



Unheard Voices: A Tranquebarian Stroll.

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The Portuguese expeditioner Vasco da Gama (1469–1524) arrived in Kōzhikōde (Calicut, 11°25'N, 75°77'E) from Lisbon in 1498 during the reign of Nēdiyirūppū Swarōpam Mānava Vikraman Sāmōtīri¹, planting the seeds for European trade in the Indian subcontinent. Consequently, the early years of the 17th century were busy for Europeans. Britain launched the English East-India Company (EEIC) in AD 1600 to explore India, seeking pepper and cardamom. The Netherlands established the Verenigde Nederlandsche Geocroyeerde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) for a similar purpose in 1602. Staggering profits made by the EEIC and VOC enticed Christian IV (1577–1648), ruler of the Denmark–Norway Kingdom (DNK) to institute the Danish East-India Company (Ostindisk Kompagni, OK) in 1616 that operated, albeit with some spells of discontinuity, until the mid-19th century. Admiral Ove Gjedde (also, Giedde, Figure 1), representing Christian IV, arrived in Faraṅgampādi, a sleepy coastal village in India (11°1'N, 79°51'E) in 1620 (ref. 2). None of these European trade missions then knew that their arrival would ignite a massive fire of geopolitical changes in the subcontinent in the following years³.

Faraṅgampādi (Tranquebar, Trankebar), presently in Nāgapattinam (Nāgapattam) district, Tamil Nadu, India, lies on the Coromandel Coast, about 25 km south of Kāvēri-p-pūm-pattinam (Pūmpūhār, puhar = estuary), a famous port during the times of the *Çōlā*-s (3rd–13th centuries AD with

vast interregna)^{4–7} and about 30 km north of Nāgapattinam town (10°77'N, 79°83'E). A 14th-century stone inscription retrieved in Faraṅgampādi identifies this town by a Sanskrit–Tamil name Śaḍāṅganpādi (Śaḍāṅgan – six-armed, Sanskrit; pādi – a residential locality, Tamil). A popular, but less-convincing, explanation of Faraṅgampādi is ‘singing waves’: taraṅgā (Sanskrit, Sinhālā) – waves, ‘pādi’ (Tamil) – that sing. The interpretation of ‘pādi’ to mean singing is incorrect, because it evolves from padai-vēdū, meaning an ‘army camp’. No notable reference to Faraṅgampādi exists in either ancient or medieval Tamil literary works, although many in the Sangam period (200 BC–AD 200) speak of Pōrayār^{5,6} (11°02'N, 79°83'E), a little south of Faraṅgampādi.

P. S. Ramanujam (PSR), the author of this book, is an emeritus professor of photonics at the Danmarks Tekniske Universitet, Lyngby, Denmark. Further to making valuable contributions to photonics, he has variously written on Faraṅgampādi and the science promoted by Scandinavians there. *Videnskab, oplysning og historie i Dansk Ostindien* (Syddansk Universitetsforlag, 2020) referring to Danes in Faraṅgampādi is yet another volume by him, co-written with Lise Groesmeyer and Niklas Jensen.

This book sparkles with high-quality printing and pleasing layout. Superb photographs of the present-day Faraṅgampādi made

by PSR and elegantly restored illustrations extracted from past documents of Faraṅgampādi enhance its quality. Fourteen elegantly captioned chapters (pp. 21–354) form this book: from the arrival of Roelant Crappé – a Dutch sailor and a director of OK in Kāraikkāl (10°92'N, 79°83'E), 15 km south of Faraṅgampādi, after his Cutter *Øresund* was annihilated by the Portuguese commander Andre Botelho da Costa in 1619, to the end of Danish interests in India in 1845. The book describes Faraṅgampādi’s chequered history lucidly. PSR literally walks us – his readers – through the streets of Faraṅgampādi and its neighbourhood, maintaining the tempo of the narrative until the end. He narrates historical details, incidents and explanations of places simply and gracefully, supplementing them with stories of people associated with the OK – either directly or indirectly. While talking of Henning Munch Engelhart, a pastor in the Zion Church (ZC) in Faraṅgampādi, PSR alludes to Engelhart’s thesis entitled *Tanker om Oplysnings Udbredelse blandt Indianerne* (1790), which captures his thoughts on the sociology of Indians⁸. Engelhart urged that Indians need to be equipped with the knowledge to achieve clarity, eschewing despotism and superstition. His use of oplysning meaning ‘clarity’, ‘enlightenment’ impresses. Engelhart argued that the saving measure was to create a new construct that will ensure equality between the Indians and Europeans living in India: Indians were to become fully aware of human rights, and thus, aware of their own rights. Engelhart argued in favour of five knowledge tenets and that their impartment to Indians was critical. Two of them – as relevant to readers of this journal – were to enable Indians with a factual narrative of Indian history and to teach skills in Western science, especially astronomy, mathematics and natural history. Although a faint thread promoting Protestantism runs throughout *Tanker om Oplysnings Udbredelse*, the silver lining is that this thesis powerfully supports equipping Indians with knowledge, and thus empowering them to seek the ‘truth’. Such a thinking was conspicuously absent among the British in India, even in later decades. The English-Education Act–1835, marshalled by Thomas Babington Macaulay and William Bentinck, is one example of an illusory do-good activity in British India, discreetly aiming at ‘developing’ Indians to garner a body of clerks to serve the British rather than total empowerment.



Figure 1. Ove Gjedde (copper engraving) by Albert Haelwegh (1620–1673, royal engraver, Copenhagen). (Source: <https://danmarkshistorien-dk.translate.google/leksikonog-kilder/vis/materiale/grundlaeggelsen-af-kolonien-tranquebar-1620-1630/>; accessed on 17 December 2021).

Ove Gjedde arrived in Faraṅgampādi in 1620, after vain bids to build a fort in Kandy (7°17'N, 80°39'E) in Ceylon. Following a treaty signed with Ragūnāthā Nāyakā (r. 1600–1634) in Nāgapattinam in November 1620, Gjedde was permitted to build Fort Dansborg (FD, Festningen Dannisborg) in Faraṅgampādi in a 6 × 3 square mile (c. 10 × 5 km²) area⁹ (see an impressive two-page map of Faraṅgampādi, 1733, by Gregers Daa Trelund of the Danish Military Engineers pp. 24–25). With the building of FD, seeds for a Danish settlement in Faraṅgampādi were sown, later spreading to the Nicobar Islands and parts of Bengal (Frederiksnagore, now Serampore). Donald Ferguson¹⁰, a British chronicler of the late 19th century mentions (p. 625 of this book):

‘The captain, Rodant Crape (Roelant Crappé), to effect a landing, is said to have wrecked his ship off Tranquebar, at the expense, however, of his crew, who were all murdered. He then ... obtained Tranquebar for the Danish Company, with land around five miles long and three miles broad. A fort was built, and in 1624 Tranquebar became the property of the King of Denmark, to whom the Company owed money.’

On pp. 39–53 of the book, brief details from the diary maintained by Jón Ólafsson, who came to Faraṅgampādi from Iceland, written in 1624–1625, are available. Ólafsson’s diary is an interesting document because it covers details of life and culture in Faraṅgampādi¹¹, although we know that much of it is either exaggerated or distorted due to poor understanding. What is noteworthy, nevertheless, is that an Icelander from a landscape that generally experiences sub-zero temperatures dared to come to a humid, tropical land in the 17th century, lived for two years and minuted what he saw and experienced.

An elegant map of the 1800s-Faraṅgampādi by Peter Anker (1744–1832), DNK Governor-General (1786–1808), is available on p. 69 of this book. Anker was not only a popular administrator but a skilful artist as well, who made beautiful drawings of various Indian *objets d’art* and portraits, presently displayed in the Oslo University Museum, Norway. An impressive portrait of one Suppremania Setti (read as Sūbramaṅya Çetty) by Anker is available on p. 244 of this book. Suppremania was employed by Thomas Christian Walter – a

Danish privy councillor – as his interpreter (dūbāś, ḍvi-bāśi). Suppremania’s portrait reminded me of Ānanda Ranga (1709–1761), who was Joseph-François Dupleix’s dūbāś in Pōndiçéry. Reproductions of Anker’s artworks of Kūmbakōnam and Fanjavûr temples and Mahābalipūram relics are available at <https://www.khm.uio.no/forskning/samlin-gene/etnografisk/artikler/peter-ankers-kunstsamlinger-og-sor-india.html>.

Western astronomy was enthusiastically pursued in southern India as early as the 17th century. Bordeaux-born Jesuit Jean Richaud (1633–1690) observed the comet ‘C/1698 X1’ in Pōndiçéry (11°55'N, 79°49'E) in December 1689 (ref. 12). A transit of Venus occurred on 3 June 1769, attracting the attention of several stargazers throughout the world, for example, James Cook witnessed this event in the *Endeavour* anchored in Tahiti (17°40'S, 149°25'W)¹³. In the chapter ‘A forgotten astronomer – a forgotten blessed soul’ (pp. 127–150), PSR speaks of Engelhart’s insightful astronomical observations. Before arriving in Faraṅgampādi, Engelhart had trained in astronomy with the Royal Astronomer Thomas Bugge (1740–1815) in Copenhagen. He established an observatory in ZC’s tower (ZCO), the highest point in coastal Faraṅgampādi¹⁴. A transit instrument (TI) mounted on the east–westerly axis enabled rotation along a north–southerly axis and a wall-mounted astronomical clock was present in ZCO (pp. 132–134). PSR remarks that the TI used by Engelhart must have been similar to the one presently displayed in Kroppedal Museum, Taastrup, Denmark (figure 7.3, p. 136). Details of ZCO, extracted from the *Tranquebarske Dokumenter* (1786–1790) and reproduced in this book (pp. 134–137), will benefit those interested in the 18th-century astronomy in India. Engelhart determined the latitude and longitude of Faraṅgampādi, although the credit for this determination was erroneously attributed to Michael Topping (1747–1796, Madras Astronomer) by his successor John Goldingham (1767–1849)¹⁵. After comparing the results with predicted times of eclipses of Jupiter’s satellites in Greenwich (51°48'N, 0°0'E), Engelhart determined that the ‘time’ in Faraṅgampādi was in advance of Greenwich by 5 h 18 min 58 sec, impressively close to the present determination. He was a key force in founding det Tranquebarske Selskab (the Tranquebarian Society, TS) on 15 October 1788, which aimed at (p. 131):

‘...improving scientific methods and information for the betterment of Denmark and the local society in India and further improving European knowledge about India.’

TS was the third oldest of learned European societies east of the Cape of Good Hope: the other two were the Koninklijk Bataviaasch Genootschap van Kunsten en Wetenschappen established by Jacob Cornelis Matthieu Radermacher in Jakarta in 1778 and the Asiatic(k) Society by William Jones in Calcutta in 1784 (ref. 16).

Christoph Samuel John (1747–1813), a German by birth and ordained as a priest in Copenhagen, Denmark, spent nearly four decades in Faraṅgampādi. In 1789, John reasoned for a botanical garden with Faraṅgampādi’s administrators for raising plants from all over India and creating a space for the entertainment and education of locals¹⁶. He established a garden that housed medicinal plants from all over peninsular India and Dutch Ceylon. John was in touch with William Roxburgh in Madras by regularly sending plants for determination and description¹⁷. John believed in and advocated ‘natural theology’ (*Theologia naturalis, sive liber creaturarum*, ... AD 1488, <https://archive.org/details/ita-bnc-in2-00001588-001/page/n9/mode/2up>; accessed 6 February 2022), promulgated by the Catalan scholar Ramon Sibiuda (1385–1436), and reinforced by English naturalist John (W)Ray (1627–1705) as a means of evangelizing. John considered Nature close to his heart and argued that the Divine could be experienced through scientific exploration; in support of this theological–natural–historical perspective, he wrote *Nature*, in contrast to popular books that emphasized experiencing divinity through scriptures. With this philosophical underpinning, John sent plant and animal materials to experts within India and overseas. For example, he sent samples of *Diploknema butyracea* (previously *Bassia butyracea*, Sapotaceae) to Roxburgh in Madras for determination and description. John’s interest in sending *D. butyracea* to Roxburgh was because this chicle-yielding tree was used by Indians variously: to treat tonsillitis, rheumatism, itches, and ulcers, and to manage haemorrhages. This tree was also used to obtain çîŕr (similar to butter), fodder for cattle, and wood amenable to carpentry – an amazing multi-use plant. John was passionate about knowing more about animals than plants in and around Faraṅgampādi.

He documented his notes on animals in a professional manner. One example is his description of the long-nosed stargazer *Uranoscopus lebeckii* (Figure 2) (currently *Ichthyoscopus lebecki*; Pisces: Uranoscopiidae) in the article entitled ‘Beschreibung und Abbildung des *Uranoscopus lebeckii*’ in *der Gesellschaft Naturforschender Freunde zu Berlin* (1801, 3, 283–287). He sent several fish specimens to Marcus Eliezer Bloch, an eminent ichthyologist in Berlin, Germany, who included details of the materials sent by John in his multi-volume *Allgemeine Naturgeschichte der Fische* (1782–1795). John also shipped preserved snakes from India to Johann Reinhold Forster, a Halle zoologist–herpetologist, supplementing those dispatches with notes on snake poisons and locally used antidotes. It would be relevant to recall here the painstaking efforts of Çéngalpatû Sûndaramûrty Môhanavélû (formerly of the Presidency College, Chennai) to compile and annotate original documents archived both in several Indian and European libraries referring to the science promoted by several of the DNK (a.k.a. Halle) missionaries, including John¹⁸.

Copiously complemented with photographs of tombstones and obelisks in the Ātañkarai-Street (previously Nygade – New Street) cemetery in Farañgampādi, the chapter titled ‘the old cemetery’ (pp. 257–271) recalls the lives and works of DNK medical doctors such as Friedrich Wilhelm Rühde, Theodor Ludvig Frederich Folly and Samuel Benjamin Cnoll between 1620 and 1767. Cnoll is remembered for the *Laboratorium Chymicum* (= pharmacy) established in 1732 (ref. 19). The text referring to the general health of Indians in Farañgampādi by Rühde (*vide Classenske Litteratureselkskab*, 1831) is fascinating in its insights. As an example, I will quote

PSR’s words paraphrased from Rühde (p. 266) on German measles and malaria:

‘In temperatures ranging between 37 and 60°C, people tended to develop Rubella–German measles. After a few years, the skin [of the European settlers] became less sensitive and people suffered less. During periods of flooding, malaria became prevalent. Intermediate fevers were cured with quinine – however this did not seem to work with Indians. In the case of two Europeans treatment with quinine was not enough: Rühde cured them with strychnine.’

The above text attracted my attention for diverse reasons. Given that the foundations of immunology laid by Emil Adolf von Behring (1854–1913) through serum therapy and by Paul Ehrlich in referring to ‘specialized cells of the immune system’, happened only in the latter decades of the 19th century, Rühde’s use of the words ‘less sensitive’ struck me as prophetic, because much science has progressed in later years, foreshadowing tissue sensitivity, susceptibility, resistance and, of course, the discipline of immunology. Rühde’s comment linking flooding with the greater incidence of malaria is interesting since we know today that the mosquito, the intermediate host between humans and the pathogenic protozoan, necessarily requires water during its early development stages. The remainder of the chapter refers to Rühde’s observations on various aspects of medicine: methods used by local doctors (vaidyan-s), common diseases among children, public healthcare, daily consultations and inflammation of the intestines. PSR records Rühde’s notes on leprosy (p. 270):

‘Leprosy is a bigger problem in the colony. It was brought to the Coromandel Coast by Africans kept as slaves by the Dutch in Nagapattam (*Nāgapattinam*).’

This excerpt attracted my attention since leprosy (Hansen’s disease, causal agent: *Mycobacterium leprae*, Mycobacteriaceae) was known in India for ages as *kûstā*, recorded in ancient scriptures and medical treatises of later times²⁰. The African-bonded labour brought by the Portuguese introduced leprosy to India does not sound right. Moreover, few published articles speak of Africans in Pazhavérkādû (Pūlicāt, 13°42’N; 80°32’E), a popular port of the Coromandel Coast when the Portuguese arrived there in the 15th century^{21,22}. Thought-provoking comments on diabetes mellitus (DM) occur in p. 270.

‘That DM affects a lot of Indians. It is incurable because the locals refuse to give up vegetable diet. During later stages of the disease, people get carbuncles in the face and/or neck, when DM is lethal.’

In the 1700s, physicians knew that food habits and dietary changes would help diabetes management. By the early 1870s, Apollinaire Bouchardat²³ clarified that ‘food rationing’ was an ideal measure in managing diabetes and this explanation changed its future.

Chapter 10 entitled ‘Philology comes to town’ (pp. 217–232) consolidates the emergence of Farañgampādi as a dynamic hub of learning. For example, Christoph John was exploring local flora, fauna and the literature, while Theodor Folly was documenting the medical skills of vaidyan-s. The arrival of Rasmus Christian Rask (1787–1832) in Farañgampādi in 1823 complemented the Danish explorations of traditional Indian knowledge, wisdom, and biological wealth. Rask was a self-trained philologist who looked for the root language. His inferences were via comparison and contrasting of languages. He considered etymology a natural science and regarded encyclopaedic and grammatical connections in a language as critical links. For example, he studied the Zend–Zoroastrian language – and articulated the rules for its inflexion and grammar. He came to India to acquire and read palm-leaf manuscripts. While staying in Madras (Vépy Mission, Tranquebar Mission) along with



Figure 2. *Uranoscopus lebeckii*, illustration by Christoph John. (Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/de/c/c8/Uranoscopus_lebeckii.jpg; accessed on 22 January 2022).

Johann Rottler, Rask investigated the linguistic finesse of Tamil (figure 10.4, p. 225). The following text (p. 224) is one of several of Rask's comments on the Tamil language:

'*Tamulisk – (Tamla or Tamulah)* called High Tamil, is estimated to be the oldest and most indigenous language and is a source for other languages. It is also distinguished by a richer and more self-contained literature.'

Chapter 10 is full of amazing details (e.g. extracts from Rask's diary for August 1821) that are enchanting and also offer exciting insights into the life and culture of the Tamils in the 1800s.

DNK (Halle) missionaries Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg (1682–1719), Heinrich Plütschau (1676–1752), Gerhard König (1728–1785), and Johann Rottler (1749–1836) have been elaborately discussed by PSR. I have chosen to refrain from speaking about these men because we know substantially about them. Nonetheless, I will refer to the less-known Daniel Pulley, Thomas Christian Walter and Gowan Harrop, briefly. PSR identifies them as key players in the Danish *Faraṅgampādi*. Daniel Pulley, a half-Tamil *dwi-bāṣi*, a grandson of one Johann d'Almeida, lived in *Faraṅgampādi* in the second half of the 18th century. Born in 1740(?), he was fluent in German which earned him the position of being an assistant to Christoph John. From 1755, he taught Tamil to missionaries arriving in *Faraṅgampādi*. From 1782, when Peter Hermann Abbestée (1728–1794) was the Governor, Daniel was promoted as a 'first-level' *dwi-bāṣi*. In this role, he established cordial relations between the Danes and *Fūlajā Bhōslé*, the *Rājā* of *Fanjāvūr*. Because of Daniel's *Ūrdū* fluency, he, representing the Danes, mediated with *Lālā Sahéb*, the commander of *Hydér Alī*'s army, and prevented an attack on *Faraṅgampādi* by the army camping in *Porto Novo* near *Çidambaram*. In 1780 and 1781, Daniel served as a Danish emissary to *Hydér Alī* in *Mysore*. The role played by Daniel in the political and religious life of *Faraṅgampādi* cannot be gainsaid. His letters written in Tamil between 1782 and 1785 are archived at the *Riksarkivet*, which vouch for his influential role. A photographic reproduction of one letter written in Tamil by Daniel is available on p. 157 of this book. Daniel's other letters, rendered in English on pp. 158–185, offer clarity on troop movements and the prob-

lems faced by ordinary people during *Anglo-Mysore* wars. Daniel's letters in this book will undoubtedly be relevant to many investigators.

Unsuccessful in his forays into classical western classical music in *Copenhagen*, Thomas Christian Walter sailed to India and became a civil servant in *Faraṅgampādi*. He rose in ranks quickly as the Chief Financial Officer, second only to the Governor. Details of his probate – an informative document referring to the lives and works of a few of his more important colleagues – are available in chapter 13 entitled 'A musician and his tragic fate' (pp. 273–278).

Gowan Harrop of Dutch lineage arrived in *Faraṅgampādi* in 1774 and joined the OK. He was appointed by David Brown, Governor in *Faraṅgampādi*, as an OK representative and agent in *Porto Novo*. When *Porto Novo* was attacked by *Mysore* troops in 1780, he was captured as a hostage. At that time, Gowan transcribed his experiences (available in *det Ostindiske Governement: Kolonien Trankebar, Riksarkivet, Copenhagen*), which PSR qualifies as 'meticulous' (p. 281). On pp. 281–350, PSR provides a slightly edited, easily readable full text of Harrop's notes – another invaluable passage.

'The Journey's end' (pp. 355–360) is an engaging epilogue. Although short, this epilogue includes many striking remarks made by PSR. This chapter includes perplexing socio-cultural questions that prevail today, consequent to the impact of the Danes and other Europeans in *Faraṅgampādi*. As I read this section, new chimes of the subaltern-logic bell rang in me. PSR refers to remarks of a less-known traveller Hans Christensen Mesler in the *Faraṅgampādi-Nāgapattinam* region, recorded in the *Journal paa Reisen fra Kjøbenhavns til Trankebar 1708–1711*. The reference to Mesler's remarks will certainly stimulate future investigators, concurrently enabling them to see the sociological past of colonial *Faraṅgampādi* through a fresh pair of lenses.

One major strength of this book is the availability of plain-English texts of vital records made by various people associated with the Danish administration in *Faraṅgampādi* in the 17th–19th centuries. PSR must be thanked for providing details from official documents and personal diaries by translating them from Danish into English, and even 'translating' some from 'olde' English into modern English. A glossary of Indian terms (pp. 361–362), a bibliography of primary sources (pp. 363–372), a

list of archived materials from *Riksarkivet, Copenhagen* (pp. 373–374), notes (pp. 375–408), and an index of keywords (pp. 409–424) are user-friendly. I will readily compliment PSR for thoughtfully including a 'Notes' section that comprehensively explains every secondary, yet important, source of information. The section 'Tranquebar – a time capsule' (pp. 13–17) compactly captures milestone events in *Faraṅgampādi*'s history between 1618 and 1845; a diligent inclusion.

It will be impossible for me to analyse and discuss all details so elegantly presented by PSR in this book. I have touched on some as samples, especially those that appealed to me and those I thought would interest readers of this journal. On the whole, reading this book offered a fulfilling experience. It unveiled many dimensions that were new to me pertaining to a tiny segment of Tamil-speaking India. I am confident that reading this book will be a rich experience for other readers. The University Press of Southern Denmark deserves kudos for a splendid production. I am sure this book will be a prized inclusion in both personal and public libraries of India because it shines a bright beam of light on a European culture that subtly varied from that of the Portuguese in *Mylāpōre* (*Chennai*), the French (*Pōndiçéry* and *Karaikkāl*), the Dutch in *Pazhavērkādū* and *Çadūranga-p-pattinam* (both near *Chennai*), and the English in *Fort St. George* (*Chennai*) between the 17th and 20th centuries.

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