

THE EARLY EDUCATIONAL MISSION OF THE SCOTTISH MISSIONARIES IN MADRAS PRESIDENCY: ITS SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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The historical roots of the Scottish educational mission in South India date back to 1835, the year in which a school was opened by the two Church of Scotland chaplains of the East India Company. Since then its chequered history has continued through many ups and downs for about a century and a half. Through their indefatigable energy and unswerving dedication, the missionaries were destined to play a major role in the overall development of the Madras Presidency. Their mission included everything that would bring about a transformation – intellectual, social and spiritual. It is indeed difficult to measure the fruits of their labour with precision, because the indirect and unseen results of their effort are as significant and substantial as the direct and the palpable ones. An attempt is made below to elucidate their multi-faceted educational mission and its far-reaching consequences for Indian society, especially in South India.

The Educational Mission

1. Aims and objectives. Alexander Duff, who started a school in Calcutta in the year 1830, was the first Scottish educational missionary to India. Duff's strategy was to educate the higher classes of Hindu society in biblical and Western knowledge through the medium of English. His firm belief was that, if the high-caste Hindus were converted to Christian faith through education, they would in turn do the same to those below them, a strategy which came to be known as Duff's 'downward filtration theory'. Under the able leadership of Duff, the school became 'for a generation the largest and most successful missionary school in India'.¹ The instant success of the Calcutta school was followed by the establishment of another Scottish school in Bombay under the leadership of John Wilson, which also became immensely popular. John Anderson was the third to develop the Scottish educational enterprise in Madras from the year 1837. These three seized the opportunity to train the youth of the major Presidencies in India. Dwelling on the importance of their contribution, Duncan Forrester writes as follows:

¹ D.F. Wright *et al.* (eds), *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 259.

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Alexander Duff in Calcutta, John Wilson in Bombay and John Anderson in Madras together with their colleagues and imitators saw in this situation an opportunity both to make converts and influence the mind of India in a Christian direction. The converts they made, though few in number, were rather different from most earlier converts to Christianity; they came from higher castes; they were intelligent, restless and well-educated men who in many cases made considerable material and social sacrifices in order to become Christians; and a number of them became influential and widely respected intellectual leaders in the broader society.²

As the two Scottish chaplains in Madras were unable to devote much time to the development of the school, they sent an application to their Mission Board seeking a 'missionary who might do for Madras what had already been done for Calcutta'. This request, coupled with the rousing address by Duff to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in May 1835, prompted the sending of the young Anderson to Madras as a missionary in 1837. Having rented a building in Armenian Street, 'on April 3rd, 1837, with firm faith in God and in the power of His word and spirit, he began his labours as missionary of Christ with fifty nine Hindu boys and young men.'³

The following instructions were given to Anderson by the General Assembly Committee for Foreign Mission:

1. To train the youth of Madras in sound, comprehensive biblical knowledge; 2. To raise up thoroughly trained and pious teachers and preachers, who would evangelize the masses of their country; and 3. To target especially the higher classes of the Hindu society in Madras.⁴

With these objectives in mind, Anderson included in the curriculum branches as diversified as English, history, geography, arithmetic, mathematics, algebra, elements of astronomy, political economy, logic, moral philosophy and natural theology. He made it emphatically clear however, that 'every branch of knowledge communicated is to be made subservient to this desirable end [of biblical truth]'.⁵ Anderson thus was first a Christian and only then a teacher. He clearly sought to make Scripture and conversion central to all secular teachings. According to John Braidwood, Anderson's biographer-colleague, Anderson had three 'grand

² D.B. Forrester, 'Christianity and Early Indian Nationalism', in *Colloques Internationaux du C.N.R.S.* 582 (Paris, 1978), p. 332.

³ George Pittendrigh and William Meston, *Story of Our Madras Mission* (Edinburgh, 1907), p. 29.

⁴ Quoted in A.B. Campbell, 'Madras Mission of the Free Church of Scotland', *Report of the South India Missionary Conference* (Madras, 1858), p. 37.

⁵ Pittendrigh, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

aims': 1. To convert his pupils to God, 2. To qualify such converts to become teachers and preachers, and 3. To use these trained agents to instruct, convert and form Christian communities in the land.⁶ This uncompromising missionary zeal led him to face many serious problems posed by Hindu orthodoxy.

By contrast, William Miller, who arrived in Madras in 1862 to succeed Anderson, sought to redefine the role of educational mission. He believed that education should make a 'leavening impact'. As he put it, '[The Mission Institutions'] central idea is that of associating all education and all thought with revealed truth, and of making them thus a channel whereby *it may enter into and leaven the mind of the community*'.⁷ In this endeavour, Miller suggested, the task of the educational work is 'ploughing and sowing', whereas the responsibility of 'harvesting' would be of those engaged in preaching.⁸ Thus Miller was led to believe, like Duff, that education should be understood as a preparation for evangelism, *preparatio evangelica*. He was, however, opposed to using education as a 'bait for conversion'. Conversion of individuals in Christian institutions, Miller believed, should not be primary but subsidiary.⁹

2. Expansion. When Anderson arrived in Madras in 1837, there were only two other schools, besides the one being run by the chaplains of the Church of Scotland – one established by the government and the other called the Native Educational Society Institution.¹⁰ Anderson soon succeeded not only in developing the school, but also in establishing a network of schools around Madras. He opened a school in 1839 in the Hindu temple town of Conjeevaram, which was fifty miles away from Madras. Through the dedicated work of his missionary friend John Braidwood, a school building was constructed there in 1841. A school at Nellore was also brought under the control of the Scottish mission in 1840. Another was established in Chingleput in 1840. In Madras itself in 1841 a branch school was set up at Triplicane, a district of Madras.¹¹ It

⁶ J. Braidwood, *True Yoke-Fellows in The Mission Field: the Life and the Labours of the Rev John Anderson and the Rev Robert Johnston* (London, 1862), p. 62.

⁷ Quoted in Pittendrigh, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁸ See William Miller, 'The Place of Education as a Missionary Agency', *Report of the General Missionary Conference* (London, 1873), pp. 107-8.

⁹ See T. Ambrose Jeyasekaran, 'William Miller and the Meaning of Christian Education in India', *Bulletin of Scottish Institute of Missionary Studies* (1988-9), p. 48.

¹⁰ See Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

¹¹ See Pittendrigh, *op. cit.*, p. 35-8.

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needs to be mentioned that the Revd P. Rajahgopaul, the earliest convert of Anderson, opened schools separately for Chetty community and for the poor children of the rag pickers in 1870.¹²

Thus the Scottish mission enjoyed a monopoly over the educational scene in Madras Presidency. Its domination continued for well over a century. Although these schools faced frequent problems because of caste prejudices and religious conflicts, they proved to be indispensable. Stephen Neill, dwelling on the importance of the Scottish mission schools, observes that

The Scots succeeded because what they offered was so much better than what was being offered by others. At the time there was little effective competition. As a consequence, though the Christian schools were emptied as a result of conversions, they always filled up again; students, frustrated in their search elsewhere for what the Scots provided, in the end came back to the original source.¹³

Stephen Neill also pays a generous tribute to the missionaries that they were free from racial superiority and their relationship with their pupils was akin to the traditional Indian relationship between the 'guru' and 'chela' as beautifully expressed in the ancient Hindu classics.¹⁴

3. Innovations. As part of their educational mission, the missionaries introduced a number of measures, which have had far-reaching consequences towards the advancement of various sections of society in Madras Presidency. A few are mentioned here.

The residential and boarding system was introduced into the educational set-up. It was in fact a necessity, because students thronged Madras from faraway places and could not afford to stay outside on their own in lodgings or eat in hotels. Therefore William Miller started the student homes, as they were called, in 1881 on an experimental basis. They provided both lodging and boarding under one roof. These student homes became immensely popular. Miller introduced the principle of self-governance in the hostel management. In these hostels, students without barriers of language, caste, colour or creed mingled together and ate and slept together. It was probably for the first time that peoples of all sections of the highly segregated Indian society were brought together under one roof. A harmonious social life was thus nurtured in the educational provision. Miller believed that this residential system would gradually shape the future responsibilities of the students. Truly, in the

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹³ Stephen Neill, *A History of Christianity in India (1707-1856)* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 327.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

words of his biographer, 'He was a great believer in hiding a little leaven in the meal so as to leaven the whole lump.'¹⁵

Another innovation introduced into the educational system was the formation of the literary and debating societies. At Madras Christian College, which came into reckoning in 1877, Miller inaugurated several societies such as the History Union, the Philosophical Society, and the Tamil and Telugu Societies. In these societies the creative spirit of the students was kindled and fostered. Young students from these societies later emerged as outstanding orators and writers who played significant roles in the renaissance of India. Also, the Alumni Association started in 1891 was the oldest of its kind in India. Down the generations it has taken a vigorous part in the developmental activities of the College.

Mention also must be made of the monitor system that was introduced by Anderson himself. As the very few missionary teachers found the handling of the large number of students quite unwieldy, Anderson appointed class monitors, who in turn would handle the students, including overseeing their discipline. Some of the early converts were given this assignment. This measure contributed immensely towards shaping leadership qualities apart from orienting them to the teaching profession. However, these monitors 'were employed only on the lower levels of teaching'.¹⁶

4. *Ecumenism through education.* Although several missions had been operative in India since the seventeenth century, there was not much interaction among them. Bringing them under one joint enterprise was quite a task indeed. It was a stroke of genius and tremendous far-sightedness that William Miller initiated an ecumenical venture through the portals of education, which was to have lasting importance. This venture in fact was a historic necessity. Miller recounts that after 1841, the government of the Presidency opened schools conducted by officials of its own. From these schools, 'all religious, and in particular all Christian, elements were as much as possible excluded'.¹⁷ This trend towards secularizing of education was strengthened with the formation of Madras University, along with those of Calcutta and Bombay, in 1857. Disturbed by these developments which would naturally lead to the dilution if not dissolution of the Christian character of education, Miller presented a blueprint to the Foreign Missions Committee of the Free Church of Scotland in 1874, giving his reasons why a Christian College for Southern India was a necessity and why it should have a corporate

¹⁵ O. Kandaswamy Chetty, *Dr. William Miller* (Madras, 1924), p. 27.

¹⁶ See Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 328.

¹⁷ William Miller, *The Madras Christian College: A Short Account of Its History And Influence* (Edinburgh, 1905), p. 13.

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structure. He also explained the financial implications of such a move. Miller enjoyed such good rapport and influence among other missions in Madras that he ensured their formal support for his grand plan.¹⁸ Consequently, the Foreign Missions Committee negotiated with the various mission bodies in Madras. This move was endorsed by the General Assembly of the Free Church of Scotland in 1875, as a result of which the Central Institution, which already had B.A. classes since 1867, was transformed into a Central Christian College and named Madras Christian College on January 1 1877. The Church Missionary Society and the Wesleyan Missionary Society supported the move and gave financial support. The S.P.G. mission and the London Missionary Society promised to send students, and the Church of Scotland sent a friendly communication.¹⁹ Miller's dream of all Protestant bodies jointly sharing the burden of Christian higher education came closer to fuller reality in 1910, when the Church of Scotland, which hitherto carried a college on its own, decided to join the Union. This was also the year in which the Madras Christian College Governing Board was created, thus making it independent of the Foreign Missions' Supreme Governing Board.²⁰ By the beginning of 1913 Madras Christian College became a truly corporate and ecumenical enterprise. As many as six societies, viz. the United Free Church, the Wesleyan Mission, the Church Missionary Society, the Church of Scotland, the London Missionary Society and the American Baptist Missionary Society joined as partners in the control and maintenance of the College.²¹ This was probably the first time in history that so many churches were involved in a single educational enterprise.

This joint endeavour proved to be highly successful not only in establishing the reputation of the Madras Christian College as a premier institution in India but also in giving impetus to the formation of other such joint ventures among educational institutions. The United Theological College in Bangalore, St Christopher's Training College, the Meston Training College in Madras and the Medical College in Vellore

¹⁸ See Miller, 'Need of a Christian College for Southern India' – A Letter to the Committee on Foreign Missions of the Free Church of Scotland (Madras, 1874). Miller's proposal was endorsed by those in Madras belonging to Church of Scotland, Church Missionary Society, Christian Vernacular Education Society, Doveton Protestant College, Gospel Propagation Society, London Missionary Society and Wesleyan Mission Society.

¹⁹ See Pittendrigh, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-6.

²⁰ See *Minutes of the United Free Church of Scotland (May 1908-April 1912)*, nos. 1526, 1636.

²¹ See *Report of the United Free Church of Scotland Foreign Missions-1912*, pp. 25-6.

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were all results of sharing the burden together by the like-minded missions.²² Today the same ecumenical spirit continues to be the guiding force behind the high reputation all these institutions enjoy.

This co-operative effort fructified not only at the level of education but created a congenial atmosphere among the various missions in South India leading to the formation of the Church of South India (C.S.I.). The role of the Scottish missionaries in and through Madras Christian College in facilitating the formation of the C.S.I. is well brought out by Bengt Sundkler:

The role of Madras Christian College in bringing about a climate of co-operation should be stressed. Organized at first by the Free Church of Scotland in 1867, the college was reorganized in 1910 on a co-operative basis with the two Scottish Missions (Free Church of Scotland and Church of Scotland), the Wesleyans and the Church Missionary Society as supporting bodies. Most of the Indian leaders in the unity movement, for example Azariah and K.T. Paul, had received their academic training at this college. The influence of professors such as Wm. Miller, Wm. Skinner, A.G. Hogg (United Free Church of Scotland) was considerable.²³

5. Journalistic mission. When the Educational Act of 1835 was passed by the Government, the English language was accorded official status. This measure came as a great boon for the missionaries. Soon they started to use English effectively as a medium in their schools and began periodicals to ventilate their opinions on matters pertaining to religion and society. Alexander Duff founded the monthly review called *The Calcutta Christian Observer* in 1832. Under Duff's editorship *The Observer* assumed 'a characteristically polemical tone'. Duff used the journal as a platform to 'promote his mission theories' and speak for the converts and protect their legal rights.²⁴

In Madras, John Anderson started the periodical called *Native Herald* on October 2, 1841. The contents of the first number give a fair glimpse into its character. They comprised an exposure of the idolatry of the Hindus, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, remarks on Christian school books, etc. *Native Herald* received an instant rejoinder, which sought to defend Hinduism

²² See J.M. Orr, 'The Contribution of the Scottish Missions to the Rise of Responsible Churches in India' (Ph.D. thesis, New College, Edinburgh, 1967), p. 371.

²³ Bengt Sundkler, *Church of South India. The Movement Towards Union (1900-1947)* (London, 1954), pp. 29-30.

²⁴ I.D. Maxwell, 'Alexander Duff and the Theological and Philosophical Background to the General Assembly Mission to 1840' (Ph.D. thesis, New College, Edinburgh, 1995), p. 170.

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against the attacks of Anderson. Anderson rejoiced over this reaction and wrote to a friend to say, 'Nothing could work better for advancing our great object. To examine, defend and discuss is the way to pull down error and to establish God's truth in India.'²⁵

The Revd P. Rajahgopaul, the first convert of Anderson, later founded the Native Christian Literature Society and collected a great amount of books for both Christian and Hindu readers. This literary activity was continued by the Revd R.M. Bauboo, Rajahgopaul's successor, and Tabitha his wife. Tabitha, apart from her interest in teaching women, became the editor of the Tamil periodical *Amrita Vachani*. She also coedited South India's first Indian Christian journal, *The Eastern Star*.²⁶

The journalistic mission which aroused a great deal of interest and posed a challenge to the Hindu intelligensia in Madras reached its height with the starting of *The Christian College Magazine* in 1883. It was initially a monthly whose aim was to 'awaken or to keep awake an interest in higher things, and in every social, moral and literary question affecting India's present and future'.²⁷ True to its aim, it generated a great deal of intellectual vigour and curiosity among the educated, involving Christian apologists on one side and their Hindu counterparts on the other. At another level it was the professors of the Madras Christian College debating with their learned students, past and present. A cursory look at the articles published reveals the apologetic fireworks, which in turn reveal the determination of learned Hindus to oppose Christian missionaries at all levels. This literary activity by way of polemics involving Christians and Hindus greatly fostered the nationalistic spirit in the youthful minds of the Indian community.

In the year 1883-4, the Revd Professor Charles Cooper set the ball rolling. In his article, 'The Philosophy of the Upanisads', Cooper argues that Hinduism is basically pantheism, and 'pantheism negates morality, at least in any real sense. It does away with personality, free will, and hence responsibility. Right and wrong become merely a phenomenal distinction. Whatever is, must be, is therefore right.'²⁸ T.P. Ramanatha Iyer joins issue with Cooper and strongly rejects the criticism that the Hindu temper is generally pessimistic. He takes pains to put forward as many as seventeen arguments to rebut Cooper's views.²⁹ These polemical exchanges of very high intellectual order continued for about a decade

²⁵ See Braidwood, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

²⁶ See S. Sathianadhan, *Sketches Of Indian Christians* (Madras 1896), pp. 19-37. Quoted in Orr, *op. cit.*, p. 369.

²⁷ Quoted in *Report of the Third Dicentennial Missionary Conference* (1892-3), Vol.11 (Bombay, 1893), p. 679.

²⁸ See *The Christian College Magazine* I (1883-4), p. 35.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 293-9.

before culminating in the most famous one between S. Subrahmanya Sastri and Professor A.G. Hogg during the year 1904-5.

Sastri in an article on 'Hindu Philosophy'³⁰ maintains that the doctrines of karma and the transmigration of souls are the highest sanctions of Hindu morality and as such are the cardinal principles of Hindu philosophy. Sastri surveys the essence of the systems of Indian philosophy, juxtaposing it with the Western philosophical systems. He concludes that the Vedanta system afforded the most stable foundation for ethics, because its cardinal principle 'Tat Twam Asi' provides the true knowledge that all persons are one reality in Brahman, and therefore it urges one and all to rise above all desires and wants. This ideal that all human beings are ultimately one is higher than the concept of universal brotherhood. Most of his views are clearly advanced against Christianity.

Alfred Hogg, the Professor of Philosophy, in his initial response, while commending the critical spirit of Subrahmanya Sastri, nevertheless chides his overeagerness to 'accentuate superficial parallelism and ignore the fundamental contrasts' between the Indian and Western systems. He then proceeds to give a detailed reply to Sastri's charges in his famous article 'Karma and Redemption', which was serialized in five parts in 1904-5.³¹ Hogg begins with his now famous distinction between faith and belief – faith being immediate and existential, while belief being the intellectual expression of faith. In summary he claims that the contrasts between Christianity and higher Hinduism are in the area of belief and not faith. He argues that the Hindu idea of karma and the Christian doctrine of redemption differ in that the former is predominantly judicial and the latter moral. He points out that the God who is love and personally intervenes in human affairs is conceivable in Christianity alone. Nevertheless, Hogg makes a passionate plea for effective intellectual intercourse between Christian and Hindu thinkers. He suggests that the points of divergence between them would take them closer to Truth than their superficial agreements. In this endeavour the Christian must cast off his alien mould and reconstruct and reshape his thought in order to be more acceptable to the Hindu, at the same time making the historical person of Jesus Christ and his gospel the very centre of his thought.

Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, the great Hindu philosopher and apologist, having studied under the Scottish missionaries during 1904-8 at Madras Christian College, was no mute spectator. How he fielded himself

³⁰ *Ibid.*, XXII (1904-5), pp. 68-83.

³¹ For Hogg's initial response see his article, 'Mr. Subrahmanya Sastri on Hindu Philosophy' *ibid.*, pp. 121-8. Hogg's elaborate response was his 'Karma and Redemption' which was serialized in V parts in the same volume. Part I (pp. 281-92), Part II (pp. 359-73), Part III (pp. 393-409), Part IV (pp. 449-69) and Part V (pp. 505-22).

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in the arena of polemics was brought out by Eric J. Sharpe: 'It may well have been Hogg's book, *Karma and Redemption* (1904-5 in article form), in which the ethical basis of Vedanta was subjected to criticism which prompted Radhakrishnan to write his first work of Hindu apologetics, *Ethics of Vedanta* (1908).³² Such was the determination of Radhakrishnan to defend his faith against the criticisms of his missionary teachers that he contributed an article with polemical overtones to the *Madras Christian College Magazine* entitled, 'Hindu Thought and Christian Doctrine', in 1924 which was 16 years after he left the College.

Thus the Scottish missionaries aroused the religious consciousness in the Hindu intellectual community by forcing them to debate freely with the Christian apologists. This intellectually enlightening endeavour immensely contributed to the sense of Indian nationalism and patriotism. The missionary criticisms of Hindu faith and practice challenged the Hindu elite and forced them to defend their national and religious heritage. Through their writings the missionaries stirred and stimulated the power of thinking in the Hindu mind. This is precisely what they hoped for. In a letter to a friend as early as October 1863, William Miller wrote:

There is a great power of thinking in [Hindus]. In our particular line of work this is the great thing that is needed, *just to get them to think*. The barest even intellectual realization, if real one, of the truth that is lying dormant in their minds would be the most likely of all human means to lead them to Christ.³³

6. Women's education. One significant achievement of the Scottish missionaries in Madras was their labour among the women's community. While it was still taboo for Indian women to come out into open society and interact with others, the missionaries encouraged them in many ways, which was indeed a milestone in social upliftment in the Madras Presidency. Stephen Neill rightly observes; 'one feature of the work in Madras which distinguished it from the other Scottish enterprises was the extraordinary success of the work for girls'.³⁴

Since the early Danish missions started the setting up of girl schools, other missions followed them all over India. Anderson zealously advocated the need and necessity of women's education. In *Native Herald*, with a firm Christian conviction Anderson wrote, 'Native females are to be

³² See John Hinnels and Eric J. Sharpe (eds), *Hinduism* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1972), p. 101. The influence of the Madras Christian College and the missionary teachers therein on Radhakrishnan's life and thought form part of the author's doctoral work entitled 'Dr. S. Radhakrishnan and Christianity', submitted to the University of Madras, 1994.

³³ Quoted in Pittendrigh, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-2 (emphasis mine).

³⁴ Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 321.

permanently raised from their present fearful degradation... the blessed light of the cross, and the love of Him who hung there, must beam into their dark souls, if they are ever to taste of life and glory. *And why should the females not taste it as well as their fathers, husbands and brothers?*³⁵ As a result of his labours, a school for girls was opened towards the end of 1843 and another at Triplicane in 1844. Mrs Braidwood took active part teaching the girl students. The Madras school came to be known as the Madras Girls Day school. There were 100 girls present at the end of the year 1843. Their ages ranged from four to ten. They took their first examination in December 1844. By the year 1846, the number of girls had swollen to 400. But sadly, girls were often withdrawn by parents at an early age and arrangements were made for their marriages. In spite of this, the numbers increased and additional branches were opened in Chingleput, Wallajahbad and Sriperumbudur.³⁶

Another notable feature in women's education was the setting up of boarding schools and orphanages. When the girls were baptized by John Anderson, they were disowned by their parents and relatives, and therefore he had to provide them shelter in his own residence. Thus a boarding school became a necessity. The Ladies Society in Scotland gave a generous grant and thus the first school named 'The Boarding School for Convert and Orphan Girls' came into reckoning.³⁷ In order to find employment for these educated girls, a lace school was set up in Chingleput, where large sales of lace became a source of income for the school. There were also training schools set up for women teachers.³⁸

The Scottish mission in Madras was also distinguished for its Zenana work. This refers to the practice of ladies visiting the native women in their own residences, teaching them and educating them on many matters of social importance. This Zenana work arose chiefly because a large number of Indian women were confined to their homes and were seldom allowed out by the men at home. This Zenana work was largely undertaken by the wives of the missionaries and by women missionaries. Zenana work developed directly out of the school mission.³⁹

Social Reform through Education

The Christian missionaries were largely responsible for shaking up the inertia of the status quo of the Indian society, in which several evils were deeply seated and the various sections of the population were reconciled to them. With the tacit backing of the British government, the missionaries

³⁵ Braidwood, *op. cit.*, p. 270 (emphasis mine).

³⁶ Pittendrigh, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-106.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 110-12.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

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raised cudgels against all the evil practices of the society. The Scottish missionaries were in the forefront. The following two instances witness to their unimpeded zeal to bring about social reform through the mission of education.

1. Fighting casteism and untouchability. The question what caste is, says Duncan Forrester, is easy to pose, but extraordinarily difficult to answer.⁴⁰ This is chiefly due to its long and chequered history, much of it remaining unrecorded. The Laws of Manu and the Hindu Vedas and Shastras give us a variegated connotation of caste. One thing is very clear: caste was and has ever been the basis for social stratification in India. Its presence is so pervasive that M.N. Srinivas, the eminent sociologist, observed that caste was everywhere the unit of social action.⁴¹

The missionaries fought against the caste system and untouchability when these were at their worst expression especially in South India. In the words of a missionary, 'In no part of India has the caste acquired a firmer hold than in the Southern Presidency, and nowhere is the cleavage between the caste and the non-caste more complete.'⁴² The missionaries opposed caste and untouchability tooth and nail, because Christianity, they professed, believed in social equality and inequality was a sin in God's creation. In the words of Duncan Forrester, 'Equality is seen as the necessary concomitant of social justice, of a humane and caring social order, of human dignity and of progress. Inequality, on the other hand, breeds racialism, the denial of the proper claims of the individual and reaction.'⁴³

The champion who railed against these twin evils in Madras was John Anderson and the arena was the Scottish school of which he was the head. Narration of just one incident would highlight the acuteness and enormity of the problem. On October 19, 1838, a year after the school was started, three Pariah boys managed to enrol themselves as students in the school. They wore the false caste marks on their foreheads. As soon as this was detected, there was a groundswell of aversion and protest from the upper caste pupils. The parents of these caste students petitioned to Anderson to expel these 'intruders' or at least place them on separate benches so that their sons might not get 'polluted'. Anderson refused to concede either of these demands. The caste boys therefore left the school and the numbers fell from 276 to 100. The Native Education Society exploited the situation

⁴⁰ D.B. Forrester, *Caste And Christianity* (London, 1980), p.8.

⁴¹ Quoted in R.L. Hardgrave, Jr, *The Nadars of Tamilnadu: The Political Culture of Community in Change* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1969), p.1.

⁴² Pittendrigh, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁴³ Forrester, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

by admitting the boycotting students, thus adding to Anderson's woes. But the missionary stood like a rock and finally gained a moral victory. The students gradually returned and the institution flourished more than ever before.

A.B. Campbell narrates two decades later in 1858 the consequences of this moral victory:

Pariah and Brahmin might be seen sitting together on the same bench, learning the same lessons, and struggling together for the mastery. To all who were acquainted with the condition of the people of Madras at that period, to all who know how bigoted and strong their attachment to caste was, this victory which was gained by the missionary will appear no light and trivial matter. *Indeed, this was a blow given to caste, the effects of which were then felt throughout South India, and are so felt to the present day.*⁴⁴

However, caste system in India has not only not disappeared but continues to flourish today even among the Christians, although untouchability surrounding it is largely dismantled. Anderson's tenacity in retaining the Pariah boys even at the risk of the school being closed and him being physically threatened, which Braidwood so movingly narrates in his biography on Anderson, mirrors not only his Christian convictions of human equality and dignity, but his zeal to bring about a social reform in a highly segregated society. He had failed to eradicate caste, but his determination to fight social evils so early in Indian renaissance is a milestone in social reform.

2. The anti-Nautch movement. The term 'Nautch' is an anglicized form of the Sanskrit word 'Natyā', which simply means Dance. An age old Hindu custom was to employ young girls to dance at public and private functions and in religious ceremonies. These dancers were branded derogatively as *Devadasis* (Deva=God; dasi=slave), which meant that they were married and enslaved to the gods. These were treated as the handmaidens of gods, because they were married off to the temple deity at an early age and employed in most temples in South India. 'Devadasi' became a caste by itself when these dancing girls formed their own customs, laws of inheritance and rules of etiquette. These were exploited by the priestly caste of Brahmins. They used to carry on a trade in dancing girls from castes such as vellalas and kaikolas.

There was a great deal of aversion among missionaries and educated Hindus against this practice, because Nautch dancing was often associated with prostitution. While many prostitutes were not Nautch girls, all Nautch girls were treated on a par with prostitutes.

⁴⁴ Campbell, *op. cit.*, p. 38 (emphasis mine).

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The crusading missionary against Nautch dancing was William Miller. When the Madras Hindu Social Reform Association was formed in 1892, Miller organised most of its meetings at the Madras Christian College, of which he was the Principal. The objectives of the Association were the promotion of women's education, improvement of domestic and marriage habits and amalgamation of castes. Miller, who presided over these meetings, severely criticised the evils of child marriage, oppressed widowhood, untouchability, priestcraft etc. In 1893, Miller officially launched the highly successful anti-Nautch movement. This meeting was supported by the other missionaries throughout the Presidency. The high point of the movement was the active co-operation between the missionaries and the Hindu reformers.⁴⁵

Conclusion

Educational Mission for Nation-building

Although Christian missionaries were in 'social and ideological marginality',⁴⁶ their role in arousing the feelings of nationalism in the Indian mind was by no means insignificant or unsubstantial. Through education, fighting of social evils and superstitions and ushering in a new social and economic order, the missionaries tremendously contributed to nation-building. They did not do so directly, but moulded the native mind in such a way that it was soon overcome with nationalist sentiment. The Indians were geared to build a new nation. They started their own schools and colleges, began bringing about social reform and for the first time raised the slogans of self-reliance and self-rule.

A significant achievement of the Scottish missionaries was the shaping of the Hindu elite, who later played a major role in nation-building. Positively, through the process of education the missionaries caused a great deal of awareness in them. Negatively, they provoked them to undertake developmental tasks on their own. Sometimes, this negative reaction was discernible almost instantly. R. Suntharalingam explained this negative mood as follows:

Starting schools was one of the ideas which Hindu leaders in Madras conceived in their efforts to stem the tide of missionary advance. Another idea that was tried out was the starting of news papers to counter the propaganda of the missionary organs, especially *Native Herald*, which the Free Church of Scotland had launched in October 1841 in the wake of the student conversions earlier in that year. Since 1840, the Hindu cause was espoused by *The Native Interpreter*.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ See G.A. Oddie, *Social Protest in India* (New Delhi, 1979), pp. 102-9.

⁴⁶ Forrester, 'Christianity and Early Nationalism', *op. cit.*, p. 331.

⁴⁷ R. Suntharalingam, *Politics and Nationalist Awakening in South India (1852-91)* (Tucson, AZ, 1974), p. 38.

The most noteworthy feature of the missionary labour was its stamp upon the Indian renaissance movement and the regeneration of Hinduism. In the words of S. Manickam,

The revival of Hinduism and the various reform movements which have sprung up since the last quarter of the 19th century are but the direct result of the missionary activities. Not willing to remain passive to the missionary attacks on popular Hinduism, superstitious beliefs and customs, the Hindu orthodoxy sharply reacted, which in turn brought about the revival of Hinduism and the regeneration of the Hindu society. This fact alone places the Hindu community under a great debt of gratitude to the Christian missionaries.⁴⁸

It is no exaggeration to say that the native Christian leadership was largely formed by the Scottish missionaries. Great Indian Christian leaders like V.S. Azariah, K.T. Paul, Chenchiah, Chakkarai, D.G. Moses, Paul D. Devanandan and Rajaiah D. Paul among others were trained under the Scottish missionaries. These leaders played a significant role in shaping the future of the Indian church.

The impact of Western civilization on the nationalist movement was well acknowledged by many Indian Christians of the later years. For instance, Rajaiah D. Paul says,

No one in his senses ever questions the fact that it is the impact of Western civilisation, which is based on a Christian culture, that has been responsible for the new ideas of freedom and democracy which in expressing themselves have produced the results which we see now.⁴⁹

R.D. Paul goes on to enumerate the ways in which the Christian missionaries transformed the natives and their thinking. They rescued them from idolatry, saved them from a religion divorced from morality, convinced them of a personal God against a range of pantheistic belief in deity, weaned them from polytheism, from bloody sacrifices to gods and goddesses, erased superstitions, released them from the fetters of caste, made them aware of untouchability as a crime *etc.* He concludes that 'Hinduism has reformed itself from all its more blatant wrongs because of the spread of Christian ideas in this country and the people's acquaintance with Christian ways of thinking.'⁵⁰

All this does not mean to suggest that the Scottish mission was perfect or its missionaries free from folly. Like all other missionaries they too had their share of imperfections, weaknesses and even prejudices. V.S. Azariah who himself studied under Scottish missionaries at Madras Christian

⁴⁸ S. Manickam, *The Social Setting of Christian Conversions in South India* (Wiesbaden, 1977), p. 257.

⁴⁹ Rajaiah D. Paul, 'Missionary Activity in Present Day India', in Blaise Levai (ed.), *Revolution in Missions* (Vellore, 1957), p. 8.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

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College lamented at the 1910 Edinburgh conference that the Indian workers expected 'friendship' rather than 'condescending love' from the foreign workers. He cited some instances of the imperious attitude of missionaries, certainly not his teachers, but others he experienced later in his career.⁵¹ Likewise, Stephen Neill pointed out with reference to the Scottish missionaries that like the other missionaries elsewhere, these at times converted the natives not only to Christian faith but also to the European ways and European habits of dressing.⁵² Truly, there are many instances of converts developing an unsuspecting adulation for anything Western and despising their own native culture.

These imperfections notwithstanding, the educational mission of the Scottish missionaries in Madras Presidency was an ennobling saga of sacrifice and a story of success. It was indeed a 'tryst with destiny' towards ushering in a modern India.

⁵¹ See V.S. Azariah, 'The Problem of Co-operation Between Foreign and Native Workers', in *History and Records of the World Missionary Conference-1910*, pp. 306-15.

⁵² Neill, *op. cit.*, p. 321.