobilize large-scale anti-Hindi protests in the 1960s. The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam was the first political party to use language as a political strategy and Tamil purism became an official government policy from 1967. The party used the print media, public platform, Tamil festivals, theatre and later the cinema as areas of intervention to promote the idea of a pure Tamil ethnic and linguistic identity based on a glorious Tamil past and on the ancient, classical Tamil language (Chidambaram 1998; Rajendran 1994).

However, the 'Pure Tamil Movement' met with resistance from some Tamil scholars as a regressive step that closed Tamil language to any borrowing from other languages. Annamalai (1979) points out that the greatest success of the movement was in written Tamil, at the lexical level and in spelling, where Sanskrit words were replaced (regardless of whether they were assimilated or not and whether they fulfilled a need in Tamil or not) by going to old literary and inscriptive sources and by coining new words with Tamil roots; however, Sanskrit words continued to be used in speech and in creative writing (Annamalai 1979: 48-51). Ramaswamy (1997) points out how the process of arriving at *tanittamil* has been plagued with many problems, with critics wondering if such afforts to Tamilize life and culture in Tamilnadu is fighting a lost battle—"first to Sanskritization, but these days more enduringly to Anglicization and westernisation" (Ramaswamy 1997: 153).

Although the Dravidian Movement had brought about these several changes in Tamil consciousness at a popular level throughout the state of Tamilnadu, most histories of Protestant Tamils acknowledge that the Protestant Tamil community largely maintained a distance from these political movements. This was in spite of some Protestant Tamils such as G. Devaneyan (1902-81) who took active part in the Pure Tamil Movement. Lesslie Newbigin, (Bishop of Madras, 1947-74) observed: "...a colossal revival of Tamil culture was going on... New novels, poetry and drama, and new films were flooding the whole state with new ideas. But the church was out of effective contact because its theological leadership was oriented towards the English-speaking world" (Newbigin 1985: 145). Only a few amongst Protestant Tamil church leaders have felt that it was important for the community to keep up with the political and cultural trends in twentieth-century Tamilnadu. Nevertheless, almost all the revisions of the Tamil Bible in the twentieth century have been affected by the transformation of the Tamil language as a result of the Pure Tamil Movement.

In keeping with the Movement, Protestant Tamil Bible translators have advocated the replacing of Sanskrit with pure Tamil terms, thus starting a process of re-assimilation to a Tamil that was undergoing changes in vocabulary, spelling and style. Protestant Tamil responses to these revisions have tended to be argued within the frame of the ‘function’ of the Tamil language in the formulation of Tamil identity. Those sections of the Protestant Tamil community who identified positively with the definition of ‘Tamilness’ that was constructed by the Dravidian and Pure Tamil Movements felt that assimilation at a linguistic level (to ‘pure’ Tamil) would lead to assimilation at the social and political levels to the new social order promised by the movements. As the following two sections demonstrate, this process of assimilation was frustrated on two accounts: one, problems internal to the Dravidian and Pure Tamil Movements affected their success in general and the adoption of their ideology by Protestant Tamils; and two, dominant sections of the Protestant Tamil community did not identify closely with the language and identity politics of the Dravidian Movement and resisted any move in that direction. Hence, while the first section below examines the assimilative moves in the direction of the Pure Tamil Movement, the second section explores the implications of the resistance within the Protestant Tamil community to assimilation with the ideologies of the Dravidian and Pure Tamil Movements.

A. Bible translations attempted by individual Tamils: Swaminatha Pillai, Gnanaprakkasam, Jebagnanam and Manickam

Through most of the twentieth century, the possibility of Protestant Tamils translating the Bible for themselves figured prominently in Bible Society discussions in both India and Britain. This was realized fully only in the last quarter of the twentieth century. At the start of the century, most references to the subject were either apologetic that Tamils had not been involved hitherto or regretted the “absence” of Indian Christians “who could themselves take a leading part in ... revision work. We are extremely anxious that as soon as possible the work of revising and translating in Indian languages should be done largely by Indians themselves, but up to now the difficulty has been to get the proper men” (Letter, Editorial Superintendent, March 6, 1913). However, the tone of the moment was that the time had come for a greater participation of Protestant Tamils in the production of their Bible. There were several reasons for this change in attitude. It was recognized by the turn of the century that there were such “proper men” available, that is, Tamils who combined scholarship and a sound understanding of Protestant doctrine (Madras Committee Minutes, April 19, 1915). Second, such Tamils, if nothing else, would help create an ‘idiomatic’ translation: “...more Indians should be on the revision committee for the sake of an

idiomatic and correct version. They would not be ~~of~~ much use for anything else" (Letter, Rev. C.G. Marshall, L.M.S. December 18, 1917).

A third reason for this change in attitude was that a translation produced with the help of select members from the target audience would enhance its chances of being accepted by the entire community. For instance, Organe, Secretary of MABS, reported that without the support of the Tamil committee members, "...it would be impossible to secure the confidence of the Churches, especially in view of the many things that are agitating the Churches in these days. In the Tamil field we are dealing with a large and fairly well educated Christian community, divided into a number of churches, each with strong traditions and opinions" (Letter to Kilgour, Jan 28, 1926).

Fourthly, the initial stages in the build up to an Indian 'national' movement had brought about changes in attitudes towards the British even among Protestants who tended largely to be sympathetic towards the British government and the church. In 1917, the London Editorial Superintendent wrote to the Madras office about Indian Christians 'sharing' in the revision of the Tamil Bible: "We count upon you making certain that the Indian Christian element will have its full share in any such Revision. This, though always necessary, is perhaps even more necessary at the present time than ever" (Letter to Organe, November 20, 1917). This was a period when the question of Indian representation in other fields besides Bible translation, in Indian legislature for instance, was discussed. Organe recognized the impact of political change on mission activities: "Nationalism is spreading in the Christian Church; in course of time it will reach even the recesses of Tinnevelly; and one result will be a changed attitude towards current versions of the Bible" (Letter to Kilgour, December 21, 1921). Thus, Bible translation in India was going through a phase of uncertainty, having to rethink some of the premises of the nineteenth century and face the political changes of the coming years.

Although the various parties involved strongly recommended that more Tamils should be part of the Bible translation process, European translators and Bible Society officials tightly controlled the first revision project of the century, which eventually culminated in the *Revised Version* (1956). There was much debate about the ratio of Tamil to European revisers, until one of each, J. Lazarus and G.S. Doraiswamy, were appointed Chief Revisers with equal powers. In 1975, what is known as the Rajarigam Version of the New Testament was published. However, this too was a joint translation by two Indians (Rajarigam and Inbanathan) and two Europeans (MacGlashan and Grumm). It was only in the 1980s that the committee appointed to translate the Tamil Bible afresh comprised Protestant and Catholic Tamils in the majority.

Apart from these three official projects of translations, however, there were several individual efforts to translate either the whole or parts of the Bible into Tamil during the twentieth century. Of these, this section will examine three such ventures undertaken by Tamils outside the parameters of the Bible Society's framework of official translations and revisions. An investigation of these translations demonstrates that twentieth-century Tamils were choosing alternative Tamil terms, and conventions from the Tamil literary tradition from those used by the official translations thus, opening up alternative assimilative possibilities in Bible translation. Although these translations were not used widely, they influenced official Bible translation projects in the second half of the twentieth century.

1. C. Swaminatha Pillai, *Mattēyu cuvicēta ver̄pa* (1908):

The first venture in translating the Bible was the translation of the Gospel of St. Matthew into Tamil verse by C. Swaminatha Pillai. Carrying the Tamil title *Mattēyu cuvicēta ver̄pa* (hereafter *Mattēyu*) it was published in Madras, in 1908. It was a translation into Tamil verse using the *ver̄pa*,²³ a popular Tamil metre. Swaminatha Pillai was a Hindu Tamil when he composed his verse translation and there is no evidence of his conversion to Christianity later in life. In his Preface, he clarified the reasons behind his project and how he handled the translation of the source text.

Apparently Swaminatha Pillai had decided to translate Matthew's gospel because he had noticed when a student at a missionary school that his Hindu friends did not read Christian books (that were required reading); he himself had read them not for their religious teachings but for their moral precepts. In his analysis, this was because Christian books were not normally available in the poetic form. He was convinced that Christian books in verse would appeal to Hindus at least for their moral value. On the other hand, he had noticed that his Christian friends were eager to recite (the Tamil word used, *parayana ceyya*, indicates recitation of the Vedas according to set rules) their books in verse rather than prose; his aim was to aid those who wanted to quote the gospels in verse. And last, he had written in as easy a verse as possible so that even those who had attained a basic level of education could understand it.

Writing as a Hindu, Swaminatha Pillai expressed some anxiety about how his motives would be construed by others. He stated that he had not deliberately written anything against the Christian religion, nor had he added to the gospel text. However, he admitted to having added at places to what might have occurred "in reality, according to circumstances." (Pillai 1908: 7-8 [my translation]) He also assured the reader that for the 1071 verses in Matthew's gospel, he had, excluding the invocatory

verses (*kappu veṇpa*), 1029 *veṇpa*, thus making it approximately a *veṇpa* for each Bible verse. He ended by offering his services as verse translator for the three remaining gospels if his first effort proved a success.

Swaminatha Pillai's prefatory comments reveal an understanding of his audience that was at times missing from missionary translators. His potential Hindu audience was used to reading religious works in the high Tamil poetic style, some of whom may show interest in Christian texts for their moral and ethical teachings if they were written in the same style. He was equally perceptive about the needs of his Christian audience: quoting from scriptures was more effective when they were in verse especially in the religious culture of Tamil society where poetry was given pre-eminence and religious texts represented the literary achievements of each religious group. The opinions of various missionaries and Tamil clergymen appended to the preface commended his poetry and what it meant to the Protestant Tamils: Rev. C. Sundaram (Tamil Church of Scotland's Indian Mission) wrote, "The metre is sweet and the idiom and language simple and pure. You have laid the whole of the Tamil Christian community under a deep debt of gratitude" (Pillai 1908: 13). J. Lazarus in his 'Introductory Note' claims: "If like the wayside bards who recite to listening crowds the stories and adventures of Hindu heroes, Christian preachers could make use of this work in their street preaching and even Christian gatherings, they would find their work gaining in attractiveness among all classes of hearers" (Pillai 1908: 12). Interestingly, Swaminatha Pillai was the first (among Christian and non-Christian) to attempt a verse translation of a prose book of the Bible. Swaminatha Pillai's effort, thus, confirms the need (pointed out in the previous section) of the Protestant Tamil community to possess a body of sacred literature in Tamil verse.

Vedanayaka Sastri and Krishna Pillai, like Swaminatha Pillai, had in the nineteenth century recognized this lack in the sacred literature available to Protestant Tamils. The question that arises is why the two Protestant poets, and others like them, had confined themselves to extra-biblical literature and not engaged to turn scripture into verse. There were hardly any similar attempts later in the century to translate the Bible into verse.²⁴ Even though the primary impulse of Tamil religious culture was to express itself in verse, the Bible in Tamil has remained a prose text. A possible reason could be that accompanying the translated Bible were certain notions about the sacred nature of the scriptures that could not be changed by individual impulse. That is, the Bible could not be shaped to suit the needs of the receiving culture; rather the latter had to adapt to the novel elements introduced through the Bible. The authority of the missionary and the institution of Christian and Western knowledge systems, represented by them as time-tested and superior, and the new affiliation to be adopted

by Protestant Tamils may have acted as barriers to change; more so, when it was the question of changing such an important element as the genre of the Bible. The prose genre of the Bible served to mark it as different from other religious texts present in Tamil society, but at the same time it rendered the Protestant Bible inadequate within the culture it was seeking to enter. By translating and publishing (at his own expense) the Gospel of St. Matthew, Swaminatha Pillai, as a non-Protestant Tamil, could take this liberty, assumed as the right of the translator within the Indian literary tradition.

At the same time, however, Swaminatha Pillai also shows that he was influenced by western norms of translation, for instance, in his painstaking efforts to reassure his reader (especially the Christian) that his translation was accurate. That he found it necessary to avow that there were no additions, deletions or changes to the source text, in the literary context of translations between Indian languages where this was not a point of contention, shows that the new rules of translation which had been introduced by contact with western literary traditions were gaining weight. The comments from various Protestant sources he included commended him for his "faithful rendering," thus confirming that it was recognized as a crucial requirement for translations.

Swaminatha Pillai's use of religious terminology was an interesting mix of terms from the *Union Version*, considered 'Christian Tamil', and terms that had been rejected by the translators of the *Union Version* as too Hindu in connotation. For instance, he used *tēvan* and *karttar*, for 'God,' *paricutta āvi* for the Holy Spirit, *cāttān* for Satan and *ñāṇasnānam* for baptism. He referred to Christ as *kiristu nātar*, *nātar* being the accepted term among Protestant translators to denote Christ as 'lord.' He used other standard Protestant Tamil vocabulary such as *cepa ālayam* for the synagogue and *cuvicētam* for the gospel (Matthew 4: 23). On the other hand, he used terms that had been rejected: at times he used *kaṭavuḷ* for God or *tuya āvi* for the Holy Spirit, which were later used by Protestant Tamil translators in the *Tiruviviliyam*. When he referred to worship there were more Hindu overtones, such as *kai kūvittu paṇintu pattiyuṭan pūcanaikal paṇnuvāy*, (to worship with folded hands and bow with devotion) of which *pūcanai* has been consistently rejected by Protestant missionaries and Tamils as a term referring to the Hindu practice of image worship. *Patti*, (Tamil form of *bhakti*), is also a term generally avoided in Protestant Tamil vocabulary.

Thus, Swaminatha Pillai's verse translation of the Gospel of Matthew, while unique in being the first poetical version of a book of the Bible, did not attempt a radical change in the use of terminology. It is possible that he was comfortable with the Sanskritised terminology of the *Union Version* since as a high-caste Hindu he would

have been familiar with similar terminology in Hindu Tamil poetry. Further, the primary motive of the translator was not to make the language of the Tamil Bible accessible only to his Hindu readers. He was more concerned that its form and style should conform to the expectations of his Tamil audience. However, as shown in the example above, while referring in general to worship and devotion, he expressed himself not in a recognizably Protestant mode but rather in the style of Hindu worship. Unfortunately, there is no way of assessing how successful his translation was as there is no information on how many copies were sold, whether a second edition was ever printed, or who (Christian or/and Hindu) his readers were. However, the fact that Swaminatha Pillai made such an attempt adds a crucial dimension to the complex history of responses to the Bible in Tamil translations: while Protestant Tamil translators in the twentieth century were most concerned with bringing Protestant *terminology* in line with contemporary Tamil usage, Swaminatha Pillai was addressing the equally important issue of a suitable *genre*.

2. N. Gnanaprakkasam, *A New Tamil Version of the New Testament* (1919):

The second published effort was Rev. N. Gnanaprakkasam's (S.P.G.) translation of the New Testament titled, *A New Tamil Version of the New Testament from the Best Available Editions of the Greek Testament by an Indian*, which was published by the YMCA in 1919. Gnanaprakkasam claimed in his English Preface, that his primary motive was to produce an "accurate" Tamil translation of the Greek original. He stated his reasons: "When I began the study of the Greek Testament in 1875, I became dissatisfied with the accuracy and correctness of the Tamil Union Version, particularly in regard to the rendering of the Greek particulars."²⁵ He also wanted to improve the idiom of the translation: "It was often remarked by Hindus that the Tamil of the Bible was a peculiar dialect and not at all elegant in style." His third concern was to change some of the terms in the *Union Version*, from those with Sanskrit roots to Tamil roots: "There are adequate Tamil terms and expressions for Greek theological and ecclesiastical terms, which I desire to redeem and introduce into Christian literature." He intended to make this change so that "the Tamil version of the Bible shall become a standard of Tamil for Christians at least so that the truth as it is in Jesus shall shine in its unrivalled beauty and power, without the hindrance of an inelegant or inaccurate medium." In brief, "presenting the true idea of the original ... and that in a readable Tamil" had been his aim.

Gnanaprakkasam discussed a few terms that were different from those used in the *Union Version*. Two of these were translations for the terms 'sacrifice' and 'gospel'. In the case of sacrifice, he decided to reject *pali*, the term that is used in all Tamil

translations of the Bible. The reason he gave was that though there was evidence that the ancient Hindus had offered sacrifices similar to the Hebrews, “this idea of sacrifice has almost entirely faded from modern Hinduism.” This, according to him, made the rendering of the terms for sacrifice and blood difficult; especially since the word *pali* was usually associated with the worship of evil powers. Instead, he used *yākam* (sacrifice, worship),²⁶ which he thought was more acceptable. Likewise, he rejected *cuvicēsam*, the translation for ‘gospel,’ used in most Bible translations until then. Though he thought that *cuvicēsam* was “the literal equivalent of the Greek term,” he “prefer[red] to use a transliteration of the Greek:” *ivāncēliyum*. Unfortunately, he gave no explanation as to why he thought the latter served better than the former. If he was rejecting *pali* to make the Bible more comprehensible to Hindu readers, the change from *cuvicēsam*, which would convey ‘good news’ to any Tamil reader, to *ivāncēliyum* which would carry no immediate significance to Hindu readers, is unexpected.

Unfortunately, there are no copies extant of this translation. Only excerpts from his translation of a few New Testament books that he sent to the Bible Society are available. From these it is possible to make a limited study of the terminology he used. Except for the introduction of *ivāncēliyum* (I Peter 4: 6) there is no apparent deviation from the terminology of the *Union Version*. He used *tēvan̄*, *karttar*, *cāttān̄*, *iraṭcipu*, and *ñānasñānam*, all found in the *Union Version* and changed by subsequent translations that proposed to use terms with Tamil roots. The samples also contain a number of other words of Sanskrit origin that have Tamil equivalents. However, one noticeable difference is his provision of footnotes to each chapter, a practice that had been rejected by the BFBS from the very beginning. Gnanaprakkasam’s footnotes were not very academic but would be of interest to non-specialist readers of the Bible. They include literal translations of the Greek text where he varied it slightly; comparative phrases from Fabricius’s translation and explaining the cultural peculiarities of the Hebraic context. Significantly, he also referred to Tamil works, both literary and popular: for instance, he quoted like phrases from Tayumanavar or footnoted II Corinthians 12:1 with quotes from a Tamil song to corroborate St. Paul’s claim that it was not advantageous to boast. Thus, although Gnanaprakkasam did not contribute innovative alternatives to the terminology of the *Union Version*, his translation strategy of including footnotes helped to make the New Testament more relevant to his target readers (both Christian and non-Christian) belonging to Tamil culture.

Although Organe viewed the publication of this translation indulgently, “...we have a friendly rival in the YMCA which is publishing a version of the Tamil New Testament by the Rev. N. Gnanaprakkasam of the S.P.G.”²⁷, Kilgour, the Editorial Superintendent

in London, saw the YMCA as competing with the Bible Society (Letter to Organe, October 25, 1921). Both Organe and the secretaries of the Calcutta and Madras YMCAs denied that the enterprise was in competition with the BFBS. Organe thought it positive and desired to encourage original work:

...personally I am in favour of the publication of tentative versions of this kind, partly to break people away from the distinctly superstitious attitude with which many of them regard the letter of Scripture, and partly to prepare for the time when the Indian Church will have sufficient education and enterprise to make a translation of its own which may have some claim to be regarded as a classic (Letter to Kilgour, December 21, 1921).

The Secretary of the Calcutta YMCA reiterated that they were not attempting to "usurp" the functions of the Bible Society but that his impression had been that Gnanaprakkasam's was "taken to be a tentative translation, an essay towards a final version..." (December 7, 1921). Thus, even those arguing in favour of Gnanaprakkasam's effort at translation, viewed it as an experiment in the transition towards translations by Protestant Tamils rather than a serious attempt with independent translation value.

3. S.T. Jebagnanam, *Gospel of St. Mark* (1964):

The third venture at an individual translation came from S.T. Jebagnanam, whose translation of the Gospel according to St. Mark was published in 1964. It seems that he sent his draft version to the Bible Society hoping for publication. Although BFBS records show evidence of some interest by the Society's editors, Jebagnanam's translation was not published by the BFBS but printed at the Star Press at Palayamkottai in 1964.²⁸

Again, it is impossible to undertake a full-length analysis of Jebagnanam's translation since copies of his entire work are not available. But from portions of his draft version (the first two chapters of the Gospel of Mark) and the discussion generated in Bible Society circles, his impact on the practice and procedure of Tamil translations of the Bible can be gauged. Letters exchanged between the Secretary of MABS, Christy Arangaden, and the new Editorial Superintendent of BFBS in London, H.K. Moulton, reveal that Jebagnanam's translation was sent to two readers for opinion. One of them merely objected to the high style used as it might not suit "the use of neo-literates and people of limited vocabulary"; the other, while commending the "modernity of its language [which] helps to bring out the meaning very well," was far more critical of Jebagnanam's use of terminology (Arangaden, Letter to Moulton, November 30, 1962). C.J. Daniel's objections to Jebagnanam's use of Tamil were so strong that he believed "this version will be unsafe as a source for doctrine" because

"far greater attention has been given to the literary style of the work than to the original text," thus making it a "free translation." Giving a list of what he called "wrong connotations" and another of "inconsistencies" especially in the names used for Christ and God, Daniel pronounced the rendering of important theological terms, such as salvation, disappointing. He attributed this to Jebagnanam's "favouring the pure Tamil style, altogether avoiding the use of Sanskrit." Hence, though he thought the Tamil of the translation very good, Daniel doubted the success of such a version.

The terms Jebagnanam used were usually words derived from Tamil roots rather than Sanskrit. For instance, he used *Kaṭavuḷ* and *iraivan* for God in place of *tēvan* and *karttar*: both *Kaṭavuḷ* and *iraivan* have remained at the centre of the controversy surrounding the Bible Society's versions of 1956, 1975 and 1995. He also added the title *perumāṇ* to Christ to suggest 'lord.' Though the word *perumāṇ* means 'king,' 'nobleman,' or 'elder brother' it is also used to refer to the Hindu God Vishnu (also, to Siva²⁹). Jebagnanam used other Tamil terms such as *narcōtyi* for the Sanskrit *cūvicēśam*; *aruḷ muļuku* (immersion of/into grace) instead of *ñāñasnāñam*; and, *tuya āvi* (Holy Spirit) for *paricutta āvi*. He referred to Satan not as *cāttāṇ*, the term used in all other Tamil translations, but simply as *tīyōnā!* or the 'evil one.' He introduced a new term for 'prophet'—*tiru molī tonṭanai* (literally, saints or devotees with holy language)—where the *Union Version* had used *tirkatterici* and later, the *Tiruviviliyam*, *irai vākinar* (those with God's speech). When he referred to God's "word," he used *tiru molī* (holy language) instead of the Sanskrit '*vasanam*' of the *Union Version* and the '*irai vārttaī*' (word of God) of the *Tiruviviliyam*. For synagogue, he applied the Tamil word *kōyil* (temple), with a footnote that gave the Greek equivalent and explained that it was a place where people assembled to worship (i.e. *toluvatarku kūṭum ītam*; interestingly this term was taken up by the *Tiruviviliyam* and was used as *tolukaik kūṭtattil* [worship assembly] to refer to the synagogue in Mark 1:21).

The Bible Society saw such a change in terminology as too radical. The response from London was that there were a "number of mistranslations" and additions of inappropriate titles such as *perumāṇ* for Christ. While he considered the connotation of 'immersion' that Jebagnanam gave to baptism wrong, he thought that the Tamil equivalent for Synagogue was not adequate: "I notice that he uses the ordinary Tamil word for 'a temple' to translate the word 'Synagogue.' I see his point for Hindus, but it is not quite the same thing" (Letter, April 11 1963). He pointed out that his use of modern Tamil vocabulary was beyond the comprehension of 'simple folk:' "...clearly Mr. Jebagnanam has gone out of his way to avoid Sanskrit...I fully agree that this will appeal to a certain constituency..." (Letter, April 11 1963). Moulton recommended,

"...we might well encourage Mr. Jebagnanam to work this over again, eliminating errors and mistranslations, for use among people to whom this particular Tamil style will undoubtedly appeal..." (Letter, April 11 1963).

From a report of a committee meeting arranged to discuss the possibility of reworking Jebagnanam's translation, it seems that the Bible Society did take up the project briefly. The minutes of the meeting state that the committee agreed on three important points.³⁰ First, that the "proposed version should keep in mind the non-Christian reader, only nominally religious ... and [that it was] not intended to replace current versions, but only to serve as a means of introducing the Bible to the vast majority of non-Christians...." Second, the style "should therefore conform as much as possible to present-day standards without committing ourselves to any language policy or fad." However, the version would attempt to remove "the stigma attaching to current versions in regard to language, style, idiom and grammar." And third, avoid controversy over theological terms:

Basic theological terms which have been agreed upon in the past after considerable controversy will be retained. The importance of avoiding sectarian controversy is recognised. It is hoped that at the same time the opportunity for a new and more adequate theological expression will not be missed (Arangaden 1964).

Once again, theological terms became the site for contention and there was fear of dislodging terms that had been established as the 'correct' ones to express Protestant theology. This question of right terminology, in response to the move towards a 'pure Tamil' introduced by the onset of the Dravidian movement, became more critical as the twentieth century progressed.

Jebagnanam may not have been pleased with the Bible Society's recommendations to exclude new theological expressions, and he took his translation to be published elsewhere. The BFBS proposed to meet in early 1965 to discuss the draft further; however, the date of publication of Jebagnanam's translation is 1964, indicating that nothing much came out of the Bible Society's proposals. From the similarity in terms used by Jebagnanam, the Rajarigam Version and the *Tiruviviliyam*, it is apparent that Jebagnanam's attempt indicates the direction in which Tamil biblical terminology moved in the last quarter of the twentieth century.

Besides Jebagnanam's effort, Michael Manickam, a Catholic clergyman, also attempted a translation of the Gospel of Mark in the 1960s. Manickam, based at the University of Yale, produced a Catholic version of the Gospel. Copies of his letters to Eugene A. Nida and H.K. Moulton in the Bible Society files for the year 1964 explain his motives for attempting a new translation when a Catholic committee had already

been set up to bring out a new translation of the Catholic Bible in Tamil. Having noticed the “continual difficulty” with the high and low Tamil, and that official versions always tried to keep the level of Tamil as simple as possible, he realised that “this prevent[ed] the version from being attractive to the non-Christian Hindu, who want[ed] a sacred book to be in high literary language.” He proposed his version “as an academic or literary version aimed mainly at the Hindu” (Letter to Nida, 11 October 1964). In his letter to Moulton, he elaborated further on the need he felt for a translation in the high Tamil style:

I translate the Greek of the Sacred Text straight into Tamil, for the sake of the Tamils, no matter if they are Catholics or not. I am concerned with the translation coming out in a language that can be understood by a Tamil. ... I have in view readers, who are Hindus, educated to a rather high level, and as a result of this, with a taste for the literary beauty of the AV [English King James' Version]. A Hindu naturally expects a Sacred Text to be in a relatively high language. He would not like to see its style lowered, but would rather have a commentary along with it. This feeling is evidently behind the oft-repeated accusation levelled against the Christians by Hindu Tamil scholars that Tamil literature, which has the great religious books of most of the creeds, does not have the Bible... (Letter to Moulton, 10 November 1964).

He pointed out that since no Hindu had knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, it was “up to the Christians, particularly the ‘Padres,’ to make good this lacuna in Tamil literature” (Manickam Letter, 1964). To meet the needs of a Hindu reader, he proposed to provide accompanying notes that would explain the peculiar cultural and literary background of the gospel to a Hindu. These notes, however, were to be in keeping with Tamil literary tradition: “To avoid any semblance of proselytization, the notes will be in the form of brief commentaries in the form of annotations to, say, Tiruvagam” (Manickam Letter, 1964). There is, however, no record of the publication of Manickam’s translation either by the Bible Society or any other institution, Catholic or Protestant.

Some of the terminology used by Manickam in the first chapter of his draft translation, reveals his partiality for Tamil terms with Dravidian roots. Like Jebagnanam, he used *perumān* for lord; *Kaṭavuḷ* for God and *narcēyi* for gospel. However, he introduced a new term for baptism: *marai nīrāṭṭal*, where *marai* means ‘sacred’ (as in references to the Vēdas and Ākamās) and *nīrāṭṭal* means ‘bathing’ (also, bathing an image). Similarly, his term for synagogue was, *vali pāṭu manram*, that is, ‘a place of assembly for worship’. However, he retained *cāttān* for Satan and *cepam* for prayer. Moulton did not respond to the terminology but informed him that the Bible Society was contemplating a translation in the ‘high’ Tamil style similar to Manickam’s (Letter, 30 November 1964).

It is significant that each of the translators above framed their arguments for the introduction of either changes in terminology or genre within the parameters of Hindu Tamil expectation of sacred literature. Swaminatha Pillai decided to translate one of the gospels into Tamil verse, Jebagnanam and Manickam preferred ‘pure’ Tamil terms, and Gnanaprakkasam and Manickam wanted to incorporate footnotes and commentary in the literary style of traditional commentaries on Tamil sacred poetry—all these objectives were efforts to further assimilate the Tamil Bible using different aspects of Tamil literary and sacred literature. Their point of reference for comparison and contrast was the corpus of Hindu sacred literature in Tamil that challenged the sectarian language and literary conventions of the church; their aim was to enhance the literary and religious status of Protestant Christianity in Tamil society.

Further, the presence of the two Protestant (and one Catholic) translators outside the authority and structure of the Bible Society reinforced the Society’s decisions to officially revise the Tamil Bible according to the changes brought about by the *tanittamil iyakkam*. The desire, among both Protestants and Catholics, to introduce terms with Tamil origin into the Bible indicates that substantial sections in both denominations felt the need to ‘keep up’ with the political trends in twentieth-century Tamil society. This perception culminated in the joint version by Catholic and Protestant Tamils, resulting in the *Tiruviviliyam* in 1995. The very fact that the linguistic elements of their sacred text become an issue in translation after translation shows that both Catholic and Protestant Tamils have been actively concerned with the attempt to define themselves through language and form. Similarly the response of the Protestant reading public, even when critical of such attempts, points to the desire to control the way they interact with Tamils belonging to other religious groups.

B. Protest against revisions of the Tamil Bible in the twentieth century (1930s-90s)

We of the Bible Society are always anxious that the opinion of those speaking their mother tongue have full weight in the various versions.

(Kilgour, Letter to Rev E.S. Carr, 14 May 1929)³¹

Twentieth-century Protestant Tamil opinion on the Tamil Bible was divided and unstable. The Bible Society, increasingly committed to Bible revisions and translations with the support of their target audience, faced a dilemma: the opinion that they sought was not homogenous but split between support for revision and severe opposition to revisions and new translations, with the latter being the dominant view. Persons who opposed the revisions were usually labelled conservative and uninformed by the BFBS; their opinion was frequently ignored. It is apparent from the Society’s records that it had not developed a reliable method for gathering opinion from a vast and varied readership. Their main source of information was the clergy and there was

always a gap between what they considered was 'right' for the laity and what their congregations desired. This section examines the contradictory positions within the Protestant Tamil community in the twentieth century from which conflicting opinions regarding the translation of the Tamil Bible were articulated. The examination is based on both printed sources as well as fieldwork interviews of Protestant Tamil clergy and laity conducted in 2000 and 2002.

In the twentieth century, two main aspects of the Tamil Bible were identified as needing revision. One aspect was to revise the Tamil Bible in line with the English Revised Version (1881-85), which had been revised after the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls. This meant that the 'original' text of the *Revised Version*, Westcott and Hort's Greek New Testament, differed considerably from that of the KJV's *Textus Receptus*. The second aspect was that the language of the Tamil Bible should be in accordance with the linguistic changes that were being introduced to the Tamil language by the proponents of the Pure Tamil Movement. By the beginning of the twentieth century it was a well-acknowledged fact that the Tamil of the *Union Version* was handicapped by the peculiarities of 'Christian' Tamil. Using this Tamil, which contained a large number of Sanskrit words, was becoming unpopular and offensive in the context of the Dravidian politics in the Tamil areas.

Protestant missionaries of the nineteenth century who were either translators of the Bible or Tamil scholars had assumed that the special Protestant vocabulary and style of 'Christian Tamil' that had been developed for the Bible would become central to Tamil expression in the following years just as the English of the KJV had influenced the development of English language and literature. Echoes of the KJV's English in English literature had helped to establish the version as a highly literary one (Norton 1993). Protestant missionaries in South India hoped that in time Protestant Tamils would be able to produce literature in the language and style of the *Union Version* and thus establish it as a respectable, literary form of Tamil. G.U. Pope in the Preface to his translation of the *Tiruvācakam* (1900) had envisioned the production of such a literature by Protestant Tamils as a triumphant culmination to the Christian Tamil produced by missionary intervention:

There exists now much of what is called Christian Tamil, a dialect created by the Danish missionaries of Tranquebar; enriched by generations of Tanjore, German, and other missionaries; modified, purified, and *refrigerated* [original italics] by the Swiss Rhenius and very composite Tinnevelly school; expanded and harmonised by Englishmen, amongst whom Bower (a Eurasian) was foremost in his day; and, finally, waiting now for the touch of some heaven-born genius among the Tamil community to make it sweet and effective as any language on earth, living or dead (Pope 1900: xii).

Such a body of Protestant literature in Christian Tamil would also have helped to establish the Protestant Tamils as a community and Christian Tamil as their particular language. However, writers recognized as having produced the best Protestant or Catholic literature in Tamil, have not been those who wrote in Christian Tamil but in the language and styles of the existing corpus of Tamil religious literature. Pope himself mentioned Beschi, Sastri and Krishna Pillai: "There has been at least one real native Christian poet, Vethanayaga Sastriyar of Tanjore, whose writings should be collected and edited. ... The Pilgrim's Progress has been versified; and the first book of 'Paradise Lost,' by V.P. Subramanya Mudaliar, is a courageous attempt" (Pope 1900: xlii). As shown above, it is significant that the two nineteenth-century poets chose not to write in Christian Tamil, indicating that it was not adequate to express Protestant Christianity. However, they had been aware of the existence of a different kind of Tamil in use among Protestant missionaries and Tamils. Although Sastri had defended the 'missionary Tamil' employed in the Fabricius version, his vindication had claimed that whatever the quality of Tamil, the Bible would remain the true scripture for Protestant Tamils. The important point is that those Protestant Tamil works that were acclaimed as 'contributions' from the Protestant Tamils to Tamil literature or were given a place in Tamil literary history were not written in Christian Tamil but in the language and style that was predominant in each period. Thus, contrary to Pope's optimistic expectations, works using Christian Tamil were not praised for being written in the special language register of a particular religious group within Tamil society but rather seen as deviant from the Tamil literary norm.

The failure of Christian Tamil to achieve literary status encouraged the revision of the Bible according to the Tamil used in the public spheres of Tamil society. Some sections of the Protestant Tamils feared that unless they did so, they, as a religious community, would become segregated from other Tamil communities. Larsen, in one of the editorial meetings for the revision of the *Union Version* in 1923, commented: "The fact that the language spoken by Christians was largely influenced by the reading of a Bible, the style of which did not satisfy the standards of Tamil literature, was one of the causes which tended to isolate the Christian community."³² The argument put forward was that Protestant Tamils could engage with (or at least be seen as engaging with) the larger changes and concerns of Tamil society if they were to share the same language as the others: this 'same' language was to be the *tanittamil* (pure Tamil) propagated by the Dravidian Movement as the language expressing a new Tamil identity. Thus, re-translating the Bible as far as possible into a 'pure' Tamil became a central focus in the effort made to remove the language barrier of Christian Tamil.

However, once the revision of the *Union Version* began in the 1920s, there was widespread discontent in most Protestant Tamil churches. Letters and petitions against the revision were sent to the Bible Society offices in Madras. Some agitators even published book-length protests that were elaborate critiques of the revision process and warned Protestant Tamils of the dangers of reading the revisions. One such book was Edward Jesudian's *The Revised Tamil Bible: An Appeal against its Publication and Use*, published by the South India Bible Colportage Association in 1945. Another was *Arguments for the Prohibition of the Modern Version of the Holy Bible*, by P.T. Bhaktavatsalam from Martandam in 1974.³³ In the same year Bhaktavatsalam also printed a 23-page pamphlet titled, 'Christians! Wake up!! Fight against the Destroyers of the Holy Faith!!!' Resolutions against the revision of the *Union Version* were passed by the Madras Indian Ministers' Conference and the Tinnevelly Diocesan Council: further, "[t]he Tinnevelly Church refused to send elected representatives to sit on the Revision Committee appointed by the Society" (Jesudian 1945: 5-6). Individual translators and the Bible Society became targets of attack. Many commented that it was ironical that the Bible Society was responsible both for producing the *Union Version* and its subsequent withdrawal (Jesudian 1945: 4-5); or others described, "...the feelings of horror and helplessness of the Indian Christians of South India who fear that their Holy Bible is being wrenched from their hands by the very Society that gave it to them at first."³⁴ Besides these, Protestant Tamil journals and magazines were used as a medium to mobilize popular support against both the *Revised Version* and the *Tiruviviliyam*. On occasion, links were established with Protestant journals in other parts of the world that supported the use of the English KJV exclusively.

Protest against the translation and publishing of the *Tiruviviliyam*, from the 1980s until after its publication in 1995, was as sharp as the criticism against the *Revised Version* in the previous decades. Father Jacob Thekanath, of NBCLC (National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre), Bangalore recalled: "Until the printing of the new version, there had been sporadic opposition to the version but once it [the printing] began in 1995, the Bible Society of India was flooded with letters and telegrams with opposition to the CL [the *Tiruviviliyam*]" (Interview, June 30, 2000). As mentioned in chapter two, the Bible Society withdrew as one of the co-publishers of the *Tiruviviliyam* as a result of the opposition from Protestant Tamils. It was the United Bible Societies, the parent society, which provided the imprimatur for this version.

Opposition to the revision targeted three important points as threats to the entire community. The first was the change from the Sanskrit-based terminology of the *Union Version* to terms with Tamil roots encouraged by the Pure Tamil Movement. Second,

change in the source text used meant that the revised content of the new version would be different from the *Union Version*. Third, the tools of literary and textual criticism that had developed in the twentieth century were suspect when applied to the Bible for the purposes of interpretation and translation. These three changes together meant that the *Union Version* was displaced from its previous position of authority and power causing fear that it would lead to 'confusion' in the Protestant Tamil church.

1. Change in terminology: Sanskrit to Tamil based

The terminology introduced into the *Revised Version* and later the *Tiruviviliyam* was considerably influenced by the currency provided by the Pure Tamil Movement. The Report of a C.L.S. Committee on Tamil theological terms (1950) states in its forward:

The committees on [pure Tamil] terminology appointed in Madras and other Provinces by the Provincial Governments have restricted themselves to deciding the technical terms necessary for scientific and political text-books, and have left the corresponding task in the fields of religion, philosophy and theology to private enterprise. The intercourse and intellectual fellowship and in some respects possible rivalry that exist between Hinduism, Islam and Christianity in India offer to theological writers a circle of readers belonging to different faiths. It has therefore become necessary that the theological terms employed by Christians should not only be correct but should also be intelligent to readers of other religions (*Tamil Theological Terms* 1950: iii).

Father Mariadasan, one of the translators of the *Tiruviviliyam* also saw the change to 'pure' Tamil terms in the Bible as part of a larger trend in the Tamil language: "Tamil is trying to introduce technical terms in all fields—science, industry and philosophy, for example; the CL [the *Tiruviviliyam*] too tries to use new technical terms: *arul cātanam* for sacraments and *amaiti* for *camātānam*" (Interview, July 4, 2000). As discussed in the previous chapter, changes were made to important terms such as, God, gospel, salvation, and baptism as well as to the titles of the Bible and its individual books.

Of these, the most controversial was the use of *katavul*, instead of the previous *tēvan*, for God. Jesudian gave a vigorous defence of *tēvan* basing his arguments on the Madras University Tamil Lexicon. He pointed out that the Lexicon gave thirty cognates of *tēvan* and only 10 for *katavul* and used that as sufficient reason to challenge whether "devan mean[t] anything less than katavul." Jesudian cited David Devadoss, son of Muthiah Pillai, the Tamil referee for the *Union Version* as further proof that *tēvan* was the most appropriate term for God:

During one of my conversations with him [Muthiah Pillai] he told me that ...[a]fter a great deal of argument, the word 'devan' was chosen as the one which best expressed what we mean by 'God.' The word katavul now used in the Revised

Version connotes something which is not strictly what the Christian conception of God is (Jesudian 1945: 24).

Similarly, Jesudian wrote against the change in the title of the *Revised Version*, which was *paricutta vētākamam* instead of the previous *cattiya vētam*: "The substitution of parisutta for sattiya is wrong, as it detracts from the unique truths revealed in the Bible" (Jesudian 1945: 56). After titles of individual books were changed in the *Tiruviviliyam*, the reaction was that the new titles were too general; for instance, *toṭaka nūl* could refer to the first book of any literary text whereas *āti ākamam* sounded like a 'proper' name for the first book of the Bible (Interview, February 24, 2002). Though both titles mean the same, the Sanskrit base of the latter and the association with the Saivite *ākamās*, supposedly conferred greater distinction and importance to the term.

Very similar to the opinion expressed in these printed debates on the use of pure Tamil terminology in the *Tiruviviliyam* was the response of Protestant Tamils I interviewed. Protestant Tamils, both clergy and laity, when asked to identify terms that they disapproved of in the *Tiruviviliyam*, mentioned *kaṭavuḷ* almost exclusively. The Protestant Tamils interviewed in Madras, Madurai and Palayamcottai preferred to use *tēvan̄* even though *kaṭavuḷ* was used in most twentieth century translations of the Bible. The reason they offered was that they thought *tēvan̄* was the particular name for the Christian God: a term that was not used by any other Tamil religious community. Although they were aware that Hindus used *tēvā* or *tēvar*, they thought *tēvan̄*, in the masculine singular, was a special Protestant term for the Christian God that emphasized the "personal element." *Kaṭavuḷ* on the other hand, was a common term used by other religious communities and seemed too impersonal. Thus, if Protestant Tamils were to use *kaṭavuḷ*, there would be no difference between them and members of the other religious groups. Much of this attitude stemmed from ignorance of the meaning and usage of the two terms and some supporters of the term *kaṭavuḷ* were optimistic that once the connotations of the terms are explained to them, the Protestant Tamil laity will be willing to make the transition. However, several Protestant clergymen and women who supported the change to *kaṭavuḷ* complained that their congregations were unwilling to give up using *tēvan̄* in spite of continued efforts to inform them of the etymological superiority of *kaṭavuḷ* over *tēvan̄*.³⁵ Very few, like the Rev. R. Joseph of Christ Church, Palayamcottai, were able to say that eighty-five percent of their congregation supported the change to *kaṭavuḷ* (Interview, February 22, 2002). Thus, popular Protestant Tamil opinion regarding change in terminology in the second half of the twentieth century has not changed from the negative opinion that was expressed in the first half. Instead, the dominant sections of the Protestant Tamil

community continue to regard the use of pure Tamil terms in the revisions of the *Union Version* with suspicion.

Significantly, the terminology of the *Union Version* has survived mainly in the churches and private devotional spheres of the Protestant Tamil community. Both they and members of other religious communities in Tamilnadu identify the language as Protestant. Most Protestant Tamils lead a double life in terms of language use: they are quite happy to use the politically correct 'pure' Tamil in the public domain, but in the private spheres of the family and worship, they slip into Protestant Tamil with ease. For instance, Rev. Jayahanan, teaching social analysis at the Tamil Theological Seminary at Madurai, recalled that he had not been critical of the Tamil used in the Bible or the church as a child: the Christian and the public were two different spheres, and there had been no "outside influence", as he termed it, to make him critical of this dichotomy (Interview, February 15, 2002). Father Hieronymus, one of the co-ordinators of the New Testament translators for the *Tiruviviliyam*, observed, "When it comes to worship and religion, there is a definite difference between Christians and non-Christians in their language use, but there is no difference in civil life" (Interview, February 19, 2002). Several lecturers, including those teaching Tamil literature, at Sarah Tucker College, a Protestant college in Palayamcottai, acknowledged using *tanittamil* at college for purposes of teaching, setting examination papers and other official work but using Protestant Tamil at home and in the church. Further, of the twelve lecturers interviewed at the college, four of them admitted to using *tanittamil* in the classroom but Protestant Tamil with their Christian students during prayers, devotions and in Bible classes held on college premises: "We will never use the words in Bower's version in Tamil or any other classes" (Interview, 27 February, 2002). One of them felt that if she were to speak 'pure' Tamil in Christian circles, she would not be understood or seen as lecturing at others. However, when they addressed a mixed group of students some of them used the *Tiruviviliyam* and found their audience receptive, with Protestant students showing a desire to have the new terms clarified.

While some profess to being unaware of the existence of Christian Tamil, the majority view of Protestant Tamils on Christian Tamil was that it was a 'biblical' language, that is, the only language register appropriate for the Tamil Bible. Those who seemed unaware of using Christian Tamil had internalised it to the extent that it seemed the norm to them. A Tamil lecturer at the Sarah Tucker College, Palayamcottai, who was otherwise able to appreciate *tanittamil*, claimed that she enjoyed the Protestant Tamil of the *Union Version* because it gave her spiritual satisfaction (*bhakti unarvu*), as against the Tamil in the *Tiruviviliyam*, which provided literary satisfaction (Interview, February 23, 2002). Another lecturer, who had read

both the *Union Version* and the *Tiruviviliyam*, claimed that though the Tamil of the latter was good, “there was a spiritual feeling only with the old Bower version” (Interview, February 27, 2002). The Protestant Tamil laity is determined to retain words that have been identified by the Bible Society as archaic or obsolete in the *Union Version*. Many prefer the Sanskrit terms in the *Union Version* because they add weight and a sacred quality to the Bible. Such reasoning suggests that most prefer a special language register for the Bible: a language that can be differentiated from the language used in their secular lives. Dr. Dayanandan Carr, Principal of the Tamil Theological Seminary observed that Protestant Tamils gave much importance to archaic words as they made their scriptures sound ‘different.’ For instance, G. Packiaraj, invited by the Bible Society to edit obsolete words from the *Union Version* in the 1990s, argued against it on the grounds that the language used in the version was the “religious mother tongue” of the Protestant Tamils: “As we have seen, replacing the so-called Sanskrit words or obsolete words has no spiritual advantage. Moreover, it poses a threat to the consistency of the Words of the Book” (Letter to Bible Society, June 3, 1995). Bergunder notes, “This kind of Sanskritized Christian language became an explicit socio-religious marker that is often considered to be part of the Tamil Christian identity” (Bergunder 2002: 230).

A further reason the new terminology of the *Revised Version* and the *Tiruviviliyam* has not become popular among Protestant Tamils is that almost the entire body of Protestant literature that accompanies the Tamil Bible continues to use the language of the *Union Version*. Jesudian praises the ‘priceless gift’ of the *Union Version*: “Its [the *Union Version’s*] beautiful and appealing language is enshrined, not only in the hearts and minds of millions of Tamil Christians, but also in their sacred literature of Liturgy, Hymns, Lyrics and other compositions” (Jesudian 1945: 4). Most Church of South India dioceses continue to quote texts from the *Union Version* in the church calendar, ‘Sunday School’ books for children and other devotional books for adults. Since non-biblical Protestant literature continues to use the text of the *Union Version*, its language is kept in active use even after several revisions to the Tamil Bible. The Bishop of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC), Trichirapalli, a supporter of the new terminology, recognized the important role of these media and directed that only verses from the *Tiruviviliyam* were to be used in the TELC calendar (Interview, February 19, 2002). For the terminology of the revisions to be established in the manner of the nineteenth century version, accompanying devotional literature, including hymns and liturgy will need to be revised accordingly. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there have been a few attempts to do so (for instance, Theophilus Appavoo composed an entire liturgy, which used mainly *tanittamil* terms and drew on

oral folk musical traditions) but they have not been adopted widely by the different Protestant denominations.

2. Change in source text

The second important source for dissent has been changes in the Tamil translations as a result of different source texts used by the *Union Version* on the one hand, and the *Revised Version* and *Tiruvivliyam* on the other. Jesudian questioned the revisers' choice of Nestle's Greek Edition as the source text for the *Revised Version* instead of the *Textus Receptus* of the *Union Version* (Jesudian 1945: 49-50). Bhaktavatsalam's entire treatise was a diatribe on the change of the source text and the ensuing inconsistency between the *Union Version* and its revisions. His aim was to prove the authenticity and adequacy of the 'Received Text' and the corruptions of the new Greek text reconstructed on the basis of the *Codices Sinaiticus* and *Vaticanus*. Using the latter according to him had produced a "Satan's Bible" (*cāttānīn vētākamam*). *The Good Samaritan*, a monthly Protestant magazine, took up the argument in the 1930s and published several articles against the revision on the grounds that the source text of the *Revised Version* was a corruption of the Received Text. The Editor, Y. Samuel, printed several articles from western Protestant journals, which were publishing against the English Revised Version for the same reasons, in order to create support against the revision of the *Union Version* by Protestant Tamils. Samuel took his campaign further to counteract this danger: he helped to found the South India Bible Colportage Association in 1939 "for the sole purpose of distributing for sale, at important Christian centres, copies of the Union Version..." (Jesudian 1945: 9).

3. Change in methods of interpretation for translation

Thirdly, along with fears about changing the source text, there has also been suspicion regarding the use of textual criticism in order to interpret the Bible for translation. The introduction of marginal notes in the revised versions highlighted human interpretation. The *Union Version*, following the English KJV, had excluded all marginal notes, leaving close textual interpretation to the individual denominations within the Protestant Tamil churches. Further, for Protestant Tamils, the translation with no notes had come to represent God speaking directly and unequivocally to them. The editor of *The Good Samaritan* brought this point up: "The chief reviser engaged for this work is a well known modernist and his marginal notes are the most damaging ones bringing out his private personal views, whereas King James commanded that no marginal notes of this kind should be found in the Bible. ... Hence this Revised Tamil Testament cannot and should not become the accepted and popular Bible of the Tamil country"

(1933: 3). As long as the finer details of the translation process were unavailable, popular belief that the translation was inspired directly by God could be held comfortably. There are popular Protestant legends about the translation methodology of Henry Bower, the chief reviser of the *Union Version*: he was believed to have fasted and prayed throughout the entire process; or, “special prayers were offered in all the Churches and in all the Christian Homes that the Spirit of God may guide him in this sacred work...” (Jesudian 1945: 3). Such stories tend to fuel popular piety towards believing that the *Union Version* is sacrosanct and changing allegiance to another version a ‘sin’ to be avoided at all cost.

Unaware of the debates and controversies about the nineteenth-century translators of the *Union Version*, Protestant Tamils, a hundred and fifty years later, can claim divine sanction, authority and inspiration behind the translation. Rt. Rev. Devasahayam, the Bishop of CSI, Madras, identified this as one of the reasons for the lack of acceptance of the revisions: “The doctrine of inspiration has unfortunately and without thinking been identified with the translation of Scriptures, and especially to the existing one [*the Union Version*]. This contributes to the negative attitudes to the new translation” (Interview, April 15, 2002). In contrast, the processes by which the Bible Society produces a revision or translation of the Bible in the twentieth century are open to scrutiny to some extent. Conflicts over the use of terms or the mere debating of translation methods signal human intervention to a sacred text, and render the resulting text a corruption of the holy utterances of God.

Together, these factors contributed to the fear that revising the *Union Version* would inevitably lead to confusion and doubt in the Protestant Tamil community. Jesudian’s fears regarding the “possible effect on the faith” of future generations of Protestant Tamils is representative of a wide-spread apprehension concerning Bible revisions (Jesudian 1945: 6). A lay Protestant in Madurai was certain that revision or new translations created an opportunity for opponents from other religions to question or argue against Christianity (Interview, February 15, 2002). When the Bible Society had introduced the *Union Version* in the nineteenth century as the ‘standard’ version, they had meant to end the controversy over the number of translations in use among the Protestant Tamils. As mentioned earlier, it had also been done in an effort to unify the church. They envisaged that it would play a vital role in the Protestant Tamil community but it is unlikely that they meant this version to be the final and definitive translation of the Bible in Tamil. However, most Protestant Tamils have come to understand it in this way.

The *Union Version*, (or 'Bower's Version' as it is popularly known among its readers), has acquired iconic status in the community. Not only has its position been enhanced because of its acclaimed affinity with the English KJV as an 'authorised' version, but in some cases, the *Union Version* is even considered the 'original'. This includes a wide range of attitudes from thinking that the *Union Version* was the Tamil 'King James Version,' or that it was the only translation of the Bible in Tamil, to the belief that the Protestant God 'spoke' in the Tamil of the *Union Version*. A typical example is a pamphlet printed in the mid-twentieth century against the *Revised Version* claiming, "The old Version (i.e.) King James Version of the Bible is still the favourite one for Bible Lovers."³⁶ The writer of this pamphlet conflates the *Union Version* with the King James Version, a common practice among Protestant Tamil laity in the twentieth century. Some lecturers at the Sarah Tucker College had never heard of any other Tamil translation besides the *Union Version* and referred to it as the 'James Version'. A woman, who has been a Protestant for ten years, was surprised at the mention of revising the language of the Bible: she had assumed that Christ had spoken in the Tamil used in the *Union Version* and that these were sacred words that could not be changed (Interview, March 2002). Hence, the language and religious vocabulary of the *Union Version* had become the 'authorised' language of Tamil Protestantism.

Two terms, tradition and familiarity are often repeated to justify the continued use of the *Union Version*. The tradition and authority of the different denominations are upheld as sacrosanct. Whether the Church of South India with its roots in nineteenth-century Anglican mission policy or the Tamil Lutheran church which goes back to the policies of the German Pietist missionaries of the eighteenth century, tradition is invested with much power and authority. Any changes in the present are judged against the reference point of what the 'founders' of each church, both missionaries and the early Protestant Tamil clergy, had established. Using a particular translation of the Bible represented a particular tradition that they took pride in.

'Familiarity' with a particular translation has similarly played a crucial role in the attachment to the *Union Version*. Even those (both clergy and lay Protestant Tamils) who claimed in interviews to like the *Tiruviviliyam*, confessed to using the *Union Version* for personal study or devotions. Most admitted to having great affection for it as a result of having read it since childhood. The practice of memorising passages from the Bible, a principal part of childhood training as a Protestant meant that one translation would have to be erased completely from the mind for another to take its place. Some who have tried it as a conscious act of will confess failure. Dr. M. Ravindran, head of the Tamil Department at Sarah Tucker College admitted that

though she was a proponent of *tanittamil*, made a point of reading only the *Tiruviviliyam* and attempted to quote from it, she unconsciously slipped to the terminology of the *Union Version* (the examples she gave were *ñānasñānam*, *karttar* and *cañkitam* instead of *tirumułuku*, *kaṭavuḷ* and *tirupāṭal*) while discoursing on the Bible. Some others like her, especially members of the clergy, who have attempted re-memorising the new translation, experienced the same difficulty. Other Protestant clergy, who said they admired the new translation, approved of the language changes that had been made, and used it to preach sermons, owned up to reading the *Union Version* for 'personal devotion' only because the familiarity of the passage evoked a familiar religious experience.

It is significant that though Protestant Tamils were prepared to make the change to *tanittamil* in the secular areas of their life, the majority have opposed a similar move in the sacred domain. The technical terminology of the *Union Version*, which helped to shape the sacred areas of Protestant Tamil lives, had gradually come to be understood as the correct language in which to speak about the church and its doctrines. Christian Tamil has become the only appropriate language for Protestant worship and expression of devotion. Rather than viewing the heavily Sanskrit-oriented Protestant Tamil as a handicap, the majority opinion sees it as marking their identity.

Reasons behind the unpopularity of Tamil Bible translations using 'pure Tamil' terminology can also be traced to some failings inherent within the Pure Tamil Movement. As Bergunder points out, there were linguistic shortcomings to the Pure Tamil project. Since Tamil classical literature was their preferred model, proponents of the Movement often introduced strange archaisms into modern Tamil. Besides, the leaders of the movement never reflected on the problem of diglossia and different levels of language but unreflectively propagated the idea that "pure" Tamil was always "good" Tamil. The Movement concentrated mainly on erasing Sanskrit terms from Tamil and did not pay adequate attention to other aspects of the language such as developing appropriate grammatical rules for a modern Tamil prose style (Bergunder 2002: 217). Further, the promotion of *tanittamil* by political parties was done at symbolic levels rather than by addressing how this language would become a viable socio-economic option in the Tamil state (Ramaswamy 1997). This has meant that though there may have been points of consensus, there has not been a homogenous notion of what 'pure' Tamil is even amongst supporters of *tanittamil*.

Twentieth-century translators of the Tamil Bible have similarly concentrated mainly on replacing Sanskrit-based words with Tamil-based terms. Further, they not only shared the idea that 'pure' Tamil was 'good' Tamil but that it was 'common' Tamil,

accessible to all speakers of the language. But *tanittamil* never quite became a 'people's' Tamil.' *Tanittamil* was an artificial construct that served the exigencies of a political movement in Tamilnadu in the early and mid-twentieth century. Projects such as the revision of the Tamil Bible using *tanittamil*, expose the deficiencies of the very language they seek to support. Besides their support for Christian Tamil amongst Protestant Tamils, the lack of success of the *Tiruviviliyam* has shown that merely using 'pure' Tamil terms does not make the Bible common to all Tamil speakers: that some passages and terms used can only be understood by scholars of Tamil literature has been a point for significant criticism against the translation.

Some Protestant Tamil scholars, theologians and clergy have been very critical of what they view as the insularity and conservatism of the dominant sections of the Protestant Tamil community. Disputes over the revision of Protestant Tamil from the Bible have provided ample opportunity for such criticism. Since most religious groups have a special religious discourse that is specific to their religion, it is not surprising that Protestant Tamils should want the same. However, according to these critics, introducing 'pure' Tamil terms in the Bible need not detract from the religious connotations and symbolism of the translation: given an opportunity the new vocabulary could come to signify an equally special and sacred meaning. But Protestant Tamils are unwilling to exchange one set of special linguistic symbols (Protestant Tamil terms) for another ('pure' Tamil terms). The former have acquired the important function of representing them as a community. This specific religious language, as Bergunder concludes in his essay on 'The "Pure Tamil Movement" and Bible Translation,' "also began to serve as a socio-religious marker that helped to reaffirm the identity of denominational Tamil Christian communities through their own dialect or 'branch language' (*kalaimoli*), which clearly distinguished them from other religious groups" (Bergunder 2002: 215). The question then is that if religion has been experienced in one language, does using a different language alter the religion or one's experience of it? If a sense of community is fostered as the result of sharing religious experience through a particular language register, then the shift to another language register could threaten the shared sense of community. In the Protestant Tamil context, this is further exacerbated because non-elite sections of the community want to consciously develop a separate language register precisely because they feel they cannot share religious experience with the rest of the community through the present elitist language in use.

The question of language is crucial within the religious life of a community. Language supports a certain kind of commonness of belief, that is, the experiential sharing of faith that finds expression through language. This leads to a feeling of unity.

However, when groups from within the community initiate a move towards the use of a different language register, the sense of shared faith is disrupted. This in turn gives rise to fears both about the nature of faith and the sharing of that faith by a community of adherents. Ultimately shifts in language use challenge the very notion of a homogenous religious community: the move towards a different language use highlights the different aspirations signalled by different sections of the community. Twentieth-century developments regarding language use by Protestant Tamils accentuate the caste and class frictions within the Protestant Tamil community. Therefore, those sections of the community who expect their socio-economic and political aspirations to be fulfilled by affiliation to 'Tamil' identity politics, adopt *tanittamil* as symbolic of their aspirations. Such moves are perceived as a threat by socially and economically dominant sections of the community, and expressed as concerns regarding disrupting the 'unity' of the community.

Conclusions

Our hope is that, in the near future, even if we may not have One Church, at least we shall have one Bible in Tamilnadu.

('A Brief Resume of the Interconfessional Tamil Bible Project,' 1991)³⁷

Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, both Protestant missionaries and Tamils have often repeated a hope for one 'church' through the one Tamil Bible. Though the above statement was made with reference to the *Tiruviviliyam*, the translation that comes closest to achieving unity is the *Union Version*. By the last quarter of the twentieth century this translation became the standard version for most Protestant churches besides becoming popular, though still unsanctioned by church authority, amongst Tamil Lutheran and Catholic churches.³⁸ However, analysis of the process of the translation of the *Union Version* and its subsequent mass appeal reveals that in spite of the apparently unanimous use of this version, there is a conflict in interest that points to the centrality of language use for Protestant Tamils in attempts to define themselves as a religious community in Tamil society.

The two phases of protest against translation projects in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reveal that Protestant Tamils did not unquestioningly accept translations given to them. More importantly, it has neither been a case of undivided support of all Protestant missionary decisions nor a complete rejection of their authority. At different points, different groups within the Protestant Tamil community have chosen to support those aspects of missionary authority that were in line with their own social and political aspirations. A brief comparison of the two phases of revision and protest shows several uncanny points of similarity; however, further examination reveals how different the motives that impelled these protests were.

Both Sastri and his fellow Evangelical Lutherans of the nineteenth century and dominant sections of Protestant Tamils of the twentieth century contest the same issues in support of their preferred translation. Each claim that the Tamil Bible should be translated into a ‘common’ but ‘pure’ Tamil, but defend ‘missionary/Christian Tamil’ as an inevitable, integral part of the Tamil Bible though it was neither common nor pure. Sastri thought that Fabricius had used a Tamil common to all castes and tribes in Tamilnadu and that Rhenius’s revisions did not do so; the supporters of the *Union Version* insist that its Tamil is more ‘common’ than that of the revisions of the twentieth century. Sastri defended the ‘pure’ Tamil of Fabricius against the ‘cutchery’ Tamil of Rhenius; the supporters of the *Union Version* uphold the Sanskrit-based Protestant Tamil of the *Union Version* and attack the pure Tamil of the *Tiruviviliyam* as the jargon of a political clique. Although Sastri acknowledged that Fabricius had used some ‘missionary’ Tamil, which he perceived as detrimental to the prestige of the Protestant Tamil community, he had defended it; while proponents of the *Union Version* often take pride in Christian Tamil as a distinguishing mark for Protestant Tamils. Both parties attack the change in terminology: Sastri, for instance, was severe in his criticism of *tēvan* in place of *parāparan*; and, the *Union Version* supporters are extremely critical of *katavul* and favour *tēvan*. Both Sastri and twentieth-century Protestant Tamils use the English Bible as a standard of reference when judging whether the Tamil translations are accurate: while Sastri challenged Fabricius’s revisers for not having made the corresponding changes to their English Bibles, the advocates of the *Union Version* are unwilling to accept change even after the English KJV was revised and the Tamil revisions attempted to follow the English Revised Version.

Both sets of protests bring up the question of ‘demand’: that is, why existing versions of the Tamil Bible were being revised when its readers had not asked for a revision of their Bibles. Their argument was that if the readers of a particular version were satisfied, revisions were unnecessary and disquieting. Further, both connect the use of a version to tradition and custom: for Sastri, Fabricius’s translation that had been in use among Tamil Lutherans for more than fifty years, was the “golden version”; similarly, for the *Union Version*’s supporters it was the “authorised version” in use for more than a hundred and fifty years. Finally, both are conscious of criticism from other religious groups: Sastri fears ridicule from the Catholics and Hindus; the twentieth century Protestant Tamils’ apprehension that revision would confuse and split the community is an oblique recognition of censure from other religious communities.

The above issues can be grouped under two concerns: first, the language used and second, loyalty to a particular tradition and custom. Both are crucial to the Protestant Tamil community's attempts to formulate an identity. However, as mentioned above, the political and social contexts within which the two concerns were articulated differ. Sastri's protest, representative of large sections of the Lutheran Evangelical community in the early nineteenth century, was in response to the high degree of linguistic mix that had entered the Tamil language: Telugu and Marathi since at least the seventeenth century, along with the Sanskrit that was already current. To Sastri and other Evangelical Lutherans belonging to the Vellala caste, Sanskrit would have been the most acceptable language. Supporting the Sanskrit-based terminology of Lutheran translations (Ziegenbalg's and Fabricius's) was a means to gain status for their castes and the entire community of Protestant Tamils. This was especially important when other religious groups commonly perceived Protestant converts as low caste. The ability to demonstrate facility in 'cen' or high Tamil, whether through the translated Bible or poetry composed according to principles of Tamil poetic traditions, became a medium for claiming recognition and space amongst the competing religious groups within Tamil society.

The twentieth century was similarly a period of transition and change for the Tamil language. The elimination of all Sanskrit influence from Tamil, which was attempted as one of the components of a larger political ideology that swept through Tamil polity and culture, led to the artificially created 'pure Tamil' that was the official language of ruling parties as well as of those who professed to be *truly* Tamil. This change also affected the trend in translating the Tamil Bible. However, a Tamil Bible using pure Tamil religious terminology was distasteful to most Protestant Tamils: first, their group identity had already been formulated and established around the Tamil used in the nineteenth-century translation; and second, for the upwardly mobile sections of Protestant Tamils, the ideology of pure Tamil—language and identity—is not attractive. By contrast, revising the Tamil Bible in keeping with pure Tamil is both a political weapon and a symbolic act for non-elite sections of Protestant Tamils who have not enjoyed the same economic and social privileges as dominant caste groups amongst Protestants. Each section seeks to articulate a particular kind of Protestant Tamil identity through the language used in their translated scripture. Both sections are equally aware of the gaze of other religious groups, critical or otherwise. Once again, who translates the Bible, and how, has become a site for competing social identities within the Protestant community.

Responses to the revising of the Tamil Bible are not only concerned with issues of language use but also what is considered tradition or is customary to a particular

group in the Protestant Tamil community. Sastri and the Evangelical Lutherans emphasized the Lutheran tradition over other Protestant ones, and Sastri himself sought to create an 'evangelical literary tradition' by composing Protestant poetry in Tamil. Borrowing from existing literary traditions of other religious groups, he self-consciously fashioned a tradition of devotional poetry that Protestant Tamils could identify with. Sections of twentieth-century Protestant Tamils continue to articulate a concern for tradition and custom in order to maintain positions of power. However, those who belong to lower castes and classes wish to challenge the power hierarchy within the Protestant Tamil community by defying tradition and custom: that is, challenging the language of the Tamil Bible is a means by which they can posit an alternative to the existing social hierarchy. Each section therefore wants a Tamil that will best represent their social identity.

These struggles over the language of Protestant Tamil Bibles highlight the internal conflicts within the Protestant Tamil community. Different sections of the community attempt to support or resist revisions of the Bible as it suits their own political and social agenda. Sastri's protests against the revision of the Bible occurred at a time when the missionaries were attempting to put a stop to caste differentiation within the Protestant Tamil church. Sastri himself connected the two issues (of revision and removing caste distinctions) on several occasions, pointing to the link between language use and social status. Sastri and his contemporary Vellala Protestant Tamils wanted to retain their right (assumed from their superior caste status) to decide what language was appropriate for the use of the entire Protestant Tamil community. Similarly, in the twentieth century, Bible revision coincided with the Dravidian Movement, which offered to radically reform both Tamil language and the Tamil social order. While this idea was taken up by some sections within the Protestant Tamil community as a revolutionary possibility to challenge implicit social hierarchy within the community, dominant sections of the community have resisted the move.

This chapter has analysed the many-layered processes of the assimilation of Protestant Christianity by examining Protestant Tamil attitudes to language and genre. The Sanskritised terminology of the *Union Version* aimed to assimilate the Tamil Bible to Tamil 'high' culture. Once a set of terms was established as 'Protestant,' dominant sections of the community fought to retain them as the only appropriate vocabulary to express Protestant Tamil piety. The shift to using *tanittamil* meant that the earlier process of assimilation had to be erased in order for a new course of assimilation to be initiated. This second process of assimilation was in conflict with the first. Another aspect of the assimilative process was the difference in emphases between the institutional efforts at assimilation and the popular workings of assimilation. While

Protestant missionaries focussed on translating the Bible into Tamil prose, Protestant Tamils concentrated on translating aspects of Protestant Christianity using Tamil poetic traditions: however, the nineteenth-century poets, Sastri and Krishna Pillai used literary conventions from the ‘high’ poetic traditions, while twentieth-century efforts, such as Appavoo’s, has been to use the poetic conventions of Tamil ‘folk’ culture. This study of assimilative processes highlights that there were both conflicts between the institutional and popular levels of assimilation as well as a contest between the several kinds of popular for supremacy.

Further, this chapter demonstrated that conflict over language use signals the lack of a shared religious experience, and hence of a shared religious identity. Although there were attempts by Protestant Tamils to posit religious identity as an essentialised reality, separable from caste, they found that faith, even as a subjective experience could not be disengaged from caste and community. The religious identity of Protestant Tamils, split between the public and private realms of experience, has continued to remain an unstable and indefinable category.

Notes

¹ Kilgour, Letter to Organe, October 30, 1928 (BFBS, Tamil file No. 4: 1926-1928).

² For instance, the unpublished manuscripts of Vedanayaka Sastri on the revision of the Tamil Bible discussed in detail later in the chapter.

³ This letter is quoted verbatim in Tamil in the unpublished pamphlet 'Noise of the New Correction' (Tamil title, 'pudutirutalin kūkural') written by Vedanayaka Sastri and members of the Tanjore Evangelical Church in 1825. It is catalogued as VPC-VNS 27 in the United Theological College Archives, Bangalore.

⁴ Vedanayaka Sastri, *Sādipedaga Sambaveney*, unpublished manuscript in the United Theological College Archives, Bangalore, catalogued as VPC-VNS 42 (1828).

⁵ An ancient Tamil grammar.

⁶ The MSS wrongly gives the date 1817 as the year when Ziegenbalg's translation of the Bible was printed.

⁷ Hudson concludes that the position was nothing more than a title and a salary, and a way for some C.M.S. and S.P.G. missionaries to fulfil a responsibility they had assumed on behalf of a new convert (Hudson 1970: 269, 271).

⁸ Tamil term for metrical glossaries or thesauruses in verse.

⁹ These are dates provided by Sastri and are not necessarily the date of first publication of each translation.

¹⁰ According to Germann (1865), some of Fabricius's compositions were included in the fifth Tranquebar Edition of 1756 but in 1774, Fabricius published a hymnbook that contained only his original compositions.

¹¹ There is evidence that such songs continued to be sung among Catholic fishing villages until the end of the nineteenth century: Gover records hearing a "company of coolies" in San Thome, then a small fishing village near Madras, sing a folk song on the biblical story of Adam's fall (Gover 1871: 193-200).

¹² Sastri, *Pandegey Perasdābam*, or *pantkaippirastāpam* (Festival Eulogy) was Sastri's response to the revised Order of the Lord's Supper published in 1825 by the Church Missionary Society in Madras. A portion of the mss is part of the manuscript collection of documents *jatitiruttalin payittiyam* (1828).

¹³ He does not elaborate on whether these were composed by Catholic missionaries or Catholic Tamils.

¹⁴ Annual Reports of the Madras Religious Tract and Book Society for the years 1874-77.

¹⁵ According to Murdoch (1901), the MRTBS published a translation in 1840 (?) and a second edition in 1890 revised by Samuel Paul. Murdoch mentions that the whole work was translated by Spauling for the Jaffna Tract Society.

¹⁶ Vedanakam Pillai, *Sattiya Vēta Kīrthanaikal*, Madurai, 1954, Hymn no. 27

¹⁷ Hudson's translation of a manuscript version of 'H.A. Krishna Pillai kirustavāna varalāru' (The History of H.A. Krishna Pillai's Becoming a Christian) Hudson 1970: 260.

¹⁸ Tamil classical literature dated between 100 B.C. and 250 A.D. comprising non-religious bardic poetry on the themes of love (*akam*) and war (*puram*). 'Cankam' means academy and refers to the literary academies (consisting of a normative body of poets) supposed to have been held in Madurai to adjudicate the worthiness of literary works.

¹⁹ Thiagaraja was a Vaiśnavite bhakti poet who wrote in Telugu. It is very likely that Sastri had opportunities to listen to his songs, especially as Thiagaraja was honoured by the Maratha King Serfoji II of Thanjavur.

²⁰ Three of Sastri's biographers give an account of the honours conferred upon him by Protestant Tamil congregations: Gnanadickam 1987; Devanesan 1956; and Manasseh 1975.

²¹ 'Dalit' comes from the Sanskrit root 'dal' meaning oppressed, broken or crushed. According to Clarke, "[t]he term has become an expression of self-representation, which Dalit activists and writers have chosen

both in recovering their past identity and in projecting themselves as a collective whole" (Clarke 2002: 198).

²² Appavoo, speech given at the People's Music Festival, Thanjavur, January 30, 1994, quoted in Sherinian, 2002: 237.

²³ *Venpa* is one of the four principle kinds of stanza forms in Tamil prosody. There are four further subdivisions within the *venpa*.

²⁴ In 1914, a poetical translation of the Book of Ruth by V.J. Sinnathambi was published by the Tamil Sangam in Madurai (*Historical Catalogues*, 1977).

²⁵ All quotations from Gnanaprakkasam's Preface are taken from a typescript version catalogued in BFBS Tamil File No. 2: 1919-1922.

²⁶ According to the Tamil Lexicon, Sacrifice of eighteen kinds; also varieties of spiritual discipline.

²⁷ Extract from a letter addressed to Kilgour from Organe, August 18, 1921 (BFBS Tamil File No. 2: 1919-1922).

²⁸ Listed in *Historical Catalogues*, 1977.

²⁹ According to the Madras University Lexicon.

³⁰ The Minutes of the meeting, written by the Bible Society Translations Secretary, C. Arangaden is dated 21 May 1964 (BFBS Tamil file No. 9: 1959-1963).

³¹ BFBS Tamil file No. 5: 1929-1933.

³² Proceedings of a Meeting of the Editorial Sub-committee of the 'Revision of the Tamil Bible.' October 6, 1923 (BFBS Tamil file No. 3: 1923-1926).

³³ Tamil title='*paricutta vētākamattin pututtirupuṭalkal purakanikkappaṭuvatarkuriya kāraṇāṅka?*'

³⁴ Printed letter to the Editor, signed by thirteen lay Protestant Tamils. No date. (BFBS Tamil file No. 5: 1929-1933).

³⁵ Interviews with Rev. John Giridharan, Iyesu Inbar Alayam, Adyar, April 19, 2002; Revs. Premraj and Deborah, Mathurandagam, March 17, 2002.

³⁶ John J. Raj, 'To all our Lord's Children' no date.

³⁷ Tamil Common Language Bible, File No. 3, Bible Society of India, Bangalore.

³⁸ Bergunder points out that once the Luther church stopped printing the Fabricius Version in favour of the *Revised Version*, the Lutheran congregations adopted the *Union* instead of the *Revised Version*. (2002: 214); Protestant clergymen, such as Rev. Robinson Levi, hold that evangelical movements (Tamil evangelicals are ardent supporters of the *Union Version*) within the Tamil Catholic church made the *Union Version* familiar to its congregations (Interview, February 18, 2002).

Conclusions

The thesis set out to study Protestant Tamil identity by investigating the translation history of the Tamil Bible and the various levels of Protestant Tamil response. As indicated in the Introduction, the intention of the thesis was not to evaluate Tamil versions of the Bible to arrive at conclusive value judgements based on linguistic equivalence; nor was the aim prescriptive, in that it did not seek to suggest how to translate the Bible into Tamil or who would make the best translators. Instead, the aim of the thesis was to analyse the role of Bible translation in the formation of Protestant Tamil identity in response to socio-political and cultural factors in South India. Thus, the investigation of the history of the Protestant Bible in Tamil highlighted the fact that because translation is located in the interstices between religion, culture, and authority, questions of accuracy, translatability, and evaluation are politically charged. Further, Protestant Tamil responses to the translated Bible revealed that Protestant Tamil identity often included contradictory linguistic and social categories that prevented the articulation of a homogenous identity for the entire community.

The main focus of the analysis has been the use of the Tamil language and Tamil literary conventions by Protestant missionaries and Protestant Tamils. The location of the translated Tamil Bible in the socio-political and cultural contexts of South India highlighted the points of conflict between the use of Tamil and the defining of Protestant Tamil identity. In order to study these points of conflict, the thesis used competing models of assimilation that interacted with each other and marked out the limits within which Protestant Tamils could define themselves. The several conclusions drawn are grouped into two sections here. The first is a consideration of the different kinds of assimilation that were available as possible choices for Protestant Tamils to conceive a place for themselves as a religious community within Tamil culture. The second section discusses the adequacy of the critical models of assimilation available for the analysis of Protestant Tamil identity: these include assimilation models as elaborated within Translation Studies, Postcolonial theory and studies of Christian mission (as indicated in the Introduction).

I first address conclusions regarding the effects of competing levels of assimilation on the mutually constitutive relationship between language use, literary production and the Protestant Tamil community. Chapter 2 pointed at the various contradictory impulses in the Protestant missionary's rhetoric of assimilation. These contradictory moves were revealed in the disagreements on the best methodology for the translation of the Bible into Indian languages. On the one hand, Protestant missionaries in nineteenth-century India sought to arrive at principles of translation and language use whereby Protestant

Christianity could assimilate new adherents from all cultural backgrounds to conform to a standardized, universal idea of a Protestant subject. On the other hand, for it to function with any relevance within the new cultures encountered, Protestant Christianity had to find points of similarity with rival indigenous religious systems. Since both assimilative moves had to be made within language and its conceptual framework, attempts by Protestant missionaries to control the shape of language for Protestant use, and their failure in achieving this, are crucial to the analysis of the nature of identity created as a result of Protestant translations. The chapter argued that the contradictions between theories of translating the Bible and the practice of it arose because of the disjunction between the attempt to assimilate Protestant texts to non-Protestant cultures and the simultaneous move to assimilate non-Protestants to the Protestant discourse of faith. That is, both were assimilative movements but in opposite directions. The universalising, institutional modes of assimilation adopted by Protestant mission often attempted to supplant local culture and practices, in order to formulate the boundaries of a coherent Protestant identity. However, local language signifiers, religious culture and social organisation posed a serious challenge to the assimilative strategies adopted by Protestant missionaries. Hence, the recurrent fear of ‘mistranslation’ in Protestant missionary discourse, which also points to the several instances of the assimilation of proscribed religious beliefs and practices into the several versions of Protestant faith as they developed in India. Yet, although translation at a formal level did not match the translation of religious culture, some religious terms did acquire sacred status. These paradoxes inherent within Protestant missionary strategies of assimilation became clearer with the examination of Protestant Tamil terms in the following chapter.

Chapter 3 focused on the Tamil terms that functioned in several overlapping religious spheres (Protestant and non-Protestant) in order to study how the multiple and contradictory claims on Tamil influenced the definition of Protestant Tamil identity. The religious idiom of Tamil became a site for conflict because it revealed parity rather than an absence of concepts and vocabulary between the contesting religions. Protestant Tamil translations had to exploit this correspondence instead of inventing a whole new vocabulary. This put immense pressure on the Tamil language to signal differences in religious doctrines and practices in such a way that Protestant Tamils could articulate a difference in belief while drawing on the same set of religious terms that the rival faiths had access to. Although the main religious ‘other’ for Protestant missionaries were the Hindu communities, Protestant missionaries (and later Protestant Tamils) were as eager to differentiate themselves from the Catholic use of Tamil terms. Thus, the discussion of various terms from Tamil religious discourse revealed the central paradox in Protestant missionary use of Tamil to assimilate Protestant Christianity: communicating difference

in religious beliefs and practices while using existing terminology from other religious discourses.

Chapter 3 examined four categories of Protestant Tamil vocabulary to study which terms had been assimilated and why —first, transliterated terms, second, new terms created by combining existing Sanskrit or Tamil terms, third, modified Sanskrit and Tamil terms, and fourth, old terms used with no lexical changes. The chapter indicated that transliterated terms invented for Protestant use were generally not a success, whereas existing religious vocabulary with a few lexical modifications, did acquire Protestant meanings with time. Terms, such as *vētākamam*, and *ñāñasnāñam*, belonging to the second category, which were new combinations of existing terms, were assimilated relatively easily because the ‘new’ Protestant meanings did not *replace* ‘old’ meanings but *extended* them to denote Protestant connotations. Similarly, terms in the third category, with minor modifications at the lexical level, carried some of the old meanings into the Protestant context and thus were successful. *Parāparan*, *tēvan*, *cepam*, for example, have become a central part of Protestant Tamil vocabulary despite including references to non-Protestant beliefs or practices. However, there were sufficient differences between Protestant and non-Protestant concepts to allow room for the development of specific Protestant connotations.

The terms that posed the greatest challenge to the analysis of Protestant Tamil vocabulary were those that belonged to the fourth category, that is, terms adopted for Protestant use without any lexical or semantic changes. Here, there was no intended change in meaning but the terms within the Protestant context were required to signify Protestant beliefs and practices. The results were mixed. The terms *pali* and *kaṭavuḷ*, for instance, were not modified in any way. However, while *pali* (in spite of doubts expressed by some Protestant missionaries) was accepted as a term that successfully carried the Protestant idea of sacrifice, *kaṭavuḷ* was rejected by a majority of Protestant Tamils as an inadequate term to signify the Protestant God. Paradoxically, the non-Protestant connotation of *pali* was further from the Protestant idea than that of *kaṭavuḷ* (of the four main terms for God discussed in the chapter, *kaṭavuḷ* was the closest to the Protestant concept of a single, almighty God). In contrast, *tēvan* was derived from a term that in its non-Protestant context was always used in the plural to refer to the Hindu pantheon of gods and goddesses, but accepted as the Protestant term for the one God. This paradox in the use of *pali*, *kaṭavuḷ* (and *tēvan*) suggests that those terms that signified a parallel non-Protestant concept were seen to jeopardize Protestant signification acutely. Thus, *kaṭavuḷ* (unlike *pali* or *tēvan*) blurs the lines between

Protestant and non-Protestant cultures and hence continues to be viewed with suspicion by a majority of the Protestant Tamil community.

Further, some paradoxes in Protestant Tamil vocabulary, such as the difference in attitude to *kaṭavuḷ* and *tēvan* also point to extra-linguistic factors in operation. That is, the actual etymology of a term did not always favourably influence the reception of the term within the Protestant Tamil community. Instead, socio-political factors have critically affected the response to some terms. In the case of the large-scale acceptance of *tēvan*, factors such as the increase in literacy and wider availability of printed copies of the Bible in individual Protestant homes in the nineteenth century assisted the establishment of the term. Likewise, the rejection of *kaṭavuḷ* was also due to the failure of the *tanittamil* movement in twentieth-century Tamil society. Further, shifts in the ascendancy of different caste groups from one period to another influenced the strength and direction of the assimilation of each term at different points in this history. For instance, in the second half of the nineteenth century, the rise in social position (through literacy) of some low caste groups within the Protestant Tamil community coincided with the publication of the *Union Version*; this meant that these, now literate and dominant caste groups, supported the terminology and literary style of the *Union Version*, which was the first Tamil Bible they read as part of the Protestant ritual of personal devotion. When, in the twentieth century, proponents of the *tanittamil* movement and advocates of liberation theology challenged the Sanskrit-based terminology of the *Union Version* in support of other low caste groups (now known as Dalits), the dominant caste groups have insisted on the use of *tēvan* on the grounds that it best represented Protestant Tamil tradition and identity. However, since tradition is ever in the process of invention, there has been a contest over which traditions truly represent Protestant Tamil identity, as the following chapter demonstrates.

Chapter 4 addressed two kinds of Protestant Tamil responses: one, direct criticism or opposition of particular Bible translations and their vocabulary expressed by sections of Protestant Tamils; and two, alternative translations created by Protestant Tamils. Both kinds of responses are immediately connected to different efforts at assimilation in order to express Protestant Tamil identity. The examination of these responses revealed that the kind of assimilation of Protestant Christianity envisaged by official translators of the Bible (both missionaries and Protestant Tamils) was different from the actual process of assimilation by the community of Protestant Tamils. For instance, while institutional efforts at translating the Bible focused on developing an appropriate Tamil prose style, Protestant Tamils made several efforts at translating the Protestant message using conventions from Tamil poetic conventions and expressions of popular piety. Thus, the assimilation at the popular, unofficial levels often functioned in contradiction to official,

institutional promotion of assimilation. There was also a difference in assimilation at the levels of concept and practice: Protestant missionaries sanctioned (often unwillingly) the assimilation of religious practices but Protestant Tamils assimilated concepts such as the bhakti concept of devotion into Protestant worship.

The history of opposition to particular versions of the Tamil Bible in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries delineated in Chapter 4 revealed some uncanny similarities between the two periods. Both groups (the Evangelical Lutherans of the nineteenth century and the dominant caste groups of the twentieth century) argued against two distinctly different translations by using identical parameters of evaluation. One such test for evaluating a translation was the category of 'pure' Tamil. The nineteenth-century Evangelical Lutherans argued in favour of Fabricius's translation, which used Sanskrit terms to a higher degree than later revisions. In view of the fact that in the early nineteenth century Sanskrit was accepted as part of the Tamil religious discourse, its use was deemed to confer status on religious communities. Large groups of Evangelical Lutherans belonged to the dominant Vellala caste, who wished to retain their social status within Protestant ritual practices: one means of maintaining this superior social status was by supporting the Sanskritised Tamil as 'pure' Tamil. In the twentieth century, although there had come a radical change in the concept of 'pure' Tamil in the public sphere of Tamil politics (the presence of Sanskrit now made Tamil 'impure'), large sections of the Protestant Tamil community rejected both the translations and the *tanittamil* Protestant vocabulary as not representing Protestant Tamil identity. This was again due to consciousness of social status: those Protestant Tamils who opposed *tanittamil* usually belonged to the upwardly mobile castes (also, usually urban and middle class) whose social and cultural identities had concretised around the Sanskritised Tamil of the nineteenth-century *Union Version*, whereas Protestant Tamils who supported *tanittamil* were associated by dominant Protestant Tamils with underprivileged sections (rural, lower castes and classes) seeking to rectify existing social hierarchy.

A second similarity in the opposition presented by the two groups was the issue of tradition and familiarity. Influential sections of the community in both centuries argued in favour of a translation on the basis that it represented the community's tradition. It can be argued that the relatively short history of the Protestant Tamil community (as compared to the other religious traditions in Tamil society) has resulted in a need to create a 'past' for the community. Located in a culture of long and well-established religious traditions, one of the projects of Protestant Tamils has been to establish an unbroken thread of tradition and continuity from the early eighteenth century. The Tamil Bible could function as one such link with the past only if there was one standard

version. Further, it confirmed their status as a religious community if they were seen not to have internal squabbles over their central sacred text; they often showed awareness of the derisive gaze of rival religious groups, none of whom had the similar problem of possessing sacred texts in multiple translations. While Protestant missionaries also laboured to arrive at one translation that could be established as a standard version to represent the Protestant Tamil community, their motive was different. For them, one version of the Tamil Bible signified a unified Protestant Tamil community separated on a horizontal plane from the other religious communities in Tamil society but linked vertically to a universal church and Christian history. Protestant Tamils, however, supported the establishment of one version because it provided them a 'past,' a vertical link within Tamil society (so that it was possible to speak of a Protestant Tamil tradition) as well as establishing horizontal ties with the other Tamil communities of faith (by gaining recognition from the other religious communities). The argument of tradition, therefore, became a convenient tool for dominant (caste or class) sections when power equations between the different sections of the community was seen under threat by either missionary policies (against caste distinctions) or by underprivileged sections within the Protestant Tamil community seeking changes in language use and worship practices.

The thesis argues that dominant sections within both the Evangelical Lutherans of the nineteenth century and the Protestant Tamil community of the twentieth century sought to retain their social status within the community at times when caste hierarchies were brought into question. In the case of the former, it was a period when Protestant missionaries were attempting to eliminate caste distinctions within the church, and in the latter instance, when underprivileged sections within the Protestant Tamil community attempted to challenge the implicit social hierarchical differentiation within the community. Such conflicts indicate that one of the important aspects of assimilating Protestant Christianity to Tamil culture, that is, whether to assimilate to the 'high,' sanskritised, brahmanical culture or to the 'low,' demotic culture of Tamil folk and Dalit sections, still remains unresolved. The thesis argues that this conflict in interest, hotly debated from the earliest successful mission of the Catholic Robert de Nobili to the present, is fundamental to the formation of Protestant Tamil identity, not from the missionary standpoint of the advantages of proselytising the elite over the low, but for highlighting the multiple perspectives within the Protestant Tamil community that struggle for primacy.

Assimilation remains a problem for the Protestant Tamils because the community has hitherto defined assimilation or indigenisation as replacing the cultural norms of Protestant mission with Tamil culture, as if the latter were a homogenous entity that

could be retrieved effortlessly. In the nineteenth century, Tamil culture was taken to refer automatically to 'high' Tamil culture, but this assimilation to high culture was meaningful only to elites within the Protestant Tamil community and to social aspirants to that culture. The support for the use of folk culture in the twentieth century poses a challenge to both Protestant mission culture and Tamil high culture as adopted by some sections of the Protestant Tamil community.

As mentioned above, the alternative translations attempted by Protestant Tamils add another dimension to the question of assimilation. While Protestant missionary translations concentrated on the assimilation of Tamil religious terms, Protestant Tamils turned their attention to the translation of Protestant texts using poetic forms from Tamil literary traditions. Using bhakti models for their poetry, Protestant Tamil poets such as Krishna Pillai and Vedanayaka Sastri offered the community an alternative mode for religious expression that combined the doctrines of Protestant Christianity with established Tamil religious forms of expressing devotion. The change in genre is an important indicator of Protestant Tamil consciousness of defining an identity in relation to the literary expression of other religious communities in Tamil society. Monius (quoting Sheldon Pollock) underlines the importance of genre: "...the question of genre must be raised, for, as Sheldon Pollock notes, genre is a critical factor in determining how South Asian texts were read and understood, serving as a guide to reader/audience expectations in social and historical contexts other than our own. 'Genre identification,' he writes, 'is a map for reading a textual maze where form has its own meaning.'" (Monius 2001: 15). By combining the poetic genre with 'Hindu' terminology and Tamil Hindu forms of devotion, this body of Protestant Tamil literature is a clear indication that the community needed to articulate its Protestant Tamil identity in alternate ways to the official missionary project.

Likewise, the translations of different books of the Bible undertaken in the twentieth century reveal a greater affinity with Hindu terminology; further, the planned footnotes in the style of Tamil literary commentaries (discussed in part II of Chapter 4) aimed to bring the Tamil Bible closer to the sacred texts of other religious sects in Tamil society. However, developments in the twentieth century again show that Dalit movements within the Protestant Tamil community have rejected the 'high culture' models of resistance offered by nineteenth-century poets. Recent efforts by Appavoo to compose Protestant hymns and liturgy using language and conventions from folk traditions propose a double resistance: against both the culture of Western Protestantism introduced by Protestant missionaries and against the high culture of Tamil brahmanical Hinduism as adopted by upper caste Protestant Tamils.

The thesis further argues that the alternative forms of translations initiated by Protestant Tamils are assimilative acts of a different nature. The skill shown by Protestant Tamils to assimilate Protestant Christianity on their own terms is a counter-assimilative move to that of Protestant missionaries. If the history of Protestant translations in Tamil society is viewed from the top down, from missionary records and the official missionary position, then the assimilation of Protestant Christianity into Tamil culture appears to participate in other hegemonic strategies of colonial power that sought to impose a rigid definition of how religious communities ought to function socially in relation to each other. However, if the history of Protestant Tamil translations is viewed from below, from the standpoint of the various sections of Protestant Tamils, the different acts of assimilation themselves become a means for resistance. Assimilation is done on their own terms. As long as the process of assimilation continues, Protestant Tamil identity will continue to change and shape differently.

Conclusions regarding the function of assimilation as a critical category derive from the three overlapping theoretical positions discussed in the Introduction. The assimilation of a text into a new culture through translation remains one of the prime concerns of different schools within translation studies. The analysis in this thesis of the problems encountered in transferring religious and cultural codes through the translated Tamil Bible question Eugene A. Nida's proposition that texts can be assimilated through 'dynamically equivalent' translation. At the same time, however, the thesis also demonstrates that in the context of mission and Bible translations in colonial societies, other theoretical positions, which approach the problem of translation and assimilation as part of wider cultural politics, need further thought. As mentioned earlier, Lawrence Venuti argued that assimilative translations are detrimental to target cultures since they assimilate, or to use his terminology, domesticate the readers, producing complicit, 'domestic subjects.' According to him, the opposite is true of non-assimilative or foreignising translations: they create resistant audiences that lead to a questioning of status quo. Such an understanding of the process of translation is reductive, even if the argument is taken at face value (for instance, this distinction presupposes stable distinctions between languages and cultures for defining 'domestic' and 'foreign'). Venuti assumes a situation (whether domesticating or foreignising) where individuals belonging to the target culture, introduce the dominant values of their culture into the translated text and thus create assimilated texts and reading publics. Further, Venuti's argument is particularly reductive because it suggests the effect of translated texts as consistently homogenous, where all its readers will either be fully domesticated or foreignised.

This reading begins to fall apart when applied to the case of the Bible in Tamil translation; in the context of colonial mission translations, most translators were

Protestant missionaries, foreign to Tamil culture. As pointed out earlier, while they attempted to assimilate the source text with the target culture, they simultaneously attempted to assimilate the target reader with the culture of the translators. Does this make the translated Tamil Bible a 'domesticated' or 'foreign' translation? The process of assimilation was never complete, contingent as it was on translator's strategies as well as the reading strategies of the receiving Protestant Tamil community. In fact, Protestant Tamil culture continues to change in response to new stimuli in the present, where as shown above, it has been advantageous for some groups to assimilate and for others not to, in response to the same version of the Tamil Bible. Moreover, the thesis argues that, in this case, the assimilation of the Bible and other Protestant literature by Protestant Tamils into Tamil culture does not make them complicit 'subjects' either within Tamil culture or to the Protestant culture of the missionary translators. As we have seen, the assimilative strategies of Protestant Tamils have functioned to resist both the culture of missionary translators and elements of 'high' culture within Tamil society. That is, by assimilating the biblical text to Tamil culture, Protestant Tamils have functioned as a resisting audience that (in Venuti's view, was ideally the function of 'foreignising' translations) subverted established institutions by calling attention to difference and the limits of culture.

Current theoretical discourse on translation has largely ignored the question of genre, and in particular, has not paid much attention to how genre travels across time and space. In Translation Studies, most theorising of translation assumes that when a text travels across cultures, it does so with its genre intact. However, the thesis highlights the important function of genre in the encounters between Protestant missionaries and Tamils: while Protestant missionaries kept the prose of the Bible intact in their Tamil translations, Protestant Tamils have consistently attempted retranslation into poetic genres (not of the Bible itself, however). Thus, genre was a site for cultural negotiation in the translation of Protestant Christianity into Tamil culture. As chapters 2 and 4 showed, Protestant missionaries were suspicious of Tamil Hindu poetry and, with few exceptions, labelled them as lying, distorting, immoral and effeminate. Prose, on the other hand, was introduced into Tamil literary culture by Protestant missionaries as the genre that carried truth—historical, scientific and moral. The Protestant use of prose as the fit means to give moral instruction is clearly evident in the persistent translation of the Bible and Christian tracts and literature into a newly-created Tamil prose in spite of awareness that Tamil religious culture on the whole responded better to poetic texts. The thesis argues that genre is not just an irrelevant category of text or merely a literary construct that can be ignored when analysing the politics of translation. Genre assumes importance as an assimilative strategy, since the selection of genre points to the important function it has in textual translations between cultures. Further, Protestant

Tamil use of Tamil poetic traditions points to assimilative moves that resisted the methods of translation employed by Protestant missionaries and facilitated the translation of Protestant Christianity on its own terms. This contest over genre, an intrinsic part of the process of translating the Bible and Protestant Christianity into Tamil, shows how translation became a site for appropriation and resistance through the use of indigenous forms of Tamil literary culture.

Similarly, proponents of colonial discourse theory suggest that colonising cultures were nearly always dominant, hegemonic structures that forced colonial societies to a victim, ‘subject’ status. Since they view Protestant mission as one of the colonial agents of empire, they see Protestant communities in colonial societies as targets of cultural aggression. However, the thesis has shown that Protestant missionary culture was neither homogenous nor totally hegemonic. Likewise, the Protestant Tamil community comprises heterogeneous sections, some complicit with and others resisting hegemonic moves from the missionary establishment. The various apparently contradictory positions within the community and the evidence of resistance and appropriation indicate that the binary opposition of colonizer/colonized cannot be fully sustained. Thus, the thesis does not view Protestant Tamil identity simply as a product of colonial discourse but as resulting from the encounters between colonial structures and the cultural (linguistic and literary) and socio-political (caste and class) elements of Tamil society. The thesis demonstrates that Protestant Tamil identity was influenced both by ideological constructs of Tamil identity that rose from within Tamil society and by those offered by Protestant mission.

Finally, as the thesis has indicated throughout, the relationship between the Protestant Tamil community and its translated scripture has been contingent on the views of Tamil language and literature dominant in a given period. This was seen, for instance, in the changed perception of what was ‘pure’ Tamil in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Further, the relationship between Protestant Tamils and the Tamil Bible has been affected by changes in social stratification: dominant caste and class groups in each period have attempted to dictate what the appropriate language register was. Similarly, the strategies of assimilation—of linguistic translation, literary genre and religious culture—employed are dependent on changes in the social hierarchy within the community. That is, issues of translatability and evaluation are connected to the politics of social dominance. In 1900, Samuel Sathianadhan, a prominent Protestant Tamil observed: “Of course, the Native Christian community, drawn as it is from all classes and castes at present, forms more or less an incoherent, heterogeneous mass, and social habits and customs among them have not crystallized into uniformity” (Sathianathan 1900: 647). A hundred years later, this uniformity is still missing.

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