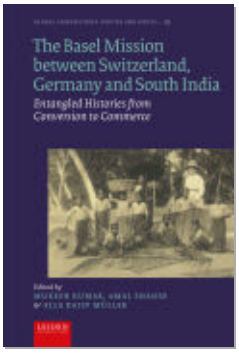
Chapter 1. Introduction: The Basel Mission in Nineteenth Century South India



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PART 1

Mission and Its Historiography

CHAPTER 1

Introduction: The Basel Mission in Nineteenth Century South India

Amal Shahid, Ella Daisy Müller, Mukesh Kumar

The Basel Mission originated in the context of the German Christianity Society in Basel and was founded as a seminary for the education and training of missionaries in 1815.[1] It aimed to educate young men as missionaries with specialised knowledge in bible studies, geography and linguistics. The origins of the Basel Mission can be traced back to the broader German evangelical awakening, particularly influenced by the pietist movements, which sought to revive personal faith and piety in a time of perceived spiritual decline.[2] Württemberg Pietism, a movement that significantly shaped the ethos of the Basel Mission, arose from the pietist tradition within the Lutheran Church in the southern German Kingdom of Württemberg.[3] Pietism itself emerged in the late 17th century, reacting against what its followers saw as the formalism and lack of personal devotion within established Protestant churches. It stressed personal spiritual renewal, Bible study, and a deeply felt and lived Christian life marked by moral purity and charitable works.[4] The pietists of Württemberg were particularly known for their missionary zeal and sense of community, which led them to establish networks of pious Christians devoted to spreading their faith. This movement instilled a sense of duty to evangelise and serve, which deeply influenced the Basel Mission.

Therefore, many of the Basel Mission's early missionaries and leaders were either directly or indirectly shaped by Württemberg pietism, aiming to adopt an ethos of hard work, simplicity, and commitment to spreading Christianity in foreign lands.[5] The mission was likewise tightly enmeshed with the local bourgeois elite population of Basel, such as businessmen or politicians, but continued to have close ties to Württemberg. Therefore, the leading bureaucrats of the Basel Mission up to 1939 were from Württemberg, and more than fifty percent of the Basel Mission's

[1] The "Deutsche Christentumsgesellschaft" was founded in Basel in 1780.

[2] Jenkins, "Villagers as Missionaries," pp. 425–426.

[3] Ibid., pp. 425–432.

[4] Strom, "Pietist Experiences and Narratives of Conversion".

[5] See: Jenkins, "Villagers as Missionaries".

overseas missionaries originated in Württemberg.[6] This is why the mission was called the Basel German Evangelical Mission, being often described as a German mission society despite having its seat in Basel.

The spiritual fervour and practical approach of Württemberg pietism played a crucial role in the development of the Basel Mission's global efforts, while the impetus to preach in foreign lands was accompanied by economic connections of Basel's wealthy elite serving on the mission's committee. The mission house initially gave young male missionaries basic training so that they could join other mission societies with global links, such as the British or the Dutch. The East India Company, governing the Indian subcontinent at the time, allowed foreign mission societies to proselytise only in 1813 with a license, removing this condition in 1833. For this reason, Germanophone missionaries trained in Basel joined the British Church Mission Society (CMS) or the London Missionary Society (LMS) and travelled to India with one of those institutions.[7] Later, it became especially influential in regions like the Gold Coast (now Ghana), southern India, and parts of China, where its work left a lasting impact on local cultures and religious practices.

The mission's primary focus was to spread Protestant Christianity by preaching the Gospel to the so-called 'heathens'. After an unsuccessful mission in the Caucasus, the first overseas mission station was established in the Gold Coast in 1828. This was followed by the establishment of Basel Mission stations in southern India on the west coast in 1834, immediately after the East India Company removed the requirement of a license for missionary societies to preach on the subcontinent upon the renewal of its charter. In accordance with the CMS, the Basel Mission chose Mangalore as the first mission station, where three missionaries were sent after an initial preparation in London. The establishment of other mission stations such as Dharwar in 1838, Mulki in 1842, or Honavar in 1845 followed. The Basel Mission emphasised practical Christian service, and its missionaries often included artisans and tradespeople who helped build communities while preaching.

The mission went on to establish schools, medical centres, and economic enterprises in its stations. In 1836 a Canarese boys' school was established, a school for Brahmins, as well as the "seminary", an establishment for British soldiers' children where they were to be taught in English.[8] Throughout these attempts, the mission received varied levels of support from other local missionaries as well as British administrators, showing a deep entanglement between the Europeans in India from the beginning of the Basel Mission's activities in India. In the following sections, we give an overview of the existing corpus of work on the history of the

[6] Ibid., pp. 425–432.

[7] Jenkins, "Die Basler Mission im Kolonialen Spannungsfeld Indien," p. 49.

[8] Schlatter, *Geschichte der Basler Mission 1815–1915. vol. 2,* pp. 8, 19–20.

Basel Mission in India, simultaneously situating the contributions of this volume within this literature. We examine the Basel Mission's entanglement with British colonialism within the larger debates about the role of Switzerland in colonialism followed by discussions on gender, caste and materiality vis-à-vis the Basel Mission.

Colonial Entanglements

The British Empire's own lack of expertise in certain fields made it possible for 'external parties' to take part in various activities in its colonies, ranging from scientific endeavours to religious conversions. These actors belonged to various nations, including Switzerland and pre-colonial Germany which did not have an empire per se at the time but had significant presence in colonies of other empires.[9] David Arnold has asserted that while such actors had only limited political influence, the empire would have been less complete and effective without them. Moreover, by not challenging imperial supremacy, these actors shared the civilising mission of the empire and created different modes of power that nevertheless impacted indigenous societies.[10] Such actors included missionaries or scientists in various fields, among others, not necessarily confined to the empire's metropole but drawn from various continental European regions.

The Basel Mission has attracted increased attention recently from both academics and the general public, driven by the growing discourse on Germany and Switzerland's colonial ties. Not only does this historiography challenge the national narrative of the countries having had, in the case of Switzerland, no colonial legacies by way of never formally colonising, it also opens up ways of rethinking historical spaces as not bound by national boundaries but rather ongoing exchange of ideas. In Switzerland, recent work has shown how the country, although it never formally had an empire, was nevertheless highly integrated into the larger processes of imperial expansion, termed "colonialism without colonies."[11] Purtschert, Falk and Lüthi have shown how Swiss 'colonial complicity' was a result of the nation being the 'third country that benefited' without officially colonising as a nation or having its own empire.[12] Moreover, Swiss commodity racism normalised racist colonial imagery at home, legacies of which can still be felt today.[13] Therefore, the Basel

[9] This claim is true beyond the case of Switzerland, see Riall, "Hidden Spaces of Empire".

[10] Arnold, "Globalization and Contingent Colonialism".

[11] Purtschert and Fischer-Tiné, *Colonial Switzerland*; Schär, "Bauern und Hirten Reconsidered"; Schär, "Global und Intersektional"; Schär, *Tropenliebe*; Schär, "Philanthropie Postkolonial; Schär, "Rösti und Revolutionen".

[12] Purtschert, Falk and Lüthi, "Switzerland and 'Colonialism without Colonies'".

[13] Ibid. See also: Harries, "Missionary Endeavor".

Mission presents a peculiar case study representing both Swiss-German entanglement with British imperialism as well as the ways in which a missionary society furthered colonial governance and civilising mission in the Indian subcontinent.

Switzerland, or Swiss individuals and their families benefitted from European imperialism by being involved in various occupational capacities, such as mercenaries, scientists, entrepreneurs or as missionaries. The case of Swiss mercenaries in the Dutch armies has been well examined.[14] In fact, Switzerland was a mercenary state for France and other monarchs from the 16th century.[15] Swiss patricians also owned plantations in Brazil, traded in commodities within and beyond empires as established businesses, or were involved in knowledge creation of the tropics through scientific endeavours.[16] Schär's research on Swiss naturalists has reaffirmed the privileged position of the Basel elites in engaging in imperial networks, some of whom were donors or even part of the committee of the Basel Mission. Moreover, missionaries accompanied and relied on imperial powers' support; their mission stations have been termed "sites for the colonisation of consciousness" by Harries.[17] Furthermore, Swiss businesses accompanied the imperial powers to conquer overseas markets, if not territories.[18] Drawing on recent secondary literature, Eichenberger has shown that Switzerland became an important player in global capitalism through its imperial entanglements, among other factors.[19] Switzerland made its imperialist stance known on more than one occasion; it was one of the first to recognise Italy's domination of Ethiopia and the Francoist regime and denounced international boycotts against South Africa's apartheid regime.[20]

Historiography on German colonial history has taken a slightly different path, not least because the German 'Reich' was, if only briefly from 1884 to 1915, in fact an imperial power, holding colonies in Africa and the Pacific. Germany's violent colonial past has received more attention in the last years with some historians highlighting Germany's Nazi history to colonialism.[21] However, scholars have been

[14] See: Krauer, "Colonial Mercenaries"; Krauer and Schär, "Welfare for War Veterans".

[15] Schär, "Switzerland, Borneo and the Dutch Indies".

[16] Dejung, *Commodity Trading*; Haller, *Transithandel*. Schär, *Tropenliebe*; Ratschiller, "Material Matters".

[17] Harries, *Butterflies & Barbarians.*

[18] Behrendt, *Die Schweiz und der Imperialismus;* Stucki, *Das heimliche Imperium;* Lucas, *Un impérialisme electrique.* Quoted in: Eichenberger, "Swiss Capitalism".

[19] See also: Ruffieux, "Die Schweiz des Freisinns (1848–1914)". He suggests that in the nineteenth century, Switzerland's development of financial trading instruments in the context of imperialism shows its complicity in international capitalism borne out of colonialism.

[20] Eichenberger, "Swiss Capitalism," p. 217.

[21] For a selection of more recent works on German colonialism, see Conrad, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte*; Conrad and Osterhammel, eds., *Das Kaiserreich transnational*; Hiery, ed. *Die Deutsche Südsee 1884–1914*; Naranch and Eley, eds., *German Colonialism in a Global Age*; Smith, *The*

pushing towards "rethinking German colonialism",[22] with similar approaches to the history of Swiss links to colonialism, ascertaining how even before Germany had its own colonies, private individuals or organisations were involved in and profited from the imperial project in various ways.[23]

Within this context, the case of the Basel Mission is atypical. According to Jon Miller, while colonialism and missionary movements arose out of the same cultural background, there was never a complete convergence between them as one focused on religion and the other on economic and geopolitical gain.[24] At the same time, their relationship was symbiotic as missionaries could prepare the 'natives' for colonial enterprises and hegemony while colonialism opened up new areas for the missionaries to preach. But because Switzerland had no formal colonies, nor did Germany until the late nineteenth century, they had to rely on the fields opened up by other colonial powers. The Basel Mission maintained good relations with the colonial administrations of their mission fields, as the latter not only allowed them to proselytise but also provided legal and economic support. For this reason, the Basel Mission and the *Basler Handelsgesellschaft/Basel Trading Company* (BHG hereafter) actively supported and were supported by the British colonial administration in India. The British colonial administration was one of the main buyers of the goods produced by Basel Mission industries, and the BHG relied on several British firms based in the main cities of India for sale of its goods.[25]

The issue of collaboration between the colonial administration and the Basel Mission is pertinent, because the BHG and the Basel Mission's industrial mission was key to its involvement in deriving gains from colonial capitalism. Historians of South Asia and the British Empire have analysed the Basel Mission's activities in India in the broader context of the British 'moral' Empire, racial discourse, and regional economy.[26] The imposition of Protestantism and industriousness by the Basel Mission is discussed by Bernhard Schär in this volume. In his chapter, Schär examines the reliance of the Basel Mission on global economic networks for donations, facilitated by the elite in the Basel Mission Committee. Adopting a

German Colonial Empire; Speitkamp, *Deutsche Kolonialgeschichte*; Zimmerer and Mellor-Stapelberg, *German Rule, African Subjects*.

[22] Zantop, *Colonial Fantasies.*

[23] Conrad, "Rethinking German Colonialism in a Global Age". For a selection of works on South Asia, see: Brescius, German Science; Tzoref-Ashkenazi, *German Soldiers in Colonial India*; Manjapra, *Age of Entanglement*.

[24] Miller, *Missionary Zeal and Institutional Control,* pp. 18–19.

[25] Shahid, "The Basel Mission Weaving Establishment in Malabar".

[26] Philip, *Civilising Natures;* Raghaviah, *Faith and Industrial Reformation;* Shetty, "Medical Mission and the Interpretation of Pain"; Stenzl, *The Basel Mission Industries*; Prabhakar, "The Basel Mission in South Kanara 1834 to 1947"; Wittwer, "The Basel Mission Factories in Malabar and South Kanara".

transnational perspective, he shows the Basel Mission shaped the socio-cultural landscape, both in Europe as in India.

The focus on India in fact presents a novel addition to the existing literature on the Basel Mission. Historians from Switzerland and Germany have mostly focused on the Basel Mission's activities in West Africa, and those on India have concentrated on the period of the First World War and the Interwar period.[27] For the latter, Bornet's work has provided new insights. In his contribution to this volume, Bornet examines the history of the Kanarese Evangelical Mission (KEM hereafter) during the interwar period in regions of current Karnataka where the Basel Mission had been present. Given the weak governance of the KEM, he traces the society's position in India in the interwar period, within the context of rising nationalist sentiments. He also explores encounters between Jains and Lingayats in the field of proselytism and education vis à vis KEM.

Another example of collaboration between Germanophone missionaries and British colonialism was in their approach to education in India. Parinitha Shetty has previously discussed the pedagogy and education under the Basel Mission and argues that not only did the conflation of Christianity with civilisational progress allow the Basel Mission schools and initiatives to flourish alongside colonial rule, but also for the pupils, "the missionary school provided training in the skills and knowledge required for them to fit into the lower-rung positions offered to Indians within colonial administrative institutions".[28] In this manner, one may argue that the Basel Mission educational efforts contributed to both the aspirations of the converts and the sustenance of colonial rule and ideology.[29] Moreover, such educational and industrial practices also shaped gender roles in Indian society and entrenched caste divisions.

Gender

The notion of gender both shaped the functioning of the Basel Mission and was shaped by the Basel missionaries through their practices and rules in India. Female

[27] Bornet has focused on the successor of the BM after the mission society was expelled from the British Empire. See: Bornet, "A 'Purely Swiss' Missionary Society in Colonial Karnataka". Feigk has written about the Basel Mission's position around WWI with a cross-border cooperation perspective. He argues that missionaries were mediators of overseas knowledge in Europe, and international conferences, including those of mission societies, were cooperation across national boundaries. He calls the Basel Mission 'binational' however the claim he makes is before national boundaries were created formally in Europe. See: Feigk, "Von Edinburgh nach Oegstgeest".

[28] Shetty, "Missionary Pedagogy and Christianisation of the Heathens," p. 515.

[29] A Master's thesis examines Swiss colonial connections through the topic of education by the Basel Mission in India: De Martin, "Von der 'Kolonialfreiheit' zur 'Allianz mit der Regierung'".

missionaries played an important role in the everyday lives of preaching, conversion, and education in colonies. Yet, very little is known about their engagements with the mission societies. This is despite the fact that the majority of missionaries in the nineteenth century were female.[30] There has been much research on the role of missionary brides in various mission societies in India, as well as the *'zenanas'* that preached to and taught Indian women in seclusion, which we need not outline here. Suffice to say that Swiss-German women brought their skills and outlook when they travelled to India with the Basel Mission. Their role in education, management of 'feminine' work such as stitching or embroidery, as well as preaching was significant. At the same time, their own position and ideas reinforced divisions of labour within converted communities.

At its establishment in 1815, the Basel Mission school was only open for men who could be sent abroad as missionaries, which has thus dominated the mission's historiography. However, those missionaries, once having established themselves at the mission stations, were permitted to marry, for which case the Basel Mission committee would select a suitable wife who would be sent to India to join her husband to be. Germanophone historiographies have been unearthing the role of such women in the Basel Mission, being either the wives of missionaries, or, at later stages, themselves female missionaries who worked at the mission schools.[31] Dagmar Konrad's work *Missionsbräute* sheds light on the role of missionary brides under the Basel Mission. This crucial work highlights the level of regulation that missionaries underwent in getting married, from obtaining marriage permits to searching for a 'suitable' bride. Konrad also points out how many brides were married against their will, at times to men they had never seen. Tracing the journey of a woman from her home to the Basel Mission house in Basel, and then the journey to the mission station in the colonies, Konrad's work sheds light on the intimacies of conjugal life of missionaries through the voice of mission-brides. Hence, a major way to include the role of gender in the history of the Basel Mission has been to use the analytic of 'families' including mission-children.[32]

More recent historiographies have also turned their eye to gender dynamics at the mission stations, studying the reinforcement of the missionaries' ideas of gender roles at the Basel Mission's boys' and girls' schools in India, but also the Basel Mission's appropriation of the colonial discourse on the protection of Indian

[30] Cox, *Imperial Fault Lines,* p. 5.

[31] Becker, "Frauen in der Mission und Mädchenschulen"; Konrad, *Missionsbräute*; Miethke, *Erika Wuttke;* Prodolliet, *Wider die Schamlosigkeit*, p. 13. See also Haas, *Erlitten und Erstritten*; Haas and Pang, *Missionsgeschichte*; Haas, Gewecke and Oduyoye, *Frauen tragen mehr als die Hälfte*.

[32] Maß, "Constructing Global Missionary Families"; Konrad, "Schweizer Missionskinder des 19. Jahrhunderts".

women.[33] Thus, for example, the Basel Mission aligned itself with the British colonial discourse that positioned colonialism as the liberator of women oppressed by "Hindu Patriarchy", publicly assigning the abolishment of *sati* to Christian missions.[34] In this regard, Parinitha Shetty's paper is an important contribution to how matrilineal structures were reinterpreted by the Basel Mission, which printed a central text on this topic. Analysing this text and tracing the history of matrilineal societal practices in the Kanara region, Shetty argues that the text could be interpreted as a 'site' where power dynamics came into play to redefine caste, kinship, gender and property from the point of view of the 'modernity' as per the Basel Mission.

There has also been a focus on the role of female missionaries and their role in running orphanages and hospitals for the Basel Mission in South India.[35] In fact, the way that morality was imposed on women was evident in the way that female boarding schools were managed. Girls in these boarding schools were forbidden from interacting with 'morally questionable' women.[36] Female missionaries reinforced ideas of class, sexuality, conjugality, and their own position in society vis-a-vis men. In general, orphanages and boarding schools became sites of strict Protestant lifestyle and coercion among children that the missionaries expected adult converts to follow in mission stations. In this sense, the history of gender and children is often analysed together.

Besides education, Swiss-German female missionaries made significant contributions to the economy and finances under the Basel Mission. A string of research has been directing attention to the women running the "Halbbatzenkollekte" (collection of coin equivalent to 5 centimes/Rappen) in Germany and Switzerland and thus supporting the Basel Mission from Europe.[37] In fact, women played an integral role in fundraising activities in Switzerland and Europe. They were part of committees that would organise fairs and festivals, or sell home-made products which would raise money for the Basel Mission. Women were also active as 'day labourers' that would spread information, collect money, and aid in gathering members for auxiliary societies.[38] Thus, far from being passive donors, women even took the lead in supporting the Basel Mission financially.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Shetty, "Missionary Pedagogy and Christianisation of the Heathens," p. 530.

[35] Konrad, "Schweizer Missionskinder des 19. Jahrhunderts"; Kannan, "Missionary Encounters"; Prodolliet, *Wider die Schamlosigkeit*; Shetty, "Missionary Pedagogy and Christianisation of the Heathens".

[36] Kannan, *Contested Childhoods.*

[37] Schürer-Ries, "Die Sammlerinnen und Sammler für die Basler Mission".

[38] Schlatter, *Geschichte Der Basler Mission 1815–1915. Vol. 1.*

Women's role and position appears sporadically in studies that deal with the history of the BHG.[39] So far, there has been even more limited effort in exploring the role of gender within the industrial mission. Women within the mission performed domestic tasks or tasks considered more feminine such as weaving, threshing or lace-making, increasing the gender divide in household tasks and duties as well as in the labour market. Jennifer Jenkins has attempted to sketch out the ways in which converted women were assigned gendered tasks of lace-making, teaching or weaving.[40] An in-depth analysis of how the Basel Mission pursued its economic goals in deeply gendered ways in South India is, however, still missing. As is the case with the exploration and conceptualisation of child labour in mission industries and companies, which has been examined for West Africa but not so far for South India. In fact, the Basel Mission inculcated gendered division of labour and tasks in converted children from a young age as the latter represented the future of the mission.[41]

In general, there has been a conspicuous absence of indigenous women in research on the history of female missionaries in India. Sandra Langhop's contribution in the book nevertheless attempts to break new ground in this regard. Langhop's chapter explores the role of Indian Bible Women in proselytism under the Basel Mission, as well as the impact of European female missionaries in encouraging or restricting them in the field, providing insights into the training practice of Bible Women. Her contribution brings to light how inequalities would manifest within gender, thereby pointing to the importance of intersectionality in mission studies. While race figures quite evidently within these intersectionalities, more attention is required to the inequalities of caste within dynamics of racial differences.

Caste

Within Protestant missionary circles, debates over how to approach the caste system in India emerged as early as the beginning of the eighteenth century.[42] Protestant mission societies in India generally viewed caste as a major obstacle to Christian conversion and a hindrance to the social progress of the Protestant community.[43] However, the missionary view on caste was often limited to the religious sphere, primarily associating it with Hindu doctrinal ideology rather than

[39] Fischer, *Die Basler Missionsindustrie; Danker, Profit for the Lord*; Wittwer, "The Basel Mission Factories in Malabar and South Kanara"; Stenzl, *The Basel Mission Industries in India*.

[40] Jenkins, "Lace-making in the Basel Mission in India, 1839–1914".

[41] Koonar, "Christianity, Commerce and Civilization".

[42] Wetjen, "The Middle Things".

[43] Bugge, "Christianity and Caste in XIXth Century South India".

understanding it as a socio-economic problem.[44] Therefore, instead of addressing the economic inequalities and unequal labour relations rooted in caste structures, the missionaries framed caste primarily as a religious issue.[45] In this process, Christianity did not simply abolish caste distinctions among converts but rather transformed and sometimes reinforced them in new ways.

Caste posed significant challenges to the proselytisation work of the Basel missionaries, which conflicted with their Pietistic belief in the spiritual equality of all individuals.[46] While they often promoted ideals of equality and sought to challenge the caste system, the reality of their impact was more complicated. As the Basel Mission expanded beyond Mangalore into other regions of Karnataka and Kerala, it brought various socio-religious groups, including, Billavas, Brahmins, Tiyyas, Mogaveeras, Kodavas, and Lingayats among others, into direct contact with its activities.[47] Unlike Catholics and some British and American Protestant missions who partly tolerated caste, the Basel Mission took a firm stance against caste segregation.[48] They advocated for the elimination of caste distinctions among converts and worked actively to integrate individuals from different castes into a unified Christian community. To reinforce this, Basel missionaries organised communal meals, arranged inter-caste marriages among converts, and ensured that schoolchildren from various castes sat together.[49] In missionary logic, caste was to be abolished for its corrupting influence on Christianity by representing a Hindu past. As a result, converts' names were Europeanised after Baptism. For example, a common Billava surname 'Amin' was often Europeanised as Amann or Amanna with first names like Samuel or Benedict. While the intention was to diminish caste-based differences, such actions also erased and reinvented identities.

Despite disadvantaged groups being most numerous among the converts, the Basel Mission's religious reforms were shaped by the intricate interplay of caste, class, and sectarianism within local society. They showed a preference for converting Brahmins, valuing their literary abilities and viewing them as 'ideal' converts.[50] In contrast, they often regarded 'lower' castes like the Billavas, Tiyyas and others as less capable of receiving Christian teachings due to their non-literate background.

[44] Forrester, *Caste and Christianity.*

[45] Viswanath, *The Pariah Problem.*

[46] Strom, "Introduction: Pietism in Two Worlds in Pietist Experiences and Narratives of Conversion".

[47] Basu, "Intertwining Christian Mission". Billava and Tiyya were classified as toddy-tapping castes, Mogaveer as fishermen and lingayats as a sectarian assortment of largely peasant groups. Kodagas were identified in the colonial discourse as an indigenous 'tribe'.

[48] Oddie, "Protestant Missions, Caste and Social Change in India, 1850–1914".

[49] This issue is captured in various annual reports of the Basel Mission.

[50] Kumar, "From Heart to Mind".

This dual attitude was marked by the mix of a respectful yet condescending tone towards Brahmins, and often disdainful remarks towards lower castes.[51]

The missionaries aimed to establish inclusive institutions, such as schools, accessible to all castes. However, implementing this vision was challenging due to deep-seated caste-based segregation. The majority of Basel Mission converts came from the Billava and Tiyya communities, who saw education as a means of social mobility.[52] For them and other marginalised communities, material progress was also intertwined with social reform and an improvement in their caste status.[53] Following the 1833 Charter Act, which allowed Indians to be hired in lower echelons of the colonial bureaucracy, the Mission opened many schools in English and Kannada.[54] These schools also admitted children from 'low' caste communities, offering them opportunities to compete for government jobs. This led to resistance from Brahmins, who often opposed the admission of 'lower' caste children to schools. Ensuring free interaction among children from various castes in these institutions proved difficult, as 'higher' caste students often refused to attend schools alongside 'lower' caste peers. The hiring of a Billava convert as a teacher in a Mangalore school, for example, incited strong opposition from local Brahmins.[55] Although some 'lower' caste individuals benefitted from missionary efforts, the broader social structure remained largely unchanged.

Caste was also closely linked to occupational identities, which were gradually altered through the employment of converts in Basel Mission institutions, schools, industries and factories. Some of these jobs, previously inaccessible to 'lower' castes, included roles in teaching, nursing, and clerical work. Raghaviah's contribution suggests that these shifts in occupational identities were integral to the missionary endeavour of 'social engineering' aimed at eradicating caste among converts. Conversion often provided access to new forms of education, employment, and community support that were otherwise inaccessible within the social structures of Hindu caste society.

To the so-called 'lower' castes, Christianity offered creative avenues for self-transformation, such as adopting dignified lifestyles, giving up alcohol, and embracing literacy and Bible reading, which fostered civic virtues and important life skills.[56] The missionaries promoted new dressing habits, hygiene, cleanliness, and orderliness of homes as Christian values to distinguish converts from their

[51] Missionary reports and letters are full of such descriptions.

[52] Oddie, "Christianity and Social Mobility in South India 1840–1920".

[53] Kooiman, *Conversion and Social Equality in India.*

[54] See: Shetty, "Missionary Pedagogy and Christianisation of the Heathens".

[55] Koudur, "Languages, Castes and Hierarchy".

[56] Mosse, "Caste and Christianity".

'lower' caste origins. These changes were often captured in Basel Mission photographs, which serve as valuable historical records preserved in the Mission 21 Archive. As discussed by Chinjumol in this volume, these photographs not only depicted caste markers but also highlighted the transformations brought about by the Mission's influence on the everyday lives of converts. Photographs are among various forms of materialities and objects brought back to Europe by the Basel Mission which served to influence mentalities among Europeans in the nineteenth century and continue to evidence Switzerland's colonial connections today.

Materiality

The opening of the new mission house in 1860 was also the inauguration of the Basel Mission's museum. The objects exhibited came from a donation by Swabian theologian Christian Gottlob Barth as well as from an already existing collection from the committee room, showing how various missionaries had been sending ethnographic objects back to Basel from their mission stations.[57] The catalogue for the mission's collection was published two years later and lists objects from the Gold Coast Colony, Cameroon, India, China and beyond.

The Basel Mission hosted regular exhibitions, such as the 1908 exhibition to present its rich collection.[58] Those collections served different purposes, among others, the justification of its mission enterprise by highlighting the presumed 'backwardness' and 'heathenness' of other extra-European societies. Thus, many religious, but also daily objects were transferred from various mission stations to Basel and exhibited there for educational purposes, furthering European ideas of cultural superiority.[59]

In 1981, large parts of those collections were transferred to the *Museum der Kulturen Basel*, where they remain until this day. The museum commissioned scholarly studies by Dagmar Konrad and Isabella Bozsa which were published in 2019 and 2020 to further provenance research on its collections.[60] Their close scrutiny of the objects' history and the museum's archives shows how the collection houses different types of objects; some stemming from individually collecting missionaries, whilst some missionaries followed the mission's call to acquire objects by buying objects locally, oftentimes sending back pieces which were specifically created for European collectors.[61] In her contribution to this volume, Isabella Bozsa

[57] Pistorius, *Die Schildkröte im Schwarzwald*, p. 6.

[58] Konrad, *Entfernte Dinge*, p. 48.

[59] Ibid., p. 11.

[60] Bozsa, *Geschenkt, gekauft, erbeutet*; Konrad, *Entfernte Dinge*.

[61] Konrad, *Entfernte Dinge*, p. 53.

further develops her work as she studies the colonial implications of the Indian objects in the Basel Mission Collections focusing on the motivations for collectors, interactions with the local population and their own agency.[62]

The material collections assembled by the Basel Mission are not limited to only that museum in Basel. On the contrary, ethnographic objects collected by the Basel Mission can be found across the world, stemming from the diverse set of collectors and collecting enterprises. As the Basel Mission asked the missionaries to return ethnographic objects to Basel to locally support and justify their mission cause, different missionaries followed this cause, such as Hermann Gundert but some also adapted the task to their own interest.[63] Thus, the tailor Karl Merkel collected fabrics in India, Paul Hunziker working at the printing press created 'naturelike' prints of plants and some missionaries such as Gustav Peter sold their collections individually and privately.[64] To collectors and traders, such missionaries were interesting intermediary actors as they knew the area of their mission stations much better than a collector who would only visit briefly. They also had much more direct access to local communities and knowledge. Being far away from the mission committee in Basel, missionaries could also profit from the delays in communication and use it for their own purpose and privacy in such endeavours.[65] However, the exact relations of collecting between mission committee and missionaries remain to be uncovered.

Research on the Basel Mission has been dominated by German and Swiss scholars who frequently study the Basel Mission within their respective national frameworks and focus on the activities of German and Swiss missionaries. More recently, attention has been slowly turning towards local agency and knowledge and thus also the colonial and local entanglements of the Basel Mission. Through an increasing exchange with scholars from India, more fruitful collaborations are bringing forward a deeper understanding of not only the participation of local converts or workers in the collection of objects, but also their role in the making of knowledge and the Basel Mission industries.

The Basel Mission lastingly impacted the local economies and material cultures through their introduction of printing presses, tile factories and weaving workshops in the domain of its mission industries.[66] Those workshops did not only follow the purpose of 'educating' the converts towards an industrious lifestyle and sustaining them after conversion, but also created additional revenue which would

[62] Sammlung Basler Mission (English: Basel Mission Collections).

[63] Bozsa, *Geschenkt, gekauft, erbeutet*, p. 12.

[64] For Karl Merkel, see: Konrad, *Entfernte Dinge*, p. 22; for Hunziker, see: Frey and Badenberg, "Die Pflanzenwelt Südindiens"; Sebastian, "Localised Cosmopolitanism and Globalised Faith"; and for Peter, see: Bozsa, *Geschenkt, gekauft, erbeutet*, p. 11

[65] Konrad, *Entfernte Dinge*, p. 52.

[66] Raghaviah, *Faith and Industrial Reformation*.

serve the mission and its finances and were thus considered an integral part of Basel's religious mission enterprise.

Therefore, from the 1840s onwards, the printing press was in action creating bibles, schoolbooks and maps and from 1865 onwards the renowned Basel Mission Tiles were being produced in Mangalore.[67] Those industrially produced tiles have made a lasting impact on the region's architecture and to this day they are more commercially known as "Mangalore tiles" or "Basel Mission tiles". With the establishment of the Basel Mission trading company (BHG) in 1859 and the further growth and expansion of the Basel Mission industries, the Basel Mission soon came to be one of the most important employers in the region. Scholars have been turning away from the Eurocentric narrative of the Basel Mission bringing industrialisation and 'advanced' knowledge to the region of Malabar, and increasing attention is being paid to the local knowledge which the missionaries in charge used to set up their factories. Thus, the skills and knowledge of local workers in India or the role of Indian master potters in the making of the first Basel Mission tile-making oven are being given more attention, paving the way for a more balanced history of the Basel Mission.[68] In her contribution, Priya Joseph takes an architectural approach towards the history of the Basel Mission, studying the interaction of European and Indian expertise in the making of tiles and the process of standardisation which the Basel Mission started in the area with the introduction of machine-made manufacturing. Likewise, approaches such as Linda Ratschiller's method of employing commodity culture to counter the hegemonic dominance of missionaries in written sources and study the agency of local actors can be employed for the Indian context. As Ratschiller argues for the case of West Africa, such new approaches will enable the study of the Basel Mission's entanglements and also contribute to a comparative understanding of colonialism.[69]

Scope of the Book

After various exchanges between the editors and contributors at different points in time, we concluded that, despite the variety of work being produced on the topic of the Basel Mission in India, there is no single volume that collates key sub-fields and arguments. Thus, the idea of the present book was shaped. The book addresses major scholarly gaps in the understanding of the Basel Mission's activities in India,

[67] Ibid., pp. 30–33; Tripati Sundaresh, Gudigar, Bandodker, "Exploration of Basel Mission Company Shipwreck Remains at St George's Reef off Goa, West Coast of India".

[68] Hueglin, Joseph and Tripati, "From Basel Mission to Mangalore Tiles," pp. 13–14.

[69] Ratschiller, "Material Matters".

like topics of caste, gender, indigenous laws and the position of the Basel Mission in the interwar period. Notably, as mentioned earlier, the Mission's presence in India has also received less attention compared to its work in Africa, despite the Basel Mission's base in India being the largest both numerically and financially.[70]

An important objective of the conference, as of the book, was to go beyond the research produced in Europe and therefore to include researchers from India. The main archive of the Mission is based in Basel, with sources in German, many of which in German *Kurrentschrift*. It is thus no surprise that much of the research on the Basel Mission in India has been reliant on and produced by German-speaking scholars in Germany and Switzerland. Rarely have the sources in South Indian indigenous languages figured into the otherwise well-researched existing works. In India, scholars have relied on the English-language annual reports, complemented by other material produced by the British colonial administration. Their access to German records has been restricted not only by language but also by practical issues of travel, visa regimes and expenses. However, scholars based in India in the region of Malabar and South-Kanara have access both to surviving vernacular material as well as the rich field of the remnants of the Basel Mission which still stand strong today, such as the tile factories, orphanages, mission schools, and so on. Therefore, bringing together scholars from the two regions brought not only different perspectives from sources and approaches, but also ideas and methodologies.

Hence, the motivation of this book is twofold: firstly, it takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on various academic areas such as history, anthropology, religious studies and sociology to analyse the Basel Mission's activities. It not only examines the missionary objectives and theological aspects but also delves into the social, economic, and political impacts of the mission's work, highlighting its multifaceted role in shaping societies. Secondly, by emphasising the transnational activities and exchanges facilitated by the Basel Mission between Europe and India, the book provides a nuanced understanding of global interactions during the colonial period. It explores how products, ideas, and beliefs were exchanged and how these interactions influenced social and cultural landscapes in Switzerland, Germany, India, and beyond. Certain topics have already been well studied, such as the contribution of the Basel missionaries in linguistics, producing dictionaries for Kannada, Malayalam and Tulu. Also, the industries of tile and weaving and their functioning have also received attention. Nevertheless, much needs to be explored on social themes of caste, conjugality, racial difference, as well as cultural, ideological and economic exchanges. By focusing on these overlooked aspects, the book not only advances the understanding of the Basel Mission's history in the world, but also contributes to broader discussions on British colonialism, German

[70] Shahid, "The Basel Mission Weaving Establishment in Malabar".

Protestantism, historical debates in Switzerland and Germany on their countries' own respective links to colonialism as well as global interactions, offering new insights and challenging existing narratives.

Despite its ambitious aims, the book could cover only limited ground, selecting certain themes over others. The conference and this volume made evident that there are further avenues of research to be explored. For instance, the position of the Basel Mission in relation both to the British colonial state and to other mission societies remains unexplored territory.[71] Additionally, child labour and the history of children under the Basel Mission is much less examined for India than its African counterpart. Divya Kannan's work attempts to fill this gap.[72] Another topic is a systematic history of the Basel Mission Trading Company's financial and social history. The chapters in this volume could only touch upon the economic activities of the Basel Mission, an aspect peculiar to this mission society that engaged openly in industries and trade. Both these themes open up the question of financing and maintenance of the mission's activities. A research group based at the University of Lausanne, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation (no. 194512), has a subproject on the Basel Mission studied by Amal Shahid. She traces the Basel Mission's financial history through its donations and fundraising efforts by auxiliary societies, as well as welfarism measures in India as part of financial management by Germanophone missionaries. The entanglements of the Basel Mission in both colonial and trade-networks are also the subject of Ella Müller's doctoral project on the collection and exchange of naturalist specimens by Basel Missionaries. Similarly, Mukesh Kumar's work examines the historical and ethnographic impact of the Basel Mission. Additionally, his research looks at the significance of gardens and gardening, as spaces that influenced the material and aesthetic aspects of both missionary and convert lives.

As more records are uncovered in the archives, further possibilities of topics will open up, especially interdisciplinary in nature. Nevertheless, this volume is a humble attempt to outline current and pressing work related to the Basel Mission. The book is organised in five sections which reflect the themes discussed in this introduction. The first section explores existing historiographies; while this introduction examines historiographies specific to the Basel Mission, the next chapter by Felicity Jensz outlines the major trends in missionary historiography in general. This helps situate the position of the Basel Mission in the broader histories of Christian missionaries in the colonial context.

[71] For an exception, see: Jenkins, "The Church Missionary Society and the Basel Mission"; Jenkins, "Die Basler Mission im Kolonialen Spannungsfeld Indien".

[72] Kannnan, *Contested Childhoods.*

The second section then places the Basel Mission in a relational context, with Bernhard Schär's chapter contextualising the Basel Mission in Europe as a way to explain its activities in India. Similarly, Philippe Bornet's contribution places the Basel Mission's successor organisation, the KEM, in relation to other indigenous religions. In the third section on caste, Jaiprakash Raghaviah gives an overview of social engineering practices by the Basel Mission which resulted in shifting meanings of caste, and Chinju KR examines changes in caste practices through photographic evidence. The fourth section then turns the focus to gender, with Parinitha Shetty's chapter highlighting indigenous matrilineal practices in the South Kanara region through a Kannada text, and how it was reinterpreted and used by the Basel Mission. Sandra Langhop's contribution in this section then shifts the focus to indigenous Bible Women and racial hierarchies between them and European missionaries. The final section of this volume comprises Isabella Bozsa's chapter examining the objects in Basel today. Priya Joseph then turns attention to the tiles produced on the south-west coast of India. These two chapters of the last section together serve to explore the material aspect of the Basel Mission concluding the volume with contributions which illuminate our understanding of the Basel Mission's legacies today. In addition to these two chapters, an afterword by Linda Maria Ratschiller Nasim summarises the key findings of the book, weaving together various themes from across the chapters.

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