



HERMANN GUNDERT

Historian, theologian, teacher, missionary, linguist, writer and publisher

Hermann Gundert (* February 4, 1814 in Stuttgart, † April 25, 1893 in Calw) made great contributions to the history of Kerala and to the study of the South Indian Malayalam language, as well as to the introduction of a modern school system that eventually led to the New Malayalam. Kerala is now the state with the highest literacy rate in India.

Gundert not only brought a solid classical education to Kerala, but also his experience in Tamilnadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. For his pioneering work in Malayalam and his gift of meeting all people as human beings, the day-labourer as the owner, the Christian as the Muslim and the Hindu, the native as well as the foreigner, he enjoys great recognition to this day. He listened to all, spoke to them, accepted many of them, and acted widely as a mediator.

As the first school inspector for Malabar and Kanara, Gundert influenced the construction of the modern school system from primary school to university education in an area that stretched from Kozhikode in the south to Mangalore to Hubli in the north and from Thalassery about 100 km inland to Manantavadi in the Wynad Mountains.

After returning to Germany in 1859, Gundert worked in Calw at first as an employee of the Calwer Verlag and from 1862 as its director. During this time he edited relevant historical works and commentaries on the Old and New Testaments by renowned authors or wrote them himself. For years he published five journals at the same time and wrote hundreds of articles, usually without revealing his authorship. He contributed his extensive knowledge at lectures throughout the country and at international mission conferences, and thus contributed significantly to understanding between peoples and religions.

In Thalassery, a monument was erected to him on Gundert Road in Gundert Park with a 4 m high statue on a 5 1/2 m high pedestal. In the Kerala Museum in Ernakulam, Gundert has a permanent place among the personalities who made a decisive contribution to the country. Numerous schools, colleges and universities regularly dedicate commemorative lectures to him and keep the memory alive with busts, pictures and appropriate names.

An important role in Gundert's life and work is played by his wife Julie née. Dubois, whom he had married in July 1838 in Chittoor (now Andhra Pradesh). She was not only the first missionary woman of the Basel Mission in India, but also founded the first "girls' institutes" (girls' schools with homes) in Mangalore, Thalassery and Chirakkal near Kannur. From these schools came out well-educated women instructed in the Protestant faith, who became great supporters of the newly founded congregations.

Hermann Gundert is gaining prominence in Kerala and increasingly in Germany. In 1993, on the centenary of his death, several seminars took place in Calw and the Hermann-Gundert-Conference in Stuttgart with large Indian participation. Malayalam research as well as Gundert's level of awareness gained new momentum in India and Europe.

On the occasion of the 200th anniversary. On Gundert's birthday, the Hermann-Hesse-City of Calw declared 2014 the year of Gundert. Institutions in the city organised celebrations, lectures, exhibitions, school programmes, seminars and a Gundert family day in cooperation with the Hermann-Gundert-Gesellschaft. In October 2015, the Gundert Chair was established at the University of Tübingen, where lecturers from Thunchath Ezhuthachan Malayalam University Tirur (Kerala) teach Malayalam. The guest visits are also used to process Gundert's estate at the University Library of Tübingen.

Gundert's scholarly legacy has been digitized by the Department of Indology of the Asia-Orient Institute and the University Library of Tübingen with the support of the German Research Foundation and has been available worldwide in a freely accessible portal – the Gundert Portal – since November 2018.