Over the last few centuries people in different parts of the world have been exposed to what one might call, a ‘historical consciousness’ that recognizes the important role one’s history plays in molding or shaping one’s thinking and perspective. Therefore, most people would easily recognize that one’s missiological perspectives are influenced and shaped by one’s own history. While there is such an agreed recognition of historical consciousness, there are marked differences of opinion as to how and in what specific ways one’s history affects one’s perspectives. In this essay, I am attempting to show that the missiological perspective of a convert from Hinduism to Christianity is not only shaped by his or her history, but more importantly by the manner in which he or she reads and interprets that history.

Why study the perspectives of a convert from Hinduism as such? What are the reasons for choosing the convert as the subject of study? First, a convert from Hinduism who continues to reside among the majority community of Hindus has distinctive issues and problems to deal with. For example, such converts tend to be overly preoccupied with and concerned about defining their identity primarily over against the Hindus around. Second, the experience of moving away from a strong and ancient religious tradition such as Hinduism is markedly different from that of moving from secularism or no religion in the West. Therefore, reading one’s pre-conversion history might perhaps be more complex for a convert from Hinduism than for a person who has replaced his or her secularism with Christian faith. Thirdly, a convert’s approach to Hinduism is loaded with psychological and emotional factors along with concerns of self-definition. This is illustrated well by the difference between how Christians in the contemporary Western context approach Hinduism and how Indian Christians do. Christians from the West, for example, are able to approach Hinduism with relative ease and freedom, and they often wonder why an Indian Christian is unable to do so. For an Indian Christian the relationship with Hinduism is loaded with a lot of ‘psychological baggage’, as one might call it. These are some of the reasons that propel me to examine the missiological perspectives of a convert from Hinduism to Christianity, and these will be further elaborated during the course of the overall argument of this essay. I am testing this thesis—that the way one reads one’s history shapes one’s missiological perspectives—with two cases of conversion, namely, that of Pandippedi Chenchiah and Christians in a small town in southern part of Tamilnadu.
Pandippedi Chenchiah (1886-1959)

Chenchiah converted to Christian faith when he was 15 years old. Belonging to the Brahmin caste, his family had strong intellectual tradition of its own. Chenchiah became a lawyer and eventually the Chief Justice of Pudukottai State in South India. He had a great admiration for another convert, Sadhu Sundar Singh. Chenchiah was a member of an organized group of lay theologians in Madras (now renamed Chennai), called The Rethinking Group, which made a significant contribution to Indian theological thinking through their publication, titled, *Rethinking Christianity in India*.

Some of the striking features in Chenchiah's reading and interpreting of his own history are: first, Chenchiah needed to make sense of his religious history. He identified himself with the Aryan race as far as the religious history of India was concerned. He wrote, 'At the very beginning of our national existence the Aryan faith which our ancestors brought with them to the plains of the Punjab had to exist side by side with the Dravidian religion'. It is very striking that Chenchiah identified himself with the Aryan race and not with the Dravidians. The composite culture of India, which is a result of the encounter of Aryans with the local inhabitants, is a complex phenomenon that escapes simple grouping of people in India as Aryans and Dravidians. However, the dominant view is that the Dravidians are the local inhabitants and the Aryans were the 'invaders'. Of course, the easy and clear identification of Dravidians with South Indians and Aryans with North Indians is a much later creation in the politics of Tamilnadu where Chenchiah lived. Yet, South Indians would not readily view the Aryan race as 'our ancestors', as Chenchiah does. Perhaps, Chenchiah found it natural to name himself as an Aryan, since this would correspond with his position as a Brahmin in the Indian caste structure.

Second: Chenchiah needed to make sense of his personal history. He views his experience of conversion and joining the Christian church in psychological terms. It is closely linked to the question of identity. He also detects a certain evolutionary growth in the life of a convert. He writes, 'A convert at the beginning of his Christian life feels keenly the contrast between Hinduism and Christianity. They are incompatible with each other.'

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2. According to the Indian caste system, Brahmins (priests by profession) occupy the highest position in the caste hierarchy.
3. Sadhu Sundarsingh (1889-1928) was a convert from Sikh religion and lived a life of a monk and itinerant preacher.