

RELIGION AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN NORTHERN SRI LANKA, 1796 - 1875: PROTESTANT MISSIONARY ACTIVITY AND THE HINDU RESPONSE

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General trends and characteristics

The Christian evangelical enterprises undertaken by Protestant missionary organizations from England and the New England region of the U.S.A amongst the Hindu Tamils concentrated in the Northern and Eastern provinces of the island initiated a process of social, cultural and psychological change which effected their transition from medievalism to modernity.¹ A social transformation of such magnitude was effected chiefly through the medium of modern education of which the Protestant missionaries were the pioneers in Sri Lanka. Protestant missionary enterprise was directed against indigenous religious tradition with the aim of converting the native inhabitants to Christianity but, ironically, one of its main consequences was the resuscitation of the local Hindu religious tradition which had revived soon after the establishment of British colonial rule. Closely connected to this process was the development of the Tamil language in its modernized form and the rediscovery of the Tamil literary and cultural heritage.

These developments were the result of a conjunction of circumstances and an interaction of forces the most outstanding of which are the British colonial presence, the intensity and resourcefulness of missionary enterprise, the creation of new frontiers in economic opportunity, social and spatial mobility, the receptivity, resilience and acculturation of the upper layers of Hindu society and the development of an indigenous intellectual tradition among the newly emergent intelligentsia.

In order to understand the Hindu revival in Sri Lanka and the impact of missionary enterprise on it in a historical perspective it may be useful to make a few observations on the religious and cultural revival among the Tamils in the island and the Bengalis in India. The religious and cultural renaissance among the Bengalis in British India and the Tamils in British Ceylon occurred under circumstances that were different in many ways. The renaissance in nineteenth-century Bengal was directly influenced by the orientalist policies of the government and was promoted by official policy.² Among the early Governors General Hastings (1773-1785), Wellesley (1798-1805) and the Marquess of Hastings (1813-1823) favoured the acculturation of British officials attached to the political, administrative and military establishments of British India.³ By training and in outlook they belonged to the eighteenth-century world of enlightenment and were cosmopolitan in their view of other cultures and rational in their quest for the search of those constant and universal principles which illustrate the unity of all mankind

Fort William College, Calcutta - the first western-type institution of higher learning ever established in Asia - founded by Wellesley in 1800 was the pivotal social unit of acculturation involving in the the process both British and Indians.⁴ Oriental languages

and culture were accommodated alongside the western tradition in its departments of study and research. It helped to generate among British civil servants a feeling of respect for and sympathetic understanding of Indian cultural heritage. The Indians acquired through it the intellectual equipment and the academic training which enabled them to rediscover their past and readjust its legacy to modern conditions.

The policy orientation of the British government in the island colony in this respect was altogether different. Unlike in India the Orientalist-Anglicist alternatives never came up for consideration in decisions on matters of policy and this may perhaps explain to some extent the significant differences in the processes of acculturation among the westernized elites who emerged in the two countries. The governors of British Ceylon were pronounced Anglicists with strong leanings towards evangelism and so were most of the British officials serving in the island. They were not favourably disposed towards religious and cultural revivalist movements among both Buddhists and Hindus.

A vital source of inspiration for the Bengali renaissance was the rediscovery of India's classical past through the scholarly enterprises of William Jones, H. T. Colebrooke, H. H. Wilson, James Prinsep and other eminent pioneer orientalists. It had even determined in some measure the scope and character of British orientalism. There were no comparable developments to inspire the Hindus in Sri Lanka. They had no conceptions of a Hindu classical past or of a 'Hindu golden Age'. In fact it would appear that they had no view whatsoever of a distant historical past.

Unlike in Bengal, the Hindus of Sri Lanka, concentrated in the outlying provinces of the island, had no direct encounters with the British official and mercantile classes on any intellectual or social footing so as to be exposed to western influences. Calcutta, the principal setting for the interaction of oriental tradition and western influences, was the metropolis of British India of which Bengal was the nucleus. In that metropolis the Hindus and the British intermingled at various levels. The Hindus were agents and auxiliaries of British commercial entrepreneurs. A large and affluent Hindu mercantile community had developed as a social by-product of the East India Company's establishments. The affluence and extravagance of the Indian princes and the Zamindari classes attracted the attention of British officials and merchants. Hindus and the British worked together in the administrative, judicial and educational institutions and occasionally intermingled at festive gatherings and on ceremonial occasions. Such developments and experiences were almost totally lacking in the island particularly amongst the Hindus. When considered against this background the role of Protestant Christian missions as agents of social change and sources of westernization amongst the Hindu Tamils assumes great significance. Their enterprises initiated a process of social transformation and provided the stimulus for the process of acculturation which revitalized the Hindu religious tradition and led to a literary and cultural renaissance.⁵

In historical perspective it would appear that the revival of Tamil Hinduism preceded the missionary evangelical enterprise although the Christian evangelical movement and the Hindu revival were contemporaneous during a greater part of the nineteenth century. The two movements, Christian evangelism and Hindu revival, although ostensibly conflicting, had a complementarity as interacting social forces leading to acculturation and the eventual revitalization and modernization of a traditional society. It would appear that as a result of their encounter Hinduism revitalized itself and many benefits accrued to Hindu society.

The period selected for the present study may be said to consist of three distinct phases: (1) the first twenty-five years of British rule (1796-1820) which witnessed the gradual and steady revival of Hinduism and the virtual extinction of Dutch Protestant Christianity as a religious tradition and social force, (2) the following three decades (1820-1850) which witnessed the establishment of missionary institutions on a secure and solid foundation and (3) the period of thirty years after 1850 when the Christian missions intensified their efforts and extended their operations amidst mounting opposition from Hindus who sought to counter missionary effort under the leadership of Arumuga Navalar engaged in defending, reforming and revitalizing Saivism.

Hindu revival and the extinction of the Dutch Reformed Church

A most remarkable change that occurred in the Tamil regions of Sri Lanka within a few years after the British occupation and one which struck British officials and missionaries alike was the re-emergence of Hinduism which they described as heathenism and idolatry. Under Dutch rule most of the inhabitants of Jaffnapatnam were officially reckoned as Christians. In 1722 Valentyn recorded that there were 189,388 Christians.⁶ It was found that there were 182,226 persons who could be considered as Christians in 1760.⁷ This number was considerably reduced in 1802 when it was found that there were 136,000 nominal Christians.⁸

In a short span of four years (1802-1806) Protestant Christianity was found to have almost disappeared among the the native inhabitants. Claudius Buchanan who visited the island in 1806 'described the Protestant religion as extinct, the fine old Churches in ruins, the clergy who had once ministered in them forgotten, and but one Hindu Catechist in charge of the province.'⁹ That Hinduism was once again ascendant in Jaffna is further testified to, by the observations of two American missionaries, Samuel Newell and Daniel Poor. Commenting on the state of Christianity Samuel Newell observes:

'There is but one congregation of Protestant native Christians in the district; and that is in the town of Jaffna. Except for a few thousands, who are principally Roman Catholics, *the present generation are all idolaters*. The Roman Catholic priests have taken possession of this vineyard, once cultivated by the Dutch clergy, and almost all who chose to retain the Christian name, have gone over to them; *but the great body of people are the followers of Brahma* Here is a little province, which the soldiers of Jesus once won from the god of this world and added to the dominions of their lord. The people of God possessed but for a little while. The prince of darkness has regained it, and reigns again in full power over these 120 thousand souls'.¹⁰

Daniel Poor says:

'After an external pressure weighing the people down for ages and drying up their spirits, was removed by their being brought under British rule, they believed not for joy that they were once more allowed to taste the sweets of idolatrous liberty. But on finding that it was even so, there was a mighty rush from a nominal Christianity to the all-absorbing system of Hindu idolatry; and they entered on a course of temple-building

and adornment wholly unparalleled in the annals of the province, and which is in vigorous progress at the present time. Such was the state of things on our arrival in the year 1816'.¹¹

That a vast majority of the population in Jaffna were found to be Saivites is also recorded in the Winslow Memoirs. It says: This district called also Jaffna has a population of 147,771; of whom, 650 are reckoned as whites, that is descendants of Dutch and portuguese . . . There are among the natives, a few Protestant Christians, but the great mass of the population is Heathen. With few exceptions, the natives are of the sect of Siva, though some are followers of Vishnu . . . The Hindus of Ceylon, are generally of the sect of Siva. This god has two sons, Ganesa and Skanda. These two have many temples in Jaffna, even more than Siva himself; as has also Doorga, or Parvati'.¹² It was estimated that there were in all 329 Hindu temples in the Jaffna Peninsula in 1814.¹³

The disappearance of Protestant Christianity and the recovery of Hinduism within a few years of British rule is all the more significant considered in the light of the fact that Jaffnapatnam was under European Colonial rule since 1619 when the local Tamil dynasty, was overthrown by the Portuguese. For over a period of a hundred and seventy-five years under the Portuguese (1619-1658) and the Dutch (1658-1796) Christianity had enjoyed the status of a state religion. Public profession of Hinduism in all its forms was prohibited by law. All Hindu religious institutions and places of worship had disappeared during this period. In the eastern littoral a similar situation had prevailed in the military enclaves of Trincomalee and Batticaloa and for a shorter period of time in the settlements surrounding them.

The Dutch colonial government imposed the Dutch version of Protestant Christianity on the inhabitants. The bestowal of honours, traditional ranks, privileges and positions in the administration were conditional upon conformity on the part of the natives to official policy in matters of religion.¹⁴ Besides, the efforts of the Dutch ecclesiastical establishments were directed towards securing their acceptance of Christianity and education was employed as the primary means of achieving this objective. Schools were set up beside Churches in all towns and principal villages and attendance at schools was made compulsory to all children by government proclamation. Elementary education and instruction in the basic principles of Christianity were provided in schools where large gatherings were reported.

The almost total disappearance of the Dutch Reformed Church among the Tamils and the recovery of Hinduism in the early years of the nineteenth century may illustrate that the Dutch experiment at evangelization was a failure of the highest magnitude and raises serious doubts about the sufficiency of elementary education as a means for effecting religious conversions. In some ways it may provide a clue to the failure of the Protestant Missions in the subsequent period to effect conversions in any substantial measure. The conversions effected by the Roman Catholic missions in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, on the other hand, were permanent and enduring and despite vigorous measures adopted by the Dutch against them the Roman Catholic converts remained steadfast in their loyalty to Christianity.

The withdrawal of the element of compulsion as a means of furthering the course of Christianity, under British rule led to the re-emergence of Hinduism just as it led to the re-emergence of Buddhism in the western and south-western portions of the island. In matters of religion British policy in the initial stages was governed by pragmatic considerations.¹⁵ Christianity, however, was not proclaimed as the state religion and the inhabitants soon realized that under the new government they were not obliged to profess Christianity in order to retain privileges and rank. Besides, no restrictions were imposed on non-Christian religious beliefs and practices. The Hindus, just as the Buddhists, Muslims and Roman Catholics, could freely, confidently and without any constraints publicly profess their religion and recreate their places of worship. During the first three decades of British rule the indigenous religious traditions considerably regained ground lost previously and became major social forces in the country. That their revival, resurgence and revitalization became possible under British rule is significant.

Although Hinduism was, ostensibly, once again ascendant in the Tamil regions of the island it was not re-established on a secure and solid footing. It was particularly vulnerable when exposed to western influences penetrating through the Christian Missions inspired by evangelical zeal and employing the techniques of an advanced civilization. The social structure of Hindu society was archaic and its economic foundations were fragile. A rigid social conservatism was characteristic of the caste based Hindu society comprising hierarchically organized groups whose functions, occupations, social rank and inter-relations were governed by the principle of heredity and notions of ritual purity. The theoretical basis of social organization and the norms of social relations sanctified by tradition, validated by custom and re-inforced by the absence of spatial mobility tended towards extreme rigidity and conflicted sharply with modern and western ideals of social equality and individual liberty.

The physiography of the regions where Hindu society was concentrated was not conducive to the attainment of economic prosperity. Paddy cultivation which was the mainstay of the economy was, to a large extent, dependent on manual labour and nonsoonal rains the failure of which could result in acute shortages in food supplies. In the districts of Trincomalee, Batticaloa and Vanni where communications were poor and villages isolated, malaria and pestilential fever were endemic and mortality rates were high. In those districts, for the most part, human resources available for agricultural and other productive economic enterprises were limited. It was in the Jaffna district where approximately half of the island's Tamil population was concentrated, a stable agrarian economy had been developed despite limitations imposed by ecology and nature. A system of crop rotation and crop diversification had been in existence for a long period in the red-soil belt of the Jaffna peninsula where the system of market gardening was well developed. Agriculture was practised with the aid of lift irrigation, a strenuous process, and was economically rewarding. In the Jaffna peninsula which had a high concentration of population there was an acute shortage of agricultural land. Land holdings were small and there was nothing comparable to a Zamindari class or even to a large and affluent mercantile class and class divisions in a modern sense had not yet crystallized.

Besides, in comparison with Buddhism, Hinduism was in a weaker and more disadvantageous position. Unlike Buddhism and its institutions which had an unbroken continuity and flourished under royal patronage until 1815 in the Kingdom of Kandy, Hinduism had suffered a sharp decline under European colonial rule and its institutions were entirely eliminated while their endowments were appropriated and bestowed on Christian institutions. Moreover, the British were obliged to uphold Buddhism under the terms of the Kandyan Convention. From the viewpoint of the Kandyans it was on an undertaking by the British, as implied in the terms of the Convention, that Buddhism and its institutions would be protected and maintained the Kandyans subjected themselves to British rule.¹⁶ In relation to Hinduism in the island the British had no such obligations. In its encounters with Protestant Christian missions enjoying the support of the Governor and the principal officials with a pronounced evangelist outlook Hinduism was in a more vulnerable position than Buddhism. Nor could the Hindus expect strict neutrality or impartiality from such British officials in controversies involving them and the Christian missions.

Furthermore, unlike Christianity or Buddhism, Hinduism had no ordained clergy or monastic orders. It had no institutional arrangement or organizational framework for the preservation, transmission and diffusion of religious and secular knowledge. The Brahmins were by no means an organized priesthood, their principal concern being the performance of rituals and ceremonial functions. In the Sri Lankan context they had no tradition of propagating and expounding even the elementary principles of Hindu religious and philosophic thought. There is no indication of even the existence of schools designed for purposes of imparting Hindu religious instruction. The two notable schools that existed at Irupalai and Uduppiddy conducted respectively by Senathiraja Mudaliyar and Arulampala Mudaliyar were devoted chiefly to the development of Tamil learning and scholasticism.¹⁷

Despite its inherent weaknesses and many disadvantages confronting it, Hindu society had a capacity for survival and adaptability and the strength and vitality of its religious and literary tradition cannot be overlooked. A scholastic and literary tradition, although confined to narrow circles, was still very much alive. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had witnessed unprecedented literary activity in the Peninsula and the theme of literary composition was predominantly religious and this was most remarkable in the context of Dutch rule.¹⁸ A large number of texts, in manuscript form, on Hindu religious and metaphysical thought, rituals, grammar, poetry and poetics were available for study among the leading families that had cultivated the tradition of learning over the generations. When exposed to extraneous challenges and influences the local Hindu tradition had potentialities for revitalization and the missionary enterprise under a government that permitted freedom of action in the sphere of religion was to produce a catalytic effect.

Missionary organizations and educational institutions

The development of a modern system of education in the Tamil regions, as elsewhere in the island, was achieved chiefly through the efforts of Christian missionary organizations. The three major Protestant missionary organizations, The American Ceylon Mission, The Church Missionary Society and The Wesleyan Mission which undertook evangelical work in these regions had gained a foothold in the island during the Governorship of Robert

Brownrigg (1812-1824). The Wesleyans divided the island into two districts, the North Ceylon District and the South Ceylon District on a linguistic basis for purposes of administrative convenience and a more vigorous prosecution of their work in 1819.¹⁹ The Church Missionary Society also made a similar arrangement.²⁰ The Americans who were in many respects the pace setters confined themselves to the Jaffna Peninsula where their area of operations was the most extensive. Initially they occupied two stations, Tellipallai and Batticotta (1816) but with the arrival of the second contingent of missionaries in 1820 they occupied three more stations; Uduvil, Manipay and Pandeterippo.²¹ In later years, Chavakachery and Udupiddy also became two additional mission stations.²² The Church Mission had two inland stations in Jaffna where their field of operations consisted of two circuits, Kopay and Nallur. The Wesleyans, who had arrived in the island in 1814, spread their activities over a much more extensive area and occupied the coastal stations of Jaffna, Point Pedro, Trincomalee and Batticaloa.²³ In due course Protestant evangelical work in the whole Eastern province was left largely in the hands of the Wesleyans.

These missions had a common aim - the propagation of Christianity and all of them adopted the same methods for the realization of their objective. Unlike in the South where Protestant evangelical enterprise was marred by sectarian rivalry, the Christian Missions in the North cultivated among themselves a tradition of close co-operation and friendship. As early as in the year 1819 they instituted the Missionary Union which met in a 'Monthly Reunion' to combine the results of past experience and discuss common problems, plan of work and strategy.²⁴ Such a tradition of co-operation and unity gave them a greater degree of confidence in the pursuit of their aims and helped to gain active support and encouragement from the government of the Colony except during the period of Governor Barnes.²⁵ This enabled them to develop as the most formidable social force in the North and develop powerful and effective agencies for social change and modernization. The extent of their success and the character of the institutions they developed was, to a considerable extent, determined by the nature of responses their activities evoked from the people among whom they worked. The interaction between the Protestant missionaries and the Hindus was productive of unforeseen results and developments unanticipated and unexpected by the pioneer missionaries.

Unacquainted with oriental cultures and ill-informed as they were of oriental religions and inspired by evangelical zeal the early missionaries on their arrival had hopes of spectacular success.²⁶ They preached at market places, street-corners and at work-places besides visiting houses and distributed prayer hymns and selections from the Bible written on palm leaves in large quantities. But the results of such labours proved to be distressingly disappointing; as a means of effecting conversions open door preaching proved to be entirely ineffective. In 1817 James Lynch of the Wesleyan Mission, Jaffna, reported to the Home Committee that congregations could not be found without schools.²⁷ Although at the outset, generally, all the missions considered education as auxiliary to preaching, it was the experience of those working in the field that reinforced the conviction that education was indispensable as an instrument for evangelical work. The establishment of elementary vernacular schools became one of the immediate and principal concerns of all Protestant Missions.

By 1819 the Wesleyans had established 21 schools in their four circuits in Jaffna and the Eastern province while the American-Ceylon Mission had set up 15 schools where a total of 633 children were in attendance.²⁸ From such modest beginnings elementary education which helped to promote literacy within an ever increasing proportion of the population attained a steady expansion. The number of elementary schools run by the American Ceylon Mission, 24 in 1821, had risen to 79 with a total enrolment of 3,106 pupils in 1833.²⁹ In elementary education over which the Americans had a commanding lead in the Jaffna peninsula the Wesleyans and the Church Mission lagged behind with 21 and 18 schools each with a total of 938 and 579 pupils respectively.³⁰ In this respect the example set by the Protestant missionaries was soon followed by the Hindus and Roman Catholics. In 1828 the Hindus had 106 schools with a total enrolment of 2,430 students while the Roman Catholics managed 24 schools where 424 children were receiving instruction.³¹ By 1875 elementary education had expanded to such an extent that the American Ceylon Mission alone had 121 schools where 6588 children were receiving instruction.³² The Hindus responded most favourably to the efforts made by the missionaries to provide elementary education generally everywhere and particularly in the Jaffna region. The American missionaries introduced the system of free education and in their schools instruction was provided without levying any fees from the pupils. There were several cases where people made appeals to the missionaries to open schools.³³ They were also requested, in many instances, to take charge of private schools under Hindu management.³⁴

Once elementary education was provided on a substantial scale the establishment of institutions for the provision of secondary and collegiate education became inevitable. A general and increasing demand for English education among the people and the requirements of the missions were the main incentives for missionary effort directed towards the cause of secondary and higher education the foundations of which were laid in the North by Daniel Poor of the American Ceylon Mission and Peter Percival of the Wesleyan Mission.³⁵ Although the common vernacular schools helped to raise a literate population their insufficiency as instruments for proselytization was clearly recognized by the Americans within a short period of time. Therefore, they instituted Boarding Schools initially at Tellipallai and Batticotta and subsequently also at their other stations for children of both sexes. They were established for the purpose of maintaining and educating freely children who had been taken into them in a Christian environment and under the constant care and guidance of the missionaries.³⁶ It was hoped that the children weaned away from their traditional environment and the influence of their parents and brought up in this way would respond more favourably to the teachings of Christianity and would accept it through conviction as the one truly revealed religion. These expectations were not unfounded and a few conversions were made through this process. The pupils in the Boarding Schools received instruction in English and Tamil, and their courses included Scripture, Arithmetic, Grammar and Geography.³⁷ Those who had been longest under instruction were so far advanced as to be able, with proper help to prosecute the higher branches of Tamil learning, to learn Sanskrit or to apply themselves to European literature and Science, as might be found expedient, to fit them for service under Government, as Teachers in Schools, as Interpreters for Translators: or as Native preachers.³⁸

In the creation of advanced centres of learning and collegiate education for boys and girls, in adopting English as the medium of instruction in schools and higher centres of learning and in the provision of medical facilities and education the American missionaries were the pioneers not only in Jaffna but even in the whole island. Besides, they were the first Protestant Christian mission to introduce printing machines and initiate a tradition of journalism in any Tamil region. The Batticotta Seminary founded in 1823 attracted wide attention and gained recognition within and outside the island as a centre of advanced learning and developed as a pivotal social institution contributing substantially to the process of acculturation and the development of a modern indigenous intellectual and scholastic tradition.³⁹

The Seminary as conceived and constituted by its founders had the following principal objectives: (1) imparting to native youth of good promise a thorough knowledge of the English language, (2) the cultivation of Tamil literature, (3) the study of Sanskrit, (4) imparting a knowledge of Hebrew to a select number of students and (5) teaching in the medium of English, as far as the circumstances of the country require, the Sciences usually studied in Europe and America.⁴⁰ The courses of study provided at the Seminary included Geography, History (civil and ecclesiastical), Natural Philosophy, Natural and Revealed Religion, Mathematics, Astronomy and Natural Sciences, beside selected languages, European and Asian, Classical and Modern.⁴¹

The fact that the founders of the Seminary laid a special emphasis on the teaching of English and the cultivation of Tamil learning deserves special attention. They were of the firm view that English held the key to modern knowledge and western learning and that a sound knowledge of that language was essential for acquiring a knowledge of western science and transferring it into the Tamil language. As regards the importance of promoting the study of Tamil language and literature they asserted: 'The Tamil language like the Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek, etc, is an original and perfect language, and is in itself highly worthy of cultivation... But a more important benefit would be the cultivation of Tamil composition which is now almost neglected. The attention of many must be turned to writing intelligently, and forcibly, in their own language. Original native compositions, on account of the superior felicity of its style and idiom, will be read when the production of a foreigner, or a translation, will be thrown aside. To raise up, therefore, and qualify a class of *native authors*, whose minds being enriched by science may be capable not only of embodying European ideas, but of putting them into a handsome native dress, must be rendering important aid in the interests of learning and Christianity.'⁴²

Commenting on the benefits that were envisaged through the proposed institution the promoters of the Seminary said:

'Agriculture and mechanic arts will be improved; learning will rise in estimation, and gradually obtain a dominion over wealth and caste; the native character will be raised; and the native mind freed from the shackles of custom, will imbibe that spirit of improvement which has so long distinguished and blessed most European countries. A college such as this is intended to be, would give a new tone to the whole system of education in the District, and exert an influence which would be felt in every school and village'.⁴³

They also pointed out that the colonial government would derive many benefits from the Seminary which would have the potential for providing interpreters, translators, and English teachers for government service, and men for the learned professions. Daniel Poor and his colleagues, the promoters of the Seminary, had a lofty vision and a deep commitment to the cause of higher education. The courses of study they prescribed for the projected Seminary were very comprehensive and the emphasis on secular knowledge and natural sciences is remarkable. Far from being fundamentalist in approach they were inspired by the conception of disinterested benevolence developed in Hopkinsian theology. The Seminary as conceived and constituted by them was intended to develop as a powerful agency for effecting moral regeneration, social transformation, economic progress, intellectual advancement and cultural re-vitalization. The establishment of such an institution was unprecedented and as a western type institution of advanced learning the Batticotta Seminary was the only one of its kind in the whole island during the nineteenth century. The aspirations of its founders were accomplished by this institution, in substantial measure, during the thirty-three years of its existence (1823-1856).

The American Ceylon Mission took the lead also in the provision of facilities for secondary education in the medium of English. Encouraged by the success of their free schools and Boarding schools they proceeded to establish English schools for providing instruction of a still more advanced character in 1830. That they found themselves in a position to enforce the payment of an annual fee and maintain strictly a discipline that was essentially and avowedly Christian in character may be a sufficient indication of the appreciation in which their educational activities were held by the people and the value they attached to English education.⁴³ During the early years of their career the pioneer American missionaries in Jaffna had established free Boarding schools for girls at their principal stations. All the girls who had received instruction in those schools were transferred to a Girls' Boarding School established at Udovil in 1823.⁴⁴ This developed in course of time as a major institution of higher learning for female children and is reckoned as the oldest institution of its kind in Asia. The success of this institution helped to dispel prejudices prevailing in the community against female education and generated a demand for such education. The example set by the Americans in this respect was followed in later years by all the Christian Missions.

On account of the medical services and education they provided the American Ceylon Mission was outstanding among the Christian Missions established in the island. Richards and Warren, who were among the first band of American missionaries who arrived in Jaffna provided medical care and attention to people at Tellipallai where they had set up a minor hospital.⁴⁵ Their work however, was soon interrupted on account of their ill health and the eventual death of Warren in Cape Town, in 1818.⁴⁶ The medical services provided by the Mission assumed a new dimension and definite direction with the appointment of a medical missionary to Jaffna in 1833 and he started a course of medical education at Batticotta where a medical centre was also established.⁴⁷ On his return to America in 1847, Dr. Samuel Green took charge of the medical mission and conducted a school of medicine engaged in raising native physicians trained in western medicine.⁴⁸ The medical education and facilities provided by the American missionaries in a land subject to frequent outbreaks

of epidemics of cholera and smallpox, contributed in no small measure to an improvement in personal hygiene, environmental sanitation and conditions of public health. In an age when the colonial government was not committed to providing welfare services the medical services provided by the Americans earned for them the respect and affection of a grateful people and helped to form in their minds a most favourable impression of the nation that produced them. Besides, they moderated their passions and sentiments aroused by blatant missionary attacks on Hinduism.

The progressive ideas the American missionaries had with respect to higher education were relatively more advanced than those of others and it was only after the government formulated its guidelines on educational policy on the recommendations of the Colerooke Commission that the other Protestant missions fell in line with their views. In the scheme of reforms envisaged by Colebrooke education was to be assigned a central role. It was conceived as a powerful instrument of social transformation and modernization. The government was expected to promote the diffusion of a knowledge of the English language with a view to producing "a competent class of candidates for general employment who would unite local information with general knowledge and would eventually be capable of holding responsible situations upon reduced salaries."⁴⁹

Since 1833 the government assumed some direct responsibility for general education and took steps to provide a certain degree of central direction to educational operations in the country. The School Commission, instituted in 1834, consisting of leading British officials and Clergymen, all European and Christian, arranged matters in such a manner as to leave English education as a virtual monopoly of Christian missionary organizations.⁵⁰ Besides, the closure of government schools wherever Christian missions were established placed them in an advantageous and almost unchallenged position. Increasing employment opportunities provided by the civil and judicial branches of the colonial administration and generated by the development of incipient capitalism chiefly on account of commerce and the beginnings of plantation economy along with government regulations making a knowledge of English a pre-condition for employment created a general and ever increasing demand for English education in the country. In deference to government policy and in response to social needs all the Christian Missions directed their energies towards establishing English schools. It was at this stage that the Wesleyans and the Church Mission proceeded to establish English Schools in Jaffna, where English education had already made considerable progress, as seen earlier, through the agencies of the American missionaries.

The first English schools established by the Wesleyans in Jaffna and Trincomalee around 1821 were meant for English speaking children of Burgher and European parents.⁵¹ It was under the direction of Peter Percival that the Wesleyan institutions of secondary and higher education developed in the North. In 1834 their first institution for instruction of an advanced character was established in the main square of Jaffna. In 1837 the English Boys' school in their mission premises had 150 boys in attendance.⁵² It was called the Central School in 1847 and in subsequent years it developed into the Central College. Its first missionary principal, William Barber was appointed in 1855.⁵³ Subsequently English

schools for native children were established at all other main Wesleyan stations. There are references in missionary records to English schools at Batticaloa from 1837 and at Point Pedro and Trincomalee from 1838.⁵⁴

Another English school, the St Paul's English Boys' School, had already come into existence by 1841. It functioned as a preparatory school serving as a feeder to the main Boys' School.⁵⁵ The foundations laid by Percival constituted a firm basis for the expansion of English education and proliferation in the number of schools in all Wesleyan circuits during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In 1853 William Walton opened the Vannarponnai English School in the Wesley Chapel Vestry which later developed into Kilner College in 1862.⁵⁶

Percival devoted considerable attention to female education; in 1834 the first Wesleyan Girls' Boarding English School was established at the Central Mission Station, Jaffna, and left under the care of Mrs. Percival. In response to the efforts of Percival, Miss Twiddy was sent from England to take charge of this school as Principal in 1840.⁵⁷ The establishment of Girls' Boarding English School in Trincomalee (1859), Batticaloa (1874), Point Pedro (1878) and Kalmunai (1882), represented a major Wesleyan contribution to female education.⁵⁸

The introduction of the grant-in-aid scheme in 1872 provided the stimulus for a rapid expansion of Christian missionary educational operations, especially those of the Wesleyans in the Eastern province. The number of common schools under the management of the American Mission, which was 51 in 1870 with a total enrolment of 1,453 children, rose to 121 in 1875 with a total enrolment of 5,584 pupils.⁵⁹ While the number of schools had more than doubled there was an almost four-fold increase in the number of student enrolments. Student enrolments continued to increase rapidly after 1875. In 1878 the American Ceylon Mission had under its control 135 schools where a total of 8,120 students were in attendance and among them 1,400 were girls. Of the 135 schools, 121 were Tamil, 12 Anglo-Tamil, and two English; 18 of these were girls' schools and 58 were mixed.⁶⁰

In the North Ceylon District the Wesleyans had, in 1865, 32 schools with a total enrolment of 1194 pupils.⁶¹ But, in 1875 in the Point Pedro circuit alone, comprising the stations of Ploly, Point Pedro, Cattavelly and Vathiri, they had 13 Boys' Schools with 1329 boys and 11 Girls' Schools with 250 girls in attendance.⁶² In 1878 there were in all 46 Wesleyan Schools in their North Ceylon District. In 1889 they had under their management 140 schools in which a total of 9,735 children were receiving instruction.⁶³ Within a period of twenty-five years (1865-1889) the number of schools had multiplied by four and a half times while there was an eight-fold increase in student admissions and such a development constitutes a phase of unprecedented and rapid expansion of educational services.

The contribution of the Church Mission to education in the North, though relatively limited, was not inconsiderable. Their institutions of higher learning in English were established separately for boys and girls at Chundikully and these developed in course time into what were later known as St. John's College and Chundikully Girls' College.

The great advances made in the field of education through the efforts of the Christian missionary organizations pre-supposes that missionary enterprise in educational work evoked a most favourable response from the Hindu Tamils. That there was among them a general and increasing demand for education, especially English education is supported by overwhelming evidence.⁶⁴ The statistical returns of enrolment at schools and the observations of missionaries provide sufficient indication of public feeling and responses to educational operations undertaken by the missionaries. Economic compulsions and the general desire to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for securing employment in institutions of the government and the commercial establishments were undoubtedly the prime motives.

The general desire for education on the part of the Hindus and their appreciation of the contributions made by the Christian missionaries to the cause of educational advancement is clearly reflected in the address of welcome the leading inhabitants of Wadamaratchy presented to Hercules Robinson, the Governor, at the reception they accorded him on his visit to the peninsula in 1872. They said :

'We would observe further that we are greatly indebted to the various missionary bodies for the education imparted to us by their special labours. We are gratified to find that the Government has extended its aid to various schools superintended by the missionaries to whom most of us, owe, nearly all our English education. Convinced as we are of their sincerity of purpose and desire and well-being of our fellow countrymen we have largely contributed by local subscriptions, gifts of land, and materials to the establishment of schools, in several parts of the District which we have placed under their care. We would especially record our gratitude to the Government... which a few years ago extended grants-in-aid to vernacular education. We trust that the aid thus given may be continued and even increased as we are sure that it is one of our first means towards raising our countrymen to higher civilization and legitimate power'.⁶⁵

In appreciation of the educational services provided by the missionaries the leading inhabitants extended co-operation and support to them by donating lands and building materials, supplying free labour and in various other ways. Many such instances are recorded in the correspondences of missionaries. For instance the Wesleyan missionary John Rhodes records :

'But to obtain Government grants all our old vernacular school bungalows had to be rebuilt. The people came liberally to our help, and in addition to the three old schools we have had land and material given which have enabled us to establish 8 new schools. I was invited to Thikkam, a large central village of well-to-do farmers where I have been looking for an opening... But being invited I went to the village a month ago, on the 23rd of April. The Headman and others met me there. They showed me a splendid plot of land 15 lachams in extent, close to the houses of the people and divided into two parts... in fact it is just the spot to erect on one side a substantial school Chapel, and on the other side a Catechist's house, containing a compartment for a Girls' School. They asked me if I could accept it for the mission and build on it an Anglo-Vernacular School. Land belonging to 12 people was gifted to the Mission... This is the eighth plot of land given to us, by heathen people for school and Chapel purposes'.⁶⁶

'In this respect the heathens are setting an example which ought to speak most eloquently. At Catcovalam we have the promise of land and trees, with an attendance of 100, if we will but establish a school. At present we have no Christian footing in this village. At Alvai ground has been given to us for a Girls' School. Recently the people gave us ground for a boys' school and paid part cost of the erection. They are all high caste Sivites. At Ploly a native gentleman of great repute, who is honoured by the cognomen "the Ploly Tamby" has most generously given to the mission a fine plot of land, and has undertaken to provide material for the erection of a school building. In the Cattavelly circuit... a school of 70 boys has been offered to us at Carravetty. At Atcheloo, a central village three miles from Puttur, we commenced a school in July, which now numbers 1150 scholars. The Headman of the village has given the mission 15 ladchams of land, and the people have promised all the trees necessary to build forthwith'.⁶⁷

These were the signs that indicate of the spirit of co-operation and cordiality that had come to prevail in the relations between the missionaries and the native Hindu inhabitants. The generally favourable Hindu responses to missionary enterprise decisively contributed to the proliferation in the number of schools managed by the missionaries and the phenomenal expansion of their educational establishments which overwhelmingly absorbed their energies. The schools they established, in many instances, developed as model institutions providing instruction in secular branches of learning and modern knowledge in the medium of English during the latter half of the nineteenth century. Thus was developed a system of modern education of which they laid the foundations and raised the superstructure. The amount of energy, talent and other resources they concentrated and invested in the Jaffna peninsula had no parallel in any other area of comparable extent in the whole island. The developments that flowed from this vast experiment led to social changes which were almost revolutionary.

A most salutary effect of their educational operations was the spread of literacy in Tamil and English. In the mid-nineteenth century more than 100,000 children had received instruction in the Protestant Missions' Schools in Jaffna. The number of children who had until then been educated in the schools of the Americans was in the region of 90,000.⁶⁸ This would imply that on a modest estimate approximately half of the population in the peninsula had been provided with facilities for acquiring literacy and the capacity to seek and gain knowledge. The progress made in secondary, female and collegiate education contributed substantially to social upliftment and economic advancement of the community. The skills acquired through secondary and collegiate education enabled a large number of men and women to secure gainful employment in the various departments of the government, commercial establishments and the teaching, legal and medical professions. Besides, the missionary organizations were able to raise ministers, catechists, preachers and other trained personnel for their vast establishments. All such developments meant the emergence of a well-educated professional elite with a capacity for leadership and organization.

The introduction of printing and the beginnings of journalism were of the utmost importance. School text books of all grades, religious tracts, pamphlets and journals were being printed and published in accordance with social requirements. Texts and manuals

representative of Tamil achievements over the centuries in the fields of poetry, poetics, religion, ethical and metaphysical thought which had been in manuscript form in the custody of a select few privileged families could now be printed and made available to the public at large. The introduction of printing had unforeseen potentialities and provided the Hindus with an avenue for mobilizing their resources in defence of their religious tradition and combating the Christian evangelical enterprise.

The institution that contributed most towards the diffusion of modern secular knowledge was the Batticotta Seminary. The more competent and imaginative among those who had received instruction in that institution reckoned by informed opinion as not inferior, by any means, to the European Universities of its time produced many men who eventually developed into scholars of the front rank with a wide reputation.⁶⁹ They applied the historical and scientific methodology, with which they had become acquainted while in the Seminary, for the scientific study, exposition and modernization of the Tamil language and its cultural tradition. The inclusion of the Hindu religion and philosophy in the courses of study at the Seminary was significant. The advanced pupils of the Seminary were in a position to gain access to the ideas and teachings of Hinduism. One of its scholarly Principals Rev. Hoisington translated three main treatises on Saiva Siddhanta, *Sivagnana botham*, *Sivapragasam* and *Tattwakattalei* and made them available in print.⁷⁰ It is also significant that the leadership for the movement for Hindu revival and regeneration was provided by some who had received instruction in the advanced centres of learning established by the missionaries.

Hindu responses to Christian evangelism

It will be misleading to formulate conclusions regarding the impact of Christian evangelical enterprise on the Hindu community by only highlighting the activities of a few select individuals against Christian evangelism. The statistical returns of conversions and the impressions of missionaries may provide a sufficient indication of general trends regarding feelings and attitudinal changes evoked by missionary enterprise and the extent of the success achieved in effecting conversions. There was no uniformity and consistency in Hindu responses and reactions to Christian evangelical activities. The keenness and the enthusiasm with which the Hindus accepted and utilized the educational facilities provided by missionary organizations was not accompanied by a desire or willingness to accept Christianity in preference to Hinduism.

There were no mass conversions at any time. Never was it possible to convert all the residents of an entire village or town or even all the members of any caste or social group. Adult conversions were rare and most of the known cases of such conversions were from Batticaloa where the small Christian community had within its ranks a few individuals holding positions of influence and rank.⁷¹ A few instances of adult conversions are recorded in the following extracts from Wesleyan missionary correspondence :

‘Ramanaden of Karuvadden keni was a man of simple faith, but of strong moral courage. He manifested the sincerity of his conversions by giving up the heathen temple, which was the temple of the village, with the land on which it stood, for the services of the mission, fearlessly braving the combined opposition of the villagers.’⁷²

'I baptized, last Sunday morning, an adult, a woman . . . Her eldest son received baptism last year . . . feeling the truth of religion he had been incessant in his endeavours to lead his mother to embrace the only true faith. She publicly denounced heathenism.'⁷³

'At Batticaloa, God has given us eleven converts, most of them of adult age. Seven of them had been educated at our Batticaloa English School. Two others had first received the Truth at Jaffna and the remaining two were gathered from Puliantievoe and its neighbourhood . . . one educated intelligent man from Pt. Pedro English School . . . His father was a rigid Sivite and a great man. He was *monyar* of the great Sivan Kovil at Pt. Pedro His conversion created a great stir among the Chetties of Batticaloa, and no little presumption and abuse not a few ignominious epithets were heaped the same day upon him.'⁷⁴

Such instances being exceptional, generally an overwhelming majority of conversions were achieved through the instrumentality of schools. Highlighting the importance of schools in this respect the Wesleyan missionary Ripley Winston observes :

'It is in our schools, especially the higher schools that some of the finest opportunities for successful mission work are presented. The missionary is thus brought frequently into intimate contact with the most intelligent and respectable youth and his position gives him considerable influence, in not a few cases has resulted in great and lasting good accomplished by the dissemination of the eagerly coveted western knowledge, in the loosening of superstition and the growth of Christian public opinion it is no slight argument in favour of the schools that the great majority of our Church members and native helpers and all our native ministers and mission agents are obtained by means of them.'⁷⁵

And among schools Boarding Schools had the highest returns in the matter of conversions and this was clearly admitted by the Anderson Committee who in their Report said :

'In other words, the converting influence of the mission is and has been exerted chiefly through its boarding schools'.⁷⁶

For the American Ceylon Mission the Girls' School at Uduvil and the Batticotta Seminary were the two most vital sources for effecting conversions. By the mid-nineteenth century it was found that approximately about half the number of girls educated at the Girls' School at Uduvil had become Christian converts. By 1847, of the two hundred and forty females who had been educated in that institution, more than half had been married to Christians and were found to be 'communicating to their children the same training and advantages which they had received for themselves' while under instruction.⁷⁷ The firmness with which the females from the Uduvil school adhered to their profession of Christianity was considered very remarkable. Moreover, this institution was found to be a powerful means of implanting Christian institutions among the Tamil people of the island.⁷⁸

As of 1850 nearly six hundred students had received instruction from the Batticotta Seminary since its commencement, and upwards of four hundred had completed the established course of education. More than one half had made an open profession of Christianity, and all have been familiarized with its doctrines and were more or less imbued with its spirit.⁷⁹ Of the 454 graduates of the Seminary living in 1856, 185 graduates were connected with the churches of the American mission and among them 81 or less than one-half were employees of the mission.⁸⁰ Yet, the disposition of most graduates and students of the Seminary and the degree of their commitment to Christianity had become matters of grave concern to the mission. The large number of excommunications, 92, was in itself discouraging. Besides, the fact that many of them had married Hindu girls was considered to be significant of important facts in the character of the relations of the graduates of the institution.⁸¹ Of the 96 students who were under instruction in 1856 only 11 were Church members and it was understood that many of the elder pupils were looking mainly to government employment and were determined to have nothing to do with Christianity.⁸² The circumstance of many junior pupils in the lower classes who were children of Church members being 'so intimately connected with such uncompromising associates' caused a great deal of anxiety.

The statistical returns of conversions from the various stations of the different missions was never a matter for satisfaction or encouragement. The evangelical efforts of the Americans during the first 24 years (1816-1839) of their work resulted in a Church membership of 492. Among them 127 persons had been converted during the first twelve years while the remaining 365 had joined the Church during the last twelve years of this period.⁸³ In 1845 the total membership in all the mission Churches amounted to 630.⁸⁴ As a result of some reverses the figure dropped to 357 in 1849 and stood at 376 in 1856.⁸⁵ Substantial increases were recorded in subsequent years and the figures were 498 and 891 for the years 1869 and 1879 respectively.⁸⁶

The Wesleyans who had lagged far behind the Americans during the first half of the nineteenth century as regards success in evangelical work made impressive gains during the latter half of the century. Their total Church membership, 141, in 1838 was distributed among their stations in the following order: Jaffna 66, Pt. Pedro 22, Batticaloa 28 and Trincomalee 25.⁸⁷ Within a period of twenty-eight years there was a little more than three-fold increase in Church membership which was 469 in 1865.⁸⁸ By 1887 the total membership doubled and became 980; 463 were from the Jaffna Peninsula while 457 were from the Batticaloa district where the progress made in conversions was most impressive.⁸⁹ It is also significant that the progress in conversions gathered momentum in correspondence with the main phases in the extension of educational operations and coincided with the spread of English education and in particular the introduction of the grant-in-aid scheme in 1870. It is also noteworthy that the Christian evangelical movement had made such significant gains at a time when the movement for Hindu revival assumed a definite direction and momentum.

The details concerning Church membership could be misleading unless considered in the light of statistics of population. In 1871 there were 2,491 Protestant Christians in the Jaffna District which had a total population of 241,898.⁹⁰ In the Trincomalee District there were

only 230 Protestant Christians while there were 12,668 Hindus living in it.⁹¹ In the Batticaloa District in which there were 52,097 Hindus the total number of Protestant Christians was 480.⁹² These figures clearly show that the achievement of the Christian missionary organization in the direction of evangelism was certainly not a matter for rejoicing, comfort or even satisfaction to them but, it was not by any means inconsiderable. It had become a matter for deep concern and anxiety and as the expectations of earlier days remained unaccomplished and hopes of speedy success entertained by previous generations of missionaries faded as the years rolled on.

The unimpressive results of evangelical work in the island caused disappointment at the Mission headquarters in the U. S. A. Spaulding, Scudder and Hutchings who returned home on furlough in 1847 encountered angry protests and serious criticisms.⁹³ Yet they managed to soothe the feelings there and made assurances of impending success, and the controversy was shelved for some time. The anxieties of the American Board of Control for Foreign Missions were shared by the missionaries as well and their intimate friends in the island colony. Sir Emerson Tennent, the Colonial Secretary found himself obliged to remark: 'I am bound to declare that as yet the ostensible result of their labours falls far short of the expectation which might have been formed from their magnitude and zeal... So conscientious are they (Americans) in this particular, that after thirty years of toil and devotion they have enumerated not more than 680 nominal converts, who have been at one time or other received into communion with their Churches and the number now in connexion with them is 357. *It is a striking illustration of the inefficiency of sermons and of popular preaching to the Tamil unaccompanied by the precaution of previously awakening the mind by education, that from the first to last only 200 communicants have been received in thirty years, exclusive of those who had been educated in the schools and Seminaries of the mission.*' The Church of England missionaries speak with equal humbleness of their own labours during the past; and frankly admit, in explanation of the limited amount of ostensible success which they have as yet to point to, that "the work done bears a relation rather to the future than the present."⁹⁴

In 1855 the American Board of Control for Foreign Missions sent out a deputation consisting of Rufus Anderson and A. G. Thompson to study and report on the state of the Mission in India and Ceylon. The deputation which visited Jaffna in that year came to the conclusion that Jaffna was 'a peculiarly difficult field for missionary cultivations' and focussed attention on the unsatisfactory nature of achievements in relation to congregations and Church membership. They said:

'It should be borne in mind, that the Seminary is at Batticotta, the Female Boarding School at Oodooville, and the Printing establishment at Manipay. *Restricting our views to the five older stations we know nothing more surprising in our experience of missions, than this result as regards congregations.* For a period of from thirty four to nearly forty years, these stations have enjoyed the labors of some of the ablest and the most faithful of missionaries, and during all this time, there has been every facility which popular schools of varied form could give. In the year 1836, (when indeed the number was greatest) there were 155 common schools with 6,000 pupils connected with these

stations, not to speak of other schools of a higher order. Yet in a population of 130,000 souls, separating the congregation the pupils in the mission schools and the persons deriving their support from mission employ, only 124 adults remain for the whole of these five older congregations, who are not members of the Church. Had so much piety, talent and labour been employed, for so long a time, simply in direct preaching efforts to collect congregations without the intervention of schools, *we should have been ready to regard this mission as without doubt to be relinquished for some productive field...* We have supposed that it proves the insufficiency of schools as a means of securing stated congregations, rather than the impracticability of the field. It falls with similar facts elsewhere to show that schools may secure an audience, for the time being, they are not the best way of securing a stated congregation. They would seem to rather stand in the way of it.'

'The whole number of Church members is 376; and of these, including 31 members of the Seminaries, 249 derive their support in some form from the mission. This is not mentioned as a defect in the Churches; for on point of view, it is certainly well that so large a number of members are worthy of employment, and can find as preachers, catechists, school masters, or of being educated in boarding schools. Still it is a misfortune, that so large a proportion of members stands in just that relation. Now this peculiar constitution of the mission Churches in this province should be viewed in connection with the no less peculiar constitution of the mission congregations....'

'Churches thus produced and sustained cannot become self-supporting, active united Churches, nor give high, satisfactory evidence of piety. We find it hard to trust the motives of their members, and to confide in them, and of course to love and respect them as we should. They cannot greatly be multiplied, and some change is therefore needed in our method of operating.'⁹⁵

Such considerations inspired the deputation to make strong recommendations for a drastic reduction in the scale of the mission's educational operations. The discontinuance of the teaching of all courses in the English language at the Seminary and all other educational institutions and a drastic reduction in the number of schools and student enrolments were among their major recommendations, what was envisaged was a major reversal of policy with regard to educational work and the implementation of these recommendations greatly impeded the advancement of English and higher education in Jaffna. The recommendations embodied in the Report of the deputation were inspired by false assumptions and a misreading of the local situation. The experience of the missionaries of the older generation and statistical returns clearly indicated that congregations could not be found and conversions could not be effected without the instrumentality of schools. Rufus Anderson and his colleague had misjudged the whole course of events and developments in respect of evangelism in the Jaffna region. As a consequence of their ill-advised decisions the educational establishments of the American Ceylon Mission suffered a major blow. But the overwhelming pressure of local requirements and wiser counsels contributed in due course, to their restoration and recovery. The main point in the Anderson Report that has to be noted here is the contention that schools as instruments of conversions were not productive of desired results.

That missionary hopes regarding the sufficiency of schools in relation to evangelism were fading is also indicated by the observations of Wesleyan ministers. For instance John Rhodes says :

‘Our position in the schools is just now as far as religious results are concerned remind me very much of those miserable calms around the equators. Our sails are spread, and we are ready, longing, anxious to go, but there seems ‘nor breadth, nor motion’ The young men, whom I take daily in class, are as attentive students as anyone could desire, and teaching them is very pleasurable, but none during the past quarter, have resolved to be Christians. Though with several of them I fear, it is now or never. I never felt convinced of my own utter insufficiency’.⁹⁶

That another Wesleyan missionary, Ripley Winston, also was sceptical of the chances of success in evangelism is clear from his observations. He writes :

‘A missionary’s first impressions here are varied in immediate contrast with the circumstances he had recently left. To find oneself in actual daily conflict with heathenism in one of its most subtle forms and on the other to mark the certain indications that Christianity like leaven is permeating the mass of society, occasions, feelings of the most opposite character’.⁹⁷

The station that caused the greatest disappointment to missionaries was Trincomalee where evangelical work among the Hindu Tamils turned out to be utterly unproductive – James Osborn was constrained to remark : ‘The Church, I am deeply sorry, is not making a rapid progress. It is really very painful to see so scanty fruit for our labours’⁹⁸ Edmund Rigg accounts for the failure of evangelism in Trincomalee in the following terms : ‘but it does seem as if the conjunction in one place of both the naval and military element were extremely adverse to propagation of evangelical truth and experience’. *This much is certain that nowhere in Ceylon has effort been crowned with so little success.* It is not in the character of men than as missionaries have worked here that the fault seems to be – for Trinco can show devoted a roll of labours as any circuit. Nor is it on the plans that have been organized from time to time . . . rather it seems to lie in a peculiarity of the moral atmosphere . . . most vitiating to the half awakened moral sense of the people, and the blighting to the seeds of Truth’.⁹⁹

The Wesleyan and American missionaries identified caste and the dowry system as the two greatest obstacles to the spread of Christianity. Commenting on the dowry system John Rhodes observes :

‘Here is one of the common cases, which cause so much misery here. An educated man finds himself united to a wife who cannot at all sympathise with him but also finds the dowry a mirage, which he never gets. If God would blast this accursed marriage system, one of the greatest barriers to the spread of Christianity, if not the very greatest would be removed and certainly a principal source of anxiety with our elder boys would disappear’.¹⁰⁰

In the Churches of the American Ceylon Mission the marriages contracted by Christian converts with Hindu women often resulted in losses of membership through excommunications on account of that reason. Considerations of caste and rank and the prospect of obtaining wealth and influence seem to have been the principal motivations that attracted Christian converts to Hindu women in preference to girls converted by the mission agencies. It was pointed out: 'that the lads in Batticotta Seminary have come from far more aristocratic or wealthy families, than the girls at Oodooville; or else, by their education, they had raised their former value in the matrimonial market, and sell themselves for rank and dowry'.¹⁰¹ Ironically, the social consequence of missionary enterprise contributed in considerable measure towards transforming into a social evil of the highest magnitude the dowry-system which in pre-colonial times ensured equitable distribution of wealth among male and female members of the family and protected the proprietary rights of women.

The general missionary viewpoint on caste is substantially reflected in the following observations made in the *Letter of the Deputation* headed by Rufus Anderson:

'Your report on caste and polygamy will be highly satisfactory to the Board and the Churches at home... It is doubtless true that the peculiar state of caste in the Jaffna community makes it the more difficult to eradicate it wholly from the Church. It is an evil like intemperance in our own country, that requires a perpetual watch, a perpetual effort, and thus it will be for a long time to come. We do not find evidence, that it stands connected, in the minds of the native Christians, with the idea of blood purity; but it connects itself with notions of family, rank and consequence, and of the value of dowry in the matrimonial market; and many of our native Christians seem too desirous of retaining their connections with their heathen relatives, and too fearful of the consequences that will follow from breaking with the whole world. In their view of this subject, their brethren in our country, who are not free from similar weaknesses, should be slow in condemning them. However, it is our belief that the native Churches will never rise to be self-supporting, efficient and reliable, until the lines of distinction drawn by caste are obliterated from their social life'.¹⁰²

Such a view concerns mainly the behavioural patterns of the Christian converts and it arose from the peculiar situation in the Jaffna peninsula where evangelical work was confined mainly to the community of agriculturists who in terms of ritual purity and social status occupied the highest position in society, to the exclusion of the Brahmins. Although Christianity as a religion does not provide any theoretical justification for upholding distinctions of rank or social status based on birth or any other consideration, it is significant that enough stress was not laid on Christianity as a means of social emancipation. Therefore, there was never a prospect of mass conversions even among the weaker sections of the community. Besides, the Christian converts were also obsessed with their own notions of rank and social status arising from considerations of caste to such an extent as to cause anxiety among American and European missionaries.

The explanation provided by the Protestant missionaries about obstacles to the success of evangelism are simplistic and do not take the far more fundamental causes into account. In a large majority of cases conversions were achieved through the agency of the Boarding Schools

where children weaned away from their traditional environment and influence of parents were brought up in an avowedly Christian atmosphere under the care and guidance of missionaries. It is but natural that Christian values and principles imparted to young minds ignorant of the moral, ethical and philosophical ideas associated with their ancestral religion, made a favourable and enduring impression. What is most striking is that conversions made under such conditions were so few, although under the prevailing circumstances many efforts were made to discredit Hinduism as totally irrelevant and unsuitable as a means of spiritual salvation.

The prospect of disinheritance and social ostracism were strong compulsions against conversions. The inclination of young children to accept Christianity as their religion and undergo the ceremony of baptism met with prompt and stern disapproval from parents and relatives. The prospect of estrangement from parents and relatives asserted itself as a prohibitive influence on young minds. Although it was generally conceded that Christianity was a good religion still it was an alien religion and it was contended that it could not confer any more spiritual benefits than Hinduism would. The economic compulsions inherent in the social structure characterized by a system of interdependence in familial and social relations militated against individualism and operated as an effective deterrent against conversions. Such a tendency was accentuated ever since attempts were made to combat Christian evangelism on a co-operative basis.

That Hinduism continued to maintain its ground after fifty years of intensive and concentrated missionary enterprise is sufficiently clear from the following description:

'The American Ceylon Mission field is wholly within the Northern province of the Island, and comprises a population of about 180,000. Its stations are in the rural districts, and its labours are among the cultivators of the soil and the classes immediately connected with them. The mass of the people are Sivites. Every village has its scores of temples at which annual, monthly or daily ceremonies are performed to gods... Of the larger heathen temples at which there are annual festivals, and which are attended by crowds of people and where there is great display and such expense, there are at least seventy-seven within our mission limits. There are about 483 smaller temples which have no festivals, but where annual or monthly ceremonies are performed'.¹⁰⁸

It now remains to consider the general impact of fifty-years of Protestant evangelical activity on the psychology and attitudes of the Hindus. The diffusion of modern knowledge and learning generated a degree of enlightenment sufficient enough to cause an awakening. Inspired by the example of the missionaries and aroused by their blatant attacks of Hindu beliefs and practices a movement for the regeneration and defence of Saivism had been started by men whose intellectual powers had been stimulated and nourished by the advanced learning provided by the missionary institutions. John Kilner who clearly perceived these developments highlights the changes that were taking place in the following manner:

'There can be no doubt as to our verging on a new era, with respect to public opinion and sympathy of the non-Christian populations of the Island. We are gradually realizing these martial experiences. And if things go on as they are now doing, of which there is every probability, we shall ere long have raised the very storm which our fathers prayed to encounter. It is within the grasp of any one acquainted with the history of the missions, in this country, to understand how this storm originates and the direction it must take. Some there are among the men of influence whose gains are jeopardized and these contend for the old state of things with instinctive tenacity. *Some there are who have flung off old worldly superstitions but think they can construct, out of Hinduism a rational system of faith and duty and who gather round them the trembling sympathies of the better class of men.* Some there are who, having found that current, popular heathenism is untenable, don't trouble themselves one iota further about any novel claims for their faith; and Christianity is cast away as one of the things which rational beings don't need. Some there are - who from one or all of these reasons combined indulge a deadly hatred toward Christianity - and leave no stone unturned in order to stop its progress among their fellow countrymen and their tempers and tendencies are becoming ubiquitous. *It is a matter for surprise and regret that the only form of indigenous organization of which we have any knowledge in this part of the Island, is an organization to arrest the progress of Christianity and maintain some sort of defence for Saivism.*'¹⁰⁴

The organization referred to by John Kilner was the *Saiva-Samaj* led by Arumuga Navalar whose activities and attainments will be discussed in a subsequent work.¹⁰⁵

Foot Notes

1. Hindus belonging to the indigenous Tamil Community were also living in the districts of Puttalam and Colombo. Of the 10,498 Tamils living in the Puttalam district in 1871 5,218 were Saivites, the rest being Roman Catholics. There was no effort at Protestant evangelism among the Saivites of this district. According to the census enumeration of the same year, there were in the Colombo district 28,936 Tamils of whom 15,960 were Saivites, the rest being Christians, Roman Catholics and Protestants. The unusually high proportion of Christians among the Tamils in Colombo was partly on account of the movement of Christians from Jaffna and Batticaloa for purposes of employment. A large proportion of Tamils recruited for government service before the 1870s were Christians as they had relatively better opportunities of receiving an English education in mission schools. Another factor that has to be taken into consideration is the possibility that the Tamils living in Colombo from Dutch times did not relapse to Hinduism in such large numbers as in the other parts of the island. The Anglicans and Methodists seem to have made some conversions among the Tamils in Colombo but it has not been possible to collect sufficient information as to formulate conclusions regarding Christian-Hindu interaction in Colombo during the period under consideration.

- 2 David Kopf, *British Orientalism and the Bengal Renaissance: The Dynamics of Indian Modernization 1773-1835*. University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969, pp. 17-18.

For instance :

Hastings 'was predisposed towards a new cultural policy which aimed at creating an Orientalized Service elite competent in Indian languages and responsive to Indian traditions . . . Indianization should be conducted thenceforth not only on the level of social intercourse but also on that of intellectual exchange. In as much as the British servant was expected to work alongside his Asian counterpart in the administrative hierarchy, the Englishman would have to learn to think and act like an Asian, otherwise the British would be treated as aliens, rapport between ruler and ruled would break down, and the empire would ultimately collapse', pp. 17-18.

3. *ibid.*, pp. 17-18. 47-
4. *ibid.*, p. 47.
5. Acculturation denotes a process of culture change initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous culture systems.
6. James Emerson Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon*, London, 1850, p. 63.
7. C. D. Velupillai, *A History of American Ceylon Mission (Tamil)*. Tellipalai, 1922, p. 24.
8. *ibid.*, p. 26; *Christianity in Ceylon* p. 84.
9. *ibid.*
10. H. A. I. Goonetilleke, *Images of Sri Lanka through American Eyes*, 1976, pp. 8-9.
11. Letter of the (Anderson) Deputation, Batticotta, May 12, 1856, *Missionary Herald*, 1855, p. 121.
12. H. A. I. Goonetilleke, *Images of Sri Lanka through American Eyes*, p. 41.
13. K. Arumainayagam, 'Pattonpatām nūṟṟāntin caiva maṟumalarcci', *Tirukkētīsvaram Tirukudattirumanchana malar*, Colombo, 1976, p. 73.
14. 'With this view proclamation was publicly made that no native could aspire to the rank of Modliar, or be even permitted to farm land or hold office under the Government, who had not first undergone the ceremony of baptism, become a member of the Protestant Church and subscribed to the doctrines contained in the Helvetic Confession of faith'¹ *Christianity in Ceylon*, p. 45.
15. K. M. de Silva, 'Religion and State in the Early Nineteenth Century', *University of Ceylon, History of Ceylon (UCHC)*, Vol III, p. 68.
16. K. M. de Silva, *Social Policy and Missionary Organizations in Ceylon, 1840-1855*. London, 1965, pp. 64-65.
17. *A History of American Ceylon Mission*, p. 38.
18. P. Poologasingham, 'The contributions of Ceylonese to the development of Tamil in the Nineteenth Century', *Proceedings of the Fourth International Conference of Tamil Studies*, 1974, Vol. II, pp. 293-316.

19. *A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon, 1814-1964*, ed. W. J. T. Small. Colombo, p. 88.
20. *Social Policy and Missionary Organizations in Ceylon*, p. 27.
21. *A History of American Ceylon Mission*, pp. 34-35, 45.
22. *ibid.*, p. 85.
23. *A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon*, p. 93.
24. 'The regular gathering, too, in the first Monday of every month, of the various missionary families within a circle of 20 miles is another most interesting assembly' Wesleyan Missionary Correspondence (Wes. Miss. Corr.)
Mss. John Rhodes, Jaffna, 18th January, 1867; *Christianity in Ceylon*, pp. 43-44; *A History of American Ceylon Mission*, p. 44.
25. He was unfriendly to the Americans and refused them permission to establish the printing press. Additions to their staff through fresh arrivals from America were disallowed, Besides, in the circumstances there was no prospect of obtaining a charter from the Governor for a Collegiate institution conferring degrees.
26. 'A great many of their disappointments sprang from their overconfidence, and their under-estimation of the indigenous religions. They came expecting the sort of response the Wesleyans had evoked in the industrial cities of England and the extent of their disappointment was in proportion to the immensity of their expectations' - K. M. de Silva, 'The Government and Religion: Problems and Policies, c. 1832 to c. 1910;', *UHC*, Vol. III, 189.
27. *A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon, 1814-1964*, p. 38.
28. *ibid.*, p. 110; *A History of American Ceylon Mission*, p. 38.
29. C. H. Piyaratna, *American Education in Ceylon, 1816-1875, An Assessment of its Impact*, The University of Michigan. Ph.D. (Thesis), 1968, University Microfilms Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1971, p. 113.
30. *ibid.*, p. 195.
31. *ibid.*, p. 195.
32. *ibid.*, p. 174.
33. One such instance is reported in the records of the Wesleyans. 'When the Perenteroo School was begun and the services were held, a petition was received from the inhabitants of Tambalagamam requesting the missionary to visit them and establish a school in that village too'. *A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon*, p. 204.
34. For instance: Coomaraswamy Mudaliyar, the father of Wyman Cathiravetpillai, who conducted a free school at Valvetti, with an attendance of 60 pupils, preferred to vest the school with the American Ceylon Mission provided they accepted responsibility for maintaining it. This offer was made to Daniel Poor when he visited the locality. *A History of American Ceylon Mission*, p. 82.

35. Peter Percival, 'One of the ablest missionaries ever sent to the East' and 'The greatest Tamil Scholar Missionary Methodism has ever had', arrived in the island in 1826 and had served at the Stations of Trincomalee and Jaffna before he became the Chairman of the North Ceylon District in 1838. In 1851 he returned to England.
36. J. V. Chelliah, *A Century of English Education. The Story of the Batticotta Seminary and Jaffna College*. Tellipalai, 1922, p. 3.
37. *ibid.*, p. 4.
38. *ibid.*, p. 6.
39. A Kandyan Buddhist monk and a number of South Indians were among those who were educated at this institution before 1830. Among the South Indians trained at the Seminary Satkunanathan, Abhishekanath, Issac Pillai, Ponnaiyapilli, Masilamani and Jivanantham had subsequently attained pre-eminence in Society. *A History of American Ceylon Mission*, p. 79.
40. *A Century of English Education*, pp. 9-15.
41. *ibid.*, p. 15.
42. *ibid.*, pp 12-13.
43. *Christianity in Ceylon*, p. 147.
44. *American Education in Ceylon, 1816-1875*, p. 45.
45. *A History of American Ceylon Mission*, p. 39.
46. *ibid.*
47. *ibid.*, p. 123.
48. *ibid.*
49. L. A. Wickreematne, 'Education and Social Change, 1832-1900', *UCHC*, Vol. III, p. 175.
50. *ibid.*, p. 196.
51. *A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon*, p. 110.
52. *ibid.*, p. 215.
53. *ibid.*
54. *ibid.*
55. *ibid.*
56. *ibid.*
57. *ibid.* There are references in the Minutes of 1837 to 'upper' and 'lower' English Girls' Schools in the Mission premises with 24 and 38 girls respectively.
58. *A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon*, pp. 215, 300, 319, 320.
59. *American Education in Ceylon, 1815-1865*, p. 174.
60. *Report of the American Mission in Ceylon in 1878*, Strong and Asbury Printers Jaffna, 1879, p. 5.

61. *A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon*, p. 319.
62. *Wes. Miss. C.* W. R. Winston, Jaffna, August 10th, 1875.
63. *ibid.*, p. 319.
64. 'Thus the passion for the English Language, in preference to the Tamil, is every where cultivated; increasing our perplexities as a mission. The declaration we have heard from the most intelligent natives, as to the rush of feeling for English in the native mind, almost exceeds belief; and yet, until quite lately, we have heard no contrary testimony from any quarter. We have heard it affirmed by the highest Tamil authority in the district, that no education is valued by the people except in the English Language, that the value placed upon that language is simply as a means of acquiring wealth, office and influence. . . .' - *Missionary Herald*, 1856, p. 114.
65. *Wes. Miss. C.*, John Rhodes, Pt. Pedro, May 20, 1872.
66. *ibid.*
67. *Wes. Miss. C.*, John Rhodes, Point Pedro, September 1870.
68. *Christianity in Ceylon*, p. 144.
69. 'The course of education is so comprehensive as to extend over a period of eight years of study. With a special regard to the future usefulness of its alumni in conflict with the Brahmanical system, the curriculum embraces all the ordinary branches of historical and classical learning and all the higher departments of mathematical and physical science combined with a most intimate familiarisation with the great principles and evidences of the Christian Religion. *The knowledge exhibited by the pupils was astonishing; and it is no exaggerated encomium to say that, in the course of instruction, and in the success of the system of communicating it the Collegiate institution of Batticotta is entitled to rank with many European Universities*' - Emerson Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon*, p. 152.
70. *A Century of English Education*, p. 52.
71. Daniel Somanader of Batticaloa was one of the most influential among the prominent persons in the Eastern province. His son who was the Chief Mudaliar of the province was a member of the Wesleyan congregation in Batticaloa.
Commenting on the qualities of the Christians of Batticaloa John Rhodes remarks: ' - Fine, dignified, noble-looking, earnest, devout men they are. Three of them hold titles of native rank, several have wealth, some are vulnerable with age, others in the prime of manhood, but the interest, and practical common sense and business tact they display is most delightful. Indeed our Leaders and Local Preachers' meetings, have seemed to me like model specimens from England, firmly rooted and naturally developed'. *Wes. Miss. C.* John Kilner, Jaffna, June 24, 1868; John Rhodes, Batticaloa, 10th October, 1872. .
72. *Wes. Miss. C.* James Brown, Batticaloa, December 11, 1874.
73. *Wes. Miss. C.* Edmund Rigg, Batticaloa, September, 1861.
74. *Wes. Miss. C.* Edmund Rigg, Trincomalee, 19 February, 1869.
75. *Wes. Miss. C.* Ripley Winston, Jaffna, April 22, 1874.
76. *Missionary Herald*, 1856, p. 106.

77. *Christianity in Ceylon*, p. 161.
78. *Letter of the Deputation*, p. 112.
79. *Christianity in Ceylon*, p. 154.
80. *ibid.*
81. *Missionary Herald*, 1856, p. 112.
82. *ibid.*
83. *A History of American Ceylon Mission*, p. 106.
84. *ibid.*
85. *ibid.*, p. 131; *Missionary Herald*, 1856, p. 106.
86. *Report of the American Ceylon Mission*, 1868, p. 13;
Report of the American Ceylon Mission, 1878, p. 2.
87. *A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon*, pp. 196, 202.
88. *ibid.*, p. 103.
89. *ibid.*, pp. 29-299.
90. G. S. Williams, *Census of Ceylon*, p. 105.
91. *ibid.*
92. *ibid.*
93. *A History of American Ceylon Mission*, p. 109.
94. *Christianity in Ceylon*, pp. 170-171.
95. *Missionary Herald*, 1856, p. 106.
96. *Wes. Miss. C.* John Rhodes, Jaffna, April, 18, 1868
97. *Wes. Miss. C.* Ripley Winston, Jaffna, April 22, 1874.
98. *Wes. Miss. C.* James Osborn, Trincomalee, 13 December, 1876.
99. *Wes. Miss. C.* Edmund Rigg, Trincomalee, August 16, 1876.
100. *Wes. Miss. C.* John Rhodes, Jaffna, April 18, 1868.
101. *Letter of the Deputation*, p. 162.
102. *ibid.*, pp. 109-110.
103. *Report of the American Ceylon Mission*, 1868, p. 3.
104. *Wes. Miss. C.* John Kilner, Jaffna, No. 1874.
105. The year 1875 has been chosen as a convenient terminal date for this study on account of two principal considerations. The second phase of Protestant missionary enterprise during which the missions consolidated their position in the island came to a close in the 1870s. It was in the 1870s that the missionaries generally became convinced that their objective of mass conversions could never be achieved. Thereafter, they consolidated their monopoly of English education and extended their educational operations since the introduction of the grant-in-aid system and administrative regulations such as that of 30 November 1874 which refused grants to any school, established after that date, within a distance of three miles from an existing government or state-aided school of the same class, save under exceptional circumstances. Moreover, the first phase Hindu revival was almost over by 1875 by which time Arumuga Navalar had almost concluded his activities towards the defence and regeneration of Saivism. See *UCHC*, Vol. III, p. 196.

* The author wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Mr. K. Selvaratnam who read the draft of this paper and made useful comments.