Bunker Memorial Lectures

Christianity, Traditional Cultures and Nationalism: The South-Asian Experience

Sinnappah Arasaratnam

CHRISTIANITY, TRADITIONAL CULTURES AND NATIONALISM: THE SOUTH ASIAN EXPERIENCE

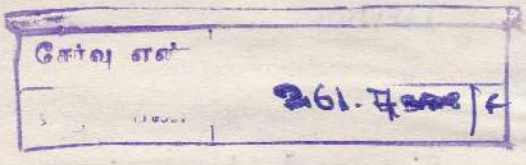
Sinnappah Arasaratnam

Bunker Memorial Lectures

1978

JAFFNA COLLEGE PUBLICATION

Published 1978



Bastian Press
Main Street,
Jaffna. Ceylon.

Rev. Dr. SYDNEY K. BUNKER

Prof. S. ARASARATNAM

PART I

Catholicism: Innovation and Experiment 1500-1650

The Indian sub-continent and the island of Ceylon have had a tradition of exposure to many diverse religious and philosophical ideas, some of them aggressively disseminated, others gradually and peacefully spread, but nearly all assimilated in one way or another and entrenched either in particular regions of the country or in particular segments of society. Considerable hostility has been generated in the process of this assimilation. The power of conflicting ideas to create fissions in society has always been great. Indian society, more than many other societies, has been driven by ideology and speculative thinking. As movements of deliberate dissemination or missionary movements, five important movements may be identified in recorded history: The Indo-Aryan religious diffusion of the first millenium B. C., the Buddhist/Jain missionary movements, the Saivite missionary movements of southern India, the Islamic conversion movements and the Christian proselytization movements of the modern period. It is useful to look at these movements briefly, before going to study in depth the last of them, the Christian movements, which is the subject of these lectures, to put the problems involved in proper historical perspective and avoid the prejudices which often abound in their study.

The most powerful, the most permanent and pervasive, while being also the most violent, was the intrusion across the Himalayas of the Indo-Aryan religious tradition in the wake of the Aryan invasions. While little is known of the process of Aryanization of the Indo-Gangetic plains, enough is known to portray the Brahman as the Aryan missionary, settled by the rulers in the frontiers of the Aryan homelands, to colonise culturally and socially the non-Aryan neighbours. This process was stemmed at the Vindhyan mountains, partly because of the facts of demography and geography and partly because of the

existence of strong and viable autochthonous cultures in peninsular India. There is no doubt that political power, as represented by royal authority, was the spearhead of the growth of Brahmanism in many parts of India.

In the Buddhist and Jain missionary movements we have different models of religious expansion. We have here, at least in its early stages in many parts of India, the model of the authentic missionary who moves others by the power of ideas and practice without external aids to back him up. Not only do we find this model operating in India but also, most touchingly, in many hostile regions of Southeast Asia, though not in Ceylon, because of the early conversion of the royal family, as a result of which Buddhism becomes a part of the establishment. Buddhism then utilises both state power and the independent power of moral persuasion in achieving its successes.

A missionary movement, not generally recognised as such because of its local character, is the Saivite expansion in southern India in the 7th to 9th centuries. It used all the techniques of proselytization among the masses by a band of dedicated believers, engaged the Buddhists and Jains in controversy and made Saivism the dominant religion of the Tamil people. It did also utilise, on the path to its ultimate victories, the power of the state, through some timely conversions of rulers of the Tamil country.

A major proselytising movement that came in from outside and established itself firmly was Islam. Islamic missionary activity also followed the dual model of independent effort and politico-military power. As a result of both types of activity, large Islamic communities were founded all over.

In this context of successive attempts at winning the mind of man for one or the other systems of belief, the Christian missionary movements after 1500 are the latest phase. Substantially they were trying to do what had been attempted before in history and utilising basically either of the two models of persuasion. One major difference, however, was that they were originating from societies that were furthest away from India

and hence operating in a social and cultural milieu that was utterly different from their own. When a set of religious beliefs, value systems and practices based on them is sought to be transmitted and transplanted in a new social environment, those who seek to do this face by necessity a whole set of problems which they must confront and solve. On the solution of these problems depends the success of the new venture. The Christian missions that had come direct from the Middle East and been successful in Malabar would have faced less problems of cultural adjustment than those that came in the modern period through Europe. The European missions used both the models of the independent missionary as well as the political or state-backed movement.

The problem of a clash of culture between the incoming forces and the host society has been there in some of our other examples. It was there in the first instance of successful diffusion of culture - the Indo-Aryan. This success was enormously helped by the large number of practitioners of the incoming religion who were physically settled in the new country and helped in the transmission of this religion to a bemused host society. The wielding of political power was important though not decisive, but the physical presence of the newcomers in dominant positions in different parts of the country was decisive. This also applies, though with less force, to the Islamic conversions of the period 900 - 1700 A. D. Political power was reinforced by the presence of a settler element which extended its influence sideways into neighbouring societies.

Christianity, though it was favoured with political power in some regions, did not have this settler element which could plant the new religion and all its institutions in the new environment. European settlements existed as coastal enclaves, extensions of the metropolitan country, rather than growing from out of Asian society. Consequently there was no way by which a Christian religious culture could spread naturally sideways into neighbouring villages as Brahmanism and Islam had done. The spread of Christianity was thus a deliberate extension of an external religion by a few powerfully motivated people, back-

ed at times by a Christian political power. What this meant was that the fundamental issues of clash of culture between the old and the new had to by solved by deliberate policy and action, not as in the previous cases by a natural evolution of a synthesis consequent on long periods of coexistence. As a result there is a large literature reflecting this cultural conflict related to the Christian effort and of the evolution of policies which are intended to resolve this conflict.

When the Portuguese missions began in India as an extension of Portuguese imperial and maritime policy, they were conceived simplistically as the bringing in of a heathen people into the light of the Christian faith as presented through the Portuguese way of life. It was an unabashed Portuguese cultural imperialism, the imposition of an Iberian Christian culture; this was the model of the early missionaries. All missionary methods during the first half century or so of activity were directed towards this end. In so far as they confronted Indian culture and Indian ways of life, there could only be one way to resolve this confrontation - by a total annihilation of this culture. Christianity was the **Parangi Markam** and to become a Christian was **Parangi Kulam Pukuthal**. In fact, in the potted Tamil that the missionaries used in parrot-like fashion in their dealings with the people, the question: Do you wish to become a Christian? was translated as, **Parangi kulam puka venuma?**

The requirements of the neophytes were in keeping with these ideas. They had to change their dress habits completely and wear Portuguese dress. They had to divest themselves of all symbols of caste or religion - tuft of hair (**kudumi**), sacred thread, sandal-wood paste, holy ash - and foreswear never to use them. They had to foreswear their caste. They had to eat meat (including the foridden beef) and even partake of intoxicating liquor. In other words, they had to become black Portuguese gentlemen. This fundamentalist approach to conversion was standard throughout Asia for a large part of the Portuguese century and was largely caused by the domination of an unimaginative Iberian clergy in the Asian Church. This attitude, unpleasantly implanted in the mind of Asians, was remembered for long in India. It kept coming up as a model of Christian

conversion, or at least was held to be so by those unsympathetic to such conversion. Mahatma Gandhi, in his autobiography, speaks of an Indian convert in his village during his childhood in the 1880's. It was rumoured in the village that this person, after his conversion, had to eat beef, take liquor and wear European dress. Gandhi says this made him unsympathetic to the idea of conversion.

In this approach to the spread of Christianity, the receiving country was ascribed a very negative role. It was a passive recipient, not contributing anything to the process. For this reason, during this period, no major attempts were made to study and understand traditional culture. All that was known was what appeared on the surface as popular religion, beliefs and practices, and there was enough of this, seen superficially, to revolt a sensitive mind. Even the best among this category of missionaries, Father (later Saint) Francis Xavier, for all his compassion, piety and love of the converted Indian, could not and did not go beyond this initial revulsion. Father James Broderick, a sympathetic Jesuit biographer of Xavier, is struck by this and goes on to say: "If he (Xavier) could have met his great contemporary in Northern India, the poet of Bhakti or tender devotion, Tulsi Das, he would have revised his views of Indian religion".

A number of factors obstructed an understanding of hinterland India by the Portuguese. Significantly enough, caste was not one of these. The social divisions, which the Portuguese immortalised by giving them the name **castas**, were not unfamiliar to them, coming as they did from one of the most stratified societies in Europe. They valued any relationship with Brahmans and received such among them as would convert with open arms. What really was anathema to them and which they unhesitatingly dubbed heathen were the many features of popular religion practised all around them. They could not understand the plethora of names given to God by the Hindus and the erection of temples under the names of each of these. They could not approve of the significance of image representations of the Godhead and the offering of worship to these. They could not comprehend the mythology, particularly the

symbolism in the many stories of the activities of devas and asuras, and could not place them in the context of the evolved religious literature of the Hindus over the ages. Above all, and this was fundamental to their lack of understanding, they had as yet no access to the deeper philosophical speculations of Brahmanism and Saivism which would have helped to put these segmented layers of beliefs and practices in their place and provided a total understanding of the Hindu religion. Unable to see the whole they saw it in unedifying parts and reacted with sweeping judgments to what they saw.

Even in the second half of the 16th century, when missionary activity was more intensified and was moving towards a confrontation of indigenous society in the mass in certain areas such as the Fishery Coast of Madura and Ceylon, the feature of mass conversions served to strengthen them in their attitudes. When entire villages and castes converted, such as among the Paravar of Tuticorin, it was possible to root out traditional institutions and plant in their place the Catholic Church and its institutions. These new converts were not people who could impart to them in any meaningful way the fundamentals of Hindu thought. So missionaries like Francis Xavier continued in their ignorance, plunging themselves energetically into the enormous task of Christianising a people with whatever tools they had.

Under these circumstances, it is surprising that Christianity grew at all in this period. Such growth as it had is largely attributable to the political and naval power of the Portuguese, the confluence of politicial and diplomatic events in the area, factors which themselves inhibited any closer understanding of Indian society by the Christian missionaries. The conversion of coastal communities in Southern Malabar, the Madura coast, West and North Ceylon, the royal families of the Malabar and Ceylon principalities can all be explained in this way. Once Christianity got a foothold, it then proceeded to win the hearts and minds, to make genuine conversions, but by this time the necessity to come to an empathetic understanding with traditional culture was gone. On the contrary, there was the determination to keep them away from the mass of traditional

society aeross the frontier by not admitting anything of it into the new convert society.

The cultural conflict between Portuguese modes and the preferred behaviour of Indian neophytes soon attracted ecclesiastical attention. The confrontation with traditional India could not be avoided: In 1549 the Rajah of Thanur, a Malabar coastal principality south of Calicut, desired to embrace Christianity. He belonged to a Brahman dynasty and desired to continue to wear the sacred thread, the symbol of his caste. This request caused a division of interpretation on theological grounds among the Catholic hierarchy of Cochin and Goa and he was finally allowed to keep it on, largely for political reasons. As yet the problem was not faced up to in all its implications for adaptation and cultural synthesis.

It was the Italian clergy which faced up to this problem squarely and sought acceptable solutions within the framework of Christian theology. In so doing, they made the first tentative steps towards an understanding of traditional culture. A century after the first Portuguese contact with India, Pietro della Vale, an Italian traveller in India of the early 17th century, a pious Catholic, talking of religion in South India, repeats the standard prejudices of the time but also tentatively remarks on Hindu statuary: "All those monstrous figures have secretly some rational significance". It was not possible for the vast majority of Iberian clergy serving in India to break through the cocoon of prejudices built up around them by an Iberian-centred view of Indian culture. It was the more educated, sophisticated theologians from the great Italian schools who would cross this barrier on the strength of their knowledge of the history of Christianity, its spread in Europe through syncretism and the absorption of aspects of Jewish and pagan culture.

The life and work of Roberto di Nobili in India is illustrative of this change in missionary attitudes. Goncalo Fernandez, priest of the Paravar of Madura, and Nobili, the missionary of interior Madura, were two models of the Catholic missionary in Asia. The former, stridently Portuguese, paternalistic in his concern for his parish, the priest essentially of

Parangi Markam. The latter, missionary of the universal Church cosmopolitan in outlook, all the world was his stage. Nobili began by repudiating any association with Parangis and Parangi Markam and presenting himself to the Indians in terms familiar and understandable to them. Casting around for modes and symbols from within Hindu tradition, he had necessarily to study in depth its sources and its intellectual roots, to familiarise himself with its literature and its ideology. In view of the esoteric nature of much of the Hindu intellectual tradition (this was part of the reason for the lack of understanding so far), Christian seekers after Hindu learning had to win the confidence of the custodians of that learning. The way to do this was not by storming recklessly the citadels of Hindu culture, a path rejected by Nobili. He significantly selected Madura, the home of the Madura Nayak's court and administration, an ancient seat of Tamil and Hindu institutions, as his residence, thus renouncing a view of India from the safety and isolation of Portuguese ports and cities. By adopting life styles and attitudes radically different from his Portuguese counterparts, he succeeded in getting closer to the Brahman custodians of Hindu tradition and secured the first enthralling peep into that tradition. The task involved the study of Tamil and Sanskrit, some familiarity with the Vedas, and exposition of the hidden truths of Hindu philosophy as seen by its exponents and practitioners - a view in short of tradition from the inside, a view which had been rejected by his colleagues as unnecessary and indeed almost heretical.

Through half a century of work in India, Nobili was able to put before his colleagues alternate models to what they had been using. **Parangi Markam** became **Satya Vedam**. The awesome figure of the black-cassocked padre became the ascetic figure of the **sannyasi** in flowing saffron robes, crooked staff, Indian type wooden sandals. The **sannyasi** model, instead of the Brahman model, was wisely chosen, as the **sannyasi** in Hindu tradition was caste-free and non-sectarian, universally accepted and respected. Much of the Islamic success is attributable to the sufic mystic, the Islamic version of the **sannyasi**, without any overt identification with orthodox Islam. A complete Indianization of life-styles - vegetarianism, teetotalism, conformity

with ideas of purity and pollution, employing of a Brahman cook, ablutions in holy water and a number of other minute details - provided authenticity which gave him social acceptance unchallenged for half a century.

All this was not achieved without a great deal of internal disruption within the Church. The Portuguese hold of the Church in Asia was strong and they resented these innovations as a challenge to orthodoxy and to their predominance. The orthodox chose to challenge Nobili over the adoption of symbols which they held were identified with Hindu religious beliefs and therefore not permissible. In particular, they singled out Nobili's wearing of the sacred thread, sporting of a tuft of hair on his head in Brahman fashion, and his use of sandalwood paste over his body. The issue, known as the Malabar Rites controversy, was referred to higher authority. Nobili justified his position by distinguishing between civil signs and religious signs, symbols of caste (or social status) and symbols of religion. The issue was resolved in Nobili's favour in 1624 with the proviso that the symbols so used were to be properly consecrated before use.

The significance of Nobili's career lies not so much in the numerical results of successful conversions he made; this was negligible. It lies rather in him as the pioneer of the process of Indianising Christianity, removing from it the stigma of an imperial religion, externally imposed and externally controlled. The great success of Islam and of Buddhism in the countries to which they spread was that they both soon ceased to be external and internalised themselves. Nobili took the first step towards such internalization. An understanding of indigenous religion from the point of view of its followers was a necessary step in this which he initiated. He went further and initiated attempts to understand the real nature of Hindu society, to unravel the relationships between society and religion and the intricate network of relationships within society. This was of course a very difficult process, one which is still continuing. Nobili made the first tentative attempts to disentangle religion

and society, to separate elements of Hindu religious beliefs and practices intrinsic to those beliefs from elements of what could be considered social customs of daily life. He very accurately pin-pointed one of these when he held that beef-eating was a social custom which one could adopt or reject without doing violence to religious beliefs. The Portuguese insistence on neophytes eating beef as a sign of their good faith was an ill-judged militancy against Indian tradition causing great pain to the newly converted. This process of unwinding social custom from religious belief was to be carried on since in the history of the Christian Church in South Asia. Over and over again we come across Indian Christians pleading with their clergy to retain this or that element of traditional custom as did not conflict with their faith. In the late 19th century and after, this process of disentangling custom from belief was to be carried on by Hindu reformers themselves.

With Nobili we also see the beginnings of a fruitful and exciting contact of the theologies and philosophies of East and West, of Europe and India. Earlier Catholic missionaries initiated some contact in a limited fashion in their search for Tamil terminology for the main elements of the Christian creed. The most fascinating of these was the search for a proper term for God that would express the Christian concept of the Universal Creator God and avoid some of the connotations of Hindu theology which differed from the Christian. Nobili took this further, and in his quest for contact with Hindu philosophical tradition, soon came into contact with Vedantic monism. He argued out the case for Christian dualism against Vedantic monism. We have record of his discussions with one Sellappa Nayak, a Salem poligar and dependent of the Nayak of Madura, on the ultimate relationship of the soul and God. The Christian dualistic approach appealed to the non-Vedantic Saivites whose bhakti ideal of worship and love of God was closer to that of the Christians. But it was a long time before such parallels were detected and put to good effect in erecting bridges between the two religions.

The Portuguese century gave way in the next fifty years under strenuous attack from the Dutch and the English.

Their political dominion was taken away and their power eradicated by mid-17th century. By this time it is estimated that there were between one and two million Christians on the Indian sub-continent and Ceylon. It is useful for the purposes of our argument to tarry here and examine the nature of the Christian community of South Asia at this time.

The great majority of them were or had been under Portuguese protection and dependent on them in one way or another. On the Indian sub-continent, they were idenifited by the vast Hindu/Muslim society among whom they lived as belonging to a separate group. They had become another caste, which, irrespective of the erstwhile castes from which they sprang, was collectively given a low status, approaching untouchability. In terms of Hindu tradition, they were held polluting in many ways. They ate meat, including the forbidden beef, took liquor, and mixed with unclean Europeans. In the cities they wore different dress. They were visible in every way. They had excised themselves from the trunk of Indian society. But though, in the eyes of the rest of Indian society, they were undifferentiated and unclean, within themselves they did not have the advantage of unity. They still clung to the status they had occupied in their previous caste - Brahmans considering themselves superior, the ruling Nairs claiming the status they previously held, other clean castes making similar claims. Thus in a parish, there would be two priests, one to attend to these higher castes, one to the lower castes. The castes that had occupied a low status previously were quite happy to renounce the system and were content with what they had achieved in the new dispensation. In those areas where there had been mass conversion of entire villages, where questions of status and precedence did not arise, things continued pretty much as before, new symbols replacing old ones.

Ceylon, however, is a special case, where many of the above generalizations do not apply. As a society where Christianity was introduced into all layers, top, middle and bottom, it learned to live with this new influence in ways different from India. Spatially as well as socially the Ceylonese Christian community was intensely juxtaposed with traditional religions.

It would be interesting to study the relationship of the new Christians with others at village level but our evidence does not enable us to do this. It could be inferred, because of the numbers involved, and the importance of the roles they performed, that their inter-relationships with their Buddhist and Hindu neighbours continued unchanged. There was an acceptance perforce of the new religion and the conversion to it of large numbers of their countrymen, an acceptance that is of great significance in contrasting the roles of indigenous Christians in India and Ceylon. Conversion came to Ceylon in this stage not as a result of competition between two contending systems of belief and the deliberate acceptance of one over the other, though there are elements of this as well, but rather as an acceptance of political and economic realities of life around them, as part of the traumatic political events of the 16th and early 17th centuries. Consequently the fascinating contact of Christianity and Hinduism as a study of intellectual and cultural confrontation and inter-action between two major world faiths cannot as yet be pursued in Ceylon or examined in a similar way.

This is almost the end of an era in Christian contact with traditional cultures for with the entry of Protestant missions a new set of forces are unleashed, a different intellectual tradition is ascendant in Christianity and consequently new ways of looking at non-western cultural traditions.

PART II

Protestants: The first phase

1650 — 1880

When we move into the Protestant phase of Christian evangelism, while the intensity and energy of the effort decreases, we are favoured with a more open system, which, with its prospensity to publicise its efforts and its innermost thoughts, enables us to make a close study of the process of contact between Christianity and indigenous tradition. It must be said at the outset that these early Protestant missionaries made widespread use of Catholic, particularly Jesuit, writings on Indian and Ceylonese culture. In the Netherlands and England, comparative cultural and linguistic studies were making a beginning in the 17th century and the literate public was becoming curious about the strange new lands to which Europeans were sailing and from which exotic products were now on sale in European markets. Ancient seats of learning in both countries were breaking out of the tradition of Judaic-Christian studies and investigating non-western cultures and religions. The University of Leiden had been a pioneer in this and in the period we are considering Dr. Adrian Reland, Professor of Oriental Languages and Ecclesiastical antiquities had done much research on Eastern languages. In Oxford, towards the end of the century, Professor Thomas Hyde, Regius Professer of Hebrew, had begun the scientific study of the Vedas.

The most remarkable contribution of the work of scholars and of travelogue - writers in this period was the slow, painful but steady movement towards the recognition of the innate value of Eastern religions and culture. This recognition is reflected in the activities of contemporary missionaries in Asia. For evangelism as such the Protestant movements of the 17th century were insignificant. Histories of Christian missions in the East tend to dismiss this period as of little value. When contrasted with the single-minded devotion and immense sacrifice made by the Catholic missionaries, this judgement is indeed

correct. But this should not blind us to a significant intellectual rapproachment between Christianity and Hinduism in this period. We are able to follow this rapproachment in a steady output of work bearing on this subject. One of the reasons for this greater opening of the doors of Hindu knowledge was the fact that the Protestant missionaries were working on the Coromandel coast of south-eastern India, near the great temple centres of Hindu learning and practice. Also, from the orderly administration the Dutch established in the Tamil lands of Ceylon they could establish contact with Hindu intelligentsia.

This contact is seen to be of immense importance in studying the process of opening the doors to the secrets of Hinduism. To the Catholic missionaries, the interpreters of Hindu tradition were the neophytes who had already taken the decision to convert and would therefore be not sympathetic or perhaps even not knowledgeable of their Hindu past. Abraham Rogerius, first of our Protestant exponents of Hinduism, was helped by a brahman called Padmanabha who had sought the protection of the Dutch in Paleacatte. Philippus Baldaeus' main informant was a brahman from Achuvely. Through these and others, there was now some familiarity with the literary sources of Hindu tradition and the philosophical and ethical ideas begin to come through. Rogerius draws attention, in his Preface, to the Hindu concept of God and to the significance of this in appreciating the cultural levels of the Hindus. Addressing the Reader, he says that it would be wrong to think that these people in the East live without God or religion. On the contrary they have such a deep knowledge that they have allowed themselves to be trapped by it. They have knowledge of the omnipotent God, the Creator of the universe, of the immortality of the soul. He goes on to say that the light of the Revelation of Christ has penetrated in former times to different nations and people in the Indies, including these brahmans, that something has still remained of this light. Baldaeus, in his Foreword, says that he has investigated for long Hindu beliefs in these quarters, has entered the portals of their temples and penetrated deep into their secrets. He claims to have utilised the authentic and original

writings of their religion. Using much of their work, a later writer of the early 18th century, Francois Valentijn, follows their approach and provides a sketch of the Hindu religion.

The actual contents of these works is not so important as the new attitudes which they reflect. Their content is very much influenced by Jesuit writings which were available to them in manuscript form. The mythology and the trivial still dominate the description and the writers are unable to see the relationship between the fundamental concepts and the mythology. They do not as yet have a picture of the structure of Hinduism, what integrates the philosophy with the practice. Some of the philosophy, however, is better understood. The monistic/dualistic argument is learnedly carried out. So also pages are devoted to the idea of transmigration of souls and its refutation and the idea that this transmigration embraces animals and birds is particularly attacked. In this argument much old disputation of classical Greek philosophy is resurrected as being of some relevance. The Hindu philosophers and the Pythogoreans are equated in the 'error' of their beliefs. In this way parallels are detected between what was confronted in India and what the early Christian confronted in Greek and Jewish beliefs. Even in respect of Hindu mythology, tentative comparisons are attempted with Egyptian and Greek mythology.

One of the consequencs of this activity was the exposure to Tamil literary tradition. Almost all the informants were Tamil literati, more knowledgeable in the Tamil literary roots of Hinduism. Sanskrit learning was very much on the decline in southern India, except perhaps in Tanjore where a Maratha dynasty ruled. Tamil literary texts are brought to view and the contents of some are translated. One of the most outstanding in the collection of Tamil texts was Batholomew Ziegenbalg, the German Lutheran missionary from Tranquebar, who prepared a bibliography of such texts. From his material and from the work of his Dutch Reformed Church colleagues, Francois Valentijn was able to publish the names of 46 such texts with brief descriptions of their contents, a sort of annotated bibilography. Particularly significant is the ethical literature as represented in Athisudi, Konraiventhan, Muthurai and

others that were seized upon by these missionaries for their didactic character and used in their schools to instruct children.

Of particular importance is the work of Ziegenbalg and the German missionaries of Tranquebar. This belongs to the category of missions without political power, somewhat after the model of Nobili. He learnt Tamil with great thoroughness, investigated the literary traditions of the Tamils and familiarised himself with the leading ideas in order to use this knowledge in his missionary work. He perceived the great gulf between monotheism and popular polytheism and idolatry and attacked this gulf directly. He published the results of his work on **Genealogy of the South Indian Gods** in 1713 in which he says how he corresponded with a number of learned Hindus, put to them questions and received answers. He had a clear concept of the structured character of Hindu beliefs and treated them in this fashion, devoted four parts to the four segments.

Part I: **Paraparavasthu.** The supreme (or rather universal) being.

Part II: **Mummurthigal,** The trinity of deities, Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva,

Part III: the **Gramadevas,** village and minor deities, and

Part IV: Devas, Rishis and other Celestials.

The Danish missionaries also published in 1719 an interesting book called **Twenty nine Conferences between missionaries and the Malabarian Brahmans, etc.** It gives details of 29 discussions held between March 1707 and March 1709 by Ziegenbalg and other missionaries with a wide variety of people in south India – Brahman priests, scholars, merchants, Nayaka princes, native physicians, women, school masters, school boys and Muslim divines. The debates reported here show an interesting cross section of subjects touched upon: concept of God (monism vs. dualism), salvation, transmigration, ritualism, custom and its sanctity. Most of the Hindu disputants, whose arguments are set down faithfully, appear to highlight the importance of tradition, the sanctity of traditional culture and way of life and the necessity to preserve what has been handed

down by their forefathers. A merchant has argued that there were essential differences between Europe and India, in climate, government, institutions, clothing, food etc. and therefore there will essentially be differences in religion. We come back to the obstacles faced by the Portuguese missionaries of the 16th century, the inability to divorce religion from culture. The argument is now being turned back on the European missionaries. The reply given by Ziegenbalg tries to meet this objection. He said: "The present Objection is very inconsiderable, viz. your arguing from Differences of **Manner** and outward **Habitude** to a necessary difference in religion: For if you did turn Christian, it would be no way necessary for you to change your way of eating and drinking, and your daily Manner of dealing with your Neighbours".

Another 18th Century notable, also from south India, should be considered as important in the contact between Christianity and Indian tradition. He also adopted the **sannyasi** model, working in areas remote from European politicial power, depending wholly on his knowledge of the culture and traditions of the people to make an impact on: them. Father Beschi, an Italian, acquired a profound knowledge of Tamil and has been called "the first foreign missionary to wield the Tamil language proficiently". True to the Catholic tradition, he did not use his immense scholarship to interpret Hindu learning and philosophy to the West, though he was more qualified than many Protestant missionaries (who attempted this) to do so. He devoted his energies rather to indigenising Christianity through the medium of Tamil literature. He was responsible for some poetic and other works of great beauty conveying the Christian message through the Tamil idiom.

The 17th and 18th centuries in India then were not years of expansion of the frontiers of Christianity as the 16th had been, but rather of the extension of understanding, of intellectual contact. A number of Indians of the literate classes during this period came into intimate contact with Christianity, befriended some of the missionaries, and though this did not lead to any long-term proselytization, it contributed to the dissemination of Christian ideas in society. Hindu society was

intellectually tolerant, if socially closed, and the ideas brought from the west were looked upon as adding yet one more dimension to the multi-faceted truths embraced by Hinduism.

Particular reference must be made to the discovery of Thiruvalluvar by the missionaries. He was admired for his straight moral ideals, devoid of mythology and situation. It was speculated that he was influenced by Western ideas, a line of thought later followed by 19th century savants like G. U. Pope.

* * *

In Ceylon we have a situation where a Protestant power had inherited by conquest the coastal territories and hence the political overlordship of a large number of persons, Sinhalese and Tamils, who had been baptised into Catholicism. One important fact that has to be remembered in relation to Dutch religious policy is that, unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch did not permit independent missionary activity in their territorial possessions. The Dutch Reformed Church, as established in Asia, was an arm of the state and continued to be dependent on the state in every way. Distinguished clerics like Baldaeus and Valentijn suffered humiliation at the hands of the political authority. Religious policy was subordinate to political and economic policy. Yet the heritage from the Portuguese brought the Reformed Church clergyman into relationship with traditional society and the traditional religions, Buddhism and Hinduism.

Immediately after the conquest, under Baldaeus' guidance, the churches and schools founded by Catholic missionaries and parishes served by them were taken over and brought under the control of the Reformed Church. The number of churches was very large indeed and many were in villages. In Jaffna and Mannar, in particular, Christianity had been taken into the villages and there were 34 churches covering 159 villages. It was impossible to manage all these parishes through Dutch ministers and a good deal of responsibility was entrusted to the Catechist and the Schoolmaster who were sons of the soil. There was a school attached to every Church and careful

statistics were kept not only of the baptised congregation but also of school going children and those leaving school in any year. At the annual inspection of Churches and Schools by the circuit Minister, he delivered a report to the political authority, providing accurate statistics of the number of males and females in the congregation, school going children, school leavers, children baptised, and couples married. A study of these reports shows that the figures given are very high, embracing a majority of the population.

For the year 1722, about half way through Dutch rule, the Christian population of maritime Ceylon is given as follows:

Jaffna (including Mannar)	189,388
Sinhalese (adminstered from Colombo)	179,845
do (Galle and Matara)	55,159
Total	424,392

The figures for Jaffna seem to include the total Tamil population.

It is important to look at this phenomenon a little closely. Under the Portuguese it was necessary to be baptised to retain administrative office and the entire district and village administrative hierarchy had done so. Mudaliyars, Muhandirams, Majorals and Vidanes in the Sinhalese areas had embraced Christianity. Likewise in the Tamil areas all those who held offices in the district and village services had been baptised. The upper hierarchy was honoured with the title Don, which they retained under the Dutch, and they also had a middle Portuguese name after which followed their ancestral Sinhalese or Tamil names. Among the Sinhalese these Portuguese names took the place of surnames which they retained even after they reverted to Buddhism. Under the Dutch these Christianised upper classes kept their offices and became members of the Reformed Church. Among the Tamils, besides the local offices within the peninsula, there were the lucrative positions of Vanniyar of the Vanni provinces which carried feudal land and tax privileges. These offices had been monopolised by a few families which also had to embrace Christianity.

To what extent this penetration of Christianity into remote villages and at the top of village society influenced and promoted changes in the traditional structure is difficult to ascertain. The records only skim the surface of these relationships, though they now and then provide intriguing insights. Certain villages appear to have emerged as more important centres of Christianity than others, with flourishing communities and a great deal of commitment. Tellipalai, Uduvil, Vaddukoddai, Pandatheripu, Chankanai, Kopay, Chavakachcheri, and Parithithurai are some that come to view with large congregations and well-attended schools. Vaddukoddai was perhaps a divisional administrative centre for the Western part of Valikamam. It was also on the road to Kayts, an important port and naval station. It was a port where elephants could be conveniently loaded on to ships from the quay-side and the elephant trade was an important revenue earner for the Jaffna Commandment. Laurens Pyl, Commandant of Jaffna (1678-79), was instrumental in having the church in Vaddukoddai built into an imposing structure, as the inscription, 'Doen maken door den Commandeur Laurens Pyl Anno 1678' (caused to be built by the Commander Laurens Pyl, 1678) testifies. Pyl subsequently went to Colombo as Governor and was noted for his great devotion and piety, his interest in promoting the Church in Ceylon, his compassion for the ruled and for his effort to patch up a peace with king Raja Sinha II of Kandy.

Looking behind the official silence of the Dutch records and piecing the little evidence together, one could sense the presence and practice of the traditional religions of Buddhism and Hinduism like the submerged mass of an ice-berg. In the initial enthusiasm there were directives (**placaats**) against the public practice of Buddhism and Hinduism, as indeed there were against Catholicism. But these were never rigorously enforced and towards the middle of the 18th century they were repealed. Very often there were appeals by the clerics to the government to reinforce these **placaats** but the government never gave in to these demands. Their reply was that this would create such an uproar among the people that it would endanger security and economic interests. Consequently there is a gradual revival of the practice and profession of these religions in the

18th century. In Sinhalese areas, Buddhist revival was helped by the Kings of Kandy. Influential priests would come down from the highlands to one of the coastal temples to celebrate this or that festival. Thus the temple at Kelaniya, so near the Dutch capital of Colombo, had frequent visits from high priests from Kandy.

There seems every evidence that the Christianised ruling class, both among Sinhalese and Tamils, led a dual religious life. On the one hand they were members of the established Reformed Chureh, participated in its functions, attended Church particularly when some visiting dignitary was present, baptised their children, sent them to Church schools and had them married in Church. In this way succession to their privileged offices was ensured. At the same time, they also led a private life where they followed traditional ceremonials, largely as domestic rites, but also increasingly in muted public temple worship. In Jaffna, the brahman settlement at Vannarponnai seems to have been left undisturbed by the Portuguese and the Dutch. These brahman priests kept a low profile in the early years of Dutch rule but became increasingly active in promoting temple worship in the 18th century. In this they were aided by the influential Tamil rural officials. In response to pressure from the clergy a proclamation was issued in 1711 that baptised Christians convicted of participating in Hindu ceremonies would be whipped and imprisoned. The big problem of course was to police the obedience to these laws.

In the mid - 18th century, a Dutch minister returning from a circuit inspection of Churches in Thenmarachchi reported seeing a new and magnificently laid out temple being built in the village of Mattuvil. It was being built on ground made available by the Majoral of Mattuvil, himself a baptised Christian, and was said to be one of an intended complex of three temples. They were to be served by brahmans to be brought in from South India and would conduct authentic Brahamic ceremonies so as to attract many worshippers and thus provide income to the builders. Also, some of these upper class Tamils would go to Southern Indian places of worship on pilgrimages, often on Dutch ships. Marriages were also performed in this dual fashion,

a Hindu ceremony being discreetly performed after a Church marriage. It would appear that to many of these neo-Christians, it was not in conflict with their religious position to practice both forms of worship. They were practising a type of syncretism which Nobili had confronted among his neophytes in Madura and which Francis Xavier saw among his Parava converts and rooted out with great severity.

This parallel practice of Christianity and Hinduism, though frowned upon by the Church establishment, is of historical importance in taking Christian forms of worship into the village and promoting acceptability and some mutual understanding. By the end of the 18th century, there was a Church in almost every sizeable village in Jaffna. It carried on its Sunday worship, it disseminated some knowledge of the elements of Christianity and promoted some familiarity with that religion. Because it had adherents among the upper stratum of village society, it did not face social ostracism or confront hostility on grounds of social stratification. Nor was it exclusively upper caste - conversion was not limited to a particular caste or segment of society but spread up and down the social ladder. Castes In the traditional structure were generally self- regulating and came into relationship with the state through their own heads or chiefs. The Portuguese and the Dutch had adopted the policy that, in order to retain the headship of caste, the family had to embrace Christianity. Hence in almost every caste, the heads and their families had at least nominally to become Christians. The extent of their commitment and the degree to which this Christian involvement spread through the caste depended on other factors and varied from caste to caste. In this way Christianity had a foothold in every segment of society.

One of the features of this period was the prevalence, perhaps the intensification, of non-Agamic forms of religious practice. These were of many varieties. There were various versions of demonology and rites of exorcism. There were fringe cults that rose and fell, centring round some miraculous object. a particular shrine which was suddenly believed to have displayed some miraculous powers or even a person who

claimed such powers. The rise of such a phenomenon in a particular area would cause a great commotion, attract widespread support, including from Christians in the vicinity, and hence the censure of and complaints of the ministers. Dutch policy was directed at combating such worship which they called 'devil worship', more than at orthodox traditional worship. In 1682 Pyl issued an edict imposing penalties on the performance of devil dancing ceremonies. Such fringe cults generally appear when the established religion, that had served a society is disrupted. The rootless and insecure community then clutches at any straw and yearns for security. In the Sinhalese low country also there were reports of messianic figures with miraculous powers emerging now and then and here this phenomenon generally took a political turn because of the wars between the Dutch and the Kings of Kandy.

Whether there was any popular hostility towards Christianity at any period is difficult to determine. There was of course a good deal of civil unrest off and on in both Sinhalese and Tamil areas and some peasant uprisings. The Churches that existed in remote villages were sitting targets for popular attacks but there is no recorded instance of such attacks. Popular apathy there was and popular ambivalence but no popular hostility towards Christianity, its institutions or its ministers. In the interior Sinhalese **korales** bordering on the Kandyan kingdom, the kings certainly utilised Buddhist feeling to mobilise support against the Dutch. But the Kandyan cause was never very popular in the sea coast, though the Buddhist cause may have been. The Sinhalese uprisings of the 1750's came nearest to being anti-Western and anti-foreign, though their initial causes were economic grievances against Dutch policies. The religious and cultural hostility, the expression of an early nationalism, seem to have spent itself out in the wars against the Portuguese in the early 17th century. It is also significant that the kings of Kandy were offering asylum to the Catholic missionaries expelled by the Dutch from the lowlands. These missionaries utilised bases in the Kandyan kingdom for a clandestine and very effective ministry to Catholic communities of the coast.

Perhaps the most abiding contribution made by the Dutch and the most effective influence of the institutions of the Reformed Church in Ceylon was through education, through a structured school system. This emphasis on education flowed from the nature of Protestantism. Lutheran and Calvinist missionaries paid great attention to a personal commitment to Christian salvation through an acquaintance with and understanding of the Bible. In order to achieve this, it was necessary to disseminate basic education which they proceeded to do by a network of schools attached to the churches. Even in India, the Lutheran pioneers, with far less resources, had launched some schools which had caught the imagination of influential groups there. They had acquired such a reputation as educators that the Nayak of Tanjore, Saraboji, had entrusted his son to Reverend Christian Schwartsz to be educated. In Ceylon the schools were administered by a Scholarchal Commission consisting of the highest officials of the province and members of the clergy. There were 34 schools in Jaffna at the establishment of Dutch power. The schools continued to function even when the churches to which they were attached were foundering. A schoolmaster was in charge of each school and had assistants to help him depending on the size of the school. The schoolmaster was an important man in the community. He kept records of attendance and small fines were imposed on parents for non-attendance. These fines were devoted to the upkeep of orphanages. He also maintained baptismal and marriage registers. Later when land registration laws were introduced, he kept records of land transfers and earned a commission for this service. Thus the job was lucrative and much sought after.

The periodic inspection by the clergymen ensured that standdards were maintained. They examined the students and determined promotions and the passing or failing of the school leavers. Though the curriculum was weighted towards scriptural studies, there was a good deal of basic education in the three R's. Traditional methods were used in this respect, including the use of traditional primary texts and moral literature. Reports of visiting ministers show that these inspections and the examinations were taken seriously.

An interesting development was the establishment of a Tamil Seminary at Nallur in 1690 for higher education. It is significant that the first such institution was established in Jaffna, though it was later shifted to Colombo. The basic school structure which would feed the Seminary with the ablest and most motivated children was functioning well in Jaffna. Such an institution was first mooted by Governor Van Goens in 1670 who intended it to provide residential education for a few well-selected youths brought up from early on in the study and use of the Dutch language and completely at home in Dutch culture. It was seen as a way to root out Portuguese language and culture, then very much in vogue among the upper classes, and substitute Dutch culture. The idea was discussed by the civil authority and church bodies. Ministers who had long experience of work in the East were very pessimistic about the possibility of educating indigenous children in the Dutch language. One of them who had attempted it in Amboina said that a child could hardly learn to understand seven words of Dutch a day.

It was finally decided to have a mixed Dutch and Tamil medium institution, with half the time devoted to each. Buildings were put up on state property in Nallur. A school, a church and a building to house the students were erected. In the first instance three teachers were appointed, a Dutchman and two Tamils. A timetable was drawn up in which the morning would be devoted to studying Dutch and in the afternoon the lessons were in Tamil. There were 24 children in the first batch of admissions. They were selected, as was said, from the 'important castes' and distributed among all provinces and many villages. A uniform of blue was given to each and a red head cloth which was to be worn always as a recognisable symbol. A daily schedule was prepared to govern their life. Some concessions were made to caste taboos and caste status. It was recognised that students from various castes could not sit and eat at the same table but any segregation was to be limited and for a period only. The cook was to be a person who could cook for all castes, high and low. In the first class students were to be graded by caste status but this was soon

to give way to grading by merit. Each pupil was provided with a silver knife and stylus to cut palm leaves and write on them. The administration and management of supply was in the hands of a storekeeper. For the duration of their course of study, the pupils were not to be allowed to go to their homes lest their enthusiasm and their knowledge be diluted. But there was a week's vacation during Christmas when amusements were to be arranged for them within the premises. When they had reached a certain standard they were to be publicly examined and the best among them, about 12 each year, were to be promoted as senior students and would enjoy greater freedom and privileges. If any of the senior students was inclined to study Latin a beginninig would be made and later a teacher proficient in teaching this language further was to be appointed.

The first Rector of the Seminary was Reverend Adriaan de Mey, a scholar of Tamil. Hundreds of parents had asked for admission to the Seminary for their children and had to be refused. It was therefore decided to attach a public school to which children would be admitted without distinction. This school was to serve as a preparatory school for the Seminary. Within a few years of the operation of the Seminary, Governor Becker on a visit to Jaffna reported hearing a sermon in lucid Dutch delivered by a Tamil youth who had studied at this Seminary.

A few years after the establishment of the Nallur Seminary, the Dutch minister at Colombo, a scholar of Sinhalese, made a case for the establishment of one at Colombo to educate Sinhalese pupils. It was soon established and also drew pupils from a wide area and background. It taught in both Sinhalese and Tamil and was cosmopolitan in the social background of its students - land owning aristocracy, chiefs of fisher castes, chalias (cinnamon-peelers), Colombo chetties. The Seminary was soon flourishing and was found to serve a genuine need in the capital. It was found uneconomic to run two Seminaries teaching Tamil and so it was decided to close the Nallur Seminary in 1703 and transfer the Tamil pupils to Colombo. The Colombo Seminary thereafter functioned as the only institution of higher learning for the island, with Sinhalese and

Tamil pupils educated in a residential system, truly a forerunner to many such colleges in Colombo in later years. Graduates of the Seminary held positions of clergymen and catechists in the Reformed Church, schoolmasters, translators, clerks, accountants in government offices. A few of the best among them were sent to Holland to study in Dutch universities.

Lord North, the first Governor of Ceylon, with his enthusiasm to promote education in Ceylon, attempted to revive the network of schools maintained by the Dutch, a scheme which foundered under his successors because of lack of funds. Among the schools revived was the Colombo seminary, under the name of the Colombo Academy. The impact of this schools system is one of those intangible things that does not appear on the surface but is nonetheless of great social significance. The ordinary village schools promoted literacy in the local languages and substituted the functions performed by the temple school in traditional society. Their attempt to impart Christianity was generally recognised as of no lasting success but their basic education kept alive the flames of literacy. The provision of higher education to a small group of selected students promoted a small elite class that was brought into closer contact with European culture and Christian values. This combined with the urbanisation going on in south-western Ceylon, produced a new class of westernised, gradually alienated from their culture, attracted to western ways of life and ripe for the changes of the 19th century. This did not happen very much in Jaffna town, because Jaffna continued to be a conglomeration of suburban settlements, with a clear divide between the European quarter and the indigenous habitat. It was most marked in Colombo, where Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Eurasians and Europeans were juxtaposed to each other. To a less extent. this was happening in the smaller coastal towns of the South

Commentators on the Dutch impact on Ceylon, like Emerson Tennent, have dismissed the social and religious policy of the Dutch as largely based on shifting sand and have rejected the extravagant statistics to prove success in proselytization. There is a great deal of truth in this assertion. The plan of in-

stitutionalising Christianity by erecting for it a large infrastructure down to the village level was an ambitious one. But the very magnitude of the undertaking was its undoing. The whole operation needed an army of clergymen and schoolmasters to run it effectively. In the absence of this vital personnel, the form was there, content was lacking. It was impossible to instruct, guide and influence 200,000 nominal Christians in the Jaffna Commandement. In the event, Christianity and its forms were grafted on to a basically tradition-ridden society. Ambivalence was encouraged, an official and public profession and a private and clandestine practice. The proximity to South India and the continuing intercourse with ports in that area enabled Hindu tradition to be kept alive. Some large temples were rendered ineffective but the innumerable village temples carried on their functions. Domestic rites were carried on and festivals celebrated. Buddhism in the lowlands declined more sharply than did Hinduism. But this decline was seen even in the Kandyan kingdom and was revived only by the external stimulus from Thailand.

The churches and compounds of the villages in Jaffna served one purpose. When the American missionaries came in 1816 and wanted to establish centres in Jaffna, they were assigned these buildings and properties in some villages, as others were given to the Church Missionary Society. Thus after the lapse of a generation a continuity was established with a tradition so shakily founded in the 17th century. Now new forces were at work and new ideologies which were to inaugurate a dynamic new era in social change and social inter-relations between contending systems of belief and doctrine.

PART III

Christianity, Nationalism and Independence

The 19th and 20th Centuries brought new oppotunities, new challenges and necessitated new solutions. The **pax Britannica** had been established in large parts of the Indian sub-continent and Ceylon. The East was not confronting any more a Europe that was not much more developed economically and politically than a number of eastern societies. It was now confronting a Europe of expanding industrialism, strident individualism and of an assertive evangelicalism. It was a Europe threatening to assault eastern society on the political, economic and religious fronts and transform it irrecognisably in the process. In the vanguard was Britain with its new-found military and naval strength, its ideologies of the inevitability of progress of which the evangelicals were the religious arm. The evangelical movement followed swiftly upon political dominance and the extensive character of this dominance (as contrasted with the Portuguese and the Dutch which was very restricted) opened up large and hitherto closed areas to the evangelical offensive.

In those areas which had already seen some missionary actlvity and success – coastal Ceylon, Malabar, Southeastern Tamil coast, tne older port cities – this activity was picked up and old foundations were built upon. Catholics, Lutherans and the American Ceylon Mission who went into these areas found remains of past efforts in varying degrees of decrepitude which were recreated and developed. A number of new missions parcelled out the remaining vast territory among themselves and a century of intense effort followed on many fronts: evangelism, education, medical care, orphan welfare, work among depressed castes and tribals. Presbyterians, Methodists, Church Missionary Society and Baptists entered the field and a substantial amount of organizational talent and resources was put into this task. Northern India was now open for missionary work for the first time. As a result of the work of the

older missionary Churches and organizations and the newer ones that had made their appearance, in both India and Ceylon, a process of intellectual, social and cultural interaction was set in motion in this latest phase of missionary activity.

As in the early modern phase of missionary activity, two types of method of conversion continued to persist. There were the individual conversions mainly from persons of the upper castes who came into contact with the Christian message and aecepted it as a personal salvation. There were then the 'mass' conversions of an entire caste or kin-group in a village which would embrace Christianity. Such mass conversions usually came from the lower castes of society, very often from untouchables or tribal peoples.

No sooner had these missionary movements got going than they had to confront the caste system. In the 19th Century, caste had begun to be lookd upon by the missionaries as a major social problem to be faced frontally aud eradicated. This is in striking contrast to the missions of the earlier period, when, as we have already seen, caste was not considered as a major problem. What were considered more serious obstacles in that period were traditional religious beliefs and practices, not traditional social organization. Both the Catholics and the German Lutherans had been tolerant of caste as practised by the neophytes. To the 19th Century missionaries, with the new Christian emphasis on individualism, humanitarianism and social equality, caste loomed large as a social evil. Not only was caste considered the biggest obstacle to conversion; it was also the major cause of apostasy. Continuing adherence to caste taboos by the neophyte enabled him to keep his links with traditional society and hence to revert to traditional religion when he desired. Conversely, if all vestiges of caste practices were uprooted in the converted Christian individuals, they would have burnt their boats as far as traditional society was concerned and their integration into the Christian community of which they were members would be that much faster.

Interestingly enough, converts from the highest stratum of the caste structure were at one with those from the lowest in their willingness to disown their erstwhile caste. For the highest caste converts, such as the brahmans, conversion was a major personal decision at great sacrifice of the high status they enjoyed in society and they lost the most in having taken that decision. Consequently their desire to repudiate their previous caste privileges was total and genuine. To the converts of the lowest castes, nothing was lost and everything was gained in throwing overboard the chains of their previous status.

It was the middle status castes that desired to retain their caste positions in the Christian community **vis-a-vis** their fellow members of the church of lower castes. So strong was their feeling that in those areas where middle status castes dominated the church, the clergy had to make concessions to their feelings. Separate pews, no interdining, no real functioning as an effective community – these were the characteristics of a caste-ridden church. Likewise in schools, provision had to be made for separate residential and dining facilities. These concessions were reluctantly made by the missionaries as otherwise the church would have broken up. Such conditions were most in force in the churches of Southern India and to a less rigorous extent in North Ceylon. In Bengal, Bombay and Punjab, however, caste was very strictly excluded from the church.

The problem worried missionaries and Christian converts greatly and they agonised over it in the 1830's and 1840's. Bishop Heber undertook a major review of the problem, inviting comments from prominent Indian Christians. Rev. Christian David from Tanjore, who belonged to one of the middle agricultural castes, justified caste in the church as something akin to class and therefore not intrinsically opposed to Christianity. He, and others who argued like him, contended that caste was primarily a social and not a religious institution. It is interesting to note that they were following the lines of analysis taken by Nobili and resurrecting the idea of separating social custom from religious belief. As a result of pressures

from these castes in the south, missionary opposition to caste was toned down. To the Catholic church, it does not seem to have been such an acute problem, partly because of its ability to discipline its membership better.

The inter-denominational Protesant Missionaries' Conference held at Madras 1850 dismissed caste as an unmitigated evil and recommended that candidates for baptism should be required to renounce caste. In northern India all Protesant denominations required such a formal renunciation of caste before baptism. But in the south it was not strictly followed and caste continued to torment the church till well into the 20th Century. The dilemma of the Christian on caste was not a simple one of enlightenment versus obscurantism; it was a real and complex problem in many ways. If the Christian convert renounced caste and thereby excluded himself from his caste society, in terms of traditional social norms he formed a new caste, one that was of much lower status than what he had just renounced. If he lived in a village, he lost a number of the social privileges that went with his caste. This was what happened in the first Portuguese stage of the missionary movement. A Christian became a **parangi** and hence an outcaste member of society. Many Indian Christians did not want this to happen to Christianity in India. They were fully aware that in becoming Christians they were becoming members of an all-India based community and entering into communion with fellow-members of the faith. But they did not want to do this at the expense of forming themselves into a new caste in the local context and thus to excise themselves from traditional society; They wanted to remain in traditional society and enjoy their roles in it as Christians. Thus they wanted to localise and indigenise Christianity and one way to do this was by being accepted by traditional village society as Christian members of their respective castes.

This problem was not faced in such an acute form in the Ceylon churches. It was present, particularly among the Tamils of Jaffna, and there is a good deal of missonary writing on lines similar to those of their colleagues in India. But there

was never at any time the possibility of Christians being excised from traditional society and deposited at the bottom of the social ladder as an outcaste. Among the Sinhalese this could not happen because ideas of purity and pollution were not prevalent in Buddhism which was ideologically opposed to caste. Even among the Hindus of north Ceylon, the constantly changing political fortunes and economic status of the past 400 years had blunted the edge of caste. Furthermore, in the 19th Century, civil law enacted by the British soon overtook customary law and direct administrative action was more interventionist than in India and protected civil rights. The much larger scale of the conversions in the 19th Century and the social composition of the Christian community made exclusion impossible. Christianity, as we have seen earlier, had entered the village in the previous centuries, and was now accepted in many villages where a substantial minority became Christians. By 1901, 11.5% of the entire Tamil population had become Christian and if the nothern districts were taken separately the proportion would be around 20%. Besides, they were more heavily concentrated in particular areas than in India (except Kerala).

Among the Tamils of Ceylon, conversion took place at all levels of the social hierarchy. In a typical village with a substantial Christian minority, there would be a Christian subgroup in each of the main castes occupying the village. These Christian sub-groups would interact vertically among each other as a Christian community with activities centred round the Church and subsidiary associations. On the other hand they would interact horizontally with Hindu members of their own caste in social functions embracing kinship ties. If the Christian group was large enough, it would marry endogamically within itself or outside the village with Christians of the same caste. Not rarely, there would be intermarriages within the caste across the religious divide. Marriages within the Christian community across the caste frontier would be unheard of. These generalizations would be valid also for the Sinhalese Christians, though caste endogamy would not be so rigid.

Thus the Christian community of Ceylon was a microcosm of the Hindu and Buddhist community outside it. As it did not lose its traditional sociological character, it blended more easily than did the Indian Christian community into the traditional background. To that extent it lost something of its Christian characteristic. It grew along models which the Christian middle castes of south India would have liked their communities to grow. This has major implications for the differing ways in which the two communities responded to the nationalist politics of the 20th Century.

Let us turn now to the ideological relationships between Christianity and Hinduism in this modern phase of missionary activity. In the early decades of the 19th Century, there is seen a reversion to the fundamentalism of the 16th Century, a hostile and arrogant attitude to Hinduism, largely the result of a strident evangelism and an impatience with the formidable obstacles posed by traditional religions. The works on Hinduism written during this period are an updated version of the criticism and condemnation of an earlier period, giving allowance for the learning that had seeped in, in the meanwhile. It was also a reaction to the tolerance and relativism bred by the writings of the period of 'the Enlightenment' of the 18th Century and the sympathetic treatment of non-western cultures by the French Encyclopaedists.

This evangelical condemnation of Hindu institutions and practices was grist to the mill of utilitarians and liberals writing on India. James Mill, in his monumental History of India, ridiculed the Hindu and Islamic periods of Indian history and dismissed them as of no relevance to the great new golden age that Britain was going to usher in.

In the first half of the 19th Century, educated Indians who embraced Christianity generally agreed with this point of view. The first signs of developing an alternative line of reasoning started with Ram Mohun Roy and his Brahmo Samaj. He too approached close to Christianity but then drew back and took up the formidable task of revising and modernising Hinduism. Brahmo Samaj was active among the Bengalee intellectuals through

a large part of the 19th Century and Christianity and Brahmoist ideals contented equally for the Bengalee mind. The radical wing of the Brahmo Samaj was always close to Christianity—the concept of God they were preaching, the forms of worship they were practising and their methods of propaganda, all owed so much to Christian ideas. One of their ideologues, Keshab Chandra Sen, envisaged a grand Indian Church into which all the religious traditions of India – Hindu, Muslim and Christian – would unite. The Brahmo Samaj conceived of Hinduism as a simple theistic religion, devoid of ritualism, caste, hereditary priesthood, and mythology and brought it close to some aspects of Christianity. These ideas soon left a marked impact on the Indian Christian intellectual who, in the new era of nationalism, was seeking to separate Christianity from its western origins.

Such ideas soon made their appearance in Indian Christian theological thinking. There was growing opposition to the confrontation and hostility which some missionaries were encouraging between Christianity and Hinduism. The Indian Christian intellectuals would replace this hostility with a search for common ground between these religions. The most forceful and positively formulated expression of this trend was given by the fascinating Bengalee who called himself a Hindu Catholic, Brahmabandhab Upadhyay. Born in a Bengalee middle class family, he embraced Christianity in 1891, first as a Protestant and then joining the Catholic Church. In his writings he sought to syncretise Hindu philosophy and Catholic theology. He maintained that Hinduism was an aggregate of a number of different systems of belief united by a broad and pervasive spirit called Hinduism. "In short", he said, "we are Hindu so far as our physical and mental constitution is concerned, but in regard to our immortal souls we are Catholics. We are Hindu Catholics."

Other Indian Christian reinterpreters did not go so far as Upadhay as they were more committed to institutionalised Christianity in India. Rev. K. C. Bannerjea, a Protestant minister, K. M. Bannerjea, another Bengalee Christian, Dr. Parani Andy and Dewan Bahadur Appasamy Pillai, two Tamil Christians, attempted in various ways to interpret Christianity through Hinduism. They were largely exercises in semantics, seeking to

show that the Revelation had been prophesied in the Vedas. These efforts, not of lasting philosophical or theological significance, are indicative of the yearning of the Indian Christian Church to strike roots in India by claiming a place in its Intellectual tradition, just as in seeking to retain caste tradition Christians were seeking social roots in that tradition.

These efforts also had an influence on western missionary thinking and writing on Hinduism. From the middle of the 19th Century western missionaries were beginning to look at Hinduism in a new light. Their attitude is less hostile, less condemnatory. Positive factors are emphasised and correspondences with Christianity are pointed out. They were participating in the rediscovery of India's past, publishing religious literature in English translation, launching a heritage of India Series. In the sonth scholars like G. U. Pope and Popley were translating Tamil devotional classics. All this evidence is drawn together in an interpretation that Christianity is the fulfillment of Hinduism - a view so elequently expressed by J. N. Farquhar in his **Crown of Hinduism.**

The influence of political nationalism of Indian Christians was first felt in Bengal, the province that pioneered nationalism in British India. In 1868 was formed the Bengal Christian Association under the presidency of K. M. Bannerjea. A few years later, in 1877, was formed the Bengal Christian Conference under similar inspiration. In 1887, K. C. Bannerjea broke with the Church of which he was a minister and formed the Calcutta Christo Samaj, on the obvious analogy of the Brahmo Samaj, to bring together Indian Christians into one Church with an Indianised Christian worship and theology. Parani Andy's National Church of India, formed along similar lines in Madras, was yet another expression of that trend. Like the Brahmo Samaj, these were movements outside the institutionalised religions they issued from and were soon stifled by the opposition of orthodoxy.

Less radical movements, under the umbrella of the institutionalised churches, and not attempting theological reinterpretations, but rather promoting social reform and political causes, were formed with missionary encouragement. Indian Christian Associa-

tions were formed in many parts of the country from the 1890's. They were the result of the political mobilization of the educated classes of the country with the formation of the Indian National Congress. This first phase of nationalism in India was inter-communal and inter-religious, looking to horizontal rather than vertical integration, bringing together people of similar views and outlook on where India should be moving. A number of Indian Christians were members of this new elite which was behind the Congress and was articulating nationalist feelings throughout the country. In the enlarged provincial legislative councils of 1891, a few Indian Christians were nominated to membership in many provinces. A number of them participated in the annual sessions of the Congress and in the liberal-oriented Indian Social Reform Conference. The movement towards nationalising the Church was looked upon by these Indian Christians as one carrying into the Church the ideas and trends which were penetrating other avenues of society around them.

In Ceylon, movements parallel to the creation of an indigenous Christian theology or reinterpreting Christianity to take account of Buddhist and Hindu truths were not present in the 19th Century. This is because the Buddhist renaissance occurred later and immediately took on a militant anti-Christian character, without passing through the first and almost apologetic phase that characterised Hindu renaissance under Brahmo Samaj. Another reason may be that philosophically there was less in common between Buddhism and Christianity than between Hinduism and Christianity. Of Hindu renaissance in Ceylon, there was virtually nothing until the 1870's. Consequently the arguments that were going on in India, within Hinduism, within Christianity and between Hinduism and Christianity do not appear to have taken place in Ceylon. The intelligentsia of all religious groups came together on the basis of a secular Ceylonese nationalism towards the end of the century. Ceylonese Christians, both Sinhalese and Tamils, as members of the new elite, participated in national, regional and communal associations, and were nominated and elected to the Legislative Council. There was also in Ceylon no formation, parallel to India, of inter-denominational associations of indigenous Christians.

There was no similar urge for Christians to come together socially or politically as Christians. Christians functioned effectively as members of society as a whole, a feature that is also the result of the secularization of society that took place in the 19th Century.

When communalism entered Ceylonese politics, the basis of division of communities was ethno-linguistic, with the exception of the Moors or Muslims. By contrast, communities in India were always for political purposes religious communities.

When nationalism in India moved on into its second stage, Indian Christians had problems coming to terms with it. Nationalism now ceased to be secular and was given a strong religious foundation and nationalist goals were interpreted in terms of past tradition. The aims of nationalism were to recreate a glorious past and this phase coincided with a militant Hindu revivalism spearheaded by the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samaj was active in the Punjab where Presbyterian and Methodist missions were working and, with Sikhs and Muslims trying to safeguard their interests, the period 1890-1910 saw an intensive religious competition and conflict not seen anywhere else. There was an atmosphere of mutual recrimination leaving a great deal of communal bitterness. Hinduism paid particular attention during this period to the untouchables who were embracing Christianity en masse to escape their depressed status. The Arya Samaj initiated a reconversion and repurification programme to win back converts from Christianity and to raise the status of the untouchables. This offensive put an effective stop to the progress of Christian conversion in the Punjab. Gandhi later built up on these foundations to reintegrate untouchables, or Harijans as he called them, into Hindu society. Gandhi was a reformer of Hinduism from within while at the same time strengthening tradition to withstand attack from without. His work gave a great boost to generating confidence in tradition which had lagged because of Christian attack and the work of the earlier Hindu reformers, and contributed to arresting the spread of Christianity in India.

In Ceylon, while revivalist movements in Buddhism and Hinduism of about the same time did not spill over into nationalism, yet they had similar effects in arresting the spread of

Christianity. The Buddhist movement, like the Arya Samaj in the Punjab, faced the Christian missionary movement frontally, engaged it in argument, pamphleteering and polemics, thus adopting methods effectively used against Buddhism. The Saivite revivalist movement among the Tamils was more muted but no less effective. Consequently, the Christian population was frozen at about 9% to 10% of the population through a large part of the 20th Century.

When the British imperial government initiated the process of sharing power with representative sections of the local population both in India and Ceylon, new challenges faced the Christian communities. The movement in India had gathered momentum under Gandhi and was demanding immediate and total independence. Gandhi and other nationalist leaders did not want to be sidetracked into any discussion of what the new India would be like except in the most vague terms. The question faced by the minorities was whether they were prepared to underwrite these demands. The Muslims rejected them outright and launched a separate political movement directly in conflict with the predominantly Hindu Congress. The Christians, who had now overtaken the Sikhs as the third largest religious group in India, had to fashion policies in the face of these new challenges.

The Indian Christian community, unlike the Sikhs, was scattered throughout India, spread out into a number of ethnic and linguistic groups, compounding problems of organising them as a united pressure group. Yet in the political struggles of the 1930's such organization was essential if any community was to safeguard its political interest. From 1922, Indian Christians met annually in an All-India Conference and Council, consisting of representatives from local associations and parishes. On behalf of this annual conference, K, T. Paul presented a memorandum to the Round Table Conference, on the Indian Constitution (1929-31). He listed the claims of the Indian Christian community under four heads: 1. Fundamental Rights, 2. Representation on Councils, 3. Share in Public Service, and 4. Machinery for overseeing Executive action. On the very thorny issue of communal representation, the memorandum stated that ultimately it should be abolished but that this stage

had not yet been reached. For the present, then, they claimed reserved seats in all legislatures proportinate to the population and election to these seats in joint, not separate, electorates.

Communalism was a very divisive issue in Indian politics of that period. The Hindu dominated Congress was decrying communalism and trying to play down the issue of minority rights. Muslim leaders were making the most extreme demands. Communalism appears to have divided the Indian Christian community. The educated professional elites among them, particularly those from Bengal, were opposed to separate representation. They wanted Christians to whole-heartedly identify with an all-India nationalism as expressed in the Congress. Their case was ably presented by Dr. S. K. Datta, a prominent Indian Christian nationalist and member of the Minorities Committee, at the Round Table Conference. He dissented from the position taken up by the major spokesmen of the Christian community in favour of separate representation. These leaders, coming mainly from Madras where there were large Christian concentrations that deserved representation on a population basis which was possible only on a communal quota, desired the retention of some form of special representation. Their case was presented by Pannir Selvam, a Tamil Christian leader. In fact this group was so alarmed at what they felt was the un-sympathetic attitude of Gandhi and the Hindu delegation at the Congress, that they joined in a combined effort with Muslims, Depressed Classes, Anglo-Indians and Europeans to present a common demand for the settlement of the communal problem.

Communal representation was introduced into India by the Indian Councils Act of 1909. The subsequent Act of 1919 had extended this further and in Madras, Christians were among minorities conceded special electorates. It was noted that this had created sectarian divisions within the community, as between Catholics, Syrian Christians and Protestants. But it had whetted the appetite of these communities for recognition and representation. The Communal Award handed down in 1932 by Prime Minister Ramsay Macdonald gave the Christians, along with other minorities, special representation in separate electorates in many provinces.

In Madras they were given 9 seats out of 134 and in many other provinces they got one, two or three seats according to the population.

The upsurge of Indian nationalism during the war and the desire to secure freedom from British rule swept the Christians along with it. They wanted to be identified with this independence movement and their leaders joined the Congress in large numbers. At the Constituent Assembly elected in 1946, the Congress took care to secure representation for small minority groups such as Indian Christians. One of the community's leaders, Dr. H. C. Mookerjee, was elected Chairman of the Minorities sub-committee. Minorities were satisfied with the fundamental rights entrenched in the Constitution and Indian Christian leaders, along with other minorities, agreed to the abolition of separate communal electorates. The Constitution had proclaimed the ideal of a secular state and the Indian Christian community was prepared to live in the secular state without political safeguards.

In Ceylon the grant of universal franchise in 1931 had transformed totally the levels of political activity. As long as the franchise was qualified, Christians had enjoyed a major voice in the legislative councils and the political process. Mass mobilization by political parties now took communal forms and the two major linguistic communities, Sinhalese and Tamils, were poised for a lengthy and tense political struggle. Christians identified themselves with their respective linguistic communities in this conflict and even emerged as leaders. During the discussions leading to independence, there was no Christian national interest separately articulated as in India. Christians of Ceylon could have said with Dr. S. K. Datta: "The community I represent needs no protection."

Ceylon did not redraft its Constitution immediately after independence and hence did not have the opportunity to put up a firm foundation of fundamental rights which would provide protection to minorities. The implications of this were not immediately felt because the post-independence governments were wedded to secularism and a minimum of state interference. Yet in Ceylon the potential for conflict between minorities, whether religious

or linguistic, and the majority was greater than in India. In Ceylon minority communities, Christians among them, occupied dominant positions in various walks of public life. Though the state did not immediately do anything to redress this imbalance, the feelings it provoked were there as potential factors of future conflict. This happened in 1956 when a government championing the new Sinhala nationalism was elected to power, ushering in a new era in Ceylonese politics, causing fundamental realignments and revision in political attitudes.

In India the problems of the Indian Christian minority arose not from the publicly professed principles and policies of the state, which were unexceptionable and subject to the protection of fundamental rights guaranteed in the Constitution, but from the public propaganda of militant Hindu nationalism and the hostility of the growing influential Marxist parties in the country. The opposition of Hindu nationalists to any intrusion into Hiudu society through proselytisation, indoctrination in schools or any other form of dissemination of what they considered 'alien' systems of belief was vigourously prosecuted after independence. In those states where they had political influence they were able to wield it to have an impact on offcial policy. The most spectacular attempt they made was the appointment by the Madhya Pradesh government of a Committee (called the Niyogi Committee) to inquire into the activities of Christian foreign missionaries. The Committee produced a report that was highly critical of missionary activity as anti-national and disruptive. The report created a stir in the country but, in the ensuing public debate throughout the nation, its views were seen to be in a minority. No adverse consequences followed except a tightening of the visa regulations for the entry and residence of foreign missionaries.

A more serious threat faced in India was the challenge to an important aspect of Christian activity in the sphere of education. In a few states legislation was passed bringing Christian administered schools under a greater degree of state controil. The Kerala Education Bill of 1957 went furthest along these lines and became the subject of a major public controversy. In Kerala, the Christians who formed 22% of the population, had

a large network of schools and colleges under their control. The Bill, brought forward by a Communist state government, brought these schools under more direct state control and enabled the state to expropriate such schools at will. Christian denominational groups, supported by Hindu private educational agencies, organised a major campaign of opposition to the Bill. Both by the judicial means of an appeal to the Supreme Court and by the political means of agitation to bring down the government, a successful struggle was carried out and the Bill was revised in favour of private educational interests.

In both these crises, the Niyogi Report and the Kerala Education Bill, Indian Christians were not alone in the struggle they waged. They were supported by other minority elements and by liberal Hindu groups. This support enabled them to tide over these crises with little or no adverse consequences. It is their pluralism which is a necessary part of the vast Indian cultural scene that is the saviour of minority cultures and minority interests. Christians were accepted as part of this plurality because they had themselves accepted the fundamentals of Indian nationalism, Indian culture and the particular Indian way of life.

Ceylon presents the paradox of what had started off as a more established Christian presence becoming, under the threat of the new nationalism, more shaky than India and struggling for its very existence. There are a number of reasons for this. In the first place, Christians in Ceylon had for long occupied a place far more prominent in society and polity than their Indian counterparts ever did. So when the reaction came it was more severe and the process towards egalitarianism far more painful. Secondly, the attack on Christians and other minority groups was more concentrated for being more unanimous and well-directed on the part of the majority groups. In India those who held similar views, while being influential sectionally, never gained power nationally. Their views never became national policy as they did in Ceylon after 1956. Thirdly, the delay in the necessary processes of reform for almost eight years after independence made the changes revolutionary rather than reformist

when they did come. Fourthly, Christian leaders themselves contributed to this situation by not making concessions in time.

The upshot of all this was that Christians in Ceylon after 1960 were on the defensive. They found themselves isolated in a way Indian Christians never were. The Buddhist Committee Report of 1955 was even more extremist than the Niyogi Report in its analysis and recommendations. It proposed a ban on many forms of Christian activity and hit them at their strongest point, the control of schools. It recommended the creation of national educational system by the nationalization of all schools. The Acts of 1960-61 which brought this about went much further than the Kerala Act which Indian Christians had opposed with some success. The main difference was that there they had the support of Hindu denominational bodies while in Ceylon the demand to nationalise schools was a Buddhist demand. Consequently whatever opposition that was organised against the Act was short-lived and unsuccessful. The Christians lost a number of their schools and retain only a few as unaided schools.

The effect of this dispossession of a valuable asset they enjoyed in the community appears to have been in many ways beneficial to their long - term interests. They are now an unprivileged, voluntary group, minding their own business and cannot be held up as public scape goats for this or that national failing. They now occupy a position rather similar to the Indian Christians, vulnerable and weak, but deriving a strength from their weakness. From positions of power and great influence, the envy of the unprivileged and weak, they are now among the meek of the world maintaining their institutions by their exertions and their sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

In these three lectures, we have attempted to sketch, admittedly in all too general a fashion, what is to many of us a fascinating process of modern social history. It is relevant and interesting to those of us who are a consequence and the subject of the interaction here sketched. It is no less relevant to those outside who have been influenced both positively and

negatively by these processes. Countries of south Asia have experienced western rule with the impact of Christianity; countries of southeast Asia—British Malaya and Burma and Dutch Indonesia—have experienced western rule without over-exposure to the Christian impact. The differing results are seen not so much in the quantitative presence of Christianity in these respective countries as in shaping the modes of thought, the values and assumptions particularly of the elites in these societies.

At the outset I made the point that, viewed in a long term historical perspective, the Christian missionary movement was not totally out of character with past historical experience. Past movements of proselytization have been blurred from historical consciousness because of their age and cannot be studied in depth because of lack of evidence though their results have been writ deep into tradition. The Christian phase challenged deep-rooted tradition but so did the previous phases of conversion. It utilised political power, and so did many previous movements. It prospered through the dedication, example and devotion of many great men and so did other movements. It gained through material incentives, so did the others. It sought security in syncretism and assimilation and so, very successfully, did many of its predecessers. The one major difference is that Christianity operated in an age of rising social and national consciousness and this told in the end against its total effectiveness. Seeing that this social and national consciousness was in itself a consequence of the western impact, it could be said that one strand of Western influence nullified the other.

BUNKER MEMORIAL LECTURES

1969 — The Crisis in Modern Society

BY

Dr. K. G. Saiyidain

1972 — Tamil Humanism — The Classical Period

BY

Rev. Fr. Xavier S. Thani Nayagam

1973 — Education and National Development
(Unpublished)

BY

Dr. Malcolm S. Adiseshiah

1978 — Christianity, Traditional Cultures and Nationalism
The South – Asian Experience

BY

Dr. Sinnappah Arasaratnam