

## REWRITING HISTORY: ORIENTATIONS

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Rewriting history is a continuous process. There are many reasons for this. These reasons may be reduced to what one may call change in context. New methodological or ideological insights or changes in worldview of peoples may necessitate rewriting. A new analytical framework drawn upon hitherto unknown facts can be another reason.

As far as Christian history is concerned some writers point out the following developments as reasons for rewriting it. There is a significant change in the profile of the world Christian community. In 1800, 87 percent of all Christians were located in Europe. Europe was considered the Christian 'heartland'. By the beginning of the third millennium the impact of a historical shift is clear. 60 percent of all Christians live outside the traditional Western heartland. The traditional interpretive framework is completely inadequate to describe and interpret the pluriform Christian reality, as it exists today. Eurocentrism has given way to polycentrism. Another source of church growth is the biological element. In proportion to the growth of world population Christian population also grew, that too much more in Africa and Asia and other "third world" countries. Previously it was the missionaries who were the main, if not exclusive, agents in this process. But the dynamism and the role of indigenous agency are increasingly recognized.

The socio-political environment is another element in the process. Whether measured in terms of the growth of population since 1800 – from approximately 900 million to more than six billion two centuries later – or of political and social change in this period, the environment has been marked by great dynamism. This is the period of the rise of the modern city, industrialization, technological revolution and transformed transportation and communications systems. The consequent rise of the

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proletariat or the downtrodden and the marginalized nations and peoples is an added factor. All this have brought about a change in the role of religion and a crisis of Christian identity.

### **1. Context Analysis**

The context at present – the general consciousness that seems to be prevailing – may be viewed at several levels: the world context as a whole and the trends in general historiography; the universal Christian context and trends in the Christian historiography and theology; the Indian context both general and Christian and shaping of Indian history and Indian Christian history.

### **2. The World Context**

Some of the features of the present world context that, I believe, are outstanding will be highlighted now.

One of the most important happenings of the second half of the twentieth century was that of “de-colonization,” understood as the emancipation of peoples who were subjected to colonial powers. This process is almost complete. Many independent nations have emerged with a new awakening of their cultural identity, a new self-consciousness. However, there exists a lingering concern about the phenomenon of “economic and technical colonialism,” a “new imperialism.” Even the word ‘globalisation’ is used in this context. The “Third World” theologians understand this term to mean “a phenomenon bound up with the growth and expansion of capitalism and the integration of national economies into its system.” Globalisation has grown, they think, from a mercantile slave-trading age and passed through an industrial colonial stage into a corporate new-imperialist stage that has resulted in an unequal development and division of labour, “centre-periphery” dependency, a one-way flow of world wealth. “By engineering competitiveness, which is its dominant ideology, it creates polarization and leads to truncated markets.” It is based on monopolies sustained by dominant nations (the ‘centre’). The “Third World” (the ‘periphery’) understood as ex-colonies, are made to suffer. Such globalisation undermines identity and effects

exclusion and marginalization of peoples and regions, and 'feminisation' of poverty.<sup>1</sup>

Some radical thinkers have criticized the socio-political situation ensuing from the collapse of the Soviet Union with an unparalleled sharpness. They see a re-colonizing attempt by the West after this collapse. Roger Garaudy calls it "the monotheism of market," while for Sebastian Kappen it is "the monotheism of the capital." The latter says that the old adage "No salvation outside the church" has given way to "No salvation outside the market."

To propagate this message, the centres of capitalism are sending out missionaries by the thousands to the less industrialized countries of Asia and Africa that are not yet fully integrated into the 'saving' sphere of the market. The whole venture has been aptly called 're-colonization'.

The neo-colonialists believe that their success is guaranteed because they have an ultimate secular sanction in the nuclear weapons they have accumulated. For the so-called developing nations the only option is between consumerism utopia or nuclear devastation.<sup>2</sup>

Kappen feels that a "still greater guarantor of re-colonization is the Christian Ungod, distinct from the Divine whom Jesus met." This situation, whether it is dismal or not, is a great challenge for Christian history. It is in this context many see the relevance of Marxist analysis in writing history.

### 3. A New Epoch?

A second phenomenon is what a number of thinkers call the emergence of a "new epoch." Jean Leclerque claims that between the end of World War II and the sixties a mutation occurred on a global basis, ushering in a new stage in the forward movement of the historical process. This was brought about by the development of atomic energy, increased communications,

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<sup>1</sup>EATWOT, The "Final Statement of the Fourth General Assembly of EATWOT," 247. See also Dussel, "Towards a History of the Church in the World Periphery."

<sup>2</sup>Kappen, *Spirituality in the New Age of Rocolonization*, 2.

and the many forces at work through centuries that led to the convergence of cultures. It has resulted in the encounter of world religions and the convergence of the great traditions of spirituality (one may perhaps add secular ideologies). Leclerque's notion could be usefully compared with Teilhard's concept of "planetisation" and the radical change which the latter claims has occurred over the last century, shifting the forces from divergence to convergence in the sphere of the human community.<sup>3</sup> The main thrust of this theory is that a new awakening has happened, a movement towards intercultural, inter-religious, inter-ideology relations in the world, a mutual positive encounter, and a more positive universal vision. To this may be added what some eco-friendly thinkers postulate. They speak of the end of the "Cenozoic" age (sixty-five million years ago to the present, marked by the rapid evolution of mammals, birds, grasses, shrubs, and high flowering plants) and the beginning of the "ecozoic" age. A spirituality of "exodus," according to these thinkers, is the need of the day.<sup>4</sup> Both of these phenomena, the "new epoch" and the "ecozoic" age, deserve the serious attention of Christian historians.

#### 4. Modern Historiography

Historical critics observe an expansion and fragmentation of the universe of history: the field of history has expanded and each category has splintered into newer and newer branches. Hence, a need is felt for orientation and for something of a possible synthesis, although the task is a difficult one. We hear about the "new history" (*La nouvelle histoire*), which had its origin in France ("made in France," like *la nouvelle vogue* and *le nouveau roman*, not to mention *la nouvelle cuisine*!). Started perhaps very early, its latest expression may be found in the *Annales* School founded in 1929 by Lucien Febvre and Marc Bloch. Fernand Braudel carried its scope to the present dimensions. It claims to deal with new problems, new approaches, new objects and aims at a "total history" (*histoire totale*).

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<sup>3</sup>Cousins, "Raimundo Panikkar and the Christian Systematic Theology of the Future," 142.

<sup>4</sup>See Berry, in Anne Lonergan and Caroline Richards, *Thomas Berry and the New Cosmology*.

Peter Burke enumerates several points of contrast between the old/traditional or the nineteenth century 'Rankean' model and the 'new' models. While the former is concerned with politics, the latter are concerned virtually with every human activity, the philosophical foundation of which is that reality is culturally or socially constituted. Traditional history is essentially a narrative of events, but the new history focuses on the analysis of structures. If the old history is a view "from above" (great deeds of great men, and so on), the new is "history from below" (concerned with views of ordinary people and with their experience of social change). History from below points to the limitation of 'Rankean' 'documented' history and uses a greater variety of evidence, a greater variety of human activities (visual, oral, statistical, and so on). The old history's concern for historical explanation is criticized by the new historians because the former fails to answer the variety of questions of historians which are often concerned with collective movements as well as individual actions, with trends as well as events. The new historians consider the old school's regard for objective history as an unrealistic ideal because particular points of view, cultural relativism, the network of conventions, schemata, and stereotypes, vary from culture to culture. Both old and generally new historians are professionals. However, the concern of the latter for the whole range of human activity leads them to be interdisciplinary: they insist on learning from and collaborating with social anthropologists, economists, literary critics, psychologists, sociologists, and so on.

According to Burke, de-colonization and feminism are two movements, which have obviously had a great impact on recent historical writing. In the future, the ecological movement is likely to have an increasing influence on history as in theology and ideology. A wide notion of culture (not merely high art, literature, music, and so on) is central to the new approach to history. However, there are a number of problems that were posed in connection with the ideals of the new history: the meaning of "popular culture," of "everyday life" (*la vie quotidienne*, *Alltagsgeschichte*), the nature of sources, of methods, of explanation, and so on. Burke asks whether the two approaches coexist and how to coordinate the expansion and fragmentation. He proposes a solution "summed up into two opposite points, complementary rather than contradictory." Proliferation of sub-disciplines is virtually inevitable. It has

many advantages: it adds to human knowledge and encourages more rigorous methods and more professional standards. At the same time, there are also some disadvantages as is evident from the problems enumerated above. Communication between disciplines or sub-disciplines is one way of keeping the disadvantages at a minimum. There are encouraging signs of rapprochement, if not of synthesis.

In the spurt of newfound enthusiasm for the "new history," independence from or even opposition to the old became very strong. "Micro-history" and the history of "everyday life" were reactions against the study of grand social trends, a society without a human face. Now reaction against this reaction is slowly emerging. Historians of popular culture are open to the changing relations between the high and the low, to the interaction of popular culture and the culture of the educated people.<sup>5</sup> The history of women now shows concern for gender relations in general and the historical construction of masculinity as well as femininity (for example, "Why Gender and History?" in *Gender and History*, 1989). Opposition between events and structures is being replaced by interrelationship; and a few historians are experimenting with narrative forms of analysis and analytical forms of narratives. Most important of all is the fact that the long-standing opposition between political and non-political historians is finally dissolving. G. M. Trevelyan's notorious definition of social history as "history with the politics left out" is now rejected. Concern for social elements in politics and political elements in society is on the increase. Political histories no longer confine themselves to high politics, to leaders, to the elite, but are prepared to discuss sociology of elections and "the republic in the village."<sup>6</sup> They are prepared to examine "political cultures," the assumptions about politics forming part of everyday life but differing from one period or region to another. Society and culture are now viewed as arenas for decision-making, and political histories discuss "the politics of the family" and "the politics of language."

The concept 'culture' in its wide, anthropological sense may serve as "a possible basis" for the reintegration of different approaches to history. We are still a long way from the "total history" (*histoire totale*) advocated

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<sup>5</sup>See Gurevich, *Medieval Popular Culture*.

<sup>6</sup>Agulhon, *The Republic in the Village*.

by Braudel. Indeed, it would be unrealistic to believe that the goal could ever be attained, but a few more steps have been taken towards it.<sup>7</sup>

A word about a particular branch of history that some historians have called "overseas history" may be relevant here. It was once "colonial history" and in the British context, has been given a new name, "Imperial and Commonwealth history." Perhaps a more neutral term is "Third World" history (generally understood as history of Africa, Asia, and Latin America). It has its own problems especially regarding a proper definition. What exactly is the connotation of these various titles? Is it the history of the former colonies and their relation with the colonizing nations during the colonial period, or is it a more comprehensive history of these nations before and during the post-colonial era? It seems the meaning has undergone a great evolution since 1945, a definite year in the decolonization process. It is becoming more and more comprehensive and also Africa-, Asia-, and Latin America-centred rather than Europe-centred. For the evolution of these overseas or "Third World" histories, the influence of the *Annales* School is significant. Hank Wesseling considers the unique phenomenon of the development of an African, Asian, or Latin American history to be natural and necessary although their connection with Europe since 1500 poses a problem. The rise of the "American empire" has produced some rethinking. He derives a few conclusions: The distinctiveness between the autonomous history of Asia and Africa and the history of European expansion needs to be kept. African and Asian histories have proved their right for existence, just like European and American histories; for the last five centuries or so the history of various parts have been interconnected and various civilizations have influenced one another.

Wesseling identifies two approaches or two ways of dealing with the problem of world history – one labelled as "historical micro-sociology" and the other more traditional. The former is a social science approach, and its aim is to learn more about social process in general. The latter is more interested in the difference between various developments and the uniqueness of certain events than in their similarities. Both approaches are characterized by a strong desire to transcend traditional boundaries, particular views, and nationalist bias. The goal of both, according to

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<sup>7</sup>Burke, *New Perspectives on Historical Writings*.



Wesseling, is to make the specific Western discipline of history applicable to world history.<sup>8</sup>

## **5. The Indian Context**

As a result of Anti-colonial struggles and the concomitant new awakening of cultural identity, a new national consciousness is particularly strong in India from the second part of the nineteenth century onwards and was growing throughout the twentieth century. This is a very positive process, by which the growth of a communal element can obviously be affected. The re-emergence of the age-old philosophical wisdom of India, comparable or even superior to the ancient wisdom of the Greeks, so also the deep spiritual experience of the Indian people, with its popular, religious, contemplative and religious-philosophical expression would have opened the vision of a new social and political era marked by the spirit of Mahatma Gandhi, Aurobindo, Radhakrishnan and others. But it was to some extent marred by the trauma of the division of India and the consequent rise of communal feelings. The worst part of it is the politicisation of these feelings. Each community has its identity consciousness, which is a good thing. But that should not affect the communal harmony. The large majority of Indians are still dedicated to the ideal of harmony and peace. But our recent experience is that a minority seems to be bent on exploiting the particular identities for political purpose. Such persons can be found in all communities. But the RSS ideology and action plan are most tangible and become increasingly aggressive.

Reaction to this fundamentalist Hindu approach has given spurt to fundamentalist attitudes among the minority communities. Some of the recent events point to this fact. Terrorism seems to be part of it. Not only cross-boarder terrorism – both communally and socially motivated (rising from social and economic discrimination and oppression, e.g., the Naxalite movement) is today a regular phenomenon in India. This is another aspect of the Indian context, which necessitates a changed approach to history.

## **6. Indian Historiography**

Anyone trying to understand Indian approach to history is struck by a

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<sup>8</sup>Wesseling, "Overseas History," 67-92.



marked lack of historical awareness in this country until comparatively recent times. B. G. Gokhale, after examining critically the ancient and classical Indian literature, remarks: "The conclusion is inescapable that ancient India did not develop a historical tradition or a historical awareness in the same way as the Greeks and the Romans, the Chinese and the Arabs."<sup>9</sup> If this is the case of ancient India and, to large extent, medieval India, modern thinkers show great interest in history. This interest might have arisen as a result of a political and social need. In the closing decades of the eighteenth century a systematic rediscovery of India's past began under the impetus given by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. By the opening decades of the present century Indian and Western historians had written the long history of India on a modern scientific basis. Along with Western techniques of historical interpretation, Western ideas on the nature, content and purpose of history had also been assimilated. With the independence movement in India came a new interest in and orientation to her own history. Modern Indian historians are making their own contributions to the shaping of a view of history.

Much of the eighteenth to early nineteenth century – i.e., colonial times – history was based on a communal interpretation of history. K. N. Panikkar observes:

The communal interpretation of history has a fairly long tradition, at least going back to the colonial times. The history of the subjected that the colonial administrators and ideologues wrote, either as a part of their intellectual curiosity or as a political mission, essentially took a religious view of the past. Although James Mill's periodization of Indian history into Hindu and Muslim periods is generally pointed out as an example of this colonial view, almost every aspect of the social, cultural and political life was incorporated into this religious schema. This view has had an abiding influence on Indian historiography, with a large number of Indian historians of vastly different ideological persuasions rather uncritically internalising this interpretation. Thus the history of India is seen through a series of stereotypes rooted in religious identity. No aspect of society or polity has escaped this religious view, be it social tensions, political battles

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<sup>9</sup>Gokhale, *Indian Thought through the Ages: A Study of Some Dominant Concepts*, London: Asia Publishing House, 1961, 7.

or cultural differences. Such an interpretation of history has been a part of the textbooks, both of school and college, for a long time, moulding the historical consciousness of society and in turn the social perspectives and behaviour of several generations. This divisive notion of history was one of the several ideological weapons that colonialism invoked to construct its legitimacy.<sup>10</sup>

This colonial interpretation of history has an entirely different import than the emerging Hindutva approach to history, although the latter shares much of the colonial assumptions. The colonial history mainly emphasises social divisions. Despite invoking the tyranny of the Yavanas and the Muslims its focus is more on social antagonism and political hostility. This aspect differentiates the Hindutva communal from the colonial communal.

The antagonism and hostility encoded in the interpretative structure of the former, which identifies the 'outsider' as enemy, turn history into an ideology of communalism. The politics of *Ramjanmabhoomi* temple is a good example of the mediation of such history in the making of popular historical consciousness. The organising principle of this politics was not only the privileging of faith over reason, but also the identification of an enemy who acted against the religious interests of the Hindus.<sup>11</sup>

This Hindutva approach is also different from the revivalism, which emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century. Bankin Chandra Chatterji, Dayananda Saraswati and Swami Vivekananda are generally considered the early protagonists of this revivalist tendency. Their attempt was to reawaken the Hindu community to the many ideas and institutions from the ancient past. It was an attempt to bring about internal revitalisation and consolidation in the context of colonial domination. Their perspective was communitarian not communal. Antagonism against other religions and communities was not a part of their perspective. Even when they were critical of other religions as in the case of Dayananda, their attempt was to explore religious truth through a comparative understanding of different religions. It did not discriminate the 'other' or

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<sup>10</sup>Panikkar, "Outsider as Enemy: Politics of Rewriting History in India," 74.

<sup>11</sup>Panikkar, "Outsider as Enemy: Politics of Rewriting History in India," 75.

the 'outsider' (the Muslims, Christians, and Parsis) as the Hindutva historians do today.<sup>12</sup>

The colonial communal model of history writing continued into the twentieth century. However, the nationalist approach to history grew in pace with the momentum of the national movement and struggle for independence. At the same time such religious-philosophical thinkers like Tagore, Gandhi, Aurobindo and Radhakrishnan who started a process of reinterpreting certain fundamental concepts of Hindu faith worked out a philosophy of action and encouraged historical activity in the sense of writing books on Indian history. The historical outlook, which emerged as a consequence, went in three directions: at one end, there is the attempt at a spiritual interpretation of the Indian historical experience and, at the other, an attempt at a Marxist or materialistic interpretation. Between these two extreme tendencies there is another group of historians who do not care for a spiritual or material interpretation of history but a more secular and scientific interpretation. They may use both the spiritual and material interpretations as phenomena to be taken into account for effecting an objective history.

Since 1945, significant advances were made in the general historiography in India. The field expanded significantly, both in quantity and quality. A number of scientific and professional periodicals came into existence, which opened up studies on various aspects of Indian history. Also, the field got enormously diversified: a variety of subject matter, the kinds of research questions, and the kinds of sources and techniques used are many and varied. A great novelty was the recognition of history as a social science, the use of social science theory for formulating research questions, and the use of social science techniques for analysing sources.

Indian historians are convinced that change is the "undeniable law of life, and history is a pursuit that attempts to grasp the course of change." Much change has come over the last thirty or fifty years and has transformed Indian historiography beyond recognition. It has achieved a share of success in effecting a paradigm shift in the analysis and interpretation. A qualitative change started with the onset of nationalism. There is a concentration on social history, necessitated as it is by the

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<sup>12</sup>Panikkar, "Outsider as Enemy: Politics of Rewriting History in India," 75f.

recognition that society in present-day India carries divisions, classes, and class or caste conflicts. Need is felt for writing history from the Marxist point of view just as from any other point of view. The nineteenth century approach to history is rejected; the historians have shifted their interests from personalities to social and economic trends.

Despite the advance made by post-colonial Indian historiography, the need to explore new areas and refine existing methodologies remains. No other theme in modern Indian historiography evoked so much interest, even passion, as the complex manner in which Indians became conscious of their nationhood and organized themselves to oppose and overthrow colonial rule. In the historiography of nationalism itself, different strands have emerged. The relationship between colonialism and nationalism is fundamental. There are two different ideological approaches to the problem of this relationship: the liberal view that colonialism and nationalism are complementary and the critical view which divorces the two. The Marxists relate the internal class struggles and the anti-colonial movement. The major weakness of this approach is the relative neglect of caste and culture. Culture transcended such limits to create the worldview of people. This was a terrain in which modernity articulated and negotiated, and the cultural common sense of people was reformulated. Marxists fail to give adequate response to this fact. The recent renewal of the cognisance of the cultural context of nationalism and the significance of cultural struggles in the making of national consciousness is particularly important in the context of a culturalist interpretation of nationalism advanced by Hindu communalists and post-modern radicals.

The subaltern group has come forward to write history from below. The approach is welcome, but some historians have felt that to create a 'new' world by completely negating the old is prone to produce a myopic view. And some of the essays of the subaltern historians, they fear, can even help to bring a comeback of colonial and communal histories through the 'radical' backdoor.

New trends in Indian historiography gradually discard the periodization into Hindu, Muslim, British, or the equivalent Ancient, Medieval, and Modern. Accordingly, the line of demarcation has to be made on the basis of fundamental social changes, which do not necessarily coincide with invasions, conquests, and dynastic changes. Regional history

sometimes tends toward regional chauvinism. If this is avoided and if placed in perspective, regional history can usefully modulate the generalization about historical change on a national level and will demonstrate that there is a multiplicity of histories, even of early India, which have to be co-related. When there are various perspectives on the same event, the historian has to be aware of this variance, both in looking for evidence and in interpreting it. The greater the contention, the more there will be a honing of generalizations. The survival of history as a discipline depends as much on theoretical rigor as on historical data.

Some Pakistani historians see the history of "Muslims in India" as a struggle for a separate national right from 712 A. D, when Mohammad Ibn Qasim entered Sind. Against this, some Indian historians characterize the entire period from circa 1200 onwards to be one of foreign rule. The mainstream historians, however, have a much broader and critical view. They show a greater readiness to study the factors of change and stagnation and to identify various internal economic, social, and ideological contradictions. Historians are making a new assessment of Medieval India and there is a growing criticism of nationalist and Marxist historiography of pre-colonial India. There are definite signs of the tendency that the given histories are not taken in trust.<sup>13</sup>

## 7. Indian Christian Context and Historiography

Before the fifteenth century there was only one Christian community in India, that of the St. Thomas Christians. Their historical consciousness can be assessed from their oral traditions, customs and practices. A few songs and stories prevalent among them even before the sixteenth century witness to their consciousness. Many Portuguese and later Western records provide us with details. The salient features of their historical consciousness are the following: Theirs was an Indian Church founded by the Apostle Thomas at the very beginning of the Christian era. They had lived the same social-cultural life as their Hindu brethren. They lived in a very cordial relationship with the latter and respected their faith and religious praxis. Their Church, founded by one of the apostles, was an individual Church, which had established an early relation with the East-Syrian Church, and because of that connection had received certain

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<sup>13</sup>See Habib, et al., "Independence Jubilee Special," 55-63.

elements of the East-Syrian tradition of worship and church order. They were part of the universal Church of Christ and evinced solidarity with all Christians from wherever they came (from the sixteenth century onwards, mainly from the West). They respected the different customs and usage of the foreign Christians and expected the latter to respect those of the Indian Christians, the St. Thomas Christians. These features made up their identity and selfhood. They would resist any encroachment upon this identity and selfhood. Their turbulent history from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth and to some extent up to the present is the story of their protest against attempts at such encroachments on the part of foreigners: Western missionaries as well as Syrian Churches.<sup>14</sup>

From the sixteenth century onwards we have partial or more comprehensive histories of Christianity in India written by Western authors. Gouvea's *Jornada*, composed at the turn of the seventeenth century and published together with the acts and decrees of the so-called Synod of Diamper (Udayamperur), and an account by Francis Ros, SJ written about 1604 are perhaps the earliest systematic 'histories' of the ancient period of Christianity in India. While Gouvea the Augustinian gloated over the "good work" carried out by his confrere Archbishop Meneses among the St. Thomas Christians, Ros, the Jesuit, highlighted the "success story" of the Jesuits. Two general mission histories were composed after this: one by the Franciscan Paulo Trindade, written in the beginning of the seventeenth century (1662-67) and the other by the Jesuit Francisco de Souza, written at the turn of the eighteenth century and published in 1710. Trindade's is a story of double triumph: the glorious achievements of the Franciscans in the East and the conquest (*Conquista Espiritual*) of the religion and territories of the people of the East by Christians of the West. De Souza's history is also one of triumph and conquest (*Oriente Conquistado*, "The East won over to Christ by the Jesuits"), although it is less partial and more sober.

At the end of the seventeenth century, Michael Geddes wrote his *History of the Church of Malabar*, based, on *Jornada* of Gouvea. In it there is a faithful English translation of the decrees of the "Synod of Diamper." He was writing at a time when no Protestant mission had been started, and yet he was very apologetic and came out strongly against the

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<sup>14</sup>Mundadan, *Sixteenth Century Tradition of St. Thomas Christians*.



"Popists," the Catholic missionaries who, he alleged, tormented the St. Thomas Christians whose doctrinal tenets were, in his opinion, more in agreement with the Anglican tenets than the "Popish" or Roman tenets. In the eighteenth century, two histories appeared, one by La Croze (Protestant, 1724) and the other by Paulinus (Catholic, 1794). The stories of the first Indian bishop of the Latin rite, Matteo de Castro Mahalo (seventeenth century), and Padre Caetano Vittorino de Faria eighteenth century,<sup>15</sup> both nationalists who rebelled against the Portuguese Padroado system and worked for the indigenisation of the Indian hierarchy, are recorded in various Portuguese sources. In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, an exceptional book was written in incisive Malayalam, in the form of a travelogue, but with penetrative anti-missionary historical reflections, evincing strong national sentiments, by a St. Thomas Christian priest from Kerala, Catherar Thomas Paremakkal (1971). As it contained sharp and poignant attacks on the Carmelite missionaries who were at the helm of affairs over the Catholic St. Thomas Christians at that time, they even forbade its reading by the people.

Histories of Protestant writers like Hough, John Kaye, Sherring, Richter carry on the anti-Catholic apologetics that Geddes had started at the end of the seventeenth century. In the twentieth century, there was change in various respects. Especially, we note a change in perspective. Webster cites the examples of histories of Rajaiah D. Paul (1952) and P. Thomas (1954). While the emphasis of the former is on the history of the Indian Church, that of the latter is on the history of the Christian community. In the same century, there were four or five histories of the St. Thomas Christians (two by St. Thomas Christians themselves and two or three by Europeans<sup>16</sup>). In the former, the anti-Western emphasis and also, to some extent, the Catholic-Orthodox polemics find their place.

From the 1920s onwards a good deal of the original sources, especially of the Portuguese origin, whether printed or otherwise, became accessible to students of Indian Christian history. At least from 1950s onwards these sources were increasingly used by researchers, especially Catholic clerics. Consequently, Indian Christian history became more and more professional. The general professionalisation of Indian Christian

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<sup>15</sup>See Mundadan, *Indian Christians*, 154ff.

<sup>16</sup>Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, L. W. Brown.



history and the shift in perspective were on the increase from 1960s onwards. Kaj Baago's contribution in this regard is significant. Many members of the Editorial Board of the Church History Association of India (CHAI) constituted in 1973 also contributed substantially to this change of perspective. The cumulative result of these contributions led to the special perspective drawn up for the publication of the multi-volume CHAI History of Christianity in India.<sup>17</sup>

Good discerning historians point out four important changes that had taken place from about 1824 to the last quarter of the twentieth century. In the nineteenth century, the historians, publishers, and intended readers were all Western and mainly Protestant; in the twentieth century all of them had become Indians including Hindus and Muslims. With this, the social and intellectual context broadened. The second change in the growing professionalisation and the high expectation it placed on historians. Christian histories in India began to draw increasingly from a far greater variety of source materials and the confidence in the trustworthiness of the missionary records was shaken, since conflicting evidence was found in Hindu, Muslim or Government sources. Finally the place of change itself has changed. A rapid diversification of the community of writers and readers marked advance in professionalisation, and sharp change in perspectives introduced by advocates of indigenisation and the academic historians.<sup>18</sup>

From the foregoing analysis of Indian Christian historiography, it is clear why the Editorial Board of CHAI declared that the perspective, from which the history of Christianity has been written in the past, stood "in serious need of revision." The earlier histories, except what is reflected in some records about the historical consciousness of the ancient (St. Thomas) Christians of India or some histories written by them about themselves, treated the history of Christianity in India as an eastward extension of Western ecclesiastical history. Stress has been laid upon either its internal history or upon its "foreign mission" dimension so that the Church is viewed as a relatively self-contained unit, which acted upon and was acted upon by the society outside.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>CHAI, "Scheme for a Comprehensive History of Christianity in India," 89.

<sup>18</sup>Webster, "The History of Christianity in India: Aims and Method."

<sup>19</sup>CHAI, "Scheme for a Comprehensive History of Christianity in India," 89.

As Shenk notes, these histories swerved between two extremes: either an entirely internal and parochial viewpoint dominated or the "foreign mission" point of view. Both of these extremes reinforced the notion that Christianity was alien to Indian soil.<sup>20</sup> In the past, many concerned Hindu thinkers (for example, K. C. Sen) have painfully pointed this out.

What was needed was a history that located the Church firmly in the Indian historical context. It must describe Christian history as a real encounter of the Christian gospel with the soul of India, as the process of "the planting of the gospel inside" the Indian culture, the Indian philosophy, and the Indian religion.<sup>21</sup> Hence, the CHAI Editorial Board proposed "to write the history of Christianity in the context of Indian history" by focusing attention upon the social-cultural history of the Christian people of India, by using a framework, which is both ecumenical and national, and by using the region as their basic working unit. The four dimensions of an integral history of Christianity in India as defined in the perspective are social-cultural (the encounter dimension mentioned above), regional (a history that attends to the various diversities of India), national (the general reference being India as a whole), and ecumenical (looking at the Christianity of India as a whole).

## 8. The Task of Christian History Today and Tomorrow

The changing tasks that are set before Christian historians at the onset of the third millennium are to be derived from the world context and the Christian contexts that I have tried to delineate so far. Given the worldwide expansion of the Church and the consequent altered identity, the changed world, and ecclesial reality, Christian historians should ask, What new approaches and what new perspectives are demanded of history? They will ask questions like the ones posed below and visualize the procedure to be adopted for their task. The answers will decide what sources are to be used, how they are to be interpreted, what methods are to be used, and what perspectives are to be adopted.

The questions are as follows:

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<sup>20</sup>Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History," 54.

<sup>21</sup>Baago, *Pioneers of Indigenous Christianity*, 85.

1) Did the Churches recognize the awakened national consciousness of peoples and their culture and religion after the de-colonization process was complete? How have the alternatives to the sinister globalisation worked in the Churches? How are we to write the history of the new evangelisation, the present cycle of evangelisation in the 'periphery'? How are we to proceed with a Christian history of, for, and by the poor?

2) Has a new epoch emerged? If so, what are its implications for the Churches? Have the Churches taken serious note of these implications? Do they grasp the intercultural, multi-faceted, and integral dimensions of the present era? How do they react to them? Have the historians to conceive of a new periodization of Christian history?

3) What impact will the 'new' history and the attempts to integrate it with the 'old' have on Christian history? Will it help the search for a global Christian history? Has the early concept of independent local Churches and of the church as a communion of churches re-emerged in the second half of the twentieth century? How has that concept influenced Christian theology and history?

Having given these sample questions for writing Christian history in the future, I will now concentrate on the tasks of historians from a "Third Church," particularly from an Indian, point of view.

Christian history in the third millennium must recognize the religious tradition of India, all religious traditions of the world for that matter, as part of God's universal plan of salvation. It must recognize that God has revealed himself to peoples of various religious traditions and ideologies, that they have experienced the Divine and its manifestations. The Christian historians of this century will carefully examine whether a really deep encounter of the heart of Christianity with the authentic and multifaceted soul of India (as well as the soul of Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the soul of the emerging new cultures of the rest of the world) has taken place. They will ask whether this encounter has changed the prevailing traditional form of Christianity and whether this encounter has changed the culture of India, of the rest of Asia, and of the world.

Christian history of the third millennium will examine how far a distinct Indian, an Asian, an African, or a Latin American Christian

theology and praxis have come of age; how far they have been recognized all over the Christian world; how far these theologies and praxes have entered into mutual dialogue; how far their influence has been felt in other parts of the world; including the West; how far they have been able to help a growing realization that no particular theology or praxis or a particular institutional structure can be *the* theology or praxis or structure for the whole Church at all times; how far these theologies and praxes have been able to shake the assumptions and foundations of traditional theologies and praxes of Western and Eastern Christendoms, and how far they have assumed the proportions of a challenge.

Christian history in the third millennium must recognize that not only the intellectual-philosophical resources but also the experiential and existential (the religious-cultural and socio-political) resources of different peoples are avenues for Christian encounter and Christian hermeneutics. Christian history in the third millennium must take seriously into consideration the attempts made by secular historians, anthropologists, and sociologists and acknowledge that these attempts enable Christian historians and Christian theologians to re-read history and highlight neglected and forgotten events.

Indian Christian historians of the future are called upon to take a more critical and corrective approach in their utilization of the dominant Hindu religious resources, especially in the face of the traditional discrimination and social segregation of some one hundred and fifty million oppressed people (the *dalits*) of India. The authenticity of future Christian histories of India will depend upon how comprehensive (not selective) their approach is, since India is a mosaic of religions and traditions, a wide variety of languages, cultures, and ethnic groups that few countries in the world have.

The future Christian historians will explore how far the Christian Church and her theology-praxis has come out of the closed circle of intellectuals and academicians and become truly the people's Church, the people's theology, the people's worship, and the people's institutions. They will ask whether an Indian approach to theology has done away with a separation between orthodoxy and orthopraxis, and whether it has become a *sadhana* (a means) for the realization of the Divine; whether doing theology has ceased to be an exercise in borrowing, and become an

exercise springing from Indian roots in language and content, an exercise carried on by Indian thinkers and teachers who have their deep roots in the Indian religious-cultural context and not in the Western or Eastern Christendom.

A historian of the third millennium will focus attention on how Christian thinkers and activists have been able to release the liberating force of the gospel, how they have been able to develop a theology and an action plan which addresses the situation of mass poverty, hunger, malnutrition, and illiteracy, which contributes to the transformation of a situation of the underprivileged and discriminated-against groups: the tribal people, the other oppressed groups, the women, the children. The future historian will ask how the people belonging to these groups are involved in a major way to take up leadership in the communities, as teachers, as pastors, as theologians, and as animators.

Indian historians will in the future examine how far the Christians have taken seriously the thoughts and lives of such Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, and Muslims, who are fascinated by the person and message of Jesus, who, rooted in their culture and tradition of the people and at the same time devoted and attached to Christ,<sup>22</sup> offer fresh insights into the Christian faith. They will examine whether a single Indian theology or praxis developed, or a plurality of theologies and praxes developed, considering the composite and culturally multifaceted India and the existence of varied groups of Christians – Latin, Oriental, Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox – and the existence of a variety of religious communities, theologies, and praxes stemming from distinctly regional and ecclesiastic varieties, from the experiences of distinct groups of people like the *dalits*, women, and so on. Two or three streams or strands of theology and praxis have developed in India: the spiritual-contemplative, the intellectual-philosophical, the socio-political, or the *bhakti*, *jnana* and *karma* strands. The future historian will examine how these different streams or strands have interacted and met, and whether a paradigm has emerged to provide a synthesis.

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<sup>22</sup>K. C. Sen, P. C. Mozoomdar, Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, Subba Rao, and so on.

## 9. The Task for a Global Christian History

'Global' evokes mixed feelings today in the context of the use and misuse of the word 'globalisation' and the sinister connotations associated with it. Wilbert R. Shenk in his article, "Towards a Global Christian History," keeps a balanced view of the global, as he stresses equality and parity. He proposes a model for the development of an approach of parity, an intercultural approach to history to realize the goal of a global church history. He also provides a model for the same, based on the insights of Paul A. Cohen, who investigated how the history of China has been written over the past 150 years. Giving importance to the regional and denominational, even to the Indian identity should not mean 'parochialising'. In India, perhaps in all the previously colonial countries, anti-colonialism and anti-western sentiments, when exaggerated, turn out to be a sort of parochialism. The recent reactions in certain circles in India against some programme conceived in connection with the anniversary of Vasco da Gama's arrival in India smacks of such parochialism (the attitude of "we have nothing to do with Gama; we have nothing to do with the West"). So too the *dalit* (the oppressed classes) oriented history, "history from below," sometimes tends to be prejudicial against the high-caste culture. (Even the mention of "brahman-sanskritic" culture is anathema to some *dalit* enthusiasts.) Such histories can be hijacked, as Romila Thapar says, for purposes of regional (or national) chauvinism. Otherwise, these historians have a message, the message contained in the cluster of insights provided by the studies of Leenhardt ("acculturation in two directions"), of Fairbank ("cultural stimulus and responsibility in both directions"), and the special meaning 'translation' gets in the particular context of mission. These insights are of prime importance in our movement towards a global church history which, according to Shenk, must have the following marks: recognition that "our history" is not only our regional or national history, but part of the world church history; recognition that the local is essential, because there can be no global apart from the local; recognition of the power of narrative and social history; and finally, recognition of the meaning of the Church as "its capacity to incarnate the life of God revealed in Jesus Christ among all peoples, in all places, and in all times." The People of God can no longer afford to live in the era of the 'Western'



or 'Eastern' or any other parochialism. A global church history must celebrate cultural authenticity combined with ecclesial unity.<sup>23</sup>

Hans Küng, referring to an ecumenical council, makes an important point. All the individual Churches so different from one another, scattered throughout the *oikumene* in all countries and continents, made up of all races, languages, and cultures, belonging to societies with different political social structures, and having different rites, liturgies, theologies, and forms of piety and laws, by virtue of their assemblage constitute and realize the visible – invisible unity of the whole Church. It is a concrete actualisation of the unity of the different, heterogeneous, independent, Churches with their own problems and difficulties, needs, concerns, and demands. That is unity, catholicity in pluralism.

In the emerging picture of historiography in general, as referred to earlier, the new and the traditional seem to be gradually converging. The new epoch is marked by convergence rather than divergence. In general, in Indian historiography, regional or local histories, if not hijacked for purposes of regional chauvinism, can usefully act as a correction to easy generalization. These insights are of great importance when we consider a global history.

EATWOT members speak of a genuine globalisation. The specificity of local churches must be taken seriously, and history should be written in such a way as to be for the development of the awareness of these churches today. From these regional positions, a new world vision of the Church and its history, a global analogy, may perhaps emerge; in other words, there emerges a vision constructed from the difference and specificities of each in the light of the similarity deriving from our common Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

In conclusion, I make reference to the nineteenth century Hindu genius, Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-84), not because Sen was interested in a global Christian history, but because he entertained a global vision which is inspiring for the concept of a global Christian history. Sen was one of those nineteenth century Indian Renaissance young intellectuals who had

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<sup>23</sup>Shenk, "Toward a Global Church History," 56.

<sup>24</sup>Dussel, "Towards a History of the Church in the World Periphery," 12.



received a good English education and been deeply influenced by a Western secular and religious outlook, who looked to Western enlightenment and Christian religion as sources for reforming and renewing Hindu society from within; he longed for a healthy marriage between the East and the West; and he also looked forward to an era in which a genuine Indian heritage would shine forth with added lustre when illuminated by the fresh light from the West. In attempts to interpret Christianity as a fulfilment of Hinduism as well as in attempts to 'Orientalise' Christ and Christianity, this quest for the marriage between the East and the West is strongly evident. K. C. Sen who was a "Christian," short of baptism and membership in any Christian denomination, was perhaps the first Indian to perceive clearly the positive implications of bringing about a harmony between the Indian religious values and the spiritual content of the religion of Christ.<sup>25</sup>

Sen launched his *Navavidhan* in 1879, which he called "The Future Church." It was the Christ-centred (not Christianity-centred) harmony of all scriptures and prophets and dispensations, "the sweet music of divine instruments," "the celestial court where, around enthroned divinity shine the light of all heavenly saints and prophets." It had united the East and the West, Asiatic and European faiths and characters. He concludes his 1883 lecture on "Asia's Message to Europe" with his image of the final consummation of the Church of the New Dispensation:

And as the new song of Atonement is sung with enthusiasm by million voices, representing all the various languages of the world, a million souls, each dressed in its national garb of piety and righteousness, glowing in an infinite and complete variety of colours, shall dance round and round the Father's throne and peace and joy shall reign forever.<sup>26</sup>

This passage reminds me of the task set for global church history, "to celebrate, cultural authenticity combined with ecclesial unity."

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<sup>25</sup>Mundadan, *History and Beyond*, 312-335.

<sup>26</sup>Scott, ed., *Keshub Chunder Sen*, 289.

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