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ABSTRACTS

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Religious activities of the portuguese in Jaffna (A.D 1505- 1658) A historical perspective

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The Portuguese landed at the coast line of Galle in 1505 and gradually influenced the maritime provinces of Sri Lanka until 1658. At the time of Portuguese arrival Sri Lanka was divided in to three important kingdoms as Kandy, Kotte, Jaffna and a few chieftaincies. There were conflicts among them. This situation was favourable in Jaffna. Portuguese tried to expand their power. They captured all the Maritime Provinces gradually culminating in the conquest Jaffna in 1619. Thus the Portuguese completely captured Jaffna and succeeded in the spreading of their religion and expanding the trade. The reasons for their success were the weakness of the Jaffna kingdom and the activities of the contemporary Jaffna society. The Portuguese made use of the educational facilities and sometimes force in spreading their religion in this area. The schools were constructed close to the Churches and this helped them in their religious activities. Because of their religious activities, Hinduism was more affected in Jaffna than any the other religions. They could destroy the Hindu temples but could not destroy the believers of Hinduism.

The main purpose of this article is to bring out the problems faced by the Hindus and the crisis this religion had, as a result of the religious activities of the Portuguese in Jaffna during the above period. The status of Hinduism in Jaffna before the arrival of the Portuguese, the religious activities of the Portuguese in Jaffna, the methods they used and the problems faced by the Hindus at that time are explored. Portuguese documents, archaeological and other historical materials were used as primary sources. Relevant researches, books, journals, magazines and internet based on primary sources were used as secondary sources. As a result of the religious activities of the Portuguese in Jaffna, some Tamil Hindus had become staunch Catholics. They withstood the oppression of the Dutch and continue to the Catholic even now. Most of the Churches, the Portuguese built, were generally changed into Protestant churches during the period of the Dutch. But some vestige are found in places like Delft. Though Hinduism suffered a setback during the period of the Portuguese and revived in the later part of Dutch rule and British period. They could not erase Hinduism completely from Jaffna.

Key words: Religious toleration, Hinduism, Catholicism, Missionary activities, Primary education

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