Beyond Contextualization

Udayanacharya's *Samvāda* and the Dialogue of Traditions:
A Model of Inreligionization

by Brainerd Prince

Brainerd Prince (PhD, OCMS, Oxford/Middlesex University) is presently Director of the Center for Thinking, Language and Communication and Associate Professor of Practice at Plaksha University in India.

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This is a methodological enquiry about the dialogue of traditions, particularly religious traditions, and in specific about the dialogue between Christian and Hindu traditions in India. Historically, if Christian traditions encountered Hindu traditions in three waves, then my contention is that the quality of this engagement has continually degenerated over centuries, to an extent that the current political climate does not freely allow any engagement between Hindu and Christian traditions.

Although we only have sparse records, the first wave of the Eastern Christian tradition's engagement with Hindu traditions appears to have had huge successes. During the initial Catholic wave of about a thousand years, the language of conversion became prominent, and the quality of engagement decreased. The Protestant wave continued the agenda of the Catholic traditions, and the modern missionary movement was born. This was accompanied by the political colonization of India. Christian traditions standing on the shoulders of political power had little regard for their Hindu counterpart. Contemporary post-independent India continues to bear this brunt that has created enmity between the Hindu and Christian traditions.

Therefore, there is a need for a new model of Christian engagement with Hindu traditions, a model that not only does not antagonise Hindus but also enables Hindu traditions to legitimately self-discover Christian traditions in the encounter. What better model would be acceptable to a Hindu than one that is born and shaped within the Hindu horizon? Udayanacharya, a great Nyāya Hindu scholar of the eleventh century, has provided one such framework as a model of engagement between traditions, which can be termed the *samvāda* engagement of traditions.

The argument presented in this paper is this: if Christians are able to engage with Hindus using a model of engagement that is acceptable to Hindus, then that engagement will necessarily be successful and meaningful. The paper has four parts: Section one explores a few models of "engagement" in mission studies.

Section two critically reviews the historical engagement of Christians with Hindus in order to explicate the problematic of engagement in the Indian context. In the third section, I look at a few outliers in the Indian mission story. In the final section, I will present Udayanacharya's samvāda model of engagement between different traditions, which I argue can be the basis of a dialogical missional approach—and which could be seen as a variation of the inreligionizing model.[1]

Models of Engagement in Mission Studies

Within mission studies, different models have emerged that embody the changing understandings of the self's engagement with the other. We have come a long way from a colonial model of mission, to an indigenous model of mission, to what Jenkins has called "reverse mission" in his *The Next Christendom*. Two models that come to mind are inculturation and contextualization. The term "inculturation" is used for the first time in 1962 and then officially by Pope John Paul II in 1979.[2] The term "contextualization" had its historic first appearance in 1972 in the ecumenical publication *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the Theological Education Fund* (1972). However, these two models came out of the larger change in the philosophical climate in academia which has been termed the postmodern turn.

> The sole purpose of inculturation seems to be "transforming" the culture in order to bring about a "new creation," and in no way is it bothered about the relationship between the missionary and those missionized.

The revolt against universal rationality had begun to flourish with Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals* and was extended by the works of Lakatos, Feyerabend and Kuhn in the philosophy of science and Peter Winch in the social sciences. In the 1970s Jean-Francois Lyotard defined the term "postmodern" as an "incredulity" for universal rationality.[3] The focus shifted from text to the context. The social, political, and existential contexts that defined the conditions for the production of knowledge were given supremacy. It was against this background that both inculturation and contextualization were born.

Aylward Shorter defines inculturation as "the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures . . . it is the creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture or cultures."[4] The term "inculturation" is a development from old terms like "adaptation," "accommodation," and "indigenization" as the need to move away from the concept of a western culture imposing its universal gospel. Pedro Arrup defines it as:

> The incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question (this alone would be no more than a superficial adaptation) but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming it and remaking it so as to bring about a "new creation."[5]

It is interesting that Shorter talks about a "relationship." However, it is not the relationship between the missionary and the missionized that has been reflected upon, but rather the relationship between the Christian message and culture. It is quite revealing that although there appears to be importance given to the other's context, in inculturation, the other continues to be eclipsed. According to Arrup, the sole purpose seems to be on "transforming" the culture according to the message in order to bring about a "new creation," and in no way is it bothered about the relationship between the missionary and those missionized.

While contextualization is very similar to inculturation, Darrell L. Whiteman notes that contextualization seeks to make the gospel/text relevant to the context of the culture.[6] It is the model of contextualization that necessitated the rise of contextual theology, giving importance not only to the Scripture but also to the context in which it surfaces.[7] Stephen Bevans understands classical theology as being objective and contextual theology as being subjective.[8] However, he claims that while it does not resort to relativism, it gives due importance to context because meaning is ascribed to reality through "the context of our culture or our historical period, interpreted from our own particular horizon and in our own particular thought forms."[9] The contextual model of mission does direct us to the context of the mission field and its horizon. However, once again, the relationship between the missionary and the missionized community remains invisible and unaddressed.

In this brief survey what is seen is that while the context and historical location of those missionized are being taken into consideration, the ontological relationship or engagement the missionary has with the missionized community is not addressed. Of course, one could counter-argue that those mission agency handbooks, particularly for new missionaries, would give specific instructions on how to behave and live in a mission context. A quick look at two handbooks revealed that while there is a lot of information and even rules on how the missionary should live and relate with their home organization and supporters, I was unable to find any clear direction on how the missionary should relate with the communities they work amongst.[10] Perhaps our own mission preparation programmes echo this lack. There are

resources on friendship mission or friendship evangelism that seek to use friendships as a starting point for the mission. These models have strong critiques, and as one of them countered, "friendships with an agenda are never true friendships."[11]

Historical Engagement of Christians with Hindus in India

The main argument put forward in this section is that Christian traditions historically came to India in three main waves. With the arrival of the Catholic wave, the relationship progressively deteriorated between the Christians and the Hindus, culminating in a breakdown during the Protestant wave. Referring to the arrival of Christians in India, Frykenberg writes:

> From an Indian perspective, arrivals of successive waves of Christians on the western shores of India, taking place at various times over centuries, either as refugees and settlers and traders, can be documented. Such waves can be dated by looking at royal grants of lands and privileges which Christians received. These grants, duly certified as deeds or documents, were inscribed on copper plates, stone slabs, and/or palm leaf (cadjan). These were later embellished and reinforced by oral traditions.[12]

While this is not a work of history, a few representative sites of engagement will be chosen that best showcase the engagement between Hindu and Christian traditions.

The Eastern Wave

Mission historians have claimed that historically Christianity came to South Asia in the first century, immediately after the Jesus event, brought by one of Jesus' twelve disciples, Thomas. This is based on writings from the second and third centuries that talk about a Christian presence in India. These writings reveal that a Jewish Christian named Panpaenus, a mentor to Clement and Origen, had a determination "to preach Christ to the Brahmin and philosophers."[13]

Frykenberg argues for the authenticity of Saint Thomas' visit to India and says that the internal sources found amongst the Syrian Christians of South India through

> carefully preserved oral sagas, literary texts, genealogies, epigraphic and numismatic data on stone tablets and copper plates and coins of copper, silver, and gold (as well as bullion), and architectural remains[14] . . . [give] clearer and more specific indications of how what are now known as Thomas Christians, also known as Syrian Christians, came into being and how they came to be concentrated in the south-west corner of India, in what is now the state of Kerala.[15]

Our primary interest lies in what these oral traditions have to say about the Indian reception of the Apostle Thomas—the first Christian on Indian soil. It is said that the Apostle Thomas predominantly worked amongst Brahmins, unlike the modern Protestant Mission that predominantly worked among the lower caste. The legend claims "The rajah of Kodungalur gave

Thomas permission to preach the gospel and gave him gifts of money . . . the king also became a Christian."[16] Furthermore, it is claimed that because of his many miracles, Thomas was able to make many followers of Jesus out of the Brahmins.

Water droplets transforming into flowers has huge spiritual value within the Hindu religious imagination.

An interesting story, recorded by Zaleski, mentions Thomas venturing into the Brahmin quarter. This story follows a miracle where the Apostle Thomas throws some water into the air by the side of a pond in the presence of many Brahmins.[17] The water droplets fell back down at Thomas' feet in the form of showers of beautiful flowers. This was a turning point which resulted in many Brahmins following Christianity. What is interesting to note is that the water droplets transforming into flowers has huge spiritual value within the Hindu religious imagination. One could even say that the miracle was contextualized within the spiritual language of the Hindus, whereas flowers hold no such significance in the first century Jewish-Christian religious imagination.

This first encounter between Jewish Christianity and South Indian Brahmins was overall acceptable to the Hindu population, so much so that, according to legend, Thomas built seven churches: "Kodungalur, Quilon, Chayal, Niranam, Kokamanglam, Parur and Palayur."[18]

Although there is valid historical evidence for formal church life in India from AD 345, there is also evidence that during the great Persian persecution from AD 340 to AD 401, "a community of 'East Syrian' or 'Babylonian' Jewish Christians landed on the Malabar coast."[19] This community of 400 people belonged to seventy-two royal families. The local South Indian king welcomed this community and bestowed on them high caste privileges. Some of these privileges included

> seven kinds of musical instruments and all the honours, and to travel in a palanquin and that at weddings the women should whistle with the finger in the mouth as do the women of kings, and he conferred the privilege of spreading carpets on the ground and to use sandals and to erect a pandal and to ride on elephants.[20]

From the historical accounts what is clearly noted is that this community of Jewish Christians, also called Malankara Nazaranis, were enterprising and successful in creating wealth. Frykenberg writes that "those who had once prospered in Mesopotamia prospered in India, and were seen as generating local prosperity wherever they settled; their presence was courted and coveted by local rulers."[21]

The Catholic Wave

The second wave of Christianity in South Asia began with the clerical travellers and culminates with the coming of the various Catholic orders into the South Asian peninsula. The era of clerical travellers began with the Islamic Hejra in AD 622 to the coming of Vasco de Gama in 1498.[22] Frykenberg claims that only four visits are noteworthy. The first visit, according to the Anglo-Saxon chronicle, was that of two monks, "Sigehelm and Aethelstan, who were sent by King Alfred and who told of their visit to the tomb of St Thomas at Mylapore (Mailapur)" recorded in a report from AD 883.[23] The second visit was of John of Monty Corino, a Franciscan missionary who was sent as a papal emissary to the Christians in Malabar in AD 1293. The third visit was of Friar Ordoric to Quilon in AD 1325. Finally, the visit of Father Jordanus, which occurred in AD 1321 to AD 1322.

Converting the locals before moving on, is contrary to the settlement approach, the predominant method of the first wave.

While we do not have much information on Sigehelm and Aethelstan's visits, we are told that the efforts of John of Monty Corino were so successful that in AD 1307, he was appointed as China's first Catholic Archbishop. John of Monty Corino reports, "I remained in the country of India, wherein stands the church of St. Thomas the Apostle, for thirteen months, and I baptized in different places about one hundred persons."[24] Thus, with John of Monty Corino's visit, we can see the beginning of a missionary method in which Christians came as visitors with the primary motive of converting the locals before moving on, which is contrary to the settlement approach, the predominant method of the first wave where the Christians remained on the land.

John of Monty Corino's observations of the Hindu Indian people were that they were idolators without having any regular hours for worship like the Christians. He writes, "they never join together in worship at any fixed hour, but each goes to worship when it pleases himself. And so they worship their idols in any part of their temples, either by day or by night."[25]

He also took offense at the local Hindu population's ways of life:

> For their daily food they use rice and a little milk; and they eat grossly like pigs, to wit, with the whole hand or fist and without a spoon. In fact, when they eat their food, they do look more like pigs than men.

From this, Yule infers that "John was not received in the houses of Indians of the higher classes."[26] From this, we can see the beginning signs of the impending deterioration of the relationships between Christians and Hindus.

By the arrival of Friar Ordoric, Christians had become pure spectators, phenomenologically observing the other without a sense of empathy or togetherness. For example, Friar Ordoric observes that where "the blessed Thomas the Apostle" was buried, "His church is filled with idols, and beside it are fifteen houses of the Nestorians, that is to say Christians but vile and pestilent heretics."[27] Here is a clear example of how Friar Ordoric referred to Thomas as blessed, but held a disdain for the local South Asian population. That he also had a deep disdain for the local Christians, whom he calls vile and pestilent heretics, reveals the binary thinking that had set upon Western Christians. He also describes the local church of the Malabar Christians negatively as filled with idols.

The earliest *Pfarangi* (foreign) Christians in India were not just Catholic, nor just "Roman" Catholic. They were profoundly Portuguese. They came armed with the Padroado Real which gave them authority from the Church in Rome to fill clerical positions in overseas colonial regions, like India.[28] On 21 June 1481, Sixtus IV in *Aeterna Regis Clementina* summed up all previous papal bulls with the words:

> Navigation in the oceans of recent discovery is restricted to Portuguese ships. The Portuguese are true lords of lands discovered or yet to be discovered. The Portuguese may freely trade with unbelievers, even Muslims, provided they do not supply them with arms or anything of the kind. The Portuguese Crown may found churches, monasteries, and other places of religious usage . . . Spiritual Power belongs to Portugal in perpetuity.[29]

The Padroado Mandate opened the doors for a host of monks and missionaries from different orders to come boldly and legitimately to India and do mission work. The Franciscans (600 friars by 1635), the Dominicans (from 1498), the Augustinians (from 1572), and the Jesuits (founded in 1540), represented by Francis Xavier, came in large numbers, and all these missionaries were sent along the coastlines and across the countryside in the inner parts of the Indian subcontinent.[30] They converted in large droves the fishermen communities like the Paravars and Mukkavars who have remained Christians for over four and a half centuries.[31] Francis Xavier and others who did not know the Tamil language, walked from village to village,

> building prayer houses, baptizing children, and drilling children in rote recitations of the Lord's Prayer, Ave, Creed, and Commandments.[32] These doctrines were to be recited aloud every morning and evening at the sound of a bell. Attempts were made to install a *kanakkapillai* (catechist/accountant) for each village, to keep track of births, deaths, and marriages for each lineage *(vamsha)*.[33]

However, in 1582, a series of events took place that changed the status of Roman Catholic missions in India. Stephen Neill, the historian of Indian church and missions, captures it well and it is best to quote him at length:

> But in 1582 the even tenour of life was disturbed by one of the most disastrous series of events in the whole history of Roman Catholic missions in India. Two villages in the extreme south of the peninsula of Salsette—Cuncolim and Assolna in the spelling used by the Portuguese—had been specially obstinate in holding fast to the Hindu way and its ceremonies. Early in 1582, in reprisal for injuries done to a messenger who was carrying despatches from Cochin to the viceroy, a fleet of boats sailed down from Goa and destroyed the temple at Assolna. At the same time the captain of Rachol marched down with troops to Cuncolim; a Jesuit Fr Berno set fire to the large temple in the village; a number of smaller shrines was also destroyed. Then Fr Berno, with incredible folly, "killed a sacred cow on the spot, with the double object of defiling the holy places and destroying the object of superstition, and he profaned a sacred tank by casting into it the intestines of the slaughtered animal."[34] The authorities seem to have been unaware of the lasting fury occasioned by the outrage. In 1583 a visit was paid to Salsette by the new provincial Rudolf Aquaviva, formerly of the mission to the Great Mogul, accompanied by a number of priests, some Indian Christians and a group of Portuguese gentlemen. On 15/25 July [1583 25 July], the anger of the people broke out in open violence. Aquaviva, who stood forth as the acknowledged leader, was the first to suffer. Then the mob fell on Fr Berno, the object of their special animosity; the other two priests followed soon after. A lay brother, Aranha, though terribly wounded, survived in hiding till the next morning, when he was discovered, killed and horribly mutilated. Altogether fourteen others were killed, the bodies were stripped by outcaste menials, thrown together into a large pit which, this being monsoon time, was full of water, and covered over with branches to prevent discovery. When, the same evening, news of the disaster reached Goa, there was no limit to the distress and dismay caused by events for which there was no precedent in the history of the missions.
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> Many Christians had died at the hands of pirates or in sporadic outbursts of violence. But so ruthless a massacre, carried out by the generally kindly and gentle Hindu population, was unexpected and alarming. It was decided that the bodies of the martyrs must be recovered and given Christian burial. It fell to Stephens as rector of the college at Rachol to set about the recovery of the bodies. At first the people denied all knowledge, but before long were tricked into agreeing to the surrender; the menials carried the bodies to the north bank of the river, where they were received by the group from Goa and reverently carried to the church. It was found that the bodies were so swollen by their immersion in water that it was not possible to array them in Jesuit robes; but with such order and ceremony as was possible they were laid to rest. What follows is far from edifying. Though the fathers pleaded that vengeance should not be taken on the guilty, fifteen of the leading men who came in to plead for pardon and to promise friendship were immediately cut down by the soldiery; others were pursued to the mainland and done to death. The five villages concerned were deprived of their liberty, two being handed over in fief to one Portuguese, and three to another.[35]

This incident depicts the unspoken nexus between the missionaries and the colonial powers as well as the undercurrents between the missionaries and the native converts.

The Protestant Wave

The final wave of Christian mission into India is called the Modern Missionary Movement where a variety of Protestant groups came to India. The problematic nature of the Christian mission to the Hindus in the modern era, one could claim, lay in the lack of a robust dialogue of traditions between the Christian and Hindu traditions. Guder argues that any study of the history of missions and evangelism in the last few centuries would reveal that the missionary movement of the western Christian traditions were largely accompanied by "the legacy of western cultural imperialism" which exercised "domination and cultural control," thus reflecting an absence of the incarnational model in western mission. He argues that "the western view of all contexts for mission has been governed solely by western perspectives" with the assumption that the western way was synonymous with the way of Christ, which precisely led to the failure to do mission in the incarnational "Jesus Christ way."

> ## The assumption that the western way was synonymous with the way of Christ led to the failure to do mission in the incarnational "Jesus Christ way." (Stephen Neill)

It is alleged that Christian mission, particularly in its Protestant evangelical format, has for a long time singularly focused on the conversion of the missionized Indian to Christianity and that it does not pay any respect to their inherent Hindu traditions, texts and practices. In an insightful article on conversion and Christian mission in India, Claerhout and De Roover have set forth historical evidence from Portuguese, German and British missionary sources, arguing that Christian missions looked down on Hindu traditions. They write:

> From the 16th to the 21st century, the Christians have viewed their encounter with the Hindu traditions as a battle between Christianity and idolatry . . . Therefore, the Christians oppose the Hindu traditions to the Christian religion in terms of the beliefs these "rival religions" proclaim.[36]

Some of the examples they have cited demonstrate the deeply antagonistic perspective the Christian mission had for Hindu traditions. The language of "battle," "rivalry" and "opposition"

reveals the binary that existed between Christianity and Hindu traditions. It is worthwhile looking at a few pieces of primary evidence as testimonials of antagonism:

> In what terms shall I describe the Hindu mythology? There was never, in any age, nor in any country, a superstition so cruel, so atrocious and so diabolical as that which has reigned over this people. It is a personification of evil.[37]

> Before me was the land of idolatry, concerning which I had heard and read so much; and I was now to come into contact with that mighty system of superstition and cruelty which was holding millions enslaved in its bonds; to see its hateful rites, and by the exhibition of the Truth to contend with its dreadful power.[38]

> In this brief, the king orders that neither public nor private "idols" be tolerated on the island of Goa and that severe punishment must be meted out to those who persist in keeping them. The houses of people suspected of keeping hidden idols are to be searched. Heathen festivals are not to be tolerated and every brahman is to be banished from Goa, Bassein and Diu.[39]

These words belonging to both European missionaries and European State representatives reveal the deep antagonism they had towards Hindu traditions.

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Christian Mission Outliers

However, in the history of Christianity in India we also find that there are several instances where Christian missionaries enjoyed a meaningful experience with Hindus, and they were able to understand each another in spite of their differences and leanings, even during the colonial era.

Whereas Francis Xavier dealt with the lowest, most polluting segments of Tamil society on the Fisher Coast, Roberto de Nobili dealt with the highest and purest. Father Robert de Nobili arrived in Goa, a South Indian state, in 1605,[40] and was clear about his spiritual mission which was to "remove the impression that Christianity was merely a foreign, Western religion." Towards this goal, he mastered both Sanskrit and Tamil.[41] In the shadow of the four towering gateways *(gopurams)* of the ancient Minakshi-Sundareswarar Temple, where thousands came each day and where throngs of students from far corners of the land flocked, a young aristocrat from Italy settled down in 1606. Here, with Vishvasam and Malaiyappan, as well

as Shivadharma his guru, he became a scholar-missionary. His aim was to become thoroughly Brahmanised, to avoid any word or deed which might give offence, and to gain complete mastery of Sanskrit and Tamil learning *(veda)*.

Acquiring fluency in texts of the Agama and of the Alvar and Nayanar poets, scrupulously abstaining from all pollution from defiled or tainted things (e.g., *Xesh),* subsisting only on one simple meal, and wearing the "sacred thread" of the "twice-born" *(dvija)* along with the ochre robe of a *sannyasi,* he engaged Vedanta philosophers in public conversations and debates, and won a following of converts and disciples, including his own guru. His manifesto, inscribed on palm leaf and posted on his house, declared:

> I am not a parangi. I was not born in the land of the parangis, nor was I ever connected with their [lineages] . . . I come from Rome, where my family holds a rank as respectable as any rajas in this country.

By cutting off all links with crude, beef-eating, alcohol-drinking barbarians from Europe, de Nobili, the "Roman Brahman," identified himself as being Indian and became known as "Tattuwa-Bhodacharia Swami."

Catholic learning established in Nayaka Madurai, epitomized by its repository of rare manuscripts at Shembhagannur Monastery, reached its zenith with the work of the Italian Jesuit Constanzo Giuseppe Beschi (1680–1747). This sage, also known as Viramamuni Swami or as Dharrya Nathaswami, produced classical *Sangam (Cankam)* epics, philosophical treatises, commentaries, dictionaries, grammars, translations, and tracts for Hindu Christians and non-Christians alike.[42] Such works put him in the forefront of Tamil scholarship. His *Tembavani,* an epic of 3,525 *tetrastichs* of 30 cantos, his commentary on Thiruvalluvar's *Kural,* and his public disputations[43] with scholars *(acharyas)* and mendicants *(pardarams),* won renown. The grandeur of his entourage matched that of the Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram. Clothed in a long tunic bordered in scarlet and robed in pale purple, with ornate slippers, purple-and-white turban, pearl and ruby earrings, bangles and rings of heavy gold on his wrists and fingers, a carved staff of inlaid ivory in his hand, he sat in his sumptuous palanquin upon a tiger skin, with attendants fanning him, holding a purple silk parasol surmounted by a golden ball to keep the sun from touching him, and attendants marching before and behind him lifting high a standard of spread peacock's feathers (symbolizing Saraswati, goddess of wisdom); he ostentatiously displayed all the marks of divine and regal authority. Chanda Saheb, Nawab of the Carnatic, honoured him in his *durbar.* He bestowed the title of Ismattee Sannyasi upon Beschi, presented him with the inlaid ivory palanquin of Nawab's grandfather, and appointed him *diwan,* a position which awarded him a tax-exempt estate *(inam)* of four villages worth 12,000 rupees income per year.[44]

Let us look at the example of the German missionary to India, Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg,[45] who is also represented by Claerhout and De Roover as someone whose Christianity is incommensurable with Hindu traditions. Claiming that Ziegenbalg made a difference between false and true religion, they write, "On the one hand, the false religion of the heathens consists of sin and error … On the other hand, there is the true religion of the people of God."[46] This they claim with regard to a pamphlet written by Ziegenbalg called *Abominable Heathenism.*[47]

Furthermore, in the quote they provide from the pamphlet, they themselves say that Ziegenbalg's critique was against *a-jnana* (the absence of knowledge and the antithesis of wisdom) and all his negative claims were about a-jnana. What is interesting is that Hindus would totally agree with Ziegenbalg's negative description of a-jnana. As a matter of fact, Bhagwat Gita 14:8 clearly delineates the negatives of a-jnana. Of course, the difference would lie in how Ziegenbalg and the Hindus proposed to overcome or overthrow a-jnana but not in what it stood for. Thus, what Claerhout and De Roover fail to capture is the dialogue and the comparative work that Ziegenbalg was successfully doing and his creative use of the Hindu term a-jnana in presenting the Christian gospel as well as the wonderful relationships that Ziegenbalg had with Hindus such as Modaliappa, a young man with whom he was a friend for life, a 70-year old blind pandit Watthiar as well as many other Tamil tutors and scholars including Ganapati Wattiyar who was a "converted poet who, having already become his colleague and friend for some time, also became his partner and research assistant."[48] Frykenberg argues that none of what Ziegenbalg accomplished would have been possible had Ziegenbalg not enjoyed the confidence and support of

> Tamil admirers, colleagues, friends, informants, and teachers. Indeed, his rapid progress astonished and delighted local Tamils; and his open and engaging personality quickly won him popularity among Tamil poets and scholars.[49]

Stephen Neill, the historian, writes that it was not a one-way process with the missionaries, just as much as they wanted to change the Hindus, they too got "converted" in the process.

> One notable result of these Tamil studies was a change in Ziegenbalg's attitude to the Indian people and to the Hindu religion. When he arrived in India, he shared the view generally held by Europeans that Indians were a barbarous people, and that their religion was no better than a depraved superstition … But by 1709 he had come to realise that the Indians are a civilised people; and, as he penetrated more deeply into their classical writings, he was amazed to discover the depth of their moral insights and the admirable style in which their wisdom is expressed.[50]

There were many other western missionaries as well, for instance, Mother Teresa who is still highly esteemed in India. Greene in her biography on Mother Teresa refers to her as "Bengali Teresa."[51] K. P. Kesava Menon, in his forward to *Christianity in India,* described a church typical of the Indian Christian tradition as "Hindu in culture, Christian in religion, and oriental in worship."[52]

The Samvāda Rules of Mission Engagement

Our study of the historical engagement between Christian traditions and Hindu traditions in the Indian subcontinent has revealed problems that acted as deterrents, particularly during the modern age. While these problems began during the Catholic wave, it was during the Protestant wave these problems came into full bloom. One mustn't forget that the Protestant engagement happened during the colonial era that had a lopsided power equation between the imperial Christians and the colonized Hindus. This inequality of power affected the engagement of traditions.

> # When Ziegenbalg arrived in India, he held the view that their religion was no better than a depraved superstition . . . but by 1709 . . . he was amazed to discover the depth of their moral insights. (Stephen Neill)

The recent memory of the colonial encounter continues to cast a shadow on Christian-Hindu engagement even if in post-Independence India there has been a reversal of fortunes and power equations with the Hindus coming to political power in India. While it is the majoritarian Hindu population that presently dictates politics in India and the Christians are a minority, the long shadow of the colonial past continues to influence Christian-Hindu engagement resulting in an alienation of the Christians. However, what has remained unchanged is the Christian attitudes to the Hindu which continue to be colonial, hence the problems of the Protestant wave have not yet been successfully addressed.

While there are a lot of resources available within the post-enlightenment Western hermeneutical tradition to envision a better model of engagement between the Christian and Hindu traditions, be it in the works of Buber, Levinas, Bakhtin, Ricoeur, or Macintyre, the primary goal for us is to excavate resources from within Hindu traditions so that what is proposed will be broadly acceptable to Hindu traditions, without of course ignoring the western resources. In other words, the primary source for the proposed new model of engagement will be the Hindu traditions.

The argument presented in this work is that one way of overcoming the problems that continue to plague Christian-Hindu relations is to articulate a model of engagement that

is agreeable to both Hindus and Christians. Therefore, the task is to find a Hindu model of engagement excavated from the historical Hindu traditions that not only overcomes the problems but is also agreeable to the Christians.

If such a model of engagement be found, then it would not only critique the colonial attitude of Christians towards Hindus but also envision a way forward for future Christian engagement with Hindus. One such sophisticated Hindu model for the engagement of traditions is found in the works of the eleventh-century Nyāya scholar, Acharya Udayana.

Although it has been stated more than once that Udayana is one of the greatest Indian philosophers, unfortunately there are not very many secondary works on either Udayana or his works. George Chemparathy, who can be argued to be the foremost leading scholar on Udayana, says, "Scholars are almost unanimous in declaring Udayana to be one of the greatest of Indian philosophers." In the Nyāya-Vaisesika school itself, to which he belongs, he occupies a singular position of authority and renown. Flourishing at the period of transition from the Older Nyāya to the New (Navya-Nyāya), he shines as an unrivalled master of the former and an inspiring herald of the latter.

> His importance in the history of Nyāya-Vaiśesika can be gauged by the attitude towards him of later writers, from his own school as well as from other schools. While he became for his own school a recognized authority who is often referred to by the mere title of Ācārya . . . [53]

Furthermore, Karuvelil refers to him as ". . . Udayana, the great Naiyāyika." With regard to the significance of Udayana's work, Karuvelil writes,

> Expounding the Nyāya system, he presents his work (Atmatattvaviveka) as the "ultimate Vedānta" (caramavedānta) wherein all the other systems of thought, including Advaita Vedānta, are subsumed as preliminary stages of it. [54]

In Laine's view Udayana is not just a "great eleventh century Nyāya philosopher" but also "an extremely skillful philosopher" who had the "ability to include a wide range of philosophical topics under the aegis of his stated *prayojana* [stated purpose]." [55]

The logical competency of Udayana seems to have been generally accepted. To mention but one Indian writer of the sixteenth century, Sāyana Mādhava, the author of the *Sarvadarśanasamgraha,* speaks of him not only as "one whose fame had spread everywhere" *(viśvavikhyātakīrtih),* but also as "one who has seen the opposite shore of the ocean of the principles of logic *(nyāyanayapārāvārapāradrk),* an epithet which aptly expresses his thorough knowledge of logic." [56]

In this section, I will explore the *samvāda* rules of engagement that have historically provided a framework for dialogue between traditions. What is unique is that the Brahmanical Hindu tradition had "a shared terminology and shared procedural assumptions that allowed different Brahmanical schools to dialogue" and the dialogue also happened with other established traditions like the Buddhist and Jain traditions. [57] In other words, there was freedom to disagree and debate with those belonging to another Hindu school or tradition or even with other non-Hindu religious traditions.

I would like to present the samvāda tradition of philosophical engagement arising out of the Hindu traditions that provided the rules of engagement for dialogue between different traditions of enquiry. Samvāda from the Sanskrit, *sam* for "together" and *vāda* for "word," means "wording together" or "discoursing together" and could be used to mean "dialogue."

However, very little work has been done on excavating the concept of samvāda out of the Indian classical traditions particularly for methodological value. A pioneering work on the origins of samvāda was a paper presented by Laurie Patton entitled "Samvāda: A Literary Resource for Conflict Negotiation in Classical India," in *Evam: Forum on Indian Representations* (Delhi: Samvāda India, 2003), where she puts forward the genealogy of the term as well as gave examples of its use in classical Indian texts. Patton also translates samvāda as "interlogue" in a co-authored article entitled *Hinduism with Others: Interlogue* (2006). [58]

There was freedom to disagree and debate with those belonging to another Hindu school or tradition or even with other non-Hindu religious traditions.

Apart from Patton's work, there is scarcely any other work on samvāda, although Daya Krishna has a book by the name of *Samvada: A Dialogue between Two Philosophical Traditions* (1991), which does not refer explicitly to the classical tradition of samvāda itself, but rather captures a contemporary dialogue held in Pune in 1983, between Indian philosophers trained in the Western tradition and those trained in the classical Indian tradition of philosophizing. [59]

The only other prominent usage is by John Clayton, the philosopher of religion, whose use of samvāda provides the rules of engagement for dialogue from an Indian intellectual point of view. But before we look at Clayton's usage, a quick summary of the historical excavation of samvāda done by Patton would be useful. [60]

Patton argues that the Brahmanas used samvāda to mean "bargain" and the *Dharma Sutras* used it to mean "conversation, discussion, or dialogue." In the *Ramayana*, it means an account or an incident story and in the *Mahabharata* it has the added meaning of dispute. In the *Mimamsa sutras* it means agreement or accord and similarly in the *Tantravartika* (1.2.22; 1.2.47) and the Jain text *Prabandhacintamani* (52.4). Patton goes on to give four examples which are "named as samvāda by early and classical Hindu texts themselves" and hence she argues that samvāda is indeed an "indigenous genre." But she goes on to state that samvāda certainly "does not have a tradition of criticism behind it" like classical schools of philosophy and suggests that "it is never too late to start one." However, here Patton appears to be unaware of the development of the concept of samvāda and its use in the medieval era, particularly from the eleventh century onwards.

Clayton has precisely worked out the use of samvāda as a method for philosophical discussion and debate between different philosophical traditions from its historical usage in such discussions between different strands of the Indian intellectual tradition. Clayton illustrates the structure of a *vāda* or inter-tradition debate, through the Buddhist-Hindu debates found in the eleventh century Udayana's treatise *Atmatattvaviveka*. He argues that the structure of a samvāda debate consisted of two parts—negative and positive.[61] The conventions governing the negative component, the goal of which was to undermine the opponent's position, were: (a) a presentation of a "fair statement" of the opponent's position, (b) the arguments in its favour, and finally, (c) the arguments that can be used against it. What is interesting here is, as Clayton observes, this negative component was carried out completely in accordance with the opponent's rationality. Even in citing authorities, one had to use texts that were authoritative for the opponent. The conventions governing the positive component, the goal of which was to offer arguments in favour of one's position, dictated that proofs could be supplied that were either (a) based on reasons shared with the opponent, or (b) were "tradition-specific reasons that were not acknowledged as reasons by one's opponents."[62] This clarifies the difference between the two traditions.

I would like to term this act of dialogue that seeks to clarify the other and engage with the difference of the other and even make a contribution to inform the epistemological crisis in the other's tradition of enquiry as the very act of living together. However, this is preceded by two prior acts that are necessary to be able to conduct this dialogue. First, to know oneself, in a sense know the traditions that construct the enquiring self, its rationality, its authoritative texts, the narrative within which these texts have meaning as well as its ultimate concerns. One can only distinguish the other, if one has some clarity on oneself. I have not yet dwelt on the language of tradition or *parampara* which is central to this knowing. Secondly, to understand the other in their tradition of enquiry and rationality. To understand the other is similar to learning a new language, the language of the other's tradition. Macintyre calls it as possessing "second first languages" or being "polyglossic" à la Bakhtin, and similar to Bhabha's "hybridity." It is only after this understanding of the other that one can perform the act of living together with the other as dialogue. Now to summarise the three elements of samvāda: first, know oneself, secondly, understand the other, and finally, dialogue as living together.

> To understand the other is similar to learning a new language, the language of the other's tradition.

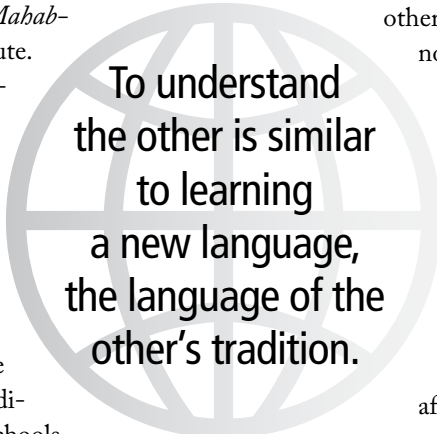There is clear resemblance between the vāda-tradition and the dialogical-hermeneutics that is at an infant stage of development within the western intellectual tradition. This similarity is attested by Flood with regard to his own work in the academic study of religion that the vāda-tradition is "wholly in accord with the dialogical model I wish to develop in the coming chapters" for the study of religion.[63]

The samvāda form of dialogue historically has brought into dialogue different intellectual and religious traditions primarily to delineate the boundaries of the discourse between rival schools of Vedic textual exegesis, in ways that clarified difference and debate in South Asia.[64] This is an example of the dialogical freedom that Hindu traditions have historically possessed. There is freedom to learn about another religious tradition, including its scriptures and rationality at a proficiency that is acceptable to an adherent of that tradition. One also had the freedom to dialogue and converse with those of other religious traditions about religious matters.

A Model of Inreligionization

I would like to end by elucidating the "dialogue of traditions" approach which can be used as the process that delivers inreligionization. This model is built upon Udayana's samvāda rules of engagement as well as the literature on hermeneutical thought which is not reviewed here for the sake of brevity.

The "dialogue of traditions"[65] can be said to have five stages, which when completed successfully would have accomplished the vision of inreligionization. "Incommensurability of traditions" can be seen as stage one and as the starting point. At this beginning point, the Christian tradition that is entering into

an engagement with another religious tradition recognises that at the point of beginning, the "other" tradition is very different from one's own, to an extent, one is even unable to understand it at first blush. This incommensurable starting point is important as it protects the other from being subsumed by the Christian tradition and re-invented in its own image.

The second stage consists of "Imagination of the Other" and here the Christian makes a dedicated effort to learn the other's tradition. He learns it so well that the other tradition becomes like a "second mother tongue." The third stage "Inhabitation of Tradition" builds on the second, and now not only gets to "know and learn" about the other but also takes a further step and participates in the other's tradition. This enables the Christian to truly and empathetically walk in the other's shoes and makes the other's tradition as their own. It is only after this level of engagement that one is able to exercise "Interrogation" and critically engage with the other. During this stage, one has earned the right to ask the tough questions, discern similarities and differences between traditions and even pass judgement over traditions in a comparative sense. Finally, this process culminates in the "Integration of traditions" where a new tradition is born. This new tradition sublates both the Christian and the other traditions and births a new flavour that entails both. This newly birthed tradition can be called their very own by both Christians and the other with whom this process of "dialogue of traditions" engagement has happened leading to inreligionization.

Here is a model of dialogue and engagement that is homegrown in the Hindu world and gives clear instructions on how different religious traditions should engage with one another. If the Christian missionaries were to follow the samvāda model of dialogue, I believe that not only can the challenges and problems that have been raised in the history of missions in India be avoided, but without compromising on our beliefs, Christians can meaningfully engage with Hindus. **IJFM**

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Endnotes

[1] This paper was presented at the Ralph D. Winter Memorial Lectureship (October 2023, Pasadena, CA) and specifically was a response to Kang-San Tan's proposal of the inreligionization model.

[2] Timothy J. Gorringe, *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 199.

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[5] Pedro Arrupe, "Letter to the Whole Society on Inculturation," in *Aixala* (ed.), Vol. 3 (1978), 172.

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[7] Stephen B. Bevans and Katalina Tahaafe-Williams (eds.), *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2012), 9.

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[9] Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology,* 4.

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[12] Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India, From Beginnings to the Present*, eds. Henry and Owen Chadwick, Oxford History Of The Christian Church (series), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 107.

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[14] Frykenberg, 99.

[15] Frykenberg, 99.

[16] Susan Visvanathan, "The Legends of St. Thomas in Kerala," *India International Centre Quarterly* 22, no. 2/3 (1995): 29.

[17] Ladislas Michel Zaleski, *The Apostle St Thomas in India* (Mangalore: Codialbail Press, 1912).

[18] Visvanathan, "The Legends of St. Thomas in Kerala," 30.

[19] Frykenberg, *Christianity in India,* 108.

[20] Visvanathan, "The Legends of St. Thomas in Kerala," 32.

[21] Frykenberg, *Christianity in India,* 110.

[22] Frykenberg, 117.

[23] Frykenberg, 117.

[24] Frykenberg, 118.

[25] *Cathay and the Way Thither: Being a Collection of Medieval Notices of China,* Vol. 3, trans. and ed. Sir Henry Yule, 1st ed. (Oxford: Hakluyt Society, 1866), 64; (See also the newer edition, London: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[26] Yule, *Cathay and the Way Thither,* 64.

[27] Frykenberg, *Christianity in India,* 118.

[28] Frykenberg, 127.

[29] Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to AD 1707* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 37–38, https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511520556.

[30] Frykenberg, *Christianity in India,* 129.

[31] Frykenberg, 137–38.

[32] Frykenberg, 138.

[33] Frykenberg, 138.

[34] Neill, *A History of Christianity in India,* 239.

[35] Neill, 240.

[36] Sarah Claerhout and Jakob De Roover, "The Question of Conversion in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 28 (2005): 3048-055. 3051.

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[42] Frykenberg, *Christianity in India,* 139.

[43] Frykenberg, 139.

[44] Frykenberg, 140.

[45] Frykenberg, 147.

[46] Claerhout and De Roover, "The Question of Conversion in India," *Economic and Political Weekly* 40, no. 28, 3050.

[47] Claerhout and De Roover, 3050.

[48] Frykenberg, *Christianity in India,* 148.

[49] Frykenberg, 148.

[50] Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India 1707–1858* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 3.

[51] Meg Greene, *Mother Teresa: A Biography* (London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 18.

[52] Bob Robinson, *Christians Meeting Hindus: An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2004), 2; K. P. Kesava Menon, *Christianity in India,* eds. A. C. Perumalil and E. R. Hambye (Allepey: Prakam, 1972).

[53] George Chemparathy, *An Indian Rational Theology: Introduction to Udayana's Nyāyakusumāñjali* (Vienna, 1972), 25.

[54] George V Karuvelil, "Absolutism to Ultimacy: Rhetoric and Reality of Religious Pluralism," *Theological Studies,* Vol. 73 (2012): 62.

[55] Joy Laine, "Udayana's refutation of the Buddhist thesis of momentariness in the Atmatattvaviveka," *Journal of Indian Philosophy,* Vol. 26 (1998): 51–52.

[56] Chemparathy, *An Indian Rational Theology,* 27.

[57] Gavin Flood, *The Ascetic Self: Subjectivity, Memory and Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 65.

[58] Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, Laurie L. Patton and Kala Acharya, "Hinduism with Others : Interlogue," in John Stratton Hawley and Vasudha Narayanan (eds.), *The Life of Hinduism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

[59] Daya Krishna, "Samvada, a Dialogue between Two Philosophical Traditions" (Delhi: Indian Council of Philosophical Research in association with Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 1983), xi.

[60] John Clayton, *Religions, Reasons and Gods: Essays in Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[61] Based upon a 15th century Tibetan Buddhist account, King gives a more detailed structure of the *vāda*-tradition with eight basic steps in *Richard King, Indian Philosophy: An Introduction to Hindu and Buddhist Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 134–35.

[62] John Clayton, *Religions, Reasons and Gods,* 38–39.

[63] Gavin Flood, *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), 57.

[64] Clayton (pp. 44–47) offers three sources of the *vāda*-tradition: first, it was developed within the Brahmanical circles, arising from "the question-and-answer methods of instruction in the meaning of Vedic ritual texts" (J. C. Heesterman, "On the Origins of the Nāstika," *WZKSO* 12–13 (1968–69): 171–185; and Esther A. Solomon, *Indian Dialectics: Methods of Philosophical Discussion,* Research Series/ Sheth B. J. Institute of Learning and Research (Ahmedabad, Gujarat: Gujarat Vidya Sabha, 1978), 21ff.). Secondly, it was developed from ancient methods for resolving legal disputes and medical practitioners' methods for agreeing to a diagnosis/treatment (45) and, finally, in philosophical dialectic, independent of Brahmanic circles, within Jaina and Buddhist groups "according to their own distinctive procedures and categories which eventually fed into the mainstream tradition of *vāda*" (47). Clayton, *Religions, Reasons and Gods,* 44–47.

[65] Brainerd Prince, *The Integral Philosophy of Aurobindo: Hermeneutics and the Study of Religion,* Hindu Studies Series (Oxford: Routledge, 2017).