

THE BATTICOTTA SEMINARY

1823 — 1855

THE AMERICAN MISSIONS ATTEMPT AT

HIGHER EDUCATION IN JAFFNA

IN THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY

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The period between 1823 and 1855 is one of utmost importance in the history of higher education among the Tamils of Jaffna. The American Missionaries who had come from the New World with a view to propagate Christianity in the Jaffna Peninsula undertook to establish a college which was basically similar in its objectives and the courses of instruction provided, to the advanced centres of learning — the Universities in Europe. The college which they established had many distinctive features and was unique in the whole Island. It is considered as the oldest among the institutions of higher learning in Asia devoted to imparting a modern education. As an institution of higher learning it was unrivalled in the whole Island during the nineteenth century. Besides, it was also the oldest among the institutions of higher learning in Asia providing instruction in English. Long before the British colonial Government made definite policy decisions regarding English Education the promoters of the Batticotta Seminary had foreseen the value of English Education in British Ceylon. Although instruction at the Seminary was in English, adequate attention was paid to the study of Tamil and Sanskrit languages and their literary traditions. One of the Principal objectives of the Seminary was to disseminate Western knowledge and Science and introducing them into the Tamil language with a view to fulfill contemporary requirements.

Although similar centres of higher learning were set up in India even before the establishment of the Seminary, those institutions were not comparable to the Western Universities. Marquis Wellesley, the Governor General of India, had established Fort William College in Calcutta in 1800. Although the courses of study provided and the teaching staff employed were of university standards, instruction was provided only to officers of the British Government.¹ In 1812 a similar college was established in Madras by the joint efforts of Colonel Mackenzie and Lord Ellis. The College of Fort St. George which was thus established principally for the purpose of educating British Officers in Dravidian languages was closed in 1854.²

The Baptist missionaries who established themselves in Bengal towards the end of the eighteenth century set up a college at Serampore in 1818. Those who were associated with its management were steadfast in their conviction that instruction should be provided in the medium of the mother tongue.³ The Serampore College therefore became an institution which was confined to the Bengali region of India.

The Indians who had an attraction for English Education had established the Hindu College in Calcutta in 1816. But these enthusiasts were anxious to provide instruction on European Sciences and literature only. The founders of this Institution advocated the view that Hinduism and Hindu Philosophy should not be taught at this Institution.⁴ It could not therefore develop as an institution of the University model. In 1855 it became the Presidency College of Calcutta.

After 1830 some full-fledged University Colleges appeared in India. In that year Alexander Duff of the Scottish Mission founded the Scottish Church College in Calcutta. In 1832 John Wilson of the same mission established a College in Bombay which was later named after him and was referred to as Wilson college. Another such missionary, John Anderson, established a college called the Institution in Madras, in the year 1837. It later developed as the Madras Christian College. There have been several studies on these institutions and the services they rendered to society. Their contributions have been examined and evaluated from different stand points.

But hitherto there have been no serious and comprehensive studies about the American Ceylon Mission and the Batticotta Seminary established by this mission. However, from time to time, brief historical accounts about the American Mission have been published. "A History of the American Ceylon Mission" written by C. D. Velupillai in Tamil was published in 1922.⁵ It briefly surveys the history of the American Ceylon Mission from 1816 to 1916. But the Educational work of the American Ceylon Mission has not received adequate attention. The author has given only brief notes about the Batticotta Seminary. The author has not made use of materials in mission reports and other sources. If he had taken pains to make citations and bibliographical references the work would have been of considerable value to modern scholarship.

In "A Century of English Education" J. V. Chelliah attempts to provide a historical account of the Batticotta Seminary and Jaffna College. This monograph was also published in 1922.⁶ Although he had access to materials relating to the Seminary he had failed to make proper use of them. The Seminary's contribution to social progress and the advancement of Tamil Studies have not

received adequate attention. In this book there are no references to sources of information. His account of the Seminary is essentially superficial and in some instances faulty.

American Education in Ceylon 1816 - 1875. An assessment of its impact is a monograph submitted by C. H. Piyaratne for his Ph. D. degree at the University of Michigan in 1968⁷. The Educational work undertaken by the American Ceylon Mission has been discussed in detail but the Social Changes brought about by the Seminary have not been discussed adequately. The author has utilized only the sources that were available in America. The manuscript sources available locally and Tamil publications relating to the work of the mission have not been used by him. The Triennial Report of the Batticotta Seminary were also not accessible to him.

In 1973 R. Rajapakse wrote a thesis on *Christian Missions, Theosophy and Trade: History of American relations with Ceylon 1815 - 1915* to the University of Pennsylvania.⁸ As he had attempted to study the work of the American Mission during a period of a hundred years and tried to evaluate its significance in the context of developments within the whole Island, there was no detailed study of the Batticotta Seminary in his work. Even in this work the sources that are available locally have not been used.

Some of the American Missionaries who have served in the Jaffna peninsula have written a few treatises on the work of American Ceylon Mission. They were generally intended for the reading public in the United States of America. It may therefore be assumed that they were not written with a view to evaluate the contributions of the mission from the stand point of examining developments in the Tamil Society. Among these those written by the Winslows⁹, the Lietch sisters (1880 - 1886)¹⁰ and Miss Helen. I Root¹¹. (1899 - 1907) are most remarkable from the point of view of our study. These are basically in the form of diaries.

A detail study of the American Mission and the Batticotta Seminary with special reference to their contribution to the modernization of Tamil Society in Sri Lanka has not yet been attempted and as such there is a major gap in the modern History of that society. S. Vithiananthan, K. E. Mathiaparanam, S. Ambihai-bahan, S. Kulendran. and others have written on the contribution of the American Ceylon Mission to the development of Tamil.¹² They indicate the need for making a detail study of the Batticotta Seminary. In the course of a lecture delivered at the Annamalai University in 1963, T. P. Meenakshisundaram emphasized that the Tamils are indebted in considerable measure to the American

Mission for the progress of Tamil learning in the nineteenth century and that the publications of the Batticotta Seminary should be reprinted for the benefit of modern Tamil scholarship.¹³

If the work of the Batticotta Seminary about which there is an abundance of literary sources, is examined from different points of view many facts could be clarified.

One of the important questions that has to be posed is, why the American Missionaries who were concerned with evangelical work gave prominence to the advancement of Scientific Knowledge. What was the purpose of the study of the basic Saivaite texts at the Seminary? What were the consequences of such studies? Why did the American Missionaries who were eminently successful in the educational work failed to achieve a similar degree of success in evangelical work?

The Seminary was responsible for the production of some very useful standard works on Logic, Geography, History, Mathematics and Astronomy in Tamil. It also provided a stimulus for the development of Drama, History of Literature, Prose Writing and New Poetry. Many Scholars who were educated at the Seminary were well accomplished in English, Tamil, and Sanskrit learning. The scholars educated at the Seminary became sceptical of the religious traditions and practices prevailing in Jaffna.

Such a situation resulted in an intellectual ferment involving most of the scholars living in Jaffna. When considered in the light of these developments one would see that the American Missionaries and the local scholars produced by the institutions they established in Jaffna occupy a prominent position in the modernization of the Jaffna society. Why were the Graduates of the Batticotta Seminary steeped in the traditions of Tamil culture? Why were not the seminary students attracted by the cultural traditions and ideals of the West, to the same extent as the students trained in other missionary institutions were attracted? What type of students received Education at the Seminary? Why did the Education provided by the Seminary fail to attract people of the lower ranks of the Society? What was the impact of the Seminary on the attitudes and thinking of the Tamils in the Island? It would be possible to find answers to such questions.

The modern history of the Tamils in Sri Lanka in general, and their educational and cultural progress in particular have not been studied in depth. The present study would practically explain the great progress achieved in English

Education and Science Education in the Jaffna Peninsula. Besides it could also be seen how the Seminary contributed towards the modernization of Jaffna society through social changes, political consciousness and employment opportunities.

The origins of the Batticotta Seminary

The establishment of the Batticotta Seminary was an event of utmost importance in the history of education in South Asia. In *A Century of English Education*, which is a history of the Batticotta Seminary and Jaffna College. until 1922, J. V. Chelliah says:

“That the small sandy peninsula of Jaffna situated in a remote corner of the Island of Ceylon should enjoy the privilege of having one of the pioneer institutions of higher Western learning in the East can only be accounted for by the inscrutable ways of Providence.”¹⁴

The Political Conditions in Sri Lanka

A combination of religious, historical and social considerations led to the formation of the Seminary. The British Government except under Edward Barnes extended warm support to the activities of the American Mission. The religious sentiments prevailing in England and the influence wielded by the Evangelicals in the British Parliament were factors that led to the positive responses to the missionaries from the Government of the colony. When the charter of the East India company was revived in 1813 the Evangelical interests strived for the inclusion of clauses in the charter which accommodated their interests. It was incorporated in the charter that the East India Company should be responsible for furthering the cause of evangelism, permit the establishment of missions in the territories under its jurisdiction and assume responsibility for the remuneration of Bishops and Archdeacons.

Robert Brownrigg who was the Governor of the colony from 1812 to 1820 was deeply interested in the Evangelical movement. The colonial office in London provided all support for Brownrigg in the promotion of evangelical work. In a communication to the Governor in 1812 the Secretary of State for colonies says:

“His Majesty’s Government are most anxious to afford means of Education and Religious education”¹⁵

All the Christian Missions received support from Brownrigg. In matters of rights and privileges all the mission were placed on an equal footing. Because of the great support extended by the Governor all the missions gained a foot-

hold in the Island. With reference to the support he extended to the missions Robert Brownrigg observes.

“It has been a matter of peculiar satisfaction to me that I have seen under my Government Wesleyans, Presbyterians and Bapbists uniting with regular clergy of the Church of England”¹⁶

In the second decade of the nineteenth century conditions in England and Sri Lanka favoured the development of educational institutions by the mission. However, it is a matter for investigation that the American Ceylon Mission alone among the Protestant Missions was able to establish an institution of higher learning.

Puritans Love for Learning

The religious conceptions of the American Mission gave pride of place to learning. The congregationalists since their inception had taken a great interest in the cause of learning. As the congregationalists who were puritans were denied admission to the old established universities in England they set out to establish universities of their own. The University of London was one of such institutions. Commenting on the Puritan concern for Education, church historian R. W. Dale observes;

“Congregationalists for many generations were accustomed to assert the claims of the interlect in religion far more earnestly than other evangelical churches.”¹⁷

It is noteworthy that almost all American missionaries who came to the Island during the nineteenth century have had a university education. Levy Spaulding who came as a missionary in 1820 had completed his education at the Cornell University with distinction and had come first in the M. A. examination. Clifton Phillips who had done research on the work of the American Mission in foreign countries says:

“It was in collegiate circles that the missionary enthusiasm flamed high creating societies like the secret brethren and producing the sense of vocation that called forth the Youthful evangelists to foreign lands.”¹⁸

The congregationalists settled in America established many Universities for educating their clergymen. The University of Harvard was thus established in 1638. William and Marry College was set up in 1693 and the Yale Univer-

sity was established in 1701. These three institutions were designed as Puritan models of centres of learning. But during the late eighteenth century religious sentiment fell into the background at these universities. Their connection with the church became only a nominal one. Rationalism and scientific inquiry which gained an overwhelming importance in education and knowledge in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries pervaded the Puritan citadels of learning. 19 During the early nineteenth century the Americans attached an unusual importance to education and believed that knowledge was power. Although the American Missionaries considered that education was a vital agent of evangelization, yet they were inspired by the ideal that the imparting of knowledge was an act of charity. They shared with Thomas Jefferson the firm belief that education was the only avenue to all kinds of progress. It was their conviction that economic prosperity and social progress were dependent on, and inextricably connected with the advancement of learning.

The American passion for education is a logical outgrowth of their background in the enlightenment; like their contemporary Jefferson they believed that Education was the only avenue to all forms of progress and that social and economic development went hand in hand with growth of the spirit.²⁰

Instrument of Evangelization

The American Missionary James Richards who came to the Island in 1816 makes the following observation in relating to the importance of education.

“What in our minds can be a good substitute for the society of beloved brethren, sisters and friends whom we have left behind, as a presence of a circle of males and females bearing their names snatched from their ignorance and misery of idolatry, through their instrumentality and placed in circumstances favourable for cultivating the same virtues which our brethren and friends possess”.²¹

The American Missionaries in the Island published a prospectus outlining the objectives, aims and relevance to social needs of a collegiate institution and made it available for distribution among their associates in Sri Lanka, India and America. The ideas they expressed about education in their prospectus are worthy of utmost consideration.

They said:

“Knowledge is power”. This maxim, so justly celebrated, so steadily kept in view by the philosopher and statesman is, not less practi-

cal or important to the Christian Philanthropist when those who are engaged in a meliorating the condition of their fellow men have knowledge or means of disseminating knowledge they have the power of doing good. To extend the blessings of the most favoured countries of Europe or America to almost any section of the globe, we need only carry thither the literary and religious institutions of those countries whatever may be said of the influence of the soil, climate or even government upon national characters and happiness it cannot be doubted that these depend principally upon causes more exclusively intellectual and religious being and under the combined influence of pure science and true religion and of these only attain the moral dignity of his nature.²²

All the Protestant Christian missions established in the Island considered education the most effective medium for prosecuting evangelical work. It was on account of this consideration that the missionaries established native primary schools in India and Sri Lanka in several thousands.

Viscount Torrington, British Governor of Sri Lanka (1847 - 1850), made the following observation about the scheme of education:

"Education is the best preparation for conversion to Christianity. Experience has taught every church whose clergy officiate among the natives of Ceylon that preaching makes but a transient impression if any, unless the way has been first prepared by the process of mental conversion."²³

The system of education initiated by the American missionaries with the opening of primary schools at Mallakam and Tellippalai had developed into a stable one in 1823. The system provided satisfaction and a sense of achievement to them. In 1824 there were ninety primary schools with an attendance of 2863 boys and 613 girls in various parts of Jaffna.²⁴

In their programme of educational development, the Boarding schools came next to the Primary schools. Students with a capacity and desire for learning were selected for schooling and were provided free board, lodging and clothing in the boarding schools. Boarding schools were set up in five mission stations viz:- Pandateruppu, Tellippalai, Manipay, Uduvil and Vaddukodai. The missionaries had observed the low cost of living and the comparatively less rigid observance of caste rules were more favourable for the development of those schools in Jaffna than in South India. In 1923 there were one hundred and fifty boys and twenty eight girls receiving instruction at those five boarding schools.

The expenditure incurred for the maintenance of these children was met from the grants supplied by the donors in Massachusetts. As a gesture of goodwill for the help rendered by the donors their names were applied to the children for whom the grants were allocated. In the Boarding schools instruction was provided both in English and Tamil. Christianity, Mathematics, Grammar and Geography were among the subjects included in the curriculum. Gradually the prejudices against mission boardings began to fade out. A considerable number of students showed a keen interest in joining these schools.

The unusual interest and intelligence displayed by these students vindicated the need for the establishment of a centre of higher learning. In this context it shall be noted that all the protestant missions working in South Asia became involved in the educational activities and initially with the primary schools. Once these were developed, by necessity they had to institute centres of higher learning. In 1799, the Baptist missionary William Carey established a native school at Serampore. Subsequently in 1818 he instituted a college providing instruction in the Bengali language. Like the American missionaries of the congregational church the Anglicans and the Methodists also started their educational work with primary schools in Jaffna. The Anglican seminary at Nallur was inaugurated in 1823. The Methodists established their Seminary in Jaffna Town in 1848. But the educational standards of these institutions were much lower in comparison with that of the institution set up by the American missionaries.

The College Plan

When the American missionaries had decided to set up a College and drew up a plan, they appealed to their benefactors in America and India for support. They prepared and published a prospectus styled "Plan for a College for the literary and Religious Instructions of Tamil and other Youths"

This was widely distributed locally and abroad. It may be mentioned here that this was in pursuance of a tradition initiated by William Carey in Bengal.²⁵

In the letter which they wrote to the Mission headquarters in Boston in 1824, the members of the American Ceylon Mission made the following observations about their plan of work in relation to the seminary.

"In our last letter we mentioned that we had it in contemplation to establish a Central School or College. We have matured the plan of such an institution, and had it printed. As soon as circumstances will admit we hope to carry this plan into execution., for particulars upon this head we refer you to a separate communication which will soon be sent to you.

In order that the most favoured boys at our respective stations may be better prepared to reap the benefit of such an institution we are about to establish an Academy; into which they will be received, and put under the care of one of the brethren, who will devote his time almost exclusively to their improvement, Batticotta has been considered the most eligible place for its location and the brother who has been unanimously chosen to take charge of it is Brother Poor. He will in a short time remove to Batticotta and his place at Tillipally will be supplied by brother Woodward''²⁶

It is an undeniable fact that education had been a monopoly of religion in the countries of Asia and Europe from ancient times. The history of medieval Europe is inextricably bound with that of the monasteries. In the Indian sub-continent Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism had promoted the cause of learning with the objective of furthering their religious ideologies, It is difficult to find instances where educational institutions were maintained outside the control of religious agencies.

In England even in the nineteenth century educational institutions were maintained by Christian denominations for promoting their interests. The concept that education was meant for promoting the welfare of the people had not developed in Asia and Europe even in the nineteenth century. The organization and working of the educational institutions, therefore, had a religious orientation.

The ideas expressed by the American Missionaries in their plan reveal that they also were motivated by similar considerations.

Although like other Christian denominations they considered education as a medium of evangelism yet they were also of the view that education was the basis for cultural and economic advancement. The promoters of the Seminary said:

“Agriculture and the 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 which now confine all in the beaten track of their ancestors. will imbibe that spirit of improvements which has so long distinguished and blessed most Christian countries. It is not want of mind which leaves Asia at so greater distance behind Europe in the march of improvement. It is the want of, a spirit of inquiry and of unwillingness to improve. 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.²⁷

It was also pointed out that such a scheme would provide a number of benefits to the colonial government of the Island. The improvement of the judicial system, the availability of competent interpreters, the raising of English teachers and high ranking officers were among the developments that would emerge. In this connection they observed:

“The advantages of this must be appreciated by all these gentlemen in the Civil Service who in their official duties have intercourse with the Tamil part of the population. Among a people so litigious as the Malabars and at the same time removed, from the observation of their rulers by difference in situation, customs and language, the impartial administration of justice becomes a most perplexing and difficult concern. The mass of the people are so bound together by the ties of caste, family and interest and are at the same time so regardless of the obligation of an oath; that those of the same class cannot be made to testify against each other. A native of influence can therefore scarcely be brought to justice. His course of life however bad is known principally by those who are under his influence. He may be the leader of a gang of robbers and it may be known, even particular acts of his depredation may be pointed out while the most active magistrate is unable to convict him for want of evidence. How much then must course of justice be impelled in its descent to the lower classes, when in addition to all this, interpreter at any court may give what colouring he pleases to the evidence which he is the medium of transmitting, with little danger of its being discovered, if he is not above the influence of a bribe, the cause of truth will be sacrificed to his love of gain. Were the knowledge of English more common among the natives, they would act as checks upon each other and the practice of bribing less common.²⁸

The Name of The Institution

The American Ceylon Mission had not come to any definite decision regarding the name of the Institution which they wanted to establish. They referred to it as variously as the Central School, Seminary and College. There was also some debate among them about the site. Although they first decided to establish it at Vaddukoddai, they were indecisive, and later toyed with the idea of establishing it within the limits of Jaffna town. They therefore made a decision

to purchase the residential premises of Anthony Mooyart who was previously an official serving under the Dutch government for the sum of one thousand five hundred Rix dollars. However, it was finally decided in 1827 that this institution should be set up at Vaddukoddai. In the same year it was ceremoniously named American Mission Seminary. In the constitution which was revised in 1846 the institution was referred to as the Batticotta Seminary.

The local missionaries published the plan of the institution in March 1823 and set up the Central School at Vaddukoddai on the 22nd of July. This was done on their own initiative without the express permission from the mission headquarters in Boston or the consent of the British Government in the Island. Forty eligible candidates selected from five boarding schools were admitted to the new institution. Daniel Poor M. A. D. D. assumed responsibility as its head with the approval of his colleagues. Gabriel Tissera was placed in charge of the departments of English and Tamil. Besides two teachers were appointed to the Institution.

Although the missionaries had set out to find an institution which would confer degrees, circumstances were prohibitive in that respect. Generally a theological institution providing training for clergymen is spoken as a Seminary. The term is commonly applied in the Roman Catholic and the Protestant traditions. Such seminaries were under the direct supervision of the churches. During the Portuguese and Dutch periods the seminaries established in the island were meant for clergymen.

In America the educational institutions which had the right of conferring degrees were referred to as the Colleges. In 1827 the Baptist missionaries established in Serampore, applied for and obtained a charter from the King of Denmark who had political jurisdiction over Serampore. Since 1826 the Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions communicated to the Secretary of State for colonies in London for the purpose of obtaining a charter for the institution at Vaddukoddai. In the meanwhile the local missionaries made efforts to obtain permission for their project from the British Government in the island.

When Robert Brownrigg the British Governor in Ceylon relinquished his post in 1820, he was succeeded by his deputy Edward Barnes. Barnes had fought under Wellington at Waterloo and therefore had a sentimental hatred for the Americans as America was at war with Britain during the Napoleonic wars. He viewed with suspicion the activities of the American missionaries. He took up the position that the number of American missionaries should not be increased,

and if a college was to be established it should be managed by British personnel and as the British Government had the intention of establishing such an institution, there was no need of the American establishing a college. When the Church Missionary Society inaugurated a seminary at Kotte in 1827 Edward Barnes participated at the function and expressed support for it undaunted by the refusal of the Government to grant a charter to the American Missionaries who were steadfast in their determination to sustain the institution. With a view to offset the restrictions of the government they decided to name it as the Seminary, on the advice of the mission headquarters in Boston.

The Curriculum and Courses

The Batticotta Seminary being the first experiment in providing Western Education to an Oriental Society had to take into account several factors in designing its curriculum and courses. Most of the American missionaries who served in Jaffna had completed their courses of study at the prestigious American Universities like Harvard, Yale and Princeton. It is therefore natural that the syllabuses which they prepared for the Batticotta Seminary were modelled on those of the American universities from which they graduated. The significant innovations they introduced were in consideration of local needs and circumstances.

Medium of Instruction

In the plan for the college which they had published in 1823, the authors had elaborately stated the case for English as the medium of instruction. In this publication it was stated:

A leading object will be to give native youth of good promise a thorough knowledge of the English Language. The great reason for this is that it will open to them the treasures of European science and literature and bring fully before the mind the evidence of Christianity.³⁰

The arguments which they advanced in favour of English as the medium of instruction are worthy of examination. The idea of establishing a college or an Institution of higher learning was largely influenced by the work of the Baptist missionaries of Serampore. In 1818 the Baptist missionaries who published a prospectus setting forth the plan and objectives of the institution they intended to establish in Serampore advanced the reasons for adapting Bangali as the medium of instruction. American missionaries considered these arguments carefully and came to the conclusion that they had no relevance to the situation in Jaffna. 31

The arguments adduced by the American missionaries in favour of English were basically similar to the ideas of Thomas Macaulay who laid the guidelines of educational policy in India. Macaulay said:

I have not yet found an orientalist who could deny that a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia.³²

The American missionaries also expressed their ideas on this matter in the same tone. In "The plan" we see the echo of Macaulay's guidelines.

Were all that is valuable in history in the arts, in metaphysics, ethics law physics and divinity which is found in all the languages of Eastern Asia living and dead put in the balance with what is contained in English on the same subjects or in any other calculated, really to enlarge the mind and from it to correct and manly thought the treasures even of a small, but select English library, such as a native might read would outweigh them all³³

It should, however, be noted that the objective of the American missionaries in advocating the cause of English as the medium of instruction was fundamentally different from that of Macaulay. Macaulay was of the firm conviction that Oriental Culture and studies were an impediment to modernization which in his view amounted to Westernization.

The American missionaries however do not seem to have intended to Anglicize Jaffna Society. From the very beginning it would seem that they were opposed to that process of development. The sentiments expressed by Samuel Green in one of his letters provides some indication of the extent to which the American missionaries were opposed to the process of anglicization.

He wrote

"I begin to think that the change here will be from a waist cloth to pants from a scarf to a coat, from a turban

to a hat from vegetarianism to carnivorism from a hut to a house and so on till many while yet unchristianized may be denationalized. I would rather here see Christian Hindus than Hindus Europeanized''³⁴

These missionaries who were under the spell of eighteenth century liberalism did not want to destroy the values of traditional culture. But they firmly believed that it was only through English education that the native society could be sufficiently enlightened. They, therefore, rejected the ideas of Serampore missionaries relating to the medium of instruction. They were of the view that education in the native language could not confer benefits on Jaffna society although the case was slightly different in respect of India. In some of the Indian languages like Gujarati and Marathi there was some progress in book production and the assimilation of modern European knowledge through the media of such languages.

In 'The plan' they wrote.

"In some parts of India where the inhabitants are more of a reading people where they enjoy the advantages of the press, and where the epitomes, if not larger works on European Science are circulated the case is somewhat different.

The treasures of the English are to a small extent transferred to the native languages. Owing to this no doubt and considering the facilities they have for further enriching the common dialects from stores of European learning the venerable missionaries at Serampore have seemed to disparage English studies for natives''³⁵

They attributed the lack of mental and intellectual development among the Tamils to their unacquaintance with English Education. They formed such an opinion about the Tamil people and their literature owing to several reasons. Although they recognized that Tamil was of great antiquity like Greek, Sanskrit, and Hebrew they had no opportunity of familiarizing themselves with Tamil literature of high quality or with men of learning or scholarship. Tamil scholars refrained from having any contact with the missionaries. It was also not possible for the missionaries to obtain manuscript copies of Tamil texts. It was only in course of time that they were able to gain some knowledge about Tamil Literature. Daniel Poor, for instance, was able to procure a copy of a Tamil Astronomical work only in 1829 after a period of thirteen years sojourn in Jaffna. It is interesting to learn that the person who sold the manuscript to him made

the request that the transaction should be kept a secret.³⁶ In 1835 Daniel Poor had the chance to study "Agatiar Padal" (அகத்தியர் பாடல்) about which he had a high opinion and expressed great appreciation of the work. While referring to this work he said:

"Last evening at my usual meeting in Santilipay I had Akuttiar's 30 songs sung. He is said to be one of the most learned if not the most so of the Tamil race. The credit of being the author of the Tamil language is ascribed to him. It is said that he is still alive in some distant country. According to report he is one span in height. I regret very much that I did not come into possession of his songs until very late, as several of them convey sentiments strictly in unison with the doctrines we preach".³⁷

Of special interest are the views of H. R. Hoisington Principal of the Batticotta Seminary (1836 — 1849) on Thirukural.

"Introduced today into the first class the Cural one of the most eminent moral poems of India. It contains the chief doctrines of the vedas This we design as the highest Tamil classic".³⁸

Although they became appreciative of the quality of Tamil literature after gaining some acquaintance with it, at the beginning of their career in Jaffna they had developed a strong prejudice on account of their ignorance and were strongly opposed to providing instructions in the medium of Tamil.

Western Culture and Science

In order to realize the objectives of their institution they made provision for teaching Western Culture and Science to their students. Until the mid-nineteenth century generally all the missionaries serving throughout the world were of the firm belief that the inculcation of Western Culture and science would facilitate the progress of evangelism. Although rationalism had its impact in the early nineteenth century the theories developed by Lyell and Darwin which could shake the foundations of Biblical cosmology had not extended much influence in Western Society. Lyell's Principles of Geology was published in 1833. "The Origins of Species" and "The Genealogy of man" by Charles Darwin were published respectively in 1859 and 1871. Before the ideas incorporated in these works had influenced Western thought it was believed by missionaries that Western Science would be a useful medium for serving the needs of Christian missionary enterprise. The American missionaries made the following observations about their expectations.

“ The light of erudition and science is always favourable to Christianity. It courts inquiry and the more it is examined the wider will it be disseminated”³⁹

At the seminary it was intended that the first year students would be taught Tamil and English Languages. Students would be taught Mathematics, Science and Western Culture in the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th years. Although languages were not taught in Western Colleges in the first year the American missionaries strongly felt that the beginners should acquire competence to, write and comprehend the languages effectively. The curriculum which they prepared for the institution is as follows.

Studies: 1st year: Tamil poetry, select English authors translating English into Tamil and Tamil into English.

2nd year: Arithmetic, Geography, Chronology, and Abridged History.

3rd year: Rhetoric, Mathematics, Geography and Natural History.

4th year: Natural Philosophy, Chemistry and Mineralogy.

5th year: Astronomy, General History and Logic.

6th year: Philosophy of the Mind, Evidences of Christianity Natural and Revealed Religion.⁴⁰

Tamil Studies

Although the missionaries were very keen in prosecuting this scheme of education it would appear that they had a concern for promoting studies relating to the Tamil language. Imparting to the Tamil youth a sound knowledge of the English language came first in the order of priorities in their scheme of education. The cultivation of Tamil studies came next in order of importance.

They made the following observations about the Tamil language.

“ To maintain any good degree of respect among the native inhabitants. it is necessary to understand their literature. The Tamil language like the Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek and etc. is an original and perfect language and is in itself highly worthy of cultivation”⁴¹

The earliest stations established abroad by the American missionaries were in the Tamil land. The American missionaries established themselves in Jaffna with the hope of evangelizing the entire Tamil society including the one in South

India. It therefore became necessary for the missionaries to acquire a sound knowledge of the Tamil language. It was thought such an attainment would enable them to get acquainted with the people and would facilitate the process of evangelization. As it was indispensable for the missionaries to gain some knowledge of the culture, religion and heritage of the Tamils they were eager to learn the Tamil language in its spoken and literary forms.

Although they attached a great deal of importance to English education they were under the strong conviction that Christianity should be indigenized. They were inclined to foster the development of an indigeneous Christian literary tradition and a theology based on local cultural conditions.

They felt the need for raising a Christian elite well acquainted with and proficient in the Tamil language. They also made efforts to train men and women who could write and conduct discourses on Christianity in elegant Tamil. They openly expressed their feelings about their objectives in this matter very forthrightly

They observed:

It is common to find among Tamil people men who can read correctly, who understand to some extent the poetic language, and able perhaps to form a kind of artificial verse, who yet cannot write a single page of correct prose. Indeed with very few exceptions nothing is written in this "Iron Age". All agree in looking to their ancestors for books which were composed as they imagine under a kind of inspiration, and have a greater degree of sanctity from being quite unintelligible to the common people. One effect of this is that few books are read and fewer still understood. Those put into the hands of boys at school are so far above their comprehension that they learn the words without attaching the least meaning to them whatever to correct both these evils and to prepare the way for the sacred scriptures by forming a reading population" (an object of vast interest) the attention of many must be turned to writing intelligibly and forcibly in their own language.⁴²

They were of the opinion that the books in Tamil expounding the principles of Western Science should be made available to the public. For this purpose it was felt that persons competent for this task should be trained. They said

"Original native composition 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 most important aid to the interests of learning and Christianity''⁴³

They undoubtedly had certain well defined objectives in formulating their scheme of higher education and although they anticipated some practical problems in its implementation they were of the conviction that their scheme would provide avenues for evangelization. They observed.

“ That all the students will be able to make great advances in most of those different branches is not supposed, but that many will thereby obtain an expansion of mind, the power of receiving and originating thought, which will not only free them from the shackles of superstition but enable to them to guide others also, is not only hoped but confidently believed''⁴⁴

The American missionaries also planned to raise indogenous clergymen through their scheme of education. However they did not make provision for separate courses for church ministerial candidates and others. All had to follow one and the same course of study. It was anticipated that prospective candidates for ministry could be given further instruction in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Sanskrit and Hindu Astronomy.

The scheme of Education that was formulated in the plan for the college was substantially modified almost from the very beginning in response to environmental conditions in Jaffna and social needs. It was only by 1831 that the curricula for the courses attained a definite form. In course of time steps were taken to provide classes in certain subjects which were not included in the original scheme. Subjects like Hindu Astronomy and Hindu Mathematics began to occupy an important position in the courses of study.

Instruction in English accounted for about two thirds of the time allocated for studies while the rest of the time was taken for instruction in Tamil.

However, from the very beginning there was controversy about the medium of instruction. Although the parent society viz: Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions was in support of the view that education should be in the medium of the native language, the missionaries established in Jaffna were strongly convinced that instruction should be

provided in the English language. By 1833 it was found that the students in Jaffna had developed a great interest in English education. Although missionaries expounded the cause of English education they wanted to cultivate Tamil Studies for two obvious reasons. The first was that they wanted to acquaint themselves with the principal texts in Tamil literature and the other was that they could command the respect of the local population only with a sound knowledge and understanding of the Tamil language and its literary and cultural tradition. The recommendations of the Colebrooke commission (1833) in matters relating to education provided an impetus to the cause of English education, and probably contributed to the neglect of Tamil studies by the missionaries and their students. The parent society in Boston did not extend full support to the policy adapted by the local missionaries in favour of English education. They desired that all subjects should be taught in the Tamil language as they were apprehensive that those who received instruction in English would be tempted to seek employment provided by the agencies of the Government. The local missionaries were therefore obliged to communicate with the mission headquarters regularly in defence of their stand point. This controversy became most acute when Rufus Anderson became the Secretary of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. He was of the view that those who received English Education would enter Government Service and would never be contended with employment under the establishments of the Missions with low rates of remuneration. He, therefore, insisted that at least a specified number of the students at the Seminary should be provided instruction in Tamil, In this context it may be mentioned here that the controversy regarding the medium of instruction was a principal cause for the closure of the Seminary in 1855. Rufus Anderson in his report recommending the closing of the Seminary wrote. "It has also tended to draw the most promising pupils from the village English Schools and unfit them in some respects to return and obtain a livelihood among their own people. By their Education they are so much elevated above the masses, that they feel unable to live on their income they would receive in the ordinary occupation of the country."⁴⁵

The Text Books Used At The Seminary

The books that were recommended for use at the Batticotta Seminary, provided an indication of the educational and religious background of the men who founded it and the values they wanted to inculcate among the young men who came under their guidance. The Bibliography prescribed by the university of Harvard was the main source of inspiration to these men.⁴⁶ A list of books prescribed for the Science course is incorporated in the Triennial Report of the

Seminary published in 1830. On the basis of the books that were used it could be claimed that the standard of education at the Seminary was comparable to that of contemporary European Universities. The Tamil texts taught at the Seminary were increased in numbers in course of time. As the missionaries gradually began to acquire an increasing knowledge of Tamil literature, the list of Tamil books were revised from time to time and new items were included in it.

In the original plan, Tamil studies as envisaged consisted of instruction on Tamil poetry, translation from English into Tamil and translation from Tamil into English. But during the first three years of the existence of the Seminary it appears that only translation was taught to the students.

In relation to the Tamil studies the Triennial Report of the Batticotta Seminary for 1823 makes reference to the study of translations only. The Tamil course consisted of the explanation of certain concepts and explanations in English and the translation of the English lectures into Tamil. The Third year students were given exercises in translation from English into Tamil. The second year students do not seem to have followed any course in Tamil. But by 1830 this situation had changed considerably. By that time a definite attempt was made to encourage the study of the most important works in Tamil - Literature. The Triennial report of 1830 provides a list of Tamil works that were taught at the Seminary and this suggests that the missionaries had by that time acquired a competence to learn and provide instruction on the themes of literary works. The following books are listed in that report.

“An abridgment in prose of Nannool, the standard Grammar of the poetic dialect, with an application of its principles in analyzing Auveiyar and Moothurai:-
Nannool itself accompanied with copious explanations and illustrations from standard authors.

Thiruvalluvar Cural a work on moral subjects. Some parts of Scanda Purana.

Tatwa Kattalai which treats of the constituent parts and functions of the human body and a native system of Arithmetic. The Arithmetic well deserves the student's attention though he may be acquainted with the European system. It contains many useful tables both in integers and fractions and some important rules in mensuration and other branches expressed in a laconic poetical manner by which they are easily retained in memory for practical purposes.”⁴⁷

The Triennial Report of 1833 says that the Examinations were conducted in Skanda Purana, Coorma Purana and Ramayana. The Triennial Report of 1839 says that the students in all the grades were given instruction on 'Nigandoo'.

Like other Protestant missionaries working in Jaffna, the American missionaries also had to encounter opposition from the Saivaites. The Saivaite scholars published books condemning the activities of the missionaries and the tenets of Christianity. Such polemical writings were studied by the students at the Seminary and the missionaries formulated their arguments to refute them. "Gnana Kummi" was the earliest among the tracts published by the Saivaites denouncing christianity and the evangelical work of the missionaries. It appears that this work was studied in detail at the Seminary.

In the eighteen forties the polemical tracts produced by the Saivaites were also included in the course of instruction. The missionaries who considered that a deep knowledge of Tamil and an analytical approach to the study of its literature was very vital, made efforts to teach the language and its literary tradition in accordance with the teaching methods developed in the West. However, in this attempt they encountered stubborn opposition from the students and native teachers,

The Triennial Report of 1830 says.

"It has from the beginning been considered an important object, to introduce a more rational method of teaching TAMIL, than that pursued in the Native schools and also to displace by works of real utility, those extravagant and immoral fictions of the poets which are studied by all here who make any pretensions to learning and which are held in high estimation by the people. It was at once evident however that no innovations could be effected without much patient and persevering effort. At first indeed it was necessary to make a compromise, and to proceed in some respects according to the Native system introducing the new course only in parts and by degrees; but continued effort has at length brought the department more under control."

Commenting on the traditional methods of learning Tamil

H. R. Hoisington (Principal 1835 — 1846) says.

"The experience of this term gives a decided testimony in favour of a general room for study, in which all the classes are brought together, and made to study silently. The custom is but six months old in the district and this is the only example of the country to which this is opposed, is to have but one room for study and recitation and for each and all to study with a loud voice.

The usual mode of study is merely to commit to memory words and phrases. Our present course while it does not lessen the ability to commit to memory to found, make study more strictly the business of the intellect, to make more thorough and independent scholar and at the same time to exert a most salutary influence on all as to habit of punctuality and regularity.⁴⁸

It was the objective of the missionaries to provide facilities for the study of science in the best possible manner as circumstances would permit. It is undeniable that the faith in traditional religious beliefs among the students who studied Puranic literature with Western Science was shaken. It is interesting to note that T. P. Hunt (Murugappah Sathasivam) who graduated from the Seminary in 1850 had his daughter's wedding solomanized on the eighth day after new moon (அட்டமி) considered traditionally as very inauspicious by the Hindus.

Rhetoric and Composition

Rhetoric and composition were accorded an important place in the curriculum of studies at the Batticotta Seminary. Although the Puranas were recited with explanatory comments at Hindu temples regularly, the Hindus had not cultivated the tradition of delivering discourses on selected themes with logical sequence and coherence.

As oratorical skill was an important requisite for those who were engaged in the task of preaching Christianity, special attention was paid to the cultivation of oratorical skill at the Seminary. They conducted regular classes on rhetoric and composition, and at the end of the course the candidates had to sit for an examination. The lectures delivered at the Seminary by the students after careful preparation and study were published in the "Morning star" and "The Missionary Herald" and were widely read in Jaffna and abroad. When the rival religious groups were engaged in controversies, rhetorics became one of their principal instruments.

The cultivation of the art of Tamil composition was one of the principal objectives of the inauguration of Tamil studies at the Seminary. The missionaries provided a very good training to their students to write accounts about subjects relating to Science Astronomy Religion and Geography. The essays written by the missionaries and the native teachers testify to the standard of excellence they had attained in the art of composition.

The curriculum and courses of study at the Batticotta Seminary had the effect of producing a literary ferment in Jaffna society. There was an encounter

between the indigenous literary and cultural traditions with the educational thought and cultural values of the American missionaries which were inspired by Puritanism of the sixteenth century England.

The missionaries introduced into the local society some elements of the highly developed educational system of the Western world. Although the educational background of Jaffna was sound, the native scholars showed utmost reluctance in establishing contacts with missionaries. At the beginning therefore the missionaries could not perceive the antiquity and the high quality of the Tamil literary traditions. But in course of time they were able to gain some knowledge about these matters and became appreciative of them. Although they remained firm in their conviction that oriental religions were heathen, yet, they discovered vital facts about the oriental culture, art and Society. The science education provided at the Seminary had the effect of making the local students recognizing some of the fundamental weaknesses in their tradition.

The missionaries inaugurated a system of education which inculcated a scientific outlook and a spirit of inquiry among our people.

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