

The Basel Mission in India: Social, Economic, and Religious Entanglements with the Swiss-German World

Aim and motivation:

The Basel Evangelical Mission was established in 1815 and later expanded to the southwestern region of India in 1834. Over the years, it developed an extensive network of churches, schools, factories, and medical centres to support its evangelical endeavours. The Mission primarily attracted marginalized communities, who made up a significant portion of India's Protestant population. The upcoming conference aims to bring together scholars from India, Germany, and Switzerland to explore the social, religious, and economic implications of the Basel Mission's work in India. The conference has several key objectives: (a) to facilitate the gathering of dispersed researchers in one location for the purpose of sharing ideas and information regarding the Basel Mission's activities, (b) to encourage researchers working with German, Kannada, Tulu, and Malayalam language archives to consider collaborative opportunities, and (c) to examine the interconnected nature of economic, educational, entrepreneurial, and theological processes in all three countries. Many of the missionaries trained at the Basel Mission House belonged to the present-day southern German state of Baden-Württemberg. These missionaries utilised their specialized training and local knowledge of the societies and cultures they worked in, resulting in the exchange of products, materials, ideas, doctrines, and beliefs between diverse cultures in India, Africa, and Europe.

The conference seeks to investigate how the encounter between European missionaries and socially disadvantaged individuals led to significant social, cultural, and economic transformations for both groups. Through debates and discussions, the conference aims to deepen our understanding of global interconnectedness and Switzerland's role in colonial entanglements. The conference will provide an interdisciplinary platform for historians, anthropologists, missiologists, Indologists, and scholars of religious, literary, and gender studies to interact, debate, and share knowledge across national boundaries. Another objective is to enhance South Asian Studies in Switzerland. Current historical debates in Switzerland revolve around the country's direct or indirect involvement in colonization. Examining the Basel Mission in India will contribute to these discussions by critically examining the relationships between missionary forces and colonial powers. The cultural exchange between India, Germany, and Switzerland fostered multifaceted social, economic, religious, and commercial interactions that cannot be simplified as 'imperial versus local', 'modern versus traditional', or 'western versus eastern'. The Basel missionaries, for example, made significant contributions to Indological research in Europe and utilized the knowledge of their expertise to establish successful businesses to support their mission work and the converts. This conference seeks to create a platform for holistic and interdisciplinary dialogue to construct a meaningful but critical narrative of the Basel Mission's history and its involvement in colonial contexts. It also emphasizes the importance of incorporating local perspectives and employing local archives and languages in discussions of colonial Switzerland, ensuring that these historical debates are not limited to a European perspective. By inviting Basel Mission scholars from India to engage in dialogue with European researchers, the conference also aims to explore the local dynamics of mission work from non-European perspectives.

The conference is being organised in cooperation with Mission-21 (formerly the Basel Mission) on the premises of the Basel Mission house. By doing so, the conference's aim is to not only closely understand the functioning of the mission work but to also have a deeper understanding of its archival sources. The Mission-21 is also very keen to continue its critical reflections on its colonial past and to share information about their current undertakings. Additionally, the Mission 21 encourages the exchange of knowledge between the public and the scholarly community, which will be helpful in disseminating our research findings for a broader audience.

Conference Program

The Basel Mission in India: Social, Economic, and Religious Entanglements with the Swiss-German World

23-25 November 2023

Mission 21, Missionstrasse 21

4009 Basel, Switzerland

**Room: Alpha & My (located in the restaurant building next to the Mission House/Hotel
Odelya on the first floor)**

**For more information, contact:
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Day 1 : 23 November 2023

11.00-11.30 : Introduction by Mukesh, Amal and Ella

Welcome Address: Magdalena Zimmermann, Deputy Director Mission 21.

11.30-13.00 : **Keynote speech by Felicity Jensz (University of Münster)**

13.00-14.30 : Lunch break

14.30-16.00 : **Panel 1 : Gender and the Basel Missionaries in India**

Chair: Judith Becker (Humboldt University)

Discussant: Elena Valdameri (ETH Zurich)

Parinitha Shetty (Mangalore University) : Translating Matriliney through the Interpretative Structures of Colonial/Missionary Patriarchy

Sandra Langhop (University of Oldenburg) : On Indigenous Women Becoming Christian – Reflections on the Bible women of the Basel Women's Mission in 19th/20th century India

16.00-16.30 : Coffee Break

16.30-18.00 : **Panel 2 : The Basel Mission and its Impact on Children**

Chair: Felicity Jensz (University of Münster)

Discussant: Nithin Donald (University of Lucerne)

Divya Kannan (Shiv Nadar University): Constructing 'Model' Christians: Basel Mission Orphanages in Colonial South India

~~Dagmar Konrad (University of Basel) : "Western Mothers, Eastern Nannies and the Children in-between"~~

18.00-18.30 : Presentation by **Andrea Rhyn (Archivist, Mission 21)- *(New) India records of the Basel Mission Archives - new research perspectives and possibilities***

Day 2 : 24 November 2023

09.00-10.30 : **Panel 3 : Ecology and Agriculture for the Basel Missionaries**

Chair: Amal Shahid (University of Lausanne)

Discussant: Ernest Sewordor (University of Basel)

Mukesh Kumar (ETH Zurich): Gardening the Community: The Basel Mission,

Household Economy and Vegetable Gardens in Germany and India, c.
1800-1950

Ella Müller (ETH Zurich): Rudolf Friedrich Hohenacker and Johann Friedrich
Metz: A Mission Collecting Business

10.30-11.00 : Coffee Break

11.00-12.30 : **Panel 4 : The Basel Mission Industries and the Indian Economy**

Chair: Ella Müller (ETH Zurich)

Discussant: Nikolay Kamenov (CeMIS, Göttingen University)

Chinju KR (Calicut University): A Photographic Perspective on Recasting the
Caste Individuals, An Exploration of Basel Mission's Industries in Malabar
(ONLINE)

Amal Shahid (University of Lausanne): The Basel Mission Weaving
Establishment in Malabar: Work Discipline and Resistance

12.30-14.00 : Lunch Break

14.00-15.30 : **Panel 5 : Theology, Religion and the Basel Mission**

Chair: Mukesh Kumar (ETH Zurich)

Discussant: Bernhard Schür (University of Lausanne)

Judith Becker (Humboldt University) : Theology and Religious Practice in the
Basel Mission. Interactions and Interdependencies between India, Switzerland
and Germany, 1834 – c. 1860

Philippe Bornet (University of Lausanne): The Kanarese Evangelical Mission
in the Interwar Years (1918-1928): A Terrain for Social, Cultural and
Religious Exchanges?

15.30-16.00 : Coffee Break

16.00-18.00 : **Movie Screening by Prashant Pandit followed by general discussion**

Title: The Word and the Teacher/ Das Wort und der Lehrer

80 minutes (Kannada, English, German)

Moderator for Discussion: Parinitha Shetty (Mangalore University)

19.00 onwards: Conference Dinner

Day 3 : 25 November 2023

10.00-11.30 : **Panel 6 : The Practice of studying the Basel Mission**

Chair: Claudia Buess (in charge of public learning events and outreach, Mission 21)

Discussant: Harald Fischer-Tiné (ETH Zurich)

Jaiprakash Raghaviah (Calicut University): Social Engineering in the Praxis of Basel Mission.

Paul Jenkins (Former Archivist, Mission-21): A Lingayat Initiative, the Basel Mission in Northern Karnataka 1839-1840, and the potential for multilateral re-assessments of regional social history buried in the documentation of one Germanophone mission archive.

11.30-12.00 : Closing remarks

12.00-13.00 : Lunch Break

13.00 onwards :

City Tour (optional): by **Christian Weber and Claudia Buess (Mission 21)**

Mission and Colonialism in Basel: Various places in Basel recall the city's special mission history and its international involvement with colonialism. The guided tour makes the colonial history of the city visible and its points of contact with the Basel Mission. Which entanglements of the past continue to have an effect today?