

# Early References of the Existence of Christianity in Rajasthan

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## Abstract

The present work is an effort to study the diverse facts about Christianity in historical perspective with factual and informative sense. This is also a first effort to touch and cover this subject in Main Stream Study of Religious in Rajasthan.

### (I) Sir Thomas Roe

Sir Thomas Roe, the ambassador from King James I of England, arrived at Jahangir's court in 1615.<sup>1</sup> At that time Jahangir was in Ajmer.<sup>2</sup> Sir Thomas Roe, the ambassador, had in his entourage a chaplain called Edward Terry. It does not seem that Terry made any special effort to evangelise anyone at the Moghal Court or in the towns where he stayed.<sup>3</sup> Sir Thomas Roe and Fr. Corsi, the Jesuit attached to Jahangir's court at this time, supported opposing interest in politics and religion; they appear on the whole to have maintained good mutual relations creditable to them both. At an early stage of their acquaintance Fr. Corsi suggested to Roe that they should show mutual tolerance to each other's form of faith, and that they should avoid injuring the missionary efforts of the Jesuits by exposing their difference in the face of non-Christians. Roe seems to have accepted this attitude.<sup>4</sup> According to available sources we can say that Sir Thomas Roe was the first Christian who visited Rajasthan.

## (II) Mirza Zu'lquarnain

Mirza Zu'lquarnain a converted Roman Catholic, held high office under Jahangir and Shahjahan. At first he was in charge of the salt works at *Sambhar*. He had more than 200 Christians in his service and constantly kept Jesuit Fathers with him as resident chaplains. When he was stationed at Sambhar, there were at least two or three hundred Christians there. Around 1621 he was appointed the Faujdar of that Sarkar (Sambhar). His charity was conducted on a sumptuous scale. On the time of a famine about 1620, he supported numbers of starving people. He not only helped the Jesuits in every possible way, but he also conformed very completely to the catholic ideal of a devout life.<sup>5</sup>

## (III) Jahangir and Franciscan Mission in Sambhar

In 1623 two Franciscans reached *Sambhar* where, Jahangir was staying at that time. They were received in audience by the emperor, and a Jesuit Father was asked to act as interpreter. For the occasion, one of the Franciscans had prepared a speech in Portuguese, which Fr- De-Castro translated into Persian. The speech consisted of a violent denunciation of Mohammed as a false prophet and an invitation to the emperor to embrace Christianity if he wanted to save his soul. Naturally the speech excited the anger of the Muslims at the court. It was only the intervention of the emperor that saved the friars. A few weeks later another meeting was arranged as a farewell visit, when the Franciscan, after denouncing Mohammed, once again invited the emperor to become a Christian. Needless to say, these violent denunciation and direct appeals did not produce any special fruit.<sup>6</sup>

#### (IV) Nicholas Mannucci

In 1650 Nicholas Mannucci, historian and gun maker for prince Dara Shikoh, left the Prince when his fortunes deteriorated and joined Mirza Raja Jaisingh at *Amber* (former capital of Jaipur State in Rajasthan). Apparently he made some of his guns in Jaigarh Fort. Though nothing much is known about his religion and religious practice, one may presume that Manucci was an Italian Catholic.<sup>7</sup>

#### (V) Sawai Jaisingh and Jesuits

Sawai Jaisingh's unique characteristic was that he was genuinely interested in science and more especially in astronomy. For his knowledge he had relied entirely on his Brahman experts and those Muslim scholars whom he met at the Emperor's Court. He had already acquired some more rare books, brought from abroad and even maps, globes and scientific instruments. Through his contacts with Surat, he heard of the Jesuits of Portugal, some of whom were very learned and knowledgeable in the very subjects in which he was interested. The Jesuits heard of his need and did not want to neglect the possibility of evangelising a new mission and so started negotiations. Fr. Emmanuel de Figueredo, the superior of the Mogor (Moghal) mission was approached by messengers from Jaisingh. The Raja begged that a mission be sent immediately. He added that he expected experts on astronomy bringing with them the latest books on his favourite subjects by experts from Europe. He had a keen desire to know of the latest achievement of European astronomers. Fr. Figueredo considered the matter so important that he himself went to Portugal and returned to Goa near the end of 1728 with the latest edition of La Hir's famous Astronomical Tables and other rare books. With him came a medical man who was also an expert in astronomy. This man Pedro D' silva (also known as Padre D'silva, Don Xavier, Akalmand Khan and by other names) was to be a leading figure in the future of Jaipur Mission. The Raja and his two "Phirangi" friends were soon in deep discussion about the merits of each other's scientific achievements. Fr. Figueredo was of course mainly concerned about preaching Christ and was somewhat disconcerted at the lack of such opportunity. The Raja himself was very open and indeed generous, where the religion of his guests was concerned, but no one else seemed interested. When the padres presented

him with the picture of the Madonna and child, the Raja, with full reverence touched it with forehead and handed it over to the servants with instructions of safety and regard for the same. Later, Figurredo was disillusioned and left, D'silva decided to stay on with him were some other Jesuits. The Raja was not fully satisfied with the material he had received from Figurredo and when he heard from D'silva of two Jesuits, Pons and Boudier then living in Chandranagar in south. Who were working on the same line, he at once invited them. As it happened the mission in Chandranagar was undergoing considerable difficulty, so they were glad to see what they could do in Jaipur, where the Raja had the reputation of treating Christians well. But their mission was a failure. All that seemed to have happened is that they had a long argument with the Raja as to how much the ancient Indian astronomers were influenced by Greek ones. The Raja still unsatisfied wrote to Rome seeking further mission.

This time Rome sent two Bavarian Fathers, Stroble and Gabelsperger. After great difficulties and a journey of three years they arrived in Jaipur on the 4th of March 1740. Stroble presented the Raja with a wonderful atlas bound in leather, printed at Nuremberg in 1725. The Raja of course could not understand the language but a local scribe was made to take notes of relevant passages. This he did including one which indicates the country of origin of the Bavarian. The atlas with the piece of paper and also the telescope, books printed in 1551 and 1557 and many others and the painting mentioned are preserved in the Maharaja Sawai Mansingh-II museum at the City Palace. The Raja was very concerned about the welfare of his guests and arranged for special furniture to be made and food to be provided for them. The Raja had provided a special room in the palace for their worship. The Raja himself attended Christmas Mass with all reverence and always left a substantial gift on the altar. He provided the fathers with Rs. 5 per day for their personal expenses and Rs. 5 a week for church expenses quite a sum in those days. Despite the Raja's care and concerns Gabelsperger died in 1741 and was buried in Agra. Stroble was now lonely though he continued his work for the Raja. D'silva kept his occasional company. But he seems to have found other company preferable. By now through his medical work he had become extremely popular not just with the Raja but also

with his citizens. He was given a Jagir and assumed the title and status of a Jagirdar. Even up to 1939 his descendent Hakim Justin, Joakim D'silva is mentioned as such in the courts records. D'silva had opted for the Indian way of life. His clothes, his food, and his habits even his language become almost completely Indian. For the local people he was a doctor, hero, friend and advisor. The other Jesuits could not cope with the situation.

De'silva never abandoned his faith. By his influence with the Raja, he was able to help in the preservation of the Christian buildings in Agra when they would otherwise have been destroyed. After the death of Jaisingh, Stroble returned to Delhi. In 1743, Sawai Jaisingh passed away and to quote Tod, "Three of his wives and several concubines ascended the funeral pyre, on which science expired with him." This was also the beginning of the end of the first Jesuit Mission in Jaipur.<sup>8</sup>

#### **(VI) The Journey of Bishop Reginald Heber in Rajputana**

Reginald Heber is remembered now mainly as missionary bishop of Evangelical tendencies.<sup>9</sup> Heber's lifetime thus coincided with the beginning of a new phase of missionary activity in India one that was carried on more intensively and on a wider scale than ever before.<sup>10</sup> After a visit to Oxford in 1818, he began developing an active interest in missionary work, as was evinced by the *Sermons* he preached on behalf of the Bible Society, the S.P.C.K.<sup>(A)</sup> and especially the C.M.S.<sup>(B)</sup>. He used to tell his wife that he felt attracted to missionary work himself especially in India, a country which, as she wrote, "had a romantic charm in his mind."<sup>11</sup> In the various sermons and addresses which Heber gave before his departure for India from England he achieved the unusual feat of pleasing men of the most diverse opinion as a Bishop of Calcutta, did not at first give such much satisfaction to High Churchmen, but his reply to the Bishop of Bristol's valedictory address at a meeting of the SPCK in which he paid graceful tribute to it's work in south India and promised to do what he could to further it, was very well received, Archbishop Manners-sutton commenting "It was Perfect". On the other hand his appointment was warmly welcomed by the CMS and after his last sermon at Lincoln's Inn (of which he was the official preacher) a leading Methodist could

only exclaim "Thank God for that man". It was therefore with some reason that he could tell Charlotte Dod that he was "on good terms with and well thought of both by the Evangelicals and High Churchmen".<sup>12</sup>

Heber arrived in Bengal in October 1823, by which time Lord Hastings had been succeeded as Governor-General by Lord Amherst.<sup>13</sup> Heber spent the eight months after his arrival from October 1823 to June 1824 in Calcutta dealing with the business which had accumulated since the death of Middleton over a year before.<sup>14</sup> Heber left Calcutta for his visitation of northern India on 15 June 1824.<sup>15</sup> The main interest of Heber's tour has always been his impression of the land and the people, but as a professional duty, it was essentially a visitation of the Anglican Christian Communities which had by then come into existence in the important centres of northern India Civilian and Military; British, Eurasian and Indians; in East India Company and in the Princely States. Heber tried whenever possible to be in some such centre on a Sunday, so that he would be able to conduct services and to preach; other functions which he often performed were the consecration of churches and burial grounds, confirmation and the inspection of Christian schools.<sup>16</sup>

On January 17, 1825 Bishop Heber started his journey to Rajputana from Bharatpur.<sup>17</sup>

A- S.P.C.K: Society for Promotion of Christian Knowledge

B- C.M.S: Church Missionary Society

...ve days.<sup>18</sup> Heber proceeded through Ajmer ...ed Chittorgarh<sup>20</sup> and on March 6 he entered the State of Banswara.<sup>21</sup> Heber had stayed in Rajputana near about two months. In his narrative he has written about Jaipur, Nasirabad, Bharatpur, Udaipur, Banswara etc. He has also narrated about Bhil, Chumar, Charan and Bhat castes of Rajasthan but he has not written anything on his vision about Christianity in Rajputana.

## Source

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