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Book Review: "German Exploration of Indian Society"

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German Exploration of Indian Society: Ziegenbalg's "Malabarian Heathenism." Daniel Jeyaraj. Chennai: The Mylapore Institute for Indigenous Studies; New Delhi: ISPCK, 2006, xviii + 418 pp.

THIS year being the 300th anniversary of Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg's arrival (1706) in Tamil Nadu, South India, this publication of his work in English gains greater significance. Ziegenbalg's (1682-1719) arrival in Tranquebar marks the beginning of the Protestant Mission in South India, and on this occasion this work of Ziegenbalg which was written in 1711 to help his European contemporaries understand the Tamil people and their culture, is translated into English. This is the second book of Ziegenbalg translated by Daniel Jeyaraj, the other book being *Genealogy of the South Indian Deities – An English Translation of Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg's Original German Manuscript with a Textual Analysis and Glossary*, London, New York: Routledge Curzon, 2005.

Ziegenbalg's text itself has two parts, one entitled "Theological beliefs and teachings" with twenty-six chapters, and part two with the title "Philosophical beliefs and teachings" with eighteen chapters. Daniel Jeyaraj has translated the text into English and gives additional information on the background to this text, i.e. the biographical details of Ziegenbalg, and concludes with a section on the significance and the limitations of the text. The text was first published in 1926 by the Dutch Indologist Willem Caland, and other Indologists were commenting on it, praising Ziegenbalg's firsthand knowledge of Tamil literature and religion.

It is said that Ziegenbalg has quoted from sixty-nine different Tamil books on religion, ethics and culture. He is appreciative of Sivavakkiyam, one of the protest poets known as cittars

(siddhas) in the Tamil Tradition, and has translated some twenty-five stanzas from his work. He refers to fifteen different Tamil works on ethics and summarizes their content.

Ziegenbalg is different from many other missionaries in the sense that he did not just imposingly preach his religion to the people in India, though he was clear about his missionary goal. He learnt first of all their language and studied their literature and philosophy in order that he could appreciate their background before he could speak about his faith convictions. Obviously, there were opponents who did not approve of his approach, and as a result his manuscript on the genealogy of the Malabar gods remained unpublished for nearly 300 years. He was told, it is said, to eliminate heathendom in India and not to propagate heathen nonsense back in Europe. That was the response he got from his patrons in Europe, when he sent his manuscript first to the European headquarters. Today, his work places the missionaries in different perspectives, thus giving him the credit as pioneer in intercultural studies.

Ziegenbalg is aware of his own limitation in handling a language such as Tamil and in understanding a foreign culture, but his positive approach towards the Tamil people and their religion places him in a different light. Hence this publication is significant in highlighting the intercultural dimension of European encounter. Perhaps he is redefining the notion of 'mission' in the right sense and what a missionary should be. Like Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656; since 1606 in South India) Ziegenbalg seems to question the method of other missionaries, who depended

on the reports of others and not directly from the texts of the local people. Ziegenbalg is remembered also for his work on Tamil grammar and his translation of the Bible into Tamil.

This book has to be placed in the context of intercultural encounter. One of the contributions of the missionaries in South India for example, like Ziegenbalg, later on Karl Graul, Schomerus, Arnos Lehmann and others, is their translation of major Tamil works into German, which established in Europe the independent cultural identity of the literature and culture of the Tamil people on a par with Sanskrit tradition as presented by the Western Indologists, and thus it shaped the European

consciousness in understanding and appreciating the South Indian culture. In a way such an approach also supported the Dravidian movement in the South against the process of Sanskritisation with all its implications.

Daniel Jeyaraj has done a great service in making the works of Ziegenbalg known to the English speaking world, which creates a new awareness of this phenomenon and also places the missionary contribution in a different light than merely identifying the Christian mission as Western hegemony or colonial heritage.

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Gandhi's Pilgrimage of Faith: From Darkness to Light. Uma Majmudar. Foreword by Rajmohan Gandhi. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005, 280 + xv pages.

MOST visitors to Chennai will likely remember a very striking bronze image of Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948) along Marina Beach. This statue captures Gandhi mid-stride, with staff in hand and head down, clearly intent on the journey ahead. This is also, in a way, the basic portrait offered by Uma Majmudar in *Gandhi's Pilgrimage of Faith*. Gandhi emerges in its pages as a kind of pilgrim, whose "outer achievements" as an Indian nationalist followed from a much more fundamental "interior journey to Truth" (233). Majmudar characterizes this journey in psychological and spiritual terms as a lifelong process of faith development which began in Gandhi's infancy and reached its climax shortly before his assassination. By offering such a portrait, she attempts to cut behind the various hagiographical and Freudian "myths and misconceptions" that have accumulated around the memory of "the Mahatma" (13), as well as to "finish that unfinished story" that Gandhi himself initiated with his *Story of My Experiments with Truth* (233).

Given the nature and boldness of Majmudar's objective, it comes as no surprise that the majority of her book consists of an extended re-telling of Gandhi's life story from his childhood (chs. 2-5) through his studies in London (ch. 6), early experiments with *satyagraha* in South Africa (chs. 7-9), and eventual leadership in the Indian independence movement (chs. 10-11). In constructing this narrative, Majmudar depends heavily upon existing treatments of Gandhi's life and thought, especially the contributions of Bondurant, Chatterjee, Erikson, Fischer, Pyarelal, Radhakrishnan and Woodcock. In interpreting it, however, she looks to a rather different source: the six "stages of faith" enumerated in James W. Fowler's theory of faith development. Hence, Gandhi's journey becomes not only a pilgrimage but also a kind of ascent, beginning with "intuitive-projective faith" and maturing, step-by-step and stage-by-stage, into "universalizing faith," the apex of Fowler's schema. This approach, Majmudar claims, is intended to render Gandhi accessible as a