

Towards a Historiography of Martyr Devasahayam

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Devasahayam is a household name among the Catholics and other Christians in the southern districts of Kerala and Tamilnadu. (The name of the present bishop of Chennai is also Devasahayam). Parents continue to name their children as Devasahayam though the latter's original name, Neelakandan, may not be known to them.

The name Devasahayam was, probably for the first time, owned by a palace official and a Nair convert to Christianity who died for his Christian faith in 1752 in the erstwhile state of Thiruvithancoor, South India.

Today, 250 years after his death, people still remember him with affection and admiration, as can be seen from the large concourse of pilgrims at the place of his martyrdom at Aralvaimozhi, at his grave in the cathedral at Kottar, Nagercoil and at Nattalam, the place of his birth.

Our question is: is it possible to construct his biography with the aid of critically examined primary and secondary sources? How reliable is the historiography of martyr Devasahayam?

The **Random House Unabridged Dictionary** defines historiography as "the narrative presentation of history based on the critical examination, evaluation and selection of material from primary and secondary sources and subjected to scholarly criteria."

Living Primary Sources

Primary sources are two-fold: "living" and written.

The strongest "living" testimony or source, in my opinion, is the fact that this 'layman' lies buried within the cathedral church and that too in front of the main altar, of the diocese of Kottar. Why did the people come forward to enter his remains in the church, if not for his saintly life and heroic martyrdom? A lay person being buried within a church is indeed a vibrant testimony. It is a clear case of the 'sensus fidelium'- the firm conviction among the Christian faithful of the time that he was indeed a saintly person who was killed for his faith.

The 'sensus fidelium' secured him a resting place in the central church of the region. Denying the claim to his mortal remains put forth by the Christians of Vadakankulam (where he was baptized and with which place his initiation into Christian life was associated), the people of Kottar and surroundings welcomed the remains of this holy man into their place of worship.

Kottar was not yet a separate diocese or ecclesiastical unit in 1752 when he died. Yet it is indeed significant that the Cathedral of a diocese to – be born (in 1930) become the resting place of this holy man already in 1752.

The 'sensus fidelium' did not cease with his burial. Christians from all over the district of Kanyakumari as well as from the districts of Thiruvananthapuram, Neyyattankara, Kollam, Tirunelveli, and Thoothukudi kept coming all these two centuries and more on pilgrimage to the site of his execution at Aralvaimozhi and his grave at Kottar. So too is Nattalam, his birth place, where large crowds continue to converge every Friday evening to seek his intercession.

Not only that. These people kept transmitting from generation down to generation the living tradition of Devasahayam's saintly life and martyrdom. This certainly was the case

with J.P. (Mascreen ii, Preface).

Even other Protestant Christians of the area cherished the memory of the visit of their Hindu ancestors to this holy man in fetters and transmitted the living tradition to their children and children's children. This is clearly the case of the celebrated historian of Christians in Thiruvithancoor, C. M. Agur. In his book **Church History of Travancore** (1903) while describing the cruel torture to which Devasahayam was subjected such as "drinking the dirty water in which coconut skins were soaked" (still a familiar scene in the district of Kanyakumari) goes on to say that "the Christian of the South and those in Myladi came to see him" (Agur 283-84).

This is indeed a valuable piece of living testimony preserved among the people of his village Myladi. He does not introduce Myladi to the readers; but we know that he is reporting here the living testimony of his own people.

It is significant that the memory of this visit to Devasahayam while his ancestors were still Hindus was transmitted from generation down to generation up to Agur and beyond. It is unfortunate that the 1930 publishers of Agur did not know the significance of Mydadi and therefore spelt it as 'Maynaud' – an error blindly copied by Mascreen of Kollam. (Agur 284, Mascreen 45).

Along with this are other living 'sources' associated with sites that are still visited and venerated by the people. Important among them is a small rock at Puliurkurichi called in Tamil 'Muttitichan Parai', meaning the rocks from which water gushed forth as Devasahayam in excruciating pain and thirst rested his elbow (Muttu) on it. The fountain is still there and pilgrims visit and drink of the water in memory of Devasahayam.

Another living testimony, of course, is the hillock at Aralvaimozhi on which Devasahayam was shot dead and from which his dead body rolled down. Large crowds visit the spot everyday and this living testimony of the glorious finale of the martyr's life touches their hearts. It is indeed considered a miracle that the branch of the banyan tree which provided cool shadow for a day or two to the dead body of the martyr remains distinct in coloration from the other branches of the tree. It is indeed a living witness to the martyr.

Also extant is the site of his ancestral, and typically Nair, house at Nattalam, about twenty five kilometers north of Nagercoil. Some families of the Nair caste, to which Devasahayam belonged, still live there and some of them trace their lineage to him. The sword he carried as a mark of his position in the king's palace is being preserved. Apart from the ancestral home is the small old Church at Vadakankulam in the adjoining district of Triunelveli where he was baptized in 1745.

At Vadakankulam is still preserved the turban that he wore as an official of the court of the king of Thiruvithancoor. The iron chain that fastened his hands and legs during the 18 months of torture and mock procession were until recently in the same Vadakankulam when it was taken by the local bishop for presentation to the church authorities in Rome.

All in all, numerous are the living primary sources for Devasahayam to be seen and touched in and around the district of Kanyakumari.

Written Primary Sources

Dramas in Kanyakumari, Dindugal and Pudukottai districts:

As for written testimonies, of foremost importance are the folklore in the form of Natakams (dramas), Nattukuthus, and Villupattus that sprang forth soon after his death and

were enacted in the villages. 'Devasahayam Pillai Natakam' had a unique fascination for the village people. In these dramas, each in some places enacted over a span of several days, especially during the 10 day patronal feast in Catholic parishes, Devasahayam comes out as a folk hero of compelling attraction, giving up the rights of his noble birth by identifying himself with the downtrodden and the outcasts and the marginalized (Wilson).

By the medium of drama Devasahayam's name had spread far and wide. Not only within the district of Kanyakumari but also in the Catholic Communities around Puthukottai, Thiruchirapalli and Dindigul people still remember the dramas depicting the life and martyrdom of Devasahayam.

It is not difficult to find out how it happened. The priest who baptized Devasahayam at Vadakankulam, Buttari, carried fresh memories of the martyr to the Avur mission area to which he was transferred from Neman. The present author on his visits to Avur and the neighbouring Karunkulam could feast his eyes on the hand written "Nataka Kattus" which are religiously preserved by the artistes of these villages.

Some persons from India have indeed confessed to me that they witnessed the 'Devasahayam Pillai Natakam' first in Jaffna, Sri Lanka.

Incidentally, these dramas (plays) bring out more vividly and forcefully the real reason for which Devasahayam had to be killed. The real reason was not simply that he confessed the Lordship of Jesus Christ but that his faith in Jesus made him disregard the rigid caste distinctions of the awfully conservative society. This is the core of several ancient dramas (Wilson).

Apart from the early dramas in Puthukottai, Thiruchirapalli, and Kanyakumari districts other written testimonies make up a long list. Interdependence among them was inevitable.

The earliest biography of Martyr Devasahayam in Tamil according to Peter Dahmen was the one by Saint Cyr S. J. under the title Devasahayam Pillai Sarithram published with no date by the Catholic Mission Press at Pondicherry. Most of the information therein, according to Dahmen seems to have been drawn from the accounts left by Buttari. "And from the traditions still current among the Christians of Travancore and Tinnevely" (Buttari, Preface).

It is from this booklet of Saint Cyr, claims Dahmen, that later biographers such as Ladislav Zaleski in chapter 75 on "Devasahayam Pillai" in his book *Les Martyrs de L'inde: Constance des Indiens dans la Fol* (Little- Paris Rome 1900) and Joseph Bertrand in his 1854 volume IV of his: *La mission du Madure on Devasahayam* (pp.386 ff) derived their accounts (Buttari, Preface by Dahmen).

Among the specifically written primary testimonies

Report of the Local Bishop

Of prime importance is the paragraph dealing with the holy life and martyrdom of Devasahayam Pillai, as part of the Quinquennial Report of the then Bishop of Kochi, still preserved in the Secret Archives of Vatican, dated 15 November 1756 (mere 4 years after Devasahayam's death). Further there is also mention of Devasahayam in the same bishop's pastoral letter of the period (Hamby, 86).

The area of the present district of Kanyakumari at the time of Devasahayam was part of the Diocese of Kochi, and the bishop was a Portuguese Jesuit, Clement Joseph Colaco Leitao by name. Embroiled in the Padroado- Propaganda conflict the bishops of Kochi almost from the very beginning had to lead a wandering life. Earlier, Bishop Peter Pacheco (1694-1714)

was almost always absent from the diocese residing in Goa while his successor Francis Vascocellos fearing the Dutch in Kochi took up almost permanent residence in the coastal village of Anjuthenku, not far away from the present district of Kanyakumari. At the time of Devasahayam's martyrdom bishop Colaco of Kochi was residing (and would continue to reside till 1717) at Anjuthenku. No wonder the news of the martyrdom reached him without delay and he had the Te Deum sung in the "cathedral" in thanks giving for the gift of an Indian martyr to the world (Bertrand 397)

Bishop Paremakkal

Of equal importance is the written testimony left by a prominent Syrian Catholic leader, later bishop Thomman Paremakkal, as part of his celebrated travelogue covering his journey to Rome and Lisbon during the years 1773 to 1786 (about 21 years after Devasahayam's death?).

In the 18th century, at the time of Devasahayam, the ancient Syrian Christians lived their ecclesiastical life under two different authorities: the Padroado bishop of Kodungalloor and the propaganda vicar Apostolic of Verapuzha. But whether under Kodungalloor or Verapuzha, all of them stood united in their demand for the traditional rights of the St. Thomas Christians as distinct from the so-called "Latin Catholics".

The problems that plagued them at that time were mainly procuring a successor from Rome to the deceased vicar apostolic, the anti- Carmelite sentiments among a vast majority of Syrian Catholics, apparently aggravated by the shrewd machinations of some Carmelites themselves, recent quarrels among them involving certain matters of protocol (such as who should carry the bier of a dead bishop) and finally but more importantly the delay on the part of Rome to respond to the offer of the Syrian Orthodox metropolitan Mar Thoma VI to join the Roman Catholic Church along with his about 80,000 strong flock.

At the general assembly at Alangad on August 20, 1773, convened for the purpose of dealing with the above issues, it was decided to send two priests to Rome to plead the cause of the Syrian Catholics.

They were Joseph Kariattil (born 1742) and Thomas Paremakkal (born 1736). It is not our intention here to describe the eventful journey of these two, suffice it here to say that Kariattil after being made bishop of Kodungalloor in the course of his journey expired in Goa in September 1786.

Paremakkal, his successor at Kodungalloor wrote down a detailed account of their journey along with a brief history of the "Malabar Church".

Paremakkal's book rendered into English with an Introduction and Notes by Fr. Placid J. Podipara CMI, still keeps its original Malayalam title: **The Varthamana Pusthakam**, (Rome 1971). In it he narrated their activities in Rome, their efforts to get into the good books of a Cardinal.

This Cardinal was the head of the Congregation for Saints. So during our stay in Rome the Malpan (Kariattil) wrote in Latin the history of our Devasahayam Pillai and submitted it to this Cardinal with a petition. The Malpan implored the Cardinal not to neglect to decide the cause of this Martyr on the ground that the churches of Malabar, being poor, were not able to advance money. We had with us a copy of his history. On our return to Portugal, our friend priest Jose Cajetan Masquita took it from us for reading. But he lost it (Podipara 156-157).

On reading the above we are at once happy and sad. Happy that there was a time when the Syrian Catholic Churches felt one with the non Syrian and pleaded the latter's poverty

as their own. Note the expression "Our Devasahayam". Sad, that if only bishop Kariattil's history of Devasahayam were not lost we would have had fuller and newer information on our martyr. After all Kariattil and Paremakkal belong to a period (1773-1786) not far removed from that of Devasahayam's death (1752).

It means that events affecting the life of the new Christians in the extreme south were keenly watched by the ancient Christians of the north, especially the persecution these new Christians were going through.

Paolino of Thuckalay fame

The next written testimony comes from the pen of a great Austrian scholar who was a Carmelite monk. While Kariattil and Paremakkal were in Rome and Lisbon pleading the cause of the Syrian Catholics of Kerala this Carmelite scholar was sent from Rome to Thiruvithancoor to bring about a peaceful settlement between the Syrian Catholics and the Carmelites through the good offices of the political powers in Kerala. His name was Paolino da San Bartholomeo.

He came to India in 1776 (24 years after Devasahayam's death) and stayed here for about 13 years. Meeting on three occasions with the king of Thiruvithancoor, Rama Varma, the successor to the great Marthanda Varma. He was the honored and affectionate guest of this king, supplied with special meals from the palace when he stayed at Padmanabhapuram-Thuckalay (the monastery?).

Paolino was a philologist, capable of writing, conversing and even composing booklets in the language of the place, which he calls "Tamil Malabar". He reveals in his intimate knowledge of the customs and idioms of Kanyakumari district by use of several terms which are known mostly to the Tamils of this area- such as Punnakku, Chackal, Kappai and Nali. He was a keen observer of persons and events and things such as the variety of timber available here- tekku, veti, ayani, chacka and pillavu.

His proficiency in "English and the Malabar language" so impressed the king that the latter "ever after called me always his guru or preceptor. He was extremely desirous to retain me at his court" (Paolino (1798)-181)

On his return to professorship in Rome in 1789, Paolino wrote down his impressions of Christianity in India and published it under the title *India Orientalis Christiana*. The original is in Latin and the translation of relevant passages herein are mine. Among Indian native languages only Malayalam has a translation of this book.

In it he dwells on the "beginnings of the Indian churches, succession of her bishops, missions, schisms, persecutions, kings, and illustrious men". He devotes one chapter to recording the persecutions Christians in India and neighbouring Nepal and Tibet had to suffer on account of their faith. He writes down not only what he had read in ancient documents such as those by Alphabeticus **Tibetanus**, **Marcus a Tumba** and the like (Paolino (1794) 64), not only the sufferings of the Christians he himself witnessed such as those of Velandran, Arulan and Arulappan (Paolino (1794) 172) of whom wrote later Zaleski in his **Les Martyrs de l'Inde** (1896) chapter LXXXIII, but also what he heard from immediate eye witnesses.

In this connection Paolino says that many Hindu companions of one "Nilampulla", struck by admiration for the way the latter suffered for his faith "often narrated to me about his life and death. This "soldier Nilampulla or Devasahayam Pillai, or Lazar by his baptismal name by the order of the king of Travancore Vira Marthanda, after 18 months of excruciating suffering outside Thovalai in the hill of Arampoli was pierced to death with a spear for his faith in 1759" (Paolino (1794) n167).

Coming as it does about 40 years after the death of Devasahayam this testimony does contain a few discrepancies - one about the year and the other about the manner of death. One should expect such discrepancies when the memory of an event is being transmitted orally by a living community from generation to generation. In fact such discrepancies confirm the solid veracity of the central event. This is the first report as Paolino heard from the people. By the time he came to write four years later in Italian (in 1798) an "account of the manners customs etc of the natives" under the title **Viaggio alle Indie Orientali** (A voyage to the East Indies) he had gathered more accurate information on Devasahayam. Thus he writes in **Viaggio**.

The king of Travancore threatens with imprisonment and death every nobleman who shall quit his court to become a Christian and who shall afterwards fall into his hands; and indeed Nilampulla, an officer of a noble family, was shot at Arampalli because he refused to renounce the religion of Jesus Christ (Paolino (1794) 207).

That Devasahayam was shot dead for his faith was indelibly impressed upon the memory of the local people. Hence in the **Viaggio** he calls him simply "an officer of a noble family" though he probably knew that he belonged to the Nair community. For in the very next sentence he speaks of four Nairs who were imprisoned "because they would not apostasy from their Catholic faith".

Paolino we should remember does not set out, as do Zaleski and others, to give us a researched biography of Devasahayam. He is telling us what he heard from others. His references to the martyr and the persecution of the time in Thiruvithancoor are purely incidental. He is not at all building up a case for or against Devansahayam.

Further, Paolino certifies that one indigenous priest of Malabar Francis Cruz Fernandez by name, had written down the history of the life and death of Devasahayam. "a summary of which I transcribed from a Dutch manuscript prepared by John Rosier, the Dutch officer at Kollam, a responsible and Protestant officer" (Paolino (1794) 168) .

Paolino claims he knew de Lannoy (who was instrumental in bringing Devasahayam to Christian faith) personally and also some judges of the state. The conviction of the local people regarding the holy life and heroic death of Devasahayam was so strong that later biographers did not feel the need to quote Paolino in this regard.

This is true especially of Ladislaus Zaleski who set out in 1896 to include a chapter on Devasahayam in his book on the Martyrs of India. Zaleki probably knew of Paolino's written testimony as he singles out for treatment the martyrs the latter mentions in passing in his book. Moreover by the time of Zaleski another written testimony had taken center stage in India and abroad. That was the account of the life and martyrdom of Devasahayam by Buttari, the priest who baptized Devasahayam.

The Buttari Document

There appeared in Italian at Loreto in Italy in 1844 a biography of Joseph Baptist Buttari under the title *Vita del Padre Giovanni Battista Buttari*. This Buttari , as we said, was the Jesuit who baptized Devasahayam at Vadakankulam in 1745. A copy of this book in original Italian and as printed on papers of poor quality at Loreto is available in the Archives of the Madurai Province of the Society of Jesus at Kodaikanal, India.

The book opens with a notice to the Readers (*Avviso ai Lettori*) to the effect that one Fr. Lawrence Buttari discovered in the library of his home a manuscript containing the life history of his grand uncle, a Jesuit who died in India. This book contains a section dealing with the conversion and martyrdom of Devasahayam. This biography by Buttari remained

for more than half a century confined to a small number of Italian knowing readers till Peter Dahmen then a young teacher at Thiruchirapalli, fell on the original Italian section dealing with Devasahayam Pillai's conversion and martyrdom from contemporary accounts. Curiously enough to my surprise, I found in Rome that this same matter traditionally claimed to be coming from the pen of Buttari and as part of his Vita Jesuit Archives in Rome with 'Buttari' written (later) in pencil (Malabarica- Historia Vol. 6).

For the first time in the historiography of Devasahayam this booklet became a written witness to some otherwise unknown details such as the immediate circumstances that led to the dialogue between de Lannoy and Devasahayam culminating in the latter's conversion and baptism, the caste based objections from his wife, the confrontation between the Brahmin priests of the court and Devasahayam leading to verbal exchanges on the 'sacred thread' (poonul), ambivalence of the king towards sentencing the martyr to death and the like.

To these details the booklet in question is certainly an important witness. Our question concerns only the degree of the "contemporariness" of these accounts as claimed by Peter Dahmen. From one point of view, however, we feel certain that Buttari was the ultimate author of the booklet namely from the point of view of the caste objection of Devasahayam's wife to his conversion which were found for the first time in the booklet in question and which were very much emphasized in the Kanyakumari, Puthukottai, and Thiruchirapalli folklore traditions almost immediately after his martyrdom.

What creates some minor problems here is that Dahmen, the editor, does not hesitate to make additions and omissions to the text he had already published in 1908. Thus for example while the 1908 booklet in faithfulness to the original Italian does not mention the exact place of Devasahayam's birth the 1945 booklet under the claimed authorship of Buttari and Dahmen has "Parpanatha Puram" as the place of his birth we know he is copying Zaleski even to the point of spelling Padmanabhapuram wrongly (Zaleski 292).

Though the rather minor difference in Dahmen himself between his 1908 booklet and subsequent brochures are rather disconcerting, the core fact of Devasahayam's conversion and Martyrdom remained solidly embedded in the living memory of the people.

Zaleski

No wonder then, when Ladislaus Michael Zaleski, the apostolic delegate first came to collect materials from "the books that have become rare" (Zaleski introduction) in order to compose a single volume on the Martyrs of India, he felt compelled to include in it a chapter on Devasahayam. According to Zaleski, writing in or around 1880, "Devasahayam Pillai is a Martyr most known and most venerated in South India and Ceylon" (Zaleski 292). He alone informs us that Devasahayam brought to Christian faith some members of his own family and that he "had formed in his native village a large community of Christians" (Zaleski 295).

While agreeing in several details with the "Buttari witness" which by the time of Zaleski had just begun to enter into the mainstream of Devasahayam historiography, Zaleski's written testimony has some features that are not found in other such as the following:

He did tour the district of Kanyakumari and Thoothukudi. It is probably from the people he met at Vadakakulam and Kottar that he received the oral tradition that Devasahayam once had a vision of the Holy Family (to glorify the patron of Vadakankulam Church?) and that the devil once tempted him to deny his faith (Zaleski 307-308). It is to the merit of the "Buttari witness" that it does not indulge in such visions, adding to our arguments in support of his authorship.

Secondly, Zeleski reveals his intimate knowledge of the region as he for the first time among the biographers, provides a rather detailed description of the muttidichan parai at Puliurkurichi which, as we said earlier, is a living testimony to the martyrdom of Devasahayam. He writes

I did not hear any miracle or any extraordinary sign happening at the tomb (of Devasahayam at Kottar) or at the 'grotto' at Aramboly. But near Padmanabhapuram at Cavengat (confusing Puliurchurichi with Karangad!) there is a miraculous fountain said to have sprung up at the prayer of Devasahayam. It is about 300 meters away from the church of St. Theresa which is today in ruin and which had been constructed in the fort by the pious and famous Benedict de Lannoy and his soldiers... the regularity of the flow of water at the fountain is always the same during dry season as well as during the time of heavy rains... the admirable and spontaneous devotion with which the faithful drink this water and seek it at times of sickness make me consider it as an extraordinary case and deserving our special attention (Zaleski 321).

One still wonders about the identity of the church of St. Theresa near the miraculous fountain. He also avers that "the late Fr. Joseph erected a chapel on the rock of the fountain and dedicated it to Archangel Michael" (Zaleski 321-22). To be sure, the church near the fountain is still that of St. Michael. Was there previously a shrine dedicated to the great Carmelite St. monastery? Was it replaced by that of St. Michael in memory of the church within the Udayagiri fort left in ruins after the departure of Lannoy? These are interesting questions for historians.

Zeleski concludes his eye witness account:

It is unnecessary to add here that in this place as well as at Aramboly the faithful pray anointing with oil the cross and the rock. In one word, they perform acts, which are done in honour of other saints. All the people, even the non-Christians regard Devasahayam Pillai as a glorious martyr of our religion (Zaleski 322).

Further Zaleski the globe-trotter and indefatigable researcher also remarks that

It would be interesting to seek out the correspondence Lazar had with Fr. Buttari and other missionaries during his imprisonment. These letters were probably preserved at Manapad in the archives of the Malabar Province of the Society of Jesus. But these archives were scattered during the persecution of Pombel. One part should be found probably at Lisbon and another at Rio-de-Janeoro; but most of the documents could have been destroyed. (Zaleski 316.)

This author could not find any of these ancient documents in the **Bibliotheca National** (Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo) in Lisbon which he visited for the purpose.

By the time Zaleski wrote down his testimony to Devasahayam Thiruvithancoor had become a land of hectic missionary activity. Starting from 1804 the London Missionary Society (LMS) had taken rather imaginative steps to reach not only the Nadar community but also to bring to the Christian faith a large segment of the society. Among these changes was the right to, after a long fight (1822-59), for a decent upper dress for women, and secondly forcing of the Thiruvithancoor government directly and indirectly through the British administration at Madras to declare the abolition of slavery in 1855. (Narchison) 92-112).

G. T. Mackenzie and C. M. Agur

At this time of Protestant beginnings too, originating from the little hamlet of Myladi in the

district the new Christians had to undergo untold sufferings for their faith, especially the family of Vedamanickam, the father of Kanyakumari Protestantism. As they settled down to peace, at the dawn of the 20th century there appeared two books of history by Protestant authors. One by the British Resident in Thiruvithancoor, G. T. Mackenzie *Christianity in Travancore* (19-1) and the other by C. M. Agur, the grandson of the above –said Vedamanickam, *Church History of Travancore* (1903). Both these Protestant authors found the living testimony of the people to the memory of Devasahayam too strong and too widespread to be ignored in their narratives.

Mackenzie writes:

This (mission) station at Neman near Vadakankulam from 1743 was under Father Buttari S.J. who in 1745 baptised a Travancore convert who is revered as a Martyr. Nilakanda Pillai, a man of good family, held office in the court of the Raja. He was disposed to become a Christian and after discussion on Christianity with Eustace de Lannoy, a Belgian officer in the Travancore army Nilakanda Pillai was baptised being then thirty two years of age and he took the name Devasahayam. Four years afterwards he was imprisoned because of his change of religion and after three years of imprisonment he was shot in 1752, by order of the Raja at Aramboli about the fifty first mile on the road from Trivandrum to Tinnevely. His corpse was thrown into the jungle, but the Christians got possession of the corpse, burned it and buried the ashes in a tomb which still exists in the centre of the church of St. Francis Xavier at Kottar (Mackenzie 80).

As for C. M. Agur, an unexplained observation of his as we pointed out above is a valuable clue to the popularity of Devasahayam among the first Protestants of the district. While describing the suffering of Devasahayam he observes: "The Christians in the South and those in Myladi came to see him" (Agur 284). The printer in Thiruvananthapuram did not know the tiny village of Myladi and hence misspelt it as Meynaud and Mascreen of Kollam faithfully recopied the mistake.

In the years 1745-52 (Years of Devasahayam's life as a Christian) there were no Christians at Myladi. If therefore Agur says "Christians at Myladi" visited the Martyr he certainly transmits the memory of his forefathers. Myladi was the native village of C. M. Agur. His ancestors about two generations ago, even as Hindus, had come to have a 'dharsan' of the martyr.

Buttari's written testimony which we discussed above as received in India in the 19th century still remains the standard and for the most part a reliable testimony. Among the numerous writers who followed (and even copied) Buttari's account are Peter Dahmen, Bertrand, D.Ferrol, A. Caussanel, Perioquinn, L. Besse, P. J. Mascreen and a host of Tamil and Malayalam writers whose names and writings are listed in P. Anthony Muthu, *A Detailed History of Martyr Devasahayam Pillai* (Tamil), Nagercoil, Nanjil Printers, 1988, Pages 8-12).

A Post-Colonial Perspective

One final note from a post –colonial perspective.

It is exactly 250 years since Devasahayam of Thiruvithancoor died for his Christian faith. It was a time when the Western colonial powers were waiting on the Indian shores to pounce on the subcontinent. With the first to come here in modern times, namely the Portuguese, Christianization was in the words of K. M. Panikkar, "a state enterprise" (Panikkar 280).

By the time of Devasahayam's stewardship in the Thiruvithancoor royal court the Dutch had come to stay in Kochi, the English at Anjuthenku (Angengo) and Thallaserry,

and the French at Mahe along the Arabian coast. Devasahayam owes his conversion to the Christianizing efforts of none of these colonial powers. He was brought to the Christian faith by a layman soldier called Eustachins Benedict de Lannoy. The story of Devasahayam is the story of a layman martyr and of a layman apostle. Did the coming of Western colonialism mean further clericalization of Indian Christianity???

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