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GERMAN MISSIONARIES AND RABIES HYDROPHOBIA

Mission History as History of the Globalization of indigenous Tamil medical Knowledge of 18th Century

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INTRODUCTION

The First Germans in India

Balthasar Sprenger was the first German to visit India as could be evidenced from a published source material.¹ He came to India as an agent of Indian Consortium of a few German merchant houses. He and his companion named Hans Mayr set out in a fleet of three ships along with Dom Francisco d'Almeida, the first Portuguese Viceroy of India² and arrived in the small coastal village Kayankulam, on the south west coast of India, in the present Kerala state in 1505. Sprenger observed and recorded the socio-cultural life of the *Nayar* community people in Kayankulam. Thus started the Indo-German interactions more than half-a-millennium ago. Sprenger's maiden Indian experience was published as a very small book but with the very long title and unique German spelling³ in 1509:

"Die Merfahrt und erfahrung nuerer Schiffung und wege zu viln onerkanten Inseln und Kunigreichen, von dem grossmechtigen Portugalischen Kunig Emanuel erforscht, funden, bestritten und Ingenommenen, wunderbarliche Streyt, ordenung, leben wesen handlune und wunderwercke des volcks und Thyrer dar inn wonende, findestu in dieem buchlyn warhaftiglich beschriben unn abkunterfeyt, wie ich Balthasar Sprenger sollichs selbs in kurz verscheyn zeiten gesehen und erfaren habe etc. Gedruckt Anno MDIX."⁴

But history does not record any significant follow up activities of these two Germans. They simply came here to south India to explore any possibility of finding a potential field for trading activities; but such an attempt was not fruitful. For nearly one and a half century after this first German visit to India, we do not get any information about the next German attempt to explore India. Only in 1652 we hear about the second German visit, when German Jesuit missionary named

1 Cf. Leifer, Walter: India and the Germans. 500 Years of Indo-German Contacts, 2nd edition, Bombay 1977, p. 26.

2 Cf. ibidem.

3 Cf. ibidem, pp. 26 f.

4 Ibidem, p. 27.

Heinrich Roth (1620–1668) visited Goa.⁵ From there, he came to Agra where he lived for a few years and attended the Moghul Court.⁶ Roth also worked as the Court physician for the Moghul Emperors⁷ and was the first European to write a grammar of Sanskrit language, which was highly regarded by Prof. Max Mueller.⁸ It is my inference, that if the legacy bequeathed by a person is kept alive by successful follow-up actions, by his disciples and followers, it may be considered significant; otherwise, insignificant. It can be inferred that the activities of the above-mentioned three Germans, when measured with this yardstick, had been insignificant, for, we do not get any information for the follow-up actions of these first three German visitors.

But significant German interest for India came to be realized only with the arrival of the first German Lutheran missionary Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719), on 9th July, 1706 in Tranquebar.⁹ From thence commenced the most significant aspects of Indo-German or better-said, Tamilo-German interactions. Thus, from the times of Ziegenbalg's visit to Tamilnadu in 1706, a new and an enriched Tamilo-German interactive epoch had dawned and this German intellectual quest for India, is kept alive until this day, thanks to the dozens of Germans for their continued involvement, interactions and contributions to Indian studies in general, and to Tamil studies, in particular. While the other five European powers viz. the Portuguese, the Dutch, the Danes, the British and the French fought with each other and the local Kings for political and commercial gains in Tamilnadu during 18th and 19th centuries, the Germans looked at the indigenous Tamil society and culture from their innate "Techno-Germa" angle and recorded in hundreds of their diaries and travel accounts many aspects of special academic significance. From tiny grass to huge banyan trees, from small ants to large elephants, from the new-born babies to age-old centenarians, from the rich riding the palanquins to the poor walking bare-foot, not a single observation seemed to have escaped the watchful eyes of those Germans. Voluminous notes about the indigenous Tamil customs and manners, rites and rituals, legends and fables, diseases and medicine etc. filled hundreds of German diaries, which were all sent to Germany along with many Tamil medical palm leaves bundles and rare artifacts "mit den nechst abgehenden Schiffen"¹⁰. The Indian experience of the Germans in general, and their Tamil experience in particular, is a fathomless fascination. This is just a small road map to show how deeply did the German saplings, planted by Ziegenbalg in 1706, gain firm roots in Tamilnadu for more than three centuries!

5 Cf. Stache-Rosen, Valentina: German Indologists, 2nd edition, New Delhi 1990, p. 1.

6 Cf. ibidem.

7 Cf. ibidem.

8 Cf. ibidem.

9 Cf. Fenger, J. Ferd: Geschichte der Trankebarschen Mission nach der Quellen bearbeitet. Aus dem Dänischen übersetzt von Emil Francke, Grimma 1845, S. 20.

10 Lehmann, Arno: Hallesche Mediziner und Medizinen am Anfang deutsch-indischer Beziehungen, in: Wissenschaftliche Zeitschrift der Martin-Luther Universität Halle-Wittenberg, Nr. 2, Halle (Saale) 1955, S. 124.

The Innate "Techno-Germa" *Aussenpolitik*

The West met the East. The East seldom met the West. The ever fertile Indo-Gangetic plains in India, the Yangze river valley, the very fertile Manchuria province in China were all objects of immense curiosity for the West and western rulers, right from the times of Alexander the Great, down to Akbar the Great and even thereafter, to the British and other European powers and this envious surprise prompted the West to invade the East. The obsolete military practice of using bows and arrows, and the political isolation policy, better known as the close door policy¹¹ of the Chinese "Heavenly Kingdom" of the Manchus gave a positive signal to the Western invaders that they could easily win over these oriental powers with their modern artillery equipments like the riffles, guns, cannons and other such warfare methods, which were all unknown to the Indian or the Chinese military organizations then. This kind of indigenous weak Indian and Chinese military power provoked any country having guns and canons to wage wars on India and China to exploit their rich natural resources. But even at such favourable times, Germany did not wage any war on China; instead, the German scientists, with their advanced technical devices and knowledge, located mineral resources like coal and petroleum in China and found out that such natural underground resources were abundant in the Shantung province. The Germans only liked to share with China, these natural resources, which eventually benefited the Chinese exchequer also. The German *Aussenpolitik* – foreign policy was never to explore any trade and commerce activities nor to usurp the political power of any country or to extend the rule of the German Kaiser on oriental countries. The very first two Germans, Sprenger and Mayr mentioned above, who came with the mission of establishing potential commercial contacts with India, were not successful in their trading efforts and no other incidence can better prove that the Germans foreign policy was based on their innate science and technology spirit. This "Techno-Germa" quality was further carried over on the Indian soil also. Almost all the German missionaries showed keen interest for indigenous Tamil natural science though they were ordered to confine themselves only with the spread of the Gospel and nothing else in the East Indies.¹²

Germans as "Royal Danish missionaries"

Next, let us know as to what brought the Germans to Tamilnadu as "Royal Danish" missionaries. After acquiring the coastal village Tranquebar and a few surrounding villages from the Nayaka King named Ragunatha Nayaga by a treaty¹³

11 Cf. Clyde, Paul H./Beers, Burton F.: *The Far East. A History of the Western impacts and the Eastern Responses 1830–1975*, 6th edition, New Delhi 1977, pp. 228 ff.

12 Cf. Fenger, J. Ferd: *History of the Tranquebar Mission*. Translated into English by K. Pamperrien, 2nd bicentenary edition, Madras 1906, p. 237.

13 Cf. Nagaswamy, R.: *Tarangampadi*, Madras 1987, p. 7.

dated 19 November, 1620 the Danish King Frederick IV (1671–1712), who ascended the throne in 1699, very much liked to spread the Gospel among the native Tamil people in and around Tranquebar. The Danes did not like this kind of religious efforts of the King and criticized him in these words:

“Indessen sieht man hieraus, dass es in Europa noch wohl so viel gibt im Christenthume zu begiessen, dass man, ehe solches geschehen, sich nicht in andere Theil der Welt zu pflanzen, zu begeben hätte.”¹⁴

This could also be due to the reason that the Danish Trading Company and its directors in Copenhagen did not like religious propagation in the East Indies, which they considered as hindrance to the Danish commercial interests.¹⁵ At this critical hour, Germany came to the rescue of the Danish King. Prof. A.H. Francke (1663–1727), a devout Lutheran theologian in Halle trained young Germans as missionaries; but Germany did not have the money for overseas religious enterprises. They supplied Lutheran missionaries and the Danish King funded them for travel and for propagation of the Gospel in the far off Tranquebar. The first two Germans named B. Ziegenbalg and H. Pluetschau were selected to go to Tranquebar on the Danish expenses. Following them, dozens of Germans were sent to Tamilnadu for the spread of the Gospel all through the Danish expenses. Hence, though they were Germans by birth, they came to be called as “Royal Danish missionaries”.¹⁶

German missionaries as Natural Scientists

The Germans from the cold Europe came to the hot tropical Tamilnadu. Tropical heat, especially during the three summer months April–June, besides certain tropical diseases were known to the early Germans only after coming here. Many diary reports about the ere-unknown diseases, the corresponding herbal medicines, which the local Tamil medical men – better known as *Siddhars* prescribed, the tropical reptiles, insects and ornithological observations were sent to Germany. It looks as though a few medical doctors and natural scientists in Germany thought of knowing more fully about such tropical aspects. Dr. J. R. Foster, Dr. Roxburg – to name a few at random – were a few such inquisitive Germans, who sent several questions to the German missionaries in Tamilnadu, who in turn, sent corresponding answers and even a few tropical specimens to their Professors in Germany. Christoph Samuel John (1746–1813) had done a remarkable service in the transfer of Tamil heritage science knowledge into Europe. Other such “missionaries”, to mention a few at random, were Johann Friedrich Koenig (1741–1795) and Johann Gottfried Klein (1721–1790). Even earlier, the pioneer German

14 Fenger, J. Ferd: Geschichte der..., a.a.O., S. 269.

15 Cf. Beyreuther, Erich: Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, Madras 1956, S. 65.

16 Cf. Mohanavelu, C. S.: German Tamilology, Madras 1993, pp. 23 ff. A more detailed investigation of the lack of coordination between the Danish Crown, Clergy and the Company can be found in this book.

missionary Johann Ernst Gruendler (1677–1720) spent eleven years to buy medical palmleaves from the Brahmin widows and to translate them into German as a medical treatise *Malabar Medicus*, which he sent with several medical palmleaves bundles to Germany for “the serviceable information of his fellow countrymen”.

The “Spiritual Paralysis”

The German Lutheran stalwarts and the Danish Crown and Clergy looked into the German diaries, sent from Tamilnadu as to know if there were any increases in the number of converts. Many German and Danish eyebrows were raised to find in those diaries, voluminous information about tropical insects, reptiles, diseases and praising notes about the indigenous Tamil language and literature, customs and manners, society and culture besides even ornithological and other sundry notes on onomastics, pressure and wind, Tamil calendar system etc. In short, the very mission of spreading the Gospel among the Tamils was overcome and outshone by the irresistible German quest for such indigenous natural science studies. Retardation in the conversion process resulted. This was lamented by another German missionary named William Tobias Ringeltaube¹⁷ (1770–1816) and Francke Junior noted that “the missionaries might let the chief business lie and take more interest in curiosities.”¹⁸ Though the Danish King gave specific orders to the missionaries not to mind anything other than the Gospel, this kind of spiritual paralysis came to be felt. Was it due to the reason that the German missionaries were seemingly disobedient to their paymaster, the Danish King, or was it due to the reason that Tamil Studies were all a sort of fathomless German fascination, which created unending and irresistible “Techno-Germa” curiosity?

SUBJECT MATTER

Ancient Tamil Medical System

The indigenous tropical medical heritage of the Tamils was indeed a fathomless German fascination. This claim is based on certain ethno-geographical factors. To put it more simple, I am to say that as tropical vegetation was not possible on the cold European soil 300 years ago, the early German missionaries, who came here to Tamilnadu from 1706, knew not about tropical diseases, and the corresponding herbal treatment. The first German missionary Ziegenbalg himself agreed this

17 Cf. Lehmann, Arno: Es began in Tranquebar. Die Geschichte der ersten evangelischen Kirche in Indien, Berlin 1956, S. 300.

18 Ibidem.

claim in the following words. "Weil aber die dazu verordnete Species in Europe nicht zu finden sind, so hat man keines von selbigen hierher setzen wollen."¹⁹

Also Ziegenbalg adds that the Tamil medical doctors are not dull people, as one might think so in Europe.²⁰ Starting from Ziegenbalg, this kind of "Techno-Germa" tempo, to know more and more about Tamil medicine, consumed most of the tenure period of German missionaries.

A separate chapter had been devoted in my book cited earlier,²¹ (Ch. IV) to bring out the surprising notes of the hot tropical climate, which threatened the Germans, the corresponding tropical diseases, how the early German missionaries came to suffer from such diseases for the first time in Tamilnadu, how they were cured by native Tamil doctors, how deeply the Germans involved themselves in knowing so much from the traditional Tamil medical palmleaves, how eagerly were these Tamil medical prescriptions translated into German and sent along with palmleaves bundles in a remarkable haste by the next available ship to Europe, a few ancient Tamil medical books and their contents, the expertise knowledge of the Tamils in the field of yoga and pranayama breathing exercises and a particular page from a German diary, consisting of four medical prescriptions for certain ear disease are all outlined in that chapter of my book.

Pleasant surprise, at the indigenous Tamil medical knowledge, spread in Europe among natural scientists, thanks to the Germans who sent voluminous diary reports carrying such indigenous medical information. Soon dozens of questions about tropical diseases were sent from Europe to the German missionaries in Tamilnadu, for which answers were dispatched immediately – sometimes along with tropical botanical and zoological specimens also. How many kinds of diseases a Tamil medical man knew of, three centuries ago? An 18th century diary-gives the answer.

"Unter dem 20 Februar 1726 berichtet das Diarium der Herren Pressier und Walther von einem Gespräch mit einem Malabarischen Medicus. Dieser versicherte, die Krankheiten seien 'von 4448 Arten' und daß die Krankheit nur den Leib betreffe und niemals die Seele."²²

What are these 4448 diseases? How many of them still are easily curable with other medical systems? What were the indigenous diagnostic methods to detect them? What indigenous Tamil medical treatments were prescribed? How far these diseases and corresponding treatments differ or run parallel to the present day medical techniques? A full-fledged ethno-medical research project can be taken up to bring out these aspects in full.

19 Caland, W. (Hrsg.): Ziegenbalg's Malabarisches Heidenthum, Amsterdam 1926, S. 220, my emphasis.

20 Cf. ibidem.

21 Cf. Mohanavelu, C. S.: German Tamilology..., op. cit., pp. 120 ff.

22 Lehmann, Arno: Hallesche..., a.a.O., S. 117.

The Disease

Rabies-Hydrophobia is a dreadful as-yet 100% fatal disease. Rabies continues to be a serious public health problem in many countries, especially in developing and under-developed countries. A leading German pharmaceutical company HOECHST had published a news report²³ that every year, 30.000 people die in India due to this disease. Another publication informs us that "over 3 million people are bitten by dogs, many of them fatally."²⁴

Some dogs, which breed the dreadful rabies virus in their mouths, are the carriers of this disease. In a few countries like India, there are stray dogs, roaming about on streets and roads and there are no rigid rules and legislations to regulate the upbringing by their owners. If these stray dogs bite a passerby, he is rushed to the government hospital and given the ARV (Anti Rabid Vaccination).

The poor slum urchins and even the affluent ones, while playing with their canine pets, contract this disease. The saliva of rabid dogs, when it comes into contact with the skin of the human preys, with even a slight bruise, transmit into the blood system, the rabid virus, which in turn, after many weeks and months, enter into the nervous system and affect finally the brain. At this stage, the patient crawls, sometimes barks like a dog and shows deep aversion to water. (Hydro=water; phobia=aversion) and die out in the most cruel and miserable manner! Their bodies are not even given to the relatives for conducting last rites. It is highly pathetic to find a sole bread-winner of a family dying due to rabies hydrophobia as informed in a publication.²⁵

No private hospital in Chennai or elsewhere will admit rabies patients for any huge amount, their relatives may like to give. Bitten by rabid dog sometime ago, and when the rabies virus had entered their nervous system, they are brought to the hospital in a serious condition. Even at such a critical stage, if the herbal medicine, as found in a German letter could be given, the rabies victims can be saved. In developed countries, there might not be any expected response to prepare and administer this medicine because, there are no stray dogs at all on roads and the canine pets are periodically administered with preventive injections not only to save them from getting infected with rabies; but also to prevent human lives from contracting rabies.

23 Cf. The Hindu Newspaper, Chennai 10.5.1989.

24 The Hindu Newspaper, Chennai 19.10.1991, p. 2.

25 Cf. The Hindu Newspaper, Chennai 6.6.2000, p. 12.

The Medicine

The native Tamil doctors, 300 years ago, treated rabies victims with the herbal medicine, the formula of which, can be found in a brittle letter²⁶ of 18th century. This prescription copy consists of five ingredients. Three of them are tropical vegetation. The first of them grows almost all over the year in India. The second ingredient is a small bush like plant, with fleshy thick lush green leaves and gives pungent aroma. The third herb is also a bushy plant, which has medium sized green leaves and stems of about one to one and half foot height. This one grows only during July till March. The fourth one is the ordinary sweet south Indian edible item and the fifth one is the ash of a wild animal. All these five ingredients, when made into a paste, form the medicine. This letter does not tell whether the flower or the fruit or the stem part of the herb is to be used. However, it can be seen that mostly for such indigenous medicines, the leaves parts are used. The leaves of the three herbs, when mixed with the fourth and fifth ingredients, will form a paste. If this homogenous paste could be administered orally into the mouth of the positive rabies patient, then, he should be saved from death. No tablet or syrup or any other form was mentioned in this brittle letter. This is certainly a laudable medical aspect that several centuries ago, the Tamil medical men knew of such a life saving medicine, when their counterparts in other parts of the world did not at all know of such a medical treatment then and even till this day!

The Methodology

How the ingredients of this prescription were called nearly three hundred years ago, when the German missionary copied it in his letter, and how they are now known as, is to be found out. Their botanical equivalents are also to be ascertained so as to cross check with any standard form of botanical nomenclature like the *Linnea* classification. The favourable climatic conditions under which those herbs can be grown in the place of their testing should also be monitored carefully. A proper international patent has to be obtained so as to avoid duplication and exploitation of this medical project by unscrupulous trading agents. This will enable the authorized establishments to carry on with this project un-hindered for preparing this medicine.

A team of pharmaceutical personnel will be requested to co-work with me for a few technical works like finding out the “materia – medica” of the ingredients, procure the skin of the dead wild animal with due permission etc. A cost effective

26 This hand-written letter, captioned “Against the bite of a mad dog” is a paper manuscript-letter dated 6 May, 1792, in Tamil and German languages. This half-a-page copy of a prescription has a list of five ingredients. This medical prescription, would have been, in all probabilities, written as answer to various questions put to German missionary Christoph Samuel John (1747–1813) in Tranquebar, by Prof. Dr. Johann Reinhold Foster in Germany. John’s missionary tenure period in Tamilnadu is 1771–1813 and the date of this letter, 6.5.1792 falls within this tenure period.

medicine, as found copied in the German letter has to be prepared, tested on mice and other animals and then on rabies patients at nominal or free of cost.

The Hindrance

Certain medical, zoological and public health protocols prevented me from dispensing this medicine to the dying rabies patients. As one of the ingredients is to be prepared from the skin of a wild animal, the animal rights activists and even the law of the land may place hindrance for this. This problem can be solved if we make use of the skins of such animals after they died. Secondly, the medical protocols placed hindrance. That is, who will come up to feed this medicine into the mouth of the patient and see that he swallows it! As this disease is highly contagious, which may result in the death of a healthy helper, no one is likely to come forward to take the risk of feeding this medicine to the critical rabid patients. This hindrance can also be solved if a close and willing relative of the patient or the para medical personnel can be persuaded to administer this medicine under more preventive gloves and masks. And more readily persons will come to help, once this medicine is tested successfully and proved an effective antidote for rabies.

A Million Dollar Question

A few futile initial attempts were made to prepare and test this medicine on rabies patients, over the past 24 years! First, I approached the German pharmaceutical company Hoechst, a few years ago, through my letter informing them about this rare indigenous medical prescription, which I happened to see in the German letter and requested their cooperation to prepare, test, administer and to market this herbal medicine. Having received no positive reply, I requested Prof. Dietmar Rothermund²⁷ to kindly take up the matter with this German company, and he wrote to the Director of the German pharmaceutical company Mr. E. Baltin to do the needful. But alas, even his representation did not receive the due attention. He also took up this medical project with the philanthropist Shri. Rahul Bajaj (of the Jamanlal Bajaj Foundation); but nothing came out of this. Hoechst (Marion Roussel) pharmaceutical company, instead of taking up this project, "suggested that I get in touch with an infectious diseases hospital. [...] and publish in research journals,"²⁸.

Alidac Genetics and Pharmaceuticals, with the motto "We care for your health" was the next company whose doors did I knock with my representation

27 I gratefully recall his assistance to sponsor me for a DAAD scholarship, which enabled me to visit Heidelberg University and the Francke Foundations, Halle.

28 Letter from the Medical Director, Hoechst Marion Roussel, to me, 8.8.1996.

and hope. But this institution also did not receive this project with due concern. Their two letters²⁹ did not show any expected interest.

Aventis Pharma is the next company whom I contacted still with hope. They could only say³⁰ that "rabies is a 100% fatal disease [...] we express our inability to be a part of this project." Unfazed, I wrote³¹ to the President of the Zandu Pharmaceutical Works and I do not remember having received any reply from him at all.

My next futile attempt was with Kottakkal Arya Vaidya Sala who wrote "we are always interested to try new medicines which will save humanity from dreadful diseases."³² This attempt also did not yield any expected result.

One thing I could not digest is, how so many pharmaceutical institutions, who brand themselves as custodians of public healthcare, could simply let off such a rare life saving prescription from being tried on rabies patients. When there are hundreds of dying rabies patients in hospitals and when there is an age old indigenous medical herbal prescription to cure them, why none of them showed due interest, is what I could not understand! This appeared to me as a million dollar question, which raised my eyebrows several times during the past 24 years! *Was-ser predigen und Wein trinken!*

WHAT NEXT...

Potential Donor

The U.S. based Bill & Melinda Gates Foundations, as far as my observations of their funding norms are concerned, keep granting huge funds for eradicating major health hazards like tuberculosis, polio, AIDS, etc. across the world. This foundation, periodically publishes through their Grand Challenge Explorations schemes, medical programmes under various themes and sends such programme notifications to the e-mail addresses of interested researchers. Very much moved by their motto that "all lives have equal value", I also tried to log in to download the application for Great Challenge Exploration; but it appears that Gates Foundations grant funds only to organizations and not to individuals.³³ It is gratifying that this foundation had also sent me a reminder e-mail to submit the medical proposals online before the deadline date.³⁴

29 Cf. letters to me from Alidac Genetics & Pharmaceuticals, 28.11.1996 and 24.1.1997.

30 Cf. letter from the General Manager, Medical Affairs, Aventis Pharma, to me, 2.8.2001.

31 Cf. my letter to Mr. K. M. Parikh, President, the Zandu Pharmaceutical Works Ltd., Bombay, 25.12.1999.

32 Letter to me from Arya Vaidya Sala, 17.10.1998.

33 Cf. Grand Challenges Explorations Round 5, Rules & Guidelines Proposals, p. 2.

34 Cf. Bill & Melinda Gates Foundations' e-mail to me, 5.5.2010.

Affiliating Institution

A medical research and philanthropic foundation in Germany or elsewhere may be persuaded to work as an affiliating institution, through whom, grant from Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation can be applied for, to carry out this medical project successfully. Certain initial contract, with the terms and conditions, is to be finalized in which, a few aspects like how this affiliating institution will help me to patent this medical formula, how and where the herbs will have to be grown, how effectively will it interact with the governmental agencies to procure the skin of the wild animal, to test this medicine on mice, guinea pigs, or any other animals and other allied aspects are to be discussed in detail and accepted. Above all, in late-developing and under developed countries, this medicine should be made available to the rabies patients at very nominal cost or even free of cost. If I hear a positive echo from any medical research organization for taking up this project to work until its successful completion, above all, to save thousands of lives across the world, then, the purpose of this paper will just be fulfilled! For more information, may I invite you to my personal website: www.germantamilology.com Please send your queries and comments to my e-mail: ugcmohan@gmail.com.

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