MODERN SANNYASINS, PARALLEL SOCIETY AND HINDU REPLICATIONS

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A STUDY OF THE PROTESTANT CONTRIBUTION TO TAMIL CULTURE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY SRI LANKA AGAINST A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

By

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the patterns of change within Sri Lankan Tamil tradition, with a particular focus on the nineteenth century. It endeavours to accomplish two things. First, by the examination of colonial Sri Lanka against a detailed consideration of the pre-existing society and culture, the thesis shows that the colonial period, far from being one of great change and disjunction with the past, in fact experienced a very gradual course of social change which was facilitated by the widespread incorporation of traditional structures that gave colonial society a much needed stability and a peaceful environment where trade and commerce could prosper.

Secondly, by taking this approach, the thesis demonstrates that the nineteenth century Anglo-Saxon Protestant missionaries eventually fell into the traditional role of sannyasins, a role, as this work shows, that had been adopted by the Jain mendicants and the Buddhist bhikkhus who had preceded them. The thesis first demonstrates that the sannyasin, although in a fundamental sense an enemy of caste, having turned his or her back on caste society, has nevertheless deeply influenced Hindu society, particularly when organized as a community of renouncers. The thesis then goes on to argue that the Protestant sannyasins likewise, in the establishment of male and female boarding schools, advocated a form of communal renunciation, which contributed to the formation of a parallel society alongside the caste society, and which became instrumental in initiating many changes within Tamil culture in Sri Lanka.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My attention was attracted to the subject of this thesis several years ago while I was living at the Anglican Mission House in Nallur with my grandfather, the late Rev. Canon S. S. Somasundaram, whose ascetic ways invoked in those who knew him a sense of both awe and fear. Hindus and Christians alike readily recognized and acknowledged him as a holy man and gave him due honour. I was not, however, able to begin my investigation of this subject until recently when I began taking several graduate courses on South India and Hinduism under the instruction of Professor Paul Younger and the late Professor K. Sivaraman.

Much of my research necessitated visits to libraries and archives in Sri Lanka, England and the United States and I am very grateful to the School of Graduate Studies for so generously providing the funds to make those trips possible. I would also like to acknowledge the assistance I received from the librarians and archivists, especially those in the School of Oriental and African Studies and the Church Missionary Society, located in London, Birmingham University library and archives, the Houghton Library in Cambridge, Mass., Congregational House in Boston, Jaffna College library and archives, Jaffna University library and St. John's College library, Jaffna and Peradeniya University library. I am very thankful to all the friends and relatives in each of those places, who offered to my wife and me warm and generous hospitality.

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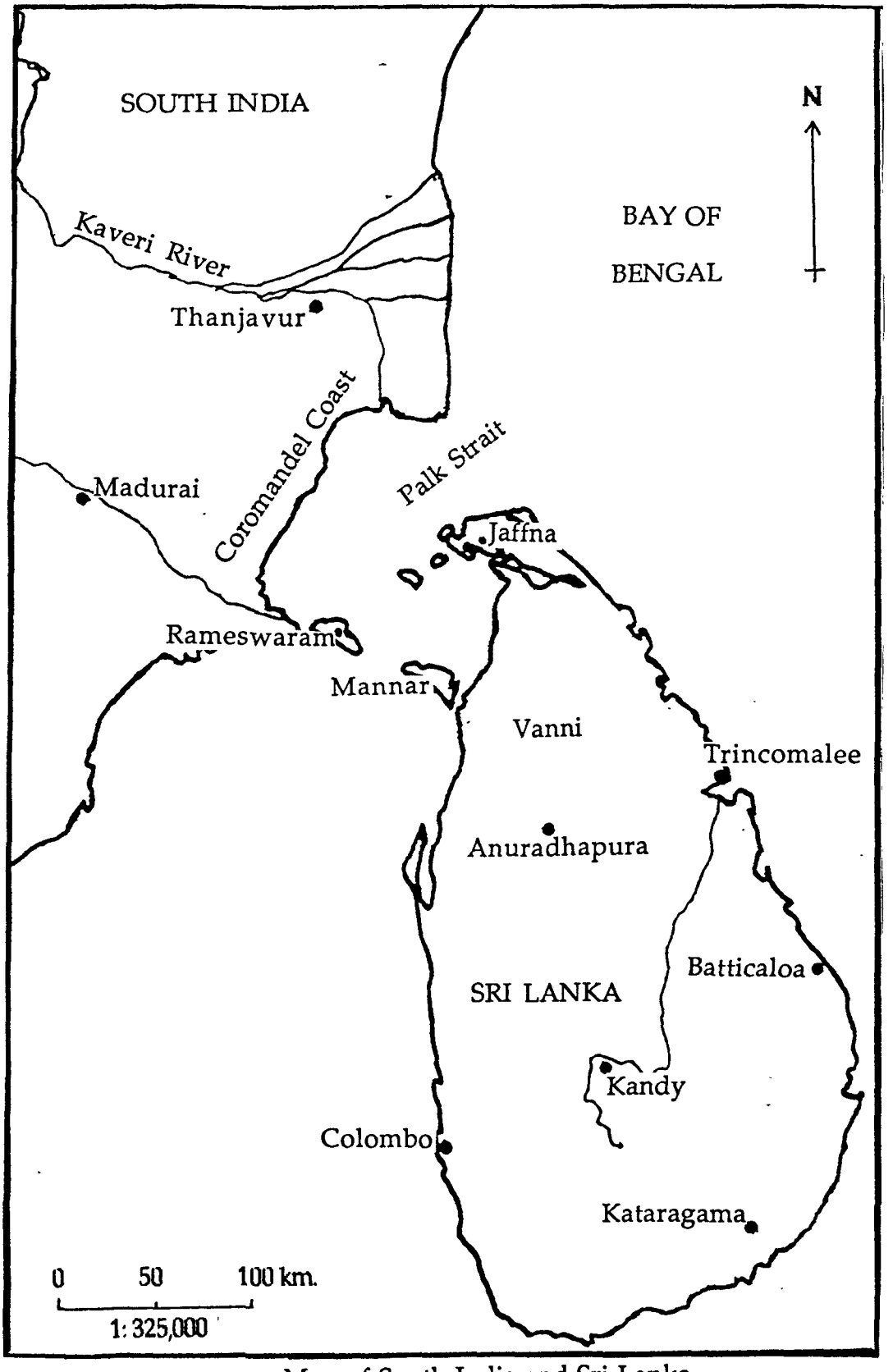
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED IN NOTES AND REFERENCES

ACM	American Ceylon Mission
Ak	Akananuru
CJHSS	Ceylon Journal of History and Social Studies
CLS	Christian Literature Society
CMS	Church Missionary Society
Cor	Corinthians
Ex	Exodus
Gen	Genesis
HMCC	A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon
Jn	John
Kt	Kuruntokai
Lev	Leviticus
Lk	Luke
LMS	London Missionary Society
Manu	The Laws of Manu
Mk	Mark
Mt	Matthew
n.d.	no date
Nr	Narrinai
Puram	Purananuru
Rom	Romans

SISSW	South India Saiva Siddhanta Works
UCHC	University of Ceylon History of Ceylon
WMMS	Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society

Owing to the absence of a uniform system of using diacritical marks in romanized Tamil, this thesis has avoided their use in both Tamil and Sanskrit.



Map of South India and Sri Lanka

To

Elijah Hoole

and

S. S. Somasundaram,

founders

of a

Parallel Society

INTRODUCTION

A comparative work of this nature must begin with a study of the values or ideology particular to a society. This study proceeds from the recognition that ideology is prior to concrete reality. Ideology in this sense is taken to be constitutive, in that it does not merely reflect reality; on the contrary, it orders, explains, and legitimizes reality for the human beings of a particular society. As such, ideology embodies a model of the society that is isomorphic with its concrete manifestation.[1]

This view that value systems are primary and form a constitutive part of social action and social change, may be explained by referring briefly to S. J. Tambiah's important work on Buddhist missionary expansion.[2] The Buddhist system of values, he shows,

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[1] The anthropologist B. Kapferer's argument about culture as "ontology" and the Indologist R. Gombrich's treatment of culture as "orthodoxy" are on a par with our understanding of ideology. For both culture constitutes a fixed set of values and practices from the past delivered to the present. See R. Gombrich, Precept and Practice, Traditional Buddhism in the Rural Highlands of Ceylon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971) 45f.; B. Kapferer, Legends of People, Myths of State: Violence, Intolerance, and Political Culture in Sri Lanka and Australia (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institute Press, 1988) 79-84

[2] S. J. Tambiah, World Conqueror and World Renouncer: A Study of Buddhism and Polity in Thailand against a Historical Background (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

because they contrasted sharply to the prevailing ones, played a key role in recruitment and social change. In the Indian case, early Buddhist missionaries, armed with the critical doctrine of nonself (anatta), attacked the citadel of Vedic and early Hindu thought, a strategy designed to undermine the public legitimacy of the associated Hindu religious institutions and beliefs. This ideological confrontation directly led to open recruitment of "monks and nuns of Brahmans and Shudras alike" to the Buddhist ranks.[3] This early Buddhist denunciation of Hindu thought was deeply social and even political in its reality and implication, because on the opposing brahmanical conception of the self (atman) "rested the sociological institution of the joint family, its pattern of authority and rites of perpetuation, and the political institution..... buttressed by Brahman functionaries."[4] The Vedic Hindu society is here portrayed as "resting" on a system of ideas or values, and a fundamental alteration of those values resulting from the Buddhist impact logically amount to change of the society rather than merely change in that society.

Since society as we have attempted to show rests on a particular set of ideas or values that are constitutive, thereby embodying a model of that society, the historian's task is not to invent concepts for the purpose of analysis and comparison, but to take concepts from those societies and develop an analysis in terms of them fully. A society, be it

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[3]Ibid., 33

[4]Ibid., 34

Hindu or Christian, is for this reason best explained and understood through its own ideology and categories; through the model it has of itself. In the case of the Hindu and Christian societies, we have access to their respective system of values through their encoded traditions, that is, through their normative literatures.

In following this line of inquiry, Part One of this thesis introduces the core ideas of Hinduism and Christianity. These ideas provide the distinct frameworks for interpreting the behavioural patterns of Hindus and Christians, and the contrasting behavioural orientations present the nature of my argument regarding the "mutual" relationship between a parallel society and the caste society which is discussed in chapter 3. Parts Two and Three consist mostly of background essays which are important for establishing the historical context of my argument. In particular I regard chapter 6, the account of the religious disputes between the orthodox and heterodox establishments that occurred in the Medieval period, as crucial to the development of my argument, which has at its centre the religious and social significance of the sannyasins in the Tamil tradition. Part Four illustrates my thesis through a study of Protestant activities in the nineteenth century and the concomitant Hindu responses.

PART ONE

IDEOLOGY

CHAPTER 1

THE HINDU CONCEPTION OF WORLD PROCESS, DHARMA, AND SOCIETY

The Hindu civilization with which Tamil Sri Lanka is closely associated, is often described in popular as well as scholarly literature as peculiarly open to influences outside itself. The Hindu tradition is here portrayed as eclectic, choosing concepts and values from many sources to create an integrated world view. Such an interpretation cannot, however, be taken as an accurate reading of Hindu history, for one could argue that the most determining factor in its history is the endurance and persistence of the style and pattern of thought often called Hinduism. Despite internal changes and external invasions, Hinduism is heir to a way of thinking, a way of living, and a way of understanding the world. From this perspective, Hindu civilization constitutes a universe in itself that differs in many fundamental ways from other civilizations.

It is possible to identify a cluster of ideas that underlie Hindu civilization; they are kala, karma and samsara, dharma, suddha and subha. These ideas might also be described as the basic fabric of classical Indian religious thought. Throughout the ages this cluster of ideas has

remained characteristic of Hindu society and pervasive at all levels of culture.

1.1 Kala or Time:

The classical Hindu conception of time is in terms of cycles that repeat themselves endlessly – having affinities with the classical Greek view. According to the Hindu view kala is one of the four original forms of ultimate reality. It is something which exists and is without beginning and without end. Its cyclical character is thus emphasized.

In Sanskrit "epic mythology," which has been described as "the real Bible of the people,"[1] Visnu is represented as resting on maha sesha (the great snake), the symbol of time. Sesha or the snake which in its coils represents the cycles of time, has two names – ananta meaning endless and adisesha meaning the primeval remainder. At the time of pralaya or dissolution, when the whole cosmos is reabsorbed into Visnu, it is kala which is the instrument of this process and it alone remains till the last of the world is in Visnu, who is therefore called Seshin, "one who has the last remainder of Time."[2] The Visnu Purana declares, "The deity of Time is without beginning and his end is not known."[3] The snake symbol illustrates how time moves in cycles

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[1] J. N. Farquhar, An Outline of Religious Literature of India (London: Oxford University Press, 1920) 36

[2] See K. N. Aiyar, The Puranas in the Light of Modern Science (Madras: 1916) E. W. Hopkins, Epic Mythology (Strassbourg: Trübner, 1915) 189ff.

[3] Visnu Purana bk.I:2, trans. H. H. Wilson (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1961) 11

within cycles, all of immense duration conceived in terms quite beyond the scope of human imagination. It gives human history a setting not of thousands of years but of thousands of millions of years. Human history being a part of the cosmic process is moreover infused with the principle of deterioration, determining that its movement is towards pralaya or dissolution.[4] According to the Visnu Purana, Hari in his manifestation as kala was responsible for infusing the principle of deterioration and no human action can prevent it reaching its necessary end.

Within this process world history is divided into four yugas or ages, each declining successively. The present age is kali yuga, Age of Strife, when the world is at its worst. It is the last age in which righteousness has given way to unrighteousness, where "dharma" is "only one footed", allowing humankind to go towards its inevitable "annihilation."[5]

Time, therefore, personified as a deity, expresses an omnipresent power manifested in the deteriorating nature of the whole cosmos. It is this sense of time that caused Bhartrihari, the great Sanskrit poet who is said to have lived in the seventh century, to pay homage to the power of time:

> Great was the king
> With his circle of courtiers,

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[4] Visnu Purana bk. 1:2, bk. 6:1, Wilson, 41, 487

[5] K. Klostermaier, A Survey of Hinduism (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press 1989) 80, 122; R. Lannoy, The Speaking Tree (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) 288

The counselors at his side,
The ladies' moon-like faces,
The host of haughty princes,
The bards and their tales –
But we submit to time,
Which swept them all from power
to the path of memory [6]

Nothing is more indicative of the all-encompassing nature of time than that gods, no less than humans, are part of the eternal cycles. The gods, as a famous hymn in the Rg Veda[7] puts it, are this side of creation. There is no dividing line between the human and the divine. It means nature, humanity and god belong to a whole, all inseparably bound in the movement of time.

The view that all reality including gods and humans are somehow bound up with the outstreaming flow of cyclical time has important implications for the Hindu understanding of the cosmos. If the plurality of gods too must participate in the field of constant change, to which the entire cosmos and natural processes are subject, then the gods cannot be regarded as the origin of all things. The idea of an exclusive Creator God responsible for good and evil is alien to Hindu thought. By the same logic the idea of unrepeatable events or unique historical avatars is also excluded by the cyclical conception of time. According to the Hindu concept of kala, the only constant

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[6] Bhartrihari, trans. Barbara Miller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 123, Poem 169

[7] The Rig Veda trans. Wendy D. O'Flaherty (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1983), 37-40

phenomenon, the only empirical reality, is dynamic change, and change itself has no ultimate significance.[8]

1.2 Karma and Samsara.

Closely related to this idea of time is the second great concept of classical Hindu thought – karma, the belief that every action, whether mental or physical, of necessity produces an appropriate result. Karma expresses sequentially that which is perceived retrospectively as kala, the sentiment of uncertainty, of impermanence, of the transience of life. The two concepts are in fact used almost interchangeably in the classical understanding of death. In the Upanishads phenomenal life is perceived as death, the creator and destroyer of all that is.[9] Death, especially in the form of re-death, is the greatest evil that threatens human existence.[10] The most important synonym for death in the Upanishads is kala, time. Everything created by time must also find its end in time. Only that which is not born from death-time, the atman, is not liable to die. The concept of karma expresses the same thought sequentially, that phenomenal life is a movement from death to re-

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[8]The consequence of this view is reflected in the indifference towards chronology, that is, towards events determined by human decisions. It is perhaps the vastness of the cosmic process – in which human history would be swallowed up – that accounts for this Hindu attitude. The highest goal for the individual is to escape from the coils of time. Such an ideal is designated jivamukta, the one who is liberated from time.

[9] Brhadaranyaka Upanisad IV, 4, 1-7

[10] Ibid., I, 2, 7

death – a lineal cumulative process. To escape from the anguish of time then is to escape from karma and its effects.

Literally, karma is simply the deed done, work performed. But the deed is not terminated when a certain action comes to an end. The accomplished deed continues to exert its influence, even without the will and activity of the doer. Karma is thus able to determine the fate of the soul even beyond death.

Karmic deeds being cumulative, they accumulate like a bank account for later use. The karma acquired in this birth, good or bad, works toward a future birth; and the karma of former births is worked out in the present birth. At the time of death the deeds and thoughts of the previous life are preserved and cling to the atman, and the quality of their deeds determines the form of the atman's rebirth on earth. In view of the endless repetition, rebirth itself becomes part of an endless chain of existence in the form of god, human, animal, or demon. This chain of existence, described also in terms of the vicious cycle of death and re-death, is known as samsara.

Karma apart from being a cosmic force, causally accounts for the wheel of existence, samsara. It is this observation that led Max Weber to assign the concept of karma the distinction of being the most airtight response extant to the question of theodicy:

> karma doctrine transformed the world into a strictly rational, ethically - determined cosmos; it represents the most constant theodicy ever produced in history[11]

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[11] M. Weber, The Religion of India, The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism (New York: Free Press, 1958) 121

For "the devout Hindu" this intellectualist explanation for the imperfections of the world was deemed meaningful, and therefore, according to Weber, the belief in karma "burdened his conduct."[12] The doctrine as a result became linked to "the individual's social fate in the societal organization and thereby to the caste order."[13] It meant that inequality of status and privilege at birth is the consequence of ethical conduct in previous lives, and is thus accounted for by viewing the world as an impersonal cosmos of ethical retribution.

The twin concepts karma and samsara, from this perspective, may be viewed as ideologically[14] welding the social system and Hindu religion together. Karma on the one hand is about compensation for good and evil (literally, deed and the result of deed); samsara on the other hand stands for the doctrine of rebirth in a social state (caste) appropriate to the karmic legacy.

1.3 Dharma.

The fourth and perhaps the most socially significant of all Hindu concepts is dharma. It has been given diverse meanings in various Hindu schools of thought, but is generally used in a socio-ethical sense to mean duty or conduct. The term dharma consists of three categories:

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[12] Ibid., 121

[13] Ibid., 119

[14] Although, ideologically the twin concepts appear rigid and determinist, soteriologically they appear in a different light. The Upanisads, for instance, claim that they have found a way to deal with karma, that could even neutralize it.

the cosmic dharma, the principle of harmony pervading the entire universe; the caste dharma (varnasrama-dharma); and svadharma, the personal moral conduct of the individual. The cosmic, social, and individual all blend in the concept of dharma. In its totality of meaning dharma affirms the harmonious unity of the cosmic, social, and individual dimensions of life.

Dharma, because it relates both to social behaviour and to cosmological features, should be seen as a mediating concept, just as middle air mediates heaven and earth. This is acknowledged in the Sanskrit epics where gods and culture heros who personify dharma act as conciliatory mediators between the temporal and the spiritual, between the society and the cosmic order.

As a mediating concept, dharma, first of all, has its roots in the structure of the cosmos. It may be understood as an eternal, all-encompassing law or order. When violated, it destroys, and when upheld, it protects. For this reason, one can appreciate the frequently quoted statement from the authoritative Manu: dharma should not be violated lest the violated dharma destroy us.[15] Dharma because it is eternal and sacred, is its own justification: it does not depend on the personal authority of a god or priest who could make exceptions and pardon the transgressor. Dharma, like karma, is inherent in the structure of the cosmos, and does not allow for modifications. On the other hand, quite unlike karma, dharma guarantees the continued

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[15] Laws of Manu VIII.15, trans. B. Buhler, Sacred Books of the East vol. XXV (New Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1964) 255

existence of its people and land; as seen in the periodic appearance of avatars in order to rescue dharma from corruption and thus restore the country.[16]

Secondly, dharma is a socio-ethical order modelled on the cosmic which serves to protect its people as an "ark" against "the deep darkness of samsara."[17] Phenomenal life or samsaric life is a ceaseless struggle between dharma and adharma, in which dharma always protects and in the end triumphs over the forces of darkness, lust, and evil. In this respect, the great epic poem, the Mahabharata emphasizes the harmony that results from following one's own dharma and also the consequences of failing to follow one's class obligation.

Manusmrti is by far the most important authority on the laws and obligations of socio-ethical dharma. The promise is held out to the individual who follows all the rules laid down in Manu's law book that he will obtain "fame in this world and after death unsurpassable bliss."[18] Manu claims that these laws and obligations are in turn rooted in "the Veda in its entirety, the traditions (smrtis) fixed by men conversant with the Vedas, the customs of righteous people and self-contentment (atmanastusti)."[19] The same work also excommunicates

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[16] For example, Krsna in the Gita

[17] Paul Younger, Introduction to Indian Religious Thought (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972) 37

[18] Manu II. 9, 31

[19] Ibid., II.6, 30

as nastikas those who place their own reasoning above the authority of tradition.[20]

The dharma of the Manusmrti is geographically defined by flowing rivers, that symbolize trajectories of cosmic forces:

> That land, created by the gods, which lies between the two divine rivers Sarasvati and Drishadvati, the (savages) call Brahmavarta. The custom handed down in regular succession (since time immemorial) among the (four chief) castes (varna) and the mixed (races) of that country, is called the conduct of virtuous men. ..... That land where the black antelope naturally roams, one must know to be fit for the performance of sacrifices; (the tract) different from that (is) the country of the Mlekkhas (barbarians). Let twice-born men seek to dwell in those (above mentioned countries); but a Sudra, distressed for subsistence, may reside anywhere.[21]

The social order envisaged here on this land is the division of the society into four varnas – literally, colours. The actual origin of the class idea is obscure, although its possible association with slavery cannot be excluded. One thing that is certain is that by the time the Brahmanas were composed in the late Vedic period, the varna ideal had become fully developed. The sacred texts emphasize that the origin of the four-fold division of the society is divine, not human, rooted in the structure of the cosmos. The implication being that the right ordering of the society is an ideological concern. In other words, the social order is co-terminous with the law of the universe.

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[20] Nastikas, were in practice the Buddhists and Jains, followers of non-Vedic religions. Manu, II. 11

[21] Manu, II. 17, 18, 23, 24

Hierarchy and interdependence are the fundamental features of a society conceived as an extension of the cosmic order. According to the Rg Veda the society modelled on the cosmic Brahman, is a giant organism, in the image of the human body: the Brahman is the head, the Ksatriya its arms, the Vaisya its trunk, the Sudra its feet(Rg Veda 10.90.11-12). The text expressly states that no part of the whole may claim exclusive importance over the others. Collaboration and exchange of services are the essence of this organic view of society, in which the various organs of the Purusa body-image are related in structural consistency.

The social hierarchy conceived as the varna system was legitimated by the law of karma. The Brahmans were born into the highest class on account of karma accumulated over their past lives. Lesser karma resulted in lower births. Birth as a Sudra was designed to atone for past sins. The three upper classes alone were eligible for initiation and the other samskaras (sacraments).[22] In being designated the "twice-born" they had attained a level of purity not to be attained by the Sudras. These religious distinctions within the varna system offered a basis for the regulation of intermarriage and commensality.

Under the all-encompassing rule of dharma the structure of life of the individuals belonging to the upper, "twice-born", classes was divided into four stages (asramas) and four ends (purusarthas). Such divisions were based on the assumption that not only did individuals

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[22] Ibid., 27ff.

differ in their needs and capabilities according to their class but also according to their particular stage and aim in life.

The first stage of brahmacarya is devoted to learning the tradition, normally terminating with the marriage of the student. Thereafter he enters the second stage, grhastya, the life of a householder, which is devoted to enjoyment of life and the duties associated with the care of the family and the aquisition of artha, material wealth. The next two stages are devoted to spiritual pursuits. At the third stage of vanaprasthya, the householder was supposed to hand over his worldly business to his sons and become a hermit meditating in the forest. And in the final stage of sannyasa, he can completely renounce society and become a homeless ascetic, who possesses nothing and desires nothing but liberation from the body.[23]

The four successive stages of life of the high class individual were correlated to the four ends of life. The four legitimate ends to be pursued were dharma (duty), artha (material gain), kama (sensual enjoyment), and moksha (liberation).[24] The "stages" and "ends," it needs to be recalled, differed according to class. Kama, sensual enjoyment, was defined very differently for a Brahman student for example, than it was for a member of the warrior class. Overarching all these classes with their "stages" and "ends" of life was dharma, the

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[23] Klostermaier, 320-321

[24] Younger, Introduction, 48

essential element that made them all work together producing a harmonious totality.

It needs to be emphasized here that the ideal social order depicted in these texts represents the dharmasastra tradition, being a typical Brahman view of society.[25] The Brahman authors of this tradition elevate the Brahman priest to the position of the preserver and protector of the universe by means of sacrifice.[26] The duties of all varnas are spelt out in such a way as to strengthen the authority of the Brahman. The Brahmans are to study and to teach the Veda, to sacrifice for themselves and for others, to give and to accept alms. The Ksatriyas on the other hand are to protect the people by means of their arms and to offer gifts to Brahmans.

The Ksatriya view represented by the arthasastra tradition posed an important challenge to the Brahman view of society. Eventually, the Brahman ideology gained ascendency over the Ksatriya, and it is that victory of the Brahman that led to the separation of status from power in the varna system. As Louis Dumont has pointed out:

> Hierarchy culminates in the Brahman, or priest; it is the Brahman who consecrates the king's power, which otherwise depends on force (this results from the dichotomy). From very early times, the relationships between Brahman and kings or Kshatriya are fixed.

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[25]The Brahman's view of society is also repeated in other important works. The Bhagavad Gita, despite some inconsistencies, reflects the dharmasastra tradition. The need to fulfil svadharma, to stick to one's class duties irrespective of the immediate consequences, for the sake of the well-being of the whole order, appears to be the central message of the Gita, provided that it is read as it was intended, in the context of the Ksatriya war.

[26] Manu I.98-101

> While the Brahman is spiritually or absolutely supreme, he is materially dependent; while the king is materially the master, he is spiritually subordinate.[27]

Dumont links this form of relationship between status and power to two superior "human ends," dharma (duty, action conforming to the cosmic order) and artha (material gain, power), where the latter legitimates only within the limits set by the former. Together, they define the religious nature of all social activity, symbolized in the "gift" to Brahmans: material goods in exchange for spiritual good. Consequently, material goods become transformed into values.[28] Since the Brahman represents the apex of religious status, all exchange of services revolves around his pivotal role. The king is guardian of all material wealth. The Brahman priest is the microcosm of the cosmic Brahman. The religious and economic unity of the society is thus inseparably linked to the cosmic order.

It would follow from Dumont's analysis of the Hindu social order that the core of the varna system is the distinction between Brahman and Ksatriya, or between status and power. It is a social order defined and legitimised by the supreme ritual status of the Brahman priest – the "eternal incarnation" of dharma.[29] The pivotal role of

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[27]Contributions to Indian Sociology, 5 (October1961): 35; Homo Hierarchicus (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 259

[28]Dumont, Ibid., 35

[29]Manu I. 98f.

Brahmans in Indian history moreover ensured that the varna system would become virtually "universal" throughout the land.[30]

The varna system, mediated by dharma, is, however, distinct from the caste system which is verifiable by direct observation. Varna is in this sense an ideological view of social reality. As such, varna is a model of the society that is prior to its concrete manifestation.

1.4 Suddha (purity) and Asuddha (pollution)

While the core of the varna system is the distinction between status and power, the core of the caste system is the distinction between purity and impurity. The caste system, unlike the varna system, is the empirical society that can be observed. It is an undisputed fact that the Hindu society pays exceptional attention to purity and pollution. The ideas of purity and pollution are extensively treated in the scriptures and the law books. To understand, in fact, the Hindu concern with purity and impurity, systematically and meaningfully, it is essential to refer these practices to the underlying structure of Hindu thought. As Mary Douglas pointedly stated, "the only way in which pollution ideas make sense is in reference to a total structure of thought."[31]

Classical Hindu thought, as already noted, is holistic, in which the trajectories of cosmic forces, symbolized by moving planets and flowing rivers, and human lives are all interconnected. The

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[30]Dumont, Homo 73

[31]M. Douglas, Purity and Danger (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), 41

movement is generated by the all-determining kala or time. Kala also accounts for the inter-section of the trajectories of human lives and astral bodies, which is experienced as significant events – such as birth, marriage, death and so on.

The impact of kala on events is reflected in everyday language by the use of the terms auspicious time (subha kala) and inauspicious time (asubha kala). Auspicious time and inauspicious time in Hindu thought are said to have beneficent (subha) and maleficent (asubha) effects. Anticipating the effects of kala on their lives, the Hindus would first consult astrologers, priests or almanacs to find out the auspicious or inauspicious moment or time to ensure well-being and maximize success or happy consequences. The effects of kala pervade all aspects of life. Even

> grace and merit are insolubly and divinely linked with time. Therefore, it is essential to know about the auspicious time; the astrologer, conversant with the movement of celestial bodies and their various influences, is indispensable for the average Hindu in all important situations.[32]

While kala determines the time and place of an occurrence, causing it to be auspicious or inauspicious, every such event carries good or bad karma, which is believed to permeate life and all its contacts with purity or pollution. Nothing in fact is impermeable to pollution: no person, no thing, no act; and the avoidance of pollution is a major preoccupation in Hindu social life. Pollution itself varies in degrees. An inauspicious event such as the birth of an Untouchable

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[32]Klostermaier, 309,Younger, Introduction, 36

diffuses permanent pollution, which means it cannot be neutralized by religious rituals; however, the pollution that follows death is less severe. Pollution, once it is generated by an event, can be transmitted through a variety of means, through physical contact; through the medium of air, water, food, and material objects; and also through bodily substances such as human saliva and excreta, and animal carcasses. Most of the effects of pollution on human lives can be dealt with by purificatory rites. Bathing, especially in sacred rivers, is the most common of these rites. When these rites are performed at the propitious or auspicious moments, their effect is maximized.

The Hindu preoccupation with purity and pollution is also reflected in everyday speech (ordinary language), in the use of the words suddha and asuddha, (Tamil equivalent, cuttam and acuttam). In their complex usage, suddha and its opposite asuddha do not refer to events as such, but are "attributes of animate beings, inanimate objects and places with which a human being comes into contact in the course of everyday life."[33] The high degree of consistency in the usage moreover indicates that pollution and purity are not a matter of mere hygiene. In their daily concern with pollution, for example, the Hindus are frequently preoccupied with who may receive food and water from whom without incurring pollution. Such concern arises from the perception that to receive food from another is to share, to a degree, in

[33]T. N. Madan, Non-Renunciation. Themes and Interpretations of Hindu Culture (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 58

that other's nature. The ideas of pollution and its opposite, purity, are for this reason related to social distinctions.

Evidence from the law books shows reference that a religious principle of social organization had been developed centuries ago, in which pollution rules were linked to caste gradation. The distinction between pure and impure that was at that time perceived as inherent in material objects offered the guiding principle for the construction of social hierarchy.[34] The consistent application of this principle and the consequent development of a fully fledged caste system as we know it, occurred later during the period of agricultural expansion.[35]

During the period of agricultural expansion that led to the assimilation of many non-peasant tribal groups, this Brahman-defined principle became useful for ranking and regulating the newly incorporated groups. As a principle of diversity it was highly suited for this purpose. Since pollution and purity were perceived as inherent in material objects, the principle offered a multiplicity of concrete criteria for grading the innumerable castes in terms of degrees of purity. The consistent application of this principle led to a holistic conception of caste, in which hierarchy was expressed in a code of relative purity and impurity in a continuously graded status order whose extremes are the Brahman at the top – the most pure of humanity – and the Untouchable at the bottom – the least pure of humanity.

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[34]Dumont, Homo, chap. 2

[35]See chapter 6 of this work: Emergence of Caste in the Medieval Age.

The opposition between the Brahman and the Untouchable is the most graphic demonstration of this principle. In a typical Indian village the Brahman and Untouchable are opposed in a number of ways that, according to Dumont, contribute to their purity and impurity. The Brahman lives in the centre of the village, and is "god on earth," while the Untouchable lives outside the village and is apparently excluded from religious life. The murder of a Brahman is as heinous a crime as the murder of a cow, while the Untouchable is the scavenger and the eater of dead cows. The Brahman purifies himself in order to approach the gods, and thus mediates between man and god. The Untouchable makes personal purity possible by removing the strongest sources of organic impurity, and the Untouchable mediates between man and the maleficent demons.

The opposition of Brahman and Untouchable, or of purity and impurity is also a complementarity. The "impurity of the Untouchable is conceptually inseparable from the purity of the Brahman." For "the execution of impure tasks by some is necessary to the maintenance of purity for others." In other words, without the Untouchables to take upon themselves the society's impurities there can be no Brahmans, and therefore no purity. Society is understood here as a totality made up of two unequal but complementary parts. From this perspective, the Brahman and the Untouchable do share a common task: the spiritual security and well-being of all.

In this holistic conception of caste based on the distinction between purity and impurity, social changes are by no means excluded.

Social changes instead become institutionalized by a process of structural replication. According to this view, the lower castes, including the Untouchables, when they are excluded, replicate.[36] That is to say they create among themselves an entire set of the institutions and the ranked relations from which they had been excluded by the higher castes by reason of their lowness. In his analysis of the linear cults of the Parimalai Kallar of South India, Dumont provides ethnographic data showing how orthodox cultural structures are replicated among a low and territorially isolated dominant caste.

Replication is the strongest indicator that caste is a model of unity, interdependence, and consensus. This does not mean that the system is free of strife and conflict; but it does mean that most disputes, including temple entry conflicts, from this perspective, are disputes about one's legitimate position in the hierarchy, not about the legitimacy of the system. Replication moreover allows Hindu social life to move along the vertical axis of purity – impurity; to which the caste system owes its existence. As such the structure of replication follows the general cosmic patterns mediated by the Brahman priest, which moves downwards and upwards, following the line of creation from dissolution to unity. Caste being so all-pervading has significantly influenced Hindu ethical life.

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[36]For a definition of the term 'replication' see Michael Moffat, An Untouchable Community in South India. Structure and Consensus (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 5, 29

Conformity to caste-rules which regulate the caste members' life in every minute detail is considered the supreme virtue, and a violation of caste-rules, even if committed accidently and involuntarily, may result in dire consequences. Conformity to caste-rules implies avoidance of pollution, and therefore, a violation would incur pollution, which in turn would lead to a decline in ritual status. The pollution incurred is moreover contagious, and for this reason, the wrong conduct of one individual can have a chain-effect on others, particularly on the innocent members of one's household. In view of such adverse consequences on the group, the caste society cannot permit the individual much freedom in the regulation of his or her life.

Caste-morality recognizes no universal morality equally applicable to all human groups; it is based on the assumption that humanity is composed of groups of different nature (guna) and status. There are thus differences in the socio-moral codes of different castes. Moral conduct permissible for members of one caste, can be wrong for those of another. This leads to a multiplicity of behavioural patterns in Hindu society and the acceptance of the concept of relativity of moral standards.[37] Different forms of marriage, such as monogamy, polygamy and polyandry, can be considered equally legitimate under appropriate social conditions. This acceptance of the relativity of moral

[37]I. Karve, Hindu Society - an Interpretation (Poona: Deccan College, 1961) 87-90. Even that which is called evil is a manifestation of Brahman, and thus has a right to exist alongside the good in the world.

ideas, should, however, not be associated with a high degree of freedom of choice. As no one can choose the caste to which one belongs, there is also no possibility of giving preference to the one or another set of caste-rules for the regulation of one's personal conduct. The caste system then requires the co-existence of two opposing attitudes: one of extreme intolerance regarding any deviant behaviour on the part of the members of one's own in-group, and great tolerance in regard to the conduct of members of other castes. The ethical code of this system does not "prescribe an attitude of personal interest and sympathy for persons standing outside the narrow circle of kinsmen and caste-fellows."[38] The Hindu is thus allowed to view the behaviour of those below, above and outside his or her group with indifference. He or she takes it for granted that they observe customs different from one's own. Such divergence, including the coexistence of morality and immorality, of truth (sat) and falsehood (asat), seems neither shocking nor even undesirable, "but inherent in the divine world order, which provides for the division of humanity into groups of different status and value."[39]

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[38]C. von Furer-Haimendorf, South Asian Societies (New Delhi: Sterling Publishers PVT Ltd., 1979), 177

[39]Ibid., 176

CHAPTER 2

THE CHRISTIAN CONCEPTION OF WORLD PROCESS, HISTORY AND SOCIETY

The foregoing analysis showed that Hindu thought is holistic, an heir to a unique way of thinking, and that it constitutes a universe in itself. The idea of God, it was noted, is not central to this universe. God in Hindu thought is not almighty. Beside the gods stands primeval matter, while above there are the eternal cosmic laws. God is merely the servant of yet higher laws. These regulative laws do not "rule the world from without according to their own imposed schemes, but are immanent in all cosmic phenomena and processes." Hindu thought for this reason is "consistently reluctant to acknowledge the pre-eminence of any unique, original, eternal and active spiritual principle, that is to say of any creator of the empirical world."[1]

Christianity on the other hand represents a dualistic system of thought that differs in many fundamental ways from Hinduism. There are three important ideas that define Christianity as a dualistic theological system, and which contribute to the development of a

[1]Betty Heimann, Indian and Western Philosophy, A Study in Contrasts (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1937), 29-45

historical Christian distinctiveness. The understanding of God as Creator (Elohim), and as the active Redeemer (Yahweh), and of humanity as a participant in redemptive history as a covenant people, provides for an internally coherent Christian world view. All three concepts are biblically based, but their later historical developments are no less significant. The notion of covenant, for instance, was important to the English Puritans in their struggle for emancipation from existing ecclesiastical and political structures.

A study of Christian missions to Europe, Asia, and Africa will show that the Christian conception of God played a crucial role in formulating an alternative vision of the world. It is often in a missionary context that the idea of God as the sole arche of the world was consistently affirmed. Such an idea for the early Christians meant that God was no longer conceived as ontologically intertwined with the world as he was in Stoicism and most contemporary cosmologies in the Greeco-Roman world. Nor was he the active principle in relation to a passive principle. God was independent of the world as its Creator – its sovereign as well as its beginning. The Christian conception clearly implied a different view of the origin of things and a different estimate of the material world. Early missionary-Christianity's conception of God thus became a fundamental factor in the development of Christian distinctiveness, which also made Christianity self-consciously in confrontation with contemporary cultures.

At a remarkably early phase missionary Christianity developed a coherent and distinct world view with respect to some fundamental characteristics of Mediterranean cosmologies, which were variations on the idea of the eternity of a divine world revolving through infinite aeons. In his work The Refutations of all Heresies, Hippolytus, Bishop of Portus, a disciple of Irenaeus, provides his own picture about the historical roots of the idea of eternal returns as he began to discuss Democritus' cosmology, where the innumerable parts of an infinite world were seen to be in a perennial process of creation and dissolution. Democritus, he points out, propounded his system after "conferring with many gymnosophists among the Indians, and with priests in Egypt, and with astrologers and magi in Babylon." This vision of the world seemed to contrast sharply with the perspective of the Creator God. In his concluding section, Hippolytus thus summarizes the two contrasting positions as follows:

> The first and only (one God), both Creator and lord of all, had nothing coeval with Himself, not infinite chaos nor measureless water, nor solid earth.... nor refined spirit...But He was One, alone in Himself. By an exercise of His will He created things that are, which antecedently had no existence except that He willed to make them.[2]

Not surprisingly, it is in such an ideological encounter that the Christian distinctiveness became fully developed. The ideological

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[2]Hippolytus, The Refutation of all Heresies Bk.10, ch.XXVIII, The Ante-Nicene Fathers: The Writing of the Fathers down to A.D.325 vol.5 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1986) 150; For further discussion of Hippolytus' cosmology see S.L. Jaki, Science and Creation: From eternal cycles to an oscillating universe (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1986) 166-167

encounter first crystalized in Alexandria, the chief focus of cultural activity during the first and second centuries A.D. It is there that one witnesses the emergence of the first school of Christian thought, with the African theologians Clement and Origen as its leading representatives.

2.1 Elohim: One God, Creator of All

The book of Genesis presents two accounts of creation. The account of Genesis 1 affirms a radically monotheistic universe, by deliberately purging the cosmic order of all gods and goddesses. The account begins with the declaration that God is Elohim, the Creator of all, and thus sets the stage for clearing the universe of its polytheism, syncretism and idolatry. The affirmation of Genesis 1.1 in this sense, already contains within itself an implicit denial of the gods that inhabited the various regions of nature; the gods of sun, moon, and stars; the gods of sky, earth and water; the gods of light and darkness, animals and fertility. This becomes clearer in the following verses that deal with the six-day creation account. Each day of creation takes on another set of divinity in the pantheons of the day and declares that these are not gods at all but creatures, creations of the one true God who is the only one.

The monotheistic emptying of nature of its many resident divinities is always followed by the affirmation of the goodness of creation. Nature is thus demythologised and de-divinised, declared to be good, and placed under ultimate divine sovereignty. Finally, in

Genesis 1:26f, human existence too is emptied of any intrinsic divinity, while at the same time all human beings, from the pharaoh to the slaves, are granted a divine likeness. In that divine likeness, all human beings are given the royal attributes of dominion over the earth and of priestly mediation between heaven and earth.

Since every nation surrounding ancient Israel, including the superpowers, Egypt and Babylon, were polytheistic, the radical affirmation of one Creator-God and the dismissal of the various pantheons of the day, contributed to a radical shift in the (polytheistic) cosmologies of the day, a shift from the imagery of procreation to that of creation, from a genealogy of the gods to a genesis of nature. For the first time the natural order was allowed to become natural rather than supernatural. Just as nature becomes natural, so also time and history are no longer intimately related to the movements of gods and goddesses or of stars and planets but are given freedom to move and exist in human and natural terms. They too are declared to be created by God and therefore good. By virtue of creation, events in time are worthy of attention, even though they are transient.

In engaging the polytheistic cosmogonies of the surrounding cultures, Genesis 1 thus affirms faith in one transcendent, Creator God, for whom no cosmic region is assigned, no biographical details are offered.[3] Elohim is not restricted in his presence, power and authority in a way that the gods and goddesses would be. Marduk of Babylon or Re of Egypt may rise to supremacy in the pantheon, may absorb the

[3]cf. Isaiah 40:12-13,18, 21-23

functions of other gods, but they were still national deities whose presence was circumscribed.[4] The Creator-God, because he is radically transcendent, is also immanent, interacting with the world at every level. In the words of the Apostle Paul, this God is, therefore, "Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all."[5]

2.2 Yahweh: One Lord, Redeemer of All Peoples

The second creation account in Genesis 2:4 and following, is as monotheistic and as critical of idolatry as the first account, but here there is a shift in focus from cosmos to history. The first account, by desacralising nature and humanity, offers a basis for the second. As such, a corollary to the Hebraic faith in one God and Creator of all, is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of Moses and the Exodus, in other words, the one who acts in human history.[6] The term used for God in Genesis 2:4ff is Yahweh. Yahweh is seen as a person, actively involved in human history, able to enter into personal relationships and the closest is that of the Father.[7]

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[4]"The essential point in the Babylonian theme is the victory of Marduk over the savage earlier gods, and the cosmogony is a part of the theogony; in the Bible, the essential point is the creation of the world, and cosmogony is divorced from theogony." Paul Ricoeur, The Symbolism of Evil, (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 203

[5]Ephesians 4:6 (NIV)

[6]As such he is also known as the God of the Covenant: "The God of the Bible is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; that is, the God of the Covenant, or a God who freely binds Himself to the welfare of mankind through the mediation of Abraham's progeny." Jaki, Creation, 139

[7]"God," The Illustrated Bible Dictionary vol.1 (Leicester: Tyndale House, 1988), 570

Yahweh in contrast with Elohim, is a proper noun, the name of a person, though that person is divine. Strictly speaking Yahweh in Hebrew is the only "name" of God. The name in Hebrew thought is a reflection of a person's character. In particular God's names such as Yahweh Shalom (the LORD is peace) and Yahweh Jireh (the LORD provides) are the designation of his attributes. Such personal titles are always given in the context of his people's needs: compassion in the presence of misery, long-suffering in the presence of ill-dessert, grace in the presence of guilt. All this suggests that Yahweh is a redeemer who enters into personal relationships with those who feel their need of him.[8]

Yahweh redeems by his acts, and history is the theatre of his activity. He thus chooses to reveal his name at the time of the Exodus when he liberated his people from slavery in Egypt. Since he is known by his redemptive acts, it may be more accurate to refer to the Bible as the Acts of God rather than call it the Word of God. The Bible is a story of redemption in which God appears as a dynamic being, introducing dynamic change, engaged as it were in the active direction of history. In the Hebrew narratives "Yahweh Elohim" is remembered as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in other words as the God who has been active in past history and who for this reason will also be the God of the future.

Yahweh's historical involvement with his people is moreover presented against a dark backdrop of a broken fraternity characterized

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[8]Ibid., 571f.

by continual conflicts between brothers. The history of the Old and New Testaments is dominated by hostility between brothers. In each generation brother attacks brother, while parents either suffer because they have no means of expressing their love in the situation or take sides with their favorite child. At the beginning of the story the eldest son of the first human pair murders his younger brother because of jealousy and denies that he is responsible for him. So we have Cain and Abel, only to be followed by Lot and Abraham; Ishmael and Isaac; Esau and Jacob; the eleven brothers and Joseph; Saul, Jonathan and David; Amon,Tamar and Absalom (11 Sam. 13); Jerusalem, Samaria and Sodom (Ezek.16); and finally, the eleven apostles and Judas. Biblical history contains a long list of brothers and sisters who are suspicious, jealous, aggressive, murderous towards one another, who consequently find themselves separated from the common heritage that bound them together.

Against this background, biblical history unfolds as the mission of God, missio Dei, in which the broken humanity is remade. Andre Dumas, in his work, Political Theology and the Life of the Church, points out how central and pervasive throughout the Bible is the theme of mutual relations between brothers. Reconciliation is always a costly and difficult task requiring time, patience and restraint – as the stories of Jacob and Esau, and of Joseph and his brothers illustrate.[9] Just

[9]Andre Dumas, Political Theology and the Life of the Church (London: SCM Press, 1978) 32-42

rule is seen as a divine instrument for establishing a just peace among brothers.

From an early stage, Yahweh's acts of restoration of brotherly relations point toward a future that would embrace the whole human family. It gradually becomes clear that Yahweh as the Creator and Lord of the whole world is as concerned with the nations as with Israel, and that he will ultimately bring into being a universal "fratriarchy," a supra-ethnic community on earth. The New Testament identifies the establishment of the Jerusalem community on the day of Pentecost as Yahweh's eschatological deed par excellence, which is seen as the fulfilment of global reconciliation promised in the Old Testament. As such the role of Ebed Yahweh (Is. 42:1f), the promised messiah became crucial to this interpretation, who is acknowledged as the one who presides at the messianic banquet of reunion (Matt. 22:1-14, Is. 2 :6-9)

The Pentecost marks the birth of Christianity. Christians throughout the world have continued to celebrate the day of Pentecost as a new beginning, a turning point in world history. It is celebrated as the beginning of a new messianic era of the justification of the godless, the forgiveness of sins and the reconciliation of brothers in enmity. Crucial to this memory is the establishment of the Jerusalem community that is understood in Christian thought as a pledge and sign and foretaste of God's intention to reunite the whole human family into a united fraternity.

2.3 Berit: Covenant People of God.

The two key-words in the Bible for covenant or alliance are Hebrew berit and Greek diatheke. Berit is found in the earliest records, and usually refers to the act or rite of the making of a covenant. It also refers to the standing contract between two partners. The idea of a covenant relationship between a god and his people is well attested through the history of the ancient Near East. It is a contract between two unequal partners. The Bible also uses this form of relationship to express Yahweh's relationship with his people. The covenant contracted between God and his people involved certain promises from God and certain obligations on the people.[10]

From a biblical perspective the covenant between God and his people belongs to a history in which the relationship is frequently broken and reaffirmed. That history with all its human failures and resultant uncertainties is, however, purposefully shaped by a series of divine initiatives and human responses. The covenant(s) with Abraham, Moses, David, and Jesus Christ were ratified for the purpose of creating a people set apart for service. Primarily they were to serve the marginal in their midst: the orphan, the widow, the poor, and the stranger. Whenever the people of God renew their covenant with Yahweh, they recognize that they are renewing their obligations to the victims of society.

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[10]N. H. Snaith, The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1946) 135ff.; "Covenant", Bible Dictionary, 326-332; S. L. Jaki, "The Beacon of the Covenant", Creation, 138-161; L. Newbigin, "Politics and the Covenant", Theology 84 (September 1981): 356-363

Also, in God's ultimate purpose the covenant people are called to participate in the missio Dei to the whole world. In the New Testament the covenant people are seen as the divine instrument for the inclusion of all nations (Matt. 28:19) and all nature into a unity with Christ as its head (Col. 1:20). To realize this missionary goal the covenant people are called by God to display a prototype of the new humanity of his ultimate purpose. From this eschatological perspective the covenant people may be seen as a deliberate reflection of God's relation to humanity at large.

In biblical history, the divine affirmation "I am the LORD your God" served to define not only the identity of the chosen people of God but also their purpose in the world. This affirmation constitutes indicative declaration by which the members are "born" into or baptized into the community known as the people of God. They are now regarded as God's covenant partners invited to respond gratefully to the prior acts of undeserved love; they are summoned by an imperative to do God's will in gratitude for his grace. His will is to live as the people of God, as the new humanity on earth. It was to fit them for this purpose that a host of vertical and horizontal obligations formed part of the covenantal relationship.

It is evident that the covenant community draws its motivation and model for ethical life from the pattern of God's redemptive activity. The structure of the covenant shows that divine grace provides the main stimulus for a host of horizontal obligations. So for

instance the slaves and other vulnerable people must be treated generously because God treated Hebrew slaves with generosity in Egypt:

> Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens because you were aliens in Egypt.[11]

Social obligations include generosity to the poor, justice for workers, integrity in judicial process, considerate behaviour to other people, equality before the law for the immigrants, and other earthly social matters. This series of obligations in the book of Leviticus is presented with the constant refrain "I am the LORD" as if to say, "this is what I would require of you because it is what I myself would do."

In all the covenants it can be observed that God's character and his deeds are consistently understood as the pattern or paradigm for social ethics. God is presented as the exemplar and example for ethical life. What he has done out of compassion for his people as well as for the whole world is thus turned into motivation for consistent ethical behaviour. The motivation clause for this reason became the most characteristic feature of the covenant obligations.

For the Christians the summons to walk in God's way is exemplified in the "way of Jesus." The overall shape and character of Jesus' life – comprising his actions, attitudes and relationships as well as his responses, parables and other teachings – became the supreme paradigm to test the "Christ-likeness" of the same components of their own lives. In this respect, the Sermon on the Mount, apart from

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[11]Exodus 22:21

expressing the way of Jesus, provides the most detailed account of social life in the eschatological community of Christ.

For Jesus the quality of life in this community must reflect the very heart of God's character. The most succinct expression of this principle is found at the end of the Sermon: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48). The statement is a summary of his social teaching; which echoes a verse in Leviticus: "Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy" (Lev. 19:2), a command given in the context of the Mosaic covenant. The kind of holiness appears here in Jesus' teaching as a distinct messianic lifestyle that has also been regarded in circumstances as thoroughly practical.

In both the Old and the New Testaments it is possible to identify three key-terms, hesed, emeth and koinonia, that at once spell out the ethical requirements for the members of the covenant society and define their messianic lifestyle.

(i) Hesed

In Hebrew thought the idea of faithfulness comprises a trio of words of which the most significant is hesed. It is often translated as kindness or love, but it is more solid than those words suggest. It means one's abiding loyalty to his/her covenant, one's unshakable will to keep his/her promise. Snaith suggests 'covenant-love' as the nearest English equivalent. It is a two way word, and can be used of God and of human beings.[12]

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[12]Snaith, Distinctive Ideas, 119

Hesed is often found in association with the word covenant, and denotes an attitude of faithfulness which both parties to the covenant should observe. Hesed in this sense provides the basic framework for the establishment of covenant relationships. Faithfulness or covenant love, that abiding loyalty to one's covenant gives a person a fixed purpose as well as the motive for carrying out corporate responsibilities.

(ii) Emeth

Closely related to hesed is the term emeth, translated truth or faithfulness, a word that describes what is firm, unchangeable and trustworthy, from which is derived the word Amen, meaning "our Rock" – a favorite and early description of God in Israel. The Hebrew word emeth therefore has a strong personal and moral connotation that is clearly absent in the Greek equivalent, aletheia.

In Biblical thought the notion of truth in person always refers to a social or covenant relationship and means that a person characterized by emeth (faithfulness) is also reliable for others. This truth is demonstrative. The words and actions of a person are regarded emeth to the extent that they prove reliable. It is such occurrence of truth, of faithfulness, that justifies a confidence that has been bestowed on a member of the community.

This demand for consistency in human conduct – modelled on the divine conduct – accounts for the emergence of the historically cast idea of truth. Emeth in human conduct must occur again and again

and through constancy be projected into the future. True being is here understood as historical, having to demonstrate its reality through a history whose future is open.[13] In line with this logic the true identity of Jesus of Nazareth in the Gospel of Mark remains a secret throughout his public ministry and is disclosed only at the end when his messianic mission is vindicated through his death and resurrection. The reality in a person is known by what he/she does in space and time, comprising words and actions in relation to others.

Emeth also defines the historical character of covenant community, which effectively relativises the prevailing socio-political structures. At best, their role can only be considered provisional. In biblical times the community had passed through a tribal confederation, charismatic judges without a dynasty, a hereditary monarchy and the fragmentation of the kingdom, deportation, colonial dependence, wars of independence, and so on.

(iii) Koinonia

This is distinctly a New Testament term. 'Fellowship' is the usual translation of the Greek 'koinonia'. The fundamental connotation of the root 'koin' is that of sharing in something with someone. In the New Testament, koinonia relates to actual social and economic relationships between Christians who belong to a covenant community. It denotes a practical, often costly sharing in the social and

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[13]Anthony T. Hanson, Grace and Truth (London: SPCK, 1975); Wolfhart Pannenberg, "What is Truth?", Basic Questions in Theology vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), 1-27

economic demands of koinonia fellowship. Its effect was to encourage an intense awareness of corporate solidarity, binding members into a single community of brothers and sisters.

Some examples will make the point. At Pentecost, marking the birth of Christianity, the members of the new community, in devoting themselves to the fellowship (te koinonia), shared everything in common (Acts 2: 42,44) and ensured that nobody was in need (Acts 4:34). In 1 Timothy 6:18, the rich are to be commended to be "generous" (koinonikous). The same duty is laid on all Christians in Hebrews 13:16. Paul refers to his financial collection among the Greek churches for the aid of the Judean Christians as an act of fellowship (koinonian tina, Rom. 15:26), which he justifies on the grounds that if the Gentiles have shared (ekoinonesan) spiritual blessings from the Jews, they owe it to them to share material blessings (v.27). The same reciprocal principle applies in the relationship between teacher and the taught in Galations 6:6 (koinoneito). In commending the Corinthians for their eagerness to share in the financial koinonia collection (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13), Paul describes it as proof of their obedience to the gospel, implying that such concrete economic evidence of fellowship was the essence of a genuine Christian profession.

It is not coincidental that when Paul's own gospel was accepted as authentic in Jerusalem by means of the "right hand of koinonia", he immediately asked "to remember the poor" – as if in proof (Gal. 2:9,10). Koinonia is evidently the most visible fruit of redemption, a concrete expression of brotherhood in Christ; for the goal of redemption

through Christ is "sincere love for your brothers" (1 Pet. 1:22). In demonstrating a concern for the poor and needy (cf. 1 Jn. 3:17) koinonia expresses the ideal of equality (normally defined in terms of justice or righteousness) in both economic (cf. 2 Cor. 8:13-15) and social (Jas. 2:1-7) relationships. It is an equality expressed through mutual care, through relationships of mutual responsibility.

In the history of the covenant people the transition "from prophetic to apocalyptic eschatology" in the late sixth century B.C.[14] is highly significant because it led to the identification of hesed, emeth and koinonia as transcendent values that belonged not to this-age but to the coming age. Such identification implied that these values could only be proleptically present in a community that has already renounced this-evil-age. In inheriting the dualistic structure of the Jewish apocalyptic thought, the Christian communities of the first century, namely, the ekklesiai of Christ (Rom. 16:16), continued to emphasize world renunciation as the necessary condition for the realization of the divine order (cf. Lk. 14:26-27). Consequently, owing to this emphasis, the ekklesia became exclusive, "virtually the primary group for its members, supplanting all other loyalties."[15] Being baptized into Christ, that required the undertaking of a death ritual (cf. Rom. 6:4ff.), signaled for Pauline converts an extraordinarily thorough-

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[14]Paul D. Hanson, The Dawn of the Apocalyptic (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,1975) 16; Wolfhart Pannenberg, Revelation as History, (London: Sheed and Ward, 1969), ch.4

[15] W. A. Meeks, The First Urban Christians. The Social World of the Apostle Paul (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1983) 78

going resocialization through the articulation of transcendent values, whereby the believers in Messiah Jesus came to belong to a single, universal "ekklesia of God" (1 Cor. 10:32[16]; 11:16,22). This universal brotherhood found particular expression in the cultivation of hospitality among the virtues of the Christian common life. The Pauline letters show that ordinary Christians, Jews and Gentiles, travelling to another city could expect to find accommodation with fellow Christians in Laodicea, Ephesus, Corinth, or Rome.[17]

World renunciation and exclusivism which were essential characteristics of the earliest Christian communities, did not, however, make them into typical apocalyptic groups, sectarian and introverted, jealous in guarding their boundaries. This is because, the dualistic structure of Jewish apocalyptic thought was for the early Christians profoundly modified by the Christ-event. The death and resurrection of Christ marked the incursion of the future new age into the present age, and in consequence, the ekklesia of Christ was expected to live in the inescapable tension between the "already" and the "not yet," between joy and agony (2 Cor. 4:7-10); straining itself in all its activities to prepare the world for its coming destiny. In the midst of a "crooked and depraved generation" the Christians were to be "blameless and pure" to "shine like stars in the universe."[18]

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[16]The identification of "Jews and Greeks" with "the ekklesia of God" implies that the unity of the universal ekklesia is dramatically realised in the equality of Jew and Greek within the local ekklesia.

[17]Ibid., 109-110

[18]Phil. 2:15

Unlike the usual apocalyptic groups the ekklesia of Christ were vigorously committed to a world mission. It saw itself as "the sign of the dawning of the new age in the midst of the old, and thus the vanguard of God's new world, battling against the forces of evil and being beleaguered by them."[19] As a result the members did not withdraw into the desert, like the Essenes of Qumran:

> They remained in the cities, and their members continued to go about their ordinary lives in the streets and neighbourhoods, the shops and agora. Paul and the other leaders did not merely permit this continued interaction as something inevitable; in several instances they positively encouraged it.[20]

The evidence shows that the Pauline communities, although they remained exclusive, maintained significant "gates in their boundaries."[21]

Continued interaction between the people of God and the people of this world in this way contributed to momentous developments in the West. The small communities bearing "the marks of Jesus"[22] which articulated an alternative lifestyle gradually penetrated the mores of the larger society around them in the Mediterranean world. Their lifestyle as we saw combined intensive face-to-face interactions within disciplined local communities with supralocal networks of

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[19] J. C. Beker, Paul's Apocalyptic Gospel. The Coming Triumph of God (Philadelphia : Fortress Press, 1982) 41

[20] Meeks Urban, 105

[21] Ibid., 105

[22] Gal. 6:17

relationships. It is the resultant double identity that accounts for the social and even political success of Christianity in the age of Constantine. According to Adolf von Harnack, "It was this, and not any evangelist, which proved to be the most effective missionary."[23]

2.4 Some Comparisons

The foregoing discussion relating to the Hindu and Christian ideological systems may be summarized in the following theses.

(i) Hindus and Christians have different ideas of God or ultimate reality, and these ideas in turn locate and orient human beings differently within their social realities. In Hindu (holistic) thought God is one with the foundation of the cosmos in such a way that he belongs to the cosmos as its ground. God in Christian (dualistic) thought is distinct from his creation as one who acts freely and contingently. This means that for the Christian, the cosmos is not divine or part of God. In contraposition to the Hindu henotheistic view that the cosmos is an emanation of God, the Christian view affirms that God is transcendent and essentially different from the world.

(ii) In the Hindu scheme the cosmos is conceived of as being in a condition of continual flux; determined by the all-encompassing time. The process moves in cycles with no beginning or end. Gods, no less than human beings are inseparably bound to the eternal cycle. The cosmos in the Christian scheme belongs to the created, contingent and finite order that is maintained by divine faithfulness. Time in this

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[23] Quoted in Meeks Urban,108

finite contingent order is conceived of as a linear progression with a beginning and an end, where it moves under the control of a telos of divine faithfulness toward a finis. Moksa, the highest goal for the individual in Hindu thought, is deliverance from the coils of time. Time according to the Christian view is intimately bound up with human nature and destiny. The present time (kairos) is therefore decisive, that for which human beings are responsible.

(iii) The Hindu looks to nature as the locus of self-knowledge and understands the position of humanity in the cosmos by the strict application of the natural law of causality; in contrast the Christian looks to God in history, particularly his action in Jesus of Nazareth, to understand humanity's nature and destiny.

The application of the universal law of karma divides humanity into a religious hierarchy, with different classes controlled by norms of behaviour appropriate to their status in the hierarchy, or station in life. On the other hand the Christian conception of humanity as the bearer of the divine image recognizes the essential equality of all human beings before their Creator, who alone is the ultimate arbiter of human conduct.

(iv) For Hinduism, purity as well as impurity is perceived as inherent in material objects in the natural order; and the distinction between pure and impure provides the Hindu society with a multiplicity of concrete criteria for grading the innumerable castes in terms of degrees of purity. For Christianity, the unitary Creator alone exists as the very principle of purity and the ultimate source of moral

government. Implicit in this Christian view is a special moral sphere for humanity. The Hindu view on the other hand does not acknowledge a special moral sphere since humanity like all living beings is caught up in the same cycles of rebirth, and subject in the same way to the law of karma.

In corporate life the Christian understands the breaking of a right relationship in terms of the making of a right relationship, in other words in terms of a covenant. The Hindu understands impurity in terms of purity. The former is dealt with by confession while the latter is dealt with by rituals of purification, commonly by washing.

(v) The ideal social order depicted in the dharmasastra tradition is a social hierarchy conceived of as the varna system – with the Brahman at the top – legitimised by the law of karma, which is therefore an extension of the cosmic order. The core of the varna system is the distinction between Brahman and Ksatriya, or between status and power. Varna is an ideological view of social reality, prior to its concrete manifestation in the form of caste. The core of the caste system is the distinction between purity and impurity. Purity and impurity, because they are perceived as inherent in material objects, offer a multiplicity of concrete criteria for grading the innumerable castes.

The ideal social order portrayed in the Sermon on the Mount is an eschatological, global society that has its origin and destiny in the missio Dei, accomplished through God's redemptive acts in history. It manifests itself at the consummation of the divine mission when the

kingdom of this world becomes transformed into "the kingdom of God" (Rev. 11:15). The covenant society of Christ therefore exists messianically and proleptically in "the kingdom of this world" to the extent that the eschatological values – hesed, emeth and koinonia – are appropriated and practised by the covenant people of God. The covenant society is an egalitarian brotherhood, with its members sharing in the economic and social demands of koinonia fellowship.

(vi) Hindu and Christian societies function by replicating what is perceived as cosmic and historical patterns. Hindu society by replicating the way of cosmic Brahman, has made caste a model of interdependence and consensus. Replication of orthodox Brahman structures makes social changes institutionalized, contributing to an upward and downward movement along the purity - impurity axis. Christian society by replicating the way of God in history, particularly the way of the incarnate and crucified Christ (portrayed implicitly in the Sermon on the Mount), adopts a messianic lifestyle, consciously moving forward by subverting the present.

CHAPTER 3

SANNYASINS, PARALLEL SOCIETY AND THE PROCESS OF SOCIAL CHANGE

The Brahmanical ideology that regulates the caste society places a high premium on conformity, and does not regard individual freedom as valuable per se. Members of the society, particularly those at the top, are primarily concerned with the maintenance of their caste-status which depends on rigid observation of caste-rules. The observation of caste-rules generally means the avoidance of pollution which may adversely affect their ritual status in the hierarchy. The rules which prescribe the type of behaviour appropriate to caste-status thus tend to be negative rather than positive in character. Ritual status is to be maintained not so much by positive actions as by abstentions from many types of behaviour. It is by limiting their range of activities, by abstaining from a great variety of food, that the caste Hindus could expect to either preserve or raise their status in the hierarchy.[1]

This negativistic ethic informed by Brahmanical ideology emphasizes not dynamic action, originality and initiative, but austerity

[1] See section 1.4, 24f

and restraint, which are qualities esteemed and cultivated in the caste society. It is an ethic that does not favour social mobility, but rather, restricts the individual's choice in regard to residence, occupation, marriage and social contacts. The goal of this ethic is to extinguish all personal inclinations and to submit completely to the dharma of one's pre-ordained role.[2] The individual is not seen here as an independent agent, one guided less by subjective than by ascriptive values. One is a member of a tightly organized community, whose actions affect not only his own social status but also – owing to the contagious character of pollution – the status of those closest to him.

Yet, every caste Hindu has one possibility of freeing himself from the shackle of caste-rules and the need to consider the reactions of his caste-fellows. The Hindu can abandon caste society and caste status, and become a sannyasin or homeless wandering ascetic. In wearing the sannyasin's ochre robe and divorcing oneself from home, family and village, he is freed from the need to observe caste-rules and any other responsibility towards society. Indeed the kinsmen perform a kind of funeral rite, or sraddha, on behalf of the initiate, to indicate that the one who has become a sannyasin is dead to the family.[3] Once initiated the sannyasin is an individual outside-the-world, and should one return to the life of a householder, both he and his children would be

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[2] cf. Bhagavad Gita on niskama karma, ch. 2 ; R. Lannoy, The Speaking Tree (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 30f.

[3] R. Thapar, "Renunciation: The Making of a Counter-culture?", Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1979) 80-81; K. Klostermaier, A Survey of Hinduism (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 179f.

degraded to the status of Untouchables. It is therefore by discarding the bonds of conformity which society imposes on its members that one becomes a sannyasin, able to think and act as an individual and aim for personal liberation, the attainment of moksa.

The result is an opposition and an antithesis between the man of caste, "the man-in-the-world, who is not an individual" and the renouncer "who is an individual-outside-the-world."[4] In turning one's back on society, being concerned solely with the transcendent aim of moksa (release from the world), the renouncer stands as the archetypal dissenter, posing a threat to the dharmic order of the world. For one is then a living reminder of the transcendent value that disturbs the settled order. It is this disturbing quality of the renouncer that produced "a subdued hostility" to the institution of renunciation.[5] The ensuing "dialogue" between the two kinds of persons, the renouncer and the person of caste, must then be seen as the relationship and the interaction of two opposites.[6] It is not so much an orderly exchange as a conflict and an insoluble one at that; which is made particularly evident by "the totally contradictory rules of discipline applied to the householder and the renouncer."[7]

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[4]Louis Dumont, "World Renunciation in Indian Religions," Contributions to Indian Sociology 4 (1960) 47

[5]Ibid., 45

6Ibid.,37f

[7]R. Thapar, 80

Despite the chasm that separates the two, they clearly shared the same world, and have had to acknowledge each other's existence. It is this reality on the ground that gave rise to the mutual relations between the renouncer and the person of caste. The renouncer, though he or she has left the world behind in order to be consecrated to liberation, has therefore, through these relations, significantly influenced the society by the discovery of new ideas and the invention of new techniques. In this "dialogue", observes Dumont, initiative and innovation are on the side of the renouncer. He goes so far as to venture that "the agent of development in Indian religion and speculation, the creator of values, has been the renouncer." "Not only the founding of sects and their maintenance, but the major ideas, the 'inventions' are due to the renouncer whose unique position gave him a sort of monopoly for putting everything in question."[8]

The Brahman, the exemplar of the man-in-the-world, on the other hand, is a highly effective agent of integration and aggregation who, in the end, all but completely absorbs his rivals.[9] Vegetarianism and ahimsa are originally renouncer's values which the Brahman was compelled to borrow and integrate with his ethic so as to maintain his moral pre-eminence in the world. The great Brahman orthodox theoreticians and founders of orders, Sankara and Ramanuja, absorbed the sannyasins, while also remaining Brahmans.[10] Thus faced with

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[8]Dumont, World Renunciation, 47

[9]Ibid., 47

[10]Ibid., 47

this creative influence of the renouncer's thought and practice upon Hinduism, Dumont is led to the assertion: "The true historical development of Hinduism is in the sannyasic developments on the one hand and in their aggregation to worldly religion on the other."[11]

Dumont's speculations on the mutual relations between the renouncer and the caste society must be seen as an attempt to assess the contribution of the renouncer to Hinduism, by showing how renunciation transformed and fertilized Hinduism and how Hinduism reproduced structures and organizations first generated by the renouncer. But to appreciate fully how the renouncer, who in some fundamental sense is an enemy of caste, could have so deeply influenced Hindu society, it would be useful at this point to make a distinction between individual and communal renunciation. Orthodox Brahmanism had little difficulty in containing the challenge of individual renunciation. In dealing with the sramanas as individual ascetics, Hinduism, notes Dumont, adopted a containment policy of converting the renouncer's vocation to the last stage in the life cycle of the Brahman. In displaying the characteristic pattern of encompassment, "An individual religion based upon choice is added on to the religion of the group."[12] In this manner Brahmanism came to accept the sramana as an individual renouncer and recluse, by successfully limiting renunciation in its relation to worldly conditions.

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[11]Ibid., 47

[12]Ibid., 46

Brahmanism on the other hand was deeply resentful, indeed, hostile towards the Buddhist bhikkhus and Jain mendicants because it appreciated the fact that renouncers organized as a community and as a fraternity, were a major threat to the Brahman's beliefs and supremacy.[13] Communal renunciation, intended to endure for the life-time of a member, is a long step from the notion of individual renunciation. The renouncer, when he leaves the society at large, enters a special society "where one life-style, that of the householder, was substituted for by that of the community of monks, where the refuge of society was replaced by the refuge of the order and the monastery."[14] The special society was essentially a brotherhood of monks or a sisterhood of nuns, who through the adoption of a common disciplinary code and collective rituals not only marked themselves off from other groups, but also lent each other support in the pursuit of a common ascetic goal. The development of institutional structures became useful for the purposes of practising the ascetic mode of life, transmitting philosophical wisdom, and for making a missionary appeal to the lay public. As Horner has commented, the Jain and Buddhist monastic orders for both men and women "were strange growths, constitutionally alien to the soil of India, foreign to the mentality of the people. In spite of their genius for religion, refined by numerous and minute shades of belief and expressed in diversity of

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[13]S. J. Tambiah, "The renouncer's individuality and community," Way of Life ed., T. N. Madan (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1988), 317

[14]Thapar, Ancient, 81

forms, only the followers of Mahavira and Gautama formed themselves into communities of almspeople. Otherwise monasticism in India has never taken root."[15]

The creation of an "alternative or parallel society"[16] of renouncers, bound by a common disciplinary code often in contradiction to the caste-rules, must therefore be considered highly significant in the history of India. How would orthodox Hinduism with its characteristic genius of "including and hierarchising" new components, respond to this "heterodox" challenge? Would monasticism in time take root within the Hindu fold? How could the institutional structures developed by the "heterodox" movements for seemingly specialized pursuits, affect the life of the householder? The ensuing discussion, which will deal with the history of Sri Lankan Tamils, will address these basic questions in an attempt to assess the contribution of Protestant renouncers, organized as a community and as a fraternity, to the Hindu society at large. Early Protestantism too, it will be shown, was tinged with asceticism, drawing its main inspiration and example from the apocalyptic emphasis on renunciation leading to the creation of an alternative life-style before God.

The Protestants, however, were not the first of the "heterodox," missionary sannyasins to operate on the Tamil soil. They had been preceded by the Buddhist bhikkhus and Jain mendicants, whose

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[15]I. B. Horner, Women under primitive Buddhism: Lay women and Almswomen (London: G. Routledge and Sons, 1930) xxiii

[16]R. Thapar, 98; definition, 63

activities in early medieval South India had significantly influenced the development of Tamil Hinduism. This raises the possibility that the Protestant activities in the nineteenth century and its influence on Hinduism may well have their precedents and resonances in the antecedent Cola and Pallava eras. The next few chapters will follow this line of inquiry in order to understand and evaluate the social and religious significance of the sannyasin in the development of the Tamil tradition.

PART TWO

TRADITIONAL BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 4

A REVIEW OF SCHOLARLY INTERPRETATIONS

The richness and variety of South Asian social and religious life stems from a long history of social change and religious modification. As such it would be inadequate and misleading to describe and attempt to understand the social life from the standpoint of the recent colonial impact without also taking into account the earlier precedents. And yet, for a variety of reasons, it is the colonial standpoint that has dominated the nineteenth and twentieth century historical writings on South Asia, and these writings show a strong bias toward implanted colonial institutions and toward political, as opposed to social, change. The bias in turn has led the historians who author these writings to take a more macroscopic perspective and ignore the grass-roots social world or village – the focus of anthropologists.

In the opinion of the present writer neither Victorian writers nor contemporary historians, despite important differences, have given sufficient weight to the material and moral transformations of pre-colonial Tamil society. For the early Victorian writers, traditional society, characterized as rigid and superstitious, was deemed quite incapable of changing itself, but was now on the threshold of deep changes caused by the winds of individual conscience and scientific

thought. Marx and the first generation of socialists also described a sudden change but saw its cause as a material one. For them the basis of caste was the hereditary nature of the village economy, and it was that economy which would be blown apart by the railways and Lancashire exports. The picture was essentially the same for the Utilitarians and the Socialist historians of the nineteenth century, in that both held that Hindu society had undergone no significant change before British rule.

Writers in the second half of the twentieth century have dissented. Some modern writers have almost seemed to turn the earlier argument on its head by arguing that the subcontinent was condemned to stagnation by its subjection to colonial interests – that the society was frozen into caricatures of its feudal past by the colonial (Dutch and British) land revenue systems. Pre-colonial caste and religious practices were, according to this recent view, seen as fluid, eclectic and uncodified. In a seminal study called Social History of a Dominant Caste Society,[1] S. Arasaratnam has traced the main sources of the Vellalar dominated society as it emerged in Tamil Sri Lanka in the Twentieth Century to new economic and social elements introduced by the colonial powers. In his view it was a series of developments between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, which fundamentally altered the "balance of power shared by agricultural artisan and maritime castes representing the three sectors

[1]S. Arasaratnam, "Social History of a Dominant Caste Society: The Vellalar of North Ceylon (Sri Lanka) in the 18th Century," The Indian Economic and Social History Review, Vol. XVIII, (July - Dec. 1981), 377-391.

of the economy on which society was based."[2] Using Arasaratnam's argument, Bryan Pfaffenberger has so far provided the baldest statement of this view. After analyzing the Maviddapuram Temple entry conflict of 1968 he concludes:

> On the surface, one sees a "premodern" caste system and an "ancient" temple tradition in conflict with "modern" values and social change. Looking beneath the surface, however, one finds that this "premodern" caste system is actually a grotesque relic of a colonial plantation economy, a fundamentally unstable system that could be maintained only by the regular application of force.[3]

Yet in an earlier work, he had stated that the aim of the colonial economy was "not of transforming the indigenous social system, but rather of exacting from it as much profit as possible"[4]; pointing out that this indigenous system was premodern, composed of "pure and esteemed Brahmans," of a non-brahman "dominant agricultural caste"; of despised "Untouchable" labourers and a number of small, professional castes.[5] It was a system, he argued, based on shared religious belief and social consensus.[6] In the revised argument, which is dependent on Arasaratnam's work, it is clearly economic

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[2]Ibid., 378.

[3]B. Pfaffenberger, "The Political Construction of Defensive Nationalism: The 1968 Temple-Entry Crisis in Northern Sri Lanka", The Journal of Asian Studies, vol.49, no.1, (February 1990), 93

[4] B. Pfaffenberger, Caste in Tamil Culture: The Religious Foundations of Sudra Domination in Tamil Sri Lanka, (Syracuse; Maxwell School of Foreign and Comparative Studies, 1982), 36

[5]Ibid., 38

[6]Ibid., 25

considerations that become basic to one's understanding of the relationship between castes. Under colonial rule, this view states, changes in modes of production opened up new avenues to economic power and domination. The conditions in north Sri Lanka, it is pointed out, were peculiarly favourable to such developments. The presence of only "a few Brahman settlers in Jaffna" matched by "the absence of scrupulous concern over vellalar blood purity, were factors that significantly enhanced that process of Tamil social formation."[7]

Such recent historical formulations are, of course, based on an important observation that is undeniable. In the last two centuries the economy and the society, together with the political and legal frameworks in which they are situated, have experienced very great changes. On the other hand, at another level, at the level of religion and ritual, it is far from apparent that a similar radical change has occurred. Evidence would seem to suggest that these traditional features have persisted in spite of drastic changes at the material level, which may have therefore significantly influenced the shape of the society as it emerged at the end of the nineteenth century.

The main objection to Arasaratnam's work is its exclusive concentration on the study of material interests. In part this one-sided interpretation stems from a methodological limitation in his work. As an expert on Dutch power in Sri Lanka, he tends to rely on colonial documents even when he is trying to explain Tamil social formation. Many of his conclusions are at best conjectures drawn from the records

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[7]Arasaratnam, "Dominant Caste," 385-386

of Dutch colonial officers, and usually they involve no independent confirmation based on Tamil sources.

Even if we take the records of the colonial authorities as our source, the data they reveal is still open to a different interpretation from that of Arasaratnam's. The Dutch and British land-revenue policies, for instance, codify many local customs together into a unified Hindu law or Thesavalamai, and they also classify people into immutable castes through their ethnographic surveys and court procedures. Such records do then offer the historian grounds for finding an element of rigidity in the modern Tamil social system, but they do not satisfactorily account for the origin or the operation of that system.

These more recent scholars are then not as different from their Victorian predecessors as it first appeared, for in the final analysis both emphasize the disjunction between traditional and colonial societies. Some of the reasons for this emphasis are understandable. First, there is a remarkable paucity of information about Tamil Sri Lanka prior to Portuguese rule (A.D.1619-1658). Secondly, a retrospective vision which allows us to ascribe to colonial institutions the foundations of contemporary society, in turn encourages us to emphasize the differences between the society and religion of tradition and those of modernity. As a result, historians of Sri Lanka have tended to identify the colonial period as one of great change and disjunction with the past.

A more realistic picture of Sri Lanka's social history would give weight to deep rooted social changes within Tamil society that continue precedents from the Medieval and Classical periods. In this larger picture it might be possible to show that the hierarchical formulations of caste, which stressed the great gulf between the pure and the polluted, and the immutability of caste boundaries and life-styles, far from being "colonial relics" created by local revenue records, were but long established patterns in an alliance of rural Brahmans and peasant cultivators. To make this suggestion is not to argue that modern Tamil society is a socio-cultural fossil of the medieval era, but simply to recognize that we are dealing with a powerful tradition that has undergone many social changes over the centuries and is in the process of constant reinvention.

This picture of a slower, less disjunctive, course of social change would indicate that the recent developments in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be understood systematically and meaningfully only if they are seen in relation to their precedents in the pre-colonial eras and extending back into the time of Tamil cultural emergence. Despite the relative paucity of information concerning the society prior to western colonial rule, the available historical and anthropological data when combined together appears to be so sufficient that we must attempt to paint that larger picture by undertaking a historical reconstruction of the Tamil tradition.

CHAPTER 5

TRIBAL HUMANISM IN THE CLASSICAL AGE

A great deal of our information about South India and North Sri Lanka during the early period comes from the poetical depictions of life in the Cankam or Classical Tamil literature. These poetical sources far from being otherworldly and vague – as their Sanskritic counterparts often are – do provide a fairly reliable picture of people living under tribal chieftains, and following folk beliefs and religious practices in a territorially divided culture with a certain degree of urbanization in a few core areas where there were advanced agrarian and commercial organizations.

5.1 Cultural landscape

In the classical age the human interaction with the physical environment has left more than a few tangible footprints on the surface. The effects of geographic phenomena upon political and clan boundaries, and upon the whole course of the early Tamil civilization, are reflected in the body of poetry written under the patronage of the Cankam or the Academy. The bulk of these poems is now believed to

have been written between the middle of the first century and the late third century.[1]

The Cankam poetry divides the Tamil world, Tamilakam, into five tinais. Tinai means a stretch of land which marks off a topographically defined world into itself. Each territory was thus conceived as a total web of life, wherein the flora and the fauna, the clans of human beings, and the deities all interacted with one another and with the physical features of the landscape. In effect "each tract had its own poetic moods, its own characteristic flora and fauna, its own tevan or deity."[2] Tamilakam in this sense was composed of five distinct territories, namely, kurinci (hill), palai (arid, wilderness), mullai (pastoral, forest), marutam (agricultural, riverine), and neytal (seashore). This division highlights the challenges involved in the human occupation of the earth's different regions, and it led in turn to the development of a distinct conception of social life peculiar to each of the five regions or tinais and to the general recognition of social diversity.

The precise extent of what was thought to be Tamilakam has varied from time to time. It is beyond dispute that peninsular India which stretched southwards from Tirupati (Venkadam) hill down to Kanyakuamri, was part and parcel of Tamilakam.[3] This area is roughly

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[1]S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, History of Tamil Language and Literature (Madras: New Century Book House, 1956), 29ff.

[2]F. Clothey, The Many Faces of Murukan: The History and Meaning of a South Indian God (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), 24

[3]K. K. Pillai, A Social History of the Tamils vol.1 (Madras: University of Madras, 1975), 14-17

covered by Kerala and the Tamil Nadu of today. The actual status of Sri Lanka in relation to Tamilakam is more difficult to determine, and that question will be explored later in another chapter. At this stage it is sufficient to point out that Jaffna peninsula, on linguistic grounds alone, can be regarded as having the closest South Indian ties of any region of Sri Lanka.

During the Cankam age there were strong cultural contacts between Jaffna and South India. In the classics like Akananuru, Narrinai and Kuruntokai, for instance, there are on the whole seven verses composed by one Ilattu Putandevanar.[4] This poet is believed to have gone to Madurai from Sri Lanka and presented these verses at the Academy. Among the other poets who made presentations at the Academy during this epoch, quite a few had "Naga" prefixes or suffixes attached to their names. This indicates Naga descent, with a probable connection to Jaffna, the Sri Lankan home of the Nagas.[5]

All the territories of Tamilakam, including Jaffna peninsula, were united by a common language. The early bardic travelling troupes, whose function was to entertain the community with songs, dances, and long recitals – of the past heroic achievements of the clan – may have significantly contributed to the development and standardization of language. These bards were not mere entertainers. As "the custodians and perpetuators of antiquarian learning,

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[4]Ak.: 88, 231, Kt.: 343, 360, Nr.: 366

[5]During the Cankam Period, the Nagas dominated the western and northern parts of the island. See The Mahavamsa trans. W. Geiger (London: Luzac and Co., 1964) 1.46ff.

genealogical lore, and other accounts of the past,"[6] these men and women were clearly the foremost educationalists of that age. Their regular participation in the Academy that flourished in the Pantiyan capital of Madurai, would have contributed to the diffusion of bardic poetry across Tamilakam. At the same time, the panel of bards in these academies who scrutinized these creative works with a view of approving them, would have ensured that the standard literary conventions as prescribed in the grammatical treatise, the Tolkappiyam, were adopted throughout the Tamil territories.

5.2 Chieftaincies

Politically Tamilakam was divided into a number of territories governed by little kings (kurunilamannar) or chieftains. Most chieftains had control in only one tinai area. There were tribal chieftains in the mountainous kurinci, in the mullai forest and in the palai desert. There may have been merchant-princes at the seaside; and probably agricultural leaders in the fertile marutam tracts. These tinais were, as explained earlier, psycho-geographical units that had cultural, but not necessarily explicitly political significance. The lands were not owned or necessarily directly controlled by their respective mannar (chieftain).

In Cankam poetry there are references to three dominant chieftains, Cera, Cola and Pantiya. As early as the third century B.C. these three chieftaincies are spoken of in the Asokan edicts. They were

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[6]K. Kailasapathy, Tamil Heroic Poetry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 2

often recognized by their respective emblems: Colas–the tiger, Ceras–the bow and Pantiyas– the fish.

The world of the Cankam chieftain was a world of glory and heroism not based on the ideals of renunciation. The main concern of the chieftain was battle and plunder. Death and riches were glorified by the poets. The hero-chieftain was generally depicted as one who earns fame and honour through his gruesome deeds. The height of heroism is to die gloriously in battle, which ensured that the fame of the fallen hero would be permanently remembered by the erection of hero-stones (virakkal).[7] God Murukan of the hill tract idealizes this form of kingship.[8] He is depicted as the martial god par excellence, the "victorious hero of terrible wrath."[9] The earthly heroes, Karikalan, Netunceliyan, and the like were all compared with him, and consequently they too have been portrayed as high-strung warrior characters.[10]

The legitimacy of the chief's rule did not come from a priest or an office, but rather from his possession of the drum, tutelary tree, staff,

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[7]Ibid., 235-237

[8]"Many circumstances related of this god go to show that he was not entirely an imaginary being, but a warlike king who had been deified after his death." See V. Kanakasabhai, The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago. Reprint (Madras: SISSW, 1966), 229

[9]Patirruppattu with old commentary, ed. A. C. Duraisami Pillai (Madras: SISS, 1957), 11:6

[10]Kailasapthy, 244; Porunararruppatai 130-131. Also, Maravar as a clan have been likened to Murukan. Maram means (i) valour, bravery, (ii) anger, wrath, (iii) enmity, hatred, (iv) strength, power, (v) victory, (vi) war, and (vii) killing, murder. These are also qualities exhibited by the martial god, Murukan. See Tamil Lexicon vol.V, (Madras: University of Madras, 1936), 3118

etc., which were thought of as protected and sacred objects themselves. Apart from these objects, the possessor himself was venerated because sacred forces were believed to abide in him.

This form of heroic kingship and legitimacy contributed to a great deal of political instability. It created a war-like, violent age. The hero-chieftain alone was truly the leader of his people and he did not apportion his power. It is perhaps this weakness that spurred the Cola and Pallava chieftains at a later point to look outside, to the northern systems, for more stable forms of legitimacy.

5.3 Material Life

Tamilakam constituted a loosely knit federation of chieftaincies. Each chieftaincy was composed of small, face-to-face communities, fairly homogeneous in character. Their occupations and dietary habits broadly correspond to their physical milieu. The only exception to this basic feature is the urban-agricultural and commercial settlements, which were, of course, not characterized by social homogeneity.

The Kuravas of the kurinci tracts lived by hunting, primitive cultivation and gathering fruits. Evidently, the hilly region suited this style of life. Their houses contained several weapons of warfare, like spears and shields, bows and arrows.[11] These houses seem to have been beehive-shaped thatched huts.[12] Tamil traditions of courtship (kalavu) and marriage (karpu) probably originated in kurinci since it is

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[11]Perumpanarruppatai ed. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer (Madras: Kapir Accukkutam, 1956), 118ff.

[12]Ibid., 123

described as the suitable background for poetry relating to the theme of courtship. The kalavu pattern of love usually follows the following manner. A young man while hunting or being hunted by a wild animal accidently encounters a young maiden who sings and makes herself merry while guarding the millet crops of the hill region. Such an encounter in a romantic setting produces spontaneous attraction that will in due course develop into kalavu and then consummate in karpu.

The Ayar, Kovalar and Ideyar of the mullai forest tract domesticated cows, goats and buffaloes, and also cultivated paddy and maize. Most pastoral communities confined their activities to producing milk and milk- products that could then be sold in barter for procuring their domestic requirements.

The pastoral settlements were made of thatched (straw) huts. Perumpanarruppadai[13] states how in front of the small hut, wooden pegs were fixed to which lambs and goats were tied with strings. The shepherds (Ayar) and cowherds (Kovalar) pastured their sheep and cattle upon the adjacent grazing ground with a close row of thorny bushes serving as a fence.

The Paradavar of Neytal were fishermen, who also traded salt in other regions. In due course they became famous as divers, sailors and boat builders. Brahmi inscriptions suggest that they had from a very early time established active commercial links with Sri Lanka.[14] Also

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[13]Ibid., 148-155

[14]K. K. Pillay, South India and Ceylon (Madras: University of Madras, 1963), 30

during this time "adventurers" from the Pantiyan chiefdom, whose main preoccupation was battle and plunder, were making repeated incursions into Sri Lanka. In 103 B.C. one such group joined a local rebellion in Anuradhapura that helped send the Sinhala ruler, Vattagamani Abhaya (89-77 B.C.) into exile.[15] The evidence suggests that the people of Neytal were fairly enterprising in their varied pursuits and were capable of undertaking relatively long voyages. They operated two classes of commercial shipping vessels. The large sailing vessels were dependent on ocean winds.[16] The small crafts were operated by human or animal power. Among these the kattumaram (catamaran), which is a raft of two or more logs lashed together, has endured to this day.

The Ulavar people of the soil settled in the marutam tracts located in the riverine valleys. The most organized settlements are to be found in this region, and owed their prosperity to the three principal rivers, Kaveri[17], Vaiyai[18] and Periyaru; the sources from which the agricultural fields were irrigated. There early forms of irrigation involved the construction of canals through which water was channelled to paddy lands and sugar-cane plots. On the other hand, well irrigation was adopted for regions outside the reach of rivers or

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[15]C. R. de Silva, Sri Lanka: A History (New Delhi: Vikas, 1987), 28

[16]Maturaikkanci ed. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer (Madras: Kapir Accukkutam, 1956), 75-83

[17]Pattinappalai ed. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer (Madras: Accukkutam, 1956) 5-15; Purananuru ed. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer (Madras: Kapir Accukkutam, 1956), 35: 8-11

[18]Puram 71:9-11

canals connecting them. Besides paddy and sugar-cane, fruit trees and cotton were cultivated over a considerable area.

Paddy being the staple crop, its cultivation was not confined to riverine tracts. Reclamation of forest land was undertaken, for example, by the efforts of the Cola chieftain Karikalan II.[19] Paddy was also cultivated on the slopes of hills after they had been cleared of thorn bushes and sandalwood trees.[20] Reclamation of land was a major factor in the growth of the Tamil economy at this time, for it provided an increase in land resources and therefore enlargement of opportunities for the Ulavar people to gain a livelihood from the soil. Also, the reclamation of lands was accompanied by the establishment of new Ulavar settlements. These developments contributed to a greater integration of the five tinais.

Such developments show that the centre of gravity of Tamilakam was gradually shifting towards the marutam region and towards those who were shaping them. The Velir agricultural landlords were thus emerging as a powerful group upon whose labours the world of Tamilakam was becoming dependent:

> The ploughers are the linch-pin of the world they bear them up who other work perform, too weak its toils to share.[21]

The daughters of this landowning clan were much sought after in marriage by the ruling chieftains. These affluent people had houses

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[19]Pattinap 283-286

[20]Maturaik 286-288

[21]Tirukkural trans. G. U. Pope, et. al (Madras: SISS, 1982):1082

constructed of burnt bricks and thatched roofs, with extensive courtyards. The agricultural settlement itself was marked with heaps of paddy-grain and sugar plants.[22]

The commercial and agricultural activities centred in the neytal and marutam regions contributed to a degree of urbanization. The practice of exchanging goods would often take place in the towns known as perur in the riverine plains, such as in the Kaveri Delta. Here the Ulavar would exchange their agricultural produce for salt and sea fish from the Parattavar, milk and milk products from the Kovalar, meat from the Kuravar, and so on. The coastal towns known as pattinam were on the other hand associated with foreign trade and commerce, contributing to a greater measure of urbanization. The quarters of rich merchants, both local and foreign, gave a prosperous outlook to the coastal towns.

The material life of the Tamils in all regions during this epoch shows many features that are typical of tribal societies elsewhere. It was easy-going, self-indulgent and driven by the present. The Tamils excelled in the tribal passion for music and dance. Meat and toddy provided vigour to mundane existence. Romantic courtships, love adventures, and men and women working together, emphasized liberal relations between sexes and relative equality of status for women. As a tribal society it had few taboos, and the rules of social behaviour were relaxed.

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[22]Perumpan 237-244, 247-249, 259-262

These were also features peculiar to the Tamils. The poets depicted their society as heroic. Society was divided between heroes and non-heroes, functionally between great exploits and drudgery. Fame and honour were won by the performance of heroic deeds, to which advantages of birth, power, wealth, etc., were contributory factors.[23] This division did not produce any recognizable dominant groups or political hierarchies, and was not related to an economic dichotomy rooted in the unequal control over goods and production. It is in this socio-political sense that Cankam society was tribal, for the lack of centralized authority is characteristic of a tribe rather than a chiefdom. The five tinais were comprised of a loosely integrated and variable constituency. These groups were self-regulating in contrast to being regulated by persons institutionalized for that purpose.

In economic terms, however, Cankam society shows features that are characteristic of a chiefdom. Compared to a tribal society, the society was more complex and more organized, particularly in relation to the production and distribution of goods. While reciprocal exchanges of goods between inhabitants of different territories have taken place to some extent in tribes, what is significant here is the quantity of exchange and the degree of economic specialization. For example, the farmers of marutam and the herders of mullai must have attained a higher degree of specialization to produce enough surplus for exchange, which in turn would require a higher level of organization for redistributing the goods received. What needs to be

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[23]Kailasapathy, 258-259

emphasized here is that economic specialization did not lead to the establishment of a central authority – the linch-pin of pyramid-shaped chiefdoms.

5.4 Religious Life

The integration of nature and humanity into a common web of life indicates that they also belonged to one moral order. A tribal society has its own moral order that arises from the "identification of men and animals."[24] Scholars have over the years attempted to explain this particular socio-religious phenomenon in terms of totemism.

Totemism has been variously regarded as a elementary form of religion or a type of social organization, a form of classification, or a cosmology. The existence of such varying and even conflicting views led Levi-Strauss to argue that totemism as a concept dissolves on close examination.[25] A fluid concept on the other hand is not without its advantages, particularly in dealing with culture-specific cases. For our purpose totemism can be broadly defined as referring to "the identification of man and animal – either the identification of a social group with an animal species or of a person with a species or individual animal." Totemism understood in this broad sense as the identification of the human species with the natural species expresses at least three things concerning the religious life of the Tamils.

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[24]The Social Science Encyclopedia ed. Adam and Jessica (London: Routledge and Kegan, 1985), 860-861

[25]C. Levi-Strauss, Totemism (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), ch.3. For further discussion of the concept, see Emile Durkheim, The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life. Trans. J. W. Swain. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1915

First, totemic symbols serve to express the self-image of groups or individuals. In the Tamil country the territorial groups were known by their totems: Minavar by the shark, Nagas by the snake, Kuravar by the tiger, and so on.[26] The adoption of these totems by a group was not arbitrary, and was clearly determined by specific experiences of the "numinous." In the case of the Minavar of Neytal, the fearsome and dreaded shark constantly lurked beneath the surface of the waters when they traversed the sea; and it is nothing less than the repeated encounters with this powerful reality that led to its symbolic representation in the totem. The Kuravar, on the other hand, even the bravest of the hunters, were haunted by the fearless and stealthy tiger that stalked the forest of the Kurinci hills and this powerful reality was symbolized by the tooth of the tiger, which was worn around the neck for protection. Also in this connection, flowers of the totemic tree, Venkai, that bore resemblance to the stripes of the tiger, were worn by the tiger clan chieftains on the battlefield.[27] The association of Venkai flowers with warrior chieftains of Kurinci in all probability implies a distinction between the chieftain and the makkal (people), or between the hero and the non-hero, a demarcation familiar to Tamilakam as a whole.

In Tamilakam totemic symbols were by no means restricted to natural species. Totems of a different kind, that is, "objects or

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[26]Puram 335:7, Maturaik 611-615

[27]Puram 100:5-8; 168:15-16; 335:7

manufactured goods"[28] that are not totemic in the usual sense of the term, were also adopted for the purpose of social classification, to differentiate in terms of age and sex. The cilampu (anklet) is a well known maternal totem. It was originally known as kalal, made of plants and leaves; however, during the Cankam period the manufactured anklets were very much in vogue. There were anklets made of gold, and then others made of strings to which tiny bells were attached. The latter was worn by toddlers, that would be removed and replaced by another type when they reached adolescence. The anklet made of gold, known as the heroic anklet, was worn by chieftains.

These totems of different kinds, of animals, plants and objects, evidently functioned as the primary sources of social identity. It created as a result a strong sense of the physical and psychological affinity between the social groups and their totems, especially the animal totems. For this reason, when a social group adopts a totem, it also feels obliged to adopt the appropriate type of behaviour. The tiger clan would thus be expected to be tiger-like, to have long legs that run fast and to love fighting.

As a model of diversity, the natural model offered a tremendous range of symbols for social classification. At the same time, the natural model, because it is far more diverse, had the effect of sharpening the social distinctions within a society that was relatively homogeneous[29], and therefore, as Levi-Strauss points out, a potential source of conflict.

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[28]Levi-Strauss,The Savage Mind (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 120-121

[29]Ibid., 116-117

Secondly, totemism is a symbol system that serves to integrate nature and humanity into a totality. Under appropriate conditions the totemic symbols are capable of introducing worshippers to "a powerful set of moods and motivations" and encouraging them to pursue a style of life illustrated by that group of totems.

Clan totems taken together present the human community with a style of life that harmonizes with its cultural landscape. In the Kurinci country, the clan totems are often located on the top of the hills – the habitat of the chief totem god Murukan. The totem god would be housed under the totem tree called venkai, where he can be seen seated on one of his carriers, either a blue feathered peacock or an elephant. Murukan is also known as velan, the Lord of the hunt[30] and his favorite weapon is a vel (spear). In his personification as the great hunter, he is depicted bearing his vel and riding his carrier.

Murukan for his worshippers is the warrior/hunter par excellence, the slayer of cur, a male demon. He is also the red faced Ceyon, whose redness symbolizes anger, and anger is the necessary disposition for the performance of heroic deeds. For the Kurinci people, anger is probably the most powerful manifestation of the sacred. Murukan, the red faced god, was thus conceived of as truly fearsome to behold when he is angry. It is his anger that must have led to his association with the Venkai tree. This totemic tree is believed to represent the tiger because the colour of the tiger's stripes had a strong

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[30]Ainkurunuru ed. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer (Madras: Kapir Accukkutam, 1957), 245:1

resemblance to the colour of its flowers.[31] In addition, the tree's leaf is shaped like the head of Murukan's leaf-shaped lance. Hence adorning themselves with Venkai flowers and leaves, symbolized for the worshippers the presence of the angry god as well as the fearsome beast, both being manifestations of the same sacred force.

These totems taken together, provided the necessary setting for the performance of religious dances such as veriyatal and kuravai, which involved frenzied dancing accompanied by musical instruments and songs.[32] Intoxicating toddy would be ritually consumed during the performance, and Murukan would be worshipped with the sprinkling of water, and the fermented juices of paddy and red millet. On such occasions the sacred symbols induce in the worshippers, the appropriate moods and motivations to undertake a specific course of action as indicated in the ritual dance.[33]

Totemism as a symbol-system not only depicts an idealized natural world that is familiar and immediate, but by the manner of this depiction induces in its worshippers new moods and motivations to pursue appropriate goals. Finally, totemism is a magico-ritual system designed to overcome the opposition from nature. This type of ritual is instrumental, to be distinguished from commemorative and expressive rituals, in that it is performed to achieve some specific goal or end. The more important rituals would be undertaken by a

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[31]Puram 202:18-20

[32]Maturaik 611-615; Akanauru 98:19, 114:2, 182:17

[33]Kuravai dance, also called poratal, meaning, war-dance, was therefore performed before a battle or a raid of plunder

specialist, a shaman-priest, who would be expected to diagnose the human problem and to provide the appropriate antidote. Socially, the shaman was highly esteemed because he took care of the well-being of the society and the cosmos in which it was located. It is noteworthy that the priest of god Murukan is also called Velan, the same name as the god.

In Cankam society instrumental rituals were widely employed to deal with the negative, disruptive effects of cosmic forces, expressed in fear, distress and social separation. Ananku[34] (fear and distress) is frequently mentioned by the poets as a problem that afflicted many young maidens separated from their lovers. In such cases the mother of the distressed daughter would approach the priest or priestess of Murukan[35] – conceived as a lover who is known to seek and possess beautiful women, popularly depicted in the courtship of Murukan and Valli – who would be expected to diagnose the illness and provide the necessary remedy. In his response the shaman-priest begins with divination that would become possible during the course of a frenzied dance of possession (veriyatal) performed under the influence of intoxicating toddy. When the shaman-priest becomes possessed of the

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[34]Any woman who had come of age and was sexually appealing was thought to be filled with a magical power, ananku, to afflict men. This power was thought to reside in her breasts (Kuruntokai 337, Akananuru 7). The chief source of such power was a woman's chastity, karpu. Ak 73, thus describes the heroine as having "chastity full of afflicting sacred power [ananku uru karpu]" as she suffers while her husband is away. It is this power of chastity that makes a woman into a goddess (Ak 198), a quality that also produces domestic peace. Yet this power is potentially dangerous, capable of causing immense destruction as well as contamination. Hence the woman is urged to keep this sacred power under control.

[35]Ak 22:5-11, 98:8-10

god, he is then thought to have access to the god's will. His client would then be informed that Murukan is the cause of her daughter's suffering, and a remedy would be prescribed usually involving an offering to Murukan preceded by an invocation to the sacred hill. It is not always clear whether the remedy was immediately successful, for the diviners sometimes held that Murukan was not the only cause for this kind of illness.[36]

These acts of divination and sacrifice are a part of a magico-ritual system. They were performed in a specific location that was marked as a sacred centre by the physical presence of a totem tree or an image of a totem god. Rituals of this kind, performed by a shaman, are relatively elaborate and expensive, but they provided important and immediate power to the client according to need. Although the powers rendered were substantial, access to these elaborate rituals was limited by a number of factors such as space, time, availability of ritual specialists and the cost itself.

These restrictions were not a problem where ritual amulets were used and they were thought to provide some of the same powers of protection, healing, or simply good fortune, without the inconvenience of prior arrangements. Amulets ranging from flowers (venkai, katampu), to animal parts (tiger tooth, fish horn), to manufactured objects (cilampu) were worn with necklaces and leg-rings. The wearers and possessors of amulets would attribute virtues and powers according to their totemic significance.

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[36]Maturaik 606-610, Tirumurukarrupatai 32-41

In the case of amulets, magico-rituals must first be performed to make them efficacious. Once they are rendered sacred, the amulets with their powers can be carried into any living situation, where those powers of protection, healing and prosperity are readily available to their possessors.

In early Tamil society, amulets were used for success and protection on the battlefield. The poetess Auvaiyar speaks of her chief, Atiyaman, still wearing the great venkai flowers when he returned from the battlefield. It is however the spear adorned with peacock feathers that is stressed as the most powerful of all amulets. So firmly rooted is this belief in amulets that according to Auvaiyar, when the combatants of Atiyaman and his enemy stood pitted against one another, the soldiers of the enemy camp are said to have lost confidence and set about laying down their arms quickly.[37] In such situations special efforts would be made to capture the enemy's battle amulets, while one's own were carefully protected. The primary function of these communal amulets is to exorcise the forces of chaos, a necessary condition for the stability of the society in the cosmos.

5.5 Conclusion

The term "tribal humanism" (used by W. M.Watt, a leading biographer of Muhammad, to describe the pre-Islamic beliefs and ritual practices of the Arabs of the Arabian Peninsula[38]) can be usefully employed here to

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[37] Puram 98:9-14

[38] W. Montgomery Watt, Muhammad at Mecca (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), 24

describe the religion and social system of the early Tamils of peninsular India, provided that the concept is open to suitable alteration required by the Tamil evidence. The early Tamils were bound together by group feeling, particularly at the clan level. The basic attitudes and activities connected with each group – honour, manliness, hospitality, the hero as first among equals, and raiding as a display of courage and devotion to one's clan symbolized in the group totem – together comprise the real religion of most Tamils' in the Classical Age. The Tamils deepest feelings in this sense were rooted in tribal humanism. Although the term humanism has been frequently used in the description of ancient Tamils, it should not be understood in the modern sense of the term. The magico-ritual system used for mediating conflicts, showed that beneath the tribe was a sacred power that keeps it going. Thus the ultimate reference was beyond the human plane. But humanism also means locating the source and value in the human, and the evidence showed that the Tamils did that, as can be seen in their this-worldliness, which saw no meaning beyond this life. Regardless of the totemic features of the society, tribal humanism is a good way to characterize the functional aspects of life among the Tamils of pre-Hindu India.

CHAPTER 6

EMERGENCE OF CASTE IN THE MEDIEVAL AGE

6.1 Pre-Medieval Society in Transition

The rise of the Pallava and the Cola dynasties between the seventh and the tenth centuries marks the beginning of the Medieval Age which is defined in terms of some important changes in the social structure of Tamilakam. As Burton Stein has pointed out, the changes were not as abrupt as some have maintained, for much of what appears in the Pallava and Cola records had been growing during the previous centuries. In this process of transition it is important to identify two important developments, one in Marutam and the other in Neytal, that contributed to the emergence of the Medieval Age.

In Marutam, the expansion in agriculture and the reclamation of new tracts of land by ulavar peasants, as already noted, contributed to an increase in land resources, which in turn led to an enlargement of opportunities to the peasant colonists. Those who formerly occupied the land either fled more deeply into the forests and hills or found a role in the expanding peasant colonies. The conversion of forest or dry tracts to wet field cultivation, in fact, required the labour of many, a demand that led to the assimilation of non-peasant folk into the

peasant society. These folk became subordinate in their relation to their peasant masters, their occupations being treated as of lower value.

Cilappatikaram, a classical work possibly of the fifth century, offers important evidence for the unprecedented emergence of a social hierarchy in which the ulavar peasants were ranked higher than all other people of Tamilakam. Beneath the ulavars were ranked cowherds and shepherds (kovalar and ayar) hunters (vedar), various artisan groups, armed men and, in the lowest stratum, fishermen (valaiyar) and scavengers (pulaiyar).[1] If ranked relationship of this kind is aberrant and alien to the heroic society of the Cankam Age, then these developments at the closing of that age point forward to the emergence of another era.

In the age of Kurunila mannar (little kings), peasant domination like every other form of domination must have been a precarious one. The highly varied and discontinuous character of the physical landscape constituting the five tinais, did impose certain geographical limits to the peasant domination. Excessive slope and aridity made certain types of tract unsuitable for peasant agriculture, where non-peasant people could continue to live and offer stern challenges to the peasants. The geographical factor also left many peasant settlements scattered, separated by tracts of inhospitable land. This discontinuous pattern of peasant settlement made many localities vulnerable to raids, especially from the inhospitable hill tribes.

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[1]cf. V. Kanakasabhai, The Tamils Eighteen Hundred Years Ago Reprint (Madras:SISSW, 1966), 113-114

Agricultural expansion therefore could not continue indefinitely without radical changes in the social and political structure of society. Socially, the peasants needed a mechanism for assimilating the new people into their order while preserving their own position of ascendency in that order. Politically, kingship based on kulam (kinship) alone was becoming inadequate, spurring the peasants to look for broader forms of legitimacy, capable of accommodating the existing developments.

The presence of Brahmans, including Brahman villages (Parpancheris), particularly in the Marutam region from the early Cankam Period on, must have persuaded the peasants to look outside their own society to brahmanical forms of legitimacy. In this respect, the varna model provided a possible mechanism for assimilating and regulating the non-peasant people into the peasant-led sections of society. Evidence from the two Tamil epics the Cilappadkaram and Manimekalai, (A.D.300-500), together with some evidence from the ethical literature of this period, shows that a rudimentary form of the caste system was already in operation at the end of the Cankam Age.

The developments in the urban centres of the Neytal region are no less significant. The Cilappadikaram and Manimekalai are full of references to merchants and merchant communities living in the coastal towns (pattanam). These people were non-peasants, either northerners or foreigners. These merchants operated a money economy based on internal and external trade, whose network was quite extensive. The prosperity of this expanding economy depended to

a large extent on protection that could be offered by the king. The merchant needed open and comparatively safe roads that only the king could provide. It is extremely doubtful whether the warrior chieftains of the earlier Cankam society could adequately fulfil this role. They probably did not often control much outside their home town, for the control of land was not their primary concern, and their conquests were not meant for empire as much as for glory. For this reason the newer cakravartin model of kingship first introduced to the South by the Jains and Buddhists would have been strongly supported by the merchant communities. Cilappatikaram. XXV 33-55 describes the extensive tribute that hill tribes brought to the Cera king, suggesting that the Tamils were already experimenting with a new model of kingship.

Increasing political stability not only enhanced trade but also facilitated the growth of Jainism and Buddhism. Unhindered by initial tribal violence, merchants from the pattanam began more and more to support openly the transcendental doctrines of Buddhism and Jainism. The pattanams were the real home of these sects, to which non-caste tribals were attracted in large numbers. This movement of people to the cities is a result of the connections being established between the non-caste tribals and the merchants who upheld the heterodox sects. Life in the cities was characterized by guild activity, cross-caste fraternization and commensality.

These developments in the Neytal areas eventually resulted in a convergence of interests with the Brahman-peasant alliance

developing in the Marutam areas. On the one hand the Buddhists and Jains held a strong position in the towns of the Coromandel coast, and among many of the warriors keeping peace in that area. On the other hand the Brahmans, were most securely situated in peasant villages, and this meant that their own interests were advanced primarily by establishing close relations with the dominant peasant groups. The Brahman-peasant alliance in the increasingly expansive marutam area eventually became the dominant pattern in what was primarily an agricultural society, and it was this pattern that went on to become the central pattern of the institutions of the Medieval Age.

6.2 The Gupta Intrusion

The rise of the Gupta empire in the North is significant because, for the first time, it provided the political, social, and cultural basis for the creation of an All-India Hinduism. Under its strong Sanskritic influence, Tamilakam gradually developed a regional variation of that so-called "Great Tradition." Politically, Northern penetration of the South began with the rule of Samudra Gupta (A.D.335-376). He is said to have restored in great measure the splendour once associated with the Mauryas. His power reached from Assam to the borders of the Punjab, while southwards his frontier probably stretched as far as the Pallavas of Kancipuram, whose king had been defeated and was technically his subordinate.[2] Samudra Gupta also claims to have

[2] A. L. Basham, The Wonder that was India 3d. rev. ed. (London: Sidgwick and Jackson,1988), 64

received missions bearing tribute from Sri Lanka, Nepal, the Kusana rulers of the Punjab, and the kingdoms of Indonesia, Malaysia and Burma.[3]

The reign of Chandra Gupta II (A.D.376-415), on the other hand, marks the height of ancient North Indian culture, and this has sometimes been described as India's Golden Age. Certainly, works of literature and art of exceptional merit were produced during this period. In literature this epoch saw the masterly poetry of Kalidasa, who is considered the greatest author in the whole literature of Sanskrit. It was also during this time that the sacred epic, Mahabharata, received its finishing touches, while the Ramayana of Valmiki was expanded by the addition of its first and last books. The Kamasutra of Vatsyayana is a work of a different order, which reflects the pleasures of the small class of sophisticated urbane men and women.

This period however cannot by any means be described as a Golden Age for all its people. The Chinese pilgrim Fa-Hsien, reporting on his visit to the holy places of Buddhism around A.D.400, was rather shocked by the fact that the Candalas, or untouchables, were compelled to strike a wooden clapper when they entered a city, for fear of polluting their betters .[4] It is also possible to sense a growing reaction against the "heretics" among the instigators of the Hindu revival. The heretics – the Buddhists, Jains, and Cavakas – are referred to as nastikas

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[3] A. L. Basham, "Introduction," Essays on Gupta Culture ed. B. L. Smith (New Delhi: Motilala Banarsidass, 1983), 9

[4] Ibid.,7

because they deny both the Vedas and the atman of the Upanishads.[5] In one of the revivalist works, the Visnu Purana, which first appears between A.D.400 and 500, the Buddha is depicted as deluded and destructive, while the Jain and Buddhist texts are contemptuously denounced as Mohasastras, or scriptures of delusion. Such writings clearly bear witness to the still thriving establishments of Jainism and Buddhism in North India.

6.3 Brahmanical Kingship: From Pallavas to Colas

The Gupta influence is clearly noticeable during the long reign of the Pallavas, when Northern forms of kingship and social organization were gradually adopted into the South Indian milieu. The Pallava reign is limited to the Tontaimantalam region in the northern part of the Coromandel plain, while the southern part continued to be ruled by their arch-rivals, the Pantyas. The Pallavas appeared in this area after the collapse of the Satavahana (Andhras) empire in the Deccan sometime around the beginning of the third century A.D.[6] The Pallavas in this respect can be considered as a successor state of this Deccan empire.[7] Pallava kingship became more influenced by the Deccan dynasties – which in turn arose from the ruins of the great

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[5]Wendy D. O'Flaherty, "The Image of the Heretic in the Gupta Puranas," Gupta Culture, 107-127; J. C. Heesterman, The Inner Conflict of Traditions: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship and Society (Chicago: Unversity of Chicago Press, 1985), 70-80

[6]Basham, Wonder, 61

[7] T. V. Mahalingham, Kancipuram in Early South Indian History (Madras: Asia Publishing House, 1969)

Maurya Empire of the North – than by the forms of polity represented in the Cankam literature.

Pallava kingship, although fundamentally brahmanical or ritualistic in its conception, was significantly modified after the so-called Kalabhra incursion between A.D. 400 and 550, because it was fueled to seek a measure of local political stability by the incorporation of local chieftains into the system of Pallava sovereignty. The king's authority was thereafter extended through the medium of kinship, that is by marriage alliance. The process indicates how earlier forms of kingship – especially the tribal "kingship" based on kulam where authority derives from the sacred link of the chief with kinsmen – were gradually assimilated in South Indian practice in order to overcome the limitations of the brahmanical conception.

The early Pallava kingship was exclusively northern in conception, with its precedents in the Satavahana empire, where numerous Vedic sacrifices were performed by the kings. The most important of the Deccan rituals adopted by the early Pallavas is the Rajasuya, the consecration (abhiseka) of a king. Through this great samskara ritual, the king is able to transform himself and his kingdom by the mechanism of rebirth.[8] The sacrificer is thus reborn a king, and as such becomes identified with the lokapalas, the guardian deities of the world:

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[8]Klostermaier,17 ff.

> A king is an incarnation of the eight guardian deities of the world, the Moon, the Sun, the Wind, Indra, the Lords of wealth and water (Kubera and Varuna), and Yama.[9]

The king is here understood as a deva belonging to a "class of powerful beings, regarded as possessing supernormal facilities and as controlling a department of nature or activity in the human sphere."[10] The king as the representative of the Vedic Varuna who protects rta (the moral and natural order of the Vedas), which foreshadows the later conceptions of moral order as karman and Brahman, also upholds dharma on earth by rewarding good and punishing evil.[11]

In his monograph, The Ancient Indian Royal Consecration, J Heesterman has noted that the cosmic implications of the consecration ritual are apparent throughout:

> the scene of the unction is a replica of the universe: the king standing in the centre and stretching his arms to the sky impersonates.....the cosmic pillar; round him the officiants are standing and confer on him his new body from the four points of the compass; moreover each officiant...imparts the king the quality of one of the gods mentioned in the unction formula.[12]

The unction or consecration as an enactment of rebirth is evidently the central and most crucial part of the royal ritual. The sacrificer is as a result reborn as king in a "universe" of natural and moral relations which constitute the totality of the political system.

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[9]The Laws of Manu, v: 96

[10]Jan Gonda, Ancient Indian Kingship from a Religious Point of View (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), 24.

[11]Klostermaier,130

[12]Heesterman, 120

Borrowed from the Gupta neighbours, the Rajasuya ritual became the defining feature of sovereignty during the early Pallava period.[13] Prakrit and Sanskrit inscriptions show that kings often proclaimed their kingship primarily in terms of the sacrifices they performed, and only secondarily in terms of the gifts they made. These gifts (danas) were often given as offerings (daksinas) at the sacrifice (yajna). Gift-giving thus became an integral part of the royal sacrifice at this time and was justified on the following grounds:

> We are told that there are two kinds of devas, the gods and Brahmans learned in the Vedas: both have to be propitiated, the former through yajnas and the latter through danas.[14]

Royal sacrifices were usually performed at the commencement of a dynasty, usually after considerable military success. The Rajasuya ritual once performed, has the capacity to have a cross-generational effect by transmitting the godly substance introduced by rebirth. Later generations of Pallava kings therefore continued to base their sovereignty on genealogies traced back to the sacrifices performed by the earliest Pallavas.[15]

The relative absence of specific sacrificial references in later Pallava inscriptions is therefore understandable, and need not be seen as a major transition in the conception of kingship, from "sacred kings

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[13]Burton Stein, All the Kings' Mana: Papers on Medieval South Indian History (Madras: New Era Publications, 1984), 310

[14]Romila Thapar, Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1979), 112

[15]Stein, Kings' Mana, 310

to sacred kingship", from "sacrifice (yajna) to prestation (dana)." In following this line of argument Burton Stein states:

> dana is mentioned as a minor motif to the major one of royal sacrifice in the earliest records of the Pallavas; however dana completely displaces the element of sacrifice in the Pallava records during ..... the eighth century and thereafter.[16]

It is here important to emphasis the close link between gift-giving (dana) and sacrificial ritual (yajna) via the daksina.[17] As such, royal gifts even in late Pallava times were made meaningful in terms of a conception of sovereignty which was, at its root, connected with the performance of royal sacrifice. The value of such gifts is significantly enhanced due to their royal substance.

Gift-giving as daksina defined a special relationship between the donor and the recipient. Daksina was not given or received as a fee or salary.[18] Gifts were instead given in recognition of the recipient's status or the spiritual value of his or her service. The most valuable gifts were offered to the priest. Fields and villages (brahmadeyas) are mentioned as appropriate gifts.[19] The gifts here signify the spiritual dependence of the king on the one who controls the sacrifice. As Dumont points out "the gods do not eat the offerings of a king devoid

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[16]Burton Stein, Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 30; Kings' Mana, 307

[17]Thapar,106

[18]Ibid.,113

[19]Stein, Kings' Mana, 311

of a purohita" (chaplain).[20] The king depends on the priest for all the actions of his life, and would not succeed without him.[21]

The early Pallava kings, despite their highly exalted status as devas possessing supernormal powers, could only control a small core area along the Coromandal plain. Over the rest of the plain, conditions were extremely fluid with the peasants and the non-peasants, the "orthodox" and the "heretics," competing for dominance. Evidence in fact suggests that until the period of the so-called "Kalabhra interregnum," the fortunes of the heretics who were allied to the non-peasants were very much in the ascendency. Nilakanta Sastri, has stated:

> We may perhaps surmise the Kalavar-Kalabras were a widespread tribe whose large scale defection to the heretical faiths [Jainism and Buddhism] resulted in a political social upset lasting over some generations.[22]

"Kalavar-kalabras" are the people of the hills and dry forests who during the "interregnum" (A.D. 400-550), made their strongest bid to control the lowland plains. The non-peasant control over the Pantya country during this period demonstrated that they were a formidable military force, possibly well positioned to extend their control over the northern plain (ruled by the Pallavas) as well.

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[20]Louis Dumont, Religion, Politics and History in India (The Hague: Moulton, 1970), 64

[21]Ibid., 65

[22]Nilakanta Sastri, The Culture and History of the Tamils (Calcutta: F.K.L.Mukhopadhay, 196), 19

To meet the non-peasant challenge, the local peasant chieftains and the Pallava king appear to have come together to forge a new alliance. The existing political system therefore had to be expanded to accommodate the local chieftains. By about A.D. 550, epigraphs, according to Stein, suggest that the authority of the Pallava kings actually diminished[23], as a result of the development of this form of shared sovereignty.

This new modality of relations between the chiefs and the king represented an expansion in the political system. The chiefs are for the first time recognized as independently virtuous and deserving of honour, and they received honour by participating in the granting of royal danas. That is, they entered into a relationship with the Pallava king by participating in the central royal ritual of gifting, and by this ritual binding they in turn came to share in the godly substance transmitted through the Pallava family. It needs to be emphasized that, from the very beginning, it is the royal ritual that transforms the Pallava kulam (dynasty) into a sacred "ksatriya" clan. The new chieftain being added to the "family" does not distort the notion of a royal dynasty whose claims have always been based on a mythical charter.[24] Under the newly established shared sovereignty, the Pallava military reserves during the Kalabhra period soon came to an end. Beginning with the reign of Simhavisnu (A.D. 555-590), the Pallavas

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[23]Stein, Kings' Mana, 28

[24]R. A. L. H. Gunawardene, "The Kinsmen of the Buddha," Religion and Legitimation of Power in Sri Lanka ed. B. L. Smith (Chambersburg, PA: ANIMA, 1978), 96-106

penetrated southward to the Kaveri basin, a prized possession.[25] The successors of Simhavisnu soon brought all the people of Tondaimandalam firmly under their control. Political expansion at this time had broad peasant support in recognition of the protection afforded by Pallava rule, so "the Coromandel peasantry supported Pallava kings as cakravartins."[26]

The Pallava state, for all its achievements, had little impact on the newly emerging agrarian order and the Tamil way of life. Although the Pallava kings, from the reign of Simhavisnu on, left a record of continuous warfare[27], and the state itself could hardly be described as centralized with well-organized control extending from the king to the corners of his state by means of a standing army, and a substantial treasury. The Pallava conception of shared-ritual-sovereignty actually involved a highly decentralised state. Burton Stein, using the concept of the "segmentary state", has shown that the late Pallava kingdom may be understood in terms of micro-regions, nadus or combinations of nadus, where there is little power beyond the local level.[28] Local power was held by the chiefs of the micro-regions. The local chief's authority derived from kinship ties to "a people and their land of which he was substantially a part, indeed, an extension,"[29] and in this

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[25]Stein, Kings' Mana, 41

[26]Stein, Peasant State, 88

[27]Stein, Kings' Mana,41

[28]Stein, Peasant State, 44-46

[29]Stein, Kings' Mana, 45

sense his authority is best seen as a continuation of the classical tribal kingship. The Pallava king who ruled from Kancipuram would depend on the chiefs, the nattars, for warriors and tribute to a limited extent. The king, however, on the whole depended for his resources on his own micro-region, where his power did resemble more that of a centralised state. There he commanded men and resources by virtue of his coercive power (ksatra).[30] But for all the people in both his own micro-region and that of neighbouring chiefs, he was essentially a ritual figure who protected the moral order (dharma).

The Pantyans too, with their capital at Madurai seem to have begun to adopt from the Pallavas this tradition of kingship which combined local and brahmanical elements. Their conception of sovereignty also came to be defined by Vedic sacrifices (yagas), including the rajasuya,[31] and gifts too were exchanged in the context of these rituals.

After the final defeat of the Kalabhras, beginning with Kadungon (A.D. 560-590),[32] a line of Pantyan warriors began their kingly rise at the same time as the line of Pallava Simhavisnu, and they were soon challenging the Pallavas for the control of the Coromandel plain. During this time the Cola country in the middle was reduced to political insignificance, and the armies of the two

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[30]Stein, Peasant State, 24

[31]Ibid., 298

[32]N. Sastri, A History of South India (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1975),152

contending neighbouring powers moved freely over it without encountering any resistance.

Beginning with Srimana Srivallabha (A.D. 815-860) who invaded Sri Lanka in the reign of Sena I (A.D. 833-853), the Pantyans became actively involved in Sri Lankan politics, seeking a measure of control over the pearl fisheries of the Gulf of Mannar, and the gems for which the island was famous.[33] Apart from trade, they also seemed to have sought a durable relationship to counter the challenges from the north. An alliance with Sri Lanka soon materialised during the reign of Maravarman Rajasimha II (A.D. 905-920) who, with the help of the Sinhalese ruler Kassapa V (A.D. 914-923) made an unsuccessful attempt to fight back an invasion from the newly aggressive Colas.[34]

By now the Colas, who succeeded the Pallavas when the Pallava Aparajita was conquered by Aditya Cola I (A.D. 871-907), were the dominant power in the peninsula, attaining their greatest days from about A.D. 950-1100. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Cola power starting from Kulotunga I (A.D.1070-1120), began gradually to wane, and this allowed for a revival of the Pantyas. A series of Pantyan warriors, notably one Kulasekhara (A.D. 1268-1308) had free rein over Sri Lanka. Pantyan power had already become supreme in the southern peninsula under Maravarman Sundara Pantya I (A.D. 1216-1227) and Jatavarman Sundara Pantya II (A.D. 1227-1215). This Pantyan

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[33]K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka (London: C. Hurst and Co., 1981), 24-25

[34]Sastri, History of South India, 176; C. R. De Silva, Sri Lanka: A History, 32

expansion was brought to an abrupt end by the invasion of Muslim armies from North India in A.D. 1310.

The Cola state of the tenth to thirteenth centuries was the first to include all Tamils. The state also carried Tamil people, their language, and their gods to the newly acquired territories or mandalams, that included the Rajaratta in Sri Lanka. The Colas unified their vast empire by utilizing and perfecting the ritual form of kingship first established by the Pallava dynasty of Thondaimandalam. Brahmanical elements played a vital cohesive role in this integration. Continuing the Pallava pattern, Brahman settlements (brahmadeyas) were established in virtually every locality or nadu; and from these settlements there issued a homogeneous, brahmanical culture which profoundly altered certain aspects of Tamil society.[35]

6.4 Social Structure: Hierarchy and Interdependence

The medieval pattern of Tamil kingship became fully developed when the local nattars or chiefs imitated the kings in their support of Brahmans and brahmanical rituals. This political process reflects a larger cultural "process of Sanskritization..... already well advanced several centuries before Pallava power was extended southward"[36]; and by Pallava times the culture of the Tamil region was already a single system combining both Sanskrit and Dravidian elements. This

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[35]Stein, Peasant State, 254-365

[36]Ibid., 66

syncretic culture was linked to the alliance between the peasant natter caste (mostly Vellalas) and the Brahmans, an alliance that first emerged in the late Classical age and then became the foundation stone in the medieval social structure.

The close co-operation between Brahmans and the dominant cultivating groups was entirely voluntary and recognized as mutually beneficial. The beginnings of such a relationship was noted in the late Classical period, even though the Brahmans had lived among and depended upon the generosity of the peasantry for centuries before then. It was pointed out that the alliance between Brahmans and peasant chiefs was based upon the convergence of important interests which came to exist between those who cultivated the land along with others who depended on them, and those who by their sacral functions possessed a powerful ideological capability. The alliance soon led to the peasant victory over the non-peasant people – hunting, fishing, pastoral people – by successfully integrating them into the peasant society. The Kalabhra interregnum of the fifth and sixth centuries in Pandimandalam represented a last bid for power by the non-peasants and a temporary success of hill raiders over peasant people.

Since this victory in the sixth century, there has never been a serious challenge to the supremacy of the alliance between Brahmans and high sat (pure) Sudras, and the dominance of this alliance persisted through Vijayanagar and even late British times.[37] In the late medieval period when the warrior-kings (nayaks) exercised greater

[37]Ibid., 50

political control, they still found it advantageous to preserve the old Brahman-Sudra alliance.[38] The early period of British rule brought increased benefits to these locally dominant castes, who returned the favour and reciprocated the relationship by becoming the most dependable servants of British officials in both the collectorate and provincial offices of the Presidency.[39]

One important consequence of this alliance is the resultant tripartite division of South Indian society. The three social groups are Brahmans, respectable or clean agricultural castes of acknowledged high ritual rank, and the lower castes of non-peasant extraction. Evidence would strongly suggest that this three-fold division of the society would have first emerged around the sixth century when the Brahmans and peasants became victorious allies. The new order was distinctly hierarchical in that the respectable and powerful sat-Sudras were acknowledged to be next only to the Brahmans in moral standing. They were accorded the status of satrik, men of a respectable way of life, and thus distinguished from the lower orders of the population. The new order was clearly brahmanical in its character. Social stratification was according to ascribed ritual purity. For the two upper classes, brahmanical caste relations provided the means for regulating each peasant locality, and the Brahmans and the Sudra chiefs controlled the lower castes through the local assemblies (sabhas).[40]

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[38]Ibid., 50

[39]Ibid., 53

[40]Ibid., 48f

There is no universal scholarly consensus on the nature of the tripartite division of medieval Tamil society. In a study of Cola inscriptions, B. Suresh (1965) found some 1800 named persons. Brahmans were often identified as such, even their gotra identities being often given, but there were only 18 other caste identities given, and these were all for Vellalar and Cetti merchants.[41] The absence of other caste designations in temple records led Suresh to conclude that "the caste system had not yet set."[42] For Stein this is "a quite unnecessary conclusion." The temple records for him are concerned only with "the two most prestigious social groups, for, presumably only those persons could be suitable participants in the canonical temples." He instead insists on the view that the tripartite division of South Indian society was firmly established before the formation of the Cola state of the ninth century.[43]

A third persistent characteristic of the social structure of medieval South India was the dual division of lower castes in terms of right and left hand groupings. In the inscriptions studied by Suresh, although lower castes are not designated, there are references to right and left hand groupings. For almost nine centuries, roughly A.D. 1000 to 1900, South Indian society has been explicitly divided in this

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[41]Ibid., 102-103

[42]Ibid., 103

[43]Ibid., 103,133

manner.[44] Stein prefers to call these "divisions" of the Cola period as alliances that were occasionally activated for some common goal.[45] The earliest references in inscriptions to the valankai, right hand, and idankai, left hand, indicate that these were contingents of soldiers. Sri Lankan records show that the "great army" (macenai) which was made up of both valanka and idankai and was called velaikkarar came to the island in the wake of the Cola conquest (A.D. 993) and continued to remain there long after the end of Cola rule (A.D. 1070).[46] In these records valankai and idankai do not refer to conflict or competition, but they are instead two distinct military "regiments" co-operating beyond their local bases to achieve a common goal.

It appears that the Brahmans were considered above the right – left division and provided services to the more prestigious castes of both groups.[47] In some areas Vellalar landlords closely allied to the Brahmans also tried to remain above the division. Generally, however, below the Brahmans the right division castes were grouped around the dominant Vellalar cultivators. These low-ranking castes subsist largely by providing agricultural labour for the Vellalar landlords, who are also esteemed and emulated.[48] The left division castes on the other

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[44]Brenda Beck, "The Right-Left Division of South Indian Society," The Journal of Asian Studies XXIV, 4 (1970):779

[45]Stein, Peasant Society,179

[46]S. Pathmanatham, "The Velaikkarar in Medieval South India and Sri Lanka," Sri Lanka Journal of Humanities 2 (December 1976): 125

[47]Beck, "Right-Left Division," 780, 782

[48]Ibid., 787

hand represented by merchants and craftsmen shirk the world of agrarian life in favour of life in the town, and to some extent they emulate the lifestyle of the Brahmans.[49] Above all, the left and right divisions represent supra-local networks of low castes or lower Sudras in a highly segmented political-social situation.[50]

It is a matter of surprise that the "left hand", which seeks to emulate the Brahman model should be "considered polluted and inferior to the right."[51] The stigma of pollution attached to the left hand is also linked with female sexuality. In the iconographic representation of Siva as Ardhanarisvara, or as male and female joined in one body,

> the right side of the figure has the hip, shoulder, and chest of a man, while the left side is fashioned with the thighs, waist, and breast of a woman.[52]

Although the origins of the two divisions "remain obscure,"[53] G. Oppert's suggestion that the bifurcation of the Tamil society with its pollution implications arose from the conflict between Jains and Hindus during the Pallavan period, is compelling. In advancing this view that the stigma pollution attached to the merchants and craftsmen from the towns, he states:

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[49]Ibid., 787

[50]Stein, Peasant State,182

[51]Beck, "Right-Left Division," 783

[52]Ibid., 783

[53]Ibid., 175

> The influence of Jains was perhaps strongest on the towns where artisan classes form an important portion of the population, while the Brahman appealed to the land owning and agricultural classes.[54]

6.5 Territorial Structure: Nadus

Tamilakam in the medieval epoch comprised hundreds of distinctive localities or nadus. About A.D. 1300 in Colamanadalam alone there were 140 nadus.[55] The term nadu, first used in the Classical period, refers to agricultural land in contrast to kadu – a word for forest land not suited for cultivation. In the Purannanuru, the Cola king Karikalan is said to have "made nadu" by clearing forests.[56] Since then the term has been closely associated with agricultural expansion and the establishment of peasant settlements.

The nadu as an ethnic (kulam) as well as economic territory is thus a legacy from the ancient past of South India, which became a fundamental characteristic of Cola society (A.D. 1000-1300). The introduction of caste principles of hierarchy and purity did, however, change what was once an ethnic region. By then the locality or nadu, as the basic building block of social organization, would be composed of dominant families probably of the same caste, a dominant kindred, allied with Brahmans, together ruling, through assemblies, the lower

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[54]Ibid., 202

[55]Ibid., 91-92

[56]Ibid., 91

castes – who in turn were allied with their low caste fellows in supra-local divisions, especially for fighting in wars and raids.[57]

The economic region of medieval South India was represented by three kinds of nadus. Brenda Beck talks about "central, entrance and marginal areas in a geographical region" which she says "corresponds in a general way to Burton Stein's use (1971) of core, secondary and periphery zones to describe southern India as a whole at various periods in its history."[58] These two conceptual interpretations, developed independently, recognize the intimate link between "nadu" and the "local socio-cultural and economic structure." [59] They talk about three kinds of micro areas or nadus in a macro region or mandalam. There were central nadus usually existing along rivers, reliable sources of water for agriculture; intermediate nadus to be found in dry lowlands and uplands where agriculture depended upon often inadequate rainfall and wells; and peripheral nadus in areas least hospitable to agriculture.

The central nadu was "elaborately hierarchical" in social structure, its prosperity and unity dependent on the productive agriculture that, in turn, was made possible by irrigation. It is in such a central area that brahmanical institutions and brahmanical learning were strong, as were mercantile settlements. It had the greatest

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[57]Ibid., 23-124

[58]Brenda Beck, Perspectives on a Regional Culture: Essays about the Coimbatore Area of South India, (New Delhi: Vikas,1979), 90

[59]Ibid., 13

concentrations of landless labourers "stigmatized as impure and sequestered in a paraiyar-ceri, separated from the main settlements of any locality."[60]

Each of the central nadus was closely linked to a ruling dynasty, so it was in the central areas that the royal influence was most evident. Kathleen Gough in her study of Thanjavur, where the capitals of the Colas were located, argues in connection with the Cola kingdom of about A.D. 850-1290 that:

> at least in the Kaveri delta, the central government had strong coercive powers and great resources. Thus, for example, the Cola government organized the building of at least 150 large temples in Thanjavur district alone[61]

In the central areas the king would have a professional army of his own, housed in barracks, with which he would protect the irrigation network.

The intermediate or secondary nadus were ruled by hereditary chieftains, nattars, of dominant local agricultural groups who were only loosely or ritually linked to the king who lived in the central nadu area. As such, these economically self-sufficient micro regions were capable of occasionally transferring their allegiance from one king to another. [62]

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[60]Stein, Peasant State, 134

[61]Kathleen E. Gough, Rural Society in Southeast India (London: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 424

[62]Stein, Peasant Society,136

Also, brahmanical influence, particularly in terms of institutions such as seminaries (mathas) and temples devoted to Vedic gods, were less evident in these areas. The number of Brahman personnel in the intermediate nadus was, however, not insignificant, but they appear to lack the institutional and sacral prestige of the Sastric Brahmans in the central nadus.[63] The local society as a result was less rigid and not so hierarchical in its organization.

Cultivation in these tracts was a matter of considerable risk and uncertainty, requiring the utmost skill and effort. As a dry area, the intermediate nadus lacked reliable sources of water for regular or extensive irrigated agriculture. Successful occupation of the land, therefore, became more a matter of skill and effort than military prowess.[64]

Stein specifically cites Kongumandalam[65] as such an intermediate area. Brenda Beck in a study of localities in the Coimbatore district, the northern part of Kongu country, has observed that the character of the local social order appears to be directly linked to the presence of a dominant caste.[66] She has argued that the truly "dominant" castes exist in India only in "secondary areas":

> Dominant caste areas, furthermore, do not seem to be located near the oldest civilizational centres, but rather in secondary areas of

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[63]Ibid., 137

[64]Ibid., 135-136

[65]Ibid., 138

[66]Brenda Beck, Peasants of Kongu (Vancouver: University of B.C. Press,1972)

> previously low population density. It is into just such areas that well organized outside groups have tended to expand during periods of political and economic prosperity..... Once established, such castes continue to dominate local social institutions and to structure them to their own advantage. [67]

A group becomes dominant by asserting power over others, which involves face-to-face management of people. This sort of management will rest on two things, a near monopoly of local resources (usually agricultural land) and considerable numerical strength (roughly thirty to fifty per cent).[68]

Louis Dumont who also published a monograph on Tamil social organization [1957], has pointed out that there is a homology between the function of dominance at the local level and the royal function at the level of a larger territory. The dominant caste reproduces the royal function on a smaller territorial scale by its: (i) control over land; (ii) consequent power to grant land and to employ members of other castes either in agricultural capacities or as specialists, to build up a large clientele, not to say an armed force; (iii) power of justice, to arbitrate inter-caste and intra-caste offences; (iv) monopoly of authority by control over local assembly; and (v) ability adopt royal customs (meat diet, polygyny, etc.). These similarities in function led Dumont to the conclusion that "the relationship between the Brahman and the dominant caste is the same as that between the Brahman and the king."[69]

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[67]Beck, Coimbatore,59

[68]Ibid., 55

[69]Dumont, Homo, 162-163; cf. Beck, "Right-Left Division," 784

Finally the peripheral nadus were located on those areas least hospitable to agricultural and pastoral pursuits. Nadus of this type displayed the strongest "tribal" characteristics. That is, most of the people of these localities shared a single common identity and a large tract of land where few other groups would reside. Stein thinks that the isolation and the hazardous basis of livelihood were the major reasons for this tribal feature.[70]

Despite their isolation, the peripheral nadus have always been an integral part of the macro region. The isolated folk in the marginal areas had regular contact with itinerant merchants from the cities (pattanam), a link that probably goes back to the Cankam period. Being highly mobile – not attached to land – and war-like, the peoples of these tracts were frequently enlisted by the kings to participate in his raids of plunder. It is, however, the links with the peasant colonies in the neighbourhood that became historically significant, because they led to greater integration of the peripheral nadus into the larger society.

Much of modern Ramnad along the Palk Strait facing Sri Lanka is identified by Stein as a peripheral type of zone. This area was palai (desert) according to the tinai classification of Cankam poetry. From early times, the Maravar people have been closely linked to this tract. In Cankam poetry they were depicted as personifications of the harsh and forbidding palai. Throughout the medieval period these militarily capable, mobile, clan-organized people served in the Pantyan armies. By the time of the Nayaks of Madurai, Marava chiefs had become

[70]Stein, Peasant State,138-139

prominent political actors, achieving considerable eminence in the macro region. During the British period they were once more isolated from the larger society after being branded by the British as a "criminal caste."[71]

Available evidence suggests that these supra-local political and military connections, although impressive, had very little impact on the palai people's corporate identity and lifestyle as they had been depicted in Cankam poetry. Temples and inscriptions are virtually absent in the Ramnad region. Contact with the peasant folk on the other hand had an important impact on these people. Peasant influence probably came late to this region because the far south was generally in a less advanced state of colonisation. With the arrival of peasant colonists in this region, possibly during later Cola times, the Maravars began to convert their lands to peasant agriculture. In this way the cultivated parts of the region became extensions of intermediate nadus.

Contact with the peasants also provided a model of a different way of life for the peripheral people. Records show that some Maravar and Kallar groups did follow the way of the peasants and become dominant castes in their own territories. Such emulation of an elite group, usually a dominant caste, has been desribed variously as "Sanskritisation"[72] and "Vellalaization."[73] It led to a change in

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[71]Ibid., 301-302

[72]Srinivas, "The Cohesive Role of Sanskritization," India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity, ed. Philip Mason (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 67-82

corporate identity. In this case, Kallar and Maravar "reformed their customs in accordance with Sanskrit tradition, and began to call themselves Vellalas, usurping the Vellalar caste-title 'Pillai'."[74] Eminent Kallar and Maravar families were accorded the prestigious Vellalar title nattar, that referred to their common domination over the land as well as shared religious and ritual affiliations.[75] This practice must have been well-known for it gave rise to a proverb "Kallar, Maravar, and Agambadiyar, becoming fat, turn into Vellalar."[76]

6.6 Religion: Hindu Bhakti

The medieval period has often been described as the age of bhakti. Religiously, this era is characterised by a surge of Hinduism, particularly of Saivism and Vaisnavism, inspired in a large measure by the bhakti poets who lyricized the possibility of personal salvation through devotion to a personal deity. Since its beginning in the seventh century, Hindu bhakti, and by the tenth or eleventh century, came to represent the mainstream, orthodox religion of the Tamils.

It is generally agreed that the birth of Hindu bhakti which coincides with the second phase of Pallava rule, marks the end of one

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[73]E. Kathleen Gough, "Caste in a Tanjore Village," Aspects of Caste in India, Ceylon and North West Pakistan ed. E. R. Leach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960)

[74]Ibid., 57

[75]Stein, Peasant State,110,131

[76]Quoted in, Gough, Rural Society, 29

era in South Indian history and the beginning of a new one. In this new era bhakti came to epitomise the creative synthesis of two classicisms, a synthesis of the Sanskrit and Tamil traditions. While these features are easily identifiable in Hindu bhakti, the basic structure and role of this new religion are less obvious, and there have been different views expressed on these matters.

Most scholars believe that Hindu bhakti arose at this moment in history to meet a religious need that had become acute during the "dark period" of Buddhist and Jain ascendency.[77] Bhakti thus represents the Hindu reply to the aridity of these two heterodox systems; variously described as "radically pessimistic", "life-negating", "anti-social", and hostile to the emotional life characteristic of the Tamils.[78] So we are presented with a contrast between the austere ideals of the heretics and the emotionalism of bhakti. The same sort of contrasts has also been made in social and political terms. One scholar has depicted the emergence of bhakti as a patriotic movement with "strong Tamil national feeling," reacting to alien religious systems

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[77]eg. Sastri, South India, 145

[78]Kamil Zvelebil, The Smile of Murugan: on Tamil Literature of South India (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), 195; F. W. Clothey, The Many Faces of Murukan: The History and Meaning of a South Indian God (The Hague: Moulton Publishers, 1978), 73-75; Sastri, History of South India, 144-145; David Shulman, "Idealism and Dissent in South Indian Hinduism," Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy and Dissent in India (Amsterdam: Moulton Publishers, 1984), 35; Stephen Neill, "Bhakti" Hindu and Christian (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1974), 59-61

"connected with foreign, non-Tamil powers."[79] Another has argued that bhakti aimed at "social equality for all."[80]

All these interpretations emphasise the disjunctive character of this period of history, portraying Jainism and Buddhism as providing the dark background for the emergence of bhakti. This picture is not, however, an accurate reading of history. First, the negativistic judgement on South Indian Buddhism appears to be based on a well known tendency among scholars, especially textual scholars, to confuse "scriptural" Buddhism with the religion of Tamil Buddhists. That is, by focusing exclusively on the religion of the monks, they have overlooked the religion of the laity – which played a crucial role in the rise of Buddhism as a world religion. This lay religion has most of, if not all, the features of bhakti religiosity.

Buddhism before it entered South India had already incorporated the Bodhisattva cult that involved the adoration of a Buddha endowed with charismatic and saviour qualities.[81] This development of a bhakti type of religiosity pertains to the accommodation that early Buddhism had to make to magical animism or totemism at the level of the masses. The Bodhisattva cult could well be an adaptation of Yaksa worship among the merchant and artisan

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[79]K.Zvelebil,196-197

[80]S. Vaiyapuri Pillai, cited in Zvelebil, 191

[81]"Maha Parinibbana Suttanta," Digha Nikaya, ii.108-128, trans. T. W. and C. A. F. Rhys-Davids, Dialogues of the Buddha pt.2 (London: Luzac and Company, 1971), 114-139

communities who had embraced Buddhism in large numbers.[82] The erection of stupas over the bodily relics of the Buddha and the building of stupas for former Buddhas were firmly established by the time of Asoka.[83] The early development of the stupa as a place of worship indicates the institutionalization of this cult. Since then the adoration of the person of the Buddha came to constitute an important element in lay religiosity.

Literary evidence suggests that the Buddhist bhakti cult was by no means restricted to North India, the original home of Buddhism. The nature of Buddhism professed in South India in the heyday of its power is reflected in the closing canto of Manimekalai, in which Manimekalai finally decides to follow her mother and to become a Buddhist devotee. There is a reference to the countless multitudes of Buddhas who had appeared on earth, before the final avatar of wisdom and truth in Gautama, the Enlightened One. This is characteristic of the Mahayana School with its doctrines of countless heavens presided over by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas – among whom was Avalokitesvara whose cult became popular in the Theravada countries.[84]

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[82]Balkrishna G. Gokhale, "Buddhism in the Gupta Age," Gupta Culture,150; also Gokhale "Bhakti in Early Buddhism," J. Lele (ed.), Tradition and Modernity in Bhakti Movements (Leiden: E. J. Brill,1981),16-28

[83]Gokhale, "Bhakti," 20

[84]Canto Thirty, Manimekhalai (New York: New Directions Books, 1989). "Buddha was considered a God and he was addressed in great reverence as 'Uli Mutalvan' and 'Atimutalvan'." See S. N. Kandaswamy, Buddhism as Expounded in Manimekalai (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1978), 30. For comparable Sri Lankan evidence see, John C. Holt, Buddha in the Crown. Avalokitesvara in the Buddhist Traditions of Sri Lanka (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 27-71

There is nothing unusual in the development of Buddhist bhakti. Two types of soteriologies have always co-existed in Theravada Buddhism. The arhant ideal was for the elite group of monks who strived for liberation from the mundane worldly existence. The Bodhisattva cult met the religious needs of the laity for whom happy rebirths either in this world or in the heavens constitute their immediate goal, a goal which they can visualise in terms of their worldly cravings for wealth, power, prestige, sensual pleasures, etc..[85] G. Obeyesekere's recent study of "Bhakti Religiosity in Buddhist Sri Lanka" further confirms its importance for the laity.[86]

All this evidence strongly suggests that South Indian Buddhism through the incorporation of saviour cults was able to and did satisfy the emotional aspects of human nature. It may also be noted in passing that both Buddhism[87] and Jainism[88] encouraged goddess worship, which had an antiquity in Tamil culture much greater than these two traditions themselves. When all these religious practices are taken into consideration, it is possible to see in Hindu bhakti a continuation of Buddhist and Jain precedents, rather than a radical departure.

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[85]Charles R. A. Hoole, "A Reassessment of Sinhalese Utopia: Explorative Essay on the Sri Lankan Political Crisis," Journal of Church and State 33 (Winter 1991):102-103

[86]Gananath Obeyesekere, "The Fire-walkers of Kataragama: The Rise of Bhakti Religiosity in Buddhist Sri Lanka," Journal of Asian Studies, 37 (May 1978):457-476

[87]eg. Pattini-Kannaki cult, cf. G. Obeyesekere, The Cult of the Goddess Pattini (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1984)

[88]Yaksini cult, cf. B. Desai, Jainism in South India (Sholapur: Jaina Samskrti Samrakshaka Sangha, 1957)

Secondly, by using the term "anti-social," scholars fail to appreciate Buddhism's missionary appeal to the Tamil laity. From its very beginning Buddhism did offer a genuine alternative to the dharma of caste. Towards this end Buddhism developed a lay ethic for those devoted to economic and political pursuits. R. Thapar has in this respect cogently argued that the Buddhist sigalovada sutta embodies a meaningful code of action for the householder and is a pointed contrast to the householder ethic as recommended by the Brahman priesthood.[89] The Buddhist lay ethic was therefore particularly attractive to those subjected to brahmanical ritualism and the varna-linked codes of conduct. The situation in Tamilakam was not very different in this respect, where the general process of Sanskritization had reached an advanced stage several centuries before Pallava power was finally established.[90] This process was closely linked to the efforts to achieve dominance made by the elite peasants using brahmanical forms of legitimacy.

Buddhism by its advocacy of a "double morality" came to have a wider appeal than Jainism – which emphasised greater continuity between monastic and lay life. Jains by their zealous, unconditional insistence on ahimsa and vegetarianism, influenced the prohibition of occupations and activities (like agriculture and statecraft) that involve the taking of life in any form. Their appeal was thereby restricted to the

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[89]R. Thapar, "The householder and the renouncer in the Brahmanical and Buddhist traditions," Way Of Life: King, Householder, Renouncer ed. T. N. Madan (Delhi:Motilal Banarisidass, 1988), 284ff.

[90]Stein, Peasant State, 66

merchant communities. Both Buddhism and Jainism, however, had a special appeal to the warriors, who were allowed to achieve legitimacy and 'Aryan' respectability without having to accept the brahmanical elements of contemporary peasant culture.

Based on these and earlier observations, it is possible to offer a different explanation for the emergence of Hindu bhakti. Hindu bhakti cult may first of all be seen as a brahmanical response to developments in Buddhism, centred on the Bodhisattva and saviour cults. The response offers an interesting parallel to developments in the North culminating in the syncretistic work, Bhagavad Gita. There the Hindu move to bhakti was clearly formed by the effectiveness of the Buddhist and Jain missionary appeal to the ordinary householder. In the South, the towns of the Coromandel coast were the home of these sects, and from those bases they were also able to recruit non-caste tribals in large numbers. Their lives were characterized by cross-caste fraternization and commensality. By positioning themselves strongly in the towns, Buddhism and Jainism came to represent the interests of merchants and warriors from whom they received lavish support. The successful recruitment and the spread of the Bodhisattva cult in effect strengthened the non-peasant powers in the Tamil macro region.

This is precisely why the expansion of heterodox sects, which had definite social and political consequences, was a major threat to the Brahmans and their peasant allies, situated in rural villages. There rural settlements were constantly expanding by assimilating more and more of the non-peasant peoples of the forests and dry plains, and

using the varna model as a mechanism for regulating these peoples into inferior positions. The accretion of non-peasants was, as already noted, crucial to peasant agricultural expansion, while the resistance and hostility of the non-peasants towards brahmanical institutions made the peasant's task difficult and somewhat uncertain. It is that hostility, which must have been widespread, that finally crystallised in the so-called "Kalabhra interregnum" when for a brief period non-peasant warrior control was extended over some of the peasant areas.

In the light of these developments, Hindu bhakti, which emerged in the aftermath of the "Kalabhra interregnum" may be better understood as a peasant-Brahman response to the challenge of non-peasant forces, who ideologically favoured Buddhism and Jainism and were hostile to Brahmanism. The spread of Hindu bhakti in the second phase of Pallava rule coincided with the increasing ascendency of the Brahmans and peasant alliance in Tamil social life, an alliance which was proving effective against the non-peasants and their heretical merchant allies. K. Zvelebil has drawn attention to this important fact by taking note of the caste origin of a number of Hindu bhakti poets. His study shows that a bhakta was "usually a Brahmin..... or at least a Vellalar (landlord community)."[91] The Brahman/peasant alliance attained its most mature expression in the Cola state that succeeded the Pallavas in the tenth century A.D., when Hindu orthodoxy – including the caste system – became normative throughout the central and

[91] K. Zvelebil, Murugan, 192-193. About 35% of Brahmin origin, (eg. Campantar, Cuntarar, Manikkavacakar, Periyalvar); about 20% of Vellalar (Sudra) origin, (eg. Appar, Nammalvar)

intermediate nadus. At this time we witness the virtual disappearance of Buddhism and Jainism from the Tamil soil after undergoing some centuries of decline in the face of the Brahman/peasant opposition.

There are two important factors that contributed to the disappearance of Buddhism and Jainism from Tamil society. Violence was one of the methods employed by the instigators of Hindu revival to undermine the Buddhist and Jain missionary appeal to the ordinary householder. When the Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Hsuan-tsang in A.D. 642 visited South India, Buddhist and Jain influence was still in its zenith and there is in his writings no allusion to anything in the way of religious persecution or hostility to Jains and Buddhists. He also seemed completely unaware of the bhakti revival which was being carried forward by Saivite and Vaisnavite poets. It means religious persecution which broke out about that time must have occurred subsequent to the pilgrim's visit. The long standing tolerant relations among religious sects characterized by peaceful competition seem to have come to an abrupt end "when the worshippers of Siva and Visnu felt the call to stem the rising tide of heresy."[92]

At the instigation of the Saivite saint Campantar who converted the Pantyan ruler, thousands of Jains, it is reported, were persecuted[93] for refusing to apostatise. The most savage cruelty was inflicted on them when no less than eight thousand Jains suffered a horrible death

[92]Nilakanta Sastri, A History of South India (Madras: Oxford University Press, 1975), 423

[93]Romila Thapar, Cultural Transaction and Early India: Tradition and Patronage (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987), 17

by impalement. The event is celebrated in an annual festival at the Minaksi temple at Madurai commemorating the impalement at the young saint's urging. Historian Vincent Smith notes that these claims of tradition seem to be confirmed by sculptures on the walls of a temple at Tiruvattur in the Arcot District, in which tortures inflicted on the unhappy victims are all too clearly portrayed which seem to confirm the reports of the massacres.[94]

Religious violence of this order, states Romila Thapar, is difficult to reconcile with a persistent and popular belief that "non-violence and tolerance were special features of Hinduism," and that "the Hindus never indulged in religious persecution."[95] She points out that "ahimsa as an absolute value is characteristic of the Buddhists and the Jains who first made it foundational to their teaching, and their message was very different from that of the Bhagavad-Gita on this matter." The Saivites in particular, she argues, have been prone to persecuting their competitors, which is also borne out by the evidence from Kashmir, a strategy that was crowned with success in North India.[96]

Religious persecution continued into the following century alongside Hindu revivalism. In the eighth century Nandivarman II

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[94]V. Smith, The Early History of India: From 600 B.C. to the Muhammadan Conquest (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 475.For a record of Saivite persecution of Buddhists and Jains see Thapar, Cultural Transaction, 1-20

[95]R. Thapar, "Imagined Religious Community" Modern Asian Studies, vol. 23, no. 2 (1989): 218-219

[96]Ibid., 219-220

Pallavamalla, an ardent Vaisnavite, carried out persecution of Jains and Buddhists. His contemporary, the Vaisnavite hymnist Tirumangai, is reported to have plundered the Buddhist vihara at the town of Nagapattinam, using the golden image to finance, among other things, the construction of walls around the principal shrine at Srirangam.[97]

It would appear from the evidence that the Buddhist and Jain monasteries were the prime targets of the Hindu religious zealots. Most of the victims were therefore monks who were easily identifiable. But what happened to the non-peasant laity who were left without religious leaders? Did they apostatise by succumbing to the pressures? The emergence of the valankai (right hand) and idankai (left hand) social divisions from the tenth century suggests that the final blow to the heterodox sects was struck when the lay merchant and artisan classes were incorporated as polluted inferiors into the Hindu social system. They became associated with the left hand, which "in South India has connotations of impurity" whereas the right hand associated with agriculturalists and land "has powerful and positive normative" connotations.[98]

Considering the stigma of pollution which is attached to the left hand it would be surprising that those of the idankai would have acquiesced in the designation. That they did eventually is clear from

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[97]Sastri, The Culture and History of the Tamils (Calcutta: F. K. L. Mukhopadhay, 1965),112-113

[98]Arjun Appadurai, "Right and Left Hand Castes in South India," The Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol. II, no.2 (1974): 221, see above, ch. 6.4

the numerous references to the local dues regularly collected from the idankai groups in the Vellalar regulated jajmani relations. Following their incorporation into the left hand division, the merchants and artisans have attempted to escape the oppression by emulating the Brahman style of religiosity. As a result their status was elevated somewhat in the twelfth century by granting them somewhat greater privileges. However, they have always been ranked below the Vellalars.[99]

Here again coercive methods must have been consciously employed for the purpose of weaning the lay men and women from the heterodox sects, for it is highly unlikely that they would have willingly accepted their incorporation into the left hand division with its connotations of pollution. On the other hand such coercive methods alone cannot account for the vitality and dynamism of early medieval Hinduism. During the early period of reaction against heterodoxy, orthodox Hinduism adopted Buddhist missionary methods which transformed it into an effective missionary religion.

The rapid growth of Saiva monasticism clearly points to the missionary character of medieval Hinduism. In the seventh and eighth centuries when religious controversy was becoming intense, Saiva monasteries (mathas)[100] modelled on heterodox monastic orders were established throughout the peninsula for proselytising and for

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[99]cf. Stein, Peasant State, 199

[100]matha in Sanskrit and matam in Tamil

"colonising" new areas. The mathas borrowed from the Buddhist sangha, elements of its organisational structure and its disciplinary code, and made provision for young men to be directly initiated as sannyasin by-passing the grhastha stage. Like the sangha, the matha had a reciprocal relationship with the lay community. Reciprocation was in the tying of dana (gifting) to punya (merit), where, in exchange for alms and donations, the householder acquired merit. This institutional link with the lay community was crucial in the Hindu missionary efforts to influence public opinion. One of the channels for exercising public opinion was through the educational function performed by the matha.

This form of communal asceticism was entirely new to Hinduism. Traditionally, communal asceticism represented by Jainism and Buddhism had posed the greatest challenge to brahmanical domination. However, when it was incorporated into a Hindu framework it became an instrument in the defense of orthodoxy. This is precisely what was appreciated by Sankara (A.D. 788-820) the founder of Hindu monasticism. He, on the one hand, campaigned against Buddhism because he wanted the Vedic prescriptions of varna and asrama to be the foundation of lay life. His group of Saiva renouncers, the Dasanami Sannyasins, became in this connection the guardians and enforcers of these regulations. But on the other hand, to realise his goal, he borrowed from the Buddhist bhikkhus elements of their organisational structure and their disciplinary code: "permanent residence in the monasteries, austerity, celibacy, subsistence on alms,

and the study and teaching of prescribed texts."[101] His Saiva mathas attached to temples became instruments of proselytization and acculturation. Sankara thus crowned his "counter-reformation" by establishing monastic centres in "the four quarters" of India.[102]

From these observations we may conclude that medieval South Indian Hinduism borrowed many features of the heretical religions in order to serve the needs of the householder. This would make South Indian Hinduism a syncretic religion par excellence. However, it must also be appreciated that the new elements, the alien new deities and organisational structures, were incorporated in a specifically Hindu manner, into a dominant Hindu framework of ideas and ethos.[103] By this manner of integration, the imported elements become redefined, annulling thereby their linkage with the prior heterodox or totemic tradition.

This process of borrowing in Hinduism is perhaps best illustrated by the example of the early Murukan. As late as the sixth century, when the general process of "Sanskritization" had reached an advanced stage, we can still discern the earlier classical identity of Murukan. In Paripatal (A.D. 400-550)[104], for instance, one of the later

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[101]Thapar, Ancient Indian, 75

[102]Ibid., 75-76; G. S. Ghurye, "Dasanamis of The Sankara School of Ascetics", Indian Sadhus 2d. ed. (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1964), 82-97

[103] On the question of religious syncretism cf. G. Obeyesekere's "The Principles of Religious Syncretism and the Buddhist Pantheon in Sri Lanka", Images of Man: Religion and History Process in South Asia, ed. Fred W. Clothey (Madras: New Era Publications, 1982), 133

[104]Kamil Zvelebil, Tamil Literature (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), 50

Cankam anthologies, god Cevvel or Murukan still retains his own earthy, classical identity, although by now he had in addition acquired the celestial qualities of brahmanical Skanda (of Sanskritic epics) as well. He shows himself as an earthy Tamil god about to become elevated into a Sanskrit high god. By worship of him, the Tamil people at this time still continued to affirm their present worldly life and showed little desire to enter an other-worldly realm.

Then something unusual happened to Murukan. During the period roughly between the seventh and ninth centuries, the second phase of Pallava rule when there is a surge toward Hinduisation, Murukan almost disappears from the official religious scene.[105] Whenever he does surface in the literature or iconography, he is given a subservient position as a member of Siva's family. Even his adoption into Siva's family was based on his likeness to Skanda, whose filial relationship to Siva had become firmly established around the time of the Gupta emperors; when he was worshipped as the warrior-son of Siva and Parvati. The worship of Skanda-Kumara by the Guptas is reflected in their coins, seals and pillar inscriptions.[106] It is also significant to note in the Saiva pantheon of the Guptas, Skanda-Kumara was at the same time becoming an independent cult object – a

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[105]Fred. W. Clothey, The Many Faces of Murukan The History and Meaning of a South Indian God. (The Hague: Moulton Publishers, !978), 76-77

[106]B. L. Smith (ed.), Gupta Culture, 180

development which would in turn influence the development of the Skanda - Murukan cult in South India.[107]

The metamorphosis of Murukan into the son of Siva illustrates the Hindu manner of incorporating what were originally alien elements into the religious system. Murukan is thereby redefined and brought into line with the cult of Siva. The story of Murukan on the other hand, in Geertzian terms, illustrates the transformation of the "classical style" (a Tamil ethos) into a "medieval style" (a Sanskrit ethos).[108] We have noted how the legendary personality of Murukan depicts the moods and conceptions of the classical or heroic style of Tamilakam. He acts as a symbol of that age – its world view and ethos. His fading into oblivion and subsequent reappearance as the son of Siva marks the closing of that age and the beginning of a new one dominated by a Sanskrit framework of ideas and ethos.

This dominant Sanskrit framework that defines the cultural context of medieval bhakti was probably inspired by the Brahmanism of the Gupta period. It is widely recognized that the Gupta age saw a resurgent Brahmanism within court circles which served to revive the ancient Vedic sacrificial rituals. Almost all the Gupta kings favoured Brahmanism and were declared adherents of Vaisnavism or Saivism. They called themselves bhagavatas, devotees of Visnu and Siva. They

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[107]Ibid., 39

[108]cf. C. Geertz, Islam Observed, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 25

made their allegiance public by taking the names of the gods and placing the emblems of the gods on their coins.

There are two important aspects of the "Gupta style" which appear relevant to our present discussion. One is the Hindu temple. The first Hindu temples – including sculptured icons – were built during this period. The Hindu temple was conceived as the condensed image of the cosmos. The building of the temple, like the shaping of the image, could for this reason not be left to the creativity of the architect, but had to follow the prescribed canons of building and were from beginning to end a ritual activity. The dark interior sanctum of the temple is called the garbhagrha, the "womb chamber." When the temple is being constructed, a rite called garbhadhana, the implanting of the seed takes place, which makes the temple – the microcosm of the universe – a living organism. Stella Kramrisch writes:

> "The temple is the concrete shape (muti) of the Essence; as such it is the residence and vesture of God..... The devotee who comes to the temple, to look at it, does so as a 'seer', not as a spectator."[109]

The temple was conceived of as the body of Purusa, the microcosm of the society. The body of Purusa, also called Prajapati, is reconstructed from various parts of the society with their diverse functions. In the same manner, the prestigious temples built in towns, were an agglomeration of separate shrines enclosed within a wall. The erection of separate shrines was intended to reflect the caste divisions

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[109] S. Kramrisch, The Hindu Temple, vol. 1. 1946, reprint ed., (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass,1976), 165

of society. In such orthodox temples the lower caste would be kept at a distance from the most hallowed images, while direct access to them was reserved for the officiating priest.

In addition to the construction of Hindu temples, the composition of puranas reflects the mood of the Gupta age. A number of influential puranic works are ascribed to this general age, among them the most influential one being the Visnupurana.[110] The puranas were composed by Brahman advocates of Hindu revival, who saw the need to combat the diversity which had flourished under the ecclectic age of the Kusanas, who had built a great international empire. The efforts of the Brahman authors were on the whole successful, as the masses increasingly turned to the new Puranic Hinduism. Buddhism, which was still thriving in some centres in the Gupta Period, virtually disappeared in the post-Gupta age.

The composition of the puranas may be seen as an organized "counter-reformation" by the Brahmans to combat heresies that had become well-entrenched and continued to flourish. It had not been long ago when shaven heretics (mostly Buddhist monks) persuaded men and women to reject all that had traditionally been held sacred, especially the holy Vedas and the priests who memorized and expounded them. The learned Brahmans of that time had roundly denounced these evil forces let loose on the sacred soil of Aryavarta. The dharmasastras called the Buddhists, Jains and Carvakas, nastikas, because they deny both the Vedas and the atman of the Upanishads;

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[110]H. H. Wilson, The Vishnupurana (Calcutta: Punthi Pustak, 1961)

not withstanding the fact that their influence could be seen even in such orthodox documents as the Bhagavad Gita. The Puranic authors in this sense continued the battle of their fathers in the form of sharp and contemptuous denunciations of all non-Vedic religion.

The Visnupurana, one of the great puranas in which Vaisnavite bhakti is unfolded, represents the most important anti-Buddhist work of this period. It is in this work that inclusiveness reached its highest form with the Buddha depicted as an avatar of Visnu, who is himself is deluded and corrupt, dishonestly used by Visnu to lead his followers astray. Heresy and corruption belong to the nature of the Kali Age,[111] so the Buddha and his followers are seen as unfortunate victims of heresy, in that they did not choose to embrace heretical doctrines.[112]

The puranas and temple architecture which gave medieval Hinduism its distinctive form in the Gupta age soon found their way into the Tamil country.[113] The Pallavas who centred their kingdom in the city of Kanchipuram were deeply influenced by the Sanskritic culture to the north and served as a primary means of transmitting that culture to the Tamil country. By A.D. 900 when the second phase

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[111] Ironically, when dealing with bhakti, the author, Vyasa, maintains that the Kaliyuga is the most blessed age, because salvation is now most easily obtained by merely invoking the name of god. But for Sudras and women to be saved they must also perform their duties of serving those above them. M. Biardeau, Hinduism (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1989), 104-5

[112] The myth of Buddha avatar may explain why the Vaisnavites did not seek to proselytize through monastic groups since the myth acts as an agency of incorporation

[113] In the south, temple architecture was modified and the puranas were reworked, but the basic structures were retained.

of Pallava rule came to an end, Hinduism stood victorious over Jainism and Buddhism, and Tamil culture was deeply impregnated with Sanskritic influences.[114]

For medieval Hindu bhakti, it was the Sanskritic temples that provided the physical setting for divine revelation. In both the Saivite and Vaisnavite traditions, five factors are almost universally recognizable in these experiences: (i) The revelation of god is locally conditioned and is closely associated with one of the temples of the deity. (ii) The self-manifestation of the deity is closely linked to the visible form of the image, in which he is seen in the shrine. (iii) Vision and apprehension are accompanied by an immense sense of deliverance. (iv) This vision is followed by the rapture of oneness with the object of devotion and this ecstatic oneness is regarded as the highest religious experience. It is

> a surging emotion which chokes the speech, makes the tears flow and the hair thrill with pleasure and exitement, and often leads to hysterical laughing and weeping by turns, to sudden fainting fits and to long trances of unconsciousness.[115]

Language is hard pressed to find adequate expression for this sense of union with the divine and frequently the form of expression is erotic, the experience of oneness between the lover and the beloved. (v) The bhakta devotee delights in the society of those who have shared

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[114] While most Tamils will welcome the defeat of heresy, they have not fully accepted the Pallavas as part of the Tamil tradition: "Even today the Tamil uses the term 'pallava' where he wants to designate one as a rascal or a thief." H. G. Rawlinson, India, A Short Cultural History (London: Cresset, 1943),194

[115] J. N. Farquhar, Religious Literature, 230

the same experience as himself or herself. The temple is normally surrounded by groups of devotees with each one finding solace in the companionship of others.

How do these mystic experiences in the temple relate to the bhakta's life in the larger society? Here the notion of pilgrimage is helpful in bridging the gap between spiritual and mundane existence. The bhakta's visit to the shrine constitutes a pilgrimage whereby he leaves his mundane world and enters an idealized cosmos. The most common term for pilgrimage places is tirtha, literally a "crossing place or a ford." Through the centuries some of India's most important places of pilgrimage have indeed been located along the banks of her great rivers and have been "fords." As pilgrimage places, however, they are also symbolic and spiritual fords, where one may cross the flood of samsara, and in some measure all the major temples can be seen as places of pilgrimage.

The Tamil puranic myths insist on the distinction between the temple and the outside world.[116] The temple and its "womb" lie on the "far shore" beyond the world of samsara. Kala, the cycle of death and re-death, has no power over the shrine or anyone who worships there. In other words, the shrine is immune from the effects of real, historical time; that is, from the Kali Age, the present moment of time.[117]

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[116]D. Shulman, Tamil Temple Myths: Sacrifice and Marriage in South Indian Saivism (Princeton University Press, 1980), 23

[117]N.B. "Yama, the god of death, has no power over men who reside in the sacred area. Nor does the Kali Age, the degenerate period of time in which we live." Ibid., 23

The Tamil talapuranam, based on the Sanskrit sthalapuranas embodies a record of great deeds of Siva performed at various places. These places are praised in the talapuranam, and singing praises of the various shrines is characteristic of Saivite bhakti religiosity. It may be recalled that the bhakti poet-saints, the nayanmars, were wandering from shrine to shrine, as it were in perpetual pilgrimage, singing the praises of the various shrines of Siva. While the place names in the puranam are Tamil, the framework of the "stories" or myths are northern, informed by Brahman values.[118] In these Tamil myths clustered around temple cults, the values and perceptions of the medieval bhaktas find trenchant expression. D. Shulman writes:

> How are these shrines seen by the devotees? The sthalapuranas paint a happy picture of the temple as a refuge from reality: no sorrows of any kind reigns within their walls which demarcate a zone of total purity, safety and freedom. The shrine appropriates the attributes of various celestial worlds and thus renders these worlds redundant: Amrta, the divine food of immortality, is brought from heaven to the shrine.[119]

What is so significant about the Tamil shrine is that it had made the earth the locus of mukti. The shrine is the place where the deity (or the sadhu) gives darsan, that, by implication, is equated with salvation. The shrine is thus the realm of timelessness, of absolute freedom and purity. Hence the pilgrim after circumambulating the intricate exterior

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[118]Ibid., 14,22. Kantapuranam, the definitive Tamil text of Murukan myths is similar, based upon the Sanskrit original, Sivarâsyskhanda, it was composed by Kacciyappacivacariyar who lived between the 15th and 17th centuries. cf. Shulman, 1984: 48

[119]Ibid., 12-13

of the temple, usually undergoes an initial purification by bathing before journeying to the interior, to the very centre of the world where he will receive the darsan of the deity. This is what makes the shrine superior to any world of gods. By a brief sojourn in the shrine, all the benefits of the celestial worlds can be realized here and now.

The temple, it was noted, is a microcosm of the idealised universe, but it differs from the surrounding world by the strict ordering of its component elements. That universe was ordered ritually within carefully calculated boundaries to create an ideal world opposed to the disorderly world of nature. The pilgrim in his journey moves between these two worlds and indeed belongs to these two different realms at once. Outside the walls of the temple, he belongs to the caste society with its evil impurities. When he enters the ideal world erected around the sacred, he rids himself of the evils which life in the social world outside necessarily imparts. This would be symbolised in the washing. The temple in this sense offers him "refuge" from the reality of social life.[120]

It may be observed that there exists here a well defined boundary between the ideal and the real worlds. This demarcation contributed to a two-faced or two-tiered attitude toward social relationships: egalitarian relations with fellow devotees in devotional or sacred situations, and hierarchical relations, even with fellow devotees, in mundane or profane situations. As such, bhaktas from different castes

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[120] For this reason "the universality of salvation" implicit in bhakti had to "accommodate itself to the secular hierarchy," M. Biardeau, 107

would share in the ritual eating of consecrated food (prasadam). This sharing, however, tended to be restricted to devotional ceremonial situations: at special places, on certain days, in the company of fellow devotees. But different castes did not, and would not, intermarry, nor were the restrictions on inter-caste dining lightly over-ruled. Such an approach to life, from the perspective of brahmanical tradition, is neither confused nor inconsistent. As K. Klostermaier explains:

> Hindus, of course, are used to compartmentalizing society and to accepting a corresponding compartmentalization of right and wrong behaviour. The devotee, in satsang, moves temporarily into another society, the group of the believers that operates under its own laws. The termination of the satsang brings about the terminations of this status, and the person moves back into the caste he or she was born into.[121]

These two different worlds, the ideal and the real, can have the effect of reinforcing each other. The ideal world of the temple can easily act as a "safety valve" for the containment of social dissent in the caste society. For those who are socially despised and must carry the stigma of pollution, the temple takes on the role of an egalitarian sanctuary into and out of which they could freely move back and forth. Apart from this passive role, David Shulman has argued that the shrine, by making the earth the locus of mukti, in effect "sanctified" life on earth and within society. Having achieved mukti, because it is present within the conditions of one's social life, "the bhakta is commanded to live not on some future heaven but here, in the present moment,

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[121]Klostermaier, 58-59

through the recognition of the divine within him and within the world in which he lives."[122]

By making the "Tamil land" the "realm of the divine," Hindu bhakti provided the religious legitimacy for the conventional social order and for the status-quo. Far from being revolutionary in the social sense, it tended toward the "preservation of the social order through the sanctification of the present."[123] Thus, in the hagiographies of the poet-saints, as recorded for example, in the twelfth-century Periya puranam, one sees the bhakti-hero intervening repeatedly against the politically or socially powerful heretics in order to save the threatened Hindu dharma.[124] In fact the legacy of Hindu bhakti, except in its most extreme manifestations, is one of acceptance of the social order.[125] For those at the bottom of the varna hierarchy, this meant, on the one hand, acceptance that the sufferings in the present life are inevitable and inexorable, because they are atonement for an ancient unpardonable offence. On the other hand, by the fulfilment of all social duties prescribed for them, accompanied by an intense devotion to the

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[122]Shulman, Temple, 21-22,83

[123]Ibid., 21

[124]cf. Periya Puranam 6.1.648-856 of Cekkilar , and also the similar Vaisnava hagiographies or Guruparamparas.

125Akileshwar Jha, The Imprisoned Mind (New Delhi: Ambika Publications, 1980), 1

local deity, both the suffering and the stigma of pollution one might otherwise expect, could be erased in future years.[126]

In this manner Hindu bhakti was instrumental in making the varna system more workable and acceptable to the discontented non-peasant masses.[127] This is precisely why the popular Buddhist bhakti movement was openly embraced by the Brahmans and their peasant allies, only to ensure the continued vitality of the classical Vedic tradition. Especially in the early medieval period, a period of major socio-economic changes, the inclusion of popular religiosity endowed with increased authority, prestige and durability, gave the brahmanical system the stability and continuity it needed so badly. It is this process of remodelling the brahmanical system that is variously called, "Sanskritization," "Vedicization," and "Brahmanization." The introduction of bhakti into this process directly contributed to the popularisation of the brahmanical traditions. This reformulation of an older tradition, the agency of mathas, provided for change and the revitalization of ancient norms and practices.[128]

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[126] J. B. Gokhale-Turner, "Bhakti or Vidroha: Continuity and Change in Dalit Sahitya," J. Lele (ed.), Tradition and Modernity in Bhakti Movements (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 29-42

[127]Biardeau, Hinduism, 105

[128]The philosopher - saint, Ramanuja is instructive here. In embracing the bhakti movement he liberalised worship by curbing the authority of the Vaikanasa priests who insisted on the mastery of Sanskritic lore, and thus he conforms to the conventionally-accepted picture as a friend of the lower castes. On the other hand, in the administration of the Srirangam temple he made a concerted effort to remove all the accouting duties from the long-standing Vellala control and assign them to fellow Brahmans. V. N. Hari Rao, Koil Olugu, The Chronicle of the Sri Rangam Temple With Historical Notes, (Madras: Rochouse and Sons, n.d.), 94-5 For the growing influence of Islam on Hinduism during this period see Appendix 1, Islam and Hinduism.

CHAPTER 7

SOUTH INDIAN PATTERNS IN SRI LANKA

7.1 The Rise of Rajarata Civilization

Sri Lanka is an island in the Indian Ocean, 25,481 square miles in area, and separated from the southern extremity of peninsular India by the Gulf of Mannar and the Palk Strait, the width of the intervening sea at the narrowest point being about 20 miles. The position of the mango-shaped island in the Indian Ocean places it on the great sea-routes between Europe and China. From about the second century when the island first became familiar to Greek and Arab sailors, it has been an important port of call for the sea-borne trade between West and East.

Sri Lanka and South India

In both Classical and Medieval times, merchants from the Coromandel and Malabar coasts as well as Byzantium, Persia and China, were regular callers at the Sri Lankan ports. Most famous of the ancient ports was Mahatittha or Mantai,[1] now a buried city located

[1] "Mahavoti," "Mahavutu," "Mahaputu" and "Matottam" in medieval Sinhalese and Tamil inscriptions

close to the island of Mannar. Other sea-ports which facilitated international trade in this period were Kankesanturai[2] and Kayts[3] in Jaffna, Tambapanni at the mouth of Aruvi Aru on the northwest coast, and Trincomalee[4] on the east coast. Here, ships from various countries sold and exchanged merchandise and also took away pearls, precious stones, cinnamon, elephants and other products of Sri Lanka.

The proximity to, and the contacts with India profoundly influenced the civilization and economy of Sri Lanka. From the dawn of its history, Sri Lanka has witnessed the arrival of Tamil and other Indian traders, adventurers, invaders and peaceful immigrants. As time advanced, the Tamil element in the island's population progressively increased and Tamil influence upon Sinhalese civilization became more pronounced. Most notably, from the late tenth century when South Indian invasions became systematic, Tamil influence became all-pervading. From roughly A.D. 993 to 1070 and again from 1215, the Colas and the Pantyas held sway over the old capitals of Anuradhapura and Polonnaruva, and Rajarata became a principality of the South Indian kingdoms. It was at about this time that the separate Tamil kingdom in the north arose, following the conquest of the major part of the island by Magha of Kalinga in A.D. 1215. This pattern of direct involvement in Sri Lankan affairs continued until the decline of the Vijayanagar.

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[2]"Jambukola" in Sinhalese

[3]"Huratota" in Sinhalese

[4]Gokanna and Tirukkonamalai in the Sinhalese and Tamil sources

Throughout the island's history the peaceful migration from South India of people – as traders, sailors, and adventurers – has continued intermittently. Their numbers, however, grew sharply with the arrival of refugee-immigrants in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. With the establishment of the Delhi Sultanates (A.D. 1206-1526), Muslim power was for the first time felt in the Deccan and beyond. The Khalji sultans (A.D. 1290-1320), for example pursued a policy of launching long-distance raids into the south of India, intending to secure the benefits of plunder as well as annual tribute payments. These raids of plunder involved the destruction of Hindu temples, including the prestigious Srirangam temple, and they must have created a great sense of insecurity in the region, and contributed to the large-scale movement of people to Sri Lanka. In some areas, the rise of the Hindu power at Vijayanagar in A.D. 1336 helped alleviate the sense of insecurity among the people, but the new Hindu regime's militaristic and interventionist policies also did damage to the old way of life associated with the local nadus,[5] and weakened and in places replaced the later Brahmin/Velallar alliance.

All these contacts with South India, which were close and prolonged, would suggest that the Rajarata civilization that evolved in the low country dry zone with its capital in Anuradhapura, was profoundly influenced by South India. The fact that the Rajarata

[5]K. K. Pillai, South India and Ceylon 139, G. W. Spencer in B. L. Smith (ed.), Religion and the Legitimation of Power in South Asia, (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 14-27; Ira M. Lapidus, A History of Islamic Societies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 437ff.

civilization was primarily Sinhalese speaking and supported Buddhist monasteries, seems on the surface to point in another direction and a few Sri Lankan scholars indeed hold to the view that the Rajarata civilization was founded by a people of "Aryan" descent and that it continued to receive its main inspiration and example from North India. As a result of this claim, which is widely accepted, insufficient attention has been paid to South India's role in Sri Lankan history. In the ensuing discussion some of the evidence pertaining to the South Indian connection will be examined more closely.

The first point that needs to be noted is that the area called the "low country dry zone" is the most important region in early Sri Lankan history because it is the cradle of the Sinhalese civilization. It embraces 70% of the land area. It is called the dry zone because it receives only the rains of the north-east monsoon (October to April), while during the south-west monsoon (May to September) it undergoes a period of drought. The main problem in the dry zone is providing an adequate supply of water for agricultural and domestic use during the annual drought.

The civilization that arose in the northern half of this dry zone was known to the Buddhist chroniclers as Rajarata, meaning the King's Country. Anuradhapura was selected as the capital of this region probably because of its central position within the area initially settled by the adventurers from India who landed near Mannar. Anuradhapura was far enough from the sea to have some protection from raids, but near enough to guard this exposed frontier. It was also

well placed in a level agricultural area which very early on developed an irrigation system.

The greatest challenge that these dry zone settlers would have faced is the provision of an adequate supply of water. According to the Sinhalese Chronicles, the construction of tanks and other irrigation works was undertaken in the second century B.C.. King Vasabha (A.D. 67-111) of the Lambakanna dynasty was the first of the great tank-building Sinhalese kings. His engineers are credited with the construction of a system of underground pipes that conducted water to the bathing tanks at Anuradhapura. But it was largely during the reign of Mahasena (A.D. 275-301) and subsequently in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries, that large scale and complex irrigation schemes were established.[6] In the medieval age Sinhalese civilization had grown into a fully-fledged "hydraulic society" renowned for its colossal and complex system of interrelated anicuts, channels, tanks and reservoirs.[7] These are not only engineering accomplishments but indications of a prosperous economy and well-organized society.

Central-state Thesis

While the complexity of the hydraulic works does indicate that the society was well-organized, many scholars have been led to the conclusion that such a society must have been built on a centrally

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[6]University of Ceylon History of Ceylon (UCHU) vol.1 pt.1, ed. H. C. Ray (Colombo: 1959), 223-224

[7]E. R. Leach, "Hydraulic Society in Ceylon," Past and Present, 15 (April, 1959): 2-26

administered, rapacious bureaucratic system. In a survey of the archaeological, documentary and ecological evidence, Rhoads Murphey has drawn attention to the perfect manner in which Rajarata society fits the requirements of Wittfogel's concept of "oriental despotism":

> The old society of Raja Rata must have been able at will to marshal and organize enormous amounts of labour. The Mahavansa and surviving inscriptions outline a clear picture of Wittfogelian oriental despotism.[8]

Yet this same central state, characterised here as "the most barbarous", has also been portrayed as benevolent by those historians who desire to tell an impressive story about their hero-kings.[9]

The pre-colonial state as a benevolent central state has a great deal of appeal to historians of post-colonial Sri Lanka. The scholars from the University of Sri Lanka who contributed to the second volume of the work University of Ceylon History of Ceylon (1960) therefore agree that the Sinhalese king possessed absolute power but they also insist that power was "limited to a great extent by public opinion which demanded of the ruler that he follow fundamental principles of justice and equity." As a result presumably the king ruled an elaborate Asokan type of welfare state that was centrally co-ordinated by "a department of the central government." The

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[8] "The Ruin of Ancient Ceylon," The Journal of Asian Studies, vol.XVI: no. 2, (Feb.1957): 194

[9] In the case of Parakrama Bahu I (A.D.-1153-1186) some have drawn attention to his application of cold rationality that kept prisons full of dissidents as efficiently as the tanks full of water [K. Taylor, "The Devolution of Kingship in Twelfth Century Ceylon" in K. R. Hall (ed.) Michigan Papers in South and Southeast Asia, no.11, (1976), 282]; while others praise him for his devotion to the enhancement of agriculture, his liberality to the poor and his benefactions to Buddhism.

department's successful operation depended on a "class of feudal nobility" called "the kulinas" who alone "had the specialised knowledge and experience that were required to run the public administration, including the maintenance of irrigation works."[10]

Leach's Critique

In his article, "Hydraulic Society in Ceylon," E. R. Leach has offered a critique of the central state thesis. After acknowledging the obvious (that is, the existence of elaborate hydraulic works in Rajarata) he raises the crucial question whether a hydraulic society logically requires a large scale administration involving centralised control of large labour forces.[11] Leach believes that the central state thesis rests on a propagandist type of argument. He asks, "Can we really infer from a tradition of 'great' kings that the kings in question were truly great? Might it not be that the 'greatness' of the hydraulic monarch is itself a product of propaganda myth? Need we believe the Sinhalese chronicles any more than we believe Knox?"[12]

Leach cogently argues that in the case of Rajarata the characteristic pattern is "Indian" rather than "Oriental" (Chinese), where legitimate authority is manifested in personal charisma as against bureaucratic government and patrilineal kinship. Consequently, "the Indian type of hydraulic society, of which the

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[10] UCHC vol.1, pt. 2 (1960), 369, 377, 715

[11] Leach, "Hydraulic Society," 8,13

[12] Ibid., 13

Sinhalese one is an example, is cellular and not centralised in structure; localized groups of technical specialists form a work team centred in a leader."[13] Leach also refers to this cellular society as "caste feudalism" in which specialised occupations are professed not by individuals but by groups (sub-castes), who are physically immobile and whose status is defined by birth. The socio-economic contract between these castes, continually resident in particular localities is a permanent one. All this means that within the framework of "caste-feudalism" "stupendous" hydraulic works can be undertaken by the localized groups centred in a leader, but carried through several generations. Such works are not created rationally and systematically but as haphazard pieces developed by individual leaders.

If Rajarata was indeed an Indian type of hydraulic society, then the authority of the king would be seriously curtailed by the existence of numerous independent localized groups. Beyond the agricultural core area around the capital, his control or rule would be indirect instead of direct, accomplished through a system of alliances. The chronicles (Mahavamsa and Culavamsa) describe the governors (disava) of the king in glowing terms, and probably have exaggerated their actual authority.[14] In theory the outer provinces of the kingdom were ruled by these governors appointed by the sovereign; however in "practice the lordship of the local chieftain (Vanniyar) was virtually

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[13]Ibid., 24

[14]H. Ellawala, Social History of Early Ceylon (Colombo: Gunasena, 1969), 117

absolute." In many cases the "rank of the disava was simply the titular office of the court official who never went near his domain."[15] It is indeed typically Indian for the king to claim absolute authority as a cakravartin even though he could never exercise it.

Leach's critique of the use of the colonial model of the despotic, central state is convincing and the evidence he presents helps us to understand Rajarata as a decentralised state composed of autonomous petty principalities continuing to exist alongside a dominant principality that pulls them together and holds them together as a differentiated whole. Described in this broad sense, Rajarata would be on a par with other contemporary examples of a decentralised state in the region of South and Southeast Asia: i.e. what Geertz describes as the "theatre state" of Java;[16] Tambiah describes as the "galactic polity" of mainland Buddhist Southeast Asia;[17] and Stein describes as the "segmented" state or nadus of South India.[18] In all these states the king's sovereignty is achieved not so much by the real exercise of power and control as by the devices and mechanisms of a ritual kind performed at the magic centre, the axis mundi. The kingship based on ritual sovereignty is typically Indian, and was clearly the basic model borrowed and adapted by the polities of Southeast Asia.

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[15]Leach, "Hydraulic Society," 18

[16]Geertz, Islam, 36-39

[17]Tambiah, World Conqueror, 113

[18]Stein, Peasant State, 23

From ritual sovereignty to segmented state

A state based on ritual sovereignty is defined by its centre, and not by its perimeter.[19] Such a state, according to Tambiah, is "centre-oriented," where "the centre represents the totality and embodies the whole." Accordingly, the king, his palace, and his capital are the pivots and embodiments of the kingdom, i.e., the totality.[20] This centre-oriented view of the state was familiar to the Sinhalese tradition. Perhaps the earliest evidence of this view comes from the Sinhalese coronation ritual.[21]

An account of the coronation in the Mahavamsa begins by pointing out that the coronation ritual receives its Buddhist legitimacy from none other than "the great thera Mahinda", Asoka's emissary to the king Devanampiya Tissa. Prior to the inauguration of a Buddhist state, the great Mahinda himself states, the "doctrine of the conqueror", that is, of the Buddha, would not "stand" until "the boundaries (sima) are established" which demarcate the ceremonial centre of an indigenous Buddhist monastery (vihara). Anxious to comply with the prescription, Devanampiya Tissa replies, "I will abide under the

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[19] "Whilst in the pre-modern state the centre is stressed and made sacred by being hedged around with taboos, in the modern state boundaries are stressed and made the arena of taboo." J. Spencer (ed.), Sri Lanka: History and the Roots of Conflict (London: Routledge, 1991), 26

[20] Tambiah, World Conqueror, 114-115.

[21] Mv. 15. 178-194.

Buddha's command..... Therefore establish the boundaries with all speed, taking in the city."[22]

What is envisaged here is a religious state that would include within itself a political state, as indicated by the boundaries set for the building of the Mahavihara, the monastery at Anuradhapura, whose boundaries would also establish and define the place for the capital city within the sacred precincts. "If it be so," advised Mahinda, "then do thou thyself, lord of the earth, mark out the course of the boundary."[23] The king himself "ploughed a furrow in a circle, making it to begin near the ford on the Kadamba river, and ended it when he (again) reached the river."[24] Finally, when "the fixing of the boundaries (sima) were completed" the "great earth quaked." Thus it was with characteristic cosmic acknowledgment that a Buddhist state was given its foundation.

Here "taking the city" by circumambulation appears as the central part of the coronation ritual. From a centre-oriented cosmological view of the state, the capital city in turn stood for the whole country. Therefore, by circumambulation of the capital city, the king would take possession not only of the capital but of the whole island.[25] Having taken possession of his kingdom, the king plays a

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[22] Mv. 15:182-183

[23] Mv. 15:184

[24] Mv. 15:191

[25] The coronation ceremony for B. L. Smith suggests brahmanical influences upon the Sinhalese concept of kingship. B. L. Smith (ed.), Sri Lanka, 50

pivotal role in keeping it together, that is, governing both the dominant principality and its "satellites" in an ordered unity. He performs this role not by the exercise of firm fiscal and judicial control, but by a pattern of alliances and overlordship that is strengthened by regular ritual validation of the ruler's credentials. To the loosely linked outer principalities or satellites the king at the "centre," situated in his capital city and within it again in his palace, would appear as the iconic Mount Meru, the pillar of the universe, which holds them in the overall cosmic "orbit."

According to this traditional centre-oriented, cosmological conception of the state, the Sinhalese king would have exercised direct political control only over a core area around the capital. This would be the area of concentrated irrigation works. Even the capital province would be ruled through a mechanism of delegated authority to members of the king's dynasty. The great Parakrama Bahu I himself started life as the governor of a province within this domain and attained the throne by leading a successful rebellion against his cousin, the king. If the Chronicles are to be credited with any historical merit at all, then the frequency with which kings were overthrown by rebellious relatives shows not only that the king's control of the agricultural core area was dependent on his alliances, but also how precarious those alliances were at times.

The outer provinces in theory were ruled by the king who could claim ownership of all land. But in practice they were often beyond his control. When the customary law of the North Central Province was

being recorded in 1820, it was stated that: "from ancient time the Vanniyar had been deemed to possess power equal to that of the disava, but that he is restrained in the exercise of it when the disava is in the province."[26] Apart from the Vanniyar, there were also independent Veddha or tribal chieftaincies which had at one time controlled much of the land and were as late as the "first half of the seventeenth century holding important positions in the country."[27] Under these circumstances, the king could, and indeed did, resort to a relation of either marriage alliances or (tributory) overlordship, to tighten his links with the different independent petty rulers. From a South Indian perspective, extending one's authority through marriage alliances proved to be the most effective and durable of the two. Certainly, for the first Sinhalese settler king it is his marriage to the Veddha princess Kuveni that enabled him to establish his authority in the first place. For his descendants, the story of Vijaya and Kuveni may have functioned as a social charter for integrating and aggregating the independent Veddha principalities.

Among the outer principalities, the Veddha and Vanniyar chieftaincies were located in the interior, whereas there were others that were in control around the thriving sea-ports. From the very beginning economic factors contributed to the autonomous status the sea ports held within the kingdom. In general, the Anuradhapura

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[26]Quoted in E. R. Leach, "Hydraulic Society," 18

[27]cf. H. Parker, Ancient Ceylon. reprint (New Delhi: Marwah Publications, 1982), 98-103

kings were most directly concerned only with the rice-growing, land-based sector of the economy:

> The kings and the state seem to have paid little attention to trade, which was left largely in foreign hands; Anuradhapura contained a special quarter for foreign merchants and religionists, according to the Mahavamsa, but no mention is made of local merchants, and the general impression is clear, the grain revenues and rajakariya were the main supports of the state.[28]

The discovery of a stone terrace inscribed with the names of Tamil gahapatis (householders) dating back to the first century A.D. shows that many of the foreign residents of ancient Anuradhapura were from South India. The stone-terraced building is believed to be an assembly hall which was the common property of the resident Tamils.[29] This piece of evidence suggests that Tamils were actively involved in both internal and external trade in Sri Lanka.

Most of the traders, whose roots were in the Coromandel and Malabar coasts, settled in the port cities (pattanams) of Rajarata. As South Indians they would have belonged to well-organized alliances of merchant and artisan groups – groups which also handled the bulk of domestic and maritime commerce in their homelands.[30] Prior to the eighth and ninth centuries, many of these traders resident in the port cities might well have been lay Buddhists, and therefore supportive of

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[28]K. Indrapala (ed.), The collapse of the Rajarata civilisation in Ceylon and the drift to the south-west, (Peradeniya: University of Ceylon, 1971), 41

[29]Ellawala, 137

[30]George W. Spencer, The Politics of Expansion: The Chola Conquest of Sri Lanka and Sri Vijaya (Madras: New Era Publications, 1983), 56

the Buddhist missions in Sri Lanka. Following a general South Indian pattern, in their frequent travels the traders almost certainly carried not only earthly goods but also transcendent doctrines, and they may have contributed quite a bit to the Buddhist expansion within the island.[31]

From these observations, it is possible to detect in the beginning of the Christian era, the emergence of an economic pattern that is similar to Tamil South India. Two of the most vital sectors of the Rajarata economy were sharply differentiated. The land-based, rice-growing sector of the economy was on the one hand controlled by the cultivator (goyigama) class – who were very like the Vellalars of South India; and the port-based trading sector on the other hand was controlled by the merchant and artisan classes. Since it is well attested that at the beginning of the Christian era there was an explosive expansion of trade along the maritime trade route extending from the Red Sea to South China, the trading sector of the Rajarata economy would have certainly kept pace with the expansion of the agricultural sector during the first millennium of the Christian era.

In ancient Sri Lanka, there were three major port-based satellite principalities that were active in domestic and maritime trade. All three principalities were closely linked to the capital principality through domestic trade. The Chronicles refer to the existence of important commercial routes connecting Anuradhapura with the port-

[31] Tamil involvement with Buddhism continued well into the medieval period. The Mihintale Tablets from the late tenth century which lay down regulations for the monastery there refer to a community of Tamil bhikkus in residence. cf. H. W. Codrington in Indrapala (ed.), Rajarata, 15

cities of Mannar, Jaffna and Trincomalee. These routes are described as main highways (mahamagga), distinct from roads (magga), streets in towns (vithi) and footpaths (ekapadikamagga or anjasa).[32] Through these commercial routes the three port-based principalities mediated between the outside world and the agriculture-based principality in the interior.

In the light of these observations, is it legitimate to speak of Rajarata as a single society? The answer to this question would require a detailed analysis of the relevant sources – literary, archaeological and anthropological – a task that is beyond the scope of this study. But the foregoing discussion would remain incomplete without some comment on this question. One thing that has become evident from the discussion is the extreme diversity of the region. Rajarata was clearly not a centralised, unitary state. It was instead a galactic or segmented state composed of several autonomous principalities, often culturally and economically distinct from one another. It also appears that every principality was dominated by a distinct variga, or ethnic group.[33] On the other hand, behind all these complex and diverse social manifestations, it is imperative that we recognize that the Rajarata society was built on certain general structures. Apart from giving the region considerable uniformity, these structures

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[32] UCHC vol.1, pt. 1, 14-15

[33] Sinhalese word variga (variety, kind) denotes categories of human beings of all kinds –endogamous, racial, linguistic, etc. In its usual narrower sense variga is a sub-caste. cf. E. R. Leach, Pul Eliya. A Village in Ceylon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 23f.

reverberated through the region's socio-economic life. Our next task is to ask about the nature and origin of these underlying structures.

South Indian patterns in Rajarata

Susantha Goonatilake, using using what he describes as "hard archaeological evidence prior to the introduction of Buddhism" has argued that the hydraulic civilization of Rajarata has its foundation in the aboriginal (Veddha) "settlements associated with the South Indian megalithic culture."[34] On this ground he rejects the Sinhalese nationalist attempt to link the birth of the hydraulic civilization with the "so-called coming of the Aryans."[35] Evidence based on archaeological excavations in the dry zone, he argues, demonstrate that well before the advent of the "so-called Aryans" and the "Mauryan traditions in the third century B.C.," the inhabitants had cultivated rice through tank irrigation and were culturally close to the early iron age "megalithic" man of South India.[36] In his opinion, the village tanks associated with the megalithic culture are central to understanding the subsequent socio-economic changes in the next millennium and a half.[37]

Goonatilake believes that those early settlements based on tank irrigation were widely distributed, and that we may conclude that the

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[34]Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka, (Colombo: SSA, 1984), ii,iv

[35]Ibid., v

[36]Ibid., iv

[37]Ibid., v

megalithic-rice culture was truly pan-Sri Lankan.[38] There were at least three chiefdoms cultivating rice by the use of tank irrigation in the pre-Vijayan times, namely, Mahiyangana, Nagadipa and Kelaniya – the three localities allegedly visited by the Buddha. The people of these localities would have lived in houses made of wattle and daub, used implements like grinding stone, and left artefacts associated with weaving. In this connection, the later Chronicler's portrait of the Veddha princess Kuveni spinning cotton may be seen as an accurate reflection of the pre-Vijaya culture.

Secondly, critical use of literary sources shows a characteristic South Indian social process at work through the early and medieval periods of Sri Lankan history. In a comprehensive study of the Vijaya story using multiple sources, R. A. L. H. Gunawardena has argued that the Mahavamsa version of the "myth", which was composed a thousand years after the event in about the sixth century of the Christian era, is best understood in terms of a social "charter" conceived in the Malinowskian sense.[39] The myth identifies and explains the origins of certain major social groups in the island, providing in consequence a charter that serves to locate and justify the positions of these groups within a particular social order.

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[38]The discovery of the first megalithic burial site in one of the Anaikottai mounds in the Jaffna peninsula, in December, 1980, has finally "confirmed" that "there was a megalithic phase common to the whole of South India and Sri Lanka preceding the early historic period". James T Rutnam, "Jaffna before the Dawn of History," Jaffna Public Library. Commemorative Souvenir (Jaffna: Jaffna Public Library, 1984), 12

[39]R. A. L. H. Gunawardena, "The People of the Lion: Sinhala Consciousness in History and Historiography," Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka, 1-53

The Vijaya myth recognizes the existence of three major groups: "Sihalas," service castes, and Pulindas.[40] The main concern of the myth is to validate the sacred and prestigious origin of the Sihalas. Who are the Sihalas? Gunawardena convincingly argues that the sixth century myth identifies the term "Sihalas" with the ruling dynasty, implying that it is the members of this lineage who are the real people of the lion. It may be recalled that ruling dynasties in contemporary South India were also known by their totemic emblems such as fish, tiger, lion, etc.. The myth establishes the sacred origin of the Sihala lineage by pointing out that Vijaya, the founder of the dynasty and also the conquering coloniser of Sri Lanka, landed in Sri Lanka on the very day of the Buddha's parinibbana.[41] The temporal synchronicity further associates the house of Sihalas with the "faith," making their destinies inseparable.

On the other hand, the social status of the Sihalas is defined in the account of Vijaya's marriage to a ksatriya princess from Madura, after brusquely dismissing his aboriginal wife, Kuveni.[42] The Mahavamsa version presents the view that only by marrying "a maiden of a noble house" could Vijaya rightfully be "consecrated as king."[43] This view according to Gunawardena:

> embodies the message that the ksatriya status of the ruling family marks them out from people of all other ritual categories. The story of the embassy sent to Madura to fetch a ksatriya princess and Vijaya's treatment of Kuvanni serve to underline the point that only such a king who is a ksatriya and who also has a queen of the same varna status can be consecrated.[44]

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[40]Geiger identifies the Pulindas with the Veddhas, but for want of space their position in relation to others will not be discussed here.

[41]Mv.vii.

[42] The act implicitly defines the inferior position of the Pulindas and their distant relationship with the Sihala dynasty.

[43]Mv.vii.46,47

[44]R. A. H. L. Gunawardena, "People of the Lion," 16

The members of Vijaya's retinue were "by reason of the ties between him (Sihabahu) and them" called Sihalas, so they were recognised as part of the dominant social group.[45] In accordance with their higher ritual status which marked them out from the great majority of the populace, these men established their own villages.[46] On the same grounds they too had to find wives of high birth. So the embassy sent to Madura not only asked for the king's daughter but also "daughters of others."[47] The required number of maidens was obtained by giving compensation to the families of the maidens.

While outlining in such great detail the origin of the Sihalas, the myth also attempts to explain the origin of the service castes. On the return voyage three categories of people are reported to have accompanied the embassy. The Madura king's "daughter, bedecked with all her ornaments"; "all the maidens whom he had fitted out according to their rank"; and "craftsmen and a thousand families of the eighteen guilds." This arrival of the thousand families of craftsmen in the mythical past is intended to explain another social reality of the sixth century A.D., the existence of groups of service castes relegated to subservient positions in the social hierarchy. As descendents of the "thousand families" from Madura, they are unlinked by blood to the

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[45]Mv. vii.42

[46]Mv. vii.43-45.

[47]Mv. vii.50

Sihalas and thereby excluded from membership in the dominant social group.

Even though the term Sinhala (Sihala) gradually became more inclusive, the Sinhala ruling dynasties continued to emphasise the purity of their descent and their distinct varna status. It has been noted that as late as the eighteenth century, the Sinhalese royalty "considered it a privilege to intermarry with the Madura dynasty and in the seventeenth century it became a matter of state policy for the chief queen (aggamahesi) of Kandy to be a princess from Madura."[48] In this manner, the Chronicles, especially the most revered Mahavamsa, have played a key role in mediating South Indian social structures to Buddhist Sri Lanka. This is precisely why the capital province of Rajarata, which was ostensibly orthodox Buddhist, developed a South Indian type of social differentiation.[49]

Finally, anthropological studies show that Sinhalese, Tamil and Muslim communities in Sri Lanka are all based on common principles of kinship. Nur Yalman has further shown that marriage rules in South India and Sri Lanka form a common structure, and are not related to any particular economic or group features of special

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[48]S. Gopalakrishnan, The Nayaks of Sri Lanka, 1739-1815 (Madras: New Era Publications, 1988), 17-18

[49] Similar evidence is provided by G. Obeyesekere's discussion of the Gajabahu story as a "colonisation myth" which, according to him, "has been a continually viable one, justifying and explaining the existence of South Indian settlers" who arrived "through waves of conquest, peaceful immigration, or 'introduced' by Sinhala kings themselves." The colonisation myth thus "served as a useful mechanism for incorporating immigrant populations into Sinhala social structure" [G. Obeyesekere, "Gajabahu and the Gajabahu Synchronism," B. L. Smith (ed.), Sri Lanka, 160-161

communities. "We find," he insists, "the same rules in communities that exhibit every conceivable variation in ecology, economy, caste structure, lineage, and so on."[50] The marriage rules when applied to a small circle who are allowed to intermarry such as the early Sihalas, serve to produce small exclusive endogamous groups of people, who would consider themselves to be of the same variga (sub-caste) and of the same social status. In a typical Sinhalese (or Tamil) village, members of one variga would be enjoined to intermarry with one another, but are strictly forbidden from marrying with members of any other variga, even when they are of a higher social status.[51] Marriage rules in this way have become a major aspect of the Tamil and Sinhalese social systems, and have significantly contributed to the uniformity of the medieval Rajarata society.

7.2 The Formation of Tamil Nadus in Rajarata

In the preceding discussion it was argued that the models of the pre-modern state developed by theorists such as Stein, Tambiah, and Geertz, help us to understand the historical material from Rajarata in terms of relatively loosely structured organizations built up on the bases of heterogeneity and on the ideal of the delegation of power from the centre. Burton Stein's work on South India exemplifies such an approach. Stein, drawing on Southall's work on Africa, argued that the

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[50]N. Yalman, Under the Bo Tree (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 9

[51]E. R. Leach, Pul Eliya. A Village in Ceylon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1961), 23, 27

pre-modern state in South India is best conceptualized in terms of segments or nadus:

> The parts of which the state is composed are seen as prior to the formal state: these segments are structurally as well as morally coherent units in themselves. Together, these parts or segments comprise a state in their recognition of a sacred ruler whose overlordship is of a moral sort and is expressed in an essentially ritual idiom.[52]

The Chronicles, it was noted, provide lengthy descriptions of this style of sacred kingship, and not of a bureaucratic monarchy, as is often implied in the popular representations of the past. The Sinhalese king exercised symbolic overlordship in the regions beyond the capital province. This ritualistic form of hegemony is actualised when the lesser chieftains of those regions acknowledge the king at the centre as the upholder of the social order by virtue of the eminence that he acquires through a special relationship to the guardian deities of the island.[53] The assumption of Sinhalese royal titles is the most common gesture of accepting overlordship. Emulating royal deeds such as gift-giving and tank-building, was regarded as the means by which the minor rulers could aspire for similar eminence.

Jaffna Peninsula or Yalapana
kuda nadu : A Secondary zone

It appears that the Jaffna peninsula was one such segment within the Rajarata state. The peninsula was known to the Chroniclers

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[52]Stein, Peasant State, 23

[53]Mv.vii.1-4

as Naga dipa, over which Anuradhapura probably did at one time exercise ritual hegemony. By the beginning of the Christian era more than a trade relationship appears to have existed between the Naga inhabitants of the peninsula and the Sinhalese. Evidence shows that the Naga rulers adopted Sinhalese royal names. The following list of early Naga rulers – Ila Naga (95-101), Mahalla Naga (193-199), Kuja Naga (246-248), Kaunca Naga (243-244), Sri Naga 1 (244-263), Abhaya Naga (285-293) and Sri Naga 11 (293-295) – provided by M. D. Ragavan[54] mostly correspond with the names of the kings of Anuradhapura, belonging to the Lambakanna dynasty.[55]

What was probably a somewhat ambiguous political relationship was however strengthened by common religious values. The Nagas and the Sinhalese at this time shared a common religious bond through their commitment to Buddhism. Archaeological surveys have shown that in the early Christian era there was a strong Buddhist presence in Jaffna. In its own refractive way the sixth century chronicle, the Mahavamsa, also acknowledges this fact. In contrast to the Yakkhas, the Nagas are presented in the Mahavamsa as friends of the faith who accept the authority of the Buddha.[56] There is, of course, no justification for believing the author's claim that the conversion of the Nagas occurred during one of the Buddha's three visits to the island. It

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[54]Tamil Culture in Ceylon,: A General Introduction (Colombo: Kalai Nilayam, n.d.), 73

[55]UCHC, 179-193

[56]Mv. i.59-60

is more likely to have happened much later and less dramatically through the influence of South Indian merchant communities.

As long as the centre remained strong, the local chieftains with their own power bases would be willing to lend various kinds of support to the Sinhalese overlords. From the time of the legendary Kuveni, the Veddha leaders have provided military support to the Sinhalese kings. In the middle ages, the Polannaruva kings became dependent on South Indian mercenaries of the left-hand division – recruited for them by the powerful merchant communities resident in the port principalities. But such commitments were highly ambiguous, and involved a high degree of voluntarism where everyone's calculations of advantage had to be taken into account. Allegiances therefore could easily be switched to some rival overlord if conditions warranted. This is precisely what must have happened in the thirteenth century when the Sinhalese centre became very weak.

Well before the Cola invasions of the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Sinhalese kings had become entangled in the dynastic politics and military conflicts of southern India, as both plunderers and the plundered. Long distance raids of plunder were becoming more frequent. Along with the building of monuments or of irrigation tanks, court sponsored military expeditions were also seen as compensatory activities designed to strengthen the centre in weakly integrated political systems. Through the grisliest military deeds the warrior-king would earn fame and immortality, while the network of personal loyalties would be strengthened by the distribution of plunder. Rajaraja

I, Magha and Parakramabahu I are examples of this newly emergent royal style.

Many modern historians have unfortunately followed the medieval court propagandists in exaggerating the effects of these raids of plunder. The medieval work, Culavamsa, for instance, catalogues the Cola outrages in great detail, precisely because its compilers were the group most adversely affected by the plunder. As far as the Colas were concerned, the great viharas of Anuradhapura simply happened to be conspicuously prosperous and hence tempting as objects of plunder. At the same time, the Colas do not appear to have tried to disrupt the intricate irrigation system of Rajarata. The hydraulic civilization seems to have continued to flourish despite repeated invasions by South Indian kings and adventurers.

A great deal has been written about the destruction of the administrative machinery[57] of the irrigation network by Magha of Kalinga, and the over-centralisation[58] of authority in the political system bequeathed to his successors by Parakramabahu I. These two developments are sometimes cited as the two principal causes of the "collapse" of the Rajarata civilization. On the other hand, if the central state thesis is rejected, as we must, then the spread of malaria remains the most likely cause for the disintegration of Rajarata society. In the stagnant pools of water in the dry zone, anopheles mosquitoes found ideal breeding places when they were introduced to Sri Lanka, and they

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[57]K. Indrapala (ed.), Rajarata

[58]K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka, 62, 83

thereafter made large scale occupation of the capital province virtually impossible – until the advent of DDT in this century helped rebuild the population in this area. As a result starting in the fourteenth century, the Sinhalese kings and their capitals seem to have retreated farther and farther into the hills of the wet zone in search of a new economic base on which to establish their authority.

While the Sinhalese capitals drifted southwards, peoples from the Malabar and Coromandel coasts, by now Hindus, continued to arrive in the Rajarata region as peaceful immigrants, soldiers and traders. Coastal principalities centred in Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Jaffna and Mantota grew significantly in size and strength through colonisation. Three Siva temples of antiquity, Tirukethisvaram at Mantota, Konesvaram at Trincomalee and Tirukovil near Batticaloa, enable us to make reasonable inferences regarding the growth of Saivism in these localities. The first two are mentioned in Tamil literature as famous Saiva centres which attracted pilgrims from South India.

The growth in population and the economic activity of the coastal principalities, made it more and more difficult for the sovereign, whose position was by now weak, to even control formally these domains. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries when Cola power waned, a series of Pantyan warriors, notably one Kulasekhara (A.D. 1196-1215) had free reign over Rajarata. Under Maravarman Sundara Pantya I (A.D. 1216-1227) and Jatavarman Sundara Pantya II (A.D. 1227-1251), Pantyan power became supreme in South India. It is

during these heroic days of Pantyan expansion that Sri Lankan chieftains from the modern Vanni and Jaffna regions appear to have thrown off their traditional political affiliation to the Sinhalese monarch and set off on an independent course of their own.

The allegiances of these rulers were switched primarily for defensive reasons, but also in a search for a new legitimacy. The rulers of Jaffna began in this period to style themselves as Arya Cakravartis, tracing their origins to Ramesvaram in the Pantyan kingdom. The founding of the Arya Cakravartin dynasty seems to have synchronised with an event recorded in the Culavamsa, according to which Aryacakravarti, the "Damila" general sent by the Pantyas plundered and destroyed many political and religious centres in the island. The Tamil chronicle Kailayamalai identifies this Pantyan warrior as Cinkaiyariyan or Ceyaviran, the Tamil king who founded the Arya Cakravarti dynasty.[59] Whatever the relationship between the two Aryacakravartis, Pillay has rightly pointed out that the "invasion enhanced the prestige" of the Jaffna kings. Certainly, for the Tamil chroniclers the link was crucial to their purposes. The royal motives of valour, destruction, plunder, and fame associated with the Tamil classic hero served to affirm the dynasty's prestigious origin and thus afforded it imperial legitimation.

On the other hand, modern Tamil historians have paid close attention to the study of lineage, in tracing the ancestry of the Jaffna

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[59]S. Pathmanathan, The Kingdom of Jaffna (Colombo: A. M. Rajendran, 1978), 199-200; K. K. Pillai, South India and Ceylon (Madras: University of Madras, 1963), 103

kings to either Brahman[60] or Ksatriya[61] origins. In order to strengthen the Ksatriya claim the authors have shown ingenuity in establishing matrimonial links with families beyond South India, for example, Orissa, Gujarat or Bengal. None of these claims, however, are based on any reliable evidence. What the evidence does point to, with a great deal of certainty, is the dynasty's connections with Ramesvaram in the modern Ramnad district. This is borne out by the fact that the Aryacakravartis of Jaffna were also known by the epithet "Cetukavalan," and they also issued coins having the legend cetu in Tamil characters, thereby affirming their connections with the cetupathis of Ramnad.[62]

The kings of Jaffna must have made their claim to the title "Cetukavalan," meaning "the guardian of cetu," on account of their descent from the cetupatis of Ramnad. The word cetu has several meanings: it may denote a causeway, a dike, or a landmark.[63] Specifically, the island of Ramesvaram, as well as the reef connecting it to Mannar, are generally referred to as cetu. In the course of time several localities around Ramesvaram also came to be called cetu. Based on this evidence it may be inferred that the Aryacakravartis of Jaffna were closely affiliated to the Maravar rulers of Ramnad.

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[60]C. Rasanagakam, Ancient Jaffna (Madras: Everyman's Publishers, 1926)

[61]Pillay; S. Gnanapragasar, (1928);Pathmanathan.

[62]Pathmanathan, 207-208, Pillay, 36 See also C. R. A. Hoole, "A Perspective on Edicating for Peace," Tamil Times (April, 1993): 14-15

[63]Tamil Lexicon

The Maravars of Ramnad are depicted in Classical works as personifications of the harsh and forbidding palai. In those times, northwestern Sri Lanka could be regarded as an extension of the same tinai. The Maravars always retained an independent kingship tradition, and are portrayed in subsequent literature as a fierce, clan-like folk, famous for their military prowess. Maravar chiefs achieved considerable eminence in medieval times, especially during the time of the Nayaks of Madurai, and consequently became major political actors in the southern peninsula. But their political fortunes rapidly declined under the British when the Maravars became branded as a "criminal caste."[64]

Territorial proximity also ensured that the Tamil Maravars would become major actors in Sri Lanka's affairs throughout both ancient and medieval times. The Maravar themselves affirm this involvement by claiming descent from Kuha, Rama's boatman who rowed him across to Sri Lanka.[65] In historical times, the head of the Maravars was called the "setupati," "lord of the bridge or Raja of Ramnad."[66] The Rev. J. E. Tracy points out that the cetupati line claims great antiquity:

> According to popular legendary accounts, it had to rise in the time of the great Rama himself, who is said to have appointed, on his victorious return from Lanka (Ceylon), seven guardians of the passage or bridge connecting Ceylon with the mainland.[67]

The Rev. Tracy does not question the antiquity of the cetupati dynasty:

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[64]Stein, Peasant State, 302

[65]E. Thurstan, Castes and Tribes of Southern India vol. 5 (Madras: Government Press, 1909), 24

[66]Ibid., 25

[67]Ibid., 25

> It rests its case principally upon a statement in the Mahawanso, according to which the last of the three Tamil invasions of Ceylon, which took place in the second or third century B.C., was under the leadership of seven chieftains, who are supposed, owing to the silence of the Pantyan records on the subject of South Indian dealings with Ceylon, to have been neither Cheras, Cholas, or Pandyans, but mere local adventurers, who territorial proximity and marauding ambition had tempted them to the undertaking.[68]

In the middle ages, many of these Maravar families came to prominence through military exploits. Their eminence in the twelfth century is marked by the frequency with which they are mentioned in Cola inscriptions, the titles which they bore, and "the practice of including Chola royal titles."[69] The adoption of royal names and titles by minor chiefs is one expression of ritual sovereignty. There were others who attained the status of Vellalars by imitating the modes of life appropriate to the peasantry.[70] All the evidence shows that the Maravars – until the advent of the British – were not excluded by the dharmic society. On the contrary, some Maravar groups achieved eminence within this larger society.

During the period of Pantyan expansion, the maravars who retained their predatory ways, would have found suitable employment as soldiers. For the Pantyan kings of a loosely integrated state, the predatory wars in Sri Lanka were vital to their more immediate purpose of winning the allegiance of the local chieftains. It was a long

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[68]Ibid., 25

[69]Stein, Peasant State, 115

[70]Ibid., 304

established practice that at the end of a successful expedition, the war leader would not keep the loot for himself, but would dispense it to his comrades and also make pious donations. For the warrior chieftains of the peripheral nadus, these military exploits were in addition, an opportunity to earn fame and royal titles. Inscriptions belonging to this period, in fact, mention that the title Aryacakravarti was a distinction earned in military service.[71] There are also references to Aryacakravartis in Ramnad in the inscriptions of Maravarman Kulasekhara (1268-1310).[72] At the same time we know that this dry plain was locally controlled by Maravar and Kallar chieftains. It is therefore highly probable that the Maravar rulers known as cetupatis would have both aspired to and attained this "high status in the Pantya kingdom."[73] It would then follow that the kings of Jaffna known by the twin epithets cetupati and aryacakravarti, were the descendents of the Maravar chieftains from Ramnad.

Ramnad is also instructive for the purpose of understanding the transformation of Jaffna peninsula into an intermediate zone. Unlike

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[71]Pathmanathan, 174-175

[72]Ibid., 173

[73]"Historically," states Carol Appadurai Breckenridge, "the royal head of the Maravar community, entitled 'Setupati', had played a prominent role among Tamil kings. Since at least 1600, Setupatis had borne royal titles, had carried royal paraphernalia, and had commanded contexts in which both to grant and to receive honours." See "From Protector to Litigant-Changing Relations Between Hindu Temples and the Raja of Ramnad," South Indian Temples ed. Burton Stein (New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House, 1978), 76. The Maravar Setupatis' desire to replicate the royal rituals of Vijayanagara sovereigns, that included the performance of the rajasuya rite, would suggest that these regional kings also claimed to belong to the sacred Ksatriya clan (Ibid., 78,88). On rajasuya ritual, see above, ch. 6.3

Colamandalam, the region surrounding the Kaveri delta, peasant influence came late to Pandymandalam, the country lying south of the river Kaveri. This is why this region proved a difficult place for the Cola overlords, requiring numerous punitive expeditions against would-be restorers of Pantyan kingship. In the desolate parts of the southern country Cola hegemony was often non-existent. But with the arrival of peasant colonists, the southern plain was progressively being transformed into an intermediate zone.

By the tenth and eleventh centuries, the Vaigai and Tambraparni (Ambasamutram) river basins were already well-settled core areas.[74] During this time some palai tracts which were back waters of this core region would have emerged as fully-fledged intermediate zones. It is here that we observe Kallar and Maravar gradually converting their lands to agriculture. In the original Ramnad and Madurai regions comprising the "eighteens nadus" ruled by Kallar and Maravar warrior-chiefs, the existence of Brahman and Vellalar settlements from the late Classical age would have exercised considerable influence on these changes. So as tank-supported irrigated agriculture was very slowly established in these palai tracts, the people there modified their lives to take advantage of these changes. Some groups of Kallar and Maravar evidently attained Vellalar status and began imitating the modes of life appropriate to the peasantry, just as their kurinci mannars (little kings) became elevated to the rank of Aryacakravartis by the performance of brahmanical rituals.

[74]Stein, Peasant State, 299

A similar Vellalization process occurred in Sri Lanka. The Jaffna and Mannar areas originally belonged to the palai category, virtually extensions of the southern Coromandel coast. On account of their geographical proximity these areas had been exposed to South Indian colonisation from pre-historic times. Around the middle of the first millennium, the colonisation of this region assumed a new phase with the appearance of Vellalar and Brahman settlements along the coast. Many Hindu temples, mostly of brick, were built in the Pallava style. Among them, Tiruketisvaram and Konesvaram became sufficiently prominent to draw the attention of two Brahman hymn-writers, Tirunanacampantar and Cuntarar, who have sung of their glories. From this time on the Hindu - Vellalar influence grew steadily along the northern coast, primarily through peaceful immigration. By the year 1310, a date which marks the decline of Pantya fortunes as Muslim power was extended to their part of South India, the Vellalars had no doubt emerged as the dominant group in the Jaffna peninsula.

The Kailayamalai and the Vaiyapadal are the earliest works on the colonisation of Jaffna. They are written in poetic style, paying no attention to chronological detail. Besides, the authors of these chronicles are mainly concerned with the deeds and achievements of the Aryacakravarti dynasty. The pages of Kailayamalai are almost entirely devoted to the reign of Cinkaiyariyan, the founder of the dynasty. In outlining his reign in great detail, the author, Mutturaca Kaviracar, also gives an account of the arrival of peasant colonists from South India. They name chiefs, or Nattar, from the Coromandel coast,

who had brought service castes with them to the peninsula. The names indicate that most of these Nattar belonged to the Vellalar caste.[75] These chiefs and their large retinues are credited with the founding of many of the well-known localities in the region, areas such as: Irupalai, Puloli, Tirunelveli, Mayilitti, Tellippalai, Inuvil, Pachilappalli, Tolpuram, Koyilakanti, Velinadu, Netuntivu (Delft) and so on.[76] The presence of a large number of high-status peasants with their menial labourers in Jaffna at the close of the Polonnaruva period follows the classic pattern of colonisation in the Tamil plain of South India where too, Vellalars migrated from the core areas to the periphery. The same pattern was also observed in the colonisation of Rajarata, a task accomplished by the Goyigamas and their service castes. Through the denser settlement of this region, Jaffna had, however, emerged as the most South Indian region of Sri Lanka. It is this region that created and preserved the most characteristic patterns of peasant domination. In fact, while in medieval South India the rise of Brahman secular power through royal endowments sometimes obscured the ancient patterns based on the Brahman-peasant alliance, in Jaffna the older features of the ritual and social domination of the peasant settlers have been preserved. Here there are no brahmadeyas, or royal donations of Brahmin villages. Secular power has thus remained in the hands of the Vellalars, whereas, the Brahmans, though relatively poor and

[75] But eleven of the leading colonists have kallar and maravar caste titles.

[76] Pathmanathan, 195-198, Pillay, 138-139

powerless, are still accorded the highest rank, and are supported by the Vellalars.[77]

Pathmanathan may be correct in his observation that this particular system of agrarian caste relations became fully established during the period of the Cola occupation of Rajarata:

> The social and cultural institutions of the Tamils settled in the island continued to be more or less the same as those found during the period of Cola rule and did not differ fundamentally from those of contemporary South India. They were vitalised by the streams of Indian cultural influences that flowed from South India as a result of the close contacts that existed between Sri Lanka and that region. The endogamous castes and the division of society as a whole into two broad categories called Valankai and Itankai – the two main characteristics of medieval Tamil society – were to be witnessed in the island during this period.[78]

These observations lead to the conclusion that Jaffna or Yalpana kuda nadu (Jaffna peninsula nadu) best preserves the features of intermediate nadus in South India. Economic and social powers were in the hands of the dominant Vellalar caste. The powerful brahmanical institutions associated with central nadus are not found in Jaffna. Vellalar domination of this region was achieved not through coercion in the Western sense, but by ritual design, which situated the Vellalars advantageously with respect to cosmic, divine, human and demonic powers. The result is a social order exemplified in the varnasrama

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77Pfaffenberger, 26-27. Dumont was mistaken in his belief that Jaffna was a marginal and distinct region, cf. Homo, 216

78Pathmanathan, 83

dharma – rooted in religious beliefs profoundly accepted by everyone, including the subordinate castes.

The Vellalars were also ritually linked to the Aryacakravartis and through them to the Pantyan kings. It may well be true that the Maravar kings of Jaffna who maintained a martial tradition did deem themselves to be Ksatriyas. But it needs to be emphasised that the Ksatriya model of domination has never found currency in the heartland of the South, the rice-growing plains. In Jaffna as in South India, the Maravars and Kallars were peripheral to the agrarian social formation.[79]

Vanni nadu: a peripheral zone

Much of the land between Jaffna and Anuradhapura, commonly known as the Vanni, was on the other hand almost unaffected by the socio-economic forces operating in the peninsula. Cankam poetry identifies this type of region as kurinci, where people live by hunting and primitive cultivation. It is quite possible that the term Vanni, like kurinci, primarily referred to the nature of the tract. Among the many derivations assigned to this term, one is taken from Sanskrit or Pali "vana," meaning "forest."[80] Whether this derivation is correct or not, in Sri Lanka the word Vanni does denote forest tracts, and also refers to a distinct conception of social life peculiar to those tracts.

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[79]Stein, Peasant State, 70-71

[80]James E. Tennent, Ceylon. An Account of the Island. Physical, Historical and Topographical, 6th ed., 1st ed. 1859, vol. 2 (Colombo: Tisara Prakasakayo, 1977), 961, S. Paranavitana, UCHC, 736-737

In the medieval Sinhalese and Tamil chronicles, the term Vanni or Vanniyar was used to refer to the chiefs of the Vanni areas.[81] According to these sources, many chiefs in the North Central and Eastern Provinces claimed the title of Vanniyar around the thirteenth century, following a series of invasions by mercenary armies. It is also known that members of the Vanniyar caste, noted for their skill in archery, served in these mercenary armies and some of them were given land-grants as well as grandiose titles for their services when Magha seized Polonnaruwa and the northern centres of Sinhalese power in A.D. 1215.

It is not difficult to understand why these soldiers chose to adopt these peripheral tracts as their new home. South Indian evidence shows that the Vanniyar were originally a "forest race" given to martial pursuits. The link between the name Vanniyar and their original habitant (skt. vanya) appears strong in the North Arcot district bordering on the Telugu regions, where, the Vanniyar still live and where the use of Sanskrit caste names is not uncommon.[82] This would in part explain the soldiers' decision to settle in the forest tracts of Sri Lanka, because these areas enabled them to pursue the age-old occupation of hunting and chena cultivation. That decision also helped them to escape from the debilitating effects of the caste system in their homelands. Since the "fall of the Pallava dynasty" these people had

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[81]K. Indrapala, "The origin of the Tamil Vanni chieftaincies, of Ceylon," The Ceylon Journal of Humanities vol.1 (July 1970):125-126

[82]Ibid., 124-125

become gradually absorbed into the system as "agricultural servants under the Vellalars."[83] Joining a military expedition, normally offered them only a temporary respite; since any such expedition consisted of no more than "temporary assemblages" of warrior-cum-service castes, belonging in this case to the right hand division associated with the dominant peasantry.[84]

Yet only a small percentage of the people in the Vanni areas during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries could have actually belonged to the Vanniyar castes of South India. We know that the forest tracts of Rajarata were already populated by the Veddhas. It may be inferred in the absence of contrary evidence that the new arrivals were absorbed into the Veddha population through a process of miscegenation.[85] In this regard they were continuing a social pattern that had already made the Veddhas an extremely heterogeneous community. Over the centuries, the Sinhalese royal families had probably contributed much to this growing heterogeneity of the Veddha population for during the turbulent history of royal dynasties, entire families regularly fled to the forests for extended periods of refuge. South Indian invasions also contributed to this "flight to the forest," with perhaps the largest movement of this having occurred when Magha seized the capital, Polannaruva in A.D. 1215.[86]

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[83]Thurstan, vol. VI, (1909), 9

[84]G. W. Spencer, Chola Conquest, 25-26

[85]Implied in S. Fowler's observation in the 19th century, see Indrapala, (ed.) Rajarata, 24.

[86]UCHC, (1960), 715-716

Among the Vanni chiefs, those from the Trincomalee area claim the closest links with the South Indian Vanni caste. A Tamil chronicle, Konecar Kalvettu, from Trincomalee, which preserves a tradition of Vanniyar migration from South India, claims that the Vanniyar who came to the Trincomalee area were "introduced" by a Cola prince by the name of Kulakkottan, under whose patronage chieftains were "appointed" in different regions. The more reliable Mattakkalappu Manmiyan from Batticaloa suggests that the mysterious Kulakkottam could well be Magha, whose authority did extend as far as the lower reaches of the Eastern Province. These slightly different legendary accounts seem to be in agreement that the first Vanni chieftaincies emerged in the Trincomalee area in the thirteenth century – if not before – and that they, at least temporarily, indicate a period of South Indian overlordship. For some reason, the chiefs of other parts of Rajarata found it to their advantage to adopt the usage of the Trincomalee region and assume the prestigious appellation of "Vanni." As a result there gradually emerged a plurality of chieftaincies, made up, no doubt of Veddhas, Vanniyars and Mukkuvars, in the peripheral regions all bearing the title Vanniyar.

The Mattakkalappu Manmiyam thus refers to the existence of Vanni chiefs of Mukkuvar caste in the Batticaloa area. The Vanni principalities of Batticaloa and Puttalam were dominated mostly by Mukkuvar. In the Batticaloa area they are found in greater numbers than anywhere else. The circumstances surrounding the arrival of the

Mukkuvars are somewhat similar to those of the Vanniyar in Trincomalee. Both groups served in the mercenary armies that frequently invaded Sri Lanka, particularly in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries A.D. They are together referred to as "Tamils and Keralas" during Magha's invasion in A.D. 1215, but their differences are significant. The Vanniyar were of Coromandel origin where they had become agricultural servants of the Vellalars. As such they belonged to the right hand division of the dharmic society. At least nominally, they would be Saivites. The Mukkuvar, by contrast, were of Malabar (or Kerala) origin where they are recognized as hereditary fishermen. As such, they were traditionally neither bound to the land nor to the caste system. In their relative freedom they had pursued occupations other than fishing, particularly trade and cultivation. In the Batticaloa area they assumed the role of chiefs and powerful landlords (potiyar), and generally consider themselves fishermen.

There is still no solid historical evidence of how the Vanni principalities of Batticaloa, Trincomalee, Mullaitivu, Vavuniya and Puttalam were colonised and settled in the middle ages. From the meagre evidence we have, some based on legendary accounts, it may at this point be suggested that the Mukkuvar and Vanniyar who swelled the ranks of the mercenary armies assumed dominance in particular localities of Sri Lanka by wresting political power from local chieftains. Dennis McGilvray thus refers to a legendary account from Batticaloa which credits the Mukkuvar with expelling the local fishing caste and establishing strict dominance. Their dominance was, he points out,

symbolized in many aspects of domestic and public ritual and maintained by possession and control of the largest share of the land.[87] But in most cases, as the previous Vanniyar-Veddha example would indicate, the Mukkuvar, Vanniyar and other warrior contingents easily amalgamated with the local groups to create broad-based kinship traditions.[88]

These traditions of the Vanni areas may at the same time be seen as a regional variation of those found in the peripheral zone of South India. The peripheral zone represents the territories outside the settled agricultural zone, an unsettled world inhabited largely by martial predators and forest-dwelling hunter-gatherers. Although this unsettled realm had many links with the settled agrarian world, including many complex transactions, it remained independent of the Vellalar and the Brahman ritualists. In the same manner, the deities of blood and power, which also inhabited this realm, were in many ways related to the "pure" and "high" gods of the other realm, but here they acted independently by actively seeking and possessing, often without invitation, their human devotees as well as victims.

The blood and power deities of the Vanni are mostly goddesses or ammans, who are believed to revel in sickness, gore and slaughter. The fierce and malevolent side of their character is duly acknowledged

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[87]Dennis B. McGivray, "Mukkuvar vannamai: Tamil caste and matrician ideology in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka", Caste Ideology and Interaction, ed. D. B. McGilvray (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 60

[88] Mattakkaluppu Manmiyam preserves the traditions of Mukkuvar kinship with its principle of matrilineal succession

in worship. The village "mother" goddesses such as Kannaki amman and Mari amman, the bringer of small-pox, are the most prominent in popular worship throughout all the nadus and are the most readily appealed to in time of calamity.[89] They have remained popular despite the fact that any victory that may be gained in time of calamity is always temporary, because in order to gain even this partial victory over the demonic world, the goddess must become as terrible as the enemy she fights.

The "demonic" goddesses, though universally venerated by Tamils, have always been more prominent in the world of the warriors and forest dwellers. Consequently, the spread of goddess worship has been closely related to the movement of migrant warrior groups in South India and Sri Lanka. The goddesses with their capacity to possess living men and women became powerful protector-patronesses of warrior groups, in whose honour many shrines, often around trees, were built. The martial groups were specifically drawn to these goddesses because of their sakti (divine power or energy) which was seen and experienced in everyday life. Although all beings are believed to possess some measure of sakti, the goddesses are possessed of an extra endowment. Hence to contend with the "demonic" world, the domain of lust, pollution and greed which threatened the harmony of

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[89] W. T. Elmore writing no doubt from a western perspective, observes that these dieties being female ammans "is not especially complimentary to the female sex among the Dravidians. The qualities which bring these goddesses the worship of the people are the most undesirable ones. These qualities are quarrelsomeness, vindictiveness, jealousy, and similar attributes." J. Cartman, Hinduism in Ceylon (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena, 1957), 74

their universe, these people sought and enlisted the powers of the deities by offering worship.

This basic picture of a warrior world remained unchanged throughout the medieval period despite the establishment of settlements of Vellalars –with their service castes and "high" gods – in the maritime principalities. Such settlements were never large enough to change the existing features of the Vanni. The warrior elites had indeed permitted these "strangers" to maintain their corporate character while retaining superior political control in their own hands, an arrangement that could also be observed in the dry areas of the southern Indian peninsula. This arrangement led to, most noticeably in maritime regions of the east, the creation of a two-part society.

As the Vellalars slowly pushed into the warrior world, they did leave their mark on the Vanni society. In the Batticola region where the Vellalar and Mukkuvar competed for economic domination, the Mukkuvar borrowed religious symbols from the agrarian world in order to enhance their claims to domination. In this situation it eventually was the Mukkuvar and not the Vellalar who emerged as the chief guardians and overseers of the major temples – the institutions which have traditionally played the central role in organizing and legitimizing the peasant society. It would however be a mistake to conclude from this development that the Mukkuvar at this time had also become, perhaps unwittingly, patrons of a brahmanical world-view. On the contrary, the Mukkuvar appear to have deliberately modified the borrowed religious symbols with the sole

purpose of reinforcing their own established systems of authority and overlordship. In opposition to Brahmanism and Hindu orthodoxy, the Mukkuvar of Batticola embraced Virasaivism (rather than Saiva Siddhanta), as numerous lower caste South Indian groups had done, as the ideological vehicle for furthering their economic and political aspirations. The Brahmans have consequently stayed out of this region, and the Virasaiva Kurukkals, the non-Brahman priests who serve in the Virasaiva temples, "stoutly maintain their superiority to Brahmans and the brahmanical 'varna doctrines' (varuna vetam), reflecting an antipathy well known from South Indian ethnography."[90]

Finally, on account of their cultural links, the fisherfolk of the neytal region can be grouped with the peoples of Vanni. These especially mobile people are found on the coastline as well as the off-shore islands of Sri Lanka in large numbers. From ancient times, the fisherfolk of Sri Lanka shared with the Veddhas in the worship of pey spirits, ammans[91] (blood-drinking goddesses) and other "demonic" deities. Their life too was hazardous. Every day the fishermen had to traverse the "demonic" world. The sea is regarded by all South Indians as a domain of formless "demonic" chaos. The seafarer is the man who sailed or dived into this demonic void. The classical symbol of this destructive world is the shark. Its hideous flesh-devouring qualities

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[90]McGilvray "Mukkuvar", 63

[91]Kannaki valakkurai kaiviyam which preserves the traditions of kannaki cult in Sri Lanka suggests that the cult was primarily confined to the fishing and trading comunities in its early stages of development inthe island. [S. Pathmanathan, "South India and and Sri Lanka, A.D. 1450-1650, Political, Commercial and Cultural Relations," Journal of Tamil Studies, 21 (June 1982): 53-54

has made the shark the perennial embodiment of the wild, destructive energies of the sea.[92]

These people of neytal were only partially integrated into the society of the interior. Along the northwest and northeast coasts of Sri Lanka, three distinct castes or groups of fisherfolk were settled: Karaiyar, Mukkuvar and Thimilar. It was noted in the Cankam period that some of these people left their ritually polluting, low status occupations, to take advantage of more lucrative trades. As Max Weber has suggested, in Hindu society entrepreneurs were often outsiders to the caste system and would sometimes include those of low caste status. In the early Christian era there was a great expansion in the maritime trade. From humble beginnings as fish dealers some groups of fishermen first built up capital and then moved into ship-building and other waterfront industries in the ports. Thus we saw the emergence of urban centers or pattanams, controlled by powerful maritime trading clans. Their wealth and opulent lifestyle are described in Cankam literature.

It is such opportunities in maritime trade which enabled the Karaiyar fisherfolk to move up the ladder by establishing themselves as chank and pearl traders and boat owners. They owe their rise to an accident in geography. They are mainly concentrated on the strip of the northwestern coastline which runs along the Gulf of Mannar. Although the Karaiyars are found in other parts, this must have been

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[92]Susan Bayly, Saints, goddesses, and kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 333

their original home. This meant that unlike the Mukkuvar, the Karaiyar were in a position to exploit one of the region's great natural resources, the celebrated pearl-bearing oyster- beds which lay offshore. Pearling had become an important Sri Lankan export industry as early as the first century A.D.

What really set these people apart from other farming and labouring groups is the high level of skill they acquired in a variety of specialised occupations. Pearling and its associated trade of chank diving involve great skill and specialist knowledge of the region's oyster beds. The fishermen also moved into other lucrative trades. In the port towns of Mantai, Kankesanturai and Kayts, they easily moved into ship-building, and their skill in building fishing boats gradually enabled them to take up carpentry in a more general service. They also moved into the interior from their homes on the Sri Lankan coast as itinerant merchants and artisans. By first century A.D. some were permanently based in the "foreign" residents' quarters of Anuradhapura city[93] from where they may have controlled much of the internal trade. Circumstantial evidence would further suggest that the bulk of the port-based trade was controlled by the Karaiyar in alliance with the South Indian Paravas, a group with marked similarities.

Owing to these occupational specialities, the Karaiyar of the middle ages were the least homogeneous among the fishing communities. Specialized occupations on the other hand led to the

[93]Paranavitana in UCHC vol.1, 236

formation of tightly knit and caste-like regional groups with their little (port) kings and talaivans (headmen or elders). These locality leaders often received privileges and titles from would-be-overlords in order to secure them as clients. This may explain the emergence of Mudaliyars and Pillais among the elite maritime trading clans.

These exchanges of honour and service tended to further reinforce the Karaiyar locality's sense of corporate identity. The titles conferred, moreover, strengthened the position of the talaivan of headman, and, consequently, the institutionalised leadership that emerged from this patronage network[94] proved to be useful for recruiting and disciplining the coastal population and developing the social identity of those with valuable maritime skills.

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[94]It is through this network that the Karaiyar came to embrace Saivism and Roman Catholicism, while the Paravas [S. Bayly, (1989)] under slightly different circumstances, embraced Hinduism, Islam and Roman Catholicism.

PART THREE

COLONIAL BACKGROUND

CHAPTER 8

COLONIAL RULE AND THE PERSISTENCE OF TRADITIONAL PATTERNS 1505-1796

8.1 Portuguese Colonial Rule A.D. 1505 - 1658

From the beginning of the sixteenth century, to 1948 Sri Lanka has been partially or wholly ruled by European colonial powers. For four and a half centuries, a political and military hegemony was formed by three successive powers: the Portuguese (1505-1658), the Dutch (1658-1796) and the British (1796-1947). Through the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, colonial rule was confined to the maritime regions, while an indigenous ruler, in the Kingdom of Kandy, continued to exist in the interior. The existence of a hostile power in the interior to some extent weakened the Portuguese and Dutch control over the coastal areas and thus opened many gaps in their attempt to monopolize the seaborne trade. The eastern and south-eastern littoral in particular remained mostly outside the control of these two powers.

Conquest

The Portuguese conquests of the Sri Lankan littoral proceeded spasmodically throughout the sixteenth century. Their primary aim was to gain control over the island's lucrative trade in cinnamon and pearls and to this end an initial contact was made with the Kingdom of Kotte in A.D. 1505 and a fortified settlement was established at Colombo in 1518. As the century progressed, other settlements were established at strategic points along the coast. Portuguese interest in the Tamil areas in the north of the island stemmed from two considerations. First there was the pearl fishery in the Mannar region; and secondly, the Jaffna Peninsula was strategically important in securing control of the seaborne traffic, to and from the South Indian coast. By the end of the century, Jaffna came under Portuguese control with the capture of Nallur in A.D. 1591 and the beheading of Puviraja Pandaram, the King of Jaffna (A.D. 1582-1591). The power and control of the Portuguese were subsequently extended to the east coast by fortifying the ports of Trincomalee and Batticaloa.

The Portuguese conquests of the strategic ports through this period were designed to gain control of the flourishing long-distance trade around the Indian sub-continent. From Hormuz of Persia came horses, silks, carpets and dyes. Bengal exported cloths and food-stuffs, while Coromandel provided cloths and yarns. Sri Lanka exported cinnamon and precious stones, while Malabar through the port of Calicut provided pepper. In order to take control of this trade the Portuguese in the year A.D. 1600 created an empire based on control of

the sea by means of naval power. Land areas were bases only, and revenue was overwhelmingly derived from maritime activities.[1] This however was not deliberate policy. In fact in most areas of Sri Lanka as well as India, the Portuguese were faced by societies strong enough to resist any encroachment inland. Control of the sea meant that the Portuguese could hold on to littoral areas, but penetration further inland was too risky and difficult.

Seaborne tributory system

On the seas the Portuguese operated a "tributory system."[2] All ships trading within Asia were required to take a pass or cartaz issued by the competent Portuguese authority and to call at a Portuguese fort to pay customs duties before they proceeded on their voyage. A cash security left at this fort served as a guarantee that the ship would call there on its return voyage also, and that again involved more dues. Enemies of the Portuguese and forbidden goods such as certain spices were not to be carried. The Portuguese in introducing the cartaz system claimed they were providing protection against piracy. But in reality it was the system that created the need for protection, and what was sold was exemption from the threat of Portuguese violence. In the modern sense, the cartaz system was nothing less than a "protection racket."[3]

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[1]C. R. Boxer, The Portuguese Seaborne Empire, 1415-1825 (London: Hutchinson,1969)

[2]S. Arasaratnam, Merchants, Companies and Commerce on the Coromandel Coast, 1670-1740 (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986), 114

[3]M. N. Pearson, The Portuguese in India. The New Cambridge History of India vol.1, pt.1, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 78

In this manner Portuguese aims were achieved without "introducing a single new element into the commerce of Southern Asia."[4] In fact in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries India was, in technological areas, "one of the advanced countries of the world."[5] Portuguese dominance in Asia was thus based entirely on their artillery ships. It implied that indigenous patterns of trade would continue to operate as in the past but under the Portuguese "protection" system. By selling protection on the sea they created a "redistributive empire";

> where the Portuguese skimmed off a layer of profits for themselves, but were not able to effect radical changes in routes, products or productive techniques at any level. In its simplest terms, the Portuguese system did nothing except divert trade in some goods, and force some Asian traders to pay extra customs duties. At most they manipulated, but did not transform.[6]

Conversions

In addition to profits the Portuguese sought religious conversions to Roman Catholicism. A member of Vasco da Gama's crew, when asked in Calicut, "What brought you here?" is reported to have replied "We seek Christians and spices."[7] Indeed for the

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[4]J. C. Van Leur: quoted in S. Arasaratnam, Merchants, 113

[5]Pearson, 57

[6]Pearson, 77-78

[7]C. R. Boxer, "Christians and Spices. Portuguese Missionary Methods in Ceylon 1518-1658," History Today, vol. VIII, no.5 (1958): 346

Portuguese kings there was no contradiction or unconscious irony in their linking of service to God and Mammon. As the great chronicler Diogo do Couto has stated "The Kings of Portugal always aimed in their conquest of the East, at so uniting the two powers, spiritual and temporal, that the one should never be exercised without the other."[8] Their spiritual commitment was strengthened by Papal Bulls of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries which gave the Portuguese crown certain revenues and privileges within Portugal and overseas, in return for the financing and support of the missionary drive in Asia and Africa. This patronage, or padroado, became the basis on which the Portuguese built up a massive overseas missionary operation.[9] The term padroado[10] specifically applied to the state-backed church system, and within Asia its Headquarters was the main Portuguese trading enclave at Goa.

For the Portuguese in Sri Lanka, religion, politics and economics were not clearly distinguished; and frequently all three combined in a confusingly intermingled way. If cinnamon and pearls were the attractions, "from the early days they (also) had hopes of converting to Christianity one or other of the three kings who divided the island

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[8]Pearson, 30

[9]Ibid., 118-120

[10] Stems from the medieval assumption that the pope held supreme authority over the entire globe, including the pagan world. In the papal Bull of Pope Alexander VI, this authority over the pagan colonies was delegated to the kings of Portugal and Spain. It meant that by right of padroado the king of Portugal had dominion over Sri Lanka, not only politically, but also ecclesiastically. see D. J. Bosch, Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (New York: Maryknoll, 1991), 227

between them in 1521."[11] The padroado clerics were given the task of making converts. Most of their work was confined to the fisherfolk localities along the coastline where they used the well established pre-colonial state patronage networks to create bonds of religious affiliation and clientele. Under the patronage of the padroado clerics religious "conversion" for the Karaiyar fisherfolk from the Mannar and Jaffna regions involved a two-fold response. First, following the lead of their caste elders and notables they went through ceremonies of mass baptism – and a pledge of allegiance to the Portuguese crown.[12] Secondly, they became clients of their European patrons, serving as pearl and chank divers; sailors on Portuguese warships and trading vessels; and boat-builders and sail-makers in colonial ports.[13]

The Jesuit missionary Francis Xavier (A.D. 1506-1552) exemplifies this approach to conversion. It reveals a pattern that is also found in the Padroado missions in other territories of Estado da India – the chain of fortified Portuguese settlements in the Indian sub-continent. In every region the activities of the church soon came to reinforce the Estado's military and commercial pursuits. Prior to Xavier's arrival in Mannar, by the year 1521, a small Portuguese naval force was present in the Gulf exacting tribute from pearling. In the

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[11]C. R. Boxer, "Christians and Spices," 346

[12]Susan Bayly states, "The great ceremonies of mass baptism ..... were really declarations of tactical alliance rather than religious conversions as the term is usually understood", see Saints, goddesses, and kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 328

[13]M. Roberts, Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of a Karava Elite in Sri Lanka 1500-1931, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1982), 50-53, 80-89

period 1536-1544, a large number of people of the Karaiyar caste associated with the pearl fisheries were converted to Christianity.[14] At their "invitation" Francis Xavier, "the Apostle of India," arrived from Madura to baptize them. As an integral part of their baptism they were taught to make the sign of the cross and to recite garbled Tamil renderings of the Creed and the Ave Maria. Xavier himself could hardly speak Tamil, so he used the appropriate Portuguese terms to convey key Christian concepts such as heaven, grace, sacraments, priest and cross.[15] Following this event the pearl fishery itself was organized as a Portuguese venture, with the collaboration of the Christian Karaiyars as a new client community.

It is highly unlikely that conversion to Christianity under these circumstances could have constituted a change in the community's existing world view or caste lifestyle. On the contrary, the dominant religious strain was still the traditional Hindu pattern thinly overlaid with Roman Catholicism.[16] Francis Xavier, once canonised, became a powerful guardian-intercessor for the Karaiyar. In their hierarchy of patrons and cult figures he was second only to their most celebrated supernatural patron figure, the Virgin Mary.[17] There are also startling

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[14]C. R. de Silva, Sri Lanka: A History (New Delhi: Vikas, 1991), 116-117

[15]James E. Tennent, Christianity in Ceylon (London: John Murray,1850), 10-12

[16] In many ways this is similar to the religious atmosphere of Portugal at the time where "folk religion" retained its sway under the veneer of Catholicism, and was characterized by "belief in magic, the evil-eye, witches, miracles, and love potions" and infuenced "all aspects of life, and all classes." cf. Pearson, The Portuguese in India, 16

[17]Bayly, Saints 329-331

parallels between the Marian cult and the Pattini (Kannaki Amman) cult; the latter being the chief deity of the sea-faring and trading communities in the island.[18] "The Virgin Mary" of the Sri Lankan fisherfolk, observes Obeyesekere, had "the attributes of the goddess Pattini"[19] and the famous "shrine of Our Lady of Madhu," near Mannar, was, he points out, "originally a Pattini shrine."[20] It is a well known fact in Sri Lanka that the Portuguese ruthlessly carried out an ecclesiastical decree of 1567 requiring all heathen temples in Portuguese controlled territory to be demolished;[21] and "with the stones of the demolished temples, they built their forts and churches, often on the very site previously occupied by a Hindu temple."[22]

The padroado missionaries at this time deliberately stressed emotion and devotion, that is bhakti, over strict adherence to norms. Fervent devotion to the patron figures was therefore characterised by processions and fairs, plays and dances, feasts and fasts, pujas and tirtams; and attachment was to such symbols as images, statues, bells, pictures and crosses.[23] These practises were no doubt aided by the similar trend in Hinduism at that time; for the very influential bhakti

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[18]Pathmanathan, "South India and Sri Lanka, A.D. 1450-1650, Political, Commercial and Cultural relations," Journal of Tamil Studies, no. 21(1982): 53-54

[19]Obeyesekere, The Cult of the Goddess Pattini, 480

[20]Ibid., 480

[21]Boxer, "Christians and Spices," 348-9

[22]J. Cartman, Hinduism in Ceylon (Colombo: M. D. Gunasena and co., 1957), 44

[23]Tennent, Christianity,18-19; Pearson,128-129

movement also put personal devotion above all else. The manner in which Christian customs and observances were introduced by the missionaries greatly strengthened rather than weakened the Karaiyar's caste institutions.[24] Christian symbols created a fusion between the group's social institutions and their identity as Roman Catholics. In effect Christianity became a caste lifestyle for the group, distinguished by common marriage customs, dress styles, eating habits and other codes of behaviour that mark off one jati from another.

Stones, blood and caste

The Portuguese presence also served to reinforce the caste-based worldview of the majority of Tamils who did not embrace Roman Catholicism. In the Sinhalese sixteenth century work Rajavaliya,[25] the Portuguese are described as people who ate stones and drank blood. The two symbols chosen by the Rajavaliya, stones (unleavened bread or shipsbiscuits) and blood (wine), form the basis of the ritual for the communicant in a Catholic mass. The communicant not only partakes of these symbols, representing Christ's flesh and blood, but also believes that by the miracle of transubstantiation performed by the officiating priest, this bread and wine actually become flesh and blood. The Sinhalese vegetarian Buddhist and Tamil vegetarian Hindu alike would have thus been nauseated by the dietary habits of the

[24]Bayly, Saints, 327

[25]The Rajavaliya: or, A Historical Narrative of Sinhalese Kings from Vijaya to Vimala Dharma Surya II trans. B. Gunasekara (Colombo: Government Printer, 1900)

Portuguese, which was for the author of the Rajavaliya, powerfully expressed in the celebration of mass.

In offering an important reinterpretation of this well-known account, Michael Roberts maintains that this reaction has something to do with the innate "racism" of a people bound by caste, who react in horror at what their caste-rulers consider the ultimate pollution – the eating of meat and the drinking of blood. In his usage the "racism" in this case was an Apartheid social system based on dietary, sexual and work-related taboos.[26] In the religious perspective of the Rajavaliya, the Portuguese and their descendents, the Burghers,[27] were to be looked down upon as carnivorous beings who were polluted and "sinful", and therefore contact with them had to be avoided, except where absolutely necessary.

8.2 Dutch Colonial Rule A.D. 1658-1796

In 1851, the great orientalist Richard Burton categorically declared that the decline of the Portuguese empire was a result of "above all things, the slow but sure workings of the short-sighted policy of the Portuguese in intermarrying and identifying themselves with Hindoos of the lowest castes."[28] Such quasi-biological, overtly racist explanations, although dominant for nearly two centuries, must

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[26]Jane Russel, "Fact and Fiction: The De Silva vs. Roberts Debate", Lanka Guardian, vol.15, nos. 4,5, (1992), 11f. and 19f. Prominent Sri Lankan historians representing the "status quo" have strongly objected to this interpretation.

[27]Appendix 2: Portuguese Burghers

[28]R. Burton, Goa and the Blue Mountains, (London: R. Bentley, 1851), 45

be rejected in favour of the more obvious. Even at the height of their powers at the end of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese were militarily over-extended, and as a contemporary observer complained, the empire "could not last forever, even if we had only the natives to fight against."[29] Sure enough, in the following decades, Portuguese India was virtually battered to extinction by the great land-oriented powers, the Mughals and the Marathas. The Kandyans of Sri Lanka on the other hand, were inward looking and never really tried to dislodge the Portuguese from the island's shores.

Conquest

By the seventeenth century the Portuguese were also being challenged on the seas by two new sea-oriented powers, the Dutch and the British. England at first made peace with the Portuguese in 1635, and these links were subsequently strengthened by matrimonial alliances. In 1661 the English received Bombay from the Portuguese crown as part of King Charles II's dowry from Catherine of Braganza. The Dutch on the other hand were to be the main opponents of the Portuguese. The hostility between the two was intensified when the Dutch revolted against the Spanish Crown, which had by then absorbed Portugal. For the Kandyan king, the entry of the Dutch into Indian waters in the beginning of the seventeenth century seemed at first to be a good thing. By a treaty signed in A.D. 1638 the Dutch promised to

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[29] Charles R. Boxer, Portuguese India in the Mid-seventhteeth Century (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1980), 3

assist the king in his war with the Portuguese, and in return the king granted them a monopoly of the major articles of trade and a repayment of their expenses in the war on his behalf. For the Dutch, the island's cinnamon was the great prize, for in the seventeenth century cinnamon had become a most desired spice in European trade, and both its price and volume of sales increased immensely. A few years of fruitful cooperation with the Kandyan king led to the final expulsion of the Portuguese from their strongholds in 1658[30] and the Dutch takeover.

Dutch East India Company

The success of the Dutch in the East was a result of the domination of the seas achieved by their large, well-equipped navy and merchant fleet, which was already dominating the carrying trade in northern Europe and the Mediterranean.[31] At the same time they pioneered new forms of financial management which were carefully copied by the British who were also active in the region. Unlike the Portuguese, the Dutch East India Company (Verenigde Oost Indische Compagnie or VOC) raised capital on the open market like a modern company. It had regular accounting and auditing systems which included the cost of military operations in its calculations of profit and

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[30]Sinappah Arasaratnam, Ceylon (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964),137-138

[31]In 1669 "two-thirds of all seafaring vessels" belonged to Holland. Karl Barth, "Man in the Eighteenth Century," Protestant Theology. Its Background and History (London: SCM Press, 1972), 38

loss. In a sense, therefore, the company created the first capitalist empire. The Dutch developed more fully the system of "factories" (fortified trading posts) inaugurated by the Portuguese. The English were to copy this institution also.[32]

The Dutch were also more interested than the Portuguese in establishing a territorial empire. The latter had sought to control trade by the control of strategic points through which it passed. The Dutch too, like the Portuguese before them and the British after them, tended to use this unsophisticated method, destroying rival traders and producers by military force. But they in addition desired to control the areas that produced valuable commodities, including spices, and thereby master their supply. Operating this policy in Sri Lanka, the Dutch decided very early to take over the rich cinnamon lands of the south-west coast as well as the outlets for this spice. The Kandyan king was thus out-manœuvred, becoming a victim of his own strategy. He was, however, somewhat better off than he had been under the Portuguese for he had a few ports on the east coast for his own trade activity.

In the Jaffna and Mannar areas the Dutch maintained and developed the Portuguese system by seeking to enforce an even more rigid monopoly[33] over trade in items such as areca nut, elephants,

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[32]C. A. Bayly ed., The Raj and the British India, 1600-1947 (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 1990), 61-63

[33]As in Portuguese times Tamil and Muslim traders – with connections in South India – had to carry passes issued by the Dutch authorities and their trade had tobe confined to one of the larger ports in Jaffna, Colombo or Galle, where various dues would be collected.

dyes, palmyra timber, pinaddu (palmyra produce), oils (coconut, margosa and illupai) as well as over the pearl fisheries. At the same time many traditional industries were significantly expanded. With the burgeoning demand for Jaffna tobacco in south Malabar, the acreage under tobacco cultivation increased steadily in the peninsula and extended into the Vanni. The expansion in this instance was facilitated by cash being advanced to the cultivators by the Malayali (Kerala) resident purchasers in Jaffna and slaves from South India. The small scale weaving industry received a big boost from the famine in Madura (1659-1660) when the Dutch induced a number of Kaikolar weaver families to migrate to Jaffna. Cotton yarn was imported from South India and the finished cloth was bought from the weavers by the Dutch. When the conditions in South India improved and the migration of weavers stopped, plain cloth was directly imported from South India to be dyed in Jaffna, and was exported direct to Europe and to Batavia where it became part of the Southeast Asian market. The consequence of this trade was that from the very first year of the conquest of Jaffna, the Dutch were realizing substantial surpluses of revenue over expenditure.[34]

Monopolistic state-building

In the Dutch held areas, the growth in commerce was accompanied by more intrusive forms of state building, frequently

[34]Sinappah Arasaratnam, Historical Foundation of the Economy of the Tamils of North Sri Lanka. Chelvanayagam Memorial Lectures (Jaffna: Thanthai Chelva Memorial Trust, 1982), 6-11

contributing to widespread unrest among the populace. The Dutch introduced a number of personal taxes, most of which had to be paid in cash. The most important of these was the poll-tax paid by each adult male inhabitant. It was more or less equal in its burden on the rich and the poor alike. In 1688, an increase in the poll-tax led to popular unrest in Jaffna, and thus forced the authorities to remit the increase. In addition to personal taxes, there was a personal labour service tax levied on every able-bodied male who was required to perform labour for the state for a total of twelve days a year. This service was called uliyam and could be directed towards any public works undertaken by the state. Those not able to perform the labour could pay instead a fine. Taxes on the land and their produce resulted in a traditional form of protest in that many peasants evacuated their villages and absconded into the Vanni, where the chieftains were engaged in hostility against the Dutch.

Dutch state-building tended to reinforce caste and racial hierarchies. To collect revenue they had to know a fair bit about the constitution of the Tamil society and the character of the villages and lands. Consequently, Dutch legal experts sat down with some Mudaliyar landlords of Jaffna to codify the civil laws of the region. The resulting document is known as Thesavalamai, the codification of the laws and customs of the Tamils of Jaffna. This document has ever since been used as a guide in the village administration and by the courts and revenue collectors. This codifying of the caste customs in this document tended to sharpen distinctions and to further

institutionalize the power of the headmen, through whom taxes were now collected and justice administered. At the top of the caste hierarchy were the Mudaliyars and Brahmans, and at the bottom the untouchable Nalavar "slaves" who were employed in domestic and farm labour, and were even expected to perform the obligatory uliyam service on behalf of their masters.

Racial hierarchy

An informal hierarchy also emerged among Europeans, with the Dutch at the top, the Dutch Burghers (children of Dutch/Sri Lankan unions) below, followed by the Portuguese Burghers. The latter were "the worst race of people..... corrupted by the climate" so that "any blackfellow who can procure a hat and shoes with a vest and breeches, and who acquired some little smattering of the Catholic religion, [can] aspire to the title of a Portuguese."[35] The Burghers, however, remained a key group in the Dutch administration. When, however, the British succeeded the Dutch, the Burghers were for two generations excluded from political and military office[36] because many were of Portuguese origin, and in the British view compounded the "superstition" of Catholicism with the "depravity" of their Sri Lankan

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[35]Robert Percival, An Account of the Island of Ceylon 2d. ed. (London: C and R Baldwin, 1805), 104

[36]Dennis B. McGilvray, "Dutch Burghers and Portuguese Mechanics: Eurasian Ethnicity in Sri Lanka," Comparative Studies in Society and History 24 (April 1982): 259-260

origins. Increasingly "blood" had come to define suitability for civil office and political power.

Conversion

The policy of the Dutch towards conversion differed significantly from that of the Portuguese. The Portuguese, like their European contemporaries in the sixteenth century, did not make a clear distinction between religion, economics and politics. Portuguese policy in Sri Lanka was aimed at "Christians[37] and spices." Portuguese accounts "from the sixteenth century" therefore "show huge expenditures on military and religious matters."[38] The Dutch policy, by contrast, reflects a new trend in Europe; i.e. the separation of religion from politics and economics: "piety was practised at home....while abroad slaves were being hunted and sold."[39] Religion was low on the list of priorities for the Dutch company's administration of Sri Lanka and it was relatively tolerant of all religions except Roman Catholicism. No measures were taken to suppress Buddhism and Hinduism. At the beginning of Dutch rule, stern measures were taken to root out all trace of Portuguese influence and one of the prime sources of Portuguese power was the Roman Catholic Church of Sri

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[37]Towards this end, points out Pearson, the Portuguese in a sense were waging a religious crusade, with their "shock troops" the Jesuits in the frontline, and armed with the ideology of the Counter Reformation.

[38]Pearson, 75

[39]Karl Barth, "Man in the Eighteenth Century," Protestant Theology in the Nineteenth Century: Its Background and History (London: SCM press, 1972), 38-39

Lanka which was now looked upon with deep suspicion. The first stage of Dutch rule (A.D. 1658-1687) is designated by Fr. Boudens as the "Dark Ages" because it saw a ruthless suppression of Catholics in Sri Lanka.[40] These were the years when many Catholics, hounded by the Dutch power and without any priests to minister to them, reverted to their former faiths. The statistics produced by Father Boudens speak for themselves. In 1634 there were 72,348 Christians in the Kingdom of Jaffna, but in the eighteenth century the figure had dropped to about 15,000 - 20,000.[41] This anti-Catholic policy, introduced so soon after the expulsion of the Portuguese from the island, may have been partly influenced by political rather than religious considerations, stemming from the Dutch sense of insecurity, intensified by the possibility of a Portuguese attempt at reconquest.[42]

The Dutch East India Company, however, did have a longstanding policy of propagating its own faith in opposition to Catholicism. Dutch Calvinism, though not a proselytising religion like Catholicism, had played a major part in the country's struggle for independence from the Catholic power of Phillip II of Spain, and it continued to dominate the policies of the young republic. In Asia, Dutch Calvinism was an expression of Dutch nationalism. The

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[40] Robert Boudens, The Catholic Church in Ceylon under Dutch Rule (Rome: Catholic Book Agency, 1957), 72-88

[41] Ibid., 44,100,133

[42] Arasaratnam, Ceylon,144-145; S. Saparamadu, "Introduction," True and Exact Description of the Great Island of Ceylon, Phillipus Baldaeus (Colombo: CHJ, 1959), xiii-xiv

Batavian Code for the Company issued in 1642 required that the Reformed Faith, the state-backed religion of Holland, be propagated by the VOC in the territories under its control. Efforts to propagate its national religion were always half-hearted, however, owing to the fact that the commercial company was founded by the wealthy middle-class merchantmen of Holland for the express purpose of trading in the East and securing profits for the VOC's shareholders. The Company was simply not prepared to spend a large sum of money on an effort to proselytise. Paradoxically throughout the eighteenth century Catholics had a larger number of priests attending to them, even though their presence in Sri Lanka was illegal, than the Protestants had. Most Catholic priests in Sri Lanka at this time were Indians and hence could pass undetected.[43]

The First Century of Protestant Christianity

The task of establishing the Dutch Reformed Church on the foundations of the Roman Catholic Church of Sri Lanka was given to the Predikaants or pastors of the Dutch Reformed Church. Predikaants were fully qualified preachers, formally appointed by the VOC to the colonial service. They were thus salaried officials of the Company, very much subject to its political authority. They were posted to different parts of the island where they took over the network of village schools and churches set up by the Portuguese. The institutions inherited from

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[43]Sinappah Arasaratnam, Ceylon Journal of Historical and Social Studies, vol. 1 (July 1958): 220-221

the Catholics were fairly impressive: large, well-built and permanent church buildings,[44] almost all of them with an attached house; less impressive school buildings; fruit gardens and shady trees planted in the compound; and then, school masters, sextants and a large community of baptized Christians, bearing Portuguese names[45] From the beginning, despite these assets, ecclesiastical work was hampered by lack of Dutch personnel. From 1658 till 1661, a period of over three and a half years, for instance, Baldaeus had to oversee the work of Jaffna peninsula entirely by himself, an area which had been covered by forty Catholic priests in Portuguese times.[46]

When the Predikaants settled down to the task of conversion and propagation of the Dutch Reformed religion, it was unanimously agreed that, among the institutions inherited from the Catholics, the schools[47] were potentially the most valuable and ought to be supported and strengthened. The school system was considered central to their task of conversion and dissemination of faith for two reasons. First of all, the Reformed Faith as an expression of Protestant faith is concerned with the knowledge of God, especially, knowledge of God disclosed in his Word; and by implication this faith requires

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[44] Some of them were ringed with walls, with port holes for artillery as they were subject to attack by hostile forces from the Vanni.

[45]Sinappah Arasaratnam, "The First Century of Protestant Christianity in Jaffna 1658-1750" Indian Church History Review, vol. XIX, (June1985), 40

[46]Saparamadu, "Introduction" 1959:xx

[47]In Jaffna peninsula alone there were 26 churches with schools attached to them. There were children enrolled in these schools, and also school masters were available from the previous regime. [Arasaratnam, "First Century" 41]

understanding and grows by learning. Education was then the fundamental tool of evangelism and the aims of education were the dissemination of scriptural knowledge. The basic tools of reading and writing were to help in this dissemination. Secondly, the Reformed Faith emphasizes preaching, another mode of transmitting the knowledge of God, and is central to its worship. Since preaching, unlike the celebration of mass, cannot be conducted in a European language, the Dutch made greater use of Tamil, which was also given an important place in instruction.

Education was thus vigorously promoted as a means to conversion. In the schools, some simple instruction in Christianity was given, together with reading and writing in the child's vernacular, and arithmetic. The schoolmaster in charge maintained a register of attendance, and fines were imposed to ensure attendance of children. The schoolmaster was paid by the state, and also acted as registrar of births, marriages, and deaths. The Predikaants supervised these schools and were from the outset anxious that female education should be encouraged together with male. Their attempt to make it compulsory was opposed by the political officers called scholarchs, but evidence shows that girls were enrolled in reasonable numbers.

With the need for a system of higher level training for potential school masters, it was only a matter of time before a seminary was established. A Tamil seminary was established in Nallur in 1690, in the proximity of the ruins of the royal residence. This was the first institution of higher education established by the Dutch in the island.

The ablest students from the schools would be selected for the seminary, and following the completion of their training, they would be employed as schoolmasters and also as unordained ministers (proponents, assistants of Predikaants) of local churches.

The seminary had Dutch and Tamil instructors, and language and religion were the subjects of study. The medium of instruction was mixed with half the time devoted to Tamil and the other half to Dutch. In the first ten years of its existence, Rev. Adrian de Mey, the Rector, was the leading spirit behind the seminary. His mother's side was of Tamil ancestry. He had an excellent knowledge of Tamil and of the local society. There was at this time a great demand from influential families for admission for their children. The Vanniar chief of Panankamam, Don Philip Nallamaparan, interceded with the Scholarch, Van Rhede, to secure admission for his son.[48] Among the first enrolment of 28 students in 1696, there were 3 Vanniyar, 2 Brahmans, 1 Chetty, 13 Vellalar, 2 Akamudaiyan, 1 Madapalli, 1 Malayali and 3 Paradeshis. With the death of the Rev. de Mey in 1699 the seminary went through a long period of decline under a succession of rectors not knowledgeable in the Tamil language or in Tamil customs.

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[48]On one of his holidays the boy happened to go to Nagapatnam with a Dutch officer. While in Nagapatnam the boy disguised himself and went to worship steathily in a large Hindu temple, but was caught while making an offering. It is very likely that his father specifically asked his son to make this offering. see S. Arasaratnam, "The Vannniyar of North Ceylon: a study of feudal power and central authority, 1660-1760," CJHSS, vol. 9, no. 2 (July-December 1966): 109

In seeking to propagate Protestant Christianity, the Dutch, unlike the Portuguese, were zealous about translating the Bible. The first systematic attempt to translate the Bible into any Eastern language was done by Phillipus Baldaeus (1632-1671), who had come to Sri Lanka as a Predikaant with the Dutch invading forces and in 1658 was put in charge of Christian work among the Tamils of Jaffna. Before he left the island in 1665, he had translated the gospel of Matthew into Tamil. As the Dutch at the time had no printing press in Sri Lanka, copies of the translation were circulated on palmyra leaves.[49] The work was taken up by Adrian de Mey, who completed the translation of the whole New Testament. It had, however, begun to dawn on the company officials that unless they got hold of a Tamil translator, a good Tamil translation could never be done. Such a person they found in Philip de Melho, who was not merely versed in his own language but also in many others and was a good scholar in theology and philosophy.[50] He revised what had already been done; and by 1751, the Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles were published as one book, and the Epistles were published separately.

Through all these missionary efforts, a thin veneer of Christian influence spread throughout the Dutch territories. In the Jaffna peninsula alone the number of the baptized Christian community grew from 103,831 in A.D. 1666 to 193,148 in A.D. 1760. The practice of

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[49] S. Kulandran, The Word, Men and Matters vol.5, (Jaffna: The Institute for the Study of Religion and Society,1985), 154-159

[50] Ibid., 158

monogamy also became more prevalent during this period. The Predikaants enlisted the coercive power of the state to introduce laws against adultery, concubinage and the institution of dancing girls. Adultery became punishable with death, while devadasis were to be banished, if apprehended, into more remote villages or put in reformatories.

As the case of the Vannyiar chief, Don Philip Nallamaparan, would suggest, the large majority of the "Dutch Christians"[51] were "rice Christians" who had comfortably settled down into a dualism in religious practice and profession. They baptized their children at birth, sent them to the Church schools, attended church when the minister was preaching and even took Holy Communion. Without the knowledge of the Dutch officials and clergy they also observed Hindu domestic rituals, attended temple ceremonies in their villages and kept the fasts and feasts of the Hindu calendar.

The Portuguese were obviously more successful than the Dutch in planting their version of Christianity in Sri Lanka. Was it because the Calvinist puritanism of the Dutch was less likely to find a responsive chord among the Tamil Hindus? The answer to this question has often been in the affirmative,[52] but it must be conceded

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[51]"Dutch Christianity" has become a byword in Sri Lanka. Lord North, the first British Governor of Sri Lanka, has related how about 1800 he once asked a man what his religion was and he replied that he was a "Dutch Christian." "So you believe in the Buddha?" asked the Governor. "Of course" replied the man. [Quoted in Kulandran, The Word, Men and Matters vol. 2, (Jaffna: The Institute for the Study of Religion and Society,1985), 112

[52]For example, Abbe Dubois, Letters on the State of Christianity in India reprint (New Delhi: Associated Publishing House, 1977), 10

that "ascetic" Protestantism may well have its own peculiar appeal in the East and when that appeal is supplemented by the promise of worldly success, it is quite capable of striking a responsive chord among Hindus. The major weakness of Dutch Christianity in achieving its aims lies elsewhere. Dutch Christianity was first of all "a mere appendage of the Company,"[53] a body of merchants who were autocratic and jealous of their power, and it was therefore never able to acquire a vitality of its own. The Company was not willing to hire enough personnel to staff the array of religious institutions in Sri Lanka. The school system was considered a drain on the Company's finances and was expected to be self-sufficient. Secondly, the effort of the Dutch commenced well before the Protestant Missionary movement itself was born. Most Protestant churches in Europe at the time had hardly thought of missionary work; some even strongly objected to it, on the grounds that it interfered with the sovereignty of God.[54] Consequently, only a few Predikaants were willing to learn the local language, and get involved with missionary work. Dutch interest in the conversion of those of other faiths was always languid rather than intense.

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[53]Saparamadu, xiv

[54]The dominant theology both among the Lutherans and Calvinists held that the gospel injunction to go and preach to all nations lapsed with the end of the apostolic age, and thus missionary work would be a clear violation of the divine purpose.

Some Observations :

The colonial and the traditional milieu

Some elements of society are more vulnerable than others. In Sri Lanka's long and turbulent history, political institutions in particular have been susceptible to sudden alterations, if not obliteration. Portuguese and Dutch onslaughts brought about the obliteration of the local political institutions through their superior fire-power. On the other hand most structures concerned with the kin and caste groups have shown greater stability and resistance to change, despite repeated political upheavals. Phillipus Baldaeus's portrait of Tamil society in the seventeenth century based on close personal observation over a period of eight years is in this respect invaluable. His description of caste lifestyles[55] shows how the family and kin structures had already persisted through one hundred and fifty years of European colonial rule. This is only to be expected since the social elements, in contrast to the political, have deep emotional roots. They tend to reverberate through various levels of social life: "principles found in kinship are repeated in caste concepts and, more subtly, as parts of religious ritual and belief."[56]

From the early sixteenth century, through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, only limited forms of human interaction existed between the Europeans and Tamil society. During this period, the

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[55]See Appendix 3: Phillipus Baldaeus's account of Jaffna society in the seventeenth century

[56]Yalman, Bo Tree, 5

Europeans, political officials and missionaries alike, used local patronage networks to achieve their aims, and consequently there was little incentive to learn or borrow from an alien Western civilization. Beginning with the Tamil elites, many, however, found it expedient or necessary to become part of the new colonial world and the culture which it contained. Among the Vanniyar, only the ruling families embraced Christianity after accepting Portuguese and then Dutch overlordship. In consequence they were duly baptized and followed the practice of the time in taking Christian or European names together with their own Tamil names. But because colonial rule was never extended to the core areas of Vanni,[57] these ruling families retained considerable autonomy and later on showed little trace of Christian influence.[58]

Within the conquered territories, depending on the extent of the socio-cultural interaction, a colonial milieu was slowly created. The colonial milieu developed unevenly, and separately from the traditional milieu. It was characterised by a despotic or racial hierarchy, sustained by a hybrid of slavery and forced labour alongside a monopolistic commercial economy. The crucial link between the two milieus was the patronage network offered by the local elites, which

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[57] Though they were not conquered, the Vanni chieftains needed the ports for their trade in elephants and areca nuts, and for this an annual tribute was paid. On those occasions, at their insistence, the colonial rulers had to send a party of drummers and musicians to escort them to the Jaffna fort.

[58] Arasaratnam, "The Vanniyar of North Ceylon," 101-112

provided a reliable supply of clients and converts to the colonial regimes.

Racial hierarchy was defined by the relative purity of "blood" which is believed to account for the distinctions in physiognomy, colour of the skin and other somatic characteristics. A clear racial hierarchy first emerged in the Portuguese colonial milieu, with Europeans, Eurasians and various groups of Tamils ranked according to their "blood." From the outset of Portuguese rule there were many sexual relationships between Portuguese men and Tamil women, causing a rapid growth of Eurasian or mixed (mestico) populations. These Eurasians were given markedly higher status and greater responsibility in the colonial system, in part, because the admixture of European blood was believed to have elevated and improved the nature of these peoples.

In India and Sri Lanka, during the period of Portuguese dominance, the local population was enumerated in as many as "five separate categories," according to "parentage and place of birth." The Jesuit Father Vilignano, writing to his superiors in A.D. 1580, distinguished between European-born Portuguese, Indian-born Portuguese, casticos (offspring of European father and a Eurasian mother), mesticos (offspring of a European father and a native mother), and natives.[59]

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[59]Charles R. Boxer, Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, (1415-1825), (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), 62-63. Note: European women were totally absent in the Portuguese as well as Dutch colonial periods.

As in the caste system, the statuses of those "races" in the middle order was susceptible to a great deal of variation. Under the British the mesticos were excluded from political and military office owing to their lack of alleged public virtue – they were said to exhibit the effects of miscegenation, leaving them darker, weaker, and more indolent and less trustworthy than any of the European or native races. Among the many quasi-biological views circulating in the nineteenth century, Major Jonathan Forbes offered a complete theory of racial contamination and degeneration that would account for the decline in the mestico fortunes:

> Those who are of Cingalese blood, free from exotic mixture, have the most pleasing colour; while the slightest mixture of native blood with European can never be eradicated and in some cases seems to go on darkening in each successive generation, until, as in many of the Portuguese descendents we find European features with jet-black complexion. The Dutch descendents, with native blood, are now undergoing the blackening process, although in general they have only reached as far as a dark and dingy yellow.[60]

"Natives" were incorporated into this hierarchical world through the rite of baptism, upon which, they were expected to assume the identity of the ruling "race" and conform to their ways. So when asking a candidate for baptism, the question would be put in the form, "Do you wish to enter the Parangi kulam (family or community)?" Parangi is the name by which the Portuguese were known in Sri Lanka of that day, and kulam in Tamil has connotations of blood relationship. Convinced of their own racial superiority the padroado

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[60]McGilvray, "Dutch Burghers," 245

missionaries believed that for the natives to be admitted to the parangi community was "exaltation from a lost and base condition to the highest pinnacle to which a human being can aspire."[61]

The intertwinement of colonialism and mission, and the creation of the colonial milieu at the dawn of the modern era, as it pertained to Catholicism as well as Protestantism, was in the last analysis rooted in the idea of Christendom: an idea that gave religion a territorial expression and a cultural compatibility. Fundamental to this idea is a symbiotic relationship between church and state that led to the formation of the Holy Roman Empire during the European Middle Ages. Though the Reformation dealt a severe blow to the "Holy" empire, the idea of Christendom remained intact. In each European country the church was thus "established" as a state church – Anglican in England, Presbyterian in Scotland, Reformed in the Netherlands, Lutheran in Scandinavia and some of the German territories, Roman Catholic in most of Southern Europe, etc.. As before, it was difficult to differentiate between political, cultural, and religious elements and activities, since they all merged into one.

During the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries both Roman Catholics and Protestants were, admittedly in different ways, still dedicated to the theocratic idea of Christendom. No Catholic or Protestant ruler of the period could imagine that, in acquiring overseas possessions, he was advancing only his political hegemony: it was

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[61]S. Neill, A History of Christianity in India, vol.1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 280

taken for granted that the conquered peoples would also submit to the Western ruler's religion. Hence the baptismal question, "Do you wish to enter the Parangi kulam?," must in one sense be seen as an extension abroad of the great myth embodied in the idea of Christendom, with all its social, political, religious and territorial associations.

de Nobili and Baldaeus

The Jesuit sannyasin, Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656), attached to the Madura Mission, was the first to see the fatal mistake of linking Christianity to the parangi cause of the colonies, for the inevitable decline of colonial rule would leave the church helplessly exposed. The lessons of history were plain to read: a strong Christian community must be reared not in a colonial milieu but on its own. Sri Lanka must for this reason have its own clergy rooted in its traditions. The alternative was at best foreign stigma and at worst oblivion.

More than anyone else in his time, de Nobili was acutely conscious of the barriers imposed by the missionaries in their attempt to persuade converts to adopt Parangi ways. Almost everything that the Portuguese did was objectionable to the high-caste Hindu, especially the Brahman, whom he wished to win for Christ. To the Brahman, convinced of his own superiority to every other human being, to associate with the Parangis would amount to sinking to the lowest possible level of pollution and degradation.

To win Brahmans for Christ he launched a new kind of mission at Madurai, determined to have as little contact as possible with the colonial world and the culture it contained. He donned the long ochre robe of the sannyasin, used only wooden sandals and ate rice and vegetables prepared by his Brahman cook. As a Christian sannyasin he separated himself from most contact with low-caste Parava Christians and conformed to high caste patterns of behaviour. "I am not a Parangi," he wrote, "I was not born in the land of the Parangis, nor was I ever connected with their race..... The holy and spiritual law which holds this doctrine of mine does not make anyone lose his caste or pass into another, nor does it induce anyone to do anything detrimental to the honour of his family."[62]

De Nobili's high-caste converts were allowed to retain their punul (the sacred thread), their kudumi (also, kudumbi, the sacred tuft of hair), their customary bathings and food rules, and all regulations governing social intercourse.[63] In particular, they were not required to have any association with Parava Christians, any more than they had with Hindus of low caste.[64] "By becoming a Christian", he wrote, "one does not renounce his caste, nobility or usages. The idea that Christianity interfered with them has been impressed upon the people

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[62]Vincent Cronin, A Pearl to India The life of Roberto de Nobli (London: E. P. Duttons and Co.1966), 136-137; S. Neill, History of Christianity in India, 281f. De Nobli himself was Italian, not Portuguese ('Parangi') by birth.

[63]Roberto de Nobili, Adaptation ed. S. Rajamanickam (Palayamkottai, Tirunelveli: de Nobili Research Institute, 1971), 87ff.; S. Rajamanickam, The First Oriental Scholar, (Tirunelveli: De Nobli Research Institute, 1972), 55-56

[64]Neill, A History of Christianity in India, vol.1, 284, 289

by the devil and is the great obstacle to Christianity."[65] Here, de Nobili's intentions are made explicit: a strong Christian community must be reared in a traditional milieu, because it is possible for converts to remain as Christians within Hindu society.

The only Dutch Protestant effort to establish a Tamil Christian community outside the colonial milieu was made by the Dutch Predikaant, Phillippus Baldaeus (1632-1671), whose work was centred in Jaffna. Predikaants who served in the colonies were carefully chosen by the Dutch chamber of commerce for their "docility," but the twenty four year old Baldaeus turned out to be something more than a Dutch padre ministering to the spiritual needs of Dutch Protestant officers of the company living in the town of Jaffna.[66] Nothing was more distasteful to him than taking such a limited view of his duties. He wanted to get down to the people, to learn their language in order to know and understand them, their social customs and religious beliefs. Being a travelling preacher, he stressed the importance of learning the language of the people, and rejected the prevailing practice of instructing a section of the inhabitants in Dutch in order to communicate with them through that language. Baldaeus was thus one of the pioneers of Protestant efforts to become proficient in Asian languages.[67]

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[65]Cited in C. B. Firth, An Introduction to Indian Church History, (Madras, 1961), 112

[66]Arasaratnam, "Rev. Phillippus Baldaeus – His Pastoral Work in Ceylon 1656-1665", CJHSS, vol.3 (Jan. - June 1960): 29

[67]He learned Tamil in traditional style - writing on sand, writing on olas with iron pens, etc..

After achieving proficiency in the Tamil language Baldaeus turned his attention, as mentioned earlier, to the production of Christian literature in the Tamil language. His aim was to create a body of Christian literature in Tamil, which would make the ordinary Tamil familiar with the various aspects of Christianity, without having constantly to rely on the Predikaants and their assistants. He translated the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the Articles of Faith and the Gospel of Matthew.

Baldaeus was keen on giving the Protestant Church in Sri Lanka, that included Tamil and Sinhalese speaking congregations, some unified organisation and some cohesion.[68] Through his initiative all the Predikaants in the island met at Colombo in 1659 to draw up a scheme that would lead to the formation of a unified Protestant Church. It was decided that the leadership would be held in rotation by every one of the Protestant congregations of the island. In this respect the Protestant Church of Sri Lanka would not be different from those in contemporary Holland or Scotland. Baldaeus clearly wanted the Church planted on its own soil, reared in its own languages. Such a move would also lead to the empowering of the congregations. Predictably, when the proposal was sent to Batavia for final approval it was turned down, fearing the prospect of endless conflicts with the Church. Baldaeus, easily the most successful of Predikaants in Sri Lanka, found the restrictions imposed by the Dutch monopolistic state

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[68]Arasaratnam, "Rev. Phillippus Baldaeus," 33

extremely humiliating and in July, 1665 asked that he be relieved of his duties.

The above observations show that neither the Portuguese mission (based on caste conversion) nor the Dutch mission (based on the authority of the government) were successful in penetrating the traditional milieu, because, while each had a limited attraction to a few, they were not familiar paths of religious reform. The sannyasin model into which the British and American protestants eventually fell had a bigger impact – even though there too the Hindu system had a known tradition of counter reformation.

CHAPTER 9

SULTANS AND SANNYASINS IN BRITISH SRI LANKA 1796-1900

9.1 Wars of Monopoly and Conquest 1796-1833

In the seventeenth century the VOC was the paramount power in the Indian Ocean, strong enough to win all the wars of monopoly. It led to the ousting of the British from the spice trade, but this defeat was, however, "never forgotten nor forgiven."[1] During the following century the wheel turned almost full circle. The British East India Company was rapidly becoming a great power in this region while the Dutch were slowly floundering in the seas of bankruptcy. In part, the reasons for Holland's decline in Asia was economic. The Dutch were heavily invested in the wrong commodities, particularly in the spice trade whose profitability was now on the decline. At the same time they were undercapitalized in comparison with the English and French companies, and therefore found it difficult with their limited resources to break into the growth areas of world trade, in Indian cloth, tea, and somewhat later, opium. Here the British in particular were able to out-

[1]Lennox A. Mills, Ceylon under British Rule, 1795-1932 (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 3

buy and out-sell them. At the same time there were also military reasons for the decline. The Dutch armed forces were relatively smaller than those of their European rivals, making their factories easy prey in times of European war.[2]

British ascendency over their European and local rivals in the second half of the eighteenth century was largely due to a historical accident[3] that occurred a century earlier when they latched on to Bengal, the most dynamic of the Mughal provinces. With the seizure of Bengal in A.D. 1757 the Company, without calling on the English taxpayer, was able to raise substantial funds to finance its relentless drive for monopoly by the elimination of all its rivals. The funds came from puppet nawabs, who had been coerced into making large contributions to procure protection[4] by Company armies stationed in their territories.

The rhetoric of free trade was one of the key themes in the latter half of the eighteenth century. Adam Smith's The Wealth of Nations, published in 1776, gave rise to the slogan "laissez-faire." In this

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[2]C. A. Bayly, Imperial Meredian. The British Empire and the World 1780-1830 (London: Longman,1989), 66-67

[3] Sir W. Jones- "this wonderful kingdom, which Fortune threw into her lap while she was asleep," W. Jones, The Letters of Sir William Jones vol. 2 ed, Garland Cannon (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 813

[4] Selling protection inevitably led to corruption. The real beneficiaries were the company servants. Lieutenant Colonel Clive, the founder of the British Empire at the age of thirty-two became one of England's wealthiest subjects. He returned to London with bags of Indian jewels and gold that he used to buy 200 shares of Company stock at 500 pounds-sterling each and borough seats in Parliament to ensure his company's fortune from London rivals. He finally committed suicide after having everything his ill-won fortune could buy. See Stanley Wolpert, A New History of India 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982),180-188

atmosphere the British East India Company found the "free trade rhetoric" useful to "disguise its own relentless drive for a monopoly of force, labour and revenue in the sub-continent."[5] The rhetoric of free trade as a result became an important component of imperial expansion. It particularly helped to portray the new colonial regime as "liberal" and tolerant, in strong contrast to all its predecessors. This theme would soon become popularized through colonial historiographies.

By the 1740's, if not earlier, the Dutch and the French commercial enterprises were eclipsed by the British, and from then on changes in the subcontinent came thick and fast. British troops were to fight wars in southern India, in Bengal, in Sri Lanka, and even in the heartlands of the old Mughal empire. Out of the war was to come a British empire. In 1765 the East India Company was appointed as diwan (chief financial manager) of the provinces of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa by the Mughal Emperor. This meant that they were recognised as the effective rulers of the wealthiest province, Bengal, that probably contained something like twenty million inhabitants. By 1765 the British were also dominant along the Coromandel coast. The major Indian power on the coast at this time ruled as their puppet, and was subject to their control.[6]

Owing to these conquests, which were spearheaded by Lieutenant Colonel Clive, the centre of British power in the latter half

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[5]Bayly, Imperial Meredian, 60

[6]C. A. Bayly (ed.) The Raj: India and the British 1600-1947, 19f.

of the eighteenth century had shifted from the western to the eastern coast. The only dockyards, however, were at Bombay, and there was no harbour on the Bay of Bengal that seemed capable of conversion into a naval base. The continuing wars with France, and the temporary loss of Madras to the French, made the need for such a base a matter of urgency. These were the circumstances that led the British to realise the strategic importance of Trincomalee:

> The harbour alone renders the island so valuable as a protection to our Indian commerce. The harbour from its centrical position and easy ingress and engress which it affords at all seasons, is better adapted for being made a marine depot and rendezvous for His Majesty's Squadron than any station in India.[7]

It is the strategic importance of Trincomalee that first brought the British to Sri Lanka. A century and a half of Dutch rule fast drew to a close with the capture of Trincomalee in 1782 by the British. The French invasion of Holland in 1795 and the founding of the Batavian Republic, led to the eventual annexation of the coastal lowlands of the island by the Madras troops in 1796. Dutch power at this time was only a shadow of what it had been, and could offer only token resistance to "satisfy their honour."[8] Following the expulsion of the Dutch, Sri Lanka was made a dependency of the East India Company's Madras Presidency. In 1802 Sri Lanka was placed directly under Britain as a crown Colony, and so it remained until independence in 1948.[9]

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[7]J. Cordiner, quoted in "The Royal Navy and Trincomalee 1750-1958," CJHSS, vol.7, no.1, (1964): 1

[8]Ibid., 6

[9]The Kingdom of Kandy survived until 1815, when it was "ceded" to the British Crown

9.2 Mercantilist Despotism 1796-1833

On the face of it the early British government in Sri Lanka was a "liberal" regime. Some of the restrictions on trade and immigration maintained by the Dutch Company in its final phase were lifted. There was consequently an influx of people, mainly of the Tamil Hindu, Muslim and Christian merchant communities of the Coromandel coast. British rule also led to an important change in the local power structures in that many of the local chiefs through whom both the Portuguese and the Dutch had ruled were replaced.[10] Also the holding of public office was no longer dependent on Protestant Christian confession, and the new government tried to mend fences with both the Roman Catholic Church and the Buddhist clergy.

The failure to endorse local patronage networks soon led to rebellions in many provinces. In 1805, General Sir Thomas Maitland, the Governor of the Crown colony, reimposed a variation of the Dutch monopoly and the Dutch forced labour system. This was a pragmatic reaction to the collapse of crown income. The British thus continued the state monopoly on the cinnamon trade and the compulsory labour services of the Caliya or Salagama caste of cinnamon peelers. The state monopolies in salt and tobacco were also continued. Some of the other state monopolies in arrack and toddy (both alcoholic beverages derived from coconut and palmyra trees), pearl fishery and gem digging were rented out. These changes taken together amounted to a "continuation

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[10]B. H. Farmar, Ceylon: A Divided Nation (London: Oxford University Press for the Institute of Race Relations, 1963), 34

of the mercantilist policies inherited from their Dutch and Portuguese forbears."[11]

Maitland's policies created a system that was similar to the Dutch one, a hybrid of slavery and forced labour alongside a commercial economy. The system endorsed the authority of the local talaivans (headmen) in order to secure a reliable supply of forced labour for such things as the construction of roads and the collection of cinnamon. The headmen were often employed to supervise forced labour exaction on behalf of the colonial state. This practice tended to validate the indigenous caste hierarchy upon which forced labour exaction was organized. It was in fact the British who made corvee labour a truly compulsory and universal system of labour exaction in Sri Lanka,[12] and in the long run this practice had the effect of making the traditional social institutions more rigid.

These mercantilist policies finally received their justification in the Kandyan Convention of 1815 which recognized the British Crown as the rightful successor to the deposed Sinhalese king, and thereby gave the British the right to continue pre-colonial institutions. This arrangement suited the mercantilist state whose primary interest was revenue. In addition to the existing taxes it imposed new ones such as the tax on coconut trees, aimed at augmenting revenue. The new policy was opposed to tinkering with the status quo, which had in the early years led to rebellions in the north and south and to a general

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[11]Asoka Bandarage, Colonialism in Sri Lanka. The Political Economy of the Kandyan Highlands, 1833-1886 (Berlin: Moulton Pub. 1983), 53-54

[12]Ibid., 54-55

shortage of labour. As Asoka Banarage observes, "by and large, in Ceylon as in most other colonies, mercantilist expropriation did not lead to structural transformations of the indigenous society."[13]

9.3 From Booty-Capitalism to Free Enterprise 1833-1900

During the 1830's and 1840's, liberal ideas, and particularly utilitarian liberal ideas, were on the offensive. Sri Lankan and imperial historians have characterised these decades as an "Era of Reform and Reconstruction,"[14] signalling the transition from "booty-capitalism" to "free enterprise."[15] For the believers in the power of political institutions, especially colonial institutions, the Colebrook-Cameron Reforms of 1833, are a "watershed" in the island's history. They point out that William Colebrooke was an "unmistakable proponent of laissez-faire"; and Charles Cameron, a "noted Benthamite."[16] The changes in this era came about, they argue, because the theoretical basis of the old mercantile regime was undermined by the doctrines of liberalism espoused by the authors of reform.

Colebrooke abolished the state monopolies, including that of corvee labour, and sought to transform the colonial state from direct participation in the economy to become a "facilitator for private

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[13]Ibid., 56

[14]K. M. de Silva, A History of Sri Lanka, 265-281

[15]Bandarage, 58-64

[16]Ibid., 59

enterprise."[17] His reforms also provided a framework for administrative unification through the appointment of British Government Agents in the five provinces – North, Southeast, West and Central; judicial unification through the establishment of modern-Western courts; limited self-government; and the creation of an English educated elite through the establishment of English schools[18].

But the extent of these liberal reforms has often been exaggerated. If an "age of reform" did happen, its guiding principles were still pragmatic conservatism rather than liberalism. The liberal inspired "Great Reform Act" in Britain at the time, for instance, did little to challenge aristocratic domination of politics,[19] and, indeed, would almost seem to have been designed to perpetuate it. Social status was still based on land, and the industrial middle class throughout the remainder of the century remained a lowly breed. Similarly in Sri Lanka, the mudaliyars and talaivans managed to reproduce their power and authority, and even blunt the decisions of the courts. Social bonds between the land-lord and his dependents proved even more resilient than they were in Britain.

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[17]Ibid., 62

[18]According to Thomas Macaulay's well-known "minute on education"– a private memorandum sent to the governor-general on 2 Feb. 1835 – the object of English education was "to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, opinions, in morals, and in intellect." See Thomas Babington Macaulay: Selected Writings ed, J. Clive and T. Pinney (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1972), 249

[19]John M. Ward, Colonial Self-Government. The British Experience, 1759-1856 (London: Macmillan, 1976), 209-246

The abolition of slavery or kattu atimai during this period was merely succeeded by other forms of bonded labour, what Hugh Tinker calls "a new system of slavery."[20] The legal freeing of India's slaves beginning in 1843 facilitated the export of indentured labour, for it allowed kangany agents to beguile or kidnap indigent landless labourers.[21] Evidence provided by Kathleen Gough suggests that the liberal reforms robbed these low-caste labourers of their traditional "rights" and thus contributed to greater exploitation. Thanjavur was one of the main districts supplying labour to the plantations of Sri Lanka. Prior to the "era of reform," in 1828, one hundred and fifty indentured labourers were taken from Thanjavur to the new British coffee plantations in Sri Lanka. All of them, however, deserted, a traditional device widely employed by service castes. Systematic recruitment to Sri Lanka then began in the 1830's, in the "era of reform," coupled with criminal laws prohibiting desertion, and 2,432 Thanjoreans were sent to the plantations in 1839. Emigration increased thereafter and reached its peak in 1900. Most of the indentured labourers were Untouchables or from the lower castes – Pallar, Paraiyar, Kallar and Padaiyacci. In "agrarian relations," therefore, the patterns of recruitment and service "show an extraordinary continuity during British rule."[22]

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[20]H. Tinker, A New System of Slavery. The export of Indian Labour overseas, 1830-1920 (London: Oxford University Press, 1974)

[21]On kidnapping, see Tinker, 128

[22] K. Gough, Rural Society in Southeast India (Cambridge,Cambridge University Press, 1981), 121, 131, 193

The influence of the free-trade legislation, like that of free-wage labour, has been overstated. "Free trade" was no more than the nostrum of the colonial rulers who had been able by the use of military force to break into others' protected markets. In this sense the British in the 1830's could afford to be free traders.[23] Colebrooke himself, while advocating free trade, ensured that the colonial state could step in whenever its revenues were threatened. From its very beginning, therefore, the plantation economy was built upon the restrictive policies of the colonial state, such as its legal monopoly over forest and high lands. Colebrooke was really a mercantilist at heart, not altogether different from his predecessor, General Thomas Maitland, in that he held the same paternalist philosophy as the underlying principle of the new imperialism. It found expression in one of Maitland's few known theoretical statements, a plain man's rendering of the Scottish historian Robertson's theory of the stages of human development. Maitland argued that Sri Lanka was not ready for free trade and a free labour market; it was as if "one of the ancient barons had pulled out of his pocket Adam Smith, and said: I will apply to you vassals principles that you do not understand and will not properly apply to your circumstances for another 500 years."[24] In the light of these observations, the "Era of Reform" should in fact be seen to represent a

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[23] By the end of the century the British realised that free trade would be too costly because of superior industrial goods being produced by the Germans and the Americans. At the turn of the century heavy tarrifs were thus imposed on German goods, which according to Arnold Toynbee, created German resentment that led to the First World War –another war of monopoly.

[24] W. F. Lord, Sir Thomas Maitland (London: 1935), 81-82

change in the style of government both in the colonies and in Britain; without at the same time abandoning the restrictive policies that had until then guided colonial state-building.

9.4 Sultanism

Much recent colonial research has concentrated on the eighteenth century, probing the complexities of the pre-colonial states of South Asia. Several studies in somewhat different ways, have sought to understand the early East India Company as a state and a logical extension of processes with distinctly local origins. All of them explicitly reject the postulate – shared by previous historians – that the establishment of British rule in the late eighteenth century constitutes a fundamental break with prior historical developments.[25]

It is now possible to observe a line of continuity between Pax Mughalia and Pax Britannica, with the Mughal successor states of the eighteenth century providing the crucial link between the two. The warrior state of Mysore, ruled by Haidar Ali (1761-1782) and Tipu Sultan (1782-1799), is probably the most important of all the successor states, whose leaders became the embodiment of "Muhammadan tyranny" and "Oriental despotism" owing to their spirited stand against the British.[26] Tipu Sultan's regime elaborated on and extended a

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[25] B. Stein, "State Formation and Economy Reconsidered" Modern Asian Studies vol. 19, no.3 (1985): 387-413; D. A. Washbrook, "Progress and Problems: South Asian Economic and Social History c.1720-1860," Modern Asian Studies vol. 22, no.1 (1988):57-96, C. Bayly, Imperial Meridian

[26] "Even a generation later the mild and learned Hindu reformer Ram Mohun Roy was pelted by urchins on the streets of Bristol who shouted 'Tipu! Tipu!' " Bayly, Imperial Meridian, 114

political order first established in Karnataka a century earlier, which was unprecedentedly interventionist in its effects as well as purposes. From its very inception, it was an order that was preoccupied with the construction of military power, and to this end it elaborated a system of resource-massing in order to enlarge and modernize its armed forces.

Tipu Sultan, unlike his father Haidar Ali, did not depend on tribute payments to maintain his military system. In his attempt to gain closer control over the resources in his territories, he used methods that were typically employed in the Ottoman lands, those of state monopoly and more rigid revenue management. Taxes were imposed on a wide range of items that included the coconut and palmyra trees[27] and were collected by amildars appointed by Tipu Sultan's provincial governors, asaf, of whom there were eighteen in 1792 and thirty seven in 1799.[28] He had thus created a centrally controlled body of officials to collect revenue from a broad base of payers, and this considerably increased the flow of resources to various sections of his army.

In his drive for monopoly over commerce, he placed severe restrictions on his merchants and tried to exclude foreign competitors – whereas the earlier Mughal emperors had encouraged bodies of traders, both local and foreign, to operate freely at the fringes of their sovereignty.[29] With equal vigour he sought to control production

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[27]Ibid., 53

[28]Stein, "State Formation", 402

[29]Bayly, 53

through preferential tax rates, productivity advances, tree plantings undertaken by his officials for their marketable fruits and for timber that was suitable for gun carriages, and investments in irrigation. These efforts were balanced with savage displays of force involving the destruction of rival economic bases and the compulsory mobilization of labour.[30] The latter included the forcible removal of cultivators from Arcot to settle them in Mysore.[31]

All these methods employed by Tipu Sultan in his system of resource massing, namely, the ryotwari[32] revenue system, penal taxation and ruler's monopolies over commerce and production,[33] anticipated the organisation followed by the East India Company after his defeat and death.[34] The Company with its greater resources was able to apply these methods more rigorously and more completely than could have been possible by the Tipu regime. Many "sultanist ideals" set out in a Persian document al Sirajiyya,[35] were translated into "Company Raj realities" only in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.[36]

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[30]Stein, "State Formation," 402, Washbrook, 89

[31]Bayly, 53

[32] Ryotwari (Persian) – a method by which land-tax arrangements were made, basing taxation directly on the peasants' fields.

[33] Washbrook, 89

[34]Historically, the most important element of continuity between the two regimes is the body of Brahman civil servants employed by both. For biographical details of Purniya, a Marathi Brahman administrator. see Bayly, (ed.), Raj, 74-76

[35] Stein, "State Formation," 401-403

[36] Washbrook, 89-90

There are, therefore, sound historical grounds for characterizing early British rule in Sri Lanka as sultanist, representing a set of governing principles with distinctly "indigenous" origins.[37] Following Max Weber, it is possible to identify the following set of general principles that pertain to a sultanate state. First, the army is the first institution of the state in being the major recipient of state resources and the major locus of ranking. The ruler would thus be a war commander. From Clive to Munro and from Maitland to Barnes, we can indeed trace a line of military men who have presided over this order. Secondly, rule is personal in that all state-level political relations are based upon the personal loyalty of subordinates to the ruler. Loyalty is then reciprocated by the giving of honours, privileges and rewards at the hand of the ruler.

Closely related to the second is the third – the central administrative institutions are often staffed by kinsmen of the ruler, a condition that justifies the term patrimonial. As a result all state level political relations are permeated by personalistic relations.[38] This third aspect was a permanent feature of British rule in South Asia. Ironically, it was Thomas Munro who first critisized this method of administration. He pointed to Tipu Sultan's bigotry, because of the

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[37] Admittedly, some elements are as West Asian as Islam is in India.

[38] Absent in Weber's discussion is the role of royal rituals so conspicuous during Mughal and Victorian periods. They were, as displayed in the brilliant court ceremonies, meant to dazzle the local community groups and to gain their loyalty to the throne. That British royalism drew its main inspiration and example from the Mughal experience is indicated by the fact that in England, following the Regency Crisis of 1788, a new symbolic relationship between royal ritual and popular patriotism was forged in the extravagant setting of the oriental Brighton Pavilion, where the Prince Regent established his own personal court.

favour he gave to Muslim appointees recruited from Hyderabad, presumably of Afghan-Turkik descent. Yet it was that condemned system that was soon continued under Munro. In addition to kinship, language contributed to reinforcing these personalistic relations. Like Tipu Sultan who adopted Persian as an official language, the British "imposed a new official language and a new technical vocabulary upon older terms."[39]

There is however one element in the British sultanate that appears European and constitutes an innovation, namely, racism. From the very beginning of the Islamic era, Muslim conquerors have assumed that they would form a dual society in which the conquerors would constitute an aristocracy and the conquered peoples a subject population, the former Muslim, the latter not.[40] But these conquerors had no legitimacy for enforcing such separation on grounds other than religion. In the Arab, Abbasid and Mughal empires, conversions to Islam and the acceptance of Arabic or Persian as shared languages often led to widespread assimilation of the conquerors into the general population.[41]

By contrast, the social separation of the kinsmen of the rulers from the subject population in this case was of a permanent character. The Sinhalese Radala aristocracy, for instance, showed more than a willingness to embrace the rulers' religion, language and customs, but

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[39]Stein, "State Formation," 406-407

[40]Ira Lapidus, A History of Islamic Societies, 51-53

[41]Ibid.

they failed to break through the wall of separation and to gain acceptance as equals. Quite unlike their Muslim predecessors, the British saw the world divided according to "races," and this was mirrored in many ways in their own imperial style of government that emphasised hierarchy and racial subordination. The paternalist philosophy underlying the new imperialism was "derived from the idea that cultures attained 'civilization' by stages of moral awakening and material power."[42] One consequence of interpreting heterogeneity in biological terms was that by the end of the nineteenth century a large number of distinct "races" were recognized by the colonial regime in Sri Lanka. Besides the Tamils and the Sinhalese; there were the "Up Country" and "Low Country" Sinhalese; and "Ceylon" and "Indian" Tamils; and there were also "Moors" (again divided into Ceylon Moors and Coast Moors), Malays, the Mukkuvar, the Vellalas and so on.[43] During this time language and race became conflated in European scholarship, so that eventually the smaller "races" were subsumed into the two major categories – Tamil (Dravidian) and Sinhalese (Aryan). All these developments reflected a sharpening of racial attitudes through the course of the nineteenth century.

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[42]C. A. Bayly, Imperial Meridian, 7. The idea has its antecedent in the Platonic "Great Chain of Being" , but it took on a distinctly biological form in the speculations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. see, Arthur D. Lovejoy, The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964) and Elie Kedourie, Nationalism 3d. ed. (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1966)

[43]J. Spencer (ed.), Sri Lanka:History and the Roots of Conflict, 27-30

CHAPTER 10
PROTESTANT MISSION AND COLONIALISM

10.1 The problem : Colonialism, Christianity and Commerce

Modern historiography has established a tradition of presenting missions as the surrogate of British colonial expansion. This connection has been affirmed by historians with very different persuasions. Whereas, for instance, Sri Lankan nationalist historians have been concerned to show how the two movements combined to destroy indigenous culture,[1] ecclesiastical historians have pointed to the beneficent or civilizing effects of such co-operation.[2] The former, in their interpretation see the mission serving the interests of the empire, whereas the latter view the empire as "providence," serving the cause of the mission. From very different perspectives, therefore, these writings, have maintained the tradition of affirming the interdependence of the three "C's" of colonialism: "Christianity, commerce, and civilization."

It would seem possible to present a different point of view from the standard one on this whole subject of mission and colonialism, if

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[1] K. M. de Silva , "The Government and Religion: Problems and Politices c.1832 to c.1910," UCHC vol. 3, ed. K. M. deSilva (Peradeniya: University of Ceylon, 1973), 187-212

[2]Neill, A History of Christianity in India, vol. 2

one were to examine the two developments separately and take into account some obvious differences. An inquiry that attempts to go beyond the study of what missions and colonialism had in common would have to start with the recognition that the West in the eighteenth century was no longer a monolith – as writers about colonial matters often presume. The old monolithic idea of Christendom had by this time become a casualty of the Enlightenment. With the destruction of the old unity, the power of the Western church waned rapidly, and it was no longer directly responsible for validating the structure of society. The real power of the kings and nobles had also been destroyed. The ordinary people now saw themselves as being, in some measure, related to God directly, no longer by way of king, nobility and church. It is this "shattering of the territorial shell" observes Lamin Sanneh, a historian of religion, that

> paradoxically allowed the organizing of the modern Christian missionary movement as a voluntary effort, influential certainly on numerous details of imperial policy, but organically independent enough of imperialism to conflict with it on the ground. The Christian missionary movement is in one sense the funeral of the great myth of Christendom, and in another the extension abroad of the successful separation of religion and territory. The missionary movement proved that religion can be detached from territorial identity and succeed, with colonialism reinforcing the same point by showing how colonial officials need not share the religion of their subjects to rule over them.[3]

It meant that with the death of theocratic dreams, colonial and missionary expansion would be two separate things, capable of going their separate ways.

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[3]"Between East and West: Confrontation and Encounter," The Christian Century, (Nov. 13 1991): 1071

10.2 Anti-racial foundations of Protestant Mission

Colonialism and Christian mission were first of all carriers of conflicting visions of humanity, which were to have far reaching effects on their respective policies and practices in the colonies. These two visions first came into conflict in the sixteenth century, at the beginning of the Western colonial enterprise. During this period, observes Leon Poliakov in his comprehensive study of The Aryan Myth, Spain was the principal centre of this debate which,

> in so far as it concerned the American natives, set Christian anthropology at odds with the anthropology inspired by the Classics. For humanists like Juan Sepulved, imbued with Aristotle's ideas, the Indians were barbarians and therefore born to be slaves. For the Dominican, Bartolome de Las Casas, they were part of Adam's posterity to be evangelized and treated as free men.[4]

Las Casas's views prevailed in the sixteenth century because the "Christendom ideals," which were "both anti-racist and anti-nationalist"[5] were still dominant in the West.[6]

But this situation would soon be reversed by the advent of the Enlightenment. The Christian "doctrine of the unity of the human race" that is affirmed in the Genesis account of Adam as a common father, about which Europeans always had "secret misgivings," was "directly attacked by a number of leading philosophers of the

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[4] Leon Poliakov, The Aryan Myth. A History of Racist and Nationalist ideas in Europe (London: Sussex University Press, 1971), 134-135

[5] Ibid., 326

[6] See also S. Neill on Las Casas, Colonialism and Christian Missions (London: Lutterworth, 1966), 51-59

Enlightenment."[7] Many of them deists, laid an emphasis on the "natural division of humanity into distinct and separate races," by taking up and somewhat modifying a traditional idea of the Great Chain of Being, and then appealed to the necessity and indeed "a duty laid upon us to cultivate our own peculiar qualities and not mix or merge them with others."[8] The "new anthropological ideas" under the influence of classical antiquity ensured that Adam would die as a universal ancestor among the ruins of the ancien regime, and thus each in their own way "prepared the ground for the racial hierarchies of the following century."[9] All these hierarchies unanimously affirmed the "bio-scientific superiority of white men as the standard-bearers of Progress and the possessors of triumphant Reason," and on these grounds gave reason a "scientific" basis.[10] In this manner, the Western intelligentsia of the eighteenth century rejected Adam in exchange for Prometheus: a representative of the white race, "a conqueror [who] subjugated inferior races and turned their physical powers into organized channels under his own leadership, forcing them to follow his will and purpose."[11]

While the influence of the ideology of "rational racism" on colonial state building has already been noted, Prometheus's affiliation

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[7]Poliakov, 327

[8]Kedourie, Nationalism, 57-58

[9]Poliakov, 327

[10]Ibid., 145

[11]A. Hitler, quoted in Poliakov, 2

with "Mother India" or "Fabulous Orient" did at the same time contribute to a European obsession with the subcontinent, that soon spurred Orientalists to the study of classical Indian languages with the aim of recovering the "golden age." Their contributions to the cultures of India and Sri Lanka has often been interpreted as a "balm,"[12] and (as) a "tonic,"[13] to people who had sunk so low under colonial rule, but it would be naive to conclude that the Orientalists did not, therefore, share in the classic contempt of the colonizer for the "native."[14] Sir William Jones, for instance, is typical of the Orientalists who saw in India's ancient civilization the distinctive features of Arcadia served by Brahmans "truly elevated above priest-craft"; whose sages Valmiki and Kalidasa were equal to Plato. Hinduism, he says, should rejoice in the philosophy of karma which embodied the possibility of eternal moral improvement rather than the "horrid Christian notion of punishment without end." But it is a mistake to believe that racism would be removed from the conduct of daily life by such passion for ancient India. A little later we find Jones for the first time having to buy his "daily rice" following the collapse of the interest on his Company bonds. Approaching an Indian money lender, he records: "I was forced to borrow off a black man..... it was like touching a snake or a South American eel."[15]

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[12] K. M. Panikkar, A Survey of Indian History (London: Meridian Books Ltd., 1947), 257

[13] A. Sharma, Religious Ferment in Modern India (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 117

[14] See, for example, Sharma on W. Jones, 15-17, 117

[15] Jones, Letters, vol. 2, 755ff.

In conflict with the dominant views of the time the missionaries on the other hand, believed and taught that all humans are descended from a common ancestor, Adam, through the patriarch Noah and his sons.[16] In accordance with this view, the missionaries regarded as brothers and sisters the people to whom they felt God was sending them. When the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions – commonly known as the American Board – was formed in 1810, it commissioned its first overseas missionaries with the conviction that distant Burma was "composed of our brethren, descended from the same fatal apostasy from God, and inhabiting the same world."[17] The principal theme was that of empathy and solidarity, which found expression in compassion for others whose plight should evoke the Christian's "tenderest affections," as well as a yearning for both their temporal comfort and their immortal happiness.[18] Such sentiments would be translated into symbolic actions by the Board's missionaries in Jaffna, most noticeably, in the practice of interdining and the celebration of the Eucharist – when a common chalice would be shared.

Closely related to these contrasting visions is a second important difference to be found in the goals as well as the modes of operations of the colonialists and the missionaries. From the very beginning the

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[16]cf. Gen.1 and 10

[17]W. R Hutchinson, Errand to the World: American Protestant Missionary Thought and Foreign Missions (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987), 47

[18]Ibid., 48f.

British colonial interests were mercantile and thus "secular," whereas the Protestant missionary interests were "religious," although it would still take a long time before the full implications of these differences were felt on the host society. The lives of Lieutenant Colonel Robert Clive (1725-1774) and William Carey (1761-1834) epitomize this distinction. Clive, the "founder of the British empire" used despotic or sultanic methods to reap a personal fortune which, as mentioned, included bags of Indian jewels; and he used the same methods to sell "protection" and thus procured the annual flow of silver into the bottom of British vessels from the soil of Bengal. Overnight he became one of England's wealthiest subjects. He retired back home in comfort, having everything his ill-won fortune could buy.[19]

While Clive was fairly representative of the gentlemen or gentry-class that dominated the colonial service and the new army in the nineteenth century,[20] Carey, the "consecrated cobbler," is typical of the missionaries sent out by the English societies before 1860, people who came from the class of "skilled mechanics," artisans and tradesmen with a deep distrust of hereditary hierarchies.[21] Carey is often remembered as the "Father of modern mission." His life was touched by a series of religious revivals sweeping England and the American colonies at that time, and that mood was captured in Carey's famous slogan, "Expect great things from God, attempt great things for

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[19]Wolpert, 180-181,188

[20]Bayly, Imperial Meridian, 133-136

[21]Max A. C. Warren, Social History and Christian Mission (London: SCM Press, 1967),ch. 2

God." In his life, this fervent eschatological expectation manifested itself in a remarkable commitment and dedication to the task of mission. In 1804, his distinctly "religious" goal was formulated in an eleven-point covenant,

1. To set an infinite value on men's souls.
2. To acquaint ourselves with the snares which hold the minds of the people.
3. To abstain from whatever deepens India's prejudice against the gospel.
4. To watch for every chance of doing the people good.
5. To preach "Christ crucified" as the grand means of conversion.
6. To esteem and treat Indians as our equals
7. To guard and build up "the hosts that may be gathered."
8. To cultivate their spiritual gifts, ever pressing upon them their missionary obligation, since Indians can only win India for Christ.
9. To labour unceasingly in biblical translation
10. To be instant in the nurture of personal religion.
11. To give ourselves without reserve to the Cause, 'not counting even the clothes we wear our own.'[22]

The last point, which advocates renunciation in the cause of Christ, was reflected in Carey's own life: he gave himself and the little

[22]Paul Dekar, "Expectations Conference" paper, McMaster University, Hamilton, (October 29, 1992), 5 [unpublished]

personal fortune he had made from printing contracts,[23] wholly to the missionary "Cause" in India, where he died.

In its modes of operation, the colonial enterprise tended to rely increasingly on macro-institutions such as the army, the courts, the katcheris, and the ryotwari revenue system to realise its "secular" ends. It required very little contact between the rulers and the subject population. The missionary enterprise, by contrast, emphasised face to face contact, requiring personalistic and even populist approaches to realise its "religious" goals. Again this distinction in approaches to winning the hearts and minds of the people reflects two tendencies in the contemporary English speaking world, one being rationalist and elitist, and the other pietist and populist.[24] In the Asian colonies, the elitist – bureaucratic and centralised – approach proved to be far less effective than is often acknowledged. British officials "as a result of their ignorance, sloth, or venality, frequently lost control of the management of their districts" to the local elites.[25] Similarly, the liberal-utilitarian "tide" in the 1830's and 1840's proved to be no more than "one clerk speaking to another."[26]

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[23]Neill, History of Christianity in India vol. 2, 203

[24]See A. Heimert, Religion and the American Mind. From the Great Awakening to the Revolution. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1-24. In revising traditional liberal historiographies, Heimert argues that the revivalist, "pietist" mode of operations was highly effective in moving people and as a result "the uprising of the 1770's was not so much the result of reasoned thought as an emotional outburst similar to a religious revival."(21)

[25]Stein, "State Formation," 406

[26]Bayly, Imperial Meridian, 237

10.3 Revivalist Foundations of Protestant Mission

In the English-speaking religious world three factors converged during the eighteenth century to effect a spiritual change that was to have profound influence on missionary thinking and practice. These were the Great Awakening in the American colonies, the birth of Methodism, and the English revival in Anglicanism. These movements came to be associated with three famous and distinct personalities: Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), John Wesley (1703-1791) and George Whitefield (1714-1770), who in their own ways drew from a common spiritual heritage in Puritanism, even while they profoundly modified it. It was these three revivalists who shifted the responsibility for mission from the state and the state-backed clergy to ordinary men and women, and this shift soon led to an expansion in the horizon on mission, from territorially circumscribed parishes to the whole world. It was John Wesley who uttered the dictum "the world is my parish."[27] The Great Awakening and the revival in England fostered a remarkable ecumenical spirit, by laying its emphasis on spiritual revitalization and an encounter with God, while playing down the traditional Protestant, and Catholic, stress on the purifying of doctrine and the structures of the church.

Against the prevailing Enlightenment ethic of individual self-interest (which according to Mandeville's The Fable of the Bees (1714) positively encouraged the cultivation of "private vices" – selfishness,

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[27]David J. Bosch, Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission (New York: Maryknoll, 1991), 278

rapacity, lust for power and avarice – for "public benefits"[28]) the revivalists advocated an ethic of service to the "body."[29] Edward's ethic defined virtue as benevolence toward God and toward fellow human beings, rather than as self-fulfilment, and thus moved inevitably in a social direction.[30] For Edwards a revival is not something exclusively "spiritual" and "religious"; instead, there should "be a proportionable care to abound in moral duties, such as acts of righteousness, truth, meekness, forgiveness, and love towards our neighbour."[31] He especially urged acts of benevolence as a means of expressing, deepening and advancing God's reviving work:

> If God's people in this land were once brought to abound in such deeds of love, as much as in praying, hearing, singing, and religious meetings and conference, it would be a most blessed omen. There is nothing that would have a greater tendency to bring the God of love down from heaven to the earth: so amiable would be the sight, in the eyes of our loving and exalted Redeemer, that it would soon as it were fetch him down from his throne in heaven, to set up his tabernacle with men on the earth, and dwell with them.[32]

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[28]B. Mandeville, The Fable of the Bee: or Private Vices Public Benefits (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1970), 63-75. The parable receives confirmation in Adam Smith's The Theory of Moral Sentiments (1759), in which an "invisible hand" guides all economic process, ensuring that the pursuit of private interests would somehow, teleologically, serve the general good, "the happiness of mankind." see Introduction, Wealth of the Nations (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1970), 27

[29]Jonathan Edwards, Religious Affections, ed. J. E. Smith, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 369, 383-461, On Wesley see J. W. Bready, England, Before and After Wesley. (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1938), 248-250

[30]cf. Edwards, Religious Affections, 368f

[31]Jonathan Edwards, The Great Awakening, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 522

[32]Ibid., 527

Edward's vision moved rapidly outward from Northampton toward making all "New England a kind of heaven on earth" – and from there to the whole world.[33] Edward's An Attempt to Promote an Explicit Agreement and Visible Union of God's People, in Extraordinary Prayer for the Revival of Religion, and the Advancement of Christ's Kingdom in the Earth first published in 1748, became in the second half of that century a catalyst for mission in a variety of denominations on both sides of the Atlantic. The three revival movements were by nature ecumenical. Since the publication of Carey's tract entitled An Enquiry, the "Great Commission" of Matthew 28:18-20 would become the standard text for understanding mission. Some of these societies were Carey's own Baptist Society (founded in 1792), the London Missionary Society (1795), the American Board (1810), the (Anglican) Church Missionary Society (1700) and the (Wesleyan) Methodist Missionary Society (1805); whose respective missionaries arrived in Sri Lanka in 1812, 1805, 1816, 1818 and 1814. Among these only the last three groups, that is, the Americans, the Anglicans and the Methodists, would work in the Tamil-speaking provinces in the north and east of the island.

10.4 Ascetic Foundations of Protestant Mission

Both Weber and Dumont recognized the specifically religious character of the Protestant vocation, in the use of the labels "ascetic"[34]

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[33]Quoted in Alan Heimert, Religion and the American Mind (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 14

[34]Max Weber, "Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism," The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1958), 155-183

and renunciation[35] and the two of them, from their widely differing analytical perspectives, alluded to the other-worldly and possibly monastic associations of Protestant movements. In his well known work, Weber in particular nõted in the Protestant-Puritan ethic an ascetic detachment towards worldly pursuits which was deeply influenced by a sense of the religious calling being no longer restricted to a religious elite.

In one sense the Protestant missionary movement may be understood as a laicization of the Roman Catholic monastic movement. It was noted that the modern missionary movement had its roots in the revivalist or holiness movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These movements exhibited more than a few superficial parallels to the earlier monastic counterparts, and were deeply concerned with renewal and mission.[36] Concerning renewal, there was first of all a common conviction that the development and attainment of actual sanctity or holiness, of Christ-likeness in inner spirit and outer conduct in the individual Christian disciple, is both a possibility and at the same time the supreme object of the redemptive purposes of God.[37] This theology constituted a departure from Luther's stress on justification (forensic), whereby the believer remains in some

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[35]Dumont in Homo Hierarchicus saw the Protestant missionary as a type of modern sannyasin

[36]In the medieval period all missions were undertaken by the monastic orders, whereas, in the modern period, by voluntary societies

[37]cf.Matt.5:48

sense an actual and practicing sinner throughout his or her life.[38] Secondly, the pursuit of holiness involved practical outward renunciation of worldliness,[39] the fallen desires of the flesh and of all evil, and the disciplining of all material and physical aspects of human life. The revivalist understanding of ascetic goals, however, differed from earlier formulations. In medieval monasticism, inner renunciation and salvation were achieved by the withdrawal of the ascetic from society and its corrupting temptations and distractions. In Puritanism, renunciation is by "the severe control of social life so as to make the environment suitable for the ascetic to continue to live in the world."[40] In the case of the Moravians and the Wesleyans, who did not seek to control society, it was sought through the formation of voluntary societies, that is, "holy clubs"[41] and "separate brotherhoods" that through these quasi-monastic institutions they might witness to and exemplify the perfection of Christ. Wesley's "holy club" may, therefore rightly be seen as a laicized monasticism.

Finally, it is possible to find in the holiness movements an adaptation of the threefold monastic vow[42] of poverty, chastity, and obedience, and to see these vows contributing to the development of a

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[38]Luther, "I am righteous (imputed) and sinful at once."

[39]Weber, 155ff

[40]N. F. Cantor, Medieval History (New York: Macmillan Co., 1963), 182

[41]A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon 1814-1964 ed. W. J. T. Small (Colombo: The Wesley Press, 1964), 5f

[42]Kenneth S. Latourette, Christianity Through The Ages (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), 10

lay ascetic tradition, that communally affirmed the ideals of the priesthood and monkhood of all believers. The laicized ascetic way allowed for the retention of family and marriage under certain conditions and priorities: primarily by declaring that the loyalty always must be to Christ and his kingdom, because the union with Christ transcends any earthly relationships. It is found in the New Testament injunction that the disciple must "deny (or renounce) self" and take up his cross to follow his master."[43] The laicized way thus reinterpreted the three-fold monastic vow, requiring unconditional obedience to the "call" of Christ, for which one must be willing to forsake family and country, leave all, and follow him.

Renunciation and total commitment which remained the basic features of the Catholic monastic movement now became, via the holiness movement, the most visible marks of the early Protestant missionary movement. Beginning with the Pietists, "ordinary men and women, most of them simple artisans, went literally to the ends of the earth, devoted themselves for life to people often living in the most degrading circumstances, identified with them, and lived the gospel in their midst."[44]

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[43]Mk. 18:34, Matt.10:38;16:24, In.13:13. Also "put off the old self." Eph.4:22-25, Col.3:8-10

[44]Bosch, 255

PART FOUR

THE DIALOGUE

CHAPTER 11

CONDITIONS AT THE OUTSET : TAMIL SRI LANKA IN THE YEAR 1800 AD

In the year A.D. 1800 at the commencement of British rule, Tamil Sri Lanka was composed of two milieus, the colonial and the traditional, each characterised by racial and caste hierarchies. Only limited forms of human interaction could have possibly existed between the two milieus. The walls of the forts in Jaffna, Trincomalee and Batticoloa came to symbolize the racial separation of the European rulers from their Tamil subjects. The Burghers with their admixture of European blood had become products of the socio-cultural interaction. Within the colonial system they occupied a status markedly higher than the Tamils. The Burghers were to be found in recognised nieghbourhoods in close proximity to the forts, positioned as it were between the Europeans and the Tamils.[1]

Under the new British colonial administration, however, the crucial link between the two milieus was provided by a section of the

[1]A Methodist report of 1859 offers the following description of Jaffna town: "The government officers generally reside in the Fort. The Pettah is occupied chiefly by the Burghers and the Portuguese. A Government chaplain officiates in the Fort Church....," Mins. of N. Ceylon District Meeting of 7 Sep. 1859: NR29, WMMS Archives, Birmingham

Tamil elite rather than the Burghers. The authority of these traditional leaders was increasingly endorsed by the British for the purpose of securing a reliable supply of labour, and this practice tended to validate the indigenous caste hierarchy upon which labour exaction was organized. In consequence a section of the Tamil elite came to assume a higher status and greater responsibility in the colonial system; while the Burghers found themselves increasingly excluded from political and military office.

In the year 1800, therefore, the two milieus continued to co-exist without any sign of confrontation. The traditional milieu was composed of two types of zones or nadus surrounding the European "core": the 'intermediate" or settled agricultural world on the one hand and the "peripheral" or unsettled world inhabited by the forest-dwelling hunter-gatherers and martial predators on the other. Agricultural expansion had continued through the Portuguese and Dutch periods, and by this time most of Jaffna Peninsula and several localities along the east coast had become intermediate zones under a dominant caste. Almost all the peripheral tracts were located in the Vanni, a substantial part of which had not yet been subjected to peasant colonisation.

The colonial and traditional milieus were created by different sets of cultural forces, with their own logic of hierarchization and social change. The most important of these cultural forces operating in these two worlds may be described as Anglicisation and Sanskritisation. A significant part of the traditional milieu of this time was created by the general process of Sanskritisation that had reached an advanced stage

in the Polonnaruva period. The process had clearly slowed down under the Portuguese and Dutch regimes, but was now showing renewed vitality in the large-scale reconstruction of Hindu temples.[2] In Tamil Sri Lanka, Sanskritisation was closely linked to the process of Vellalisation, which pertains to the dominant position achieved by the peasant society over other and older cultural forms. The effects of Sanskritisation may be seen in:

(i) **Language**: In its literary form Tamil had became heavily Sanskritised. The Tamil poets of this period such as Tiruvannamalai (A.D. 1370-1450) and Tayumanavar (either A.D. 1608-1664 or 1704-1742) used a highly Sanskritised vocabulary.[3] This process began in the thirteenth century when the manippravala style became popular and was used in all the Vaisnava commentaries.[4] The intrinsic value of Tamil was further eroded by the subsequent scholarly claim that Tamil was the language of the mortal and Sanskrit the language of the gods.[5] So by the seventeenth century a Sanskrit scholar and author of a Tamil grammatical work entitled Ilakkanakkottu, could confidently claim from his findings that Tamil, because it had borrowed so heavily from

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[2]According to an unpublished document, in the first year of British rule in Sri Lanka (Ceylon), 300 temples were newly built in Jaffna. Cited in Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, "Arumuka Navalar: Religious reformer or national leader of Eelam." The Indian Economic and Social History Review vol. 26, no. 2 (1989): 235

[3]Zvelebil, Tamil Literature, 108-112

[4]Mu. Varadarajan, A History of Tamil Literature (Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988), 16

[5]Ibid., 11-12

Sanskrit, lacked all intrinsic merit and on its own could not be called a language:

> Intelligent persons will be ashamed
> To call it a language
> That possesses only five letters.[6]

(ii) **Theology:** Saiva Siddhanta, the dominant Saiva theology in Tamil Sri Lanka today, was formulated in the thirteenth century, and was an attempt to give the prevailing "beliefs of the Tamil country an Upanishadic orientation."[7] Before this system was developed Siva and his consort Parvati had been worshipped in the Tamil lands for centuries, and to conceive of Siva apart from Parvati would have been impossible. In order to take this situation into account, Saiva Siddhanta, therefore, "made Uma the Sakti of Siva; ontologically Sakti was his energy and religiously his principle of Grace."[8]

Saiva Siddhanta theology generally was an orthodox continuation of the earlier bhakti period between the seventh and the thirteenth centuries which had as its central focus opposition to the heterodox arguments of the Buddhist and Jains against sacrifice and caste.[9] In consequence, despite its claim to be above all other

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[6]Ibid.,10 Quoted from Arumaka Navalar's edition of Ilakkanakkottu published in the nineteenth century

7 S. Kulandran, "The Doctrine of Creation of Saiva Siddharta," The Word, Men and Matters vol. 5 (Jaffna: ISRS, 1985), 116. First Published in the Journal of the Indian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society in 1962

[8]Ibid., 115-116

[9]John H. Piet, A Logical Presentation of the Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy (Madras: Christian Literature Society, 1952), 2

theological systems as the "end of ends," Siddhanta actually shares with the contemporary schools of orthodoxy certain basic theological assumptions rooted in the Vedas and the Agamas. These assumptions are: (a) the concept cyclical change, including the periodic appearance and disappearance of the world; (b) the all-encompassing concept of time, from which and into which the world evolves and goes; (c) the postulate of God as the director of the cycles of immense duration; (d) the idea of the soul with its fundamental taint of spiritual ignorance or anavam, that causes it to go astray; (e) evil removed by karma on the basis of transmigration; (f) the body as the temporal shell of the soul – denying the claim that personality is a unity; (g) the total separation of the body and soul in mukti, and the final advaitic union of the soul with God.[10]

It is this theological world derived from the Vedas and the Agamas that offered the eighteenth century poet-saint Tayumanavar a framework for his contemplation on the life of the soul:

> By many names to be, in many lands begot;
> Kindred to many men counted
> In many bodiments to be born, and to be
> Cause and the consequences of deeds,
> My many doings from my many thinkings sprung,
> Fame to earn, name to make often;
> Hells many to be feared; and the good gods many;
> Many the heavens for our hoping.[11]

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[10]Ibid., 159-180

[11]T. Isaac Tambyah, Psalms of a Saiva Saint reprint (New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 1985), 3. Tambyah (of Jaffna) does not adequately convey the origonal, with its sublime sweep over the countless ages through which the human soul

(iii) **Social Structure**: The existing social system with its tripartite division can be traced as far back as the sixth century A.D., to the peasant victory over the non-peasants. It was from that time on that the varnasrama model was used systematically for the purpose of assimilating and regulating the non-peasant people.[12] In this system, the Brahmans and their Vellalar allies were accorded high ritual status, and the latter were acknowledged to be next only to the former in moral standing. The Vellalars exercised ritual domination over the atimai (left-hand) and kutimai (right-hand) castes[13] who in turn had become fully "compliant"[14] to the demands of their masters. In consequence the Vellalar's status in Jaffna, where they form a majority, became so inflated that he, as one Tamil put it to A. M. Hocart, lived:

> like a feudal lord with all his vassals round about him. He had therefore slaves and vassals to serve him on all occasions, and these slaves and vassals represented different castes who served him in such capacity whenever occasion demanded. The vassals were called kudimai and the slaves adimai.[15]

Although Sanskritisation is undoubtedly the most dynamic and indigenous process of social change that could be observed in the

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travels, taking on and dropping innumerable births, names and relatives, and facing the prospect of innumerable heavens and hells in its quest for salvation.

[12]See above, section 6.4; Also B. Pfaffenberger, Caste in Tamil Culture 95f.; Baldaeus, 366-376.

[13]Pfaffenberger, 38ff.

[14]Ibid., 227

[15] A. M. Hocart, Caste: A Comparative Study (New York, Russell and Russell, 1950), 7. By the word "vassals" the informant meant household retainers.

traditional milieu at this time, its actual scope and extent should not be exaggerated. Sanskritisation probably attained a high water mark in all the intermediate nadus, most important of all in Yalpana Kuda nadu (Jaffna Peninsula Nadu), where the Vellalars had first attained dominance. In the peripheral nadus, however, particularly in those of Vanni, the effects of Sanskritisation was probably more limited.[16]

The traditions of the peripheral, unsettled world in the year A.D. 1800 were the older ones, associated, for instance, with the worship of the god Murukan, known to the Veddhas as Malai Pei, "the Hill Demon"[17] whose headquarters were at the remarkable pilgrimage site, Kataragama, which was located in the Yala forest far to the south of Jaffna. As the great hunter and lover, he exemplified the care-free, risk-taking, adventurous and disorderly lifestyles of the Veddhas, Vanniyar and the fishermen. He was also, according to orthodox Hindus, closely linked to the disorderly power (ananku) of women in general; who were seen to be saturated with that negative power, with its propensity for disorderly life.[18] On the other hand, the traditions of the orthodox Hindus were epitomized by god Kantacami, the second son of Siva. Kantacami (Skanda), it was noted, is the earthy Murukan transformed into a Sanskritic high god.[19] Although it has never been denied that

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[16] I visited a veddha colony south of Batticola, with the local Govt. Agent, D. Nesiah, where I learned in the course of conversations with these people, that many words used by them which would appear unintelligible to most Tamils of today, would have been familiar to the authors of Cankam literature.

[17] H. Parker, Ancient Ceylon, (New Delhi: Marwah Publications, 1982), 134

[18] See above, section 5.4

[19] See above, section 6.6

Kantacami and Murukan are one and the same deity, for all practical purposes they are treated separately. Kantacami unlike Murukan is believed to be a resident of the cultivated, agrarian world, with its orthodox temples dedicated to him and where he is acknowledged as the exemplar of the brahmanical way, the advocate of order and of keeping the rules (muraikal).[20]

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[20] The Vellalars who take pride in keeping these ancient rules, generally regard the Veddhas and anyone whose lifestyle resembles theirs, such as Nalavars and Pallars, as kattumirantikal – barbarians or fools of the jungle. See Charles R. A. Hoole, "A Perspective on Educating for Peace," Tamil Times (April 1993): 14

CHAPTER 12

THE CHALLENGE : CHRISTIAN ACTIVITIES IN TAMIL SRI LANKA A.D. 1800-1850

12.1 Opposition to the Policy of Religious Patronage

It was evident from the above discussion on sultanism that the British rulers in A.D. 1796 established a patrimonial state in Sri Lanka, and that in doing so they used indigenous principles inherited from Tipu Sultan and other defeated regimes. The operating principles and purposes of this new state were, consequently, already to some extent part of the political system of the subcontinent. In short, the British, first by the use of superior military power established themselves as "one landlord above other land-lords,"[1] and then sought to win the allegiance of the local lords, magnates or honoratiores by the granting of honours, privileges and rewards.

The procedural principles of this patrimonial-sultanist system required that the ruler would become patron of existing religious

[1]Max Weber on "Patrimonial Ruler versus Local Lords" Economy and Society An Outline of Interpretive Sociology, vol. 2 ed. G. Roth and C. Wittich (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1978), 1055-1059. In the "Patrimonialism of the estate type" (1063), he states, the patrimonial ruler "stands as one landlord (Grundherr) above other landlords, who as local honoratiories wield an autonomous authority of their own."(1055)

institutions and communities, whether Christian, Hindu or Buddhist. In recognizing these principles, successive British governors of Sri Lanka adopted the policy of the earlier indigenous rulers – or at least, of those rulers who had adhered most strictly to the ideas of protection, toleration and patronage of religious institutions. Being always anxious to reconcile the people to the new regime, the governors informed their subjects that the regime would protect their religious institutions and respect their religious and social customs. Fairly typical of these pronouncements was the declaration made in the fifth clause of the Kandyan Convention:

> The Religion of Boodhoo professed by the Chiefs and Inhabitants of these Provinces is declared inviolable, and its Rites, Ministers and Places of worship are to be maintained and protected.[2]

Following Protests from influential citizens in England, Brownrigg was obliged to give his reasons to the Colonial Office in London:

> In truth, our secure possession of the country hinged upon this point.....I found it necessary to quiet all uneasiness respecting it, by an article of guarantee couched in the most unqualified terms.[3]

In the neighbouring Madras Presidency, religious patronage led to increased involvement in Hindu religious affairs and British officials there gained a reputation for managing religious endowments

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[2]The "Proclamation" of 10 January 1815, Ceylon Government Gazette, 13 January 1815. The "Proclamation" issued by Governor Brownrigg reflected the religious policy of the Home Government. But the Governor himself, probably because of his personal commitment to the cause of Christian Missions in the colony, felt uneasy about the unequivocal nature of the clause expressed in the word "inviolable."

[3]Brownrigg to Barthurst, 15 March 1815, C. O. documents, Public Records Office, London, 54/55

with increased efficiency. Most prestigious temples in the second and third decades of the century appeared to be in a sad state of repair. The British collectors became convinced that protection of these temples was possible only by involving themselves in a wide range of activities connected with repairs and maintenance.[4] In accounting for the East India Company's "connection with Temples and Mosques" American missionary sources point out that before 1840 in Madras Presidency alone there were 8,292 Hindu temples annually receiving 80,000 pounds sterling.[5]

The colonial government in Sri Lanka continued this policy of religious patronage through the first half of the nineteenth century, in the belief that the policy was vital not only for the maintenance of a peaceful environment where trade and commerce would prosper, but also for the purpose of legitimizing their rule and securing the loyalty of her subjects. On these grounds the British authorities from the very beginning were opposed to activities which appeared to disturb this delicate religious equilibrium. This then was the reason for the official British hostility to Christian missions. It was felt that the fundamental purpose of the Christian missionaries was to subvert the religious, and to a lesser extent the social, order, hoping to replace Hinduism with Protestant Christianity. This is why when the idea of sending Christian

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[4]Chandra Mudaliyar, State and Religious Endowments in Madras (Madras: University of Madras, 1976), 31

[5]A History of Mission in South India under A. B. C. F. M. (Madurai: American Madurai Mission, n.d., [1912?]) at A. B. C. F. M. Archives, Cambridge, Mass.

missionaries from Britain to Asia was suggested in England, the East India Company declared the enterprise to be:

> the maddest, most extravagant, most costly, most indefensible project which has ever been suggested by a moonstruck fanatic. Such a scheme is pernicious, imprudent, useless, harmful, dangerous, profitless, fantastic. It strikes against all reason and sound policy, it brings the peace and safety of our possessions into peril.[6]

Only such paranoid attitudes towards Christian missionaries could have convinced even a religiously liberal governor, Fredrick North (1798-1805), of the necessity of keeping the ultimate control of missionary societies in the hands of the government[7] as when the London Missionary Society sent its first missionaries to Sri Lanka in 1804 on a non-East India Company vessel. The Society was going to finance the missionaries in their work, but when they arrived in 1805 North did not think it advisable to leave the missionaries wholly independent of the government.[8] Guided by the policy of religious patronage, the governor, therefore, gave M. C. Vos and his assistants J. P. M. Ehrhardt, W. Read and J. D. Palm,[9] "legal pastoral authority"

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[6]A. Mayhew, Christianity and the Government of India (London, 1929), 21ff.; K. S. Latourette, A History of the Expansion of Christianity, vol.vi (London, 1944), 69

[7]One of North's first acts affecting religion in the colony after he assumed office was to issue a Procla mation in 1779, permitting religious freedom. cf.Tennent, Christianity in Ceylon, 75-76

[8]By the time these missionaries arrived North's religious policy had led to large-scale "apostacy" of "Government Christians" to Hinduism. In 1802, the Protestant Christians amongst the Tamils of Jaffna were 136,000; in 1806 when Buchanan visited the island, he described "the Protestant religion as extinct, the fine old churches in ruins, the clergy who had once ministered in them forgotten." Tennent, 82-83

[9]Mrs. Palm, who worked among women and children in Jaffna, was the first woman missionary from the West in Sri Lanka

over certain designated parishes in Galle, Matara and Jaffna,[10] and for their pastoral and educational work allowances were paid by the government. All these government ties imposed a serious limitation on what the missionaries understood as their proper work. They found their activities strictly controlled and confined to the colonial milieu, in which they were expected to perform a role very similar to that of the Predikaants ministering to Dutch-speaking congregations. Occasionally, when they did breach government guidelines, the governor did not hesitate to discontinue their services.[11]

It was not long before the parent society in London realized that its mission to Sri Lanka was a failure and the Society ceased to count the island as one of its fields of work after 1818. In retrospect the reason for the failure becomes all too obvious. The historian of the London Missionary Society concludes his survey of the Society's work in Sri Lanka by deploring their connection with the government and goes on to say, "That the men did good work is certain; but it is equally certain that as the agents were supported by the government, other considerations than missionary necessities became dominant."[12]

The official government attitude towards missions changed briefly under the administration of governor Robert Brownrigg (1812-1820), who succeeded Thomas Maitland (1805-1812). Brownrigg has

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[10]North to Camden, 27 February 1805, C.O. 54/17; C. Buchanan, Christian Researches in Asia, etc. (London:1849), 45

[11]Vos and Read lost their positions. Vos was ordered to leave the island for marrying young people without parental consent. Richard Lovett, History of the L.M.S., vol.ii (London: Oxford University, 1899),19ff.

[12]Lovett, 2

often been described as the "friend of missions," since it was under his administration that the Baptist (1812), Wesleyan (1814), American (1816) and the Anglican Church missions were permitted to enter Sri Lanka and to establish their own independent work. In fact no other governor during this early period would have permitted the American missionaries to even enter Sri Lanka after they had been "ordered by the Governor-General to leave Calcutta by the same vessel they arrived."[13] Colonial records show that the governor's support for the cause of Christian missions in Sri Lanka was not in line with the policy of the Home-Government. In a communique to Brownrigg's successor, Barnes, the Secretary of State confirmed that it was Brownrigg who used his considerable powers to permit the American missionaries to enter and reside in Jaffna "without the previous sanction of His Majesty's Government."[14] The records indicate that the American missionaries being also non-British, were considered seditious owing to the belief that their work would "foster political objects."[15] The earlier attitudes were thus revived when Barnes succeeded Brownrigg. The Americans were told in no uncertain terms that there were to be "no further additions to the missions and that a vigilant control over the (American) press" was to be maintained by the Governor.[16] Barnes certainly kept his word. When a printer from America arrived, he was

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[13] Tennent, 11

[14] Letter of Secretary of State to Barnes, 25 August 1821, C.O. 55/66

[15] Reply of Secretary of State to letter of Brownrigg, 27 March 1816, C.O. 54/59

[16] Instructions of Secretary of State to Barnes, 25 August 1821, C.O. 55/66

ordered to leave while the mission was "uncourteously" refused permission to use their own printing presses,[17] which were thus handed over to the Anglican Church missionaries.[18]

Although the colonial officials were less right in regarding the missionaries as politically seditious to British rule in Sri Lanka, they were probably correct in believing that these missionaries would not only disturb the religious equilibrium and threaten the social order with egalitarian notions, but were generally unconcerned for the strength and stability of the government for the maintenance of law and order. The early missionaries came from very different social and political backgrounds from those of most of the government's servants. In general the British missionaries, the Methodists, and Baptists in particular, came from the class of "skilled mechanics," with an almost innate desire for better standards and a deep distrust of hereditary hierarchies.[19] As Presbyterians and Congregationalists, the New England missionaries also had a similar theology to the British; however, the egalitarian emphasis in their thinking was strongly reinforced by American democratic notions. For New England in

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[17] Tennent, 112

[18] After transferring the presses to the Anglican church in Nallur, Jaffna, the Americans, according to a Nallur tradition, continued to use the printing facilities with the connivance of the Anglicans. The American and Anglican missionaries during this early period had a particularly close relationship which developed through matrimonial links. Joseph Knight (1818-1840), the first Church missionary in Jaffna, stationed in Nallur, married Mrs. S. B. Richards and after her death, Mrs. E. S. Nichols, both widows of American missionaries. On the other hand, the American Daniel Poor (1816-1855), founder and principal of Batticotta Seminary, married Ann Knight, sister of the Anglican Joseph Knight.

[19] Max A. C. Warren, Social History, ch. 2

contrast to the "old" England, was a more egalitarian society in which emphasis was given to the importance of education and the need for open access to education for all ranks of society. All the American men who arrived in Jaffna in 1816 had had a broad educational background in New England colleges, in Andover Theological Seminary in Boston, and with a year at the Medical School in Philadelphia (University of Pennsylvania).[20] Owing to this basic egalitarian outlook, all these missionaries came with a commitment to social reform, which was in the West closely linked to religious revivalism.[21]

It is only to be expected that the first major public disagreement between the government and the missionaries would be over the question of religious patronage. The official policy was particularly offensive to the missionaries, because they understood "protection" of established religions as a show of support to the very religions they were trying to undermine. In opposition to this policy, the missionaries launched a highly effective propaganda campaign in Sri Lanka and in England, with missionary reports increasingly focusing on the British government's "connection with idolatry."[22] How could the King or Queen of England, they asked, who was also the head of the Anglican Church and "Defender of the Christian Faith," consequently

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[20]American Mission in Ceylon, unpublished manuscript, 1892, A. B. C. F. M. Archives, Cambridge, Mass.

[21]Best shown in England in the so-called Clapham Sect. See Howse, Saints in Politics (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1960)

[22]R. S. Hardy, The British Government and the Idolatory of Ceylon (Colombo: Wesley Press, 1839) [pamph.]; W. J. T. Small ed. A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon 1814-1964 (Colombo: Wesley Press, 1964), 164-170

become the protector of the Buddhist Faith? In England there was growing disquiet over the government's involvement in Hindu and Buddhist religious affairs. The government's compulsory recruitment of labour for the drawing of Hindu temple-carts and participation in ceremonies associated with the Buddhist Tooth Relic became emotive issues at home. However, the government, under local pressure from the threat of riots, continued to waver in its religious policy of patronage, and it was not until 1853 that this policy was significantly modified.[23]

12.2 Recruitment Strategies

For the most part, the missionaries maintained an ambivalent relationship to the governing authorities. Their over-riding aim was neither political nor economic but religious. The religious aim of the Protestant missionaries was to impart knowledge of God to every inhabitant in their mother tongue, with the singular purpose of converting individuals to Christianity. Since the Bible and not the catechism is the crucial standard of authority for Protestants, the knowledge of God was to be transmitted, cross-culturally, by translating and expounding various texts, narratives and books of the Bible in the every-day language of the people. In this task, it was readily assumed,

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[23] The missionaries must have regarded the withdrawal of support a great victory, for it is reported to have led to the following complaint from a Hindu:

> The government that supported our Brahmans, and appointed and paid our dancing girls and made presents to the gods, and gave money - that mantrams (incantations) might be said for rain; and repaired and took care of our temples, and have been supporters of our religion, will now have nothing to do with it.

A History of the Missions under ABCFM (Madura, n.d.), 16, at A. B. C. F. M. Archives, Cambridge.

the vernacular would be the indispensable medium for the transmission of the scriptural knowledge of God. For Christianity, unlike the three other religions of the island with scriptures, has no single revealed or sacred language,[24] and its historical experience traces this fact to the Pentecost event when the believers testified of God in their mother or native tongues.[25]

It is the adherence of the missionaries to the sola scriptura (scripture alone) principle of the sixteenth century reformers – who saw the Bible as the primary rule of faith – that had effectively made the Bible in its translated form the chief object of the Protestant missionary enterprise. Such an endeavour carried with it five important assumptions and implications. First, the vernacular acquired the significance of a revelatory medium through which the universal Gospel becomes accessible to those seeking the truth about God. This approach had already begun with the promotion of earlier vernacular translations; one of the gospel of Matthew by Phillipus Baldaeus in A.D. 1665 and one of the entire New Testament by Bartholomew Ziegenbalg in 1711 A.D.. The latter had led to criticism on the grounds of "crudeness" and "colloquialism" – an indication that prose writing in the vernacular had not yet come into its own. Secondly, vernacular primacy in translation of the Gospel implied that

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[24] Pali, Sanskrit and Arabic are recognized respectively by Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims as sacred languages. In their expansionist phases religions possessing sacred languages have generally shown preference for "mission by diffusion" rather than "mission by translation." On this distinction. see Lamin Sanneh, Translating the Message, 29

[25] Acts 2:6,8,11

all languages and cultures are, in principle, equal in expressing the word of God. Thirdly, the task of translation required open-minded and rigorous investigation into the culture, history, language, religion and physical environment of the people concerned, as well as an engagement in ancillary linguistic and cultural projects such as compiling grammars, dictionaries, vocabularies, primers and comparative lexicons.[26] Fourthly, translation tends to make the language flexible and useful as an instrument for the transmission of new ideas, and consequently it frees the language from fixed, immutable criteria of meaning. Finally, vernacular translation recognizes the ordinariness of religious language and implies that religious participation belongs with social and political participation. These assumptions and implications in many ways point to the inner logic of the Protestant missionary enterprise as a whole, and therefore, would effectively shape its policies and practices in the mission field.

With the gospel available in the vernacular, the missionaries employed a number of methods of diffusing the message in the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka to as many as would listen and receive it. Among these methods, preaching, teaching and healing were considered the original and ordained means of spreading the Gospel.[27] This three part mandate is based on the belief that the Gospel of Jesus Christ is designed to meet the needs of the whole person – of the body (Rom.8:23), mind (Rom.12:2) and soul (James1:21). At the

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[26]Eugene A. Nida, "Thorns and Thistles," God's Word in Man's Language (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), 43-55

[27] cf. Matt. 4:23

beginning of their work, however, education and medical service were considered as auxiliary to preaching, but field experience soon led to changes in that emphasis.

12.3 Itinerant preaching: Sowing on barren soil

There is very little doubt that the missionary pioneers, having been raised in the tradition of Wesley, Whitefield and Edwards, and having witnessed the effects of preaching on both sides of the Atlantic, did place a high premium on preaching in comparison with other methods of diffusing the gospel. They had come to the island as, to use David Reisman's typology, "inner directed men"[28] prompted as it were by "a still small voice.... saying, Come over and help us!" and had now chosen the arduous path of the itinerant preacher, "going forth in his name and strength," "preaching Christ crucified" in order to save souls for eternal life.[29] The hardships and privations associated with itinerant preaching appear to have had deep emotional significance for these early missionaries, because of their awareness that preaching was the supreme, God ordained, means of spreading the gospel. Thus John Murdoch, who was about to embark on full-time missionary work, having, in October 1849, resigned his position as headmaster of the Government Central School at Kandy, wrote in his journal:

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[28]David Riesman, Individualism Reconsidered, and Other Essays (New York: Free Press, 1966), 27f.

[29]HMCC,14, 36

> "I shall require to travel on foot, and shelter at night wherever I can, as I shall be unable to pay for lodgings; but even this has its associations which ought to render it pleasant. I shall be following the example of the Apostles, yea, of the Saviour Himself."[30]

It is, of course, highly unlikely that either Murdoch or his missionary colleagues would have been aware that by consciously assuming such a role they were also walking in the foot-steps of the itinerant mendicants and sannyasins who had centuries ago carried their particular doctrines to and from Sri Lanka. These missionary preachers travelled over a wide area, covering the major population centres of Tamil Sri Lanka such as Jaffna, Trincomalee and Batticaloa, where the three societies also had their stations. They preached in Tamil at market places, street corners, work places and at any location "favourable for collecting persons passing by to hear the word of God."[31] Besides this, they also preached to "groups of individuals at their homes."[32] In these circumstances it would be usual to quote Bible texts and to explain them in a way that would be perceived as relevant to the hearers. Preaching at the Little Bazaar in Trincomalee, Brother Roberts thus quoted Psalm 115:1-8 and provided an explanation "respecting the gods of the heathen."[33] Early preaching was a vigorous protest against "Demon worship," publicly displayed in "the wearing of

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[30] Henry Morris, The Life of John Murdoch (London: 1906), 6; A.W.McClymont, The Travelling Bookman. John Murdoch of Madras (London:1947). Murdoch travelled widely in India and Sri Lanka and became the Secretary of the interdenominational, Christian Vernacular Education Society.

[31] Report, 1 July 1823, NR4: WMMS Archives, London

[32] Brief Sketch of American Ceylon Mission (Jaffna: American Mission Press, 1849), 4: ABCFM Archives, Cambridge

[33] Minutes, 21 February 1823, NR4: WMMS Archives, in London

amulets, in grotesque dances, in (animal) sacrifices, in bodily torture." In opposition to "ceremonialism" and "ritualism" the missionaries of the Anglican low Church and dissenting traditions emphasised "heart" religion and "sought to set forth the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."[34]

Preaching, as Phillipus Baldaeus had shown by his personal example, required considerable proficiency in Tamil and knowledge of the religion and literature, and laws and customs of the Tamil people. There is very little doubt that several missionaries during this period did become competent in the use of the language. After starting their careers with the help of interpreters, records Helen Root, "the missionaries themselves went to work in earnest learning the Tamil language, with such success that Dr. Poor preached in Tamil just a year from the day he arrived in Tellippalai."[35] Similarly, two years after his arrival in North Sri Lanka, Peter Percival of the Wesleyan mission was able to write in 1829, "I feel little difficulty in preaching in Tamil. I find equal liberty as well in my colloquial intercourse with the people. For this gift I cannot be too grateful to the Father of Lights."[36] At the same time, there were others whose knowledge of the language would have been far from perfect; while their expressions in it would not have always been idiomatic or readily intelligible to the hearers. This would

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[34]HMCC, 101-102

[35]Helen Root, A Century in Ceylon. A Brief History of the Work of the American Board in Ceylon 1816-1916 (Jaffna: American Ceylon Mission Press, 1916),ABCFM Archives, Cambridge

[36] Quoted in S. Kulandran, The Word, Men and Matters, vol. v, 63

be made worse by the variety in the Tamil modes of address, with its system of honorifics and personal pronouns. For most missionaries, it would require more than a year or two to become competent in the use of such a language, although as they themselves have shown, the difficulties involved in learning it are not insurmountable.

If the missionaries had any deficiency in this department, it would soon be surmounted by the increasing deployment of "native preachers" and "Bible women," drawn from men and women converted to Christianity. These Tamil Christian leaders had received their "mental and moral training" in the male and female boarding schools where they were groomed "for the various departments of subordinate Missionary Agency."[37] By the 1830's and 1840's many of these young men and women were assisting the missionaries in their various evangelistic tasks. Amoung them Richard (Vyramuttu) Watson (1824-1863) is remembered by the Methodist Church in Sri Lanka as one who "possessed a pulpit gift that has never been excelled in Ceylon."[38] He began his career as an itinerant preacher or catachist, in which role he would be expected to prove his calling to ministry. On one occasion he and another young man were "sent on a missionary tour down the centre of the Island as far as Mullitivoo [in the Vanni district]. They visited numerous villages on the route and distributed some hundreds of tracts, and a good number of portions of the Scripture, and a few of the entire Bible." In Mullaitivu, Watson

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[37]Reports of the North Ceylon District, 1846: NR19, WMMS Archives, London

[38]HMCC, 644

conducted services at the Assistant Government Agent's bungalow.[39] In the same manner his brother, Elijah Hoole, proved himself as a skilled preacher in the Anglican Church, which remembers him as a "speaker with few equals" whose preaching was deemed "eloquent but simple." It is, however, the content of his preaching that was considered significant. Owing to "his knowledge of Tamil and his acquaintance with Tamil literature," points out Robert Pargiter in a "testimonial" sent to London, "his addresses to the Heathen are marked by a force and pointedness which tells on the Hindoo mind" and as a result "his sermons are such as to command attention from the hearers."[40]

It is evident here that by the 1840's the missionaries had succeeded in nurturing a new generation of "native preachers," skilled in the art of preaching, and employing methods of approach more akin to those used by the apostle Paul in addressing the philosophers of Athens (cf. Acts 17:28). These methods were already being used by a small number of missionaries from all three societies. Missionaries like Percival and Poor were steeped in Hindu literature and made use of the writings in their addresses.[41] Since Watson and Hoole had in different circumstances worked closely with Percival, the latter's style of preaching may have had some influence on the two brothers. But this approach, apart from its obvious advantages in making the

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[39]Report, 1846:NR19, WMMS Archives, London

[40]CCE/071/11, CMS Archives, Birmingham

[41]Root, 12-13; HMCC, 102

message relevant, would seem more natural to those with a measure of appreciation of the Tamil tradition. It is in fact possible to show that there was one thing common to almost all the well known Tamil preachers and literary scholars of this period: they came from families with access to traditional learning – although what proved to be of crucial importance was the quality of English education they were subsequently exposed to at missionary institutions. In the case of these brothers, being the sons of the founder and proprietor of a Hindu temple, they received their earliest education from a Brahman, and then attended the local Wesleyan Mission School at Point Pedro where an English education was being provided.[42]

In their evangelistic efforts, the missionaries and the native preachers alike looked for conversion, that is, "a complete renunciation of the past life of the convert and a turning in faith to Christ and the Christian Church."[43] They were generally "scornful" of the ease with which conversions occurred under the Dutch, and therefore, respondents were "expected to show the fruits of conversion in [their] general behaviour."[44] Anxious though they were to win converts, the missionaries and their Tamil colleagues were unwilling to baptize candidates prior to changes in their behaviour. On these grounds preaching became more and more a call to "renunciation": to

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[42]Elijah Hoole's own account of his life, CCE/071/12, CMS Archives, Birmingham; Also, J. W. Balding, One Hundred Years in Ceylon or The Centenary Volume of the Church Missionary Society in Ceylon 1818-1918 (Madras, The Diocesan Press,1922), 95-96

[43]HMCC, 152

[44]Ibid.,152

forsake one's previous way of life and "adopt a new way of life socially."[45] When the gospel is presented in this manner, baptism, for a Hindu could mean only one thing: a death ritual, marking the transition from grhastha to saññyasa, from a life of a householder to a life of a wandering renouncer.[46] So by accepting baptism, the would-be Christian renouncer undergoes a classic excommunication ceremony that would contribute to a complete revision of his or her existing ties to family, property and society. Elijah Hoole thus explained his own baptism in the following manner:

> I now declined to take upon me the management of the Hindoo temple, of which my father was manager and gave over the silver and gold, jewellery and ornaments, drapery and brazen wares belonging to the temple with title deeds and other documents to the wardens of the temple who were subordinate to my father – I also relinquished the charge of all the estates of the temple – on the 15th of April 1845. I publicly renounced heathenism and was admitted a member of Christ's visible church by the rite of baptism administered by Peter Percival.[47]

This early Tamil Christian understanding of baptism and discipleship, would have found its inspiration from certain apocalyptic[48] strands of New Testament teaching on the subject. First, the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan marks a transition from a life of a householder to that of a renouncer – who would embrace transcendent

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[45]Ibid.,103

[46]Romila Thapar, "A distinct ceremony marked the entry into the fourth and final stage and is defined by a complete break of ties with family, property and society and takes on a symbolic form of a death ritual," T. N. Madan ed. Way of Life, 286

[47] CCE/071/12, CMS Archives, Birmingham

[48]See above, section 2.3

"kingdom" values.[49] Secondly, Jesus himself, according to a Markan account, used the term baptism to mean death, especially his own death, and with that understanding challenged his disciples to undertake a baptism of death through costly service.[50] In following their master's injunction, Tamil Christians not only underwent an initiation of baptism but many of them literally left their families and villages to embark on a sannyasic journey as individuals, a journey that combined "inner direction" with resolute activism.

Following these developments very closely, the parent societies of the missions seemed generally dissatisfied with the results of preaching and criticized the missionaries for the slow growth of the church in Sri Lanka. Based on revivalist experiences, they probably expected an enraptured response from Tamil Hindus to the simple Gospel proclaimed by their missionaries. The missionaries too would have shared the same expectations when they first arrived, but these expectations would have been soon dispelled by the experience of the mission field. It is probably in order to dispel the unrealistic expectations at home that Miron Winslow, the author of the "Comprehensive Tamil and English Dictionary," wrote to the American Board concerning his experiences in Oodooville, Jaffna:

> A missionary need not fancy that, as soon as he sets his foot on heathen ground, multitudes will flock to him with delight; and when he delivers his message, that thousands will hang upon his lips, ready to receive, and glad to obey, the gospel. On the contrary,

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[49] Mark 1:9-15; cf. Matt. 3:13f; Lk. 3:21

[50] Mark 10:38; see also Oscar Cullmann, Baptism in the New Testament, trans. J. K. S. Reid, Studies in Biblical Theology vol.1 (London: SCM Press, 1950)

> after he has toiled months, if not years, in the painful drudgery of acquiring a difficult language, if he can *occasionally* by almost any means, induce a few, a score or two, to listen a short time while he stammers out some unacceptable truths, he may consider his lot by no means the least enviable that comes to the share of foreign missionaries.[51]

Winslow, however, does not reject the Western ideal of preaching to "thousands, and tens of thousands of heathen," observing that there are individual missionaries who, in a certain way, still do it. But this, he firmly believes, is not the way into the future of missionary work on the island. He argues instead,

> the labors and hopes of the missionary must rest principally on individuals whom he is to take in every stage of unfitness; and prepare, both to understand and receive a religion, to which not only is the heart opposed, but all the habits stand in direct opposition.[52]

Faced with a sense of disappointment due to a patent lack of converts, the missionaries focused attention increasingly on the factors which seemed to impede the progress of Christianity in Sri Lanka. The causes of success and failure, the problems and difficulties which seemed to cast a shadow over all their work became from the third decade onwards topics of earnest study and debate. Among the Methodists, a lively discussion ensued between Ralph Scott and Peter Percival on the relative merits of preaching and education. Scott was an outstanding preacher, whose seven years (1840-1847) of evangelistic

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[51]Letter, 18 Dec. 1826, Memoirs of American Missionaries (Boston: n.d.), 249; A. B. C. F. M. Archives, Cambridge; Echoing the same sentiment, James Richard stated in 1819: "Few attend his instructions, though multitude pass his door" Ibid., 220

[52]Ibid., 20. There appears here a tacit endorsement of the traditional guru-shisya model for disseminating knowledge of the Gospel

work in Batticaloa and the surrounding country, including his work among the Veddhas, saw a sharp rise in the membership of the society. His preaching appears to have produced a remarkable mass movement among the Veddhas, with hundreds of "the wild men of the jungle," "living under the shelving rocks of the mountains," in a "state both of body and mind little superior to the wild beasts among which they roamed," coming to embrace Christianity.[53] On the other hand, Percival, often described as "the greatest Tamil Scholar Missionary Methodism has ever had," was strongly in favour of educational work, and in 1834 he opened in Jaffna the Central School (for boys), followed by a Girls' Boarding School and a Training Institution.[54] Without neglecting evangelistic preaching, he tended to lay greater stress on education, as a means of overcoming suspicion and prejudice, and therefore, as preparatory to the preaching of the gospel. Scott and Percival were not divided on the question of ultimate aim, which was conversion to Christianity. But they were sharply divided on the question of short-term aims and methods.

In all these discussions and debates, the traditional status and role of preaching in effecting conversion was never seriously doubted. Instead, the real problem as most missionaries saw it, was the "total indifference of the people to the concerns of their souls"[55] which also

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[53]Report of 1846: NR20, WMMS Archives, London. A similar movement would occur in 1879 at Tirukkovil, south of Batticaloa, when "a whole caste of lime-burners in two villages embraced Christianity."Report of 1879, NR62:WMMS Archives

[54]HMCC, 196

[55]Letter from Winslow, 25 July 1820, Memoirs, 237

shows itself in their "unwillingness to hear preaching."[56] All three societies were agreed that the problem could not be ignored, and to deal with it, they began to diversify their operations with the object of developing "preparatives and auxiliaries" to preaching – which continued to retain its rather exalted status "as the grand momentum of conversion."[57]

12.4 Education: Preparing the soil

While living and working among Tamils, the missionaries came up with a list of what they considered to be "obstacles" to the spreading of the gospel and the planting of a "native agency." These obstacles can be conveniently divided into two categories. On the one hand there were perceptions about the role of Christianity in Sri Lanka, and on the other hand there were conceptions directly rooted in Hinduism. They are :

(a) Religious Crusade and Inquisition. Although this cannot be taken as a popular view, there were evidently Tamil Hindus who were fearful of the missionary activity, believing that the Protestant missionaries were engaged in a violent crusade like that their forefathers spoke of in Portuguese times. An early American report spoke of "the extreme difficulty of obtaining children to be educated" owing to lingering memories of the wide-spread destruction of the

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[56]Report of 1823, NR4:WMMS Archives, London

[57]Tennent, Christianity, 278

Hindu temples brought about at the instigation of padroado missionaries. "The natives have not forgotten" the report continues, "the violence practised on them and their Religion by the Portuguese."[58] Under these circumstances, it concludes, "it is a matter of astonishment to us that we have been permitted to proceed so quietly with our schools and our daily instruction."[59]

(b) "Rice" Evangelism. Gift-giving, dana, is the proven method of securing religious allegiance and social control.[60] In adopting the established Hindu-Buddhist practice of ritual exchange, the Dutch used the dana of rice to secure clients, who earned the name "rice Christians." The Protestant missionaries of the British period, however, saw the dana of rice as a problem and thus stopped it:

> You ask them, will you come and hear me preach – the answer is yes, if you will give me rice. The head man of a large and populous village of 16,000 people, told me one day, if you will give me and the people plenty of rice and curry, we will all become Christians. It seems as though they could not conceive of a greater degree of happiness than is found in gratifying the appetite for food and drink. They, therefore, pay little attention to what is told them about Christ, for they do not care whether it is true or not.[61]

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[58]Missionary Herald, vol. XVI (1820); 251:ABCFM Archives

[59]Ibid., 251

[60]See above, sections 5.3 and 7.1

[61]Miron Winslow, Letter, 25 July 1820, Memoirs, 237

Rice-evangelism, it was felt, had made the Tamil people indifferent to the concerns of their "souls" by paying too much attention to their "bellies."

(c) Caste System. Unlike the Roman Catholic missionaries, the Protestants saw caste as primarily a religious rather than a civil institution. According to their view, caste was the cement of Hinduism, closely binding the whole socio-religious edifice.[62] From being ideologically opposed to Christianity, the system of pollution rules (muraikal) associated with caste imposed severe restrictions on the extent of the missionaries' contacts with the Tamils. As soon as Joseph Knight, the first CMS missionary in Jaffna, commenced work in Nallur in November, 1818, he was thus faced with "difficulties and opposition":

> The people thought it necessary to bathe themselves and purify their houses after the missionary's visit, and it was usual for the pundit to bathe at the tank on his way home after giving a lesson at the Mission House.[63]

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[62]Policies on caste: ABCFM: Slavery, Caste and Polygamy (New York: American Missionary Association, 1854), CMS: Bishop Daniel Wilson's pastoral letter of 5 July 1833 to Anglicans in the Diocese of Calcutta – to which Sri Lanka at that time belonged – published in J. Bateman, The Life of Daniel Wilson (London: John Murray, 1860), 437-443. The letter gives the following injunction:

> The distinction of castes, then, must be abandoned, decidedly, immediately, finally; and those who profess to belong to Christ must give this proof of their having really 'put off', concerning the former conversation, 'the old man', and having 'put on the new man' in Christ Jesus. (Ibid., 438)

His policy on caste was to be enforced throughout the Diocese even though it diverged from the Government's line of non-interference with the local social and religious customs.

[63]Balding, Church Missionary Society in Ceylon 1818-1918, 89. The practice of washing and bathing to remove contamination from Christians continued well into

Again, it is these pollution rules that became "a formidable obstacle to the establishment of Boarding schools":

> To send one's children away from home to eat, drink, sleep, and have companionship with others, some of whom perhaps might be of lower caste or family standing than themselves, was a difficulty not easily got over by native parents.[64]

Since caste imposed barriers against commensality, it would have been regarded by Christians, to be the greatest obstacle to the progress of the gospel, and therefore, also, the best defence against Christian proselytization.

(d) Idolatry and Superstition. As they lived and moved among the people of Tamil Sri Lanka, the missionaries saw a vivid variety of gods and goddesses, of divine beings and demons, and manifestations of the divinity in human and animal forms. Most of these gods and goddesses would have been visible to them in the countless wayside shrines. They also had some knowledge of puranic and epic mythology, especially Kantapuranam which was regularly popularized through recitations and ritual enactments.[65] This rich iconography and mythology was in every sense opposed to their Protestant sensibilities. By calling the belief in them idolatry and superstition, the missionaries

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the twentieth century, cf. G. D. Somasundaram, My Recollections, n.d.,10f. [private circulation]

[64]Brief Sketch of the American Mission (Jaffna: American Mission Press, 1849), 10

[65] eg. W. Adley's detailed description of Kandaswamy Festival at Nallur, 7 September, 1826: CCE/0/28-30, CMS Archives. Poor's use of Kandapurnam at the Seminary in Root, 12-13

saw in those beliefs a distortion of true religion. They were thus firmly resolved that they must "expose the utter folly and irrationality of idolatry and superstition" without which true religion cannot be safely or securely established. Since "idolatry with its grim satellite, superstition" were mysteriously wedded to "caste," any such exposure could not be carried out without also rooting out and destroying the other "monster evil."[66]

(e) **Illiteracy.** At this time "there were only a few Tamil schools here and there, and only a few could read and write with the style on ola, but very few could read the printed character with ease and fluency."[67] The few were almost all men, since there were "no more than a dozen women,"[68] at the time of the commencement of Protestant missionary work "who knew the Tamil alphabet."[69] If ordinary men and women should be able to read the Bible in the vernacular, mass illiteracy of this kind would have appeared totally unacceptable. The missionaries firmly held to the conviction of Martin

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[66] The language is borrowed from Alexander Duff's pamphlet, What is Caste? (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1858), 21: CMS Archives. In more sober language Percival declared, "it is not from the priesthood that they have anything to fear, but from the Brahmanical system, coupled with the Oriental aversion to change and the cementing influence of caste." Quoted in Tennent, Christianity, 164-165

[67] J. V. Chelliah, A Century of English Education. The Story of Batticotta Seminary and Jaffna College 1st ed. 1922 (Vaddukoddai: Jaffna College, 1984), 1

[68] "Strange to say .... the only Hindoo females amongst whom education is permitted being the dancing girls and prostitutes attached to the temples, who are taught to read and write in order to qualify them for transcribing copies of the songs and stories of the gods." (Tennent, Christianity: 156)

[69] Report of the Female Boarding School at Oodooville, Manipay, Jaffna: American Mission Press, 1939), 3 :ABCFM Archives

Luther that the divine message in the form of vernacular Scripture is so plain, that any man or woman, without the aid of a religious specialist, should be able to read, understand and thus appropriate the message to oneself. As a result they felt the need to promote the learning of the Tamil language by "raising up a reading population in Tamil."[70]

(f) Status of Women. Christian David, a Tamil pupil of the celebrated pietist missionary Christian Schwartz, who was possibly the first Protestant missionary to arrive in Tamil Sri Lanka in the British period, is reported to have once said that the conversion of one woman is of more importance than that of six men.[71] Christian David was probably alluding to the great influence of the woman at home, of the vital role she plays in the training of children, and therefore, of the favourable influence she could have on the society through converting to Christianity. With the growing number of young men joining the Christian movement, the need to seek female converts continued to increase. As one American report stated "it is strikingly obvious that pious and educated men should have pious and educated companions." "A heathen companion" on the other hand would be "a source of constant trial to her husband, and not infrequently of ruin to the children."[72]

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[70]Chelliah, 1

[71]Kanagasabai Wilson, The Christian Church in Sri Lanka (Colombo: Study Centre for Religion and Society, 1975), 59

[72]Report of the F.B.S. at Oodooville, April, 1839, 10

While the missionaries needed women converts to build Christian homes, the women themselves remained largely beyond the reach of hearing the gospel. It became a formidable difficulty in having any form of contact with wives, mothers and daughters, particularly those of the higher castes, who seemed confined in the most rigorous cloister-like seclusion with all its ignorance, frivolity and narrow-mindedness. Indeed, the whole interior of the Tamil home in the Vanni and Jaffna was (and still is) considered a refuge for women. Most of these houses have an exterior verandah or a specially built reception room called a talaivcal in which visitors can be entertained. The kitchen, kucini (a corruption of Portuguese), is set apart from the house, usually at the rear of the compound. So the women who spend their time either in the interior (vitu) or in the kitchen will not be visible from the verandah. Then to ensure that no stranger may penetrate the house, it will be surrounded by a stout fence. What was therefore obvious to any missionary operating in these regions, is the fact that the society took every possible step to seclude its women.

Faced with this reality, the missionaries broadened their objectives, and spoke of the need to "raise" the females "so as to hold their proper rank in society."[73] Roberts's lengthy report on women shows that the missionaries were aware that the present status of women was reinforced by a powerful tradition of "wretched fables and tales of wonder," of "ancient and modern literature bearing more or

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[73]Report of FBS at Oodooville, April, 1839, 9; using almost identical language a Wesleyan report urged for the need to "raise" the females "to their proper and just place in society" and thereby "partake of the blessings of our common faith." Roberts, 20 Jan. 1828, NR16:WMMS Archives

less upon the depravity, ignorance and meanness of woman."[74] But the missionaries seem to have been unaware that they were here dealing with another religious issue, and therefore, any attempt to emancipate women would bring formidable resistance from the men of higher castes. The cloistered woman in the interior of the house that the missionary on rare occasions saw, is to a Hindu a protected womb, as sacred as the womb in the inner sanctum of the Hindu temple, and such protection from the disordering forces, it is believed, brings great blessings to the family, including the birth of many sons.[75]

In taking into account these many obstacles, the missionaries in their usual manner appeared confident that they could develop methods and institutions which could overcome them, and would create a mental and social environment more conducive to the spread of Christianity. Anticipating this change in direction, in 1817, the

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[74] He refers to the works of Akattiya, Tiru Valluvar and the woman sage, Auvaiyar. Another Methodist report, also from Jaffna, gives a slightly different perspective: "The Hindoo female is a fit object of sympathy, not as degraded in her relation to the government of her own household (for in that respect, in this Province, they hold a high and commanding place) but in the deprivation of all intellectual and moral training to which she is subjected." NR19:WMMS Archives

[75] "The status of women in South Asia," states Susan Wadley, "is related to Hindu belief. Women, who like the goddesses are feared, must like the goddesses, be kept under control. Through male control and her own chastity, the Hindu woman controls her dangerous sacred powers and is able to use them for the benefit of the family." Susan Wadley (ed.), The Powers of Tamil Women (New Delhi: Manohar, 1991), xxii. The need for protection and social control arises from the woman's alleged propensity to create disorder (on ananku, see above, section 5.4) which led to the enforcement of a decree from Manu that she should never be independent:

> In childhood a female must be subject to her father, in youth to her husband, when her lord is dead to her sons; a woman must never be independent. Though destitute of virtue, seeking pleasure elsewhere, or devoid of good qualities, yet a husband must be constantly worshipped as a god by a faithful wife. In reward of such conduct, a female.... gains in this life highest renown, and in the next world a place near her husband. (The Laws of Manu v. 148. 154, 166.)

Methodist Chairman of North Ceylon District, James Lynch, reported to his supporters at home that "it would not be easy to find congregations without schools."[76] Within the following decade the three missionary societies were engaged in the founding of schools in the three major population centres; the areas surrounding Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Jaffna. Education was seen both as a means of preparation for the gospel, and as itself an evangelising agency.

The three missionary societies, American, Methodist and Anglican, as they expanded their activities in the Tamil-speaking areas, started to co-ordinate their activities through the formation of a "missionary union" where they came together "to contribute the results of past experience, and decide on measures for the future." As a result their methods came more and more to be "almost one and the same," and more importantly, they appeared to the Tamil public as united.

> they have altogether avoided, in the eyes of the Tamils, the exhibition of controversial rivalry, which to some extent has impeded the success of the missions amongst the Sinhalese in the South.[77]

It was the Missionary Union which by the 1830's resolved that from then on the societies would "rely less upon formal preaching than on familiar discourses, and trusting more to the intimate

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[76]HMCC, 110

[77]Tennent, Christianity, 144

exhortation of a few than to the effect of popular addresses to indiscriminate assemblies."[78]

Schools of all kinds were established in the north-east region, beginning with primary (village) schools and going up through secondary schools (or the so-called colleges) and a university. Unlike the other two societies the American missionary work was restricted to the peninsula, where they emerged as the leaders in the field of education. As indicated in an Anglican Church missionary instruction at the time, the schools of all three societies "were the principal, if not the only, means of converting the heathen to Christianity."[79] Because the educational institutions were primarily intended to serve a religious purpose, it is not surprising that religion was a central part of the curriculum.

Among the missionary schools the village schools were the most numerous. In just about every Tamil village a school was established to deal with the problem of mass illiteracy, since only a few traditional scholars in 1800 could read and write on ola leaves. In the classes ranging from grades one to five, children were taught to read and write in their own tongue; to read portions of the Bible; and to learn small bits of Tamil poetry, plus some arithmetic and geography.[80] They learned to write their own language, first by tracing

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[78]Ibid., 144

[79]Ranjit Ruberu, Education in Colonial Ceylon (Kandy: Kandy Printers, 1962), 208

[80] Methodist School Report of 1823, NR4: WMMS Archives, J. V. Chelliah, [illegible] 2; Tennent, Christianity, 144

the letters on the sand, and eventually by inscribing them with an iron style on palmyra palm leaves. It is through these primary-village schools that the Protestants strove to raise up a reading population. By 1850, in the free village schools of the American Mission alone there were 4000 pupils; one fourth of whom were female. The American Mission calculated in 1850 that over 90,000 children had been taught by them alone to read and write since the schools were opened. In other words about one-half of the population of the peninsula at that time had an education in an American Mission primary school.[81]

The establishment of primary schools was only one stage in the proposed strategy of the missionary societies. They were not satisfied with the meagre education given in these schools, and were anxious to provide a more thorough system of training by keeping pupils entirely under their influence. With this objective a second initiative was taken with the opening of secondary schools, of male and female boarding schools starting in the 1820's as well as central day-schools at stations where the missionaries were already resident. The initiative for educating the girls in this manner came from the female members of the missionary societies, usually the missionary wives, who first laid the foundation for this work by taking Tamil girls into their homes for the purpose of education and training.[82]

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[81]Ibid., 145

[82]Jane and Daniel Poor had nine Tamil girls besides their own three children, and thus operated their own "ready made boarding school" until the first Female Boarding School in Sri Lanka was opened by the Americans at "Oodooville" (Uduvil) in 1824. cf. G. D. Somasundaram, My Recollections, 2

When several boarding schools opened in the 1820's, they offered to feed, clothe and educate the pupils free. But it was found that most Hindu parents remained apprehensive, for they were reluctant to permit their children to reside under the same roof with their Christian teachers and to share the same food and water with children of other castes. To deal with this problem the missionaries had to be firm, yet tactful, and it took a few years before the matter could be resolved satisfactorily. In the boarding schools the pupils received instruction in both English and Tamil, whereas in the village schools, the instruction was solely in the vernacular. According to a Methodist report on the Central School in Jaffna in 1846:

> Every useful branch of education is taught in this establishment: Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar, Geography, History, Algebra, Geometry, Natural Philosophy and Elements of Mental and Moral Science. Great prominence is given to the Bible, which is systematically taught in its Evidence, Doctrines, and Morals. There is a Sabbath School conducted in connexion with the Day School, and the attendance of the boys on that day is regular and encouraging. The daily duties of the school are commenced and closed with singing and prayer. We regard this school as one of great importance and as calculated, with the blessing of Almighty God, to advance the cause of the Redeemer in this part of the island.[83]

Boarding schools were found in Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Jaffna, but were not found in the inland area of Vanni (north-central) or the coastal area of Mannar (north-west). Protestant schools were conspicuously absent in the heavily populated neytal or coastal tracts, including the island of Mannar, because it was widely recognised as a

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[83]Report of 1846, NR19: WMMS Archives. Percival, the author was the founder and principal of this school. In this school the well known Hindu revivalist Arumuka Navalar was a student and pupil teacher between 1834 and 1847

Roman Catholic strong-hold. The restraint the Protestants showed about opening schools in these Roman Catholic areas contributed to the cordial relations that prevailed between the two major segments of Western Christianity in Tamil Śri Lanka,[84] but it also resulted in lower educational levels in these areas. The Protestants did not totally abandon missionary work in the neytal and forest tracts. Itinerant preachers of the American mission were active on the sparsely populated chain of islands off the coast of Jaffna peninsula, and the Methodists made parts of the Vanni interior a routine area to be covered by their circuit-preachers. Eventually the work of the circuit preachers led to the founding of a string of village schools in the Vanni.[85]

At the apex of the educational system was the third initiative, a university college, opened in 1823. The American missionaries, who, more than others, could not see a distinction between evangelization and the spread of enlightenment, had already proved themselves to be pioneers in education. They had opened the first female boarding school in the whole island, and the university college in Jaffna was another ambitious project of theirs. The American missionaries had to be both indefatigable and determined in order to get their ambitious plan implemented, because of the hostility they were to receive from Governor General Barnes. Barnes had been a menace to the American mission all along, and he refused permission for the college,

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[84] cf. Tennent, Christianity, 164

[85] On schools for the veddhas see NR20:WMMS Archives, London

demanding that "such an establishment ought to be British and placed under the special care and protection of the Governor."[86] The American mission got around this objection by calling it a "seminary," a fluid term that meant different things to different people, but the real status of the institution as a top flight college was never in doubt. Some years later, after visiting the Seminary, the Colonial Secretary, Sir Emerson Tennent made the following observation:

> The knowledge exhibited by the pupils was astonishing; and it is no exaggerated encomium to say that, in the extent of the course of instruction, and in the success of the system for communicating it, the Collegiate Institution of Batticotta is entitled to rank with many an European University.[87]

In his lengthy account, Tennent also pointed out that the Seminary, like all other institutions founded by the Mission, was essentially a Christian institution.

The Batticotta Seminary was intended to meet the needs of the boys from the boarding schools, who, it was felt, were so advanced in their studies that provision should be made for their further education. Enrollment was based on good "talent" and not good "birth," and those admitted were provided a "Literary and Scientific" education. The subjects included Tamil, English, Geography, Chronology, History, Arithmetic, Algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry, Mechanics, Optics, Astronomy and the most useful branches of Native Philosophy.[88]

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[86]Ruberu, 196

[87]Tennent, Christianity,178

[88]Ruberu, 198; J. V. Chelliah, 1984:6ff.

Hebrew, Greek and Latin were offered to a select number with the object of raising up competent preachers.

In the prospectus of the Seminary, the missionaries emphasised the need to give the students a thorough knowledge of the English Language and the cultivation of Tamil Literature. A knowledge of the English language was intended to "open to them the treasure of European science and literature, and bring before the mind the evidences of Christianity."[89] English language, it argued, is indispensable, since "the treasure of the English" can only "to a small extent" be "transferred to the native languages." On this issue the authors were aware that they disagreed with "the venerable missionaries at Serampore" who "seemed to disparage English studies for Natives."[90] While English education was central almost an equal emphasis seems to have been laid on the vernacular. The prospectus stated that "to maintain any good degree of respect among the native inhabitants, it is necessary to understand their literature. The Tamil language like the Sanskrit, Hebrew, Greek, etc., is an original and perfect language, and is in itself highly worthy of cultivation."[91] The description of Tamil as an "original and perfect language.....highly worthy of cultivation" is unique for its time, and this significant

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[89]Plan of the College for the Literary and Religious Instruction of Tamul and other Youth, Jaffna (Colombo: Wesleyan Mission Press, 1823); ABC: 16.1.5, vol.1, ABCFM Archives; see also J. V. Chelliah, "The Plan and Objects of a College", Batticota Seminary, 4-13

[90]Ibid., 6; Serampore College established in 1817 by W. Carey and his colleagues in Calcutta was at that time the only other collegiate institution of this kind in Asia.

[91]Plan

observation may well be taken as the beginning of the Tamilisation process being launched by the Seminary.

The prospectus also observed that "the cultivation of Tamil composition .....is now almost entirely neglected."

> It is common to find among Tamul people men who can read correctly, who can understand to some extent the poetic language, and who are able perhaps to form a kind of artificial verse, who cannot write a single page of correct prose.[92]

At that time the available Tamil works, such as the Puranas and other religious books, were found translated into "high Tamul," and as a result "few books are read and fewer still understood":

> Those put into the hands of boys at school, are so far above their comprehension that they learn the words without attaching the least meaning to them whatever; and, unhappily, they seldom acquire any better habits in after life.[93]

The authors of the prospectus, (Poor, Meigs, Winslow, Spaulding, Woodward and Scudder) were clearly dissatisfied with the traditional method of learning Tamil. A new, more rational, scientific method was recommended so that the students could write "intelligibly, and forcibly, in their own language." The Seminary's task in this regard was seen to be to provide the appropriate tools for the cultivation of "Tamul composition":

> Original native composition, on account of the superior felicity of its style and idiom, will be read when the production of a foreigner, or a translation, will be thrown aside. To raise up, therefore, and qualify a class of native authors whose minds being enriched by science may be capable not only of embodying European ideas, but

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[92]Ibid.

[93]Ibid.

of putting them into a handsome native dress, must be rendering important aid to the interests of learning and Christianity.[94]

The education provided by the Seminary, in several respects, was broader than that provided at Serampore. For a short time even medicine was taught. J. Scudder, one of the authors of the prospectus, was once a practising doctor of medicine in New York. When, according to him, the "call" came to leave the surgery at once and work as a missionary in the foreign field he came to Batticotta.[95] Two other teachers, L. Spaulding and M. Winslow, were eminent lexicographers. The small group that set out the first prospectus were without doubt equipped to set up a first class college and the results were almost immediate. Within a few years the Seminary did raise up "a class of native authors" who could justifiably be called "the group of pioneers who heralded the Tamil Renaissance" in the middle of the nineteenth century, both in Ceylon and South India."[96] What these men of letters had in common was a "critical sensibility" developed from the more rational and historical approach to learning Tamil. It is precisely this sense of history and scientific spirit that launched the Seminary's most famous student, C. W. Thamotherampillai, on his pioneering attempt at periodization of the history of Tamil literature and into textual criticism.[97] He was to become the editor of many ancient Tamil works

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[94]Ibid.

[95]James Rutnam, "The Earliest American Impact on Sri Lanka. The American Mission Seminary in Jaffna," CJHSS, vol.VI, no. 2 (July- December 1976): 77

[96]Prof. K. Kailasapathy, "Arnold Sathasivampillai and the Tamil Renaissance," Jaffna College Miscellany. Centenary Publication (Jaffna: Jaffna College, 1981), 81

[97]Ibid., 86

that had lain neglected in the archives of local princes in South India for centuries. He eventually became the head of Tamil studies in Madras University[98] and influenced the important revival of Tamil learning in this century. Although it is not widely acknowledged, he served the mission in his early life, training Christian teachers.[99]

For the present discussion, it is the influence of the Seminary on its immediate locality that is of greater significance. As James Rutnam has observed in his "The Earliest American Impact on Sri Lanka,"

> Poor had seen to it that the Seminary was not isolated from the life of the community. One of the functions of the Seminary was to influence the intellectual life of the people of the area. The Seminary was the centre which radiated good will, stimulated a spirit of enquiry and extended knowledge beyond its walls, reaching the homes and families of its students and their friends.[100]

12.5 Humanitarian Service

Humanitarian service was not in the original agenda of the pioneer missionaries. They were sent out by their respective societies solely to preach the simple Gospel, but they were from religious traditions that encouraged social reform and philanthropy.[101] Soon after their arrival in Sri Lanka their background of humanitarian

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[98]Chelliah, 51

[99]Somasundaram, My Recollections

[100]Rutnam, 79

[101]The less pietistic among the three societies, the Anglicans and the Americans, were at this time active in social reform movements at home. cf. E. M. Howse, Saints in Politics 124

concern began to find expression in many charitable works, which developed almost instinctively in the face of human misery. Writing to the Board in 1817, just one year after their arrival in the island, the American pioneers in Jaffna expressed their humanitarian concern thus:

> Our attention has been called to the sick around us. Many flocked to our doors for medical aid, as soon as they knew that we had the means of assisting them. We have reason to hope that God will bless our attention to them for their spiritual as well as temporal good..... But we find an attention to their wants subjects us to considerable expense, as many of the subjects are wasting with hunger as well as disease. ....We shall continue to assist these poor objects, as far as we can, and we hope that the Board will give us a little assistance.[102]

Strangely enough, it was the afflicted patients, Warren and Richards, who became the first Christian medical missionaries in Sri Lanka. The two had taken a short course of medical study at the University of Pennsylvania and some practice at hospitals in New England. They were thus able to open a clinic at Tellipalai "for the cure of both soul and body."[103] With the arrival of Scudder, a medical professional, in 1819, further progress in the administration of medicine was made. He left Jaffna in 1836 to found the Madura Mission. During the time of Doctor Nathan Ward (1833-1847) and Doctor Samuel Green (1847-1874) hospitals were established, while students were "trained in Western medical science, using the same

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[102]Joint letter to the Board, 10 December 1817, ABC: 16.1.5 (Ceylon Mission), ABCFM Archives

[103]Rutnam, 77

textbooks as students in America, latterly in the vernacular, Dr. Green having translated them into Tamil."[104]

The humanitarian services were provided free, which must have created a lot of good will toward the missions. They were also effective in disarming social prejudices. For instance, Tamil nurses had to be trained for the hospitals, but the women of this time were reluctant to take to a profession that would cause them to lose their caste by the handling of spit-pans and bed-pans, chores traditionally assigned to untouchables. Nursing was still a long way from becoming a "noble" profession as it was called in the West. Also, the patients in the hospitals faced the same dangers as pupils in the boarding schools, the prospect of religious contamination resulting from the consumption of water and food supplied within the premises.

To the extent that the humanitarian services disarmed prejudice and created good-will, they were regarded as useful preparatives to the great objective of conversion to Christianity. Like the schools, the existence of these vital services, made it difficult for the Hindu society to deal with Protestants in the way it had done with other untouchables. In one sense it is true that the traditional untouchables too were providing vital services to Hindu society, and by the acceptance of those services, the society is to some degree contaminated. But compared to them, the services provided by the Protestants were encroaching into several spheres of life, contributing to a much higher level of contamination. It meant that even in the

[104] S. W. Howland, The Ceylon Mission (Boston, Stanley and Usher, 1886), 111 [pamph.]

provision of social services, the Protestants were raising some profound religious questions. Are the traditional Hindu rituals sufficient to contain the new levels of contamination? If not, how should the Hindu society respond to the Protestant challenge? Could it afford to abandon or modify some of the ancient rules (muraikal), while preserving the integrity of the faith?

CHAPTER 13

GURUS, SHISYAS AND THE INAUGURATION OF A PARALLEL SOCIETY

13.1 The growth of Tamil Protestant Christianity

Preoccupied with its monopolistic trade and the raising of revenue, the British government regarded expenditure on education in Sri Lanka as a luxury, and this attitude prevented it from assuming responsibility for education. In the years before 1832, notes K. M. de Silva, "it is difficult to see anything approaching a coherent government policy on education in Ceylon," and then after the so-called reforms of that year, the policy for a long time remained "disjointed."[1] The missionary societies on the other hand have always been clear on the purposes that education was to serve. These were many, including the advancement of modern scientific knowledge, but the many short-term aims had an ultimate end in view: the propagation of the Gospel at the expense of the prevailing religions. The missionary societies also had resources that an enterprise of this

[1] "Religion and the State in the Early Nineteenth Century," K. M. De Silva ed., UCHC vol. 3, 73, 75

kind required. It had above all the right sort of personnel: inner-directed men and women, singular in their commitment to this task. By training and deploying larger and larger numbers of such men and women recruited from Hindu society, the missionary societies were able to greatly expand their operation in the 1830's and 1840's. Throughout this period of expansion the societies had the field entirely to themselves, since there was no other body capable of mounting a challenge to their dominant position in education. This unrivalled monopoly over modern education, which included the teaching of the English language, soon gave the missionaries and their Tamil "assistants" certain advantages and benefits that may not have been fully anticipated when the educational enterprise was launched. From the 1820's the colonial rulers, having secured territorial control of the Indian subcontinent and the island of Sri Lanka, began to pay greater attention to the administrative unification of those territories. In the 1830's and 1840's the process of unification included such things as the introduction of the railway, telegraph and postal service. As a result there was a phenomenal rise in employment opportunities, in government service. In accordance with the colonial policy, English educated Sri Lankans – who would have, particularly among Tamils, been through mission schools – were now being hired to fill a variety of positions in government. The higher caste Tamils showed the greatest interest in these new economic opportunities and this in turn dramatically changed their earlier attitudes towards missionary education. Parents showed a keen interest in sending their sons to the secondary schools, even to board them, if only to secure a government

job for them at the end. This rather utilitarian interest in modern education would continue long after the demise of missionary schools.[2]

With the clamour for missionary education that started in the late 1820's, the public's attitude toward the missionary also went through sharp revisions. The earlier images of the missionary, as a wandering sannyasin, a carrier of other-worldly doctrines, were still retained, if only because well known missionaries like Poor and Percival recognized their importance to mission, and thus through their own personal example encouraged the cultivation of these images alongside other images. Among the latter, the image of the missionary as a guru-sannyasin was now gaining in prominence, owing to the superior knowledge as well as powers he displayed, almost routinely, when instructing his pupils.

In the first half of the nineteenth century the alliance between modern science and Protestant theology was still intact, and science was one of the deadliest weapons in the educational arsenal of the missionary to be used to undermine Hinduism.[3] On several occasions this weapon was effectively wielded by the missionaries in their controversies with the learned Hindus of the day. A controversy which

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[2]According to the missionary, Winslow, the Tamil interest in religion is equally utilitarian, which he saw reflected in a village headman's reply, along the lines, 'Will you give me rice in exchange for listening to you preach?' (see above). It compares favourably with Pfaffenberger's description of the "Shudras": a powerful orientation toward the mundane and earthly, and the use of religious rituals to achieve, in exchange, secular power. see Caste in Tamil Culture (1982)

[3]David L. Gosling, Science and Religion in India (Madras, CLS, 1976), 10; R. Hooykaas, Religion and the Rise of Modern Science (Edinburgh: Scottish Acadamic Press, 1972)

"became public, and excited the utmost attention amongst the Tamil population" was over the question of the validity of the Tamil-Puranic mode of determining the time of the eclipse.[4] The public interest was heightened by the fact that an accurate prediction using "the Puranic system of Astronomy" would also, it was believed, validate the entire Hindu system,[5] including its mythology and religion.[6] The calculation for the eclipse of 20 March, 1829, was originally made by Visvanandan, a Brahman of "Batticotta," a professional almanac-maker and "the most celebrated of the astronomers of Ceylon."[7] Daniel Poor, the Principal of Batticotta Seminary disputed the Brahman's calculations. Then several other lesser astronomers made their own calculations that confirmed the Brahman's prediction. Following these developments, on the evening of the eclipse, many people assembled near the Seminary, to witness the result. A learned Tamil pandaram was there to inform the people of the "three points of difference" in the predictions, so "as to leave no room for doubt or dispute afterwards."[8] In the end, when the eclipse occurred it was found that the three errors

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[4]Tennent, Christianity, 139-141, This method of calculation is to be found in Ennal, "the standard work on Astronomy, used by almanac makers" in the Jaffna province. cf. Chelliah, 22

[5] "Hinduism's boast of its.....divine system of Astronomy, including a marvellous mass of astrological principles by which they claim to be able to foretell future events, discover secrets, anticipate and avoid impending evils and make out the whole course of domestic and popular life." Brief Sketch of the American Ceylon Mission with an Appendix (Jaffna: American Mission Press, 1849), 7. In short, unlike Christianity, Hinduism does not separate Astronomy and Astrology.

[6]Chelliah, 23-24

[7]Tennent, Christianity, 139

[8]Chelliah, 24

to which Poor had drawn attention, were "sufficiently glaring to be noticed by superficial observers." The people who followed the dispute would have noticed that according to Visvanandan's calculations, "the eclipse would commence fifteen minutes later – continue twenty-four minutes longer – and cover three digits more of the moon's disc – than the true calculation showed."[9]

The Tamils who witnessed this incident were undoubtedly dazzled by the indisputable powers of the new guru or acarya, especially, his profound insight into the mysteries of this and other worlds, an insight which impinged on their religion. This new and exalted image of the missionary is a stark contrast to the old one, in which he had assumed the role of a wandering sannyasin, preaching, the often repetitive, "simple" gospel; only to be ignored and even laughed at. It is therefore all the more interesting to note that in spite of Poor's apparent success in using science as a weapon against Hinduism, the missionary – perhaps Poor himself – who recorded the incident accompanied it with a comment that "mere astronomical truth cannot suffice to alter the heart."[10] The comment not only reveals the missionary's continuing commitment to "direct evangelism," but also his recognition that science in itself as a weapon is ineffective in accomplishing the missionary task. That task could only be accomplished inside the classroom. It was also to be a profoundly religious one, requiring a religious discipline in learning,

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[9] Ibid., 23

[10] Tennent, Christianity, 141

and the cultivation of a very personal relationship between the guru and his disciples. In effect, the missionary was now a gradualist who saw his task being accomplished in the class room, where the setting would be provided for the creation of a religious elite, who in turn would have a percolating effect on the larger society outside the class room.

This would explain Poor's own reaction to the above incident. There were three issues disputed in the calculations. When the tests began with the commencement of the eclipse, Poor, it is said, left the crowd and led his students to his classroom, where he

> produced his orrery, and delivered a lecture on the phenomenon which was then visible in the sky; and lighting up the sun in the centre, he so directed the shadow to the moon as to demonstrate to the spectators the theory of what was still passing the heavens.[11]

Here in the classroom astronomy was taught systematically: "Instruction was given not only in the European system but also in the Hindu system."[12] Also in the classroom, with the purpose of unveiling another mystery, "the Scanda Puranam was for a time read"; although, "mainly for the sake of convincing people that it was possible for missionaries to understand a book which was supposed to be of a mysteriously sacred nature."[13]

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[11]Ibid., 140-141

[12]Chelliah, 23: Poor's successor, H. R. Hoisington published a book on Hindu Astronomy, which became a text book prescribed by the Calcutta University for the M. A. Examination in Mathematics. He, in addition, translated the three leading Tamil treaties on Saiva Siddhanta. Ibid., 35

[13]Ibid., 22; Root, 13

All this expertise that the missionary was beginning to display in and out of the classroom marked him out as a guru of the highest order. The knowledge he possessed seemed to give him a profound insight into this world as well as the world/worlds beyond. The Tamils also came to appreciate that this knowledge had a more earthy, utilitarian value, whose possession would be a passport to lucrative jobs, riches and happiness in this world. The guru image on the other hand seemed to complement the other image of the missionary as a sannyasin. Indeed, in his itinerant work, the guru image was now an asset to him. Wherever the missionary went, the people were willing to listen to him. They also carefully observed his mode of life. Even casual observers would have readily recognised certain sannyasic features in his life style: sternness, inflexibility and indifference to the consequences, which also happen to be distinguishing marks of Calvinistic-Puritan ethics.[14]

The educational enterprise was thus serving its intended purposes. Within a few years after it was launched, the Protestants had moved horizontally and vertically from the fringe of the traditional milieu. They now had close social contacts with Tamil Hindus, and in their midst wielded some influence that was slowly permeating the society. The quality of that influence depended a great deal on what was being accomplished "religiously" in the classrooms of the primary-village schools, secondary day and boarding schools and the collegiate-seminary. To observe the religious process at work in the classrooms, it

[14]Only the Wesleyans were not theologically, Calvinists; but through Susan Wesley, "the mother" of Methodism, they came to appropriate the puritan ethic

is convenient here to divide these educational institutions into two categories:-

(i) Primary Schools: the foundations of Parallel Society

The village schools are indigenous to Sri Lanka. In ancient times, the school was either a home or a temple where a Brahman or a bhikkhu would have disseminated knowledge orally, to the chosen and privileged few, who became their shisyas. In Portuguese and Dutch times, these village schools, in some parts of the island were reorganized as parish schools, and under the supervision of the state-backed clergy, instruction was provided in reading, writing and religion by a village school-master. During the period after 1800, which is being discussed here, the number of schools of this type was greatly expanded, and the quality of instruction greatly improved. Throughout each of these changes the important element of continuity at this grass-roots, vernacular level of education, was the village teacher; a person who lived in the local community, was revered as a guru, and whose example was followed.

The social standing of the village teacher during the nineteenth century was in one sense greater than ever before, especially after the clamour for education began affecting all levels of society. These teachers were usually Tamil Protestants, and hence owed allegiance to a religion that was different from the religion of their fellow villagers. By 1830, there was certainly a sufficient number of Protestant head-teachers, talaimai vattiyar, to take charge of all the primary schools run by the missionary societies. These teachers worked closely with the

resident missionary of their respective stations, whom they would meet once a week to submit progress reports.[15] Something more than a formal, professional relationship would have existed between the missionary and the village teacher in those early years. The teacher in most cases would have been selected and trained first as a pupil-teacher by the missionary himself, and it is that same training and instruction that was now being imparted to his pupils.[16]

In the village, the head teacher aimed at two missionary objectives. One was to upgrade constantly the school "by the introduction of better discipline and books of a higher character, than those which are ordinarily taught in such schools."[17] In pursuing this aim the head teacher held a Christian assembly at the daily opening of his school; exercised discipline in accordance with "the rules of the New Testament"[18]; and "procured school manuals of superior character" from the newly formed "Jaffna Book Society" in order to raise the level of literacy and morality of his pupils.[19]

The second missionary objective was "to witness by actually living among the people and by setting before them a Christian way of

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[15]Report of Joseph Knight of 1834:0/77/69 CMS Archives, Birmingham

[16]On the use of "monitorial" method see NR19:WMMS Archives, London. This method of training and deploying pupil-teachers or monitors to instruct other pupils was developed by Andrew Bell (1753-1832) in Madras to overcome the shortage of teachers. It has features similar to the guru-sishya method, and may well have been influenced by it.

[17]Report, May, 1841: NR14, WMMS Archives, London

[18] Brief Sketch of the American Ceylon Mission (1849), 33, 34-36 WMMS Archives, London.

[19] NR14:WMMS Archives, London.

life."[20] In other words, his aim was to be what he was, a guru-sannyasin. It may be observed here that "the Christian head teacher lives with his family inside the school's compound."[21] This spatial separation reinforced the symbol of the teacher's sannyasin-like credentials. The typical Protestant teacher's spiritual journey from one social state to another was constituted of three things; which both define his status and witness to who he is for those still within the Hindu society. The first was the teacher's acceptance of the "death ritual" of baptism by which he renounced and left his former social state. Secondly, the teacher came to function as a man "outside" and "above" his previous social state, in that he undertook a vocation designed to instruct and discipline a temporarily assembled multi-caste society. This vocation incidentally demonstrated that he himself had transcended the restrictions on social contact between high and low groups in the normal Hindu society. The third aspect of his witness is the manner in which he exhibits his new social state by adopting a different mode of life embodying Protestant values which were clearly articulated by certain styles of dress, speech and behaviour.[22]

From classical times, there have been, at least to the ordinary householders, objects of selective imitation. Heterodox sannyasins, especially, have always had for that reason a disturbing or a

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[20]Unpublished document on Village Schools, NR91: WMMS Archives, London

[21]Ibid.

[22] For a definition of Tamil Protestant mode of life see "Rules of Life" adopted by the American Mission churches, in American Ceylon Mission. (1849), 34-36

transformative effect on the householder's life. This is precisely what was expected of the Protestant head-teacher, that he and his school would be a "point of contact with the non-Christian people"[23] and through that contact have a preparative effect on the people around him by the diffusion of Protestant values. That this type of school was serving its designed purpose is confirmed in a letter written by Joseph Knight to the C.M.S. Secretary in London, to whom he had previously expressed concern about the powerful social barriers that inhibited his work. Writing in 1820 from his station in Nallur, located half a mile from the famous Kantaswamy Temple, he states that owing to the point of contact provided by the schools "we find gradual openings for preaching the Gospel around us." He is quite specific about the nature of that contact. "Through the medium of the children," he says, "we frequently find access to the parents, and thus little by little we are furnished with opportunities of delivering our message to them." Based on these observations he expresses his confidence in the missionary character of this kind of school, which was already laying the groundwork for the future; as may be evidenced in the "gradual but, sure effect of clearing away the prejudices which the people entertain respecting us...."[24]

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[23] NR91, WMMS Archives, London [illegible]

[24] Letter, 11 June 1820, 0/77/5, CMS Archives, Birmingham

(ii) Boarding Schools and Seminary:
the structures of Parallel Society

Sooner or later the guru-sannyasin must found a matha, that is, a monastic order, to propagate his peculiar discipline, knowledge and wisdom among his or her chosen shisyas. When the missionaries spoke of the need to found a self-propagating Native Agency, they were referring to such an order that would assume full responsibility for the missionary work in Tamil Sri Lanka. The decision to establish boarding schools in order to provide a community for the shisyas, may still seem an unusual one. In missionary thinking, however, there were two good reasons for starting with the children. First, owing to their primary school work, the missionary societies were by the early 1820's acquainted with thousands of Tamil children, and these children in turn would have been socially comfortable in the presence of the missionaries. Secondly, adults were considered to be unsuitable material for the purpose of training in holiness. Not infrequently, field reports speak of adult minds being too filled with "superstition," of hearts given over to "idolatry," and bodies made "rigid" by a life sustained by rituals.[25] The children on the other hand were considered amenable to Christian discipline, as long as they could be weaned from their parents before they started walking in the way of their ancestors, and raised in a distinct social setting. The practice of taking boys into a

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[25] The girls in the Female Boarding School at Oodooville "are generally taken at the age of six to eight or nine years, experience having taught us that girls past this age do not make good progress in their studies, and that their manners and habits of thinking and speaking are too much in accordance with heathenism and corrupt morals of the country." American Ceylon Mission (1939), 4

monastic setting for "mental and moral training"[26] cannot be conceived of as a Protestant innovation in Sri Lanka since the Buddhists had been doing it for almost two thousand years.

As already discussed, the missionaries, soon after their arrival had started taking in Tamil boys and girls for the purpose of imparting in them a Christian education and some practical training. This practice was at first not well received. The Tamil parents, according to a school record of 1823, "regarded the missionaries as outcastes" and "were naturally unwilling to allow their sons to be more than day-scholars."[27] With respect to the education and training of girls at mission houses, there was not one but two objections. The parents of the girls, states Mrs Winslow, the first principal of the Female Boarding School at Uduvil, "could not think of having their children lose caste, by eating on our premises and there was 'no custom' for girls to be instructed."[28] The second objection was equally strong owing to a "popular" prejudice that supposed that education of a female "would spoil her modesty, endanger her chastity, and render her insubordinate to the other sex." It was based on the assumption that "to superintend the affairs of her house and to minister to the wants of her family, were thought to be not only her first, but her sole duty."[29] There was in consequence a price to be paid by those who violated this "custom."

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[26] NR19:WMMS Archives, London

[27] A History of St. John's College, Jaffna (1823-1983) (Jaffna: St. John's College, 1983), 1; ACM (1849), 10

[28] ACM, 1849, 13

[29] Ibid., 12-13

"Little girls, when first brought into the schools, could hardly overcome their sense of shame so as to go on with their studies, and those who gave up their daughters for instruction were subjected to no small degree of reproach and ridicule for this departure from national and immemorial usage."[30]

The year 1823 may be conveniently fixed as the Pentecost of Protestant Christianity in Sri Lanka. This year saw the founding of Nallur English Seminary (later, St. John's College) by the Church Mission; English Central schools (later, Jaffna Central College, Batticoloa Central College, Trincomalee Central College) in the towns of Jaffna, Batticaloa and Trincomalee by the Methodist Mission; and Batticotta Seminary by the American Mission. The first of such schools for boys was opened by the Americans at Tellipalai before this year, and they continued their pioneering work in English education by founding the first Female Boarding School, possibly in Asia, in the year 1824. Several more of this type of institution, almost one in every mission station, were to be opened for boys and girls within the next two decades. In a very real sense, the year 1823 AD also marks the beginning of the "parallel society." This "parallel society" was founded on Protestant principles, which were manifested both in its organisational structure and its disciplinary code. The establishment of this "parallel society" would not only determine the overall shape of Protestant Christianity as it emerged in Tamil Sri Lanka, but it also

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[30] For more details see Miron Winslow, A Memoir of Mrs. Harriet Wadsworth Winslow. Combining a sketch of the Ceylon Mission. (New York: Leavitt, Lord & Co., 1835) at ABCFM Archives; Monier-Williams, "Adress on the Women of India," India's Women and China's Daughters, vol. XVIII, (March, 1989): 73-78

would be the primary stimulus for a variety of developments within Hinduism.

When the boarding schools were first opened, the number of shisyas being discipled in the mission schools under the personal care of the guru-sannyasins were relatively small. In 1823, it is said, "Mr. Knight succeeded in bringing seven boys to his bungalow," better known as the Mission House.[31] Similarly, when Mrs. Winslow started her work in Uduvil before the year 1824, she had three girls "who took their food on the mission premises."[32] By the time this Boarding School was officially opened the work had considerably grown, so that

> the admissions the first day were restricted to the girls from the homes of missionaries and 29 were enrolled that day. Poor had arrived at the school early, with his nine girls and the first to be enrolled was the youngest, Anne Bates, in the lowest class.[33]

The enrolment pattern here shows that Uduvil, being the only institution of its kind in that year, catered to a much wider area, which would account for the unusually large numbers enrolled on the first day. In these early years, the missionaries could hardly be expected to be choosy about who should be admitted. The pupils came from the high as well as low groups, from the "respectable" nalla (good) jatis as well as the not-so-respectable kurainta (low) jatis. Apart from a few stations found in pattanams (towns), the vast majority of their homes, both in the north and the east, were located in the cultivated secondary zone,

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[31] St. John's ,1

[32] ACM, 1849, 14

[33] Somasundaram, Recollections, 2

and therefore most of the students belonged to agriculturally oriented castes. Among these the dominant caste was the Vellalar caste, the same caste that owned and managed the prestigious temples. Below them, serving them like vassals, were the right hand, kutimai, castes and the left hand, atimai, castes. There were also the Brahmans, particularly in the neighbourhood of the prestigious temples in Nallur and Mavittapuran. Given this background, one of the novelties of the schools being established is that the students who had, until then, belonged to separate communities due to the principle of purity and pollution, were now living together under the same roof as a single community, sharing the same food and water and also the same "cup of the Lord."[34]

In those early years the secondary boarding school appeared identical with the Protestant Church. To be sure, the school was the locus of the church and manifested the marks of the church, and yet, the school was not, strictly speaking, the Church. In the school there were to be found the baptized and the unbaptized, though, they were all subjected to a common religious discipline. The church in this sense existed as a community within the community of the school. It came into being through a typically sannyasic process. The pupil, when admitted to the school, was like a novice on probation, "expected to show the fruits" of faith "in his general behaviour."[35] It meant that

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[34]According to an American missionary report, these pupils "eat, drink, sleep...have companionship....and sitting together on the same mat in church.....drink wine from the same cup in the celebration of the Lord's supper" and as such, they "are acts opposed to the observance of caste," ACM (1849), 10-11

[35]HMCC 152

only those who had begun to adopt a new way of life would be baptized, and thus become members of the Church. These preliminary remarks, give us sufficient grounds for the assertion that the Protestant boarding school is a type of monastic order, internally organized as an annex of the Protestant Church, and outwardly as a "parallel society" for the purpose of proselytization.[36]

Every novice attending a secondary day or boarding school was fully aware that the moment he or she stepped into the school compound the student was entering another social order that required the adoption of a new set of rules. As Tennent points out, before adopting "a discipline which is essentially and avowedly Christian,"..... "the little Hindoo must show such an outward respect for the religion.....as to lay aside for the moment the distinguishing symbols of his own idolatry." It meant that the Hindu was "not permitted to enter (the school) with the mark of ashes on his forehead."[37] The Americans, who had the largest number of schools in the peninsula, stipulated that the "pupils in attendance in the village and English schools" would "not be allowed to wear ashes or other marks of heathenism on their bodies while in the school."[38] The holy ash obtained by burning cow-dung and often worn on the forehead, was at that time the most widely used distinguishing mark of being a Hindu.

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[36]The term annex attempts to express physically the more fundamental internal relations. The church and the school at every station are situated in the same compound. The school functions for the church as the point of contact with the larger society

[37]Tennent, Christianity, 148

[38] ACM, (1849), 5

It was considered "essential to wear holy ash at dawn, noon and dusk, sunrise, sunset," and to the orthodox Hindu, the smearing of ash on the body symbolised:

> the attainment of Sivahood by the removal of the bonds (paasam) by the bonds being burnt by the fire of jnana (knowledge).[39]

The prohibition in other words infringed on the religious customs of the Hindus, and in consequence it also once again violated the colonial policy of non-interference in matters pertaining to religion. But there was, strange as it may seem, no public controversy over the matter of prohibition during the first half of the Century. Tennent in fact rightly observed that the parents of the pupils "urge no objection to the rule," which to him was suggestive of "the genius and character of this anomalous people."[40] It is, however, a serious understatement on his part to suggest that these parents, by permitting their children to remove such marks "entertained no apprehensions" concerning the possible consequences. By 1830 Hindu parents in general were aware of the proselytising role of the secondary day and boarding schools, and the accounts given by converts indicate that many parents strongly objected to their children attending these schools.[41] One source of anxiety for them was that a son, puttiran, converted to Protestant Christianity would be unable to perform the

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[39]V. K. Palasuntharam (trans), Sri-la-Sri Arumuga Navalar's Saiva Vinaavidai Book 2 (Kuala Lumpur, Second International Seminar on Saiva Siddhanta, 1986), 21, 23

[40]Tennent, Christianity,148

[41]Accounts of E. Hoole and R. Watson in CCE 0/71/12, CMS Archives,, Birmingham

obligatory funeral rites.[42] But by this time the clamour for English education among the young was becoming too strong for the parents to resist.

Renunciation of idolatry, signified by the removal of the most prominent mark of being a Hindu, is the first step that the novice is obliged to take in order to enter the new order in which he or she would submit to a different code of conduct. The novice was now obliged "not only to attend public worship on the Sabbath, but join in the daily reading of the Scriptures and the study of the first principles of Christianity."[43] In the study of the Bible, the pupil was encouraged "to store his memory with the text" presumably in the belief that it would remove the influence of superstition. Through this and other ways, the "teaching of Christianity.....entered into every aspect of school activity."[44] Throughout this period of apprenticeship, the pupil was prohibited from not only the wearing of ashes but the attending of Hindu temples.[45] Every effort was thus made to "seclude" the pupil "from heathenish influences," to subject him to the Protestant "Rules of Life" with the hope of "constructing a new person, different in their

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[42]HMCC, 102 "The son, putra, is so called, the scriptures say, because he pulls his parents out (tra) from hell (pu)..... Sraddha, the last rites, could be properly performed only by a male descendent. Without Sraddha, the deceased remains forever a preta, a ghost" Klostermaier, 179

[43] ACM, 1849:5; Tennent, Christianity, 148

[44]Ruberu, 167

[45]The missionaries sometimes scouted the local temples to ensure that this rule was being properly enforced. In the early years every school master was required to sign a declaration binding him to refrain from participating in religious rituals which the mission regarded as "heathen." Ruberu, 219

manners and habits of thinking and speaking" that would not be in conformity "with heathenism and the corrupt morals of the country."[46]

Naturally, it is the boarding school that seemed to provide the necessary conditions for the construction of that new person. Here the student was to be "kept as much as possible from the heathen influence until old enough to form a steady Christian character."[47] To achieve this the student's contacts with parents and relatives were strictly limited.[48] The cultivation of a filial relationship between the student and the missionary was encouraged. The missionary was thus officially addressed as Iyah (Father, Dad) or Amma (Mother, Mum). The missionary in turn became the supreme patron of the students. The missionary was sannyasin, guru and Iyah or Amma to every student in the boarding school. In assuming the patron role, the missionary's influence extended beyond the brahmacarya stage to the grhastya, where upon the missionary, during this period under discussion, arranged his or her student's marriage,[49] and found his or her employment in the expanding missionary enterprise.

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[46]ACM, (1849), 8, 34-36; ACM, (1839), 4

[47]"Female Boarding School," ACM, (1839), 6

[48]Ibid, 6; CCE 0/21/9, CMS Archives, Birmingham

[49] On marriage and dowry

"The business of their marriage is superintended by the Missionaries having charge of the school. The girls do not wish to go home to be married, nor would they be allowed. A dowry of 4.10s. is given which is generally expended in the purchase of dress and ornaments, this being about half of what the usages of society require as a national custom" FBS, ACM (1839),8

"With two or three exceptions, all who have remained in the Institution till they were of suitable age to leave, have given good

The grhastya stage is important in missionary thinking because the ultimate aim of the mission was the creation of a Native Agency that may be defined as a lay order of Protestant sannyasins. The grhastya stage is initiated when "pious and educated young men ..... have pious and educated companions."[50] This goal was so central to missionary thinking that when the first Female Boarding School was founded the secular ideal of "raising" females "by education so as to hold their proper rank in Society" remained subordinate to the religious ideal.[51] The pious woman to emerge from the boarding school would no longer "be the slave that she has been for ages"[52]; she would instead be a companion to her husband, sharing the same dignity, which, in the Tamil context, is manifested in table-fellowship; that is, they would be companions, having their "meals together."[53] To her children she would impart the same discipline and instruction that she received, the benefits of which she had learned by her own experience to appreciate.[54] In short, the new woman when she attains

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evidence of a change of heart and have been married to pious native assistants who were educated in mission schools. Seventy-two have been thus married, and are mothers of more than 100 children, whom they train up in a Christian manner." FBS, ACM, 1843: 6

By the year 1850 the vast majority of the students attending this type of institution came from Vellala families. In some cases these families asked the missionary to find their daughters suitable husbands, convinced that by losing their caste, these women had also spoiled their chances of marriage. See ACM, (1849),14; Root, 13

[50] FBS, ACM, (1839),10

[51] cf. ACM, (1849), 8, FBS, ACM (1839), 9,10

[52] J. O'Neil in Tennent, Christianity,158

[53] CCE/M9/537, CMS Archives, Birmingham

[54] Tennent, Christianity,158

grhastya stage would prove to be "the safety and ornament of the native assistant, and with the blessing of God she would be the life and stability of the rising Church."[55]

Finally, apart from the cultivation of a Protestant character, the day and boarding schools, produced in the individual a modern outlook characterised by this-worldly activism. These schools, like all monastic orders, encouraged the training and control of the body for the purpose of producing spiritual fruit in the form of virtue. To this end, a variety of methods were employed by the missions. Among them, prayers and the reading and memorizing of Scripture texts are, of course, recognizably traditional. But the use of time-tables, to attain rigorous control of the body, constitutes an innovation in spiritual training. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the typical Tamil Hindu strove to live a life in conformity with nature, a life meticulously guided by the movement of astral bodies. The Tamil Protestant, by contrast, was using a time-table to overcome the disorder of nature and the sinfulness of the self. The use of the time-table has a long history in Western monasticism and its use requires a sense of both social organisation and control. Since the latter half of the Eighteenth Century, various forms of time-table discipline had contributed to the practical development of institutions such as hospitals, schools and factories.

The time-table that was used in the Protestant boarding schools of Tamil Sri Lanka is a very modern one closely associated with the

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[55]FBS, ACM, (1839), 10

mechanical clock, which, as Marx observed, is the symbol of the nineteenth century European society. Guided by the mechanical clock, time was divided according to hours and minutes, and with the aid of a time-table the rhythm of the body could be raised to new levels, which was in that Century often identified with Protestant activism. It needs to be emphasised, however, that in the missionary schools the time-table was primarily used for the purpose of moral training and the cultivation of Protestant character, but its wider implications nevertheless cannot be overlooked. This point can be illustrated from the Bye Laws 18 and 19 of the Church Mission's Nellore Girls' Boarding School:

Law 18:- That every child punctually attend to the call of the Bell, be present in the school-room at least five minutes after it has been rung.

Law 19:- That the following Programme be carefully attended to and strictly obeyed by all the children.

5 a.m.	Rise and have private prayers
6 a.m.	Morning Prayers
6.30 a.m.	Sweep and clean sleeping rooms, school rooms, dining rooms wash faces, hands
7.30 a.m.	Prepare lessons
8.30 a.m.	Breakfast
9 a.m.	Commence School
1 p.m.	Close School
1.30 p.m.	Dinner
2 p.m.	Needlework
5 p.m.	On the Playground
6 p.m.	Private Devotions
6.30 p.m.	Prepare lessons
8 p.m.	Evening Prayers
8.30 p.m.	Supper
9 p.m.	Bed

According to the missionary accounts, the women who completed this form of sannyasic training were in some important respects different from their compatriots. Of Vairavi Teivanai (Marcia Hutchinson, 1818-1836), a student at Uduvil for fourteen years from 1822, it is said that she "made her *time profitable* by sewing, teaching etc., and was *systematic* in everything." When she was on a mission in the Ramnad district, it is reported that the women who "came round the Resthouses where she stopped....were astonished to hear her read" and "they listened with much attention to what she said about the Christian religion."[56] Similarly, Tangal (Johanna), a student from the female department of a Methodist institution at Jaffna Pattanam was "frequently commended by Mr. Percival to the Committee" because she showed "much independence and simplicity of character", and was "pious, active, energetic and useful, in short well-qualified.... to discharge the duties of her prospective station."[57] These two women were typical of the women coming out of the female boarding schools, and like their respective gurus, Mrs. Winslow and Mrs. Percival, they were bilingual, independent and active, simultaneously assuming the duties of a house-wife and a teacher. The Tamil Protestant woman of this sannyasic background was thus considered "of more value than that of five males."[58] In discharging her duties inside and outside the

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[56]Ibid., 16-17, (italics mine); Several other biographical accounts are provided in pp.11-18

[57]NR21:WMMS Archives, London (italics mine)

[58]Tennent, Christianity, 159

home, she too was expected to assume a decisive role in the construction of the new society.

13.2 Tamil Protestantism: Its Missionary Appeal

By the year 1823, as the foregoing discussion showed, a number of Tamil Protestant renouncers belonging to the three mission societies had become organized into a supra-caste community. Within this community, the guru and the shisya, the Brahman and the Paraya, man and woman, were all, without exception, subject to a common disciplinary code of conduct.[59] Several such communities had been founded in that year in the northern and eastern regions of Sri Lanka, and from then on the numbers grew steadily through the following decades. Some of the earliest Protestant communities were to be found in centres of Hindu orthodoxy. The community founded by Knight was in Nallur, which is often described in missionary records as "the centre of idolatry"; and the one founded by Poor in Tellipalai is not far from the Maviddapuram Kantaswamy Temple, which is regarded as the oldest and the most orthodox temple in the Jaffna province. From these influential as well as not-so-influential centres, the Protestants made effective use of the guru-sishya relationships not only for the transmission of new ideas and the practice of a modern sannyasic mode of life, but also for making a missionary appeal to the Hindu –

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[59]See "Rules of Life: Given by way of a familiar exposition of the Ten Commandments," ACM, (1849), 34-36. Rules of Life is the Decalogue contextualised. Rule number two, for example states, "You should not observe any distinctions of caste among yourselves, but live as the members of one family.....each walking humbly, and esteeming others better than himself."

first to the student and through him to his parents and relatives. The unique position of the Protestant sannyasin during this period allowed him to question many of the assumptions of Tamil society and also to make his own ideas and practices considerably more attractive to the Hindu. In his critique, the sannyasin frequently drew attention to the irrationalities, magic, superstitions, rites and orgiastic practices that pervaded Hinduism. In this manner the Protestant appeal was consciously directed at weaning the Hindu householder from brahmanical ritualism and idolatry and to substitute for him a sober, selfless life in this world, animated by an ethic of service.

The communities founded by the renouncers were also modern, their organisational methods being impregnated with rationality. These religious orders were thus in a unique position to extend their appeal to a wider Hindu audience by the use of more impersonal, rational techniques. As early as the 1820's the Anglican community in Nallur was using the printing press to disseminate the new ideas and practices, and the one in Tellipalai turned it into an impressive industry, which could not have come into being without the discipline obtained under the guidance of the guru-sannyasins. For the print enterprise to be successful, these communities had to produce writers capable of communicating their ideas at the popular level, to the ordinary house-holders. From the 1830's onwards the Protestants had a tremendous fund of scholarship to draw from, both among the Western missionaries and the Tamils.

Among the missionaries, H. R. Hoisington, principal of Batticotta Seminary from 1836-1849, is well known for his translation

and commentary of Sivagnana Bodham. Levi Spaulding and Peter Percival's scholarship commanded respect on both sides of the Palk Strait. Knight and Miron Winslow are still remembered as eminent lexicographers. Samuel Green, who taught medicine, is well known for his translation of Western scientific text books into Tamil. On the Tamil Protestant side there were also men of great learning in both Tamil and English. The first two graduates of the Madras University went from Batticotta Seminary. One is Carroll Visuvanathapillai (1820-1880),[60] the first Tamil editor of the bi-lingual newspaper Morning Star. He was succeeded in this position by C. W. Thamotherampillai, who also made many great contributions to Tamil literature. The third editor was J. R. Arnold, better known as A. Sathasivampillai, (1820-1895) who was converted to Christianity during his third year at the Seminary in 1835 and is best known for his work, The Galaxy of Tamil Poets (1886). With a sense of history and scientific spirit, these three editors wrote on a vast range of subjects, including science, history, literature and religion. Sathasivampillai's Nannerik Katha Sangrakam (Moral Tales), states Prof. Kailasapathy, "has a special place in the history of modern Tamil prose literature in that it was probably the earliest attempt to write short stories in Tamil." Muttukumaru Sithamparapillai, better known as William Nevins (1820-1889) is the author of Niyaya Ilakkanam, the first work of Logic in Tamil. Other well known personalities are Wyman Kathiravelpillai (1829-1904),

[60]J. V. Chelliah, "Mr. Carroll, whose knowledge was reputed to be encyclopaedic, was a man to be reckoned with in controversies, and his controversial booklet in Tamil, Supratheepam, an attack on Hinduism, is considered to be a masterpiece." (51-52)

author of Thamil Col Akarati (Tamil Dictionary) and Evarts Kanagasabaipillai, (1829-1873), author of Tiruvakkupuranam, a popular adaptation of Bible stories.[61]

All these writers were bilingual, having access to a wide range of ideas, which they wished to communicate in prose in an era in which scholarship still warranted versification. They were here following the example of the Bible translators, Baldaeus, Ziegenbalg, Bower and Fabricius, constantly shaping and refining the prose, even inventing new words, in order to translate and communicate those ideas in a style in accord with everyday language. It is precisely for this task that "the cultivation of Tamul Composition" was emphasised in the so-called English Institutions,[62] with the aim of raising up:

> a class of native authors whose minds being enriched by science may be capable not only of embodying European ideas, but of putting them into a handsome native dress..... rendering important aid to the interests of learning and Christianity.[63]

The expectations of the founders were indeed justified, because at the end of the first half of the nineteenth century there were now a "galaxy" of "native authors" writing intelligibly and forcibly in prose-style on science, philosophy, religion and history. It is in recognition of this pool of talented Protestant scholars that the Bible Society of Madras

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[61]M. A. Ratnarajah, Thamil Valartha Kristavar (Jaffna: Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1978); K. Kailasapathy, "Arnold Sathasivampillai and the Tamil Renaissance," Jaffna College Miscellany. Centenary Publication. (Jaffna: Jaffna College, 1981), 81-87; J. V. Chelliah, The Story of Batticotta Seminary, 51-57

[62]The Plan

[63]Ibid

in 1832 proposed that Jaffna Bible Society should undertake the task of preparing a new version of the Bible. The person chosen by Jaffna to be chief translator was Peter Percival. One of his Tamil assistants was Elijah Hoole, who was at that time employed as a Tamil Pandit by the Methodist mission. Another Tamil enlisted for this project is K. Arumugam, who later came to be called Arumuka Navalar. He was at this time a teacher at Percival's school, teaching English in the lower classes and Tamil in the higher classes. The Tentative (or Jaffna) Version of the Bible was produced in 1850 by this translation committee.

The above evidence shows that the Protestants, with the aid of the printing presses, had succeeded in accomplishing at least two objectives by the year 1850. First, in understanding their mission as translation,[64] they had within thirty years transformed the missionary compounds into major centres from which Tamil cultural influence would spread to the surrounding society. An index of that influence of Christianity, as the noted historian, Kenneth Latourette, has observed, would be its effect on language. Certainly, at this level the Protestant influence is readily explicable. It may be recalled that it was the missionaries who introduced the present innovations in language by first compiling Tamil word-books, dictionaries and lexicons and then with their aid, teaching the Tamils how to make rational and critical studies of their language, literature and grammar. From these studies, undertaken in the English schools, the tradition of writing modern

[64]On "mission as translation" as distinct from "mission as diffusion", see Lamin Sanneh's work, Translating the Message, 29, 81-84

prose emerged. The majority of the writers in this tradition were Tamil Protestants, the best among them coming from families with access to traditional learning. With some assistance from the printing machines, prose literature of various kiṅds was produced in the religious and secular fields, by Tamil Protestants, for whom the Bible was the oldest such work, having already gone through several stages of refinement and revision. It is these innovations in the language which occurred in the mission compounds, that were paving the way for the popularization of Tamil. On this ground alone it would not be an exaggeration to say that what was accomplished in the English schools is a revolutionary and epoch-making work in the history of the Tamil language. Consequently, the Tamil Protestants, far from being marginalised outcastes, had emerged as a culturally influential group, some of whom would be remembered as the pioneers who heralded the Tamil "Renaissance" in the middle of the nineteenth century.[65]

Secondly, their mission as translation contributed to the development of a distinct language, a Protestant Tamil, with its own vocabulary and meaning, which began to parallel the non-Christian connotations of Tamil words. This was a period when translators were giving new meaning to certain words, and some of them, like piranavayu (oxygen), would come into very common usage. But there are other terms that have acquired a distinct meaning for Christians. In such cases the translators took over Sanskrit or Tamil terms, emptied them of the old content and endeavoured to fill them with specifically

[65]For a list of Protestant names see K. Kailasapthy, Jaffna College, 82 and J. V. Chelliah, Batticotta Seminary, 51-57

Christian meaning. There was, for example, the Sanskrit word visuvasam which was rehabilitated as the term for faith. In attempting to express their beliefs, the pioneers even invented new terms. Viruttasetanam (circumcision) is one of them. Much of this type of work was pioneered by the Lutherans in South India. In 1713, Ziegenbalg had even compiled a "Book of Hymns set to Malabaric Music," after which a long line of Tamil Christian poets had been producing devotional songs, namely, Tamil lyrics, which made Christian singing intelligible to non-Christians. All these pioneer works were in interdenominational use, which meant that the Tamil Protestants in Sri Lanka, to a great extent, inherited this rich legacy from South India, but in doing so they also left their own mark on the emerging language and identity. In the Tentative Version of the Bible, for instance, the Jaffna Committee used the word Tevan in reference to God. From the sixteenth century onwards several other terms had been in use; Tambiran (the Absolute) by Xavier, Sarvesaran (the Almighty) by Ziegenbalg and Paraparan (Lord of Heaven) by Fabricius. The word Tevan (Skt. Deva and Gk. Theos) was much criticized because in Tamil it is generally used not so much in reference to the Almighty but to any god. Despite the apparent ambiguity of the word, it was never discarded in Sri Lanka.[66] The printing presses of the missionary societies again ensured that the emerging Tamil Protestant language would remain uniform in usage, in preaching, liturgy, singing and private devotions,

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[66]The term Katavul came into vogue after 1936 as a substitute for Tevan. See S. Kulandran, "The Tentative Version of the Bible," The Word Men and Matters vol. V (Jaffna: ISRS, 1985), 56-57

which meant that the Veddha converts in Batticaloa and the Brahman converts in Jaffna would share through that religious language a common Protestant identity.

While it is easier to define the shape of the newly emergent "parallel society" at the cultural level, it becomes considerably more difficult to comprehend it outside the context of worship, at a more behavioural or social level. What the evidence does confirm is that there was at this time a Protestant lifestyle as opposed to caste-lifestyles, and that many caste Hindus who were exposed to it through personal contact with sannyasins, found the heterodox religion both challenging and appealing. In connection with one such sannyasin it has been said that:

> it was his moral and spiritual greatness that made the deepest impression on those who came into contact with him. He seemed to live in a different plane.[67]

This fits the description of the many sannyasins who assumed the role of preaching, teaching and healing during the period under discussion. But this sort of description is still vague in the sense that it could be a reference to a Hindu or Christian sannyasin. What the account does show is that the sannyasic qualities that the Protestants displayed did make a deep impression on potential converts.

At this point it is possible to suggest that a Christian social ethic may account for the differences in the behavioural patterns of the two types of sannyasins. The ethic was expressed in a variety of

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[67]S. Kulandran, A Life Sketch of Canon S. Somasundaram (Jaffna: ACM Press, 1970), 5. The reference is to Samuel Howland of the ACM: Jaffna

humanitarian services as well as symbolic gestures directed towards the underprivileged and the needy. Among them, regular medical services provided through hospitals, and behavioural responses in times of epidemics, are the best documented, although, it is difficult to gauge what sort of impression these acts would have had on the recipients, who, on the whole did not convert to Protestant Christianity. On one occasion, a humanitarian gesture of solidarity may have led to a gain in esteem and then mass conversion to Christianity. When Scott visited the Veddhas in the Batticaloa region, his account shows, he found the traditional life of these people seriously disturbed; he moved freely with them, symbolically acting as some kind of patron figure, which could have contributed to a gain in dignity and self-respect.[68]

But the reason for the conversion of a large number of high-caste men and women must lie elsewhere. Evidence overwhelmingly shows that many Hindu families had a favourable impression of Protestant Christianity on account of the socially improved condition of Tamil women who had come out of the boarding schools. Among Hindus the changing attitudes to female education were thus dramatic, as indicated by the rise in demand for admissions. When the first female boarding school was opened at Uduvil, Mrs. Winslow had literally to "bribe" a few low-caste and poor Vellalar parents before they would send their daughters to receive free board and education. By the time the female boarding school at Nallur opened in 1842, the Tamil attitudes had dramatically changed, and as a result, the Church

[68]cf. NR20: WMMS Archives, London. The mass movement to Christianity occurred later, to Scott's surprise

missionaries had to restrict admission to one hundred and were also able to charge a small fee for admission.

The evidence also indicates that the issue of the treatment of women was central to early Tamil Christian preaching, which was ethical rather than doctrinal in content. The preachers were themselves converts, mostly from the "respectable" caste families, and it is significant that their preaching would make a connection between the sannyasic or ethical aspects of their religion and the protection of women. In describing "The Message Preached" by the "Methodist Pioneers" in the North between 1824 and 1838, it is pointed out that:

> The Tamil preachers were fond of extolling the unselfish lives of Christian missionaries, and asking if their hearers, could show a parallel in Saivism. "Is it a good religion, or a bad," they would say, "that can make a man forget his weariness and hunger in the earnestness of his desire for a blessing on the people of another race?"
>
> The result is :
>
> "You feel quite safe in allowing your daughters to be under the care of the missionaries, but would you trust your daughters to the care of a Brahman?..... You always trust the word of a missionary, but you do not trust each other.... Have we not before our eyes the proof that Christianity has the power to do what Hinduism and Buddhism have shown themselves unable to do, to change the heart, and to make a man a new creature?."[69]

The historian who recorded the above statement observed that "The argument is not altogether without force, but, looking back, we can see that this emphasis on the missionary was a mistake."[70] The

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[69]HMCC, 101-103

[70]Ibid., 103

argument of the Tamil Protestant may be summarized as follows: Tamil Protestantism is a "good religion" (nalla samayam) because it has authentic, indeed demonstrable sannyasic features, and their most evident manifestation is in the protection that Christianity offers to the women. The language of protection instead of emancipation may at first seem to be a curious one, but it was, without doubt, calculated to make Protestant Christianity appealing to a conservative society, and in consequence to elicit a desirable response from the hearers. The language touched on a deeply religious issue and was intended to draw the sharpest possible distinction between the two societies in question, the Hindu society and the "parallel society." Which society is best equipped and able to protect and preserve the chastity of the Tamil women?

Posed in this way, it was hoped that the hearer would recognize the unusual length to which his own society went to protect the womb (the garbhagrha) of the women. For the Hindu parents, the protection of the womb is a major preoccupation in life that begins with the construction of a carefully designed house that could provide refuge from strangers as well as from guests. It was also an endless source of anxiety for those who saw themselves as protectors. The hearer was then reminded that this undesirable situation exists only because his is a society devoid of virtue: the Brahman, the architect and archetype of your society is devoid of any virtue because you cannot entrust your daughters to him. Instead of promoting goodwill and "trust" the caste

society founded by him breeds "suspicion" and "cynicism."[71] A striking contrast to such a society is, as the argument goes, the one built on "trust", in which alone the womb can be protected. The word "trust" used frequently in preaching is a core concept in Christianity, by which it was meant that a society based on "truth" (emeth), that would be expected to show itself in human relationships, by proving in word and deed, to be "faithful, trustworthy and dependable."[72] The Tamil Protestants, indeed, boldly claimed that their own society embodied this transcendent value, a pointed contrast to the values embodied in the (worldly) caste order and the ethic recommended by the Brahman.

This sort of carefully crafted ethical argument is fully consistent with the entire missionary strategy for proselytization. Presented in this way the Protestant challenge to the Hindu was forceful and decisive. A challenge of this nature was undoubtedly directed specifically at the high caste Hindu, and it was from him that the reply would come.[73]

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[71]In a caste society, the need to be vigilant in dealings with one's neighbour, and the necessity of avoiding pollution-prone food and water at the simplest level, probably contributes to the development of a suspicious and even cynical character. "The Jaffna man", it is said, "is suspicious and with regard to his own kind, irredeemably cynical. ...The Jaffna man's cynicism is most scathing when one of his fellows does something generous." W. R. Holmes, Jaffna (Sri Lanka) 1980 (Jaffna: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1980), 9

[72]See above, section 2.3

[73]A parallel society founded on missionary paternalism and guru-sishya relations can be construed as a weakness, but it is a weakness only from a Western point of view, because, neither the Tamil Protestant nor the Tamil Hindu, in the year 1850, raised any fundamental questions about these structural features that have been proven sources of strength and stability. On the distinction between Western and South Asian concepts of patriarchy see S. Chitnis, "Feminism in India," Canadian Woman Studies vol.6, no.1 (1984): 41-47

CHAPTER 14

HINDU REPLICATIONS 1850-1900

14.1 The Problem of Comprehending the Challenge

Hinduism had to respond to the Protestant challenge at two levels. First, at the social level, the Protestant renouncers, deliberately organized as a "parallel society," were proving to be successful not only in transmitting the gospel and a Christian code of conduct, but also in proselytizing the Hindu householder. At this level, the universally valid ethic of the sannyasins would have appeared as a pointed contrast to the caste ethic recommended by the Brahmans, and also more than a few Hindus seeking admission for their children to mission schools appreciated that the former was economically and socially most beneficial. The projection of the sannyasin as the protector of the "womb" again drew attention to the contrast between the two modes of life; and that contrast was readily apprehended by Hindus with little exposure to the precepts and practices of Protestant Christianity.

Secondly, at the ideological level, the Protestants from their strategic bases conducted polemical attacks on Hinduism, upon its world-view and upon its demons of idolatry and superstition; employing both scholarly evidence and the sword of Christian truth;

and they were attacks aimed at undermining the public legitimacy of the existing Hindu beliefs and institutions. These polemics were based on Christian assumptions and Christian models of legitimation. There was consequently a major use of the religious texts, both Christian and Hindu, in support of the missionary arguments. At the ideological level then, the opposition between the two models of life was seen by the missionaries as an opposition between textually grounded Biblical and Hindu values. This textual argument was the perspective from which the main missionary attack on caste was launched. In their arguments, they sought legitimacy for their own code of conduct in Biblical values, such as the value derived from the original spiritual equality of humans, whose ultimate source was the creator-God. This argument was opposed to values ascribed by birth and to their social consequences, particularly in terms of their impact upon women and low castes.[1]

At the commencement of the Protestant missions in Tamil Sri Lanka, the effects from such attacks on Hinduism would have been almost negligible, because few Hindus at that time were familiar with the Protestant models of legitimation, particularly the demand for consistency in religious practice based on textual prescriptions. The Hindus of the day, of course, had their authoritative texts stretching back into antiquity, but their attitude to those texts was very different

[1]The Wesleyan missionary, J. Roberts, for instance, cites numerous texts from standard Tamil works to argue that Hinduism (or the tradition) denies the Tamil women of any social value or status as individuals outside their ascribed social roles as wives, mothers or daughters. Report of Chairman, North Ceylon District, 20 Jan. 1828; NR16; WMMS Archives, London

from the Protestant one. In drafting the prospectus for the Seminary in 1823,the American missionaries thus made the following observation:

> All agree in looking to their ancestors for books which were composed, as they imagine under a kind of inspiration: and have greater degree of sanctity from being quite unintelligible to the common people.[2]

The reference is to the Puranas and the other sacred books available only in "high or poetic Tamul" which few men at that time could read correctly and fewer still could understand. For most Hindus then a religious text, like the Latin Bible in the European Middle Ages, had an aura of authority derived from its unintelligibility, whose content would be mediated by a priesthood with sole access to the text. Under such circumstances, the missionary argument concerning the discrepancy between the religious texts and contemporary religious practices, for example, would appear incomprehensible, apart from the fact that such an argument was drawn from Christian models of legitimation, rather than Hindu.[3]

All this effectively meant that the initial challenge would be largely sociological in character and the Hindu response to the challenge was entirely defensive. Threats were, therefore, often used against potential converts:

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[2]Plan, Batticotta Seminary

[3]Daniel Poor, an innovator in so many respects, was aware of this problem, and therefore, took measures to remove the sanctity attached to the text. To demonstrate publicly his access to the sacred books and to undermine the legitimation of Brahman superiority, he printed and circulated the texts of Kantapuranam among his students and then proceeded to read and explain it to them in the class. H. Root, The American Board in Ceylon, 1816-1916, 12-13

> Fathers threatened to disinherit their children; masters, to dismiss their servants; and persons of high caste to burn down the houses of low caste people, if they attended the means of grace.[4]

Opposition also took the form of attacking the converts of the missionaries:

> The houses of converts were stoned, their belongings were robbed..... The peace of the neighbourhood was at stake, and often Police inspectors and Magistrates had to appear on the scene in order to maintain an atmosphere of calm and goodwill. Christianity to the high caste Hindu was anathema, not only because it destroyed his ancestral faith, but also because it put him on an equal footing with men of low birth.[5]

The early Hindu reaction to Christian encroachment in this sense was sporadic and unorganized, and in most cases confined to the families of converts or potential converts. Confirming this general pattern for the period of 1800-1850, an American missionary record for the year 1849 noted that there was no "active opposition to the efforts of the missionaries, except in cases of conversion to Christianity, when the friends of the converts have sometimes been stirred up to a most intense hatred."[6]

But, curiously, in the very same page, there is a brief reference to

> "the rise of a new class of gooroos, who pretend to adopt in some sense or other, the morals of the New Testament, and, like the deists of modern times, give credit to their own system, for truths first introduced to their acquaintance by Christianity."

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[4]R. Scott, Annual District Report of the Batticaloa Stations, North Ceylon, 1846: NR20, WMMS Archives, London

[5]HMCC, 103; for a case history of a convert subject to kidnapping, beating and banishment, see ACM (1849), 16-17

[6] ACM, (1849), 16

It is probable that the American missionary who recorded that statement was not fully acquainted with this new class of gurus whose activities were centred at Nallur, six miles from the nearest American station at Uduvil. The Nallūr parish was covered by the Church missionaries, and therefore, J. T. Johnson, an Anglican missionary at Chundikuli, stationed one and a half miles from the Nallur Kantaswamy Temple, was probably right when he wrote in 1848 about the state of active opposition to Christianity:

> Certain young men are rising up and endeavouring to revive the straitest sect of Hindus. They have regular weekly sermons in the principal temple at Jaffna, and unusual efforts are being made not only defensively but aggressively[7]

Unlike the old gurus, the "new gurus" had been closely acquainted with Protestant Christianity, thus having fully appreciated the challenge, they responded to it in a typically Hindu way. By doing so they gave notice that the long delayed "dialogue" between the new breed of "renouncer" and the caste bound "man-in-the-world" had finally begun.[8]

14.2 Arumuka Navalar (1822-1879)

Vigorous attempts to counter the Christian influence began in an organized and concerted way with Arumuka Navalar in the year 1848. His efforts on behalf of Saivism eventually evolved into a major revival on both sides of the Palk Strait. Without doubt, Navalar was

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[7]Quoted in HMCC, 580

[8]Dumont, "World Renunciation," 37f

unique for his time, and since then, has come to occupy a prominent place in the history of Tamil Saivism. It has been claimed that without him, Saivism would today be extinct in northern Sri Lanka.[9] A generation after his death, the Tamils remembered him not only as a religious, but also as a social reformer and a great national leader.[10] Virtually every significant development in the nineteenth century, actual or imagined, is now attributed to him and as a result, Navalar has become a symbol of a century of development in Tamil Saivism. It is in this perspective that the traditional biographers have constructed his story:

> Sri La Sri Arumuka Navalar was born at a propitious hour. The Shaiva religion was panting for him. The Thamil language was thirsting for him. Jaffna was longing for him. The Shaiva religion had been in the strangle hold of alien forces for two centuries. Thamil Literature and Grammar were goaled in palmyra leaves. Jaffna had no leader and was groping in the dark. Navalar came, saw and gave them all relief.[11]

In other words, in the Geertzian sense, Navalar belongs to the category of persons such that "Whatever they originally were or did as actual persons has long since been dissolved into an image...." In short they have become "metaphors... human recapitulations of a social transformation."[12] Even "if they did not wholly make the history of

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[9]K. Irattinam (ed.), Navalar Ninaivu Malar, (Navalar Rememberance Souvenir), (Chunnakam: 1938), 15-16

[10]Ibid., 24

[11]Quoted in K. Sivathamby, "Hindu Reaction to Christian Proselytization and Westernization in 19th century Sri Lanka. A study of the educational and socio-relgious activities of Arumuka Navalar (1822-1879)." Social Science Review, vol.1, no.1, (1979), 41

[12]C. Geertz, Islam Observed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 25-27

their times..... [they] embodied it....They sum up more than they ever were."[13]

Arumuka Navalar's biographical details have been ably examined by Sivathamby and others making it unnecessary for us to repeat those details except as they enable us to understand his contributions to the development of the Saivite tradition.[14] To suit our study, his life, like that of most Tamil Protestant leaders, can be conveniently divided into three phases, the first two being his formative years:

(i) 1822-1834: Education and training under traditional Tamil scholars

(ii) 1834-1847: Education and training under Protestant scholars

(iii) 1848-1879: Leader of a "Counter reformation" movement

His traditional credentials are impeccable. Arumukam Pillai was born in 1822 into a wealthy and influential Karkatta Vellalar family in Jaffna. His father, P. Kanta Pillai (1766-1842), held the office of Aratchy at the Jaffna Katcheri for eighteen years, and had knowledge of Portuguese, Dutch and English. The young Arumukam's family, observes Sivathamby, "can safely be described as having responded successfully to the changing employment patterns of the higher caste

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[13]Ibid., 74

[14]Dagmar Hellmann-Rajanayagam, "Arumuka Navalar:Religious reformer or national leader of Eelam," The Indian Economic and Social History Review, vol. 26, no. 2,(1989), 235-256; K. Kailasapthy, "The Cultural and Linguistic Consciousness of the Tamil Community in Sri Lanka," Punathavathy Tiruchelvam Memorial Lecture, (Colombo; New Leela Press, 1982), [pamph.]

yet preserving its orthodoxy."[15] It was a pattern that was first established by a large majority of 'rice-Christians' in the Dutch period, who had comfortably settled down to a dualism in religious practice and profession.[16] His father was understandably keen that his sons should have what he saw as the best in the two worlds, the Tamil and the Western. Kanta Pillai himself was a Tamil scholar, and the boy Arumukam had the privilege of studying under Senathiraya Mudaliar (1750-1840), one of the famous traditional scholars of the day who specialized in certain literary and grammatical texts (with their commentaries).[17]

In his formative years, the next phase was equally crucial, that is when he was sent to Wesleyan Central School in 1834 to receive an English education. This school, later renamed as Jaffna Central College, was located in the town, opposite the Dutch Fort and is about two miles from Nallur Kantaswamy Kovil, from where Navalar would launch his crusade as well as revival. 1834 is also the year that Peter Percival became the principal of the school under whose administration the school was about to emerge as a collegiate institution. Just two years before, the Jaffna Auxiliary of the interdenominational Bible Society, under the leadership of Percival, had undertaken a revision of the whole Bible.[18] The Bible Society together with The Jaffna Religious

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[15]Sivathamby, 61

[16]cf. above, section 8.2

[17]Kailasapthy, Jaffna College Miscellany, 85. S. Mudaliar is also a guru of Sanmuka Sattainbiyar (1794-1845) who taught Tamil at Batticotta Seminary

[18]D. Rajarigam, The History of Tamil Christian Literature, 43

Tract Society, instituted in 1823 by Joseph Knight, was in 1834 able to expand considerably its work of translating and printing following the installation of the newly enlarged and improved American printing press.[19] So in the year that Navalar entered the Central School, all three societies were pooling their resources in order to step-up their religious advocacy, and soon he would have the rare privilege of studying this enterprise from inside, as a shisya of a Protestant guru.

Peter Percival very quickly recognized the young boy's abilities, and employed him in 1838 as a pupil-teacher. Arumukam was now learning English in the higher classes and teaching Tamil in the lower classes. Before long he was also engaged as a translator, and "many Christian tracts translated by him were distributed among Hindus."[20] Whether the young Arumukam considered the offer an honour or not, in 1841, he accepted an appointment as an assistant in the Bible translation enterprise. This was a fairly sophisticated enterprise for that time, undertaken by a committee of competent scholars, who would contribute their distinctive knowledge to the common pool. To gain acceptance, the work would have to supersede the many versions and revisions of the Bible already in circulation. In style and idiom the Fabricius version printed in 1798 had set a high standard, which inspired the poet Vadanayaga Sastriar to call it "the golden translation of the immortal Fabricius."[21] In other words, the nineteen year old

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[19]Ibid., 29

[20]Cartman, Hinduism in Ceylon, 55

[21]Neill, History of Christianity in India vol. 2, 44

Arumukam was from now on working closely with a team of missionary and Tamil scholars, who were using modern language aids such as dictionaries and lexicons – as opposed to the traditional practice of memorizing the metrical Tamil vocabularies, called Nikandus or Nikandukal, to produce a prose work written in simple, yet respectable vernacular, that could be placed in the hands of the common people. He would have observed that an enterprise of this nature, if it was to succeed, required a great deal of flexibility and creativity in the use of the language, which had already become the hallmark of the Bible translation process.[22]

All the indications are that more than a professional relationship existed between Percival and his assistant throughout this phase. Like all other students and teachers, Arumukam participated in the obligatory Christian rituals. For thirteen years he learned Christian theology while submitting himself to the Methodist disciplinary code of conduct. Not surprisingly, "The puritanism of the Methodist Church had a lasting impact on Navalar."[23] As far as Percival was concerned, he could see nothing heathen about his puritan student, and thus treated him as a promising novice, and a loyal shisya. The relationship between the two was so close that Arumukam, even after his resignation from the school, to work for the revival of Saivism, was able to obtain a testimonial from Percival concerning his competence which was filed in the case he had instituted against Ramalinga

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[22]Rajarigam,11ff

[23] Sivathamby, 63

Swamikal.[24] It is precisely this relationship that was built on loyalty and submission, which gave the shisya the privilege and access to the knowledge of "the methods, the organization and the propaganda of Christians."[25]

The above account shows that all his activities in the second phase of the formative period can be summed up in Arumukam's role as a novice, whereby he entered a Protestant society, submitted to a guru, adopted a distinct code of conduct through which he gained access to a certain form of knowledge. He was at this stage almost entirely at the receiving end of knowledge and training. The Jaffna or Tentative version of the Bible to which he did contribute much, eventually had to be shelved on the grounds that it did not adequately meet the requirements of the "parallel society." Apart from its lack of simplicity in the style and idiom which is a basic requirement of an egalitarian society, the idiom of the Jaffna version tended to ignore the distinct religious language of the Protestants that had already emerged, to which the Fabricius version had contributed most. But for Arumukam, the involvement in the Bible translation project proved to be an invaluable experience.[26] Sabapathy Kulandran, the late bishop of the Jaffna Diocese of the Church of South India, has drawn attention

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[24]Ibid., 62

[25]Cartman, 55

[26]Kulandran, "The Tentative Version of the Bible," The Word, Men and Matters, vol. V, (Jaffna: ISRS, 1985), 74-5, originally published in Tamil Culture, vol. 7, no. 3, (July 1958)

to the link between this role as translator and the next stage in the shisya's life:

> Odd as it may seem, however, the association of Navalar with the project of Bible translation had greater influence on Saivism than on Christianity. Percival's introduction of Navalar into the workings of the Christian missionary movement gave him an inside knowledge of how a religion is best propagated in modern conditions. His introduction into the literary circles of South India gained him many important contacts on the continent. With this invaluable training he severed his connexion with Percival's school soon after the publication of the Tentative version and embarked upon a campaign of breathless zeal for the revival of Saivism throughout South India and Ceylon, that ended only with his death in 1879.[27]

With his formative years ended, in the final phase Arumukam comes into his own. He now bears the honorific title of "Navalar," meaning "orator" or "the silver-tongued," and would be referred to by everyone as Arumuka Navalar. He immerses himself in ceaseless activity in the form of preaching, teaching and humanitarian service, mirroring precisely the activities of the Protestant sannyasins. But Navalar had a new message, his activities were now being preformed in a specifically Hindu context, and they eventually came to represent a direct protest against Christianity.

In defining the Hindu context of his work Navalar saw the chief end of life as love and service for Siva, which begins when one obtains "Siva deeksha," "the initiation ...into Saiva religion by a guru."[28] Since anyone who belongs to the right caste[29] qualifies for this initiation, it

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[27]Ibid., 75

[28] Saiva Siddhanta Catechism pt.1, (1986), 15

[29]Ibid., 16

alone cannot be taken as a mark of one's dedication to the cause of Siva. What distinguished Navalar from most Saivites was that he pursued his initiation through to the third stage on the "Nirvana deeksha"[30] which was considered the sannyasic stage. As a result, he was seen as a religious leader, a jivanmukta, worthy of emulation. Being a man of means, his wealth would, in the spirit of the sannyasin, be poured into the cause of propagating Saivism in Sri Lanka and South India.

Arumuka Navalar was a great preacher, and wanted preaching to play a paramount role in reviving Saiviam, even though it had not earlier played a paramount part in Saiva worship. He defined preaching in terms of exegesis and exposition of religious texts, and through his personal example started a tradition of "street sermons."[31] Every Friday, on the Hindu Sabbath, he would gather his fellow Saivites around him at Vannarponnai and "give a sermon on Saivite doctrine, and he did the same during his journeys in Tamilnadu."[32] In Jaffna, this practice of expository preaching (katapirasangam) became so well established as a temple ritual that it continues to this day. In the temples he also introduced group singing, songs being sung by children or adult groups before a pucai and in between pucais in Tamil, and

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[30]Sivathamby, 64

[31]Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 237

[32]Ibid., 237-238

thus made Hindu worship more congregational in character than it had been before.[33]

Expository preaching, because it aims to popularize textual religion, requires that the sacred texts are in prose rather than verse. In 1849, two years after leaving Protestant missionary service, Navalar became the owner of a printing press purchased in India. Between the years 1849 and 1852 he had published Periya Puranam, Nannul, Kolai Marutal, Nikantukals, Nirottakayaka Antati[34] and three Palar Patam (Lessons for Children).[35] By rendering Periya Puranam, a epic of more than four thousand verses, into prose, Navalar would become the first to popularize this work on the lives of the nayanmars. The publication of the grammatical works Nannul and Nikantukals with his own commentary, meant that Navalar in 1850 still preferred the time-honoured practice of memorizing the metrical Tamil vocabularies to the use of dictionaries and lexicons, as aids to the study of literature. He wrote in chaste, faultless and simple Tamil, and established new standards in prose writing and literary scholarship. Owing to these accomplishments, the Saivite society on both sides of the Palk Strait would soon hail him as "the father of modern Tamil prose" as well as "the originator of public speaking."[36]

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[33]He composed many "soul-stirring" kirtanaikal cf. Mu. Varadarajan, A History of Tamil Literature (New Delhi: Sahitya Akademi, 1988), 248

[34]The author of Nirottakayaka Antati is a Virasaiva sannyasin who lived in the seventeenth century. cf. Mu. Varadarajan, A History of Tamil Liteature, 206

[35] Thananjayarasingham, The Educational Activities of Arumuga Navalar, (Colombo, 1974), 32

[36]Kailasapathy, 4. It appears that Professor Kailasapathy himself endorses these claims.

In 1846, while still engaged in full-time Christian missionary service, Navalar began giving private tuition at his Nallur residence to the Saivite children in the neighbourhood, which, in 1848 led to the founding of the first Hindu school, Saiva Prakasa Vidyasalai, at Vannarpannai. Two others were established subsequently within the Jaffna peninsula, one at Kopay and the other at Point Pedro. In 1864 he also founded a Saiva Prakasa Vidyasalai at Citamparam, South India and made plans to set up a Vedagama Seminary in the same town for the training of Saiva missionaries. The main purpose of these schools was to provide instruction in Saivism and to raise up genuine Saivites.[37] All these schools adopted the monitorial system of teaching and used printed books and stationary.

The content of education in these schools was much narrower than that available in the Christian mission schools. In other words the education offered at Navalar's schools was almost entirely religious. The Vannarpannai school had only eight classes, and education was provided in the vernacular. Instruction in the first three grades was based solely on Palar Padam – books 1, 2 and 3. The pupil was first taught "Arithmetic" at grade five, and then "History and Geography of Hindustan" at grade eight.[38] Conspicuously absent in the school curriculum was English language, which was by then becoming popular among the wealthy, influential and even orthodox Hindu families. The low level of enrollment at his schools shows that

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[37]Thananjayarasingham, 32-33

[38]Ibid.,19-21

Navalar, during his life-time was never able to counteract the influence of Protestants in the field of education. The period between 1865 and 1880, in fact, saw a rapid growth in the number of Protestant schools and pupils, and "also of considerable success in the gaining of converts through the schools, especially through the Girls' Boarding schools."[39] Navalar's successors, Sir Ponnambalam Ramanathan, S. Rajaratnum and others were far more successful in the education field, and eventually proved themselves to be effective in stemming the Protestant tide. Ramanathan's speech in 1884 at the Legislative Council, where he attacked the work of the managers of Christian schools, may be taken as the first serious challenge to the Protestants in the field of education and an important turning point in the history of religious education in Tamil Sri Lanka.

Finally, Navalar's sacrificial life in the service of Siva was extended to humanitarian service. K. Kailasapathy has in this connection, placed Navalar among the great social reformers of the nineteenth century. He thus speaks of "the paramount role played by Navalar," in this area, "that went beyond that of any other Tamil religious reformer of his time."[40] It is pointed out that during the famine and the cholera epidemic of 1876, Navalar "organized relief measures – providing meals for the needy," and his commitment to this kind of work was so strong that he "unhesitatingly threw his weight behind the campaign against the Government Agent of Jaffna,

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[39]HMCC, 313

[40]Kailasapathy, 5

W. C. Twynam, whose measures were extremely unpopular."[41] By the term "campaign," Kailasapathy is referring to a petition against Twynam, sent to the Governor in 1878.[42] Also, Navalar was instrumental in the founding of the Jaffna and Batticaloa Commercial and Agricultural Company Limited, whose prime purpose was to develop agriculture in the Trincomalee District.[43]

14.3 The Significance of Navalar's Mission

Underlying the obvious similarities between the Protestant and Hindu missions, were differences that are of central significance to the present discussion. The Protestant sannyasins in their three-fold activity – preaching, teaching and humanitarian service – were inclusive, in that they would admit all into their ranks. By contrast there was a strict exclusivism practised by Navalar. When he began his first school, for instance, all the pupils enrolled in the first class were from the upper castes: three Brahmans, three Vellalars, and one Cetty; (as inferred from the name endings: Pillai, the titular ending for Vellalars, Iyer, for Brahmans, and Cetty for Cetties.)[44] During the severe famine in 1876, Navalar distributed food only to Vellalars, and certainly not to the low castes, whose plight under those circumstances

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[41]Ibid., 5

[42]Sivathamby, 5

[43]Kailasapathy, 5

[44]S. Thananjayarajasingham, Navalar Panikal (The Life and Work of Arumuka Navalar), (Peradeniya: Hindu Students Society, University of Ceylon, 1964)

would have been worse than that of others.[45] The food distribution was in line with his teaching in the fourth Palar Padam, that requires cattiram (gifts, alms) to be given not only to Brahmans, but to the deserving Vellalar poor as well.[46]

In the end, the rationale for this caste-like behaviour is to be found in the temple – the central symbol of the caste system, both in its architecture and in its social organization.[47] The temples that Navalar chose for his operations were all exclusively dedicated to various members of Siva's family. These were the orthodox, agamic temples of the Great Tradition as opposed to the folk temples of the Little Tradition. From these temples, wearing "a punul of pure gold,"[48] he aimed his teaching and preaching at people of respectable family and caste. His intention was, in part, to acquaint them with a strictly textual religion based on the Siva Agamas and the Puranas connected to Siva, so that they may be enabled to fulfil their ritual duties correctly and be proper Saivites. Taking a cue from the Protestants, Navalar was able to simplify the requirements of textual religion by the publication of Saiva Vinavidai (Saivite Catechism; 1873). Here, in a series of questions and answers, he not only provides a definitional statement about the faith – in Pati, Pasu and Pasam – but also a description of the daily Agamic ritual for a Saivite householder down to the last detail. In

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[45]Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 248

[46]Ibid., 242

[47]See above, section 6.6

[48]Thananjayarajasingham, 74

short, the upper castes were encouraged to adopt purer lifestyles and customs.

In pursuit of these goals, he initiated a campaign against the priests, particularly the Brahmans attached to the prestigious Kantaswamy Kovil at Nallur. In one of his early pamphlets, he wrote: "If one has ignorant and ill-trained priests perform the rites, god will not respond, and further there will be harm to the world itself, according to the Siva Agamas."[49] In reminding them of their ritual duties, which was service to high-castes, he harshly criticized those who employed low-caste people for certain ritual functions; and who during festivals and special puja times take up all the best space for their own rituals while Vellalars have to share limited space with people from low and untouchable castes, thereby being subjected to considerable ritual pollution.[50]

It needs to be appreciated here that caste was not far from the mind of Arumuka Navalar when he attempted to make the masses accept textual forms of Hinduism. The campaign against the Brahmans was not an attempt to abolish the caste system; on the contrary, it was an effort to return them to textual religion, and thereby keep them in their proper place in the varna order. This move was crucial to his larger strategy, which was the reassertion of the power and status of the Vellalars at a time when it was being successfully challenged by the

[49]Quoted in V. Kanakaratnam, "The Saiva Siddhantic Foundation of Navalar's Work" in Arumuka Navalar Centenary volume, ed. K. Kailasapathy (Jaffna, Tirumakal Press, 1979), 107

[50]Arumuka Navalar, Palar Patam book 4, 28th edn. (Madras, Saiva Siddhanta, 1949), 70-71, 89, 151

Protestant missions. The Brahman, he appreciated, may well be powerless as he was in Sri Lanka, residing in his quarters in the temple, from where he would emerge to perform ceremonies at the temple or at the homes of the Vellalars, but without him the Vellalar cannot remain either a Vellalar or a Hindu. Historically, the two have needed each other and have defined each other's status and honour in the caste hierarchy. Also, by protecting and securing the status of the Brahman at the apex of the system, Navalar was keen to define the relative position of others, including the ones at the bottom. His writings show that there was among Tamils a fair amount of confusion as regards ritual duties,[51] and therefore he set out to educate them in the temple, through the correct performance of pucai (pujas) and the organization of tiruvilas (festivals). It is the Vellalars who were to benefit most from these missionary efforts. They were traditionally regarded as Sudras in the varna order, although, as it has been shown, for all practical purposes, they may be thought of as serving the functions of the Vaisya or the Ksatriya of the region. Until Navalar began his mission their status had remained somewhat anomalous. He ascribed to them the right to read the Vedas and to wear the Punul. Implicitly therefore, he elevated them to the status of the twice-born. This is, of course, a well known "brahmanical" device employed by the lower castes to advance their claims within the framework of varna and asrama.[52] In advancing these claims on behalf of the Vellalars,

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[51]See his early pamph., Yalpana Samaya Nilai (The State of Religion in Jaffna) !st. edn. 1851 (Jaffna: 1872)

[52]Weber calls this method the "usurpation" of status and honour in Religion of India 187-188; while Srinivas calls it "sanskritisation."

Navalar was aware of the independent power and status of the Karaiyar, who too had strong claims to Ksatriya status. To put the Karaiyar in their "proper" place he would once again appeal to the texts. Citing puranic and other literary evidence, Navalar referred to them as an "unclean" and "polluted" community.[53]

This call for ritual purity also had a transformative effect on the Hindu ideology in general. In the second half of the nineteenth century the two most creative processes in Tamil Sri Lanka were, arguably, Christianisation and Sanskritisation. In both cases the values advocated were expressed in Tamil texts, and in each case these values were mediated by predominantly Vellalar agents. It is possible here to argue that the process of Christianisation, initiated by the Protestant missionaries was a catalyst that awakened the indigenous process of Sanskritisation. When translating their message into Tamil, the missionaries unconsciously showed a marked preference for the Great Tradition of Hinduism (or Sanskritic Hinduism) over the more emotional popular traditions. In attempting to express the Christian concepts in Tamil, the terms in reference to God, Tevan, Sarva Iswaran, Paraparam and Karthar, were all taken from the Great Tradition; whereas the word Satan was used to translate the similar sounding word, Sattan in Tamil which was one of the names of a deity in the Little Tradition, who is also called Iyanar. Since "translation" implies some measure of "commensurability," some amount of base

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[53]"Saiva Virotam," Navalar Pirapanta Tiratu, ed. S. Kailasa Pillai, (Jaffna: Saiva Paripalana Sabai, 1954)

agreement,[54] it is only to be expected that the Protestants would single out folk religious practices as "devilish," and consequently launch a campaign against what they saw as "devil worship." In this "anti-orgiastic"[55] campaign, the Protestants who were in a real sense the opponents of Brahmans, became, unwittingly, their allies.

This is why Navalar, a propagandist for brahmanical religiosity, was able to deploy the commensurability thesis so effectively against the missionaries, when he published in 1855, the Siva Dhushana Parikarum:

> It defended Saivism and attacked Christianity. It did not adopt the old subterfuge that both Saivism and Christianity were from God, and that the former was intended for the Saivites and the latter for Christians. It undertook to prove that every one of the distinctive articles of the Saivite belief and observance had its parallel and warrant in the credenda and ceremonial set forth in the Christian Scriptures.[56]

Similarly, in a small pamphlet entitled Cuppirapotam (The Wisdom of Subramanian),[57] written against the missionary influence in Jaffna, he compared Subramanian, (the Sanskritised Murukan) favourably with Jesus Christ. Then a successor work, Cuppiratipam (The Light of Subramanian) was published in response to the missionaries' criticism of the first. In these writings we see Navalar as a

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[54]Stanley J. Tambiah, Magic, Science, Religion, and the scope of rationality (Cambridge: Cambridge Unversity Press, 1990), 124-125

[55]Weber, 137-39

[56]Kanagasabai Wilson "The Missionary Enterprise and the Hindu Reaction" in A History of the Methodist Church in Ceylon 1814-1964, 581

[57]Jaffna, (1949) [reprint]

modernist rather than a traditionalist, in that he responded to the missionary criticism by substantially reinterpreting the earthy stories of seduction and illegitimate love associated with Murukan, in order to deflect criticism and also to make them palatable to the new moral and social climate being created by missionary education. He argued that Subramanian (Kantaswamy, Murukan) should be seen as a spiritual god rather than a god of flesh and blood.[58] In the same manner he argued that the Kantapuranam has to be read together with the Agamas to be understood in its true sense as deception and allegory,[59] owing to the fact that Kantaswamy is identical with the Siva of the Agamas.

This preference for the symbolic or allegoric as opposed to the literal meaning of the texts tended to push Saivism strongly in the direction of theism, and possibly, even toward deism. So in the first Palar Padam, we are told in clear and unmistakable terms that there is "one God" who is "omnipresent," "omniscient," "omnipotent," "merciful"; he "gave us the Sun, Moon and the Stars" and "protects us while we are awake and at sleep."[60] God is here seen as a unique Creator removed from his creation, not very different from the Christian account of the relations between God and the world. Furthermore, Navalar's God, although remaining essentially separate from the world is able to act in the world as Providence, exercising

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[58]Cuppiratipam, (Jaffna, n.d.), 2

[59]Ibid., 8

[60]"Summary," Thananjayarajasingham, Educational Activities, 36

some sort of moral government. Writing to Governor Anderson on 15 December, 1852, he acknowledges "with gratitude the important advantages which his countrymen have derived from Her Majesty's Government under whose protection a gracious Providence has placed the inhabitants of this island."[61] Perhaps this conception of God is not far from his mind when he requires that the priests "should be free from 'sin' in the western sense" when performing the temple rituals.[62] Again using the Tamil Protestant term pavam for sin, he demanded that the devadasis, Siva's courtesans, should lead a blameless life for the sake of preserving the purity of the temple. Navalar was clearly disturbed by the practice of female dancers in the temples and publicly voiced his opposition to this "immoral tendency" in society:

> With reference to the practice of Dancing girls frequenting Temples or Festival, it is well known that I object to their presence and condemn in the strongest terms their encouragement.[63]

In this manner he continued the campaign initiated by the Protestants that soon led to the disappearance of this institution from the Jaffna province.

Navalar's belief in a God of absolute purity, the opposite of sin and evil, who occasionally acted in the world as Providence, did significantly contribute to the decline in the popularity of the

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[61]Ibid., 15

[62]Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 242

[63]Letter to the Ceylon Patriot, 31 August, 1872, published in Thananjayarajasingham, Educational Activities, xii-xiv

intermediate gods and goddesses in the divine hierarchy. Traditionally, the Hindu pantheon constituted three types of beings. One type are the mostly beneficent beings. Another type are deities that are alternatively beneficent and maleficent, angry and merciful; often have specifically defined powers such as those over rain, illness and human fertility, and are widely propitiated. And a third type are almost entirely maleficent and dangerous to the worshippers.[64] In Navalar's scheme, the traditional pantheon emerges considerably modified, reflecting a shift toward monotheism. His demand for ritual purity and the prohibition of orgiastic practices contributed to the decline in the cult of the middle group of deities. In this he was particularly successful in leading a campaign against what he called that "Jaina goddess" or "demoness" Kannaki, which contributed to the disappearance of the cult in the Jaffna province.[65] The introduction of American medicine probably assisted his campaign, since it made the traditional techniques of propitiation for coping with illnesses obsolete. At the same time Navalar defined Kantaswamy (Murukan, Subramanian) as identical with Siva, which constituted a movement in the direction of purified and universal identity for that deity.[66]

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[64]cf. S. Wadley Shakti: Power in the Conceptual Strucutre of Karimpur Religion (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 127-148

[65]With the expulsion of the "demoness," Navalar was able to substitute in her place a "pure," Sanskritic goddess named Saraswati. Being a goddess of learning, her arrival seemed timely, and the worship of Saraswati became common in both the Hindu home and the Hindu school. Since the Americans did the most to the spread of literacy and education, they also paved the way for the spread of the cult.

[66]In one sense Navalar is a typical nineteenth century reformer: The emphasis on monotheism is an attempt to create a special moral sphere for humanity and is consistent with his more moralistic reinterpretation of Saivism. By exorcising the middle ranking gods, he divests some aspects of the world of sacred significance to

The rise and fall of deities within the pantheon discloses in this case a traditional process at work, which shows that Navalar, when he borrowed ideas from Protestants, did so in a distinctly Hindu manner, to integrate them into a dominant Hindu framework of ideas and ethos. Consequently, whatever the resulting changes, they became an integral part of the traditional process, namely, Sanskritisation – an upward movement along the purity-impurity axis. This, as it was argued at the beginning of this discussion[67], is a holistic process, which meant that the principle of purity and impurity that orders the divine hierarchy also orders the human hierarchy. Such a principle of ordering reality requires that structural changes at the top are replicated at the bottom. From this perspective, the homology between the rise of Kantaswamy in the divine order and the upward movement of Sudras – his favoured devotees – in the human order, is not a matter of coincidence, because both changes belonged to the single process of Sanskritisation, and were validated by the same principle. Navalar's role in all this may be likened to the role of a Brahmans priest in that he mediated divine patterns to the caste society, but because of his peculiar circumstances, was compelled to borrow from his opponents, new and modern elements in order to give vitality to the whole cultural process.

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make the appropriation of modern medicines and the pursuit of modern science more meaningful.

[67]See above, section 1.4

CHAPTER 15
CONCLUSION : THE DIALOGUE IN RETROSPECT

The dialogue between the sannyasin and the man of caste seen here in terms of challenge and response, discloses certain recurring patterns in Tamil history. In many respects, the developments in the Tamil society at the beginning of the modern period have their precedents and resonances in the antecedent Cola and Pallava eras, from which the modern Tamil-Vellalar civilisation claims to draw its main inspiration and example.

The dialogue initiated by the heterodox sannyasins during the early medieval period was not so much an orderly exchange as a conflict and became an insoluble one at that. That was when the "heterodox" movements such as Buddhism and Jainism, organised and founded as communities, had become successful not only in transmitting their philosophical wisdom, devotional religiosity and ascetic mode of life, but also in making missionary appeal to the lay public. The response to the "heterodox" challenge came from those who saw themselves as guardians of orthodoxy, an alliance of Brahmans and Vellalars. The strategy for counteracting the missionary challenge thus emerged from the agricultural core-areas, called central nadus, where the orthodox, agamic-temples were concentrated, which were also centres of royal power and patronage.

The strategy adopted by the orthodox establishment was, to use Dumont's words, one of progressive "integration" and "aggregation" of elements introduced by the heterodox, which is rooted in Hinduism's characteristic genius of "including and hierarchising" new components. The aim of this strategy was to enable the orthodox religion to compete more effectively with the heterodox, while remaining faithful to brahmanical norms and practices. Such a course, if it was followed through, would effectively transform orthodox Hinduism into a missionary religion.

It gave rise to two notable developments in the Hindu tradition between the seventh and tenth centuries. One was the establishment of mathas modelled on Buddhist monastic orders. In launching his "counter-reformation" strategy, Sankaracarya borrowed from the Buddhist bhikkhus, elements of their organizational structure and disciplinary codes, but he incorporated them into the Hindu framework in order to make the vedic presumptions of varna and asrama the foundation of lay-life, of which his ascetic renouncers would be the guardians and enforcers. The Saiva mathas were deliberately organized for this purpose, which in effect became an agency for proselytizing and colonizing the border regions, particularly the secondary zone.

The other development was the incorporation of the bhakti cult into orthodox temple rituals. Previously associated with Buddhist saviour cults and Buddhist lay religiosity, the nayanmars, the famed poet-singers of Saivism, who led a successful campaign against the Buddhists, used bhakti as a vehicle for popularizing the cult of Siva.

Soon temples dedicated to Siva and his family became centres of pilgrimage and popular religiosity. Apart from serving a religious end, bhakti, because it was incorporated into orthodox temple rituals, made the varna system more workable and acceptable to the discontented masses.

The popularization of varna related codes of conduct by Sankaracarya and the nayanmars shows how the elements introduced by the heterodox had become stimulants and ingredients in a larger process, variously called Sanskritisation, Vellalisation and Brahmanisation. The labels refer to the socio-economic process underlying religious revivalism. The spread of sanskritic cultural forms in this sense coincided with a major phase in agricultural expansion from the "core" to the "secondary" zone. It involved reclamation of new tracts of land by Vellalar peasants, contributing to an increase in land resources, which in turn led to an enlargement of opportunities to the peasant colonists. The pursuit of such economic goals requires the labour of many, which in turn was dependent on the successful assimilation of non-peasant folk into a peasant sponsored or dominated social order. Religious revivalism and agrarian expansion thus came to coincide with the Tamil social formation that adopted brahmanical forms of legitimacy. The result is the emergence of a new social order in the tenth century that was distinctly hierarchical and brahmanical in character, in which the Brahmans and the Sudras were accorded high ritual status, possessing a ritual entitlement to control the lower castes. The ritually polluted, left-hand (Idankai) division of the lower castes was composed of merchants and craftsmen, and the

available evidence suggests that these people were formerly Buddhists and Jains. Hence their designation as polluted subordinate castes may seem as a crowning of the victory of orthodoxy over heterodoxy, which sealed the fate of Buddhism in the Tamil country, bringing to an end a most creative and productive period of dialogue.

Another creative period in the history of Tamils was to begin with the arrival of Anglo-Saxon Protestant missionaries in Tamil Sri Lanka in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Unlike the state-backed pedroados and Predikaants who preceded them, these men and women, supported by voluntary societies in the West, deliberately chose to operate within the traditional rather than the colonial milieu, and in making that crucial decision, they also implicitly chose the path of dialogue rather than coersion or violence as the rightful approach to mission.

The spiritual background of these missionary pioneers is to be found in the interdenominational Holiness movement of the eighteenth century, which may be seen as a movement that laicized or popularized monastic disciplines of a previous age. It is this background that made them – "inner directed"(David Reisman), and resolute in character – practice a form of "this-worldly asceticism" (Max Weber), and appear in the Tamil milieu as a kind of "modern sannyasins" (Louis Dumont). It is noteworthy that they would begin their career as itinerant preachers, a role in which they could hardly be distinguished from the wandering bhikkhu sannyasins who had also, centuries before, brought their distinct doctrines to this island.

A patent lack of converts by preaching made them draw attention to obstacles which seemed to exist in the Tamil religious and social system, and soon led to an increasing emphasis on the need to produce changes in the society preparatory to preaching the gospel. The observation led to the establishment of what is widely acknowledged as an impressive network of schools covering the northern and eastern parts of Sri Lanka, offering instruction at primary, secondary and collegiate levels, with a clearly defined religious goal, to create a mental and social environment more conducive to the spread of Christianity. An analysis of the secondary and collegiate boarding schools, male and female, showed that they were organized as monastic communities subject to a disciplinary code of conduct, to provide mental and moral training and to produce converts. They were essentially brotherhoods and sisterhoods who through collective rituals not only marked themselves off from the larger society but also reinforced each other's aspirations in the pursuit of a taxing religious goal. In the year 1823, which could be conveniently fixed as the Pentecost of Tamil Protestant Christianity, several such communities, although small in numbers, could be found, spread across the secondary zone.

The Vellalars were the dominant caste in the secondary zone. They were excessively caste conscious, while in Jaffna province, they were also preponderant in numbers and wealth. Upper-caste parents, mostly Vellalars, were naturally reluctant to send their sons and daughters to these schools, particularly boarding schools, that would subject them to a dangerously egalitarian code of conduct. Owing to

these barriers, the free boarding schools in 1823 had to, in addition, offer material incentives to attract pupils. But a decade later the prevailing attitudes toward the Protestant sannyasins and their educational institutions had dramatically changed. So when the Female Boarding School at Nallur was opened it, had to restrict the numbers admitted to one hundred, and had no difficulty in charging a small fee from mostly Vellalar parents.

The new willingness among Tamils to leave the caste society, to enter a special society, to be freed from the authority of their parents in order to become shisyas of Protestant gurus, indicates that the Protestant sannyasins were becoming increasingly successful in making a missionary appeal to the Hindu householders. The favourable attitudes displayed by Hindus in general reflected the ability of the Protestant sannyasins to present the gospel within a wider cultural framework. In consequence, the caste-Hindus were drawn into the special society for two significant reasons.

First, in an argument designed to appeal to conservative Hindus, the Tamil Protestant preachers boldly affirmed the moral superiority of the sannyasin over the Brahman by projecting the former as the protector of the sacred womb. It was a forceful reminder to the Tamils that they, in holding fast to the ancient doctrine of chastity which requires the woman to be surrounded with carefully controlled and ordered social relations, were now willing to entrust them to the care of perfect strangers. "But would you trust your daughters to the care of a Brahman?," they would ask their hearers. Employing very earthy language, this essentially moral argument aimed at, on the one hand,

validating the credentials of the sannyasin and his message and, on the other hand, undermining the moral authority of the Brahman and the legitimacy of the system he represented. In short, it is a typically sannyasic argument that attempted to persuade the householder to compare and contrast the universally valid ethic of the sannyasin with the code of conduct recommended by the Brahman.

As to the second reason why caste-Hindus were drawn into the special society, the bilingual communities had within a decade after their founding, emerged as repositories of Tamil learning, and were by then broadly recognized as cultural pace-setters. This was the fruit of the Protestant devotion to the vernacular translation of scripture, accompanied with a no less significant commitment to raising up Tamil Christian leaders who "could hold their own with the learned" traditional scholars of the day. These communities were now pioneering a more rational approach to the study of Tamil language and literature, while creating and refining flexible prose for the purpose of disseminating religious and scientific ideas of the West. The study of English too had an important place, but greater emphasis was laid on the study of Tamil – an emphasis which would not, however, continue indefinitely. These two reasons taken together, the moral stature of the sannyasin combined with the quality of education imparted by his community, was good enough to persuade parents from the most orthodox sections of the Hindu society to send their sons and daughters in the form of novices to these sannyasic communities, knowing full well that once their children entered these communities, they would be subject to a "heterodox" code of conduct.

It is precisely under these circumstances that Arumuka Navalar (1822-1879) became a shisya in 1834 of Peter Percival – "The greatest Tamil Scholar Missionary Methodism has ever had" – for a period of thirteen years. During these years he not only received knowledge and sannyasic training imparted by his guru, but was able to observe from inside, from a privileged position, the operation of a modern missionary movement.

An organized Hindu response to the Christian challenge came in 1848, soon after Arumuka Navalar resigned from Christian missionary service in order to dedicate himself fully to the reform and revival of Saivism. His revival work revealed certain familiar patterns rooted in Hinduism's characteristic genius of "including and hierarchising" new components. He adopted the strategy of Sankaracarya in launching his own "counter reformation," by establishing modern mathas modelled on Christian missionary schools. He incorporated the monitorial system, used the time-table to regulate activities, wrote school text books in modern prose, and made good use of the printing press for publishing text books. At the same time these sannyasic "inventions" were carefully integrated within the Hindu framework. His school text books, although replete with religious teachings and exhortations, were designed to create a ritually pure and punctilious Saivite. The Saiva Prakasa Vidyasalais were established to lure Navalar's people, the high-caste Hindus, back into the fold, by teaching them that the true purpose of life is service and love for Siva.

Navalar is in other ways closer to the bhakti poet-singers called nayanmars, in the choice of Tamil as the medium for popularizing Sanskritic forms. But in Navalar's time the highflown poetic language of the nayanmars was incomprehensible to most Tamils. So he would again turn to the Protestant sannyasin for some assistance in the use of the vernacular: his engagement as a Bible translator would have taught him that language is neither sacred nor immutable, and that it can be adapted to suit specific religious requirements. With this insight he began to render prose versions of all the major religious texts, and even the Saiva Vinavidai (Saivite Catechism) is in part a literal translation of the Sanskrit Agamas. He also created a tradition of expository preaching in the temples. Through all these means Navalar made the sacred text for the first time accessible and intelligible to the masses. The masses were on the other hand ready to embrace a textual religion, because the sannyasins had prepared the ground by spreading literacy.

Like the nayanmars, Navalar in his time succeeded in practically creating a language for popularizing Sanskritic forms. So in his Catechism, designed to simplify scriptural religion, one sees a classical devotion to rules, regulations, and precise formulations of conduct. It was clearly aimed at the ordinary householder, giving him discourse on the proper way to apply the holy ash, the various forms of worship, how to clean oneself, how to fast, and so on. In courting the householder, Navalar was not offering him an easy religion: service for Siva, as taught by Navalar, meant the painstaking fulfilment of the agamic ritual.

Navalar in this manner demonstrated how elements, including modern ones, introduced by the sannyasin could be used to stimulate the indigenous process of Sanskritisation and thus counteract the process of Christianisation. Education and literacy, which the sannyasins believed would undermine "the power and spell of Hinduism."[1] have thereafter been considered essential for Tamil children, to enable them to read their religious literature for themselves and thus enable them to fulfil their ritual duties correctly. To this end Navalar also favoured female education, to teach them their duties towards their fathers and husbands, and also for them to teach their children their domestic duties and taboos.[2]

Caste was very much in Navalar's mind when he opposed Christianisation and promoted Sanskritisation. In his early pamphlet, Yalpana Samaya Nilai, 1851 (The State of Religion in Jaffna) he thus spelt it out clearly that the sannyasins were destroying caste, pointing out that "the high caste children attending their schools deeply resented studying and dining with children of low caste."[3] The spread of scriptural Hinduism, therefore, in opposition, demanded the observance of strict ritual purity, which meant, the adoption of purer, caste lifestyles. His missionary efforts were aimed at the upper-caste,

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[1]Min. 1859, NR29: WMMS Archives, London

[2]This emphasis on preserving the traditional woman would lead Navalar's successor, Ramanathan, a very modern Hindu married to an English lady, to oppose the granting of universal franchise, likening it to 'throwing pearls before swine.' Jane Russel, "The Dance of the Turkey Cock –The Jaffna Boycott of 1931", CJHSS, New Series, vol.VIII, no.1, (1978), 49

[3]Thananjayarajasingham, Educational Activities, 9

Brahmans, Vellalars and Cetties, and most of the support for his mission came from the landowning Vellalars and the mercantile Cetties.

Counteracting missionary encroachments and the advocacy of religious revivalism, had everything to do with the reassertion of the status and honour of the high castes. In his effort to reform and revitalise the caste system, Navalar did two things. First, he secured the apial status of the Brahman to ensure that the remaining system would become secure as well. Navalar who belonged to the socially and economically dominant Vellalar caste, knew only too well that without the relatively powerless Brahman, the Vellalar cannot remain Vellalar or Hindu. Secondly, he took advantage of the confused state of affairs, including the ignorance of Brahmans, to "usurp" the status and honour of his "people." Social change in this sense is an integral part of the Sanskritisation process, which according to Srinivas provides opportunities for the low castes to adopt purer lifestyles in an attempt to "try to pass for one of the 'twice-born'."[4] Navalar whose writings are replete with varna terminology, i.e., "clean" and "unclean," would have been acutely aware that the Vellalars according to "Aryan" terminology are "Sudras," and thus "unclean," whereas according to "Dravidian" terminology they are the Ulavar of "marutam," a "respectable" class of people; from this perspective, the usurpation of status and honour may be seen as an attempt to resolve this longstanding contradiction, an ambivalence in the status of the

[4]M. N. Srinivas, "The Cohesive Role of Sanskritisatin," India and Ceylon: Unity and Diversity, ed. Philip Mason (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), 80

Vellalars. Whatever the reasons, he did succeed in his mission to revitalise the traditional social order by raising the caste consciousness of Jaffna Tamils, which also enabled him to secure greater privileges - ritually, the right to wear pūnul and read the vedas – for his own "people."

The nineteenth century revival, like the one before it, was to have momentous consequences that would not only crown Navalar's mission with success but would allow brahmanism to score another victory in another territory through its handmaidens, the Vellalars.

First, in the Jaffna province, a secondary zone, where the caste ideology had been dominant for centuries, the movement toward a more textual Hinduism and purer lifestyles led to the replication among the low, of those structures from which they had once been excluded. So by the end of that century the Sanskritisation process had virtually touched every section of the Tamil society in that territory, where we see:

> untouchables adopting the religion of the great tradition, fisherfolk adopting vegetarianism, and many other castes adopting more and more the rituals, calendrical rites and domestic ceremonies that were at one time the symbolic demarcation of the higher castes.[5]

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[5]R. S. Perinbanayagam, The Karmic Theater (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 32; The most important account of this trend was documented by a parliamentary commission in 1950. One of the most dramatic presentations of the views and feelings of Jaffna Hindus was voiced during the hearing by a delegation from an association of two hundred Untouchables:

> "Where is the logic of the Agamas in allowing dhobies and fishermen to enter into temples and keeping us out? Even though we are vegetarians and are engaged in occupations which by no stretch of the imagination can be called unclean, we are not allowed to enter temples. But dhobies who wash the dirty clothes of everybody and fishermen who engage themselves in the occupation of killing and eating fish, are freely admitted. Don't you think we have reason to be dissatisfied?"

Replication in this sense is a strong indicator of fundamental cultural consensus from the top to the bottom of the caste hierarchy, and therefore signified the complete triumph of the ideology of the Brahman. The society as a whole, as a result, had become more caste-conscious and more hierarchical in organization.

Secondly, the revivalism coincided with a great movement of peasant "colonists" from Jaffna to Vanni and to territories as far as Malaya, and in consequence, the last quarter of the century saw the diffusion of brahmanical forms beyond its traditional home. This time the Vellalars were not moving out as cultivators, but as clerks, teachers and judges, to take advantage of the expanding opportunities for the English educated in colonial service. In the Vanni they were now the servants of the Raj, and would wield their enormous social and political influence to introduce their peculiar civilization. They were not engaged in their traditional occupation, yet, as Navalar had taught them, they would tenaciously maintain their ancestral identification as a mark of status.[6] To establish their pre-eminence in the peripheral zone of Vanni, the Vellalars built their temples financed by the newly acquired wealth, invested prodigiously in a great variety of rituals,[7]

Report of the Special Committee on Hindu Temporalities, Sessional Paper V, Colombo: Ceylon Government Press, 1951, 29. The Chairman of the commission, Mr. K. Kanagaratnam, the M.P. for Vattukkottai, who strongly recommended religious and social reform, lost his seat in the next election in 1952.

[6]Navalar taught that there are five respectable ways for the modern vellalar to earn his living: being a priest or dedicating oneself to a religious life of teaching, going into government service, agriculture, commerce and trade, and sculpturing (of idols). cf. Hellmann-Rajanayagam, 247

[7]Pfaffenberger, Caste, 58

and made "rhetorical claims" about their status and honour.[8] In this manner the Vellalars gradually attained mastery and domination over the Mukkuvar and Vanniyar of Vanni nadu, who then began to adopt Vellalar lifestyles and customs.

Finally, the parallel society in the second half of the nineteenth century was steadily losing its sannyasic flavour, its missionary appeal, to become instead a replica of the caste society that it had opposed. By the year nineteen hundred Protestant Christianity had its own dominant Vellalar group which presented a model for emulation by other Christians. The various "Christian sub-groups would interact vertically among each other as a Christian community with activities centred around 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."[9] Although, the Protestants still rejected the ideology of caste, and did not observe the Hindu rules of pollution, their inter-group behaviour was no longer distinguishable from those of their Hindu fellows. The Protestant community in this sense was a "microcosm of the Hindu and Buddhist community outside it."[10]

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[8]Perinbanayagam, Karmic, 28

[9]S. Arasaratnam, "Christianity, Traditional Cultures and Nationalism: The South-Asian Experience" Bunker Memorial Lectures (Jaffna: Jaffna College Publication, 1978), 33

[10]Ibid., 34

APPENDIX 1

Islam and Hinduism

From the twelfth century onwards, Islam with its emphasis on equality, rationality, and brotherhood, appears to have made substantial inroads among the Hindus, especially in the Deccan, north of the Tamil country. Its monotheistic piety too, exerted a long-term and pervasive influence upon the development of Hindu theistic bhakti. Lingayatism or Vira-Saivism, born in the twelfth century Karnataka, appears to feel its major challenge from Islam. Lingayatism shares with the Hindu bhakti movements, the notion of personalised devotion to god, and a subjectivization of the attitude to the divine, but it made radical departures from the traditional bhakti paradigm as well. Armed with Islamic values, this militant religious movement under Basavanna aimed at overthrowing the varna order and replacing it with a new order based on the values of "human freedom, equality, rationality and brotherhood."[1] It made good this challenge by becoming a highly structured movement and striving for the institutionalization of those values.[2] In the Tamil country, in response to the Islamic challenge, the Sri Vaisnava Brahmans appear to have gradually embraced monotheism but with the aim of containing the

[1]K. Ishwaran, "Bhakti Tradition and Modernization" The Case of Lingayatism," J. Lele(ed.), Bhakti, 76

[2]Ibid., 81

heretical inroads that were once again threatening the brahmanical order:

> With the Sri Vaisnavas we see the first instance of a Hindu sectarian pattern that, with its own more egalitarian emphasis, social cohesiveness and popularly oriented theistic devotional piety, could compete with Islam on its own terms remaining faithful to and in continuity with the ancient classical Sanskritic Vedic heritage of India.[3]

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[3] W. G. Neevel, Yamuna's Vedanta and Pancarata: Integrating the Classical and the Popular (Montana: Scholars Press, 1977), 215-6.

APPENDIX 2

Portuguese Burghers

Portuguese Burghers, or more derogatorily the Portuguese Mechanics, are commonly associated with manual trades like blacksmithing, carpentry, and leather work. They are descendants of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka. Aside from Catholic priests, most of the Portuguese who came to Sri Lanka were exiles and criminals from the great Lisbon prison, the Limoeiro[1]; whose sentences had been commuted to military service in the East. Thus, despite the well earned Portuguese reputation for rooting out heathen practices in Sri Lanka and elsewhere, the rank and file of the Portuguese forces were scarcely committed to all the Catholic virtues and least of all to the sacrament of matrimony. In fact, the then contemporary Portuguese society in general, despite the religious prohibition of sexual acts like adultery and fornication, produced illegitimate children in "gay abandon," whose offending members included "male and female clerics."[2] It is therefore not surprising that the Portuguese soldiers would commit widespread fornication with the most vulnerable classes of Tamil women, the slave girls and dancing girls (devadasis); and eventually contribute to the creation of an entirely new caste. In Batticoloa, in the

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[1] Charles R. Boxer, Race Relations in the Portuguese Colonial Empire, 141-1825 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 61; Boxer, "An Introduction to Joao Ribeiro's 'Historical Tragedy of the Island of Ceylon' 1685," Ceylon Historical Journal, vol. 3, nos.3, 4 (1954): 247

[2] Pearson, 21

eastern province, the Portuguese Burghers tend to be endogamous, have their own recognized nieghbourhoods and in ranking, assigned rough parity of status with the middle ranking skilled castes.[3]

Long after the Portuguese "seaborne empire" had disappeared these people of mixed descent who lived in the old Portuguese enclaves were to play an intermediary role between Europeans and Sri Lankans under the British Raj. They became prominent in the railways, government offices and educational institutions throughout Sri Lanka.

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[3]D. B. McGilvray, "Dutch Burghers and Portuguese Mechanics: Eurasian Ethnicity in Sri Lanka," Comparative Studies in Society and History, vol. 24,no. 2, (April, 1982): 259-260

APPENDIX 3

Phillipus Baldaeus's account of Jaffna society in the seventeenth century

Phillipus Baldaeus (A.D. 1632-1671) was a Dutch Predikaant, who arrived in Jaffna in 1658 while accompanying a Dutch expedition against the Portuguese. In that same year, he was appointed Predikaant over Jaffna peninsula and the adjacent islands. To carry out his ecclesiastical work, particularly of preaching, Baldaeus took the unusual step of learning Tamil. He was able to converse freely, and travel widely, while also moving closely among all sections of his parishioners. As a result, his work, the Description or to give its full name, A True and Exact Description of the Great Island of Ceylon,[1] first published in Dutch in 1672, has left behind an invaluable record of close personal observation spread out over a period of eight years.

In his work, Baldeaus reports that the Bellalas (Vellalars) of seventeenth century Jaffna were agriculturalists, surrounded by their cattle, their verdant fields, and their servants.[2] They had good and neat dwellings with large compounds attached to them, in which there could be found wells of water that would be used for irrigation. The costume of the Bellalar men was a cloth hanging down from above the

[1] Description, (Colombo: The Ceylon Historical Journal, 1959)

[2] Ibid., 350f.

navel and caught up round the legs. Around their waist was a pouch in which they carried betel and areca nut.[3]

Proud of their ancestry and resolutely endogamous and by far the wealthiest, the Bellalas held the Bramines (Brahmans) in the highest regard, due without doubt to the Bramines' great purity and cleanliness. The Bramines living in Jaffna and elsewhere were "modest in their deportment, as could be wished, they are sober, alert, clean, civil and friendly and very moderate in eating and drinking and never touch any strong drink. They wash twice a day, abstain from eating anything that was endowed with or can produce life."[4]

The Bellalas on the other hand deemed themselves superior to all other castes, regarding them with "a wonderful contempt."[5] Several castes are mentioned; Chittyas (Cettis), Chivas (Civiars), Carreas (Karaiyars), Mokkuas (Mukkuvars), Parruas (Paravas); "smiths, carpenters and masons." Among them, the "Nallouas" (Nalavars) and "Parreas" (Paraiyars) are termed "nasty and dirty folk." The Nallouas were "the slaves of the Bellalas." Their chief occupation was to tap toddy, but in addition they tilled the ground, took care of cattle, and watered the plants. The Parreas performed "the most disagreeable and dirty offices in life" and were thus "a despised" people. These and

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[3] During the early medieval period the heretics – Buddhists and Jains – were ridiculed for their disgusting habit of chewing the areca nut, which had evidently by now become a fashionable Hindu custom. See D. Shulman, "Idealism and Dissent in South Indian Hinduism," in S. N. Eisenstadt, et al, ed., Orthodoxy, Heterodoxy and Dissent in India (Amsterdam: Moulton Publishers, 1984), 49

[4] Ibid., 354

[5] Ibid., 372

others belonging to the "lower castes," observes Baldaeus, were expected to show "extraordinary respect for the highest; on an inferior passing a superior, he must show his insignificance by a deep and respectful bow towards the earth."[6]

Marriage customs were similar to those practiced on the Coromandel coast.[7] The females married while very young, in their tenth or eleventh year of age. "It has been frequently the case that young maidens of between 8 and 9 years of age were brought before me that they might in my presence, and in that of their parents, pledge their troth to their intended future husbands."[8] Under these circumstances, they "frequently became a mother in the 13th and 14th year." Those who disregarded the means of propagating their species were considered "no better than murderers."[9] The husbands were clearly superior to their wives. So marked was their difference in status that the "husbands also are treated like another caste and are much respected by their wives, who eat apart and alone."[10]

Seventeenth century Jaffna described by Baldeaus at the commencement of Dutch rule, in sum, revealed the pattern of social organization that typified Tamil culture in the nadus of the secondary zone: a rural status ladder composed of pure and esteemed Brahmans; of a non-brahman, dominant agricultural caste; of despised predial

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[6]Ibid., 372

[7]Ibid., 366

[8]Ibid., 368

[9]Ibid., 368

[10]Ibid., 372

labourers of untouchable rank; and a number of small, professional castes.

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