

## FACES OF LUTHERAN MISSIONS IN INDIA



*G. Jesudason*

### Gnanamuthu Jesudason

Born: June 11, 1872 in Kandy, Ceylon (present-day Sri Lanka).

Died: November 2, 1955 in Madras (present-day Chennai), India.

The first native Indian pastor in MELIM who represented a major shift in thinking about how Missouri Synod mission work was to be implemented.



CHRIST SHOWED GRACE AND COURAGE TO HIS FAITHFUL SERVANT Gnanamuthu Jesudason, the first native Indian pastor in MELIM. He represented a major shift in how Lutheran missionaries approached South India missions. Jesudason reached untouchable and slave castes, revolutionized what a native worker could do, and addressed socially significant issues from a native Indian perspective.

Jesudason left the London Mission Society and Salvation Army and invited MELIM to join him in ministry to the completely ignored Sambavar slave caste in Travancore in 1907, an unexplored region and mission strategy. Jesudason had a moderate education but immediately was being trained by missionaries and working as an Evangelist with a much larger role than any other native worker.

Without a seminary in India, he was instructed one-on-one while simultaneously working. Finally Jesudason took his theological examination at the 1921 General Conference of MELIM, after which the conference approved him for ordination on March 13, 1921. For the majority of his career, he faithfully served the Ganesapuram congregation.

Rev. Jesudason worked with and advocated for the Sambavar population. This had practical challenges. Because of the caste structure, most Sambavars had almost no education at all, making catechesis difficult. He therefore focused on the basics of sin and salvation in contrast to the religion of India. He further had to argue for the Sambavars and his perspective as a native pastor when the Mission Board decided to shift mission strategies, as he was concerned the Sambavars would be left behind.

Jesudason died November 2, 1955. His legacy lies in the way he laid the groundwork for training future native pastors.

Though the little mustard seed that spring from Mailadi grew to a big tree, to which the souls of the air in thousands could come, yet, the thousands of sambavars near Mailadi were not able to be comforted under its shadow for about 100 years. What was the cause? If at all there are any who would embrace Christians so easy they are those that are called by the treachery of the hindu religion “the untouchables.” If that is so, it is certain that the workers of the London Mission had not worked among the sambavars for 100 years as they ought to have. Did Christ not come to save these? Did he not shed his holy blood for them? ... The things stated above were troubling my mind. Hence I had come to a decision that I must also work among them in order to bring them to salvation.

—Gnanamuthu Jesudason

*“Nothing which I have seen in our mission except the work of Jesudason, the evangelist, has impressed me half so favorably as the work of this man.”*

—missionary  
Henry Naumann

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Gnanamuthu Jesudason and his family on the occasion of the day of his ordination. Vadasery, India, March 13, 1921.

### Gnanamuthu Jesudason

- June 11, 1872 – Born in Kandy, Sri Lanka.
- 1896 – Hired as Clerk of British Resident in Travancore, joined the London Mission Society and Salvation Army.
- 1901 – Married Christina Manonmani.
- 1906 – Left London Mission Society and Salvation Army in search of a mission to reach Sambavars.
- 1907 – Wrote to Rev. Henry Nau seeking MELIM to start mission in Travancore.
- 1908 – Partnered with Rev. Huebner to start the mission in South Travancore.
- 1908 – Began a Munschi training Rev. Gutknecht in Tamil.
- April 26, 1908 – Preached his first sermon under supervision of Rev. Gutknecht.
- November 30, 1908 – Quit job with the British Resident to work full time for the mission as Evangelist.
- May 3, 1920 – Northern District Conference inquired of the Board for Mission the process to ordain native workers like Jesudason.
- February 16–22, 1921 – General Conference, after theological examination, resolved to approve Jesudason for ordination.
- March 13, 1921 – Ordained to serve Vadasery, Jattiarkolam and Puliady congregations
- 1923 – Transferred to serve Ganesapuram.
- March 24–27, 1942 – Formal appeal on behalf of Sambavars to Mission Conference to avoid abandoning them as an exclusive mission.
- 1947 – Retired.
- November 2, 1955 – Died in Madras at the age of 83.

WHAT IS ESSENTIAL IN A HEATHEN country is a knowledge of sin and salvation. Every man by nature knows that he is a sinner and it is very easy to convince an Indian that he is a sinner in the sight of the Holy God. To India's credit I say that there are no agnostics or infidels or atheists in India; you will not find one throughout the length and the breadth of India....I have preached to large heathen crowds occasionally; when I explained to them the Law and concluded by saying that all have transgressed God's Law and are therefore sinners, miserable, damnable sinners, I invariably have observed many heads nodding approval, but when the Gospel narrative began, where the Law ended, the interest began to flag, people began to be shifty and the audience ended in a general exodus.

—Gnanamuthu Jesudason