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A LIFE OF THE

REV. SEVAK S. S. SELVARATNAM

The Rt. Rev. S. Kulandran



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The Rt. Rev. S. Kulandran

1979

A LIFE OF THE

REV. SEVAK S. S. SEVATHANAM

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Bastian Press, 392, Main Street, Jaffna.



Expect great things from God  
Attempt great things for God

**Christa Seva Ashram**  
**Chunnakam**  
**Sri Lanka**



Almighty great things for God  
Expect great things from God

Christa Sara Ashram  
Chunabakam  
Sri Lanka





The Rev. Sevak S. S. Selvaratnam  
(Periannan)



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# PREFACE

Selvaratnam was a great figure in the Christian Community of Ceylon. The 40th Anniversary of the Ashram he founded was approaching in August this year. It was obvious that a "Life" of him was a clear need; but this project was started only in July this year.

Why? The answer is because of the attitude of utterly benevolent but severe non-cooperation of our community. That is, many people were anxious that the Life should be written but were not in the least willing to supply any material which many of them could. Even those who were asked did not usually oblige. What material was obtained from such sources was meagre. Most people seem to have felt that somehow the book would materialise without their having anything to do with it.

Fortunately, there were various records and documents available. Sevak Sam Alfred was able to furnish minutes of meetings and Circular Letters sent out by the Ashram from time to time and was also in a position to give first-hand touches and generally act as a source of reference and verification.

The Anniversary required that some kind of an account of the life of its founder should be put in to the hands of those attending; but a Life once written remains as a record for all time; and readers must find it useful in the years to come. This requires accuracy, to attain which there has to be a lot of checking up of various details. If this had not been done in the most painstaking manner, a book like this would have amounted to a fraud.

Therefore, what is found in these pages represents an effort to produce a worth-while life of a much beloved personality in almost frantic haste "to meet a dead-line". Such an effort is an intrinsically fool-hardy venture. It cannot both be a satisfactory book as well as one that had aimed to meet an imminently close dead-line. But such as it is, it is here offered with the earnest request that the short-comings that arise from such a situation will be forgiven.

My thanks are due chiefly to Sevak Sam Alfred, who housed and fed me during the undertaking; and to Mr. Welch Balasingham, who undertook to do most of the typing. Mrs. S. J. Somasundaram also helped out somewhat in the matter. Our thanks are also due to Mr. J. H. Ariyaratnam, who virtually pushed the book through the press, to be in time for the Anniversary.

In spite of all the draw-backs under which it was produced, it is to be hoped that readers will feel that this book is a fairly trustworthy account of the life of Selvaratnam. In any case that is meant to be its purpose.

July 1979.

S. Kulandran  
Bishop



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# PART ONE

PART ONE

## CHAPTER I

### THE FIRST STAGE

#### Birth, Parentage and Childhood

Samuel Selvaratnam was born on 19th. November, 1906 and was the only son of George Stephen Subramaniam and Ann Muttammah. He had been preceded by two sisters and was followed by another. Mr. Subramaniam was of staunch Hindu parentage and belonged to Karainagar, a large island off the western coast of the Peninsula of Jaffna, in North Ceylon, connected to the mainland by a cause-way, about two miles in length. After his early education he had joined the Methodist Training School for Teachers, situated in Jaffna Town and there had become a Christian. He was sent as a Teacher-Catechist in the Mannar District off the North-Western coast of Ceylon. There he joined the Church Missionary Society (Anglican) as a Catechist. In that capacity he served that Society till his retirement. Selvaratnam's mother was from Nallur, a suburb of Jaffna Town.

Selvaratnam's primary education was at the Vembadi Girls' School, which was the leading Methodist Girls' School for the Northern and Eastern Provinces and is situated in the heart of Jaffna Town. It has always been the custom of Girls' Schools to admit boys also in the lower classes. It is said that he used to play at being a minister and call himself the Rev. Benjamin, the only Christian minister he knew; but whether this started when he was doing his Primary schooling is not known.

Usually students used to go to a small Elementary English School when they finished their seventh

year and join a school of higher standing, when they were 12 or 13 years of age for their elementary education. Selvaratnam fortunately had Central College close by, where he could obtain both his Elementary and Secondary education, which of course was in the English medium.

### Central College

As Vembadi used to be a leading Girls' School for the Methodists of the Northern and Eastern Provinces, so was Central College for the boys. Girls, at least in the old days, could merely study their lessons and perhaps even pass examinations; but boys in addition could play games, in the old days, chiefly Cricket and Football. And for the students of St. John's (an Anglican Institution situated a mile off), to win a match in either game, particularly Football, against Central was the greatest event of the year—, if it came off at all; but which usually did not.

In the Second Standard at Central College, Selvaratnam must have studied under Mr. G. K. W. Mailvaganam, who taught that class at least for thirty years, till, I think, latterly he was promoted to the Third Standard. As he went up he must have been taught by Mr. Thamber, Mr. J. W. Arulpiragasam and others.

But a curious phenomenon at Central College at that period was the almost kaleidoscopic change of Principals, whereby it had five Principals within ten years. The Rev. W. M. P. Wilkes become Principal sometime before Selvaratnam joined. In those days, one teacher was allowed to play in the team along



with the students; and Mr. Wilkes' slow (googly) bowling was the dread of all opposing teams. Once he managed to dismiss a team for nine runs. In 1916 he went on furlough. The British Admiralty cancelled all civilian passages. The Rev. E. T. Selby acted as Principal till the Rev. H. Bullough, M. A. (Cantab) arrived in 1917. That year Mr. Romain Cooke, the Vice-Principal, left to try his hand at Tea-Planting. Mr. Bullough left early in 1921, as his wife's health was failing. The Rev. H. R. Cornish, a preacher of extraordinary force and an administrator of great ability, acted in his place, till the Rev. P. T. Cash arrived in 1922 from Wesley College. To start with, he was qualified only in Botany and Zoology; but on his own he studied Philosophy and got his London M. A. degree in that subject. He was a quiet-spoken man, deeply religious; and his influence on all students who had passed through his hands was profound. This was specially so in the case of Selva-ratnam.

It may be wondered how the wheels of the School kept moving with such infailing regularity and undiminished velocity, through these changes that nobody noticed any difference and that the prestige of the school never stood higher. The answer is that while Principals came and went, the man who really kept the show going was the Head Master, Mr. J. K. Chanmugam,

The historian of Central College runs out of adjectives when describing the various qualities of Mr. Chanmugam; and well he may. Mr. Chanmugam was a public man in great demand as a speaker at public meetings, witty, forceful, and earnest. He was



a Vice-President of the Jaffna Association, the chief political organisation of the Peninsula. But his chief passion was the College, every aspect of it. When there was a Football match on a Friday afternoon, he played it out on the black-board in the afternoon classes and was usually on the boundary line, when the game was in progress. His shouts and gesticulations, as he ran up and down the line, caused much amusement to the spectators.

Mr. Chanmugam had joined the School in 1904; and so much did the school become his life, that he died soon after he retired in 1928. His chief subject was Mathematics; but he could teach any subject. He often taught Trigonometry and Shakespeare to the Senior class. He did not care to inspire a love for any subject; he wanted his students to pass the Cambridge exams. As a teacher he was essentially a "coach".

He was a strict disciplinarian; but his cane was used unsparingly not only for disciplinary breaches but for backwardness, laziness, or carelessness in class. His severity was quite impartial; so that there was hardly anybody with whom he was popular. To his credit it must be said that his own sons, quite a few of whom passed through his hands during those years, suffered most; so that no one could ever accuse him of any favouritism or partiality. He exercised unceasing vigilance over every department of the School and saw to it that nothing went wrong anywhere.

It is a source of satisfaction to the present writer that he was one of Selvaratnam's teachers for a few

months (in 1920). This could have been no major factor in his education; for Selvaratnam would have had the benefit of instruction given by much better qualified teachers. How much time he gave to his studies, I do not know; but I am sure it was not much. His process of absorbing knowledge must have been automatic and in his own opinion adequate for his purpose.

The two most important things that happened to him at Central were, in the first place, the formation of his friendship with D. T. Niles, and, in the second place, his attending the Triennial Conference of the S. C. M. in Madras in December 1924.

Selvaratnam's friendship with Niles was one of the most abiding things in his life, yet something incapable of being explained; for neither intellectually nor temperamentally did they resemble each other. Naturally, the differences emerged only in later life to be seen by others; but they must have been there to emerge later. Intellectually, Niles was quite at home and moved freely among abstract ideas; he could easily detect the weak points in an opponent's argument and could hold his own against the greatest intellectual giants of the world. Selvaratnam had no such "high-brow" pretensions. Temperamentally, Niles had a tendency to domineer; and, in fact, did dominate any Conference in any part of the world which he attended. Selvaratnam, if he attended any such Conference, could have been seen mixing with the delegates, cracking jokes and telling them funny stories. The only thing that they had in common was that both could pass examinations without any study.



However, the friendship held fast, and without any perceptible strain, till Niles' death in July 1970. As was seen in later life, in all big matters, in regard to which Selvaratnam had no definite opinion—and there were many such—he was content to be guided entirely by Niles' opinion. Niles' devotion to Selvaratnam could take a more tangible form, because of his influence in the World Council of Churches circles. Whenever there was a Conference anywhere under the auspices of the World Council of Churches, there was a distinct possibility of Selvaratnam being nominated as its Chaplain. And wherever he went, Niles had a habit of revealing to his audience that an Ashram in Jaffna was the place where the world's most pressing problems were being solved. So much so, that when Mrs. Niles returned from Geneva to Jaffna round April or May of 1940, she said that people in Europe knew more about the Ashram than people here.

The other major event that took place when Selvaratnam was at Central brought him into contact with Dr. S. Jesudason, one of the founders of the Christian Ashram at Tirupattur, who had come as a speaker to the Triennial Conference in Madras. It was to bear fruit in Jaffna only fifteen years later; but the seed had been planted and it grew with the years.

It is recorded innocently that Selvaratnam matriculated in 1925. The present writer remembers how, in his own case, this meant, sitting up till 1 A. M. regularly, working through the Model Answer Papers in Mathematics of the Tutorial College of London. By this laborious process he seems to have given an indication to the examiners of the London University

that he knew the elements of the subject; but Selvaratnam seems just to have done it without giving a second thought to the matter. When he left, he was Senior Prefect of the College.

After this, he vegetated a little and for a term was enrolled as a student in the Inter Arts or Science class at Jaffna College, during the first term of 1927. He had now to make up his mind where he should do his Theology. The Methodists send all their candidates to Bangalore; but to get an endorsement from Synod for this purpose, a recommendation from the local Pastor was necessary. This was not possible in Selvaratnam's case, as he was *persona non grata* with the local Pastor of the time. But to Serampore anybody with the proper academic qualification could apply with recommendations from two responsible persons. But whereas, the students at Bangalore were supported by their respective Missions or Churches and were sure of employment when they returned, those who went to Serampore went on a scholarship given by the College and were not guaranteed employment. However, not a few Churches would have been glad to get a theologically trained candidate without having been put to any expense on this account. So to Serampore Selvaratnam decided to go during the latter part of June 1927.



## Serampore College

“Serampore” is the short - in - form of Sri Ramapura and is a small city 13 miles from Calcutta. In the 17th and 18th Centuries various European Trading Companies, of course with the backing of their own respective governments, had dotted South Eastern Asia with trading posts which had a habit of growing into something bigger. In the middle of the 18th Century Robert Clive had established hegemony in Calcutta; but Serampore, a comparatively puny spot, had remained under the Danes. When William Carey arrived in India in the Seventeen Nineties he was refused permission to do any Missionary work in any English controlled territory and therefore took refuge in the Danish settlement of Serampore. He founded his College there in 1818 on a scale that is amazing to us now; but he was simply living up his motto: “Expect great things from God; Attempt great things for God”. It had received a Royal Danish Charter in 1827.

In the last Century the Institution had gone through various vicissitudes, till it had ceased to count. In the late Nineties, there arrived on the spot a young Welshman, who looked round the place and realised its potentiality in an India that was getting progressively educated and a Church that had to meet the needs of the Society that was growing up. He had only a Bachelor's degree in Arts of the London University. After sometime in India he went back home and returned with an M. A. degree from Cambridge, a B. Litt degree from Oxford and Doctorates from two German Universities. By 1907 he felt he could put the Institution back on its feet. He went



to America and returned with enough money to make the place a substantial College, which could be affiliated to the Calcutta University; but he seems deliberately to have kept that side on a minor key, his heart being on the part that the Institution could play in Theological Education.

For this purpose, its right to confer Theological Degrees had to be recognised; the old Danish Charter had grown obsolete. He therefore had himself, appointed a Member of the Legislature of Bengal; and the Charter was renewed in 1918; and Dr. Howells had the satisfaction of sending out his first batch of graduates with Theological degrees that very year. All the Theological classes together were called "The Higher Theological Department". (H. T. D. for short).

It was this Department that Selvaratnam joined in 1927. The staff at that time consisted of the following:-

Principal - Dr. George Howells - Theology and Old Testament.

Vice-Principal - The Rev. J. N. Rawson, B. Sc. B. D. - Philosophy of Religion.

Registrar - The Rev. G. H. C. Angus M. A. (Cantab) - New Testament.

Dr. C. H. Watkins M. A. (Oxon) - New Testament and Theology.

The Rev. C. E. Abraham M. A; B. D. - Ethics and Church History.

Mr. S. C. Mukherjee - English

The India which Selvaratnam entered was not the staid, sober country, which the grandfathers of the present generation knew, where nothing happened for years on end. Nor was it like the India of the present time, with its petty and inane rivalries. It was an India that was charged with electricity.

The dividing line between the two Indias was drawn to some extent by Lord Curzon's Partition of Bengal Act in the early years of this century; but it was drawn indelibly and irrevocably in 1919 by what is known as the "Massacre of Jallian Wala Bagh". On the recommendation of one Justice Rowlatt, who had come out from England, Government had adopted certain repressive measures against anti-British activities. The country rose up in protest; and Martial Law was proclaimed in various Provinces. In the city of Amritsar in the Punjab a large crowd had gathered on an esplanade called "Jallian Wala Bagh" for a public meeting (which had been prohibited by law). Martial Law was in operation and The Military had a free-hand. General Dyer, the Officer Commanding, marched a Gurkha regiment in and ordered it to empty its ammunition into the crowd. 379 were killed and 1200 wounded; it is said that very humiliating acts were forced on passers - by for a week.

In 1921 the Indian National Congress launched a programme of Non - Violent Non - Co-operation, with Mahatma Gandhi as the sole Executive in charge. In 1927 the Congress in Madras had passed a resolution in favour of total Independence for India. In 1926 Lord Irwin (later Lord Halifax) one of the saintliest men who had ever been sent out as a Pro-Consul to any part of the British Empire, became Viceroy



and remained in that position for five years. He tried his best to patch up an agreement with the Mahatma; but he had also to serve his Imperialistic masters at Whitehall and his efforts were unavailing. Two years after the Congress had passed its resolution demanding total Independence, on the night of the 31st of December 1929, Jawaharlal Nehru was to hoist the Indian National flag.

This was the India which Selvaratnam entered; but the whole complex of these events, their significance and the atmosphere generated by them meant little to Selvaratnam. They were beyond the horizons of his thought.

Selvaratnam joined in at the B. D. Prelim Class, meant for non-Graduates; Graduates could join the First year B. D. Class straight. In his own Class Selvaratnam had another Ceylon student as a companion, J. W. Samarasinghe. Above them there were some other Ceylon students, J. M. Singanayagam and C. H. Ratnaike in the 2nd year B. D. and probably, W. M. P. Jayatunga in the 3rd year. But as the year went by more Ceylon students were to come in. The present writer joined in 1928; in 1929 B. C. D. Mather, D. H. Ratnathickam, T. K. Curtis and Charles Elangasekare joined the B. D. Prelim Class.

It is recorded that during the October ("Puja") vacation of 1928 Selvaratnam went to the Tirupattur Ashram to look round the place for himself, to make the acquaintance of Dr. Forrester Paton and renew his acquaintance with Dr. S. Jesudasan. The writer finds the date a little difficult of acceptance, because he distinctly remembers going to Tirupattur alone with Selvaratnam during the same vacation in 1929. The proba-

ble explanation is that what was new to the writer had become a habit with Selvaratnam.

There were considerable staff changes in our time. During the Christmas vacation of 1928, Dr. C. H. Watkins died suddenly and a young man, called Dickens, who replaced him, also died of Typhoid fever some months later.

At the Second Term of 1929 Dr. Howells left India for good. Though only 55 years of age, he decided that he could not cope with the strain imposed on him by complications from an operation for duodenal ulcer, with which he had been struggling through his whole career as Principal. He was a man of gigantic proportions, who must have found it difficult to subsist on the meagre diet on which he had been forced to live. He was a powerful speaker, with an oratorical style of speech. He was also recognised as one of the most learned men in the India of that time, and learned in a wide variety of subjects and well versed in many languages, dead and living.

He was very pro-Indian in his views; and it was said that a strong article in Subhas Bose's own paper "The Forward" sealed his chances in the eyes of the British authorities for the post of the next Vice-Chancellor of the University, and thereby hastened his departure. He had been the one Britisher to defy the tacit rule that the Britishers had imposed on themselves that no Britisher should use public means of transport (like trams and buses) and he was the only Britisher who had the courage to eat in Indian restaurants. His going was a severe loss not merely to Serampore but to the whole Indian Church.



The Rev. G. H. C. Angus, who had gone on furlough, returned in November as the new Principal. He brought with him a brilliant Scotsman, called R. A. Barclay, who was an Old Testament Scholar. The gap on the Theological side was filled by the Rev. W. W. Winfield, who was a careful scholar and an interesting teacher.

In the field of sports we from this Island held a peculiar position. Everybody from Ceylon, whether he had held a bat before or not in his life, was more or less drafted into the Cricket Team, some times even becoming Captains. So the College Cricket Team always had a considerable proportion of Ceylon Students. Those who could not play in the College Team could play in the Inter-class matches (H. T. D. versus B. A. First Year or Second Year etc.) Once J. W. Samarasinghe, whose acquaintance with the game was less than elementary was decked with pads and gloves and forced to stand at the wickets; and it so happened that a ball touched his bat; and Dr. Watkins exclaimed "Shamarasingho, my word, he is an expert!". The Rev. G. H. C. Angus though he was an expert in both games was specially addicted to Cricket and on Saturdays and holidays would inveigle students to bowl or bat against him.

The standard of Football was pretty high in Bengal and few of us could aspire to an inclusion in the College team, though the present writer once rose high enough be put down as a "Reserve". But the Inter-Class matches, which from our point of view were of a high enough standard, provided us with sufficient scope for the expression of our taste for the game. The Staff, which of course consisted mostly of lecturers from the Arts side, also put in a team in the field.

The schedule of studies every day began after a substantial breakfast with Prayers in the Chapel. Lunch was a very meagre affair consisting of two biscuits and tea. Whether Greek was Selvaratnam's favourite branch of studies cannot be said with certainty; but he always secured the highest marks in that subject. He was a favourite of Dr. Angus, our teacher of Greek; but that was not because of his proficiency in the subject but simply because he liked him. There was a large and impressive Library; but it may be said with some definiteness that the inside of the Library did not see Selvaratnam very often.

Selvaratnam's exertions in the field of studies consisted chiefly in his going about disturbing people who showed signs of devoting themselves to the pursuit of knowledge. But such persons were not the only ones to occupy his attention. He could tease any and everybody. His targets were chiefly D. H. Ratnathickam and J. W. Samarasinghe, his grievance against them being that they looked rather serious always. Once late at night he went and knocked at Samarasinghe's door, calling out "Shamarasingho" (using Dr. Watkins' version of the name). Samarasinghe's temper, which was not of the mildest in those days, said "Go and call your father Shamarasingho". To which, very coolly Selvaratnam replied, "Why should I call my father Shamarasingho? His name is Subramaniam".

Since, including the Tamil students from India, there was a good enough congregation for a Tamil service, we decided on the experiment of a Tamil service on Sunday mornings. (The evening services were under College auspices; the morning services were at St. Olaf's at some distance and attendance was



rather optional). The preacher chosen was D. H. Ratnathickam. The sermon was based on six points. The experiment summarily collapsed, the fear being that somebody else's sermon might contain even more points.

Selvaratnam did not have to go about teasing people to produce fun. He could manufacture it on his own. His favourite form of expressing his joyous frame of mind was by getting hold of particular words and working them to death or by using words altogether out of context or inventing new words and using them to denote almost anything. Thus Mr. A. M. K. Cumaraswamy on a visit to us had told us that after an attack of Typhoid, the doctors had pronounced that he had a tendency to obesity. Hence forward for Selvaratnam everybody who was bulky simply "had a tendency". His friends caught the word from him. He also used the word "corpuscle" to denote almost anything in the world. If there was more than one thing involved, they became "corpuscles and ponthulus". He also had a habit of putting Tamil songs into English and singing them to Tamil tunes and frequently mixing Tamil phrases with the English words. Thus the well-known Tamil lyric about love became "Love is important, brotherly Love is important"; then followed some Tamil words.

It is needless to say that such a person could not help being popular in the College. Everybody called him "Thambe". But despite his comic behaviour, the well-springs of his sympathy were very deep. Once a fellow-student from Jaffna fell ill with para-typhoid. The present writer and Selvaratnam watched over him through the nights and repaid our

debt to nature by performing our slumbers during our Greek classes, much to the amusement of Dr. Angus.

It ought to be mentioned that, if there was one thing in which Selvaratnam excelled every other student either at Serampore or elsewhere, it was in his ability to go to sleep at will. It was a gift he shared with such distinguished persons as Napoleon Bonaparte and William Gladstone. If a class was over by any chance five minutes before time, he could use the interval for a nap before the next class.

And so our studies came to an end with the first term of 1931. Neither of us was tied to any particular Church or Mission and so could take our choice, provided the Church or Mission concerned would accept us. Both of us applied to the Jaffna Council of the South India United Church; and to show our dedication to our work, without consulting each other, both of us applied to be sent to Pungudutivu. Delft was then not under the Jaffna Council but under the Jaffn Native Evangelical Society. Pungudutivu was the humblest station at the disposal of the Council; and the dread of all Ministers was that it was possible that they might be sent to Pungudutivu. When a young man's Ordination was under discussion, the Council often put him to the test by posting him to Pungudutivu, to see how he would take it. So we thought we had shown what stuff we were made of by offering to go there immediately on appointment.

We, however, did not realise the catch involved in the situation that the Council had created. That is, by offering to go to Pungudutivu an aspiring can-



didate could (in his opinion) consider himself automatically eligible for Ordination. A young man had been ordained the previous year during his tenure of Pungudutivu. So an aspiring Preacher, expecting similar recognition in service, anticipated us by making his application earlier. So Selvaratnam got posted as Assistant at Vaddukodai.

## CHAPTER II

# SERVICE IN CHURCHES

### Vaddukodai

So to Vaddukodai went Selvaratnam during the first week of May 1931. The Vaddukodai Church is now the Cathedral of the Diocese; but even then it was recognised as almost the central Church of the American Mission Community. This was largely due to its connexion with the old Batticotta Seminary, which has great importance in our early history and to its subsequent connexion with the College.

There was a tendency to call it "The College Chapel". The nickname was simply indicative of the close relationship between the two. The congregation largely consisted of the Teachers, their families, the students and those who served the College in one capacity or another. The evening services were in English and were in charge of the College. The Morning Service and all other activities were in the hands of the pastors.

The Pastor at that time, who himself had just been posted to that Church was the Rev. E. T. Williams. He was then in his 66th. year, but still vigorous, enjoying full soundness of mind and body. Assistants to Pastors were rather rare in those days (and still are); and so it may easily be inferred that he thoroughly enjoyed the prospect of a helper; and moreover, this was the first time young men with theological degrees were coming into churches, And

for a Minister of his generation which had had no formal theological training, it would have been an additional factor in his welcoming Selvaratnam.

But no greater contrast could be imagined than that between the Pastor and his Assistant. The Pastor was a very vehement personality, rather vitriolic in his speech, who treated everything seriously; The Assistant was gay, light-hearted and seemed to take nothing seriously. A person similar to the Pastor would have clashed with him; but with a person like Selvaratnam there could be no possibility of a clash. So the Pastor became very devoted to the Assistant and called him his "dear son". How many morning services the Assistant conducted cannot be known, because such things are not recorded in the Church Record Book.

But this happy state of relationship soon came to an end, as it had to come to an end; for we had become short of Pastors and nobody could be allowed to be an Assistant. In June 1931, the Rev. J. K. Sinnathamby, Pastor of the Uduvil Church, had died rather suddenly; Uduvil could not be allowed to remain vacant. The question of who should go to Uduvil vexed the Executive Committee of the Council for months. No Senior Pastor was willing to move out of the station to which he had been posted as recently as May of the year. Finally it was decided that the Rev. G. D. Thomas should move from Tellipallai to Uduvil and that Rev. K. E. Thambirajah from Araly should go to Tellipallai. This left Araly vacant, and the obvious solution was to send the Assistant at Vaddukoddai to Araly.



## Araly

So to Araly Selvaratnam went in November 1931. Selvaratnam served in four churches before he entered what he considered his life-calling. And it may safely be said that the period he spent at Araly was the happiest during his eight and a half years of service in churches.

Araly is a church of Ups and Downs. That is, during some years the congregations would be large and on Sunday mornings the church would be full; during other years the congregations would be sparse and Sunday services would be very poorly attended. The writer succeeded to Araly some twelve years later and he usually considered himself fortunate, if as many as five persons filled the men's side; mine was a tough period; Selvaratnam's period was a crest period. When he went there were such stalwarts, as Messrs J. V. Lambert, C. H. Kathiravelpillai, S. A. Thiagarajah; J. M. Aiyadurai; G. K. W. Mailvaganam; S. Chinniah and A. Arumugam. They were, no doubt, elderly; but that was the whole point about them; they were tried and hardy veterans, "the elders of the land", who in ancient times would have sat at the city gates dispensing justice. More than this the church was full of young people, those who now-a-days would be called "teen-agers". The Araly church took Selvaratnam to its heart and the youngsters rallied round him to a man. How great was their devotion to him is shown by the fact that long years later, after Selvaratnam had been in his grave for some years, one of them (a Hindu) came and insisted on putting up a statue to him at the Ashram.



In January 1932 both Selvaratnam and I were summoned to Serampore to receive our B. D. degrees at the convocations. Samarasinghe also travelled with us; all of us had passed in the Second Division. Neither he nor I nor any of us aimed at anything higher. Perhaps, Selvaratnam would have considered it a grievance if we had got anything higher, because it would have meant that studies were the only thing we did at Serampore. One thing puzzled me about Selvaratnam's performance at examinations—how any examiner could have read his hand-writing. In a term examination earlier, one examiner had frankly stated in one of Selvaratnam's answer papers that he would have given him higher marks, if somebody had read out the answers to him.

During the day of the Convocation there was a cricket match between the Old students and the Present students. And the Rev. W. J. T. Small, then acting Principal of Bangalore who played for the Old Boys, lifted the ball over the ropes for a clear six. After the Convocation there was a dinner, which was a very colourful function. Some Syrian Bishops in purple robes and with long beards were present; and an enterprising European Photographic Firm in Calcutta suspected that the Patriarch of Abyssinia was among them and was frantically in search of him, for one of their show pictures. When a day or two later, we were on the platform of the Howrah Station to catch our train back, the evening papers carried the news that Sir Stanley Jackson (F. S. Jackson of cricketing fame a generation earlier) had been shot at from the front bench at point-blank range at the Convocation of the University of Calcutta that day.

At Araly, till the Parsonage was built a little later, Selvaratnam used to live down a lane. But the pattern of his life did not change when he later moved out. And of that pattern the history of the Ashram records;

The Parsonage wherever Selvaratnam lived was always full of jollity and noise, as all young people in the neighbourhood, Hindu and Christian, spent more of their time there than in their own homes. Almost every meal was a public meal, there being quite a few participating. The parishioners seem often to have provided the where-withal for such meals.

Mr. C. H. Kathiravelpillai who was a next door neighbour when Selvaratnam was in the first house felt that Selvaratnam's frolicsomeness was due to his being single, and uttered the dire threat that when the South West monsoon had broken and his asthma had ceased to trouble him, he would "fix him up" all right. From another point of view, an elderly Christian Minister with a strong belief in Astrology and Palmistry read his palm and prophesied with his usual mannerism. "You are sure to get married, you know. If you don't, I will change my name". But neither the threat nor the prognostication took effect.

On the 25th. of April 1932, the Araly Church celebrated its Silver Jubilee, i. e. the Jubilee of its removal from East Araly to North Araly. In the last Century the congregation had centred at East Araly but had dwindled away owing to migration and other causes, whereas the Christians at North



Araly had grown in numbers; so that Mr. G. C. Thambapillai, Inspector of Schools, went to Malaya and collected enough money for a new church at Araly North. The new church had been dedicated on 10th. March 1907 (though the lettering outside the church boldly proclaims the date as 1906).

The routine of any church is like the routine of any other church; and the entries in all church Records through the years will show an almost unvarying sameness: Holy Communion Services, Baptisms; Marriages and Funerals. Since these had to be done by a Pastor, the Rev. E. T. Williams came and did them for him; but the other services were in the hands of the Worker-in-charge. And in this matter, the practice he followed deviated radically from that of the earlier generations. Pastors of those generations were very jealous of their pulpit rights and would never give their preaching turn to anyone else, unless he was a person of outstanding fame. This was the Congregational and Presbyterian tradition. Selvaratnam in this matter followed the Methodist pattern, according to which there is usually a different person in the pulpit each Sunday. Perhaps he was not consciously following any pattern, but simply his own inclination. Since there was no rule on the subject he was quite free; and nobody with any preaching capacity was safe, if he happened to get caught to Selvaratnam during a week-end.

In the meantime the church had felt the need for a Parsonage which it could call its own. About land there was no difficulty; a plot right in front of the church was available; but building a house requires more effort. Windows were requisitioned from the



Colombo house of one of the members; Somehow the money was extracted, and in the building and roofing the youth were quite active, since they felt they were building a house, for themselves. On 3rd February 1934 the house, rightly called "The Miracle", was dedicated. Mr. J. V. Lambert gave a history of the undertaking and its completion. Mr. K. Jeyaratnam read out the accounts. His experience at Araly seems to have given Selvaratnam a life-long architectural taste. For I have noticed that where ever he went later, if he could, he always laid the foundation for something; he could easily discover a need for it. At the Ashram, of course, he had to build and must have enjoyed it thoroughly.

So the months passed. In the old days when a worker went to a church he stayed there for 25 or 30 years, or for life. That still is the custom in certain traditions. But in our community there had begun to be a protest against it from the beginning and the Church Council had been experimenting with various schemes of Transfers. The practice now in force was fixed upon in 1935. Anyway Selvaratnam's term at Araly had to come to a close; and did so at the end of April 1935; and the mutual love affair between the church and the worker was wound up.

## Navaly

Araly is a small and compact church, most members more or less living within a radius of half a mile from the church, and almost all of them related by blood to one another. Navaly is a vast church, spread over a large area, including South Manipay, and various points of the compass of Navaly. Its activities

are also more numerous; It carries on a vigorous Y. M. C. A., an Adult Bible Class and Evangelistic work, its services have also to be held in more than one place.

We spoke of the Araly church as a church of Ups and Downs. Navaly Church was a church of Eras. During the first two decades of the century the church had dazzled the Christian public with its magnificence. With the death in 1920 of Mr. William Mather, at one time the biggest business-man in Jaffna and withal a pious and earnest Christian and whose family with its various branches formed the bulk of the congregation, an era that had reached its meridian was slowly declining. It had not totally ended when Selvaratnam went, but the church was not what it was twenty years earlier. Most of the names which had been on the roll earlier were still there; but many members were living in Jaffna town or Colombo; and with the eyes of William Mather not being there to look at them, attendance of members at services had ceased to be as obligatory as in the old days, but appearances could still be maintained.

Navaly church had always prided itself on its independence. The reason was that it had not been founded by the Missionaries, nor had any Missionary lived there; so it felt it owed no obligation to anyone outside. It carried its attitude into this Century; and when the Congregational Council of Churches had seen formed in 1904. it would not come in. But since, for its ordained Ministers it had to go to the Council, it began to realise that a spirit of non-co-operation would not pay and bowed to the inevitable in 1913 and signed up as a member. The old attitude had not passed, but had to pass.



The first major event in the life of the church after Selvaratnam's advent was the celebration of the 75th. Anniversary of the Church. This took place for three days and included a Thanksgiving Service, a Public Meeting and various other events, and was wound up with a pageant portraying the history of the Church.

Representatives of other denominations brought their greetings. Dr. Vernon White of the American Board, and Dr. Aldan Clark, India Secretary of the American Board, were some of the principal speakers. Over the pageant there was a storm in a tea-cup. One member of the Mather family published a vehement pamphlet to the effect that it was a sacrilege to portray Mr. William Mather on the stage. To some extent it shows the awe with which that patriarch had been regarded. But to protest against bringing the past into the present is not merely to protest against the stage but against all sacred Art itself. For in that case, the Miracle plays staged in the Middle ages, the Madonnas of Raphael, the pictures in the Sistine Chapel by MichelAngelo and their statues of Moses and David were an outrage.

It must be realised that Selvaratnam had not reached full ministerial status. An Ordination in the life of any man who enters the service of the Church is the most solemn moment of his career, In the last Century, it used to take place many years after he had come in. It continued to be so till the end of the second decade of this Century. R. C. P. Welch, who later became one of the greatest figures in our community, entered service in 1913 (or 1914) and was ordained only in 1921, After that for one reason or



another the process was speeded up; and Ordinations had taken place at the end of two years of a candidate's coming in. The present writer himself received his Ordination at the end of two years,

It was five years since Selvaratnam had come in and he was still just a "Preacher", with the right to vote in the Church Council but still under a Circuit Pastor. Why? The fault, though not grievous, was certainly Selvaratnam's. Ordinations then were in the hands of the Pastors. It was not that Selvaratnam in private life was gay and light-hearted, but that he deliberately went out of his way to scandalise them by acts which they considered unbecoming in one who would have to be looked upon as a model of propriety by the congregations through successive years.

Finally, the Pastors had to come to the conclusion that though Selvaratnam could never be expected to conform to their requirement, in other respects he had pre-eminent qualifications which could not continue to be ignored. So his Ordination was fixed for the 5th of February 1936. And an Ordination in those days was a major event, attended by all able-bodied members of the community. This Ordination took place at Vaddukoddai, starting at 3-30 p. m. in the afternoon.

Till the C. S. I. came into being, formally it was the Church Council that ordained; the writer remembers at his Ordination, the roll being called and attendance being marked by the Council Secretary. The Council President always presided at the service and uttered the Ordination Prayer, which would

usually last for about 20 minutes. The present writer, when he was President of the Church Council, used to spend a whole day in preparing an Ordination Prayer. Present day Ordination services are solemn and impressive; but an Ordination service in those days was a thrilling experience; and it could always be depended upon to be of the highest of its kind, when R. C. P. Welch did it, with his awe-inspiring invocation to the "God of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob". While the President of the Council prayed, with both his hands on the head of the ordinand, all the other Pastors participated by laying (I think) one hand.

On this occasion, along with Selvaratnam, S. T. Asservatham (his brother-in-law) was also ordained. The candidates gave their testimony; that is, their reason for coming into the ministry. The Rev. G. D. Thomas preached the sermon. Thereafter followed the Ordination Prayer; after which candidates considered themselves well and truly ordained. Then as the custom was, the last minister who had been previously ordained, which in this case happened to be the present writer, gave the new ministers "the right hand of fellowship", welcoming the newly ordained into the ministry. Dr. Aldan Clark, Secretary of the American Board, gave "the charge to the candidates"; that is an address on the duties and responsibilities of a minister and the Rev. E. K. Yesuthasan "the charge to the congregation"; that is, an address on the responsibilities of the latter. A new feature introduced into the service was that the newly ordained ministers were given Holy Communion. The Council Bulletin of the year says that the experience of that service will live long in the memory of all who attended it.



The year 1936 was also memorable in the life of Selvaratnam, because a month later at the Annual Meeting of the Church Council he was elected Secretary of that body, succeeding the present writer who received a slight promotion. It was as if the "stone which the builders had rejected" had become the "head of the corner". The Rev. R. C. P. Welch, who had been President from 1931, had to go on his "Sabbatical" and the Rev. John Bicknell was elected in his place. It was the one year of Selvaratnam's participation in the administration of Church government, except for a brief interlude later.

He would relate with gusto in latter years stories of his partnership with that very shrewd, and dynamic personality. But that partnership was not to last long, not even to the expiry of the minimum statutory requirement of one year. For on the 17th of December of that very year, the Rev. John Bicknell died of an attack of coronary thrombosis brought on by the complications of a slight rheumatic fever. He was in his 59th year. At the College, of which he had been head for 21 years, this brought about the end of a long and brilliant era. In March of 1937 Selvaratnam did not stand for election for the Secretaryship of the Church Council.

Another matter, however, continued to pursue him, the problem of marriage. The Jewish religion insisted on marriage for all able-bodied males; and priests were no exception. In Hinduism the marriage of priests is the normal method of propagating the priestly caste. Buddhism forbids it, for those who want to follow a religious calling, according to the Buddha's path, are not looked upon as priests but



as recluses or those 'who have gone forth' from the world. In Protestantism, as against Roman Catholicism, the marriage of a priest or minister is looked upon as normal.

In our own community, it was looked upon more or less as a necessary condition of Ordination. Our ministers had ceased to expect that Selvaratnam would conform to their requirements. But interested parties had not given up hope. One such party would constantly drop in on him at the Navaly Parsonage. Since the party concerned was himself unmarried, Selvaratnam adroitly turned the tables on him, by suggesting that, if he was so convinced of the merits of the bride, in question, he might avail himself of those merits himself, which I am glad to say he did.

In the meantime another development was bringing about Selvaratnam's tenure at Navaly to a premature end. The churches at North and South Erlalai had for long had two different Catechists. Those who drew up the slate of Transfers in 1935 thought they would try the experiment of regarding the two small churches as one Pastorate by putting them under one senior Pastor. The churches concerned were more than a mile in distance from each other, as the crow flies; but the path way between them consisted of lanes strewn with rocks. Two distinct services had to be held each Sunday and every thing had to be duplicated. The Pastor did not take kindly to the arrangement; he did not even have his residence at the one Parsonage available and he let the Council authorities know that he wanted immediate relief. So it was decided that Selvaratnam should move to take charge of the two Erlalais in June of 1937.

Selvaratnam's term at Navaly had scarcely lasted for more than two years. While the elders of the church had not taken kindly to him, the youth as usual clung to him with tenacious devotion. The Parsonage was their usual haunt and was as noisy as its counterpart at Araly. The parting was a severe blow to them; but they refused to let such a thing as a Transfer bring an end to their attachment to him. They stuck to him through thick and thin and when Selvaratnam went to the Ashram two years later they formed part of his entourage.

### North and South Erlalai

As has been said earlier, the work at Erlalai entailed duplication of everything. There had to be two morning services each Sunday; 2 Cottage Prayer meetings during the week; houses at both villages had to be visited regularly. Once a month there had to be two Holy Communion services; and in those days even Confirmation services were done by the Pastor (and not by the Bishop as now). Two sermons, two Communion services and two Confirmations during the course of one morning would be a severe strain on anyone, as the writer found when he succeeded Selvaratnam. But Selvaratnam was just thirty years of age when he went to Erlalai and seems to have taken it in his stride.

But by the time Selvaratnam came to Erlalai his Parish work had begun to have a second place in his heart and mind. By 1937 he had sent up a memorandum to the Jaffna Christian Union on the setting up of an Ashram. The next year an Ashram Board had been formed in January 1939, while Selvaratnam was still Pastor at Erlalai and foundation stones for



various buildings in the Ashram-to-be had been laid by prominent people. The General Transfers of May 1939 brought to end Selvaratnam's connection with the parochial ministry of the church.

But he left behind two permanent marks on our Church life. It is not that he enforced them, but that once he set an example, gradually people in other churches followed it:

- 1: In the old days, practically in all our churches the morning service started at 9 a. m. and most members came to church after a hearty breakfast.
2. As in all Congregational and Presbyterian churches the pulpit occupied a central and prominent place in the churches without any special authority.

Selvaratnam began the practice of the 7-30 morning service; and with the same lack of any warrant he shifted the pulpit at Erlalai to a side. Other churches gradually began to copy the pattern in both these respects.



# PART TWO

PART TWO

**THE ASHRAM — AN INTRODUCTION****The Meanings and Relevance**

Selvaratnam spent 32½ years of his life in the Ashram, which he founded. Many persons have spent far more years serving in churches; but churches are things which Christians understand (even if they do not go to them often). The term "Ashram" however, is foreign to Christian terminology; It comes from a different background. Therefore, in the first place, we must inquire what it means. And, in the second place, because Selvaratnam thought it worthwhile spending so great a part of his life in an Ashram, we must inquire whether it has a place in Christian life, what its significance is, and whether the whole thing was after all worth the effort. In this and the Chapters immediately following we shall come across the answers.

The term "Ashram" (pronounced with a long initial "a") is derived from the Sanskrit term *sharma* which means "care". A short "a" in front of the word would have negated the meaning and meant "lack of care"; but a long "a" has an intensive force and denotes not lack of care, but "extreme care" or effort.

In this sense, it was applied to the system whereby the ancient Rishis of India withdrew to remote places, usually forests, and taught anyone who cared



to come to them. The term "Upanishads" on which the Vedanta philosophy is based, means "sitting in front of" and is used derivatively to denote what was taught to those sitting in front of the Rishis. The sage Yajnavalkya was one of those who so taught. There were, of course, many other sages like Athri, Kausika, and Vasishtha who did this. The Rishis were not celibates and, in fact, dwelt in their remote haunts with their wives; but they dwelt in voluntary poverty and disciples were not life-long disciples.

In the early twenties of this Century, when the National Movement was gathering momentum in India, there were many Indian Christian leaders who felt that because Christianity was identified too closely at that time with foreign Missionaries, Christianity itself was being looked upon as a foreign religion; and that they themselves were not looked upon as true Indians. These leaders, therefore, strongly felt the need to indigenise Christianity. And it dawned on them that the longest step in that direction would be to renew the ancient but indubitably typical Indian principle of the Ashram within Christianity. It however was a principle difficult to renew and introduce into Christianity. We shall see later how and when it was done.

### The Contradictions Involved

Renewal does not mean making an exact copy of what once existed. For instance, if Greece wants to recapture its ancient intellectual glory, it cannot go back to the Zoology of Aristotle or the Physics of Archimedes. And modern Italians if they want to recapture the "grandeur that was Rome" will not go

back to the spear, the shield and short sword of the Roman legionaries or the toga worn in civil life: To Mussolini, who for twenty five years in Italian history wanted to recapture the greatness of Rome, these things scarcely were a temptation,

Renewal, therefore, while expressing an old idea, must take account of changed conditions brought about by the passage of time. And the greater the time that has passed, the greater may be the difficulty in retaining the principle involved in the old. In regard to the renewal of an Ashram the difficulty involved amounts to a contradiction.

The ancient Rishis could go about as they liked and teach; the Ashram would be where they were. Nobody could insist that they should teach under particular trees. But anyone who wants to start an Ashram now has to start an Institution; and this involves putting up buildings and making permanent arrangements for eating, drinking, living and lighting. These have to remain stationary.

Thus Mahatma Gandhi who set up an Ashram at Sabarmathi had to make definite arrangements to keep his Ashram going under modern conditions. That Ashram, we are told, even contained an extensive Library. The set-up of Arabinda Ghose's Ashram at Pondicherry began to expand to such an extent that the Government had to step in and prevent its further acquisition of land, and Tagore's Ashram at the Shantiniketan is quite elaborate. Modern soldiers might fight with sophisticated weapons and still insist that they are keeping up the tradition of their ancestors under new conditions. The retention of bows and



arrows is not basic to the principle of warfare. But here the Mobility of the ancient Rishis faces the Immobility of the modern Institution. The conflict of principles cannot be overlooked.

The second contradiction involved is even greater. It arises because the Ashram concept, if it is brought into Christianity, comes into a different atmosphere where basic assumptions are different. The renewal of something old in the same atmosphere may look curious; but its introduction into a new and different spiritual atmosphere will make it look startling and will make people wonder if it is not out of place. The atmosphere is different because the religions concerned are not akin.

The ancient Indian Rishis withdrew from the world and could well afford to do so. They could ignore the world. In fact, they had to do so, because their teachings demanded it. To many of them only the Self existed; this included the Universal Self and the Individual self. To that Self was applied the term Brahman. "Vedanta" says T. M. P. Mahadevan, a great authority on the subject, "is the science of Reality, without a second". This Reality is Brahman, besides "which nothing remains to be known".

This is an attitude which Christianity cannot take. "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth". The world exists and must be taken account of. "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world and they that dwell therein". We must not merely take account of the world; we must do more. God cared for its inhabitants; and Christ spent the greater part of his life in going about doing good



to people. And the history of the Church shows how (when it was not quarreling about dogma) in its own way and according to its light the Church tried to discharge its obligation to men. When it did not do so, it was clearly failing in its duty. Christianity demands that we take account of the world. An Ashram that does not do so cannot be a Christian Ashram.

H. V. Morton, the Travel writer, gives an account of his visit in 1937 to the ancient, isolated Coptic Christian monasteries in Northern Egypt and the Sinai peninsula and describes how he found that the monks living there were in total ignorance of the quiet world outside. But they do not belong to the mainstream of Church life. They were anchorites keeping up the conditions when Christians had to flee from Roman persecution and be in hiding. But the latest accounts show how the new Coptic Patriarch Shenouda III is overhauling the whole system and trying to bring them into line with modern conditions. In fact, a photograph shows the Patriarch with a copy of the latest newspaper in his hand.

So that here is an important fact that we must reckon with about the renewal of the Ashram concept in Christianity. The old Ashrams closed their eyes to the world. A Christian Ashram cannot do so and be Christian.

Therefore, in regard to the concept of a Christian Ashram now, we stand before two contradictions, viz. that though an Ashram revolves round a person, yet under modern conditions it is also an Institution, with its buildings, its distinctive atmosphere, its growing tradition and history, and secondly, before the

fact that there must be a withdrawal from the world if it was to be an Ashram at all, there must also be a participation in the world, if it was to be Christian at all.

If these contradictions had been intrinsically irreconcilable, there would have been no Christian Ashram in India at the present time. The fact that there are 26 of them now shows that they could be reconciled.

### The Reconciliation

An Institution once set up remains where it is. It certainly develops its own distinctive atmosphere and spirit; but they are derived from the central personality of one man. People may come to the place, derive encouragement, hope and spiritual power, even in his absence. But it is because he has diffused a spirit that clings to it. A tradition has grown up; customs, practices and patterns of life are taken for granted because, he has lived there.

Nevertheless, the old principle of Mobility is not lost. The head of the Ashram carries the spirit of the Ashram wherever he goes. "Where Rama is", said the old Indian proverb, "there is Ayodhya" (the capital city of his kingdom). A person may become so identified with an Institution, a movement or a people or nation that he embodies their spirit and carries it with him wherever he goes. Thus Achilles in the Trojan war for quite some time carried with him the fate of the Greek army; and Napoleon in the last century made all the difference to the French between victory and defeat.



So contradiction between the problem of Immobility and Mobility is resolvable. And the existence of modern Ashrams shows that they can be immobile, because modern times demand it and mobile because ancient times demand it.

What about the other contradiction that a Christian Ashram faced? Participation in the world is something that people in general living in the world, involved in its affairs, sometimes neck-deep, take for granted. And Christians who normally associate with churches, though sometimes they have a tendency to shut themselves up in their own world of spiritual piety, also cannot ignore the world because of the precept and example of their Lord; and many voluntary organizations have made it their business to attend to the needs of mankind.

The people in an Ashram, however, are those who have withdrawn from the world; they have turned their eyes away from its allurements; the passions that agitate it have no meaning for them. Though many of the services once performed by voluntary organizations have now come under the care of Government in Welfare States, yet there are many things that no Government can do. Other Christians may be able to take a hand in such matters, but can Ashrams do it?

The point is that it is exactly this kind of a thing that Indian Christian Ashrams are doing. In India, where State control is not so extensive as here, most Christian Ashrams are doing medical and educational work while all do some kind of Social Service. The question is not whether they are allowed to do it, but whether they feel it their duty to do so. Where there are



cares to be borne, burdens to be lightened, tears to be wiped, needs to be met, fears to be allayed and problems to be solved in this "vale of sorrows", the Ashrams try to step in and do their best. They have withdrawn from the world because the spirit of the ancient Ashrams demands it, yet they participate in it because their religion, demands it. So this contradiction also has been resolved.

Looking back, we can now see that the contradictions involved in starting Christian Ashrams, viz while preserving the spirit of the old system, adjusting it to new times and to our religion, has been resolved. But it is to the credit of those who lived fifty years ago that they saw that they could be resolved.

## The Person

The Rishis who formed the central figures of their respective Ashrams were essentially teachers. Their disciples came to them and they taught them about Religion; the disciples paid for the instruction they received not of course in cash, which hardly existed in their circles, but in kind; The Upanishads contain the teaching of the most important of them; there are more than a hundred Upanishads, though only about a dozen are usually considered worth commenting on. Selvaratnam was not a great teacher in the sense of being a theologian. If he had been, it would have been only an additional qualification.

He wanted to found a religious Ashram. Does this mean that he was a great preacher? Great preachers, unless they were itinerant, have usually been associated with churches. Selvaratnam did not belong to the great line of preachers; nor did he want to duplicate a church,

He wanted to found a religious community that by its life and example would radiate religion. Though he could not escape being the central figure—and no community can escape a central figure—what he aimed at was a community of like-minded persons following a certain pattern of life that would be a powerful religious influence.

Was Selvaratnam, in thinking of a religious community, influenced by the monastic movement in the Roman Catholic Church? All of us are influenced by history, even those who deliberately shut their eyes to it. Events that go before, influence those which come after, and they influence the world in which we live and we are caught up by the world in which we live.

The Monastic movement was put on its feet by Benedict of Nursia (c 480—553). Since then, many monastic Orders have arisen in the Roman Catholic Church. It cannot be said that Selvaratnam could have totally escaped the influence of the Monastic movement. But his Ashram had its differences from Monastic Orders. While there was (as in the Monastic Orders) greater coherence in Selvaratnam's Ashram than in the old Ashrams of the Rishis, Selvaratnam's Ashram resembled the old Ashrams more in the freedom enjoyed by its members than a monastery where it is far more limited. In a second respect also, Selvaratnam's Ashram differed from any Monastic Order. Selvaratnam's men also took vows and followed a pattern of life, but they were not a closed community, set apart and forming a world of their own. They mixed freely with others, without any feeling of self consciousness and others mixed freely



with them, without feeling they were a different set of beings. A third point also draws Selvaratnam's Ashram closer to the Indian model, its adoption of a vegetarian diet. A final point of difference is that the Abbot who was the central figure of a monastery holds his position in virtue of the authority vested in him by powers superior to both the Abbot and the monks. The power he has is jurisdictional. The position that Selvaratnam held in the Ashram was accorded to him spontaneously.

Why was it accorded to him? It might of course be said that it was because he was worthy of it. But why was he considered worthy of it? If his position was not jurisdictional it was personal. What then was it about him that made those in the Ashram and outside think he deserved it?

There is a term among Christians applied to those who by their lives earn the special respect and high reverence from those who know them—viz the term "saint". Now the Roman Catholic Church has handed over the right of making a person a saint to the Pope; and Selvaratnam is disqualified by being a Protestant. Moreover the miracles considered essential for canonisation are lacking in his case, viz, the occurrence of two extraordinary events following on contact with his relics. The Eastern Church, however, seems to have its own standards. And H. V. Morton records how on his visit to the Coptic monasteries he often saw many bags containing the bones of numerous saints totally unknown to the Western Church. All people who suffered martyrdom for the faith in ancient times seem to have been given recognition as "saints".



People, however, have taken the matter out of the hands of ecclesiastical authorities and apply it to certain persons at their discretion. So we ourselves may, without ecclesiastical sanction, make use of it if we want to. But they have no hard and fast rule in the matter; but in general it is often applied to persons on the basis of their normal character, the sweetness of their temper, their honesty, the unselfishness of their attitude, their harmlessness, their quietness and sincerity. Thus William Gladstone called John Stuart Mill the "Saint of Rationalism" i.e. a Saint among unbelievers. Whether Selvaratnam has these qualities or not need not concern us; but his possession of such qualities is not the reason why we esteem him.

There is another term which comes to us with Biblical associations, the appropriateness of which in this case we must examine; it is the term "man of God". It is used 48 times in the Old Testament and twice in the New. In the New Testament it is used in reference to Timothy. In the Old Testament the term is chiefly used in reference to prophets in the Old Testament; fortunately, it is used of King David also. But between prophets also there were many differences. Moses was different from Elijah, and Elijah was different from Elisha and Jonah was different from both. But nevertheless, there was a common factor between all of them. They were all charged with speaking or doing the will of God.

The prophets were all formidable persons, stern, unbending figures whom people regarded with awe. I would certainly hesitate to call Selvaratnam, and he himself would have been shocked at the whole idea

of being regarded a prophet; and he did not, like Jeremiah, feel about himself that "His (God's) word was in mine heart, as a burning fire shut up in my bones".

But why were prophets called to be prophets given their task; Because they were already men of God. A man of God is not just a religious man, careful and regular with his devotions. He is not one who considers God a more object of devotion, but one to whom God is the most real of Persons. An English Officer who saw Dietrich Bonhoeffer conducting his last Holy Communion service before being led out for execution by the Nazis, said of him, "He is the one person whom I have known to whom God was most real". Selvaratnam recognised the reality of all persons and things; but to him God was most real of all realities.

Such a man comes to know God intimately. It is not given to any human being to know God in His fullness: for here we see "as in a glass darkly". There are many things about God which even a man of God may not understand; but he would understand and know enough for his purposes. And the one thing Selvaratnam learnt about God and upon which he built his life was that God is trustworthy. He could say with the writer of II Timothy, "I know in whom I have believed". Later, in this book we shall see how over and over again God justified Selvaratnam's belief in Him. Here it is enough to say that belief in the trustworthiness of God was his chief characteristic as a man of God. "If God be for us, who can be against us?" said Paul. It was enough for Paul; it was enough for Selvaratnam.

Opposition and criticism mattered little; disbelief did not count. He was sure of the one support that mattered. If the elastic term is to be used in his case also, for this reason, there need be objection.

Such a person was one round whom the Ashram could revolve. Here was a faith that could invoke instinctive respect, amounting to reverence. In a world where avarice is rampant, where personal interests clash and where ambitions play havoc, here was a person to whom God was the greatest reality, about whom he was so certain that he needed no other certainty and in the light of the relationship with whom he looked at everything and everybody and therefore looked upon them with a different eye.

It was natural that there should be some willing to spend all their lives with him, that many should look upon the place where he lived as a special place, to visit which was an act of merit, and to present offerings at which was specially pleasing to God. He was also a person, who could carry a special atmosphere with him wherever he went.



## CHAPTER IV

### THE ASHRAM — THE FIRST PERIOD

#### The Inspiration:

We have already referred to the significance of Selvaratnam meeting Dr. S. Jesudason in Madras in 1924. The significance lay in Dr. Jesudason, one of the speakers there, being the moving spirit behind the Indian Christian Ashram Movement and being the co-founder of the Christa Kula Ashram. Dr. Jesudason came of a very influential Christian family of Tinnaiyveli in South India; and when he was studying for his F. R. C. S. examination in Britain he had come across a young Scotsman, called Forrester Paton, who was studying for the Bachelor's degree in Medicine at Cambridge. In those days any kind of close partnership between a Britisher and an Indian was a revolutionary practice; but between them the revolutionary practice became normal and permanent. In 1921 they came and started medical practice among the poor in Tripattur, in North Arcot, South India. In 1922 this became the basis for their Ashram.

Apart from the inter-racial issue involved, which now after 57 years looks rather ridiculous to have been an issue at all, it must be realised what this venture meant. Dr. Jesudason had an F. R. C. S. degree which even now commands high financial potentiality; and Paton could not merely have gone much further in his medical career in Britain, but belonged to an extremely wealthy family. Nevertheless, both decided to spend their time and talents leading lives of voluntary poverty and celibacy at the level of the

**Founders of the First Christian Ashram  
'The Christa Kula Ashram'  
Tirupattur**



**Dr. S. Jesudason**

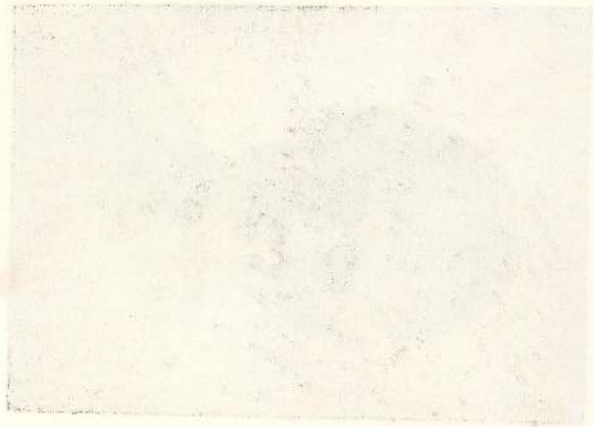


**Dr. Forrester Paton**

Dr. 2 1881/20



Dr. 1881/20



the Chief Executive,  
Department of the Interior,  
Washington, D.C.



village folks around them. They held nothing back in reserve. Extensive lands were bought, a hospital with 42 beds was put up and all the most modern equipment installed. Buildings for themselves, for the male and female Hospital workers and relations of patients and a school for children of the surrounding area were also erected. Electricity too was installed. That is, the principle of denial was confined to themselves and not to others.

Dr. Jesudason was a fervent Christian; but he realised that God had placed him in an Indian setting, that he had to make people realise that the Christian Faith could be quite consonant with an Indian setting. It was, however, clear to him that modern medical science was not a characteristic of Western countries but God's gift to mankind. So everything was to be in Eastern style; the chapel, the mode of worship, the music, the style of eating and drinking. Medical treatment, however, need not follow an Eastern pattern. Nevertheless, to show his devotion to the country and its tradition, he made himself an authority on Indian culture; and by his natural endowments became one of the greatest Indian lyricists of our generation.

Dr. Jesudason was in fact a good speaker; but he might have been a bad speaker. What influenced Selvaratnam in 1924 was not the force of the speech but the idea behind it that confronted Selvaratnam.

### Getting Set

The idea had been planted in Selvaratnam's mind. A call had sounded and a vision seen: how clear it

was cannot be said now. A considerable number of years were still to go by. We have seen how Selvaratnam went to Tirupattur once or twice when he was at Serampore. After his return to Jaffna from Serampore he had to serve in churches for  $8\frac{1}{2}$  years. Probably from the fact that he was turning down marriage proposals, it looks as if he was already making up his mind; but by the time he went to Erlalai it was definitely made up.

Selvaratnam went to Erlalai at the beginning of May 1937 and soon we see a memorandum from him to the Jaffna Christian Union on the desirability of an Ashram. Some recognised body had formally to sponsor the idea and the more representative it was, the better, since the Ashram was meant for all Christians. The Jaffna Christian Union had come into existence in 1907, succeeding the Jaffna Branch of the Jaffna Tract and Bible Society. It consisted of representatives of the three major Protestant Denominations and, if any such idea was to be sponsored in Jaffna, it certainly was the one body to do it.

Selvaratnam (who must have certainly had the help of his friend Niles in drafting the memorandum) defined the aims of the Ashram as follows: to serve as a home for converts, to experiment with indigenous forms of worship, to serve as a base for training evangelists, to provide an adequate Library of Christian Literature, to serve as a place of rest for Church-workers and to do concentrated evangelistic work in the neighbouring area.



It will be seen that the document naturally concentrates on the external aims of the Institution; there was no reference to its internal life. But during the discussions there must have been references; and during the preceding months those close to Selvaratnam must have known his mind. So the present writer, who at the time happened to be the Secretary of the Jaffna Christian Union, being then of a highly Protestant frame of mind opposed the project stoutly, as it involved certain forms of asceticism and therefore very un-Protestant for us to undertake.

However, the project found unexpected supporters. The Rev. E. M. Weaver, Head of the Methodist Church in Jaffna, who was also Chairman of the Christian Union and the Rev. R. C. P. Welch, the Chairman of the Jaffna Council of the South India United Church and the very High Priest of Protestantism, much to the dismay of the present writer came out strongly in favour of it. Of course, D. T. Niles gave his support and his father W. D. Niles gave his on the ground that the project would promote Church Union. And, of course, in all meetings or organisations there are people who support all proposals; and Selvaratnam's proposal got through.

The next thing was to scout for a site. I remember touring the Peninsula with D. T. Niles land-prospecting; finally we settled on the present site, sufficiently far from human habitation and yet sufficiently near. It is close to a spot where a road crossed the Railway line, and which could become a Railway Stop; and if there was a prospect, Selvaratnam could



be depended on to turn it into a reality. In November 1938 the Constitution of the Ashram Board was approved.

Once he had decided on a thing, Selvaratnam was hardly the man to let the grass grow under his feet. In December of the year there were important persons, passing through, to attend the meeting of the International Missionary Conference in Madras at the end of the month. Here was an opportunity for getting them associated in some manner with the Ashram; and since there was an age-long connexion between Ashrams and trees, Selvaratnam decided to utilise these person-ages for a tree-planting ceremony. So Dr. Douglas Horton, the "Pope" of Congregationalism in America, Dr. Fred Field Goodsell, the Executive Vice-President of the American Board, and Bishop Mann of Japan duly did their share. Ted Oppenheim, as representative of Jaffna College and a representative of the Uduvil Girls' School also did their share. These, I believe, were not the only such ones who took part in the ceremony.

Early the next year Selvaratnam arranged for another function. It was a seemingly innocent-looking affair; but it clinched the issue. At a service conducted by the Rev. R. C. P. Welch on the afternoon of 9th January 1939 Dr. Visser T'Hooft, who was to be the Secretary of the World Council of Churches, preached on the text, "For no other foundation can any man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ"; and himself laid the foundation for the Chapel, Welch for the Library, the Rev. S S. Soma-sunderam for a cottage called "Bethel", and Miss L. G. Bookwalter for a cottage called "Shanti". The

day was rainy and everybody was holding umbrellas over their heads but there were about 260 persons present. Perhaps people had seen the significance of the function. Now there could be no going back. And all this time Selvaratnam was Pastor of the Erlalai Church.

In May of 1939 he withdrew from Church Service and entered his life-calling. He moved to the site of the Ashram. We have said that he had drawn his inspiration for it from the Ashram founded at Tirupattur. But the differences between the sources of inspiration and the result of the inspiration were vast.

The Tirupattur Ashram had large financial resources behind it. The founders lived in poverty but it was voluntary poverty; they could have had anything they liked, if they had wanted. But there were nothing artificial about the situation in which Selvaratnam was. He required land on which the Ashram was to be situated, he wanted buildings on it, he had to sink a well, he had to find food and sometimes clothing for those who lived with him permanently, he had to feed visitors and find the wherewithal to supply meals when there were meetings big or small taking place at the Ashram; and sometimes they could be very big. And Selvaratnam had no money for anything at all, either for starting or for carrying on—yet money came in and that is the history of the Ashram.

The whole history of the Ashram is a reversal of Parkinson's Second Law. That Law says that expenses always rise up to meet the Income level. This is what everyone finds in his own experience. The



adjustment of expenses to estimated Income is observed by every organisation. The initial act by which this is done is called "budgetting". But since Selvaratnam had an iron-clad rule never to ask or appeal for money or even to make a charge for board or bed in the case of anyone, Income was always difficult to estimate. The task of "budgetting" for the Ashram therefore defied human wisdom, but income somehow always came up to meet the expenses; because there are cases where God makes foolish the wisdom of the world.

The plot of land which had been selected as the site of the Ashram was 4 acres in extent; but, when an attempt was made to sink a well in it, it proved impossible, as there seemed to be a broad ribbon of marsh running underneath most of the land. So the vendor was obliged to sell Selvaratnam an additional plot of land which did indeed contain a well. The cost of the whole transaction was Rs. 2560-00 at Rs. 20-00 per latcham (1/16th. of an acre). It is small comfort to know that at present land in the neighbourhood costs Rs. 5000-00 to Rs. 6000-00 per latcham; for his purchase Selvaratnam had only Rs. 1330-00 which had been given by the Methodist Mission from the Restarick Memorial Fund. But, of course, all the 8 acres were duly paid for.

If the land was bought cheap, it must be definitely said that at that time it was scarcely worth more. The ground was stony and was covered with clumps of a hardy and inconvenient plant, with long and narrow leaves ending with long, sharp thorns. The botanical name seems to be Phoenix Zeylonica whether



this refers to the red berry it bears or to the plant is not certain. The clumps of this plant have always attracted various types of poisonous snakes.

It was to this land that Selvaratnam moved in with two others. He also had a group of young people from the churches he served, who clung to him. Sheds had to be erected for everybody; and living in those sheds was not at all a pleasant experience, for it used to be said that in those days if at night you got out of a shed, you stepped either on a thorn or a snake. Having learnt that the smell of onions kept snakes away, Selvaratnam tried the experiment of keeping little dumps of crushed onions by his bed-side, only to find one morning a venomous snake creeping peacefully from under his pillow.

However, the task of cleaning the land and making it habitable went on a pace. Some others were also attaching themselves to him, besides the first batch of two; and the young people were ceaseless in their labours. Progress was certainly being made. It is said that about this time, Mr. J. V. Chelliah, his old teacher, met Selvaratnam and said to him, "Niles (who was in Europe) is making history; what are you doing?" Selvaratnam retorted, "Sir, I am making geography". It was a joke and a good one; but it also happened to state a profound truth. For every man who discovers, explores or makes habitable any new tract of the earth is broadening the bounds of the science of geography, since any science can deal only with the known.

People were now beginning to wake up to the fact that something was going on at Maruthanamadam.

And leaders of the Christian Church were anxious to further the project. Selvaratnam in a letter at the time refers to the interest of the Bishop of Colombo (Cecil Douglas Horsley), R. C. P. Welch, and E. M. Weaver in the matter,

In the meantime, another event also helped in focussing attention on the Ashram. In May of the year, the Ceylon Government Railway recognised Maruthanamadam as a halting place, not merely for local trains but for Mail trains, as well. Certain influential people in the surrounding area had also been asking for it; but there is no doubt that the recognition came when it did because of the *coup d' etat* engineered by Selvaratnam. As may be seen from the life of St. Athanasius (c 298—373), the skill of good and holy men in such directions need not be underestimated.

### The Ashram Gets Going

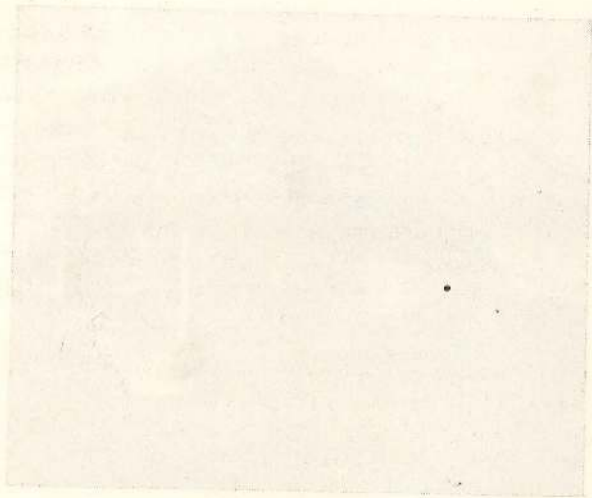
The official opening of the Ashram took place on Monday 21st of August 1939. Dr. Forrester Paton came down especially from India (actually arriving two weeks earlier). It opened with a Holy Communion Service at 5 a. m. After breakfast, there was a Thanksgiving Service. At noon 100 people sat down to lunch as to how many will remain or arrive for any meal is quite unpredictable in the Ashram.

The chief event of the day was the Dedication Service in the afternoon at 4-30. It was conducted by the Rev. R. C. P. Welch; Dr. Forrester Paton and Archdeacon J. A. R. Navaratnam were the speakers. At the close of the ceremony one of the cottages,



**First Shed from which the Christa Seva Ashram  
began its work**





First Step from which the Christian Soul Advances  
begins its work

for which the foundation stone had been laid on 9th January, viz the "Lambert Cottage". in memory of Mr. J. V. Lambert of Araly who had died in 1937, was opened by his wife. About 500 people had been present, and Selvaratnam's pleasure that a hundred motor cars had been counted was a natural human pleasure. It is obvious that the Ashram had received a flying-start.

There were seven persons staying now at the Ashram, besides Selvaratnam, the most well-known of them being K. J. Mills, later a prominent Minister of the C. S. I. Certain others also associated themselves with the Ashram, one of whom is still an enthusiastic Colporteur of the Bible Society and another was J. P. Nadarajah, who after retirement, spends most of his time at the Ashram and whose presence the writer greatly appreciates because of his knowledge of Tamil literature, which of course he naturally finds superior to his own.

For permanent members of the Ashram, life began at 4-30 A. M. At 5 there would be a group going round singing; at 5-15 there would be corporate prayers; there would be a cup of tea, in due course followed by breakfast. And since in those days bread had not been discovered as an invariable substitute or stand-by for any meal, some time-honoured solid or liquid was given for breakfast. At 12 noon there would be corporate intercession and similarly at 6 P. M. No bell had yet materialised and the Chapel had of course been founded solidly but not yet built. At 9 P. M. there would be family prayers which was also a kind of staff-meeting. The diet was, of course, vegetarian and the form of worship entirely Eastern.

The Ashram had become a fact in Jaffna; but a knowledge of the fact was not confined to Jaffna. The world was also coming to know about it. To a large extent, this was due to the presence of D. T. Niles in the West. Soon after the International Missionary Conference of December 1938, Dr John R. Mott had sent D. T. Niles on a campaign of evangelism to the Universities of England and America; and Niles naturally spread news of the Ashram wherever he went. And the news aroused a curiosity and wonder, which perhaps cannot be understood now. What was known in the West then of Christianity here was that of Christianity in the "Mission Field" which was given by the Missionaries through their reports and pictures; and it was all about something organised and practised on lines laid down by Missionaries following strictly Western patterns. Here was something new. Could Christianity, it was wondered, be practised by people, sitting on the floor during worship, under the light of brass lamps, singing to tunes used by Hindus and not to the accompaniment of an Organ? The news that such indeed was the case was breeding not merely curiosity but interest. For it is recorded that E. Stanley Jones, the word famous American evangelist, G. D. Harpur of the C. M. S., and the Most Rev. Foss Wescott, the Metropolitan of the Anglican Church in India visited the Ashram in those days.

As the idea of the Ashram had taken physical shape, the rise of new buildings also began almost automatically to keep pace with the needs involved. Before the end of 1939, "Shanti", a cottage in memory of John Clarence and Mr. R. P. Asirvatham had been declared open. And "Bethel", a gift of the Anglican



Church was declared open by the Metropolitan on his visit in 1940. However the most important of events of this kind was yet to come.

The building of the greatest consequence in the Ashram has to be the Chapel. The foundation for it had been, it may be remembered, laid by Dr. Visser T'Hooft in January 1939, but there was no promise of any funds back of it; nor was there any promise in prospect. D. T. Niles, who had returned to Jaffna about April or May of 1940, took the matter in hand. At a meeting of the Jaffna Inter-Collegiate Fellowship, which consisted of Teachers in Christian Schools, he simply asked the fellowship, why it should not shoulder the task. The response was that it would. God, of course, can be worshipped anywhere, but man has always liked a house of worship,

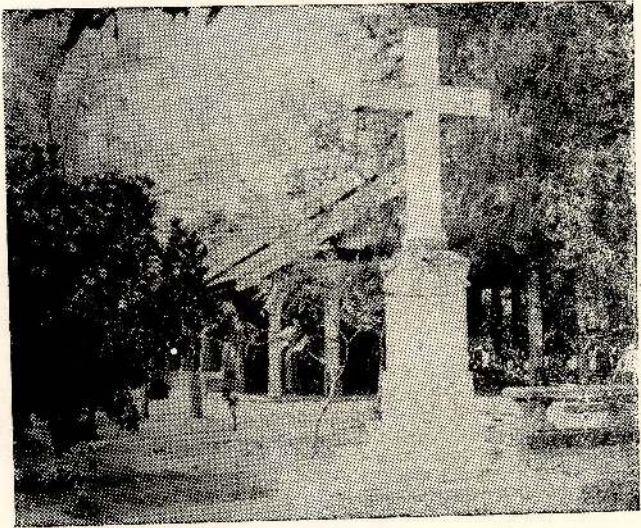
So the building rose, based on the pattern of the Chapel of Tirupattur, but devoid of the *Gopura* (the frontal tower) of the Tirupattur Chapel and which is the distinctive feature of all Dravidian Temple architecture. This may have been due to more than one reason. In Hindu Temples, these *Gopuras* hold the images of numerous Hindu gods; and the gargoyles; that perform a similar function in Western Cathedrals, are unknown here. It may also have been due to the simple fact that money available could not allow it; for to divulge a secret, the whole building cost only Rs. 3,000-00 (a thing possible then and not now). The smoothness, the paint, the polish and the portico came later.

Alongside, a belfry had also come up; the bell having been presented by Mr. Lewis Subramaniam, as

a token of thankfulness to God for the recovery of his son Albert from an attack of malignant typhoid some two years previously. So there was something to be rung at 5 A. M. and to sound the Angelus at noon and eve.

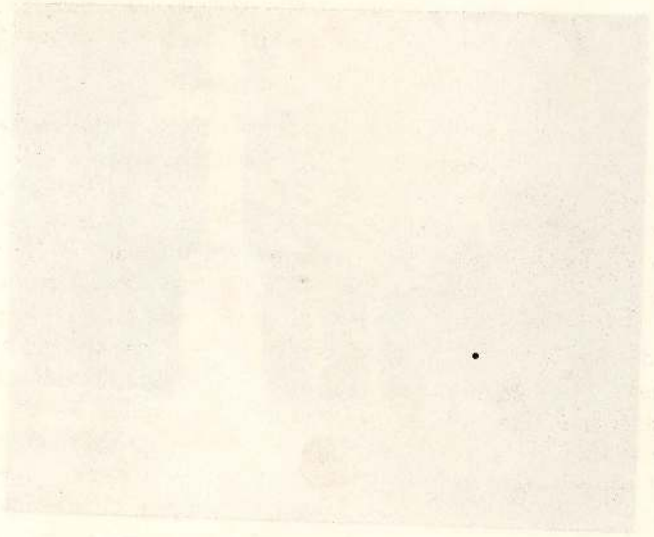
The Dedication took place on 17th December, 1940, the service being conducted by Revs. Weaver, Niles, and Selvaratnam. The speakers were Dr. Jesudason of Tirupattur and Dr. T. Z. Koo, a Chinese Christian leader of high inter-national standing at the time. The bell was rung ceremoniously for the first time by the Rev. S. K. Bunker, Principal of Jaffna College.

Two other things happened shortly after, which contributed to giving the Ashram a certain completeness. It may be remembered that Selvaratnam's memorandum to the Christian Union in 1937 had defined one of the aims as the provision "of an adequate Library for reference, study and the production of Christian Literature". As yet, however, it had not been possible to fulfil this aim. It came to be fulfilled because Mr. & Mrs. J. C. Handy who had lost their young son Balu in a motor accident sometime earlier decided to perpetuate his memory with a building in the Ashram. It was called "Balusthan" and now forms part of a residential unit named after Mrs. Handy. It was good enough for a Library in those days. The books to fill the few shelves came from the library of Rev. Henry Peto, who had died the previous year, and the stocks presented by the Rev. J. T. Arulanantham and Mrs. J. N. Arumugam. D. T. Niles, however, promised that he would soon get 600 more books from the U. S. A. The building was dedicated on 7th January, 1941 by Bishop Mar Theodosius of Kottayam.



**The Ashram Chapel**





The Eastern Church

The other new feature that contributed to the completeness of the Ashram was that now that there were buildings to break the heavy blowing of the S. W. Monsoon, the trees which had steadily resisted Selvaratnam's persistent efforts to make them grow, on their own, developed an urge to shoot up. Therefore, on the side on which most of the buildings were there appeared a grove, which seemed an adequate environment for the Ashram.

The Ashram received not merely completeness but a useful reinforcement about this time. At a short distance from the Railway line that runs along its western border, the late Mr. William Mather had purchased a large tract of land which had virtually been a coconut plantation. In 1929 the family set up an Orphanage on it in memory of Mr. Mather. In 1941, it decided to turn it over to an Inter-Denominational Board of Management to be run as a "Women's Centre", which while taking in orphans would cater chiefly to grown-up girls (helpless as well as healthy) and to helpless women. The dedication of a Chapel there on 25th. July 1941 marked the beginning of the new order of things. It has been efficiently managed; its women folk and girls contribute substantially to the congregations in the Ashram Chapel and the Superintendents have been very helpful in many ways.

## The Ashram at Work

Since the Ashram had become a recognised factor in the Christian life of Jaffna, it became customary to make it a venue of many important meetings. Apart from such meetings, the Ashram itself organised studies, lectures and seminars. In September 1942

Bishop Pakenham Walsh and D. T. Niles conducted a Seminar on the Old and New Testaments, the former on the Old and the latter on the New. The Rev. H. K. Moulton of Bangalore conducted one on the Epistles of St. Paul. The next year the Rev. Mark Sanjiva Rao, a famous Brahmin convert from India, conducted another on "Types of Religious Consciousness"

In the meantime, the Ashram realised that the time had come to pay more close and detailed attention to the life within the Ashram. It first set about prescribing the different stages for those dedicated to Ashram life. These consisted of the "*Mithran*" (friend), the "*Apedshakan*" (the seeker), and the "*Sevak*" (the servant). A *Prathama Sevak* was to be elected once in two years (but if necessity arose) one in the lower ranks could serve as *Prathama Sevak*. When the stage of the *Sevak* was reached, the going became harder; he had to take the vows of chastity (which in the Ashram meant celibacy) poverty and obedience. Obedience meant not merely formal deference to the *Prathama Sevak*, but faithfulness to the discipline of the brotherhood. The dress of a *Sevak* in public was to be a saffron or white cassock and saffron girdle. (in private greater liberty is allowed) and a silver cross. From the *Apedshakan* stage, all were expected to spend at least two hours in worship or devotional study and two hours in manual labour. Half a day a week had to be observed as a period of silence. Other days of silence and fasting duly prescribed were also obligatory during the year. All sleep on a mat on the floor (though I do not find it mentioned as necessary in their rules)



Realising that the Orders of Holy Communion Services in use were all of Western origin, Selvaratnam and Niles tried their hands at drawing up a Service that would wear an entirely Eastern aspect. This service held good at the Ashram till the C. S. I. came into being, when it was found wiser to fall in line with the rest of the community; so the C. S. I. Liturgy continues to be used. It may be remarked in passing that the C. S. I. Liturgy itself some years later became thoroughly capable of an Eastern aspect by adopting a choral version on Carnatic lines to be used as an alternative to the ordinary prose version. On the effort of Niles and Selvaratnam a pertinent observation is necessary; and that is, while both were anxious to Easternise the old version, neither was deeply versed in Eastern culture and therefore fitted to produce anything that would evoke instinctive response to those with an Eastern back ground.

## Efforts and Events

Selvaratnam was a person; the Ashram was a place; both together were a corporate entity capable of action. It may be seen that events occur in a place and that efforts are due to persons, here to one person. And in the year following when any efforts made by this entity is referred to, it will simply be called the "Ashram". The Ashram began to send members to take part in Conventions and Retreats; and others also often went out for evangelical work in the surrounding area. Knowing that being a Religious Ashram as many as possible who could be sent for Theological studies showed be sent, Selvaratnam sent out some young men for such studies to a small Theological Institute then flourishing in Guindy near Madras.

Two years later he was able to help Churches to fill vacancies in small churches by lending three young men. But the process of sending young men for Theological studies continues.

A very substantial service was also being rendered by the Ashram internally not merely by becoming a home for boys from distant places attending Secondary Schools, but also by paying all their expenses and generally caring for them. In addition to such boys, others also not doing any particular study, but doubtful about their future, found it a suitable place, where they could come to a conclusion about themselves.

After the entry of Japan into the War, what had seemed a distant thing, came much nearer. Armoured jeeps were a constant sight and Palaly nearby was developed into an important Air port. Searchlights based there were constantly probing the skies at night for the enemy, who fortunately, after a couple of daylight raids in 1942 never came again. Life, however, went on as normal at the Ashram; only belts had to be tightened a little but they were never too loose at the Ashram anyway.

About this time the Ashram launched what is considered an important project; the building of a small Chapel at Kankesanturai Tuberculosis Sanatorium. For some years various Denominations took turns conducting services there; but as not many Protestant Christians contracted that disease, our services were usually held for Hindus. But as long as Selvaratnam lived, he would continue to go there occasionally. I had a habit of spending my Good Fridays with Selvaratnam through the years; and invariably we would



go in the afternoons to the Sanatorium. We used to get a good congregation, composed entirely of Hindus. They greatly appreciated the fact of somebody from outside taking an interest in them and joined lustily in the singing of Christian Lyrics. As we shall see later, this of course was not Selvaratnam's only venture in caring for a type of people whom others tend to overlook.

The year 1944 was noteworthy in two important respects; one an event and the other an effort. The event was the beginning of the permanent association of I. T. Yesusakayam with the Ashram. On June 14th he became an "Apedshakan". He had been born in 1918, had received his theological instruction in Guindy and served in the Moolai Church, under the C. S. I. for one year. A balanced person with a sober outlook, with a joke or a humorous remark on his lips always, he was well qualified in a matter in which Selvaratnam was woefully deficient; he was an expert in Carnatic Music. Selvaratnam, though he could sing, never pretended to the observance of any rule of a science he did not know. Yesusakayam, on the other hand, not merely knew the science, and not merely could sing, but could also compose songs (and very good ones too). Eight of his songs are at present in C.S.I. Hymn Books. Because of these accomplishments, he could very well carry on a form of preaching seldom done by Jaffna Christians—and often abused in India—lyrical-preaching called *Katha-pirasangam*. For this reason he was extremely popular, particularly in the Eastern Province to which the Ashram was soon to reach out. He was Selvaratnam's right-hand man. After his accession to the rank of permanent members of the Ashram, Selvaratnam became "*Peri Annan*" (elder



brother) and Yesusakayam became "Sinnanan" (younger brother). His untimely death 26 years later was mourned not merely by the Christians but others as well.

The event we have referred to took place in July. Selvaratnam by now felt that the Ashram was established with sufficient firmness in Jaffna for him to reach out beyond the Northern Province. A small plot of land at Kaluvankeni among the aboriginal people, known as Veddhas, situated 11 miles from Batticaloa, was bought. It proved merely a token; because work there seemed unpromising and the Ashram had to move elsewhere. But it established the principle that the Ashram was committed to the Eastern Province.

In 1945 Selvaratnam could plead that having spent six years at the Ashram he was entitled to a "Sabbatical", which he said he proposed to spend at his Alma Mater, Serampore College, pursuing his theological studies still further. But those who knew Selvaratnam, knew that his urge to do theological studies which were not very strong twenty years earlier had not become stronger now. He took his leave of the Ashram in May and after spending some time in Colombo and Kandy, stayed at the Ashram at Courtallam in South India, then visited Nagpur and Jabalpur, Benares, Budha Gaya, Patna, and Shanti Niketan and arrived in Serampore in October. Here he stayed till January—what he did there is not known; but he wrote that he was too old to study—and he was just 39 years of age.

Thus without materially adding to his stock of knowledge, he hoped according to the record preserved at the Ashram, to visit Poona and Ankola in February, the Ashrams in Travancore in March, and in April to attend the Silver Jubilee celebrations of the Ashram at Tirupattur, and then positively to get home. This undoubtedly must have been the programme he carried out,

In 1946, Selvaratnam decided on a bold venture, which would have been an act of piracy, if it had not been an act of resuscitation. From 1915 the Christian Union had held an Annual Convention lasting for three days between the latter part of August and the first part of September. It held the Convention in the Fort Church; and right through till about 1940 it used to be attended by mammoth gatherings. The speakers were usually from South India. Those attending paid for their meals at Central College and were lodged at Central and Vembadi, if they stayed overnight. Of late years the Conventions had fallen on evil days. Selvaratnam decided to take the matter into his hands, and hold them at the Ashram, without any charge for meals. The meetings were held; though the *pandal*, (a cadjan erection) specially put up for the purpose collapsed one night.

Another effort made by the Ashram during the year was expressive of the basic purposes for which it had been founded, viz. the indigenisation of Christianity. Music and singing have always been considered important in religion; but purely musical recitals as expressions of religion have not been customary in Western countries, with which Christianity has been



associated. In India *Bhajans*, (Skt. *bhaj*=worship) by which name they are denoted, are more common, and in the Chaitaniya movement in Bengal the bhajan forms the most characteristic expression of religion. Selvaratnam decided to introduce it into the Ashram; but it required proficiency of the highest order in Carnatic music. Fortunately Selvaratnam had in hand the services of Mr. and Mrs. Anandanayagam, both great experts in the matter. So on the evening of Christmas day in 1946, began the practice of Christmas *bhajan* which is still continued.

### History Takes a turn and Other Things also happen.

In 1947, there took place an event which at that time was called the greatest event in the history of the Christian Church since the Reformation. The Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist and Anglican Churches of South India came together under an episcopal form of government, forming one Church, calling itself, "Church of South India". It had taken nearly 30 years of protracted negotiations for such a thing to happen. To us in the East it was a wonder that it could not take place earlier; to the Westerner it was a wonder that it took place at all. It must, however, be remembered that the history of the Christian Church is largely Western. To the Churches that formed the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India to become part of great fellowship was a great experience. To the Ashram it meant little, since it was Inter-denominational and the Jaffna Diocese was but one constituent unit. To Selvaratnam it merely meant that his old friend, the present writer, had become a Bishop. Ecclesiastically it meant that Selvaratnam who had



C. S. I. "orders" (i. e. was a priest of the C. S. I.) owed canonical obedience to the Bishop.

This did not signify much to Selvaratnam, for he did not believe in obedience to anybody or anything, unless he himself had set up the system. Nor did it signify much more to me, knowing Selvaratnam as I did. My visits to the Ashram did not become either more frequent or more scarce, But whenever it did take place, it simply gave Selvaratnam the opportunity to run up to the Chunnakam market to buy some "corpuscles and ponthulus", i. e. sweetmeats, a taste for which both of us had in common with the great Archbishop William Temple.

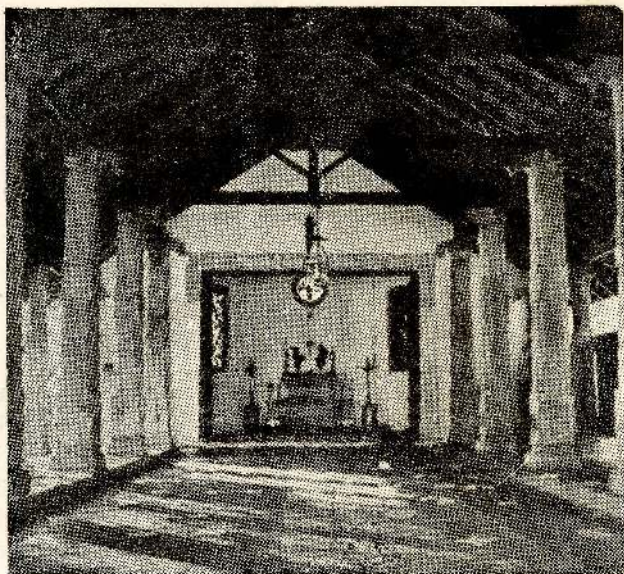
In the same year, however, Selvaratnam attained to a rank himself. Yesusakayam had become a Sevak. And since there were two Sevaks, the senior one came to be called "Periannan" (elder brother) and Yesusakayam "Sinnanan" (younger brother). The year after, Sam Alfred (born 1923) became an Apedshakan" and came to be called "Sam Annan", a name by which he still continues to be called. He had done his Theology at Serampore and Tirumarayur. He is a conscientious and hard-working person; and modest, for he has suppressed an account of his career and an appreciation which I wrote when the 25th anniversary of his reaching the stage of Sevak came along.

In March of 1949 Selvaratnam received a call to be Chaplain of the Ecumenical Institute, conducted by the World Council of Churches, at Bossey, near Geneva. He left after a number of valedictory services here and in Colombo. It was four years after World War II had ended, but there would come to the

Institute many who had endured the terrors inflicted on many non-Aryans and non-Germans and even Germans who did not toe the line during the Hitler regime. It was to Selvaratnam a moving experience. But to have Selvaratnam in their midst with his strange dress and somewhat peculiar way of life was a new experience to all of them. On a brief visit I was able to pay him on my way to the U. S. A. I found him extremely popular. In fact, there could not be any place which he visited at any time where he was not popular. After five months in Bossey he visited various countries in Europe. Ex-Queen Wilhelmina of Holland gave him a warm welcome, as a countryman of Shadu Sundar Singh. He also crossed over to England.

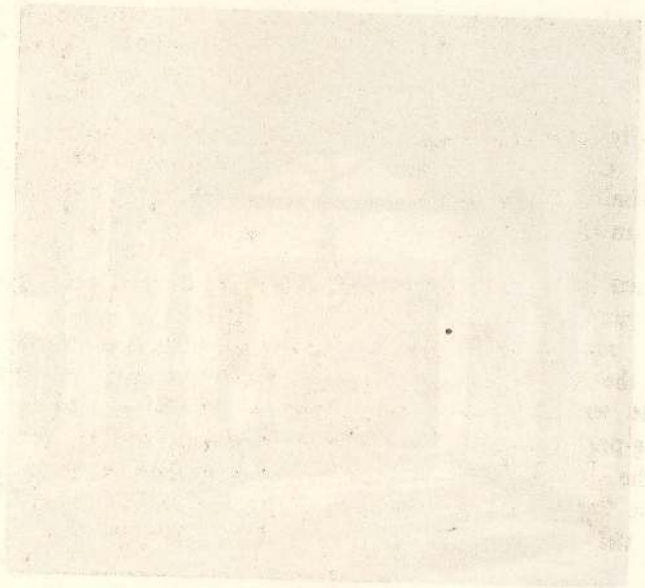
Having come so far Selvaratnam saw no reason to exclude the U. S. A. from his patronage and so to America he crossed over. Of the various cities and States he visited there, I cannot be sure; but there is a letter of his written from Detroit. He told me that in one of the churches to which he went in the States, Dr. Aldan Clark, formerly Secretary of the American Board, and who had taken part in his Ordination, said, "sometime ago I introduced to you a Congregational Bishop (myself); today I want to introduce to you a Congregational monk". To any Western Christian the terms were self-contradictory, because Congregationalists had become such by rejecting both Bishops and Monks. But since they saw us in flesh and blood they had to face the fact that in a changing world what had been contradictions were ceasing to be such. On his way back from the West, Selvaratnam, travelling by way of the Mediterranean was able to see the Arab side of the Holy Land,





**Interior View of Ashram Chapel**





Interior View of Ashram Chapel

It must be said that wherever he might have gone, Selvaratnam made little concession to the conditions and standards of life demanded by the countries he visited. He would have had certainly to wear an overcoat in winter, but otherwise he always wore his cotton collarless cassock; and preferred to go about bare-footed, though occasionally he would wear slippers. It was with a sense of relief, he told me, that when he reached the French port of Djibouti opposite Aden, he flung his slippers far out into the sea.

Finally the French boat S. S. Champalion brought him to Colombo on the 4th February 1950. His friends held a service of Thanksgiving in the C. S. I. Church in Wellawatte.

When Selvaratnam was away in Europe, the 10th Anniversary of the Ashram fell due in August 1949. But the matter instead of suffering by default, received thrice the attention it would have normally received. Here it was celebrated, with D. T. Niles taking a leading part. At Geneva Selvaratnam notified his friends and the day was duly observed, and Sam Alfred, who was at Serampore doing a Refresher course, also saw to it that the day did not go unobserved:

Early in January Dr. Visser T' Hooft who had laid the foundation for the Chapel before the Ashram had come into being and had known Selvaratnam in Geneva, paid a visit to Jaffna and was highly satisfied at the way the Ashram had materialised and caught people's imagination.

## CHAPTER V

### THE ASHRAM — SECOND PERIOD

#### An Introduction :

Within sometime of the foundation of the Ashram, Selvaratnam had become a recognised figure not merely in Jaffna but among Christians throughout the Island. Calls upon him from outside had become frequent. They were not merely calls to speak at meetings but calls from various persons, who had problems, or attacks of illness, however slight. A Post Card was enough and Selvaratnam felt it was his bounden duty not to ignore any call. Throughout the Peninsula there was his bicycle or the Bus system to be used; but soon he acquired a motor cycle.

When the call came from outside, there was of course the Ceylon Government Railway at his disposal; it was a joke at the Ashram that nobody could foretell Selvaratnam's programme for the day with any degree of certainty; for, when the whistle of the train at Chunnakam a mile off was heard at anytime, there was quite a chance that Selvaratnam would pick up his bag and hop it to the train halt close by for some unknown destination.

But all places in the country are not situated by Railway Stations. The fact that a call came from some remote and inaccessible place did not make the slightest difference to Selvaratnam, for, he felt that it was exactly for such a purpose motor cycles were meant; and off he would go; nor did the fact that the call was not prompted by any urgent reason make a difference. That somebody wanted him was enough.



So headaches, engagement ceremonies, marriage problems, weddings, funerals, anywhere among those whom he knew constituted sufficient reason for him to do a trip. The Asbram of course would be in the safe hands of Yesusakayam.

I used to protest to him often about the needlessness of most of his trips. Each person, of course, has his own set of values; but, I developed the suspicion that it was not merely that, but that he liked travel as such. Some people's purpose in travel is to arrive; but other people not merely like to arrive but also travel for the purpose of arriving. The fact that David Livingstone used positively to enjoy the use of a sextant (an instrument for locating longitudes and latitudes) is no reflection on his interest or achievement in exploration. Some people like movement as such; about which, of course, there is nothing wrong. An American Professor once told me that all persons born after 1916 preferred movement to static situations; Selvaratnam was born ten years earlier but seems to have developed the disposition by anticipation.

After his 1949 trip to Europe, Selvaratnam had become a world figure with friends in many parts of the world. They were all people about whom he cared, and in whose affairs he was interested. Whereas, formerly Ceylon (and to some extent India) constituted the limits of his outlook, now he became one of those who could genuinely re-echo the words of John Wesley, "The world is my parish";

In this Chapter we shall be referring to a number of trips he made; they were trips which took

him far out; but they were merely outstanding facts of his general pattern, which made the present writer often say, "If you want to find Selvaratnam, you may go anywhere except to the Ashram". This was often literally true; for he was frequently out on "local calls". He, however, never felt he was neglecting the Ashram; he was merely doing the duties of the Ashram outside.

### First Half of the Decade — Events and Efforts

In March 1951, Dr. Hendrik Kraemer, the Dutch scholar, a high authority on Comparative Religions and a figure with an international reputation, round whose book "The Christian Message in a non-Christian World" the chief debate at the International Missionary Conference at Madras had raged in 1938, visited the Ashram and stayed some days here. He had been Director of the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey and had come to know Selvaratnam well when the latter was there in 1949. In the eyes of the present writer, perhaps, the visit loomed larger than in Selvaratnam's, as Kraemer's, theological outlook had profoundly influenced and strengthened his own theological outlook.

Dr. Kraemer conducted a three day Seminar at the Ashram on 'The day Apostolate'. Dr. A. A. Hoover of the Ceylon University presided; the fame of the speaker drew a distinguished audience, among whom was Mr. Sam P. C. Fernando, a future Cabinet Minister. On Saturday evening he delivered a lecture or led a Seminar on "The Relevance of Religion to Life" at "Kala Nilayam" (in Jaffna Town), the very citadel of Hinduism. Mr. S. Natesan, the most outstanding



Hindu scholar of the Island presided. The discussion that followed was very animated, and Kraemer's opinion seemed to go against the very grain of Hinduism. One very learned and acute Hindu, in challenging the speaker's view point that Religion should bear on one's daily life and doings asked whether he wanted religion to be a glorified version of the British Empire. We are told that Dr. Kraemer thoroughly enjoyed the discussion.

During his stay, Kraemer, planted a mango tree at the Ashram besides Selvaratnam's own cottage. But the tree did not have much of a chance as it was planted under a margosa tree and may be seen to-day as a stunted plant. Selvaratnam obviously believed that he could dictate to Nature, as he could to the Ashram; he failed to realise that Nature had its own way of doing things.

While Kraemer's visit was something that happened to the Ashram, other happenings during the year that followed were expressions of the deliberate efforts of the Ashram itself (or of Selvaratnam's wishes, which amounted to the same thing). The first of these was in regard to Whitsun. Some years earlier an English Methodist Missionary had complained that he had a grievance against the Christians of Ceylon; and that was that while they celebrated Christmas and Easter and observed Good Friday, they took no notice of Whitsun, (which marks the descent of the Holy Spirit). Selvaratnam determined to rectify this grievance and, of course, in his own way. He turned it into a Festival lasting three days preceding Whitsunday. Those who took part in the Festival of 1952 were D. T. Niles, G. B. Jackson, and Dr. Forrester Paton. Ever since then, the observance of Whitsunday has become a part of normal Church life (at least in Jaffna).



The second effort was the holding of a School of Prayer. This did not consist of continuous prayer for three days, but of addresses and Bible Studies regarding the significance and implications of Prayer. It was conducted by D. T. Niles and J. J. Ratnarajah from August 23rd. to the 26th

In 1952, Selvaratnam took a new step regarding Easter. Easter Sundays are marked by lively services in the mornings; the evenings usually witness meagre and sleepy gatherings. Selvaratnam had already, as we saw, established the *Bhajan* principle on Christmas evenings. This year he extended it to Easter. Though the venue of the Easter Bhajan came later to be shifted, it has continued to be run by the Ashram till now. Of course, Selvaratnam's pillars of support in the matter were Mr. & Mrs. Anandanayagam.

During the latter part of the year we had the privilege of a visit from Dr. Douglas Horton, the Chief Executive Officer of the Congregational Churches of the U. S. A. and his wife, who before marriage had been President of Wellesley College, one of the biggest and most exclusive Women's Colleges in the U. S. A. It had been felt for some time that "Balusthan" which had previously been the Ashram Library was too small for the purpose and the foundation for a new Library Building had been laid in the North Western corner of the Ashram, by Dr. Kraemer in March 1951. On 19th. December 1952 Dr. Horton declared open the new Library building and Mrs. Horton lit the traditional lamp. In his speech on the occasion Selvaratnam declared the books it contained as "bad, very bad, and those not so bad." Later developments have revolutionised the position radically; but then,

the Library as it is now is only in part that of the Ashram, the major portion being the property of the Institute for the Study of Religion and Society. (the Study Centre for short),

The year 1953 saw two important efforts on the part of the Ashram and a curious experience reserved for Selvaratnam.

Mr. Lewis Subramaniam, who had retired from high service, under the Imperial Government of India and had been an important figure in the Co-operative movement in Jaffna decided to spend the rest of his life in the Ashram. He commenced the conduct of a Correspondence Course on the Bible. This he carried out faithfully till his death four years later. It was also he who kept the Ashram going while the Sevak trotted about the globe; Yesusakayam was often in the Eastern Province.

The year also saw genuine effort to put our work in the Eastern Province on its legs. Yesusakayam left for the Eastern Province with a trained Pharmacist and made Vaddipodamadu, 8 miles from Valaichenai, his headquarters. The area consisted of groups of Veddah hamlets. We were later compelled to shift from here also, though it has not been abandoned altogether.

It was recorded earlier that though Selvaratnam ceased to be the Secretary of the Church Council in 1937, there was a brief interlude during which he again participated in Church administration. The interlude was during the latter of 1953. For three months, the present writer went on a holiday to Bangalore



and appointed Selvaratnam as his Commissary. It is recorded that the period of his Commissariship was a hectic one for everyone concerned (who remained here). As mentioned at the beginning of this Chapter, Selvaratnam liked movement for its own sake; but he liked to keep not only himself but everyone else also active. But action for its own sake, without regard to ultimate purposes, is not worthwhile in the end. Anyway, when the writer went out of the Island for any length of time later, his desire to call for Selvaratnam's aid did not wax high enough to appoint him his Commissary again.

There is a difference between a Diocese with rules bearing on its many-sided life, the traditions cherished by churches, and a body of competent men in charge of the respective churches and not accustomed to be ordered about and a single unit like the Ashram, where one man's will is the law. The adjustment to the recognition of this difference may not have been easy.

From July 1954 to the middle of December of the year Selvaratnam got a kind of opportunity he liked exceedingly,—an extended tour. In the company of Canon T. R. Milford, who had been Vice-Principal of St. Paul's College, Calcutta, when we were students and Miss Lucy Burt, he went on an S. C. M. Mission through Bengal, the United Provinces and East and West Pakistan. They visited many Colleges. With Selvaratnam on it both the Team and the Colleges must have had a pleasant time.

The next year Selvaratnam shifted the Easter evening *Bhajan* to the Jaffna Esplanade. On Christmas day he



knew, few would venture out from their homes, but on Easter evening they would. These *Bhajans* on the Esplanade for years drew large crowds and were maintained at the highest level. They were later shifted to the Open Air Theatre close by and do not now attract crowds of the same size. Mr. & Mrs. Anandanayagam helped out with the music and singing and Mr. K. P. Muttiah with songs of his own composition.

In December of 1955 Selvaratnam was called to be the Chaplain of a Conference of the World Student Christian Federation (of which his friend D. T. Niles was Chairman) to be held at Castlereagh in Australia. Apart from the Conference, the tour included meetings in Perth, Sydney and Melbourne, Tasmania and New Zealand, chiefly in Universities. The High Commissioner for Australia in Ceylon had told him when he left that the Australians, did not like to be criticised—unlike the English who like it and the Americans who relish it. But Selvaratnam wrote from Australia in March 1956 that even if he was to disregard the advice he had been given, he would have had to strain himself to find any criticisms. As Selvaratnam would always have been laughing, people would have laughed with him; and it was difficult for anyone to dislike one who liked everyone. As for general situations, customs and the laws and the problems involved in them, Selvaratnam seldom concerned himself with them.

When in Australia, he had for some reason to go to a Doctor. Obviously the attempt to combine a severe withdrawal from the world with a gusty participation in it (often at high speed) had taken its toll; and the Doctor told him that his heart was so

bad that he might drop dead any moment. That he should have continued to live for 17 years after that, working always at top gear, shows the triumph of spirit over matter,

## The Second Half

The year 1958 is noteworthy for two reasons. In the first place, in the Eastern Province the Ashram shifted the site of its work once more, but this time permanently. It bought a piece of land, 17 acres in extent, and 17 miles north of Batticaloa, the locality being called "Kiran"- Work was started there in March but the land was formally taken over on 20th August. The Rev. James Mather, Chairman of the Methodist Church, held the Dedication Service. The financial strain imposed by the land transaction was not heavy, as it cost only Rs. 2,000/-. The place still houses our branch Ashram. It was given the sobriquet of "Adaikala Giri" (Hill of Refuge), because during the floods that had occurred while our buildings were being put up, it had provided shelter to a large number of homeless people.

In the second place, in the May of that year an event occurred that engulfed the whole country. Inter-racial riots of a serious dimension broke out in many parts of South Ceylon; many Tamils were killed, their houses and shops burnt, and they were driven out from where they had lived. Selvaratnam exerted himself a good deal in the matter. He was able to get a gift from the World Council of Churches and gave aid to many victims. Many Tamils of Indian origin, who had been rendered homeless, were settled in the Paranthan-Kilinochchi area. As usual, Selvaratnam endeavoured to solve the larger problem behind the



Riots by organising dialogues between Christian leaders on either side—none of whom had initiated the Riots nor suffered from them.

The year 1959 is chiefly note-worthy in the history of the Ashram for the establishment of what in honorific terms is called "The Institute for the Study of Religion and Society", but more popularly called the "Study Centre". It was part of an Ecumenical project spread out over the world; but locally financed by the Trustees of Jaffna College. Since the Ashram itself was involved in the kind of work contemplated, it was laid down that the Institute should be housed at Maruthanamadam "in close proximity to the Ashram and that its work be done in co-operation with the Ashram". During the period under review in this Chapter, it functioned under various single Directors; Mr. A. M. K. Cumaraswamy, the Rev. J. T. Arulanantham, Dr. W. L. Jeyasingham, and Mr. D. S. Sanders Jnr. The system was later changed.

The year 1960 was marked by two events, the one which bore on the Ashram in particular and the other on Selvaratnam in particular.

During the greater part of 1959, the present writer had been in Bangalore engaged in writing a book. Early in 1960 the Church of South India held its Synod meetings in Bangalore. Selvaratnam, while not a member, had come down in a still higher, but for him usual, capacity as Chaplain. So Selvaratnam was in Bangalore and was often out of the Ashram on legitimate calls. He was, however, the only ordained Minister at the Ashram; but who was to carry out ministerial duties in his absence? The Ashram was a religious Institution. It was not part of the Diocese, but was it not part of the Church?



So the conviction forced itself on the writer's mind that he, as a Bishop, should take cognizance of the situation and that Sevaks of the Ashram should receive Presbyteral (ministerial) standing to perform duties involved in the Ashram; that is, they should be ordained whether they fulfilled the requirements laid down for Diocesan ordinands or not. The ordination would essentially be for the performance of ministerial duties in the Ashram; for the performance of such duties outside, permission from the Bishop was necessary so that any clash with the prerogatives of the parochial clergy, might be avoided. The writer put the matter to Selvaratnam, who much to the writer's surprise said he had intended to ask me about it himself.

The Diocesan Executive gave its sanction to the arrangement and accordingly Yesusakayam and Sam Alfred were ordained Deacons (a stage preliminary to full ministerial standing) on 27th August.

The event that concerned Selvaratnam himself was his attendance of the World Student Christian Federation at Strassbourg as Chaplain. Strassbourg is a town in France, but on the border of Germany, on this side of the Rhine. Having finished his duties at the Conference, he spent a little while at the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey, and crossed over to America where he was present at the 150th Anniversary of the founding of the American Board (of Commissioners for Foreign Missions), held at Bradford in August, which his sister and brother-in-law were attending as official delegates of the Jaffna Diocese.

On his way back, Selvaratnam toured various countries of Europe, including Holland, where he called on

Queen Wilhelmina; he also visited England. On his way home he had the satisfaction of seeing the Israeli side of the Holy Land, where his sister and her husband had also gone, and had the pleasure of running into them by pure accident.

The year 1961 was a year of rise and fall. What rose were buildings all of them, in fact, Guest Houses; what or who fell we shall see later. In February the "East Asia House" meant for visitors from outside was completed and on the 18th of the month was opened by Mr. Victor Hayward, Research Secretary of the International Missionary Council. At Kiran in the Eastern Province, the "Shadu Sunder Singh Madam", a Guest House for that Ashram was completed and was opened on 9th. September. Here, "Susan Illam" in memory of Mrs. J. C. Handy, who had died the previous year, and which is now the most used Guest House, was opened on 4th. November. It is an extension of "Balusthan" which now forms an appendix to the latter building. The rise therefore, may be considered great.

So, it may be considered was the fall. On November 16th the Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches was opening its sessions in New Delhi. The formation of the World Council had been a world event and a turning point in the history of the Christian Church. Through the centuries the Christian Church had gone on splitting up till the number of its sects almost seemed to pass all count. The realisation that the time had come for the process to stop had not come suddenly. It was the consummation of almost a



century of the utmost exertion. If any man had played a greater part in it than anyone else, it was John R. Mott, an American layman, who fortunately lived to see two Assemblies of that body.

On that Assembly are representatives of all the non-Roman Catholic Churches who "acknowledge Jesus Christ as God and Saviour". The First Assembly had taken place in Amsterdam in 1948 and the Second at Evanston, Illinois in 1954. The schedule of once in six years was changed to once in seven years at Evanston. The Orthodox Church, which covers Eastern Europe, had not yet joined; but taking it in was one of the main items in the agenda of New Delhi.

The Central Committee of the World Council which consists of some of many of the world's greatest Christian leaders meets once a year. The actual administration is in the hands of a much smaller body in which the General Secretary plays an important part. The Assembly itself is a vast body and passes resolutions on many important topics. The papers on which these resolutions are based are first discussed in the various sections; but the papers themselves would have been drawn up by experts over a period of two years or so.

To be a delegate to the Assembly is a great honour. Though the present writer has attended two Conferences under the auspices of the World Council, he never attained to the honour of being a delegate of the General Assembly. The highest point he reached was when he was voted to the seventh place in the panel of the C. S. I. which was allowed only six delegates.



Selvaratnam was called to be the Chaplain of the Assembly at New Delhi. This was, of course, a distinction of a high order. We said almost at the beginning of this book that Selvaratnam's friend Dr. D. T. Niles who became a very influential person in World Council circles was in a large measure responsible for keeping Selvaratnam in focus in these matters. One can initially be pushed into focus by others; but if one does not deserve to be in focus, one soon gets pushed out. It is possible, therefore, that Niles did often propose Selvaratnam's name; but the fact that the proposal was always accepted without demur shows that Selvaratnam had gained the right of nomination on his own acknowledged ability. It was now almost taken for granted that when any important meeting required a Chaplain, beyond question Selvaratnam was the man.

We spoke of a fall; what fall was it? On 29th of October Selvaratnam was riding on the one mile stretch of road between Maruthanamadam and Chunnakam; and when he was on the seat of the motor cycle, no rules of speed limit bound him. An elderly man on a push bicycle was crossing the road from a lane on the left side of the road to a lane right opposite on the other side and did not care to turn to the right or the left when he did so. The inevitable happened. Some passers-by noticed two persons lying unconscious far out from the road, with a push cycle and a motor cycle lying close by. Both were taken to the Civil Hospital Jaffna. The other man was operated on the next day and died on the Table. Selvaratnam remained totally unconscious for a week and indeed took a long time to recover full consciousness. Even after his return to the Ashram he was not able to regain normal consciousness for quite some time.

The World Council offered us a "consolation prize" by holding a Seminar here in December. The Seminar was conducted by three eminent persons Dr. H. H. Wolf, Director of the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Dr. Joseph Hromadka, the famous theologian from Czechoslovakia, and Miss Kathleen Bliss of England. The people of Jaffna were, therefore, able to see the World Council of Churches functioning in miniature. It is significant that when a venue had to be selected for the purpose, there seemed to be no alternative to the Ashram.

## CHAPTER VI

# THE ASHRAM—THE THIRD PERIOD

### Introduction

In this Chapter we have reached the final phase of Selvaratnam's connexion with the Ashram. During the ensuing pages we shall certainly keep to the general plan we have hitherto followed by observing a chronological sequence. But since the Ashram had now ceased to be an experiment and had existed for twenty two years, we can also see certain general facts, tendencies, and patterns emerging. To ignore them would be not to write history but to display a calendar that would lack all meaning. In the Section here entitled "Introduction", therefore, we shall draw attention to some of these general facts and tendencies, so that we can understand not merely what has gone before but what comes after.

### Selvaratnam

We have seen, as we were coming along how Selvaratnam was acquiring a special place for himself.

Locally, this meant that more or less he was being considered indispensable to any function with any religious aspect to it. The present writer also as Bishop used to get invitations to all kinds of events and telegrams of intimation when there was a funeral; but that was largely official. It was held to be an honour if the Bishop was present; if he was not present, those who sent the invitation may have felt somewhat slighted. In Selvaratnam's case, however, it was not official; he was considered necessary for the function which would have been regarded as incomplete if he had not attended.



If he attended, he had to be given a part. A wedding would normally be solemnised by the Parish Minister assisted by the Bridegroom's Minister and possibly a relative of one of the parties. So Selvaratnam was usually called upon to do the homily. The writer was not often called upon to participate in weddings, as it would have involved certain ecclesiastical snags; but he was often requisitioned to speak at funerals. I used, therefore, to twit him often about the anomaly that he a celibate, should be asked to give advice to those getting married, while I was considered fit only to speak about dead people. I understand that D. T. Niles also had sometimes humorously questioned his right to give advice on matrimony. It was not Selvaratnam's advice on marriage that they wanted but his participation.

Outside Jaffna, elsewhere in Ceylon, whenever there was a special meeting, a Convention, Anniversary or Jubilee, it was often customary that Selvaratnam should be asked to speak to them, and innumerable are the instances recorded in the Ashram Diary of his going out to keep these engagements. But it was not merely to other parts of Ceylon he had to go but elsewhere as well. On the whole, we shall be making no references to these engagements, whether here or elsewhere, unless they were of outstanding importance.

## The Ashram

It was not merely Selvaratnam that had fastened himself on peoples' minds but the Ashram also. In part, it was due to a reason that had no special connexion with him. In founding the Ashram he had

provided a general meeting place not tied to any particular Denomination and not bound to obey the special rites and observances prescribed by any ecclesiastical authority, but where every one could meet if they had got Selvaratnam's permission; they might even arrive without his fore-knowledge or permission, knowing they would not be driven out. They simply regarded it as a general meeting where anybody could foregather.

The special place it acquired was also in a large measure due to its connexion with Selvaratnam. The first reason is that it had a special spiritual atmosphere. So various "Groups" and "Fellowships" would inaugurate themselves there and look upon it as their meeting place. It was customary for Confirmation Candidates of certain churches to go to the Ashram before the Confirmation day. And there is no doubt that the special and distinctive atmosphere that was felt was due to the fact that Selvaratnam had made the Ashram the home of a spiritual fellowship which he gathered round him and which observed a special discipline of life. The second reason was its particular connexion with Selvaratnam. People came to it because it was his Ashram. Ordinands came there for a day's Retreat with him. People brought special gifts all because of its connexion with Selvaratnam.

So much place had the Ashram gained in the Christian world, that to every International person with an interest in Church life, who came to Ceylon, a visit to the Ashram or an interview with Selvaratnam was a "must". I suppose many of them imagined that the constitution of the Ashram consisted of Selvaratnam sitting under a tree. But they came not



merely when he was alive, but even after his death, for they believed that the place would be permeated with his spirit. Thus Bishop J. A. T. Robinson of England and Prof. Jurgen Moulmann of Germany insisted on visiting the Ashram, long after Selvaratnam had been laid in his grave.

## The Study Centre

This Institution was formally called by the high-sounding appellation of "The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society" and as we saw, had been inaugurated in April 1959. We also found that the Board of Directors of Jaffna College which sponsored it had categorically laid it down that it should be situated close to the Ashram and should be conducted in co-operation with the Ashram.

From 1959 the Institute was under the charge, for different periods, of Mr. A. M. K. Cumaraswamy, the Rev. J. T. Arulanantham, Dr. W. L. Jeyasingham and Mr. D. S. Sanders Jnr.

But in January 1963, the Board of Management of the Institute substituted four honorary Directors to replace the old system. The present writer was one, the Rev. S. K. Bunker, Drs. W. L. Jeyasingam and D. T. Niles were the others. Some were given Assts; Niles was given Selvaratnam. I do not know how much was done by the others. Mr. Bunker and Niles had too many commitments to be active about the Study Centre. The writer may be unduly exaggerating his own share in the activities of the Institute;



but I do know that the Study of Comparative Religion, which is the writer's special field, was the one that was carried on most vigorously after this arrangement. Scholars of the various Religions came and led Seminars and there were interesting discussions. Selvaratnam was very helpful; he provided tea and often lunch. It was understood that whoever else was Director or were Directors, the Sevak of the Ashram was also *de facto* Director.

As a member of the Boards of Management of both the Institute and the Ashram Board, it was to me a source of vast amusement to see the activities of the Institute finding their way not merely into the Reports of the Institute but into those of the Ashram also. But the Ashram would not merely have provided the venue for the activities, but also made all the arrangements necessary to make the activities possible. However, I used to comment at meetings on both the Institute and the Ashram taking credit for the same events. Selvaratnam was content with saying that the activities of both were so interlocked that they could not be disentangled. He makes this remark even in one of his reports as late as 1971.

If it was difficult to disentangle the activities of either of them, the question may be asked why it was difficult to do so. And the answer is that they were not meant to be disentangled.

It may strike us as curious that the organisers of the Institute should have mentioned the site of the Ashram in their Constitution and have laid it down as the Second Article. The reason is that they were not founding a Society which could hold its meetings anywhere according to convenience; they were foun-

ding an Institution, which should be located in a place. But why should a particular site be mentioned in the Constitution? When we were drawing up a Constitution for the Ashram, we did not mention any particular site. We looked for a convenient site before fixing it.

Why then was it found necessary in this case to mention the site? In looking out for a site for the Ashram, we were also looking out for a place that would suit one particular purpose—a place sufficiently far and yet sufficiently near a Christian community. Though it was not thought necessary to mention it in the Constitution, that purpose was taken for granted.

In this case, the organisers of the Institute found a fellowship of Christian believers dedicated to the pursuit of Christian study and Christian activities, already settled in a place with about twenty years of tradition behind them. Here they decided was the right environment and context for the activities of the Institute they were planning. The Ashram may have its ups and downs; the same men may not always be in charge: but here was the tradition and atmosphere they wanted.

Of course, the organisers knew that if the activities they were contemplating could take place in Jaffna Town, they would attract more public attention and “make more noise”. But what they wanted was the study of interested persons of the particular subjects they had in mind. In fact, it might be said that popular discussions of these topics by passers—by totally unconnected with the subjects and devoid of the necessary background and knowledge were just what they wanted to avoid.



Besides the fact that the organisers wanted the study to be done by responsible and interested persons, they also had another aim in mind which is expressed in the phrase that its work should be done "in co-operation with the Ashram". This means that they wanted its activities to be carried out under Christian auspices. There was always the possibility that their successors might succumb to the temptation of making the Institute another "Congress of Religions". This clause ensures that possibility shall not materialise.

To see that these clauses did not merely exist on paper but got fixed, they asked the Ashram for a hall for their purposes and the "Octagon" was to be the result. And since in those days they were thinking of only one Director, they fixed him up more or less immediately in close proximity to the Ashram by putting up a house for him across the road.

Therefore it must be affirmed here that recent efforts to shift the site of the Institute to Jaffna Town would not merely be to deviate from the Constitution of the Institute, but to contradict its fundamental purpose, which the founders wanted to guard in various ways. It would be to do the very thing the founders wanted to avoid. (This is by no means to say that the popular lectures do not have their place; they can always be undertaken when the subjects are not technical and are of general interest).

That the Institute should maintain a Library is not mentioned in the Constitution, and the reason is that the Ashram Library was considered to be the Library of the Institute also. Now of course, it has been greatly replenished by the inclusion of the late



Kalai Pulavar Navaratnam's Library and the books bought out of gifts of the World Council of Churches. Therefore, the Ashram's title in regard to its possession is somewhat diminished and it might largely be considered the Institute Library.

There has been a complaint in recent times that this Library is wasted here and would serve a better purpose in Town. As against this, it must be pointed out definitely that the Library is not meant to be a General Library. It has a severely limited range. It is restricted to books on Religion and Society. They will not be attracting too much public attention. Those who need information on other subjects have the Jaffna Public Library at their disposal.

If, therefore, there is any intention to disregard the basic purposes enshrined in the Constitution, the question arises whether it would be legitimate in such circumstances to continue to depend for support on those who were willing to back the original project.

### The Toll of Time

Of course as the years go by, it is natural for all to see many they have known pass away; that this should certainly be so during the course of 33 years is unavoidable. R. C. P. Welch, the first President of the Ashram Board died early in January 1942; Mr. W. D. Niles, the father of D. T. Niles, had also died the same year; and Mr. Lewis Subramaniam ("uncle Lewis") had died in October 1957.

However, in the sixties and soon after, many whose lives were woven into the texture of the Ashram passed away. Attention will be drawn to their pass-

ing when we come to record the events of this period. What we want to say here is that the death of every one of them was a severe blow to those associated with the Ashram and caused us intense grief.

### First Half of Period

The most important event that occurred in 1962 was a Consultation that was held by high ranking persons in the East Asia Christian Conference that was held here from March 23rd. to 26th: It was natural that it should be held in the East Asia Conference House, which had been opened by Mr. Victor Hayward in February of 1959. The subject of their consultation was the various Church Union Schemes on the anvil at the time. Among those present were Dr. D. G. Moses, one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches, Bishop Lakdasa de Mel the Metropolitan Designate of the entire Anglican Church of India, Burma and Ceylon, and Dr. Wickremesinghe of the Baptist Church. Dr. E. Stanley Jones was also present, though not a member of the E. A. C. C. That the Ashram should have been selected for the purpose indicates the place that the Ashram had come to hold in the eyes of the Christian world.

The occasion was too good to miss. So Selvaratnam got hold of the members for something that did not require much effort. - the laying of foundation stones for the "Octagon". The promise to pay for the building had been made by the Swabasha Teachers; but that promise could not be kept because the Take-Over of Schools by Government had dispersed the group that made it. Therefore the Ashram had to find the money; it was completed before the end of



the year, so that Dr. Telfer Mook was able to declare it open on Christmas day.

Another event, not of the same outstanding importance as the earlier one from an International point of view, was of sufficient importance to the Ashram. Sam Alfred and Yesusakayam who had been ordained Deacons two years previously were ordained Presbyters. As Deacons they were entitled to administer only one sacrament-Baptism; now they could administer both Baptism and Holy Communion as well. This meant that there were now three fully ordained Presbyters in the Ashram; and Selvaratnam could go on his travels with an easy conscience.

In 1963 Dr. Walter Marshal Horton, the well known American Theologian stayed with us and led a Seminar on "Theology of the Twentieth Century" for two days, 4th and 5th January. He also delivered a popular lecture on "Keeping our Christian Commitments Alive".

Early in 1964, Selvaratnam was able to fulfil a need, which he felt should have been met much earlier, but to which nobody had paid any attention. Soon after World War II, after Government had abolished its old Training College for English Teachers on Thurstan Road, Colombo, it had established Regional Colleges for them. The one in Jaffna was situated at Palaly, in the buildings used by officers and men of the Air Force during the War. Since many Christian Teachers have to pass through it biennially and there was no church close by, a Chapel for them was a crying need. This Selvaratnam was able to meet by putting up a suitable little structure for the purpose.



In August of the year, the Ashram was going to complete 25 years of its existence. Where anything like a Jubilee was about to occur, Selvaratnam was hardly the man to miss the opportunity. The attention of the Ashram Board had been drawn to the forthcoming event as early as the previous year and naturally a history of the 25 years was a necessity. At a meeting of the Board, which I could not attend owing to an impending visit to a Conference in Mexico, the task was given to Selvaratnam, among whose varied talents a sense of history was not one, I was therefore, extremely surprised and asked Niles what was meant by this curious assignment and he gave me the equally curious reply, "When we asked Selvaratnam to do it, we knew that you would do it for him."

So the task of compiling the story of the Ashram during the twenty five years of its existence fell on the present writer, who had to spend some months on it. His labours had to be interrupted by his trip to Mexico, which kept him away for two months. The material for the story had to be drawn from various sources. There were, of course, the half yearly Circular Letters sent out to Ashram friends; but from a historical point of view they suffered from Selvaratnam's total lack of interest in dates and a habit of filling up space with hortatory matter. The Annual Reports presented to the Ashram Board, had the disadvantage of surveying activities from the June of each previous year to that of the current year, so that references would be difficult to fix by standards of the calendar year. There was, however, the great friend-in-need of every Jaffna historian- the "Morning Star". Somehow, the account got finished and appeared in the Ashram Brochure entitled "Twenty five Years".

The celebrations of the Jubilee lasted for two days, the 22nd and 23rd of August 1964. They started with a Communion Service conducted by Sam Alfred and Yesusakayam. During the forenoon, religious singing was conducted by Mr. & Mrs. Anandanayagam. In the evening there was a Garden party, which was followed by the dedication of a Hostel for youth to be built on the other side of the Railway line, a Hostel which we regret did not materialise. In the evening Yesusakayam did a *Katha-pirasangam*.

The second day opened with a Holy Communion Service conducted by Bishop Lakshman Wickremesinghe. At the afternoon Public Meeting, Dr. Jesudason of Tirupattur and Bishop Lakshman Wickremesinghe were the chief speakers. Selvaratnam proposed the vote of thanks. It contained the usual funny stories which formed the staple of most of his utterances when not delivered as sermons in churches or addresses at Retreats.

It may be mentioned that while Selvaratnam was responsible for organising many meetings, he never obtruded on public attention. His actual participation in them was usually confined to the delivery of "Welcomes" and proposals of Votes of Thanks.

The year after, on the 27th of May, the writer had the melancholy task of releasing a collection of songs by the late K. P. Muttiah, who had died, I think, sometime before the Jubilee. Mr. Muttiah was a poet of high endowments and every Christmas and Easter, he would give a fresh set of his songs to be sung by the Anandanayagams. Both the Ashram Hymn Book and that of the Jaffna Diocese abound in his



songs. He was the first to introduce into Christian worship, what had been a distinctive form of Hindu choral worship, whereby the leader sings one line of a song, which is then taken up by the congregation. This is now much in use in our churches and is highly appreciated. He had been a great friend of the Ashram. His early death at the age of 50 was deeply mourned not merely by us but by the neighbouring Hindu public as well to which he had rendered many services.

In April 1966, the Maha Nayaka Thera of the Malwatte Chapter, who is more or less the High Priest of Buddhism in Ceylon paid a visit to Jaffna. A change of Government had occurred the previous year; there was now a Tamil Minister in the Cabinet and the Maha Nayaka was received with great cordiality everywhere. Of course, a visit to the Ashram was incumbent and he came on the 20th. Selvaratnam made quite a function of it; the Octagon was decorated, and the Maha Nayaka was received with trays of flowers. There was a meeting and Selvaratnam welcomed him; The Maha Nayaka replied; Bishop Harold de Soysa also spoke. The present writer is recorded as having presented the Maha Nayaka with a beautifully bound Sinhala Bible. Always with an instinct for the practical, Selvaratnam presented him privately with a bottle of pills which were a substitute for sugar; the Maha Nayaka with equal privacy asked him for another bottle for a colleague. This transaction naturally did not come out in any press report.

During this year Dr. G. H. C. Angus, former Principal of Serampore College, who on his retirement



from his position, had been appointed "Master" of the College—a status that corresponds to that of Chancellor—and had been residing in Britain, was visiting his old pupils. He spent 10 days at the Ashram and was persuaded to give us a few lectures. He gave four; on the 22nd and 23rd of July he spoke on "Recent Research on New Testament Interpretation" and on the 30th and 31st on "The Application of New Testament Teaching to Modern Conditions and Problems".

On October 11th 1966, after a brief illness, he died in Colombo. Selvaratnam, along with some old students of Dr. Angus, had the satisfaction of conducting the funeral service. On the 10th of the following month we had a Memorial Service for him at the Ashram.

G. H. C. Angus was the grandson of the famous Greek Scholar Joseph Angus, who had been on the Revision Committee of the English Bible in the last century. He had come out to Serampore in 1916, had become Registrar and in 1929, on the retirement of Dr. Howells, been appointed Principal. He had taught Selvaratnam and me when he was on the staff and Sam Alfred, after he had become "Master". His subject was Greek which he taught with great meticulousness. He was a quiet man, very genial and kind-hearted in his dealings with others, and had earned the respect of successive generations of students.

On October 23rd. 1966, the Ashram gave a farewell dinner to Dr. S. K. Bunker, who was leaving for the U. S. A. after nearly 30 years of service as head of Jaffna College. He took an unflinching interest in

the affairs of the Ashram and was responsible for setting up the "Institute for the Study of Religion and Society". As prime mover in the matter it was probably he who saw the indispensable connexion it should have with the Ashram, if it was to fulfill its purpose.

On 19th November 1966, Selvaratnam attained his 60th birthday. As was his custom on all his birthdays, he spent the day in complete silence in his room. But the Ashram inmates, his friends, well-wishers and relations knew how to make room for his way of life as well as keep sufficient room for their way of life. The Ashram inmates held a Thanksgiving Service on the day itself; but the others turned up the next day. There was a Holy Communion Service in the Chapel in the morning and Selvaratnam could not very well refuse to entertain everybody present to tea in the afternoon. So both sides were pleased that each had had its own way.

In April 1967 Canon S. Somasundaram died at the age of nearly 90. He had taken part in many of the initial services held in connexion with setting up of the Ashram, and was always fond of the Ashram. In 1959, he had come to the Ashram, intending probably to spend the rest of his life here; but after six months he had to be removed against his will by his son owing to illness. For more than 60 years he had held a unique place in the Christian community. The extent to which he carried his Puritanism had made him a legendary figure. On May 25th of the year the Ashram held a Thanksgiving Service in his honour. Selvaratnam, Niles, and the present writer were the speakers.



Soon after, Selvaratnam left for Kiran in the Eastern Province to serve a period of three years, a necessary stint that the Sevaks are expected to go through. With Selvaratnam, his residence was usually merely a base of operations, from which he could go out on calls and trips. So, regular visits to Jaffna and other places were taken for granted.

### The Second Half

In January 1968 Selvaratnam went in his usual capacity to the Synod of the C. S. I. held in Coimbatore, South India. It would look as if all gatherings had made it an invariable habit of resorting to Selvaratnam for this purpose. In April (3rd to the 7th) Selvaratnam held a special Mission at Holy Emmanuel Church, at Lockgate, Maradana. On May 4th, the 60th birthday of D. T. Niles was celebrated with a service in the Ashram Chapel. In October a Hall was opened at Kiran in the Eastern Province.

On May 4th 1969 Dr. S. Jesudason of the Tirupattur Ashram died. It was not a death over which we could mourn, but the end of a life for which we could only be thankful. He had been born on 13th August 1882; he had reached the top of the Medical profession and instead of forsaking it to serve God, had dedicated his attainments to Him. He had taken part at the opening of the Ashram Chapel in 1940 and had visited us often.

He was the *fons et origo* of the Christian Ashram movement, had been a great patriot and had wanted to enrich Indian Christian lyrical literature. In all these he had lived to see his aspirations fulfilled.



He was a domineering and assertive personality and that perhaps was why he had been able to achieve so much. It was just as well that he died when he did for it would have broken his heart to have the dreams he had entertained shattered by the chaos, the intrigues, the clash of self-interests and the wild wantonness that have marked the post—Nehru era in India and formed such a contradiction of the ideals that the great leaders of the Twenties and Thirties had set before themselves. We held a Memorial Service for him on 20th August at the Ashram.

In 1970, on February 14th, members of the Ecumenical Institute of Chicago met the Jaffna clergy at the Ashram. It was natural, for this was the only place they knew as associated with Christian activities east of Suez or west of the Hawaiian Islands.

Selvaratnam transferred his base from Kiran in the Eastern Province to Jaffna on 20th March 1970 and was soon on his way to Malaya to conduct a Retreat for Rural workers in Penang. It seems to us that for such a purpose, one nearer home could have been easily found; but probably Selvaratnam's name seems to have acquired magical properties and therefore he had to be called. He also visited other parts of Malaysia and Brunei.

On May 2nd Forrester Paton died in India. He was the co-founder of the first Christian Ashram in India. He was in many ways the opposite of Jesudason gentle, quiet and soft-spoken. He proved to be a good supplement to Jesudason. It was not merely his wealth that enabled them both to achieve so much, but thy team-spirit that prevailed among them and the steady dove-tailing of their two opposite kinds of qualities.

We have during this period seen the passing of many figures, but I do not think that any one had such an impact on Selvaratnam or the Ashram as that of the passing of D. T. Niles on 17th July 1970. Niles had been the boyhood friend of Selvaratnam, had helped him set up such a new Institution as the Ashram in Jaffna, had made it known throughout the world, had made Selvaratnam an international figure and had been an invariable participant in all our important meetings so that it is obvious that the impact on us should have been heavy indeed.

But it was an impact felt by all Jaffna as well as the whole Island. He had a number of Doctorates from different Universities and was one of the Presidents of the World Council of Churches. When he returned from his election to the post, he had been given a civic reception in Colombo. He died of surgical infection following an operation in Vellore. The funeral took place in Vellore itself and was on a very big scale. If it had taken place in Ceylon, it would have been a national event. Few could attend from here, owing to the uncertainty of the date of the funeral; but Selvaratnam happened to be there and was able to take part in the last rites.

His death was also a blow to the entire Christian Church of the world. For nearly 20 years he had been a dominant figure in all world Christian gatherings. His several books had been translated into many languages. He also had a habit of manipulating Conferences, so that I once had to define a Conference as "A meeting where people who could not agree among themselves, met to agree with Dr. Niles". An important personage said about 20 years ago, "Easily



the most outstanding Christian leader in the Christian Church today is Dr. D. T. Niles”.

As to how Selvaratnam took the event there I do not know; but I am told that every time he listened to the recording of the funeral service in subsequent months he could not help crying. The event certainly affected the present writer deeply. Selvaratnam returned to Jaffna 10 days later.

Another event fraught with equally profound and heart-searing sorrow was in the waiting. His senior colleague Yesusakayam seemed all the time his usual self, perfectly healthy, uniformly gay and light-hearted about men and matters. On the 27th of December he had preached at the Kaddaiveli church. On the 28th he was suddenly taken ill and as the illness seemed to be of a serious nature he was taken to the Jaffna Hospital, where he was found to be having a ruptured liver. He passed away on the operating table. The news of his death which soon spread through the Peninsula, was received with complete incredulity.

The body was brought to the Ashram and “lay in state” in the Octagon. Friends from all parts of Jaffna and the Eastern Province filed past. The service was conducted on the 31st by the Rev. K. S. Jeyasingham the Moderator’s Commissary. Tributes were paid by Bishop Lakshman Wickremesinghe and the present writer. Selvaratnam sang one of Yesusakayam’s favourite songs, which he usually sang at all funerals, which begins with the words addressed to the Lord, “Is there any like Thee who has loved me so much?”

The great gathering went in procession in a “U” shaped fashion and Yesusakayam’s body was interred



in the North Western corner of the Ashram, which was almost in a straight line to the Octagon in the south. The Rev. K. S. Jeyasingham and Selvaratnam performed the committal rites.

I was told by one who knew Selvaratnam that the only occasion on which he saw Selvaratnam cry was when Yesusakayam died; but he had not been in India to see what Selvaratnam did at Niles' funeral; but well might he cry when Yesusakayam died.

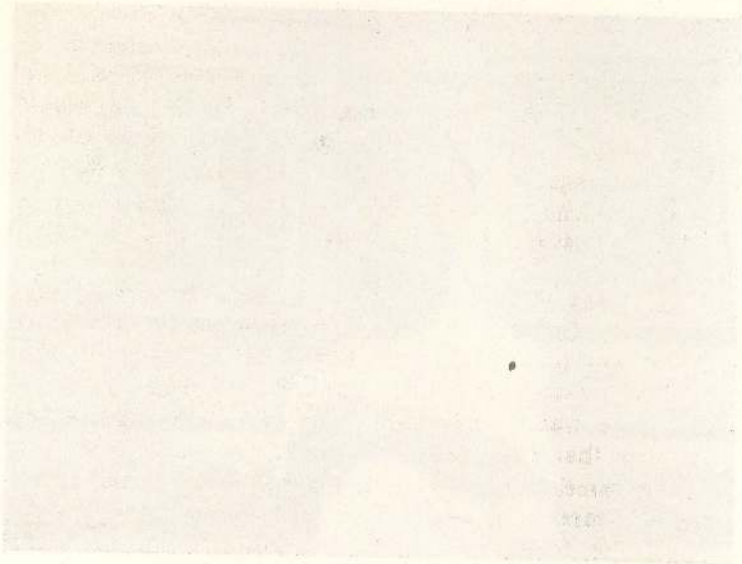
He had known Yesusakayam as a boy at Navaly and since the foundation of the Ashram he had been in and out of the Ashram constantly. But since 1944 when Yesusakayam had become an Apedshakan, the relationship between the two had been very close and intimate and Selvaratnam had come to rely upon him in all matters.

Selvaratnam, though full of bounce and bouyancy, was subject to moods of depression, when confronted with a crisis. Nothing could shake Yesusakayam. He was like the rock of Gibraltar, against which the severest gale could only spend its force in vain. Selvaratnam would torment himself, as if he had been responsible, when something occurred which should not have occurred. Yesusakayam would meet it with robust common sense and deal with the matter as a secular authority would have done, and Selvaratnam would only be highly relieved that the situation had been solved for him. The parting, which came so suddenly, must have been hard for him indeed.

While Yesusakayam was a source of strength and help to Selvaratnam personally, he held the Eastern



**The Rev. Sevak I. T. Yesusakayam  
(Sinnannan)**



The Rev. Rev. A. T. Youngman  
(1888)



Province for the Ashram. He was extremely popular and respected there among all sections of society. One evening some thugs at a street corner were creating trouble and ordering everyone to dismount from their vehicles; the moment they saw "Sinnannan", they cleared the way and the disturbance died down.

Appropriately enough the first Memorial Service for him was held at the Kiran Ashram on 9th February. The speakers were from the Eastern Province; Mr. S. A. Selvanayagam, Rev. K. S. D. Manickam, and Rev. S. B. Saravanamuttu. Here the foundation stone for a belfry in his memory was laid on the 18th of July.

On May 25th 1971, the Tirupattur Ashram celebrated its Golden Jubilee. It had blazed a trail, had shown the possibility of Christian Ashrams, with sufficient resemblances to the old Ashrams to show that there was a continuity and sufficient differences to show that the ideals of Christian Ashrams could not be the same as those of the old Ashrams. It had stood for 50 years and inspired many similar Ashrams to arise. The founders had both gone and what could be more appropriate than that Selvaratnam, their first disciple, should have been asked to be preacher?

Soon after the above function he left for Hong Kong. The purpose is stated as for an 'Institute Consultation'. What it means one cannot say exactly, except that it was not for the usual purpose of his being Chaplain there. Altogether he was out on this errand for three weeks.

On the 30th of June 1971 there occurred an event of high importance in the life of the Christian Church

in Ceylon, with which the Ashram though not intimately connected still had a connexion. In September of the previous year, the present writer having been Bishop of the Jaffna Diocese for 23 years retired from Diocesan service. The election of a new Bishop and his consecration take time. The new Bishop of the Diocese was the Rev. D. J. Ambalavanar, who had been ordained Presbyter in 1960 and had besides his academic degree, done theological studies in the London University and obtained his M. Th. degree there. The Consecration took place at Vaddukodai. A number of Bishops and officers of the Synod had come from India. It is not every day that Bishops are consecrated, and so it was a great day throughout the Diocese.

Selvaratnam was a Presbyter in the C.S.I. Orders. So he had been in the procession at the ceremony in the morning. To some extent, it was an index of the intimacy that Selvaratnam had attained to with the Bishops by having been constantly the Chaplain at their Synod meetings and to some extent, an index of the place that he and his Ashram had come to occupy in the Christian world that the Bishops and other officers of Synod who had come for the ceremony, readily consented to attend a dinner at the Ashram that night, held to celebrate the occasion. Certain other notables also were present. Whether other Ashrams hold gala dinners or not is not known; this one certainly could.

Yesusakayam had, however not been forgotten. On the 18th of July the foundation stone had been laid for a belfry in his memory. Within a month, a tall and imposing structure answering the purpose had been completed. On the Ashram Anniversary Day (21st



August) that year a service of Thanksgiving for his life was held at the Ashram at which Sister Malar Chiniah of the Eastern Province and Preacher William Thevathasan, an old friend of Yesusakayam from his boyhood days, were the speakers. The new Bishop of the Diocese the Rt. Rev. D. J. Ambalavanar offered a prayer, opened the tower of the belfry and rang the first peal of the bell, which of course was the same that Mr. Lewis Subramaniam had donated in 1940.

In 1972, a local poet M. M. Pararajasingam, who still pays frequent calls to the Ashram composed a poem in honour of the Ashram and its founder. Without the refrain "Christa Seva Ashram" with which each stanza begins, it consisted of 26 lines. The prestigious English literary magazine, "Poetry Today" (published in London and New York) which specialises in modern verse did us the honour of publishing it in an issue which came out here in June. We give below a few lines from it:

Thy tall whip trees, with their hands uplifted to  
heaven

Call all to witness a godly man has striven,

Christ's name to honour, His message to proclaim,  
Bruised souls in pain and suffering to reclaim.

On 8th November 1972, there passed away another steadfast friend of the Ashram, Mr. J. C. Handy. He and his wife had donated a building to us early in the history of the Ashram. Then he was teaching at St. John's College, Jaffna; later he was Principal of St. Thomas' College, Matara, and was for some time after employed under Government. After retirement he come



back to Jaffna. It may be remembered that he donated another building to the Ashram, from which this book itself is being written. He dedicated his life to keeping his old school, St. John's, going as a private non-fee-levying school, and went about collecting money for the purpose. Finally he founded an Academy to subsidise the school. He decided to spend the remainder of his life at the Ashram and took up his residence in the building which he had donated; and from here he had gone out to the Hospital during his last illness.

In the same month of that year Selvaratnam was able to complete the third of his Chapels outside the Ashram, this time at the "Home for the Aged" at Kaithadi. On the 27th of the month it was dedicated by the Rt. Rev. Cyril Abeyanaike, Bishop of Colombo. We believe, as in the case of all similar chapels, many non-Christians also attend the services held there. It would have been a solace to those living in the Home that some people outside were also interested in them.

On the 29th of December of 1972 Selvaratnam took ill, and had to enter Manipay Hospital. He took the matter lightly and left after a few days, in spite of the insistent advice of the Superintendent that he should stay longer. But Selvaratnam was hardly the man to take any human regulation or law, medical, legal or ecclesiastical seriously (unless he saw a deep moral or religious issue involved). The Superintendent's comment in the matter in the light of subsequent events was grim.

On January 20th. 1973, Selvaratnam attended the meeting of the Ashram Board and presented what pro-

ved to be his last report. The meeting gave him permission for a three months trip abroad. The fading sheet of paper that contains the report of the meeting has a poignant interest now. I do not know the purpose of the trip, but I understand it was to have been a round the world trip, covering the U S. A., England, Africa etc.

On the 22nd of March Selvaratnam suddenly felt ill and was taken to Manipay Hospital. I went to see him once. On an attempted second visit, my wife and I had waited at the Bus Stand in Jaffna for a long time when the Rev. Edward Gunaratnam, who had just arrived by a bus from Manipay told me Selvaratnam's condition had taken a definite turn for the better; so we left for Vaddukoddai intending to see him the next day. But early that morning (the 29th) at 3-30 he passed away.

In the afternoon the body was brought to the Ashram and for some time was kept in his own cottage. Then it was taken to the old hall, where for three days people from all parts of Ceylon paid him their last respects. On Thursday and Friday the Rev. K. S. Jeyasingham and Bishop Lakshman Wickremesinghe each held short services.

At noon on 31st March, the body was moved to the Octagon. The crowd that had gathered was immense. The funeral service led by Bishop Ambalavanar commenced at 4 p. m. Representatives of the Ashram Board and the various denominations took part. The present writer, the Rev. Celestine Fernando of the Bible Society, a very old friend, and the Rev. S. M. Jacob, Secretary of the Methodist Church paid tributes. Bishop Ambalavanar preached the sermon.



At the conclusion of the service, the procession took a "U" shaped route and Selvaratnam's body was laid by the side of his former colleague. The committal rites were performed by Sevak Sam Alfred and Rev. S. T. Aseervatham.

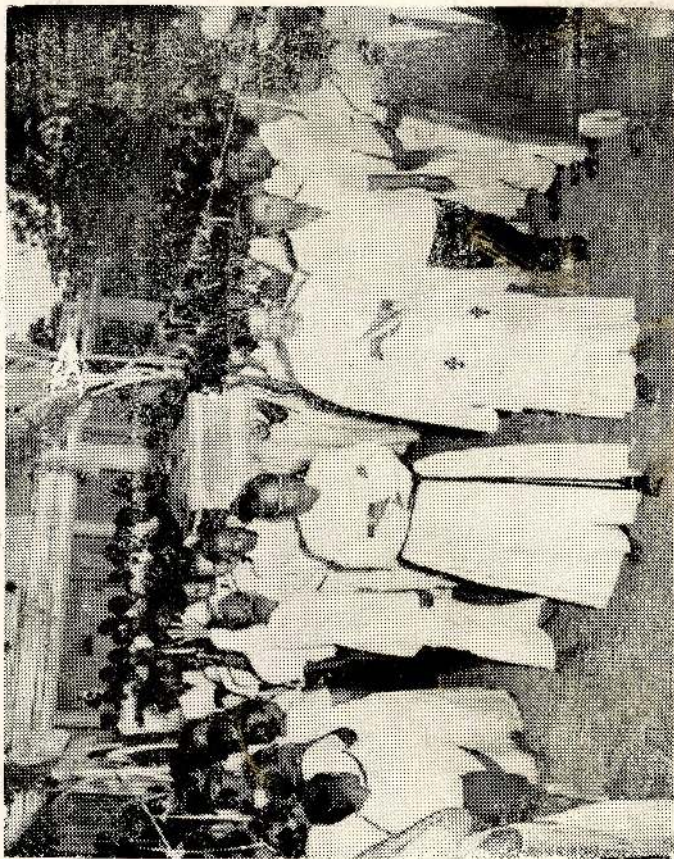
Messages poured in from various parts of the globe and for days the local press was filled with Tributes. Tributes were also paid in the Christian press throughout the world. Near the place of his burial a lamp in an onion-shaped globe on a low tower keeps burning dimly through the night. And on the stone over the grave a discerning friend had caused to be put the same words from the Psalms as are engraved on that of D. T. Niles in Vellore:

I was glad when they said unto me  
Let us go into the house of the Lord.

Some two or three years ago I was at the Ashram; Sam Alfred had gone to Batticaloa and, therefore, I had to attend to those who came. A Burgher gentleman from South Ceylon came and I inquired what I could do for him. He told me that he was migrating to Australia and before he went he had come to see Selvaratnam's grave.

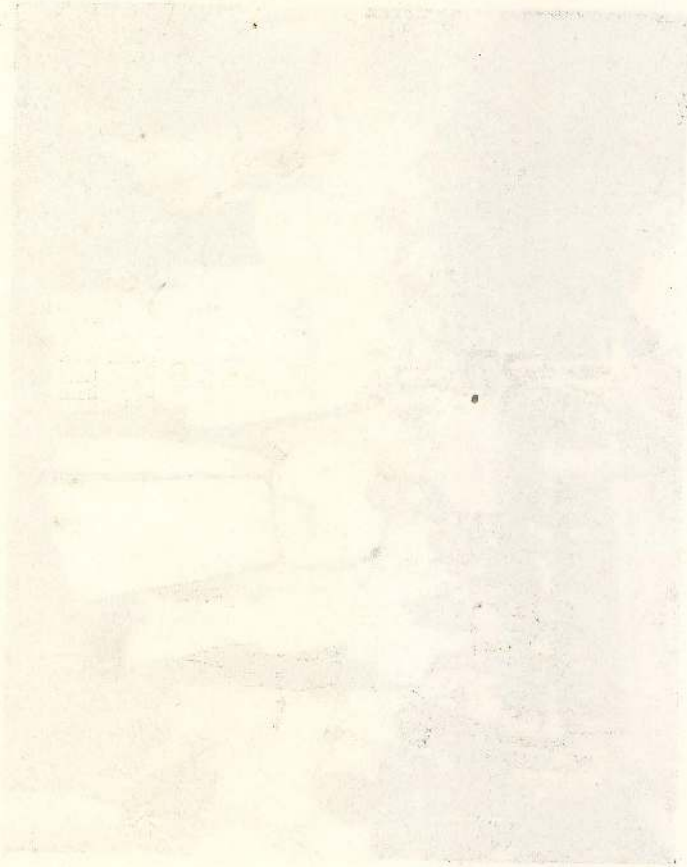
Perhaps, in the years to come when Selvaratnam would have become a legend, his grave might become a source of attraction, if not a place of pilgrimage. But for those of his generation who knew him, the pleasant face, the gay laughter, the constant good-natured jokes of that radiant personality will remain an abiding memory.





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# PART THREE



PART THREE

## CHAPTER VII

### THE MAN AND HIS ATTITUDES

#### The Man

Selvaratnam sat in the seat of the Rishis. Like them, he paid little or no attention to himself, was content with the barest necessities of life; he ate when he could and did not mind if there was nothing to eat; he slept on the floor (on a mat and pillow), went about bare-footed (except when he travelled in cold countries). In regard to the hair on one's head, there was a difference between the Hindu and Buddhist sages. It was the Hindu sages, who were called Rishis; they allowed their hair to grow; The Buddhist sages shaven their heads; but the idea behind both practices was the same—that no attention should be paid to one's hair. Selvaratnam had his hair always cropped as close to the head as possible, so that it would save him the trouble of making use of a comb and thereby making his hair look attractive.

These sages kept to the barest necessities and avoided luxuries, because they believed in paying as little attention to their bodies as possible. But they all drank herbal remedies, when they were troubled by any ailments. So it was with Selvaratnam. In fact, both of us used to patronise the same Ayurvedic Physician once. Of course, in course of time he went to Hospitals and took medicines. However, he took very little care about his body, was always a bad patient, paid little or no attention to long-term medi-

cal advice, and therefore managed to collect diseases. We referred to the Australian doctor's warning; yet he did not pay it the slightest heed. He was advised against the use of sugar, but he took it in plenty when it was in tea offered him, and consumed it with gusto, when it was embodied in the form of cubes or balls which constitutes sweetmeats. Considering all this, fundamentally it would be correct to say that he maintained the tradition of the ancient sages in respect of disregarding the needs of the body.

If, however, it may be said that he sat in the seat of the ancient Rishis, he was sitting in their seat which had been turned upside down; because between him and them there were certain profound differences; What were these differences?

In the first place, curious as it may sound, they believed that in reality, i. e. according to higher knowledge, (which in Sanskrit is called *para vidya*) the individual soul does not exist; only the Universal Soul exists. This is the teaching of the ancient Upanishads and the teaching that the Rishis imparted to their students. The form of Hinduism which we find in Ceylon, called "Saiva Siddhanta" was unknown then. The Buddhist sages went beyond this and firmly believed that no such thing as the Self (either individual or universal existed). The doctrine of *anatta* (an+atman) is a cardinal doctrine of Buddhism; for the Pali Canon says, *sabbe dhamma anatta*—all things are without a soul.

This is an important difference between them and him. The lack of attention of the ancient sages to their personal needs and comforts seems well-grounded



in their beliefs. Nevertheless, as we have seen, Selvaratnam was severely inattentive to his personal needs and comforts, though he did not share their beliefs.

In the second place, there was a difference in their attitude to the world. We pointed out in the Introductory Chapter on the Ashram that the ancient Rishis did not believe in the existence of the world. However, if in one sense they did not believe in the existence of the world, in another sense, they did. According to *apara vidya*, or lower knowledge, it did; that is, for all practical purposes, we must assume that it exists; and the Buddhists also do likewise.

But to them this world that exists is evil; all matter is evil. Hindus believe that the soul is pure and that matter is evil; the Buddhists believe that existence is *dukka*; and to be free of existence is *nibbana*. Therefore, in both religions deliverance means release from necessity of involvement in the cycle of births and deaths.

It is not merely that Christianity differs from Hinduism and Buddhism on these points, but that Selvaratnam, as a person, was one who liked and enjoyed life. He liked the company of his fellow-human beings, he liked their gatherings together, their conversation, the exchange of stories and jokes, the sound of laughter and singing, in all of which he lustily joined whenever he could.

So we face the fact that, while the ancient sages had gone into retreat from the world and a life they did not like and which they usually despised, Selvaratnam had gone into retreat from a world and life which he positively enjoyed.

Why? Those Rishis and sages had renounced or forsaken the world. In retreating to his Ashram, Selvaratnam had not renounced or forsaken the world. His whole purpose in founding an Ashram was to be an active influence in the world.

Not merely had the seat of the Rishis been turned upside down, in that the person who was sitting in it had a purpose different from theirs, but that he was a person well capable of carrying out his purpose. He was a person possessed of bounce, energy, organising power, and great executive ability—qualities from which they would have turned away in bewildered dismay.

### His Attitude to Others

From what we have said earlier, it is obvious that Selvaratnam's attitude to others was also bound to differ from that of the ancient Indian Rishis and sages. To them other human beings were a phantasmagoria, "a fantastic series of illusive images". To Selvaratnam they were children of God, for whom Christ had died. While all Christians are expected to take this view, to Selvaratnam it was an attitude rising from the depth of his soul, colouring all his views and regulating all his life.

The word "sympathy" is a much diluted word now, meaning merely "favour". When you approve of somebody's views or actions, you are said to sympathise with them; when you are sorry for someone in a bad plight, you are said to sympathise with him. The word "sympathy", however, is derived from two Greek words meaning "suffer along with". This atti-



tude in its basic sense Selvaratnam had to the highest degree.

Selvaratnam was not merely interested in others and willing always to give his help to those in need of it, he may be said to have felt their needs along with them. Most of us attend funerals when we are around the place; we call on a person who has suffered a misfortune, or is in trouble, if it is convenient for us. To Selvaratnam it was as if such things had happened to him. If he had been away when the thing happened, he would call on them when he returned, not merely weeks but even months later.

When a person is well known as possessed of this attitude, human nature being what it is, it may be seen that his sympathy was often exploited by many unscrupulous persons with imaginary woes. There were many who found him a convenient person to "touch" when they needed money. Hardly ever did Selvaratnam turn them away. Once a man came, fell on his knees and asked for a loan of Rs. 2000-00. Selvaratnam borrowed the money from someone and gave it to him; it was never returned. We may wonder at the callousness and hardihood of those exploiting an Institution that lived from hand to mouth day by day; but there are always such people. He was, in fact, reprimanded often by the Fellowship of the Ashram for his failure to discern between genuine and bogus cases; but his attitude was too basic to be changed by a reprimand.

People caught in various misdemeanours, light and heavy, always found in Selvaratnam a tower of strength. He was always "counsel for defence" Whether he sometimes broke the law of the land by helping them,



I do not know; but whatever might reasonably be done, he did.

We said there were usually various occupants at the Ashram, about a dozen school boys, and some more mature persons not altogether adjusted to the world. Most of his problems arose from the school boys. To mere peccadilloes, he usually turned a blind eye. When the faults were more serious, action from the Ashram authorities was called for. The science of Ethics lists three kinds of punishment; Retributive punishment, meted out to a wrong-doer for a wrong done, something expected by society; Deterrent- to discourage others similarly disposed and warn them that this is the fate for them; Reformative - to reform the wrong-doer.

The last view of punishment is the one most favoured now; and this was the view favoured by Selvaratnam. But there is a big difference between the way that the State would administer it and the way Selvaratnam administered it. He punished himself; he fasted. On sensitive souls, this had a good effect. Unfortunately, all souls are not sensitive; and they would say that he had probably had a hefty meal elsewhere.

So there were men, who were deeply reformed by viewing the spectacle of a holy man thus suffering for their sake. There were others however, on whom this method of vicarious punishment did not make the slightest impression.

How one who might have continued to belong to the latter class was unexpectedly transferred to the former class forms one of the sublimest episodes in

the history of the Ashram. A boy who had been severely non-co-operative and had repeatedly discarded all warnings, advice and pleadings was once taken to Selvaratnam's room. Selvaratnam removed his own upper garments, took out a cane and said to the boy "Now thrash me; I want to get the thrashing that you yourself should have got". The boy, somewhat embarrassed, laid a few light strokes on Selvaratnam's bare back. "I suppose you are driving out flies; I want to be thrashed and thrashed hard" said Selvaratnam. The boy laid one hard stroke and was completely unnerved. "I want you to continue and continue in the same manner", said Selvaratnam. The boy screamed in agony as he continued the process but he was an entirely different person after that.

We have noticed his kindness and sympathy towards others, his thoughtfulness on their behalf and his unfailing and ever-present readiness to help any and everyone. Yet we must in this section also notice two radical defects in his attitude to others.

The first defect was that though he always knew when a boy or a young man was beginning to deviate from the right road, developing a tendency to go wild, as the saying goes, "to go to the dogs", he did not see the root of it all. To help those in trouble is commendable; but to a Christian teacher, the matter could not end there. Why should there be a tendency to get into trouble, a tendency "to go to the dogs?" Was there anything back of it all? If there was, Selvaratnam did not probe it. In other words, Selvaratnam never faced up to the fact of Sin.

St. Paul in his Epistle to the Romans speaks of of a law present within himself which compels him



to do the evil that he does not wish to do and to keep away from the good that he would like to do. That is, Sin is something more than human. Selvaratnam, while he considered all men as children of God had a tendency to regard all men as good. He failed to reckon with what in the Bible is represented as "the Fall" in the story of man in the world; that is, though created in the image of God, man fell from that state. Since then, there has been working in the world, an urge to do evil.

The whole scheme of the Christian religion is built on the recognition of this fact. Jesus Christ is called "Saviour"; why should he be called Saviour of the world, unless he saves us from something great, deep, overwhelming, and cosmic—the fact of evil? The whole point of the great act of God in Christ dying on the cross to save us is lost if we look upon wrong-doing as due to a mere whim of the moment, just a mistaken notion about what is right and what is wrong, just a desire "To have a little fun." *Nondum considerasti quanti ponderis sit peccatum*" said Anselm (1033? - 1169) the great Archbishop of Canterbury. What he said means, "You have not yet considered the gravity of sin". An understanding of it is necessary to understand what the Christian message says to the world.

The other great defect in Selvaratnam's attitude to others is not one that could be observed only by those interested in Christianity but by quite a few others; but it is definitely a defect from the Christian point of view also and therefore one that should be noticed by us here. That defect was that while Selvaratnam recognised man as an individual and tried to solve his problems, he failed to recognise mankind and



its problems. He thought he could detach a man from the context of his people, race, his nation, its history and tradition. And his favourite illustration to drive home his point was that of a boy who was asked to put right a picture of the world, which had been cut to pieces in an intricate manner. He put it right by turning it upside down, and putting right the picture of a man painted on that side. "So the world will be all right if man is all right", he would say.

In taking up this attitude he was doing not merely what most ordinary people would consider illegitimate, but ignoring the Biblical attitude as well. The Bible talks of Moab, of Media, of Damascus, Babylon, Tyre and Assyria; where cities are mentioned it may be assumed that it is the nations which had their capital in those cities that are preferred to. God makes His covenant with Israel. Though now when we speak of the old Testament we think of a book, the reference is to a covenant: the covenant with old Israel. When old Israel fails, a covenant is made with the new Israel.

The Church is a body of people, who have been called. The word "laymen" is now used in a derogatory sense, suggesting that they are inferior to the clergy; but the word is derived from the Greek word *laos* meaning "people". It is a people that, God has called and to whom He speaks. It is a people whom God wants to save. If you want to be a Christian you must be part of that people. An individual Christian is not in the picture at all.

This is now recognised by such authoritative bodies as the Lambeth Conference, the World Council of Churches, and other great Christian organisations.

Selvaratnam's failure to see the world as being constituted of groups, races and nations and not merely of individuals was a serious flaw in his attitude to others.

### Attitude to God

The essential thing that can be said of Selvaratnam was that he was a man of God. Whatever else he might have been, wherever he might have been, he always remained a man of God.

Yet there are various kinds of men of God. What kind of a man of God was Selvaratnam? There is a verse in the prophet Habbakkuk (2 ; 20) which says, "But the Lord is in His holy temple; let all the earth be silent before Him." This would have meant much to such men of God as John Calvin and John Knox; it would still mean much in places as Switzerland, Holland and Scotland (i. to those who hold the Christian faith there). It would have meant little to Selvaratnam.

It might, therefore, be concluded that he did not belong to the same class of the men of God as John Calvin and Knox. They were men who regarded God with a sense of awe, and the services in Church with awe. Such is that sense of awe in Presbyterian Churches that they have a Holy Communion service only once in three months; as otherwise its sanctity might be lost.

On the other hand, such verses as "Let us make a joyful noise unto the Lord" would have been something he could understand. He positively revelled in any sort of divine service. His singing and any other kind of participation were characterised by a gusto



into which he put his whole heart and soul. It was free of the excessiveness of the sectarians. Having studied Greek under Angus and gone through a four year grind in a modern Theological College he could not abandon himself to them. But his enjoyment was full of tremendous zest.

It was, I think, due to his Methodist back ground. Methodism was born in Song. A. N. Whitehead says that before the Methodist Revival men argued; after that argument ceased to have the same place as it had done. The appeal was to instinct and feeling. He enjoyed his religion and all those who were with him were compelled to take part in that enjoyment.

Luther enjoyed reading Paul; and Karl Barth in recent times wrote his epoch-making commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Archbishop Temple has said that he undertook Paul as giddy adventure; but that when he went back to St. John he felt he was on familiar ground. The book in which Selvaratnam would have found his own familiar ground was, I think, the Psalms with their outburst of sheer joy at the presence of the Lord.

We said that while the prophets were men of God not all men of God were prophets. It was not that Selvaratnam was not a prophet; he could never have been a prophet. Imagine him in the company of Elijah or Amos. But he could well have been a Psalmist (if he ever tried his hand at composition).

In saying all this, we were not by any means suggesting that this was a defect in his religion. We were merely saying that his religion was of a particular type.



There was, however, a defect in his attitude to God. It might have made itself felt in his religion but it was essentially a theological defect. God is certainly a God of Love; if it had been believed otherwise there would have been no Christianity. But if it had been believed that God was that and nothing else also, there would have been no Christianity either. God is also a God of Justice. This had little place in Selvaratnam's thinking. To him God is God of Love; it almost seemed wrong to him to think of God as being concerned with justice. But we must realise that not merely is God spoken of as a judge many times in the Bible, not merely does St. Paul hammer away on the subject in the Second Chapter in his Epistle to the Romans, it is God's Justice that makes Christ necessary in the Christian Scheme of things.

"God so loved the world": therefore, beyond doubt God is God of love. But God so loved the world "that He sent His only beloved Son" that he might die on the cross that "whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish". It is to avoid the necessity of "perishing", of damnation that was otherwise imminent that Christ had come to die. "There is in forgiven men a shuddering thankfulness as they look back and draw breath in the peace of reconciliation, which seals the horror of darkness in which they would have sunk but for the dearly paid mercy of God", says H. R. Macintosh ("Christian Experience of Forgiveness", p. 159)

God in His mercy had love and refrained from exercising His Justice. It is the fact of Justice in the background that gives meaning to His love and mercy that we see in the foreground. If the background

had not been there, the foreground loses its meaning, Henrich Heine is reported as having said "Forgiveness is God's business"; there is no question of Justice to be taken account of. But if there is no demand of Justice to be met, what is the need for forgiveness?

Here then was a defect in Selvaratnam's concept of God. It was a weakness in his theology which does not make void a faith so deep-rooted, so strong, so over-powering, so pure and so unfaltering as that of Selvaratnam. It was not a faith that had emerged triumphantly after a life and death grapple with "the world, the flesh and the devil"; it was the faith of Innocence.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE SECRET OF HIS APPEAL

An article in the "Morning Star" which the present writer wrote on Selvaratnam soon after his death is headed "The Gay Trubadour of God". The word "Gay" according to the Dictionary has many meanings, good and bad. In a bad sense, of course it cannot have even the remotest reference to Selvaratnam. Though a dictionary must do its duty by giving all the possible meanings in which a word can be used and the various meanings in which they might have been used, when dealing with a person we must examine in what particular sense it can be used of him.

This means that while there are various kindred qualities which can be brought together, but which are distinct in themselves, we must proceed to fix on the one which characterised the person with whom we are dealing. But distinctions between qualities need not imply mutual exclusiveness. A person though essentially characterised by one of the qualities may have one or all the other qualities also in varying degrees.

When we have examined the qualities themselves, in the case of Selvaratnam, we shall go on to see how his possession of that quality was the clue to his appeal and the hold he had on the minds and hearts of all people who came to know him either here or elsewhere.

Let us, therefore, proceed to consider these qualities one by one.



## Deliberate Flippancy

When flippancy is unconscious it is either the mark of mental shallowness or moral callousness. But deliberate Flippancy is something very different. While the first may cause resentment and even anger, the second is usually welcomed. The essence of all Flippancy is irrelevance. When a Synod meeting is in progress it will be an irrelevant interruption for a member, who has just been able to get the results of a Test Match from a radio announcement, to get up and say, "Mr. Chairman, will I be in order if I announce that the results on the Test match are such and such?" But it is a welcome interruption because the members wanted to hear the results. However, the point to be noted about flippancy whether it is unconscious or conscious, is that it is irrelevant to a particular situation or in a particular context.

## Wit

This quality may almost be said to be the opposite of flippancy; and this is so for two reasons. In the first place, while the essence of flippancy is irrelevance the essence of wit is relevance. In the second place, while anybody can be flippant, wit is an intellectual quality. It depends on one's ability to penetrate to the essence of a situation or aspect of a situation and put the matter in a pithy form.

Among nations, the French are noted for this gift. So that it has been said that the French think they have solved a problem, when they have coined an epigram. Among Statesmen, Talleyrand, the early Nineteenth Century French politician, R. B. Sheridan,

Abraham Lincoln, Benjamin Disraeli, and Winston Churchill are famous in this respect. Among writers Dean Swift, Macaulay, and G. K. Chesterton are noted for it. Dr. Samuel Johnson is famous for it in his conversation.

Examples of wit may easily be given, because they are pithy. When James II had lost the battle of the Boyne (1690) in Ireland which he had fought with the help of French troops who had, however fled before the English, he arrived in France and said to a lady in court circles, "Madam, your soldiers can run". Her reply was, "I see that your Majesty has won the race." When two royal Dukes, wanted to poke fun at R. B. Sheridan, they each put their arms round him on either side and said, "Now Sherry, tell us truly whether you are a fool or a knave." Sheridan said, "I am between both." When a General who was not winning battles, but spent his time in annoying Lincoln, sent him a wire saying, "Captured a cow, wire instructions," Lincoln wired back, "Milk it". When his Finance Minister, who was issuing paper currency without any gold reserve, asked Lincoln what Scripture verse he should put on the back (as is the American custom), his reply was apt, "Why not say, "Silver and gold have we none etc?"

Disraeli's remark (probably after an interview with Queen Victoria) "Nothing in the world is so difficult as the management of men - unless it be the management of women", and Winston Churchill's remark in Parliament, "Mr. (Joseph) Chamberlain loves the working man - he loves to see him work", are also good examples of wit:



G. K. Chesterton's observation that 'A man who knows he cannot pay back a debt, is for ever paying it back', is an example of both wit and profound wisdom.

## Humour

Humour arises from the ability to see the comic side of a situation. It does require intelligence, but it cannot be called an intellectual quality. Of course, most people in the world can see the comic side of certain situations; so most people may be said to have a sense of humour. In fact, it is considered a serious disqualification in a person if he has no sense of humour. Thus Scotsmen are often (falsely) said to possess no sense of humour and nobody enjoys the allegation more than they.

While, therefore, everybody may be said to have a sense of humour, those who are noted for their humour are those who notice that side of things more than others. Of course, if they are seeing only the comic side of things and nothing else, they are just fools and not humorous. If it is not an intellectual quality, what is it? It is a natural disposition to see something in a situation, where others may not see it.

Examples of humour are far more difficult to give than examples of wit. The reasons are two. In the first place, wit may cause people to laugh, but that is not its purpose and it is not the test by which it is judged. Humour, on the other hand, is tested by the laughter it has produced. And why do people laugh? The causes may be various. It may depend on the particular company that has gathered together, the



atmosphere prevailing just then, the person who is making the joke, his gait and manner, and his turn of phrase. Though humour depends on seeing the laughable side of things it must also be expressed in a laughable manner and must suit the particular occasion. These things cannot easily be reproduced. The person who in the English speaking world is considered the greatest humourist was Canon Sydney Smith (1771—1845). He could keep a company laughing throughout the greater part of the night; and at the end of it, hardly anybody could recall what exactly had caused them to laugh.

Though examples of humour are not easily caught in a net, in this world with its long history, it would have been strange if quite a few have not been caught and preserved.

Thus Abraham Lincoln once said to a man, "Say your prayers, I am going to shoot you." "Why", said the man, "what have I done to you, that you should want to shoot me;" Lincoln said, "Long ago I made a vow that if I ever found a man uglier than I, I would shoot him". You are uglier than I. Therefore, I must shoot you". The reply was appropriate, "If I am uglier than you, then shoot away".

The reason we have given as to why examples of humour are difficult to catch because there was nothing definite about what made people laugh is only one of the two reasons. The other reason is that a comic situation often reminds the person who saw it of a story. So humorists are noted for their stories. Therefore, to account for what caused the laughter, one must tell the story; and one cannot keep on telling other people's stories at length. The telling of stories

was Lincoln's favourite expression of humour. Thus when a Judge drew Lincoln's attention to a long plaint drawn up by a lawyer, not noted for his diligence, he merely said, "Yes, like the preacher who wrote long sermons; he was too lazy to stop."

Selvaratnam was often deliberately flippant, often witty, often humorous; in fact, usually telling irrelevant stories was a favourite habit of his. But these were expressions of what he was at bottom. And what was he at bottom? At bottom he was a jovial person, a person gay in the real sense of the term. Two observations must be made on the difference between wit and humour (and even flippancy) on the one hand and joviality on the other.

In the first place, wit, humour, and even flippancy require a situation. You are witty or humorous about something. Joviality does not require any situation. It comes prepared to laugh before there is anything to laugh at; it does not arise from anything outside but from something inside. The person who is jovial can be jovial about nothing in particular.

In the second place, it is not a talent or a gift. Some people have a gift for languages, some for mathematics etc. Joviality is a part of your nature. Some people are tall, some thin; they are that. It is part of their existence. People who are tall claim no credit for it. Jovial or jolly people are that because they cannot be anything else. Birds sing, because they must; springs sprout water because they must.

Joviality or jollity or gaiety obviously betokens a happy state of mind. It cannot help expressing itself;



If it does not find anything in regard to which it can express itself, it can sing (probably very badly); it is just finding an outlet for a natural disposition. It can often be witty and more often be humorous.

But from this you are not justified in deducing the corollary that witty and humorous people are jovial by nature. It was said that Sheridan, noted for his wit, never laughed; and it was well known that Abraham Lincoln used his acknowledged gift for humour to fight off his inner melancholy. Willian Thackeray relates how in the 18th century a patient went to a doctor to have himself treated for melancholia. The doctor, having examined him said, "You must do something to brighten up your life. Why don't you go and see Harlequin on the stage?". Harlequin was a well known comedian at that time, who night after night was making his audiences rock with laughter. "I am Harlequin", said the patient.

Lincoln and Harlequin were seeking after an inner gaiety that they did not have. So it may be seen that it is an enviable quality. Some think they can attain it by artificial aids like drink or even drugs. Such joviality though attained, is temporary and artificial, and certainly does not reach down to the depths of the soul and usually does not leave the person using such aids satisfied in the end.

And why is joviality or real gaiety liked? Because the world is so full of tragedy, sorrow, hatred, and jealousy, that people like to see somebody who is not troubled by these things. "O, that I could be like him", they say.



This desirable quality is not, however, usually associated with religion. It is usually associated with the class of people called "Bohemians", who are of free and easy manners (if not morals), who do not care what happens around them. It is thought that they are jovial because they are irresponsible, untroubled by the cares and duties with which others are beset. They are considered to be worldly people who do not care about the world.

It is thought that they have this quality, because they have no religion. If they get a little religion into them they would soon turn a new leaf, look more sober (if not grim) and more sedate and give up this sort of thing. It was a pity that such a desirable quality should be the possession of such a class of people. But facts had to be faced.

If a religious man can also be found to be gay, grave doubts are entertained about the soundness of his religion. In fact, a speaker at a Convention meeting in the Jaffna Fort Church once said before a large congregation, that for a good man like him, Selvaratnam laughed too much. He thought (and probably others) that laughter and religion could not go hand in hand. Jollity was for secular people. Selvaratnam was then young, the Ashram had not been founded; and Selvaratnam had not yet come to be known. In course of time, Selvaratnam came to be known. About his religion, his holiness, and his utter devotion to the Master no one could have the slightest doubt. But the laughter had not abated; the gaiety remained the same.

Probably, St. Francis of Assisi, who was a great model to Selvaratnam, also belonged to the same cate-

gory as Selvaratnam. We do not however, have a "close-up" view of St. Francis; but from all accounts we have, it looks as if he did.

Fortunately, we have a close-up view of another of the same category, Archbishop William Temple (1881—1944), a paragon of learning and piety. An eminent theologian, who knew the Archbishop well said that when Temple laughed it was possible that the city fire-men might rush up to the scene, thinking that the uproar was due to the outbreak of a fire. Canon Iremonger concluding his massive biography of William Temple has thought it best to do so with what a humble Cumberland dalesmen said, when the Archbishop died. What he said was, "He was a jolly man". Here was a man to whom in his time no parallel could be found in the world, in certain respects and in the Christian world, in any respect, and this utterance of the Cumberland dalesman was considered to be the highest compliment that could be paid to him.

We have headed this Chapter with the words, "The Secret of his Appeal" and we said early in this Chapter that it was to what we are leading up. In the article by the present writer in the "Morning Star" to which reference has already been made, it was said:

"It was the combination of these qualities which gave Selvaratnam his irresistible appeal"

Here was a man who was not merely religious, but a holy man living in utter poverty and practising

the severest austerities, who was also irrepressibly gay almost outdoing the gayest. It is no wonder that he captured the hearts of all who came to know him.

But it had better be realised that in reconciling these two qualities, which are popularly considered irreconcilable Selvaratnam was but carrying out a Scriptural injunction. For it is the Apostle Paul who says,

Rejoice in the Lord always;

Again, I say unto you Rejoice.



## CHAPTER IX

### THE LORD AND HIS SERVANT

It is recorded that one night when David Livingstone reached a river bank, he found members of a hostile tribe, in war-paint with torches and spears in their hands, dancing in frenzy and ready to make short work of anyone who crossed. Livingstone went back to his tent, opened his Bible and his eyes fell on the verse, "Lo I am with you till the end of the world." "These", he said, "are the words of a gentleman who never goes back on his promise". That is, God is a faithful God. I am told that Selvaratnam in later life said, "I used to think that we live by our faith; now I know we live by the grace and faithfulness of God."

"Faithful is He that calleth you" says St. Paul in his letter to the Thessalonians. That is, the Lord keeps faith with His servants. Lest the words might be misconstrued to mean the Lord would give you all that you ask for and that you yourself might come to be looked upon as a miracle-man, Selvaratnam is careful to say in an article he wrote to the Ashram Brochure in 1964, that we must learn to live by the "No" of God as well as by His "Yes". God is faithful in the work to which He has called you and He decides what is necessary for that work and not you. So we are dealing with a story of not how Selvaratnam was able to get what we wanted, that he could more or less make God obey his will, but with the story of how the God who had called him to a particular task kept His faith with him.

Over the tomb of Sir Christopher Wren, the architect of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, are graven the words



**The Rev. Sevak Sam Alfred**



**Sevak Apedshakan Sooriakumar**



The Rev. Dr. J. J. ...



Rev. Dr. J. J. ...



in Latin which mean, "If you seek a monument, look around." But if you look around the Ashram and at the history behind it, it is not a monument to Selvaratnam that you see but a monument to God's faithfulness. While Selvaratnam was a spiritual man, a holy man and dedicated man and though he laboured incessantly for the Ashram, the Ashram and its history are not a testimony to his dedication and his efforts. Though he did much for the Ashram, its history reveals how little it was he did. It is all God's work.

The story of how the Ashram rose and how it was kept going may be called a miracle by us. For unlike similar institutions, as we have noticed earlier, it makes no appeals or requests for money either locally or from outside countries, Nor does it make a charge on those who turn up either as individuals or in droves of hundreds. We might call it a "miracle". The word "miracle" is derived from a Latin word meaning, "to wonder". We wonder at anything out of the ordinary, anything happening that we would have deemed impossible. But there is nothing impossible with God. Because a thing does not happen ordinarily, it does not mean it cannot happen. God is Lord of Nature; because He makes certain things happen ordinarily, it does not mean that he cannot make certain other things happen which do not happen ordinarily. When such things do happen, all that we say, as was said long ago, is "It is the Lord's doing and it is marvellous in our eyes".

As has been said already, the whole history of the Ashram is (of course from our point of view) a miracle. Nor is it possible to record all the particular incidents, wherein the Lord did stretch forth His hand to do something that was unexpected and which could not have

happened ordinarily. Selvaratnam did not parade these cases, especially because he did not consider them as extraordinary and he expected that when there was a want God would step in to meet the need. He did, however occasionally mention a few cases which probably surprised him also. Nor has it been possible for the writer to get into touch with everyone who might give him information on such happenings. So he must be content to give here some of the incidents which he could gather from authentic sources.

Selvaratnam himself told me how during the early days when buildings were coming up he had to pay a contractor Rs. 500-00 the next day. He had nothing like the amount in his possession; but he said to himself, "The Lord who has led me thus far will certainly not let me down now"; He waited that night; and then said, "Of course there is the post in the morning"; The postman came but there was no money for him, and the contractor would soon be arriving. About 10 O'clock, a man whom he never knew arrived, pulled out something from the folds of his dhoti and said, "A relation of mine in Malaya has sent me this to be given to you." It was a gold necklace (not a chain) but a closely woven piece of work.

On another occasion he badly needed some money the next day. Where he wondered, could he get the money from? With no special hope, almost mechanically he put his hand in the drawer of his desk and stretched it to the furthest recess and there was a Money Order lying there which he had put in some weeks previously and about which he had completely forgotten.

Once a contractor had finished a small job for him for which a payment of Rs. 50-00 was due. But the



contractor was in a hurry to go to Chunnakam. So he said, "Please have the money ready when I come back"; that would have been an hour later. Selvaratnam did not have a cent and even if he could get it somehow, it would take time; but the money had to be got somehow. So he took his bicycle to go out and borrow the money. When he reached the gate, Mr. E. R. Appudurai of Araly came in a car and seeing him said, "Dr. S. L. Navaratnam (of Ward Place) has sent me some money and asked that Rs. 50-00 should be given to you; here it is."

There was an occasion when he had to go to Colombo and he had no money for the trip, nor was there any money for the upkeep of the Ashram in his absence. He sat down, calculated the amount that would be necessary on both accounts, put the thing down on paper, went to the Chapel, laid it on the Altar and said, "Lord, if you want me to go to Colombo, give me this amount". As he came to his own cottage a man came along and gave him an envelope which contained the exact amount he had written down. (This story was given me by the Rev. G. A. Winslow).

One day lunch hour had approached and there was no lunch to be consumed. In the meantime a visitor had dropped in to see Selvaratnam on some business of his own; he sensed the situation, went in his car to Chunnakam, bought lunch and dinner for everyone (and I think left money for many more meals). This story was supplied by Sam Alfred.

Selvaratnam gives two further incidents of this sort in his article in the Ashram Brochure published on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Ashram.



During the war days the meagre rations they were allowed had been exhausted. Selvaratnam asked the boy in the kitchen what was available for the day "Nothing" he said. Selvaratnam gathered all his financial resources and said, "Go and buy some tapioca (manioc) yams and boil them. A couple of hours later, the mail arrived and five out of the six letters contained money. They were on solid ground for another two weeks.

One night when his finances had dwindled to nothing, he lay tossing in bed and saying to himself, "will He who has provided for us till now, keep doing so all the time?". "Yes", he said, "the Lord never fails". The next morning a friend called and said, "I could not sleep till midnight yesterday; something kept prompting me saying, "Give some thing to the Ashram" and handed over a Rs. 50-00 note (which was big money at that time).

We have so far been considering God's faithfulness as far as the Ashram was concerned. But He was faithful to His servant even otherwise. Unfortunately, examples of this are difficult to gather as Selvaratnam often wandered for over the globe; and the persons concerned usually kept these things to themselves. One incident which he related to me I am giving below;

There was a house in one of the suburbs of Jaffna Town, which was troubled by weird noises at night. The occupants had tried various expedients and having failed to get results finally came to Selvaratnam. Selvaratnam had never tried his hand at exorcism (a branch of religious activity that has been in fashion of late) and was reluctant to embark on it now. He got a picture of our Lord, prayed over it and gave it to his visitors

and said "Go and hang this in your drawing room;".  
The noises stopped.

Selvaratnam had brought no resources to his task and had no resources to draw from; Yet he embarked on a big venture; because he had the one resource that never fails - the faithfulness of God and it did not fail him.

Selvaratnam was not always sure of his own faith and no man can be; that is why he has written that God is with us not because of our faithfulness but in spite of our faithlessness. Our faith does count; but it can fail, it can falter, it can stumble; but says Scripture:

"If we are faithless, He remaineth faithful".

And this is what the servant found of the Lord.

## CONCLUSION

Here we have to attempt the rather absurd task of summing up in a few brief paragraphs the achievement of the subject of this biography and the legacy he has left behind.

C. H. Spurgeon, the famous Nineteenth Century English preacher, in one of his lectures to his students, tells of an Italian monastery, where the custom is for a monk when he meets another, to say in a most dolorous voice, "Brother, we must die", and the other adds but one word and returns the greeting in the same dolorous voice saying, "Yes brother, we must die". Spurgeon makes the racy comment, "Of course, we all know we must die; but why can't these lazy fellows do something in the meantime?"

While hardly anybody who respects religion and practises it thinks of following the custom of these Italian monks, I think it is true to say that their monks merely carried to an extreme length the view taken of religion in general; that is it is a rather dolorous business, necessary perhaps but still a somewhat unpleasant business; which demands that you should give up everything that you consider pleasant and do everything that you consider unpleasant.

The first and greatest achievement of Selvaratnam, which I would list is that he taught people that religion can be pleasant; that you can laugh, tell stories, crack jokes and sing funny songs and still pray and hold communion with God. By reconciling Joy with Religion, he reconciled many people with God.



The second may perhaps be considered an achievement rather than a legacy (that lasts). It consisted in the impact that he had on many young people. Though we know that some people did go out of the Ashram untouched by his influence, there were many others who were changed by contact with him, derived fresh hope and practically dragged from the brink of utter despair to a new life. He himself reports how one night a young man came to him, who had decided to throw himself in front of a moving train. He adds laconically that now he leads a useful life. There were many such who came to him with their problems. Whether he gave particular solutions to all their problems we do not know; but talking to such a personality probably shattered the problems themselves. It was like a tired swimmer in the sea, at the end of his physical resources, suddenly feeling that his feet had touched a rock. The problem had ceased to exist.

There are many young people whom he helped to go into the service of the Church. In some cases he kept them with him till they were ready; in quite a few cases he paid for their studies.

While this kind of thing in one sense may be looked upon as an achievement that was temporary, in another sense it was also a legacy, because even the descendents owe the turning in their history to the contact with Selvaratnam.

A third thing was definitely both an achievement and a legacy and that was his life. Certainly everybody in the world is not going to be an ascetic and live in an Ashram. But apart from his asceticism, there was a life he lived, a life not concerned with himself but

with others and yet a life that was perfectly happy. Though everybody may not rise to the same heights, it is good to have such examples before us to whom people can look up.

And the last achievement and legacy that I would like to list is the Ashram itself. Few people in Jaffna had thought of such a thing; still fewer thought it was possible to set up such an Institution. But because of Selvaratnam, here it is. Soon after the Ashram had come into being I went to visit an old Minister in his home. He asked me what I thought of the usefulness of an Ashram; I asked him what he thought about it. He told me how he had been appointed an Evangelistic Officer in 1881, and had gone and pitched a tent in a village. "I made a convert; but I didn't know what to do with him. There was no place where I could put him. If it were now, I would have had no difficulty," he said.

So the Ashram remains a home for the homeless, a place where those who have lost hope may strive to find it, a place from which those who cannot find a welcome anywhere else will not be turned away. Those who feel themselves spiritually run down and dry will find refreshment and be able to regain a hold on the ideals they have lost.









