

**LIFESTYLE OF THE *MADRASIS*, DURING 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY, AS  
REPORTED BY THE GERMAN MISSIONARY, SCHULTZE:  
A FEW ASPECTS  
(C.S. Mohanavelu)**

**I. INTRODUCTION:** Looking back at the cultural and social glory past of any society, with a tinge of nostalgia, will certainly be a pleasant experience. Especially if such aspects were keenly observed and noted down in diaries, by foreigners, then such original source materials get more historical significance. Voluminous such data are now available to us, regarding many facets of the indigenous Tamil society, thanks to the impartial German observations and their copious diary reports. A few observations of a German missionary named Benjamin Schultze, will be investigated in this paper. But before that, a small note, as to what made the Germans to visit south India as early as the beginning of 16<sup>th</sup> century and Tamilnadu at the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, I believe, will not be out of context. The Indian experience of the Germans in general, and their Tamil experience in particular, is a fathomless fascination.

Indo-German interactions are half-a-millennium old. 500 years ago, the first pair of Germans, named Hans Mayr and Balthasar Sprenger set foot on the Indian soil on the Malabar coast in 1505. After his return to Germany, Sprenger published his Indian experience as a book titled: *Merfahrt* (Sea journey) in MDIX (1509). Thus started the German intellectual quest for India, which until this day, is kept alive, thanks to those hundreds of Germans for their continued involvement, interactions and contributions to Indian studies in general, and to Tamil studies, in particular. But history does not record any significant follow up activities of these two Germans. Only in 1652 we hear about the next German attempt, with the arrival of the first German Jesuit missionary named Heinrich Roth (1620-1668) in India and more specifically in Goa.[1] From there, he came to Agra where he lived for nearly 14 years, visited the Moghul Court[2] during the reigns of both Shah Jehan and Aurangzeb. Roth also worked as the Court physician for the Emperors[3] and was the first European to write a grammar of Sanscrit language, which was highly regarded by Prof. Max Mueller[4]. 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, then it may be said as significant; lest 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. Also, when measured with this same yardstick, the labours of Ziegenbalg (1682-1719), the first ever German Lutheran missionary to visit India and whose mission and labours were all well taken over, and further developed till this day, by his fellow countrymen, are the most significant aspects of Indo-German or better-said, Tamilo-German interactions.

At this point, I may also be permitted to state one important and glorious aspect of Indo-German contact. As early as 1715, i.e. 288 years ago, a Tamil scholar named Malaiappen was taken to Germany and Denmark by this first German Lutheran missionary Ziegenbalg and he delivered a “well-sounding” German speech[5] in front of the Danish King and his court officers on 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1715. History does not record such a parallel, wherein any other Indian scholar, of having been elevated to this level of rare eminence, nearly 300 years ago. Like this, there are quite a few impartial German reports about the glorious Tamil culture. These German diaries, when published in Europe, spread the correct information about the rich Tamil cultural heritage in Germany and other parts of Europe. Just one such sample observation of none other than the first German in Tamilnadu, Ziegenbalg may here be allowed. [6]

"Most Christians in Europe", says Ziegenbalg," suppose the Malabarians to be a very barbarous people, but this arises from the Europeans who have been amongst them not understanding their language, so that they have not been able to read their books, but have drawn their conclusions from outward appearances. 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 on various subjects, I began to have a much better opinion of them and when at last I was able to read their own books I found that the Malabarians discussed the same philosophical subjects as the Savants of Europe, and that they had a regular written law, wherein all theological subjects were treated of and demonstrated. This **surprised me extremely**, and I was delighted to be thoroughly instructed in their heathenism from their own writings."

The Europeans, who thought that the Tamils were barbarous, had then to change their views after being informed of the contents of those diaries, which said high about the Tamil culture. Hence, we the Indians in general, and the Tamil people in particular, owe our gratitude to a very great magnitude, to those impartial Germans for their technical approach and unbiased judgment of an alien Tamil culture. Thus, Tamilnadu served as the earliest labour field of Indo-German cultural interactions. When two entirely different ethnical races, the visiting Germans and the hosting Tamils met each other on the soils of the latter, what were the resultant features in such a mixed society? In short, when the West met the East, how the two entirely different cultures were mutually influenced and other such allied aspects are investigated in my published doctoral dissertation.[7] It is now here suffice, to just investigate in this paper, a few observations of an enterprising German Lutheran missionary named Benjamin Schultze (1689-1760), regarding the social lifestyles of the inhabitants of the Chennai city. Nearly 300 years ago, how *Chennaiapatnam* looked like and what were the day-to-day activities of the people in and around Chennai and other allied aspects, will be all interesting information today. The term “*Madrasis*, ” in this paper, refers to the native inhabitants of Chennai city, during the times of Schultze, viz. 18<sup>th</sup> century.

## **II SUBJECT MATTER:-**

**2.1 SHORT BIOGRAPHY:-** Benjamin Schultze was born in Brandenburg in 1689, studied at Halle, landed at Madras in January, 1719, went back to Germany in 1743 worked as the Director of the orphan House in Halle for 17 years and died in 1760 aged 71 years. He learnt Tamil, Telugu, Sanscrit and Hindusthani languages. Of the total 24 years of his stay in Tamilnadu, Schultze spent 16 years in Madras city from 1728 to 1743. During this period, Madras city was dominated by Telugu people and the entire population consisted of many other Indian and foreign citizens, as well. Daily he used to go out and mingle with various kinds of people in Madras and noted down in his diaries, his observations in Telugu language. He took with him his Telugu diaries to Germany in 1743 and read them through for 8 years and published in 1750, his observations as a book titled “*Madras Stadt ...*” first in German language and then in English titled “*MADRAS or Fort St. George...*” This book was a unique publication – a product of a German

writing in Telugu and then translating in English via his German version. As per the custom of his times, this book too had a very long title.(Visusal) which runs thus:

***“The Large and Renowned Town of the English Nation in the East Indies upon the coast of Coromandel MADRAS or FORT. ST. GEORGE, representing the Genius, the Manners, the Carriage the Behaviour and the very character of the natives; likewise their trade and HOUSE-keeping the product of the country and usefulness of the Gardens, by way of thirty familiar Dialogues, written originally in the Waruga or Gentou Language, but afterwards translated into the English tongue, for the benefit of some curious readers,”***

This book was published in Halle in the year MDCCL (1750). I have quoted verbatim a few passages, from his book and one can see this type of unique spelling and wrong application of grammar. This was how this German wrote in English. Now, I am to bring to your notice a few of his observations and reports.

**2.2 A PALANQUIN:** The status symbols and the yardsticks of richness today are, ownership of palatial air-conditioned bungalows and villas, hi-tech cell-phones, air-conditioned foreign cars, fitted with stereo musical systems, international credit cards, membership in hi-tech clubs and passports with multi entries of foreign visits with a brand of ‘frequent fliers’ in national and international aircrafts and the like items. 300 years ago also, man’s ego to brand himself as rich, wealthy and affluent did exist. What were the symbols of richness and affluent status then? In a city like Chennai, richness was exhibited by having different kinds of servants like the ewer-bearers, umbrella-bearers, personal attendants, cooks, nurses, errand boys, besides by having chariots, horse carts, and palanquins etc. A palanquin was a new and a curious transport mode for a foreigner and much so to this German missionary Schultze. He portrayed this transport article vividly through a dialogue between a master and his tupas (Do-bhashi = interpreter), which runs thus:

**"... making a new Pallaquin will cost 40 pagodas including bambou, couch beds, pillows and Tossels. ... Six boys were required to carry each palanquin at the rate of 5 pagodas per month per boy and this according to the Company's order..."**

The inference from the above is not very complicated. Before the petrol-driven cars and buses, *Madrasis* - the affluent ones - used such palanquins, which was considered as a status symbol. A model of such a palanquin is even today preserved in the “**Wunderkammer**” i.e. the “**wonder chamber**” of the Francke foundations in Halle, the photograph of which you can now see. (VISUAL)

### 2.3 A MISTRESS & A CLOTH MERCHANT:-

In this dialogue[8], Schultze brings out a scene, informing us about the different varieties of cloth items, which were used by the *Madrasis*, nearly 300 years ago. A few lines of this dialogue are quoted hereunder:

“... Madam, Among the white Linnen-Cloath I have broad-Sheets, Mooriss Canvas, Linnen-Cloath with three red Stripes on the Salvage, Linnen-Cloath with silk Streaks on the Salvage, Linnen-Cloath with a red Salvage of two inch's breadth, Linnen with red thread woven, Linnen of Cat's-foot, painted sheets with Flowes, sheets with Fringes, sheets for Turbans, sheets to cover the Lyons, long-Cloath, sheets for Handkerchiefs, such and the like more. ... Sheets painted with Figures of Men, ditto with Figures of Beasts, cloath of Leaves ...Cloath intermixed with blew, yellow and white stripes, deep-red Turbans, crimson-red Sheets... cloath with gold-Flowers,...”

These lines of Schultze, on perusal, give us some idea of the dress materials, used by the *Madrasis*, a couple of centuries ago. For the modern ears, accustomed to terry cotton, terry wool, polyester, cambric, tercosa and other synthetic varieties of clothing materials, these olden ones sound very pleasant. Also, one infers from this passage, that there were different items of head and body dress materials, besides, the ones exclusively for menfolk. Thus, Schultze takes us back by 300 years to know how the dressing fashion was then.

**2.4 JEWELRY ITEMS, 300 YEARS AGO:-** After the dressing fashion, Schultze informs us about the jewelry items used by the *Madrasis*, 300 years ago thus:[9]

“... Behold, here are Rubys, diamonds, Emaralds, corals, Pearls, Jaspers, Chrysolites, Iacints, Sapphires and the like. ... The price will be esteemed according to his Lusture. ... One Pound of Emarald costs twenty Pagodas.... I don't want so much, but if You will let me have a Pound at a good Rate for fifteen Pagodas, I will take 'em. ...”

This observation informs us not only the different varieties of the jewelry items; but also the cost of each item and the attitude of the people in bargaining with the trader, as well. This kind of bargaining, is not practiced in developed countries and especially in standard business institutions; but still, in Madras, we have even now, this custom of bargaining with the traders, to reduce the price of jewelry items too.

**2.5 KINGS AND PRINCES:-** These two terms, denoting the power heads of administration, may not be prevalent now in India. How the Kings and Princes conducted themselves and cared for their subjects, in Chennai, 250 years ago, can well be gleaned from the 25<sup>th</sup> dialogue of Schultze's book. One comes to understand that poverty was the only property of most of the people in the then *Chennaipatnam*, if this dialogue will be perused even casually. Misery pervaded amidst the commonfolk, corruption and favouritism were liberally practiced by the Kings and his close associates in Chennai. This will of course be shocking information to those who might think that milk and honey flooded the roads and peace and tranquility prevailed during the period under consideration. A few lines of this passage deserve our investigation. [10] :

“... When our King observes any Body, that has a good Cloth upon his Back, presently he will suspect, that such a Man must needs be rich too, and to snatch the Money from him, ...People that comes with Gifts in the Hands, may gain their Right, but for the poor, there is not such a Thing to be aimed at. ...Last Year have departed and are gone but the number of twenty thousand Men. Every night nine till ten People did starve for Hunger. ...”

On perusal of this passage, one gets a clear picture of how the people suffered from the corrupt and cruel administration. People bribed higher officials to get their rights! And it is more painful to note that many people fled Chennai, unable to bear the King's cruelty and starvation. But Schultze did not mention the name of this cruel King. As Madras was dominated by Telugu people, it is presumed that a *Teluguraja* must have ill treated the people. Each and every minute aspect had been well observed by Schultze with the typical German technological tinge.

**2.6 THE ARUMUGAM RENGAPPAR LAW SUIT:-** To give the correct picture of the high degree of love and affection, which the *Madrasis* had for their cows, Schultze chose this civil suit proceedings.[11] One *Madrasi* named Arumugam borrowed certain sum of money from the father of one Rengappan, without any promissory note or written or personal evidence except Rengappan. After the death of Rengappan's father, the debtor Arumugam, without any iota of fidelity and sincerity, and with a view to cheat and betray, totally denied having borrowed money at all from the deceased Rengappan's father. Subsequently, Rengappan, the only eye-witness for this transaction, filed a civil suit in the court of Madras and an European judge tried this suit. Even after repeated threats to tell the truth, the accused Arumugam remained adamant and denied having borrowed money at all. He even took Oath "on Almighty God in Heaven"; but denied the truth. At the end, a novel idea struck this European judge. He was fully aware of the customs and manners, rites and rituals etc. of the *Madrasis*. Especially the high veneration and deep love, which the *Madrasis* had for their cows, was well applied by this judge. When all his persuasions and threats to get the truth from Arumugam failed, this judge asked the accused to promise on his cows that he had not borrowed money at all. At this, Arumugam shed tears and admitted having borrowed money. A *Madrasi* would never false-promise on his cows, because it was thought that such false promise would result in the death of the cows. No other passage can better portray how dearly a *Madrasi* loved his cows then. Herein lies the intelligence and presence of mind of the European judge. Far above all, Schultze's narrative skill and his acquaintance with the local customs and manners besides his close intimacy and association with the *Madrasis* are clearly displayed in this passage.

**2.7 CHILD MARRIAGE & FAMINE INJUSTICE:-** This passage of Schultze, found in the last dialogue, offers us today, the very pathetic position of the *Madrasi* women, especially of widows 300 years ago. Schultze gives even the minute details of child marriage and the cruel Sati ceremony. A few lines from this passage[12] deserve here our investigation:

“...when do they be given into Mariage? Pretty young, as about the fourteenth year of Age till the ninth year of Age. And among the Bramanes, there is customary to marry away the Daughter, the girl, the Child, the very Baby in the

Craddle, and in Case her Bridegroom, the little Boy, the sucking Child dies, she becomes a Widow and that in such a dismal Condition, that she never can be married again to any other one in all her Lifes Time. ... how is the common Character of the Malabarian Women? ...the Malabarian Wives here have the best Character of the World, so that it was to be wished, their own Husbands would come up to the same Continency too. ... Which Way they outdo a good, honest, sober European Wife, that truly minds her Husband to please and cherish him? ... In the first Place, they will keep clean their Rooms every Day. 2.They will dress the Victuals . 3. They will carry ‘em in and place modestly the Bowl with the Rice before the Husband. 4. They will stay behind him, mean while he eats, as waiting upon him. 5. None of them must be so bold as to call him by his Name, because this would, in their Opinion, abate somewhat of his Authority. 6. They can’t eat in Company with the Husband, but afterwards, when he first has filled his belly, his Wife may go and eat also. ... When in this Country the Husband dies, his Wife must burn herself alive for his Sake, is this true? ...It is the ill Custom among the Heathens, that a Wife has the Priviledge to burn her self alive for her deceased Husband. But this is not to be understood, as If every Widow was obliged to do so, no, by no any Means. ...”

Even the minute details of the customs and manners, rites and rituals of the *Madrasis* did not escape Schultze’s watchful eyes. Feminine injustice, servitude and social stigma, imposed on those unfortunate native widows were well portrayed. All the ill-treatments, meted out to those unfortunate *Madrasis* widows were all keenly observed by him. The very cruel ritual of burying an unfortunate Hindu widow alive along with her dead husband had also been portrayed as an eye witness report by another missionary, which is investigated in my published doctoral dissertation.[13]

**III CONCLUSION:** So far, dear friends, certain observations of the German missionary B.Schultze regarding the lifestyle of the *Madrasis*, 300 years ago. And now, some inferences are arrived at after investigating them. Like this German missionary, there had been hundreds of Germans, who came to Tamilnadu for the ‘*spread*’ of the Gospel and were paid by the Danish Crown. But it is an amazing fact, to observe in all of them, a sort of deviation from their assigned religious mission. The Royal Danish edicts of the King of Denmark, Frederick IV dated 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1705 consists of 11 exclusive orders, issued to all the missionaries. The fourth order runs thus:[14]

“... He must hold and handle there in Eastern India *nothing besides* the holy doctrine...and teach *nothing* besides it. ...”



But how many German missionaries '*obeyed*' in letter and spirit this order of their Royal patron, is yet another aspect of research investigation. Almost all the German missionaries deviated from their assigned mission; but there had been varying degree of deviation from one missionary to the other. In the case of a pioneer German missionary J.E. Gruendler (1677-1720), he very much deviated from his mission, as can be evidenced from the following passage: [15]

"The very first boy, who was baptized by Gruendler with great expectations at Poreiar, degenerated as he grew older; ..."

Secondly, about such deviation from their religious mission, Francke Junior from Halle lamented thus: [16]

"... the missionaries might let the chief business lie and take more interest in curiosities,..."

Further, another very enterprising German missionary Ringeltaube also accused the German missionaries of such non-religious activities thus:[17]

"The missionaries are schoolmen, and wholly lack zeal for piety. Mission work is only a sideline. ..."

When the Lutheran stalwarts in Denmark and Germany searched for the increase in the number of native converts in the missionary reports sent from Tamilnadu to Germany, they found to their sad disappointment, voluminous reports from ants to elephants, from tiny grass to huge banyan trees and other indigenous botanical, zoological, ornithological notes. Disgusted with this kind of reports, A.H. Francke threw them all aside branding them as 'heathen nonsense.' [18]

At this concluding stage of my paper, I wish to submit the following questions. Why should those Germans show more interest for such indigenous studies than to their very mission, the spread of the Gospel? Is it not betrayal of bread and disobedience to the orders of the Danish King, to look into such other aspects? It is my inference, that such deviation from their mission was all due to the fact that their interest for indigenous studies overpowered and outshone their very purpose of coming here. Their irresistible

curiosity and the innate typical German characteristic quality of seeing every thing from a scientific and technological angle, undoubtedly made them to set aside their very mission and to involve themselves in the indigenous studies. Hopefully do I leave these questions for academically healthy dialogues, debates, discussions and constructive criticism!

**IV NOTE OF THANKS:-** I thank the organizers of SASNET for granting me financial assistance to attend and to present my paper. My special thanks are also due to the convenors of the Tamil Panel for their cooperation and encouragement. Also, I am thankful to you all for the patient hearing. Last; but not the least, I thank Prof. Rothermund in Heidelberg, but for whose continued assistance and support, to be precise, my few visits to Germany and in turn, this research study on German Tamil interactions, would not at all have become possible.

#### REFERENCES

1. Valentina Stache Rosen, *German Indologists*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn., New Delhi, 1990, p.1
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid.
5. Halle Reports, Vol. I, pp. 286/287
6. Fenger, *Geschichte der Trankabarschen Mission*, Grimma, 1845, p. 56
7. C.S. Mohanavelu, *German Tamilology*, Madras, 1993, 221 p.
8. Benjamin Schultze, *Madras or Fort. St. George*, Halle, MDCCL, pp. 20-21
9. Ibid., pp. 36-37
10. Ibid., pp. 58-60
11. Ibid., pp. 62-65
12. Ibid., pp. 88-90

13. C.S. Mohanavelu, op. cit., pp. 181-184
14. Fenger, *History of the Tranquebar Mission*, (Tr. by K. Pamperrien), Tranquebar, 1906, p. 237
15. Fenger, *Geschichte der...*, op. cit., p. 68
16. Arno Lehmann, *Es began in Tranquebar*, Berlin, 1956, p. 300
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid., p. 56

(Prepared by Dr. C.S. Mohanavelu for presentation at the 18<sup>th</sup> European Conference on Modern South Asian Studies, Lund, Sweden, 6-9 July, 2004)