

**The Influence of American Missionaries on the Culture, Education, and  
Medicine of Tamil People in Jaffna, Sri Lanka (Ceylon)**

**By**

**The Rev. Daniel Jeyaruban Vijayathanan**

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\_\_\_\_\_(Signature)

**The Rev. Dr. Richard Jones, Ph.D.  
Faculty Advisor**

\_\_\_\_\_(Signature)

**Dr. Hannah Matis, Ph.D.  
Reader**

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## ABSTRACT

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, as a result of the American Presbyterian and Congregationalist Missionaries<sup>1</sup> of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission, the river of God's love flowed into Jaffna, Ceylon<sup>2</sup> (Sri Lanka) from Massachusetts in America.<sup>3</sup> American Presbyterian and Congregationalist Missionaries propagated the Christian faith in my region, Jaffna, and were deeply involved in the community by providing educational, medical, and other social service needs. They also provided a printing press, dictionaries, published *The Morning Star* newspaper, and translated western books into Tamil and other social services.

The American missionaries left their comfort zone, their family members, relatives and friends, and property, and came to our land to share their gifts and talents with our Tamil community. They lived within our community, they wore our dress and learned our Tamil language, encouraged our culture, and translated many English books to Tamil and Tamil books to English. American missionaries were like salt and light to our community. They lived with us, labored for our community, educated our men and women, died, and were buried in our land. They responded with their lives to Jesus's command to sell everything, to give up everything (Luke 18:22).

The American missionaries were quite different from the British Methodist and Anglican Missionaries who served in Jaffna. The interesting fact is that the American Missionaries were not colonizers in the same sense as those from the Methodist Mission and Church of England.<sup>4</sup> There is often criticism made against missionaries globally, but these Americans were missionaries who sacrificed their entire life for others.

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<sup>1</sup> R.F. Young and S. Jebanesan, ed. Gerhard Oberhammer, Institute of Indology, University of Vienna Volume XXII, *The Bible Trembled: The Hindu-Christian Controversies of Nineteenth Century Ceylon* (Vienna: Publications of the De Noblili Research Library, 1995, 47.

<sup>2</sup> Ancient Greek geographers called it Taprobane. Arabs referred to it as Serendib. Later European mapmakers called it Ceylon, a name still used occasionally for trade purposes. It officially became Sri Lanka in 1972. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Sri-Lanka>, accessed on March 16, 2021

<sup>3</sup> Jebanesan Subramaniam, *The American River of Love Flowed into Jaffna: The Story of Notable American Missionaries: A Series of Lectures in Tamil*, trans. Subramaniam Sukumar (Innuvil: American Mission House, Mega Printers, 2020), vi.

<sup>4</sup> Jebanesan Subramaniam, *The American Mission and Modern Education in Jaffna: The Contribution of the Higher Educational Enterprise of the American Missionaries in Nineteenth Century* (Colombo: Kumaran Book House, 2013), vii.

*Dedicated to the American missionaries and their families who labored in Jaffna and to the community of Virginia Theological Seminary, to my parents Elizabeth Jeyarane and Thurairatam Vijayathan, and Aunt Joyce Athisayarane Thavarajah, and Uncle Veeravaku Gabriel Kanagasingam.*

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## INTRODUCTION

### *About the Author*

My great grandfather Arumugam Isaiah Ponniah, who was a catechist and a teacher, worked with American missionaries in Jaffna.<sup>5</sup> Even though I did not meet the American missionaries in person, my ancestors got an opportunity to meet them and live with them when the American missionaries were serving in my home village called Uduppiddy in Jaffna. I was born at the Green Memorial Hospital which was the first hospital and medical school in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and in South Asia and was established by the American missionaries. And, I had my primary and secondary education at one of the schools established by the American missionaries. As a person who lived my life in Jaffna, I have seen and witnessed the work of the American missionaries where they served. I realized that Christianity must not be confined to preaching. Social concern and social action are an important part of my faith that was planted in me as I grew and that continues to grow in my mind. I would like to embrace the spirit of the missionaries who came to my land 200 years ago. The American missionaries did not spoil our Tamil community; instead, they lifted our community through education, western medical services, the printing press's introduction, creating book culture and breaking the caste system to serve each other equally.

As a teacher, a school chaplain, and a non-stipendiary priest in the Diocese of Colombo, Church of Ceylon, I am very much inspired by the work and commitments made by the American missionaries to our Tamil community in Jaffna, Ceylon. I am thankful to God Almighty for giving me an opportunity to study for a Master of Divinity degree and to live with

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<sup>5</sup> An Interview with my uncle Crowther Thiraviyaratnam Gasperson on WhatsApp February 5, 2021.

and learn from the descendants of the American missionaries during my three years at Virginia Theological Seminary. I can imagine how hard this experience was as I have been away from my daughter and wife for three years. During the missionaries' time, communication was only through letters. I thank God that I am able to see my wife and daughter on WhatsApp face-to-face because of modern technology.

### *The Author's Perspective*

We must salute the missionaries who came all the way from America to serve our people. These missionaries had to travel by ship more than six months to reach our land. Some missionaries died in the middle of the sea and were buried there. Some died soon after they reached our land due to cholera and malaria. Some missionaries lost their spouses and children due to various illnesses while they served in our region. We must be thankful to these missionaries who came to bring light to our people. These missionaries were faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ in their calling. But now our Hindu people are trying to change the name of the schools started by these missionaries. They have already changed some of the names of the schools into Hindu names.

When we look back in our history, we see that the American missionaries, made many sacrifices for us. I am sure that they all are enjoying eternity in the presence of God. We still enjoy the privileges established by these missionaries. We must ask, what do we do with that privilege now? Do we have such faith as they had in their lives? Do we have the strength, the dedication, and the commitment to our faith that they had? Do we still expect the American missionaries to educate our community and fulfill the needs of our community? We too are called to spread the Gospel. We must educate our younger generation to carry out God's

ministry: “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore, ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest (Matthew 9:37-38).”

The American missionaries had a close relationship with Tamil Dictionaries. The American missionaries had great authority about lexicography. For example, when Madras University decided to publish a lexicon in 1911, they decided to include a missionary from Ceylon to be on the working committee. We Tamils are proud of the American missionaries and must be thankful to them for the gift of the dictionaries compiled by them for us.

The American missionaries used the buildings abandoned by the Dutch missionaries. This was also a challenge for the American missionaries because the native people had bitter experiences with the Dutch missionaries as the natives were forced to join Dutch Christianity.<sup>6</sup>

### ***What Did the American Missionaries Do?***

Western missionaries came to Ceylon in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The last among them who came to Ceylon were American missionaries.<sup>7</sup> These American missionaries were very much concerned about the education of the people they served. They started vernacular Tamil schools in almost all the villages of Jaffna. These schools continue to serve the public in Jaffna.<sup>8</sup> The American missionaries came to propagate the Gospel of Jesus Christ but besides that they were very concerned about educating the Tamil community, bringing medicine, and establishing the printing press. In 1816, there were only three women who were able to read and write in Jaffna.<sup>9</sup> The Uduvil Girls’ College for Women was established by the American missionaries in the year 1824. This was the first boarding school for women in South Asia.

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<sup>6</sup> Subramaniam, *American Mission and Tamil Developments in Sri Lanka*, 97.

<sup>7</sup> Jebanesan Subramaniam, *A Tamil Book on American Mission and Tamil Developments in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: Kumaran Press (Pvt) Ltd, 2007), 95.

<sup>8</sup> Subramaniam, *The American Mission and Modern Education in Jaffna*, x-xx.

<sup>9</sup> William E. Strong, *The Story of the American Board: An Account of the First Hundred Years of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (The Pilgrim Press, Boston, 1910), 28.

The American Congregationalist missionaries were the pioneers of the western medical establishment not only in Jaffna, Sri Lanka, but also in wider South Asia. The Green Memorial Hospital was established in 1847 by the American missionary, Dr. S. F. Green, at Manipay, Jaffna, Sri Lanka.. This was the first medical school in Sri Lanka and Southeast Asia. The McLeod Hospital Innuvil was established for women and children by American missionaries Mary Leitch and Margaret Leitch in 1898. These hospitals continue to serve the general community of Jaffna.

### ***The Reasons to Write this Thesis: Why I Chose this Subject?***

I have many reasons to write this thesis. First, the work of the American missionaries in Jaffna is not well known to the world because there were not many writers to write about the missionary activities in Jaffna. Second, generally, there is criticism against missionaries who served not only in our land but also worldwide. In the same manner, in Sri Lanka, there is propaganda against American missionaries. It is said that these missionaries destroyed our religion, our culture, and the lifestyle of the Tamil Community and that they wanted to create a community for the British government. This thought prevails even among well-educated people. But there is minimal truth in this. As we research this matter, we will find out that the Jaffna Tamil Community was given the education needed to practice their religion. I understand there is always criticism for everybody who lives on this earth. As human beings, we always criticize whether something is good or bad; that is the nature of the world. Elbert Hubbard said, if we want to avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, and be nothing.<sup>10</sup>

This research aims to enlighten the Tamils in Sri Lanka and the diaspora around the world of the American missionaries' contributions in supporting their culture and civilization in

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/46700-to-avoid-criticism-say-nothing-do-nothing-be-nothing> accessed on December 21, 2020.

Jaffna, Sri Lanka. The American missionaries encouraged Tamils to develop their culture and offered medical education, medical services, and general education, especially for women. The best American doctors, academics, and printers of the era served in Jaffna.<sup>11</sup> The prophetic statement of Thomas Jefferson enriched the American missionaries: "Education is the only avenue to all kinds of progress."<sup>12</sup> This was implemented in Jaffna to uplift the Tamil community. Today the Tamil community, including women and low caste people, do well in studies.

In this research, I am focusing on the influence of the American missionaries on the culture, education, and medical support of the Tamil people in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. I want to discover how the commitment, dedication, techniques, humility, and sacrifices of the American missionaries uplifted the Tamil community in Jaffna, so that I can help my community understand how the American missionaries shaped the lives of the Tamil people and helped move us from darkness to light. People would be thankful and grateful to these missionaries and thank God for them for all that they had done for our Tamil community if they understood. The American missionaries responded to the command of Jesus Christ, "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:16)."

In this research, I would like to examine and evaluate the work and ministry done by the American missionaries to bring out the truth to our Tamil community about what American missionaries have done. I hope that my Tamil community, especially my Hindu brothers and sisters, will understand the truth of whether the American missionaries uplifted our community or spoiled our community. My research will give room for them to decide. I will provide as

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<sup>11</sup> Subramaniam, *American River of Love that Flowed into Jaffna*, vi.

<sup>12</sup> Subramaniam, *American River of Love that Flowed into Jaffna*, 8.

much evidence as possible for readers and hope to prove my argument. The readers should thank God Almighty for the sacrifices and commitments made by these missionaries to better our society. I hope our community will be encouraged to continue the excellent work started by these missionaries.

In Chapter One, I discuss the establishment of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions and American Ceylon Mission and its developments in Jaffna.

Chapter Two deals with the Portuguese and Dutch period, the challenges during British colonial rule, the Jaffna Tamil Hindu culture and the challenges encountered by and early responses to those challenges by the American missionaries. Chapter Two also considers the obstacles and the caste system in Jaffna, the arrival of the printing press and *The Morning Star* Newspaper publication in Jaffna, publication of Dictionaries and the establishment of the first boarding school for women.

In Chapter Three, I talk about the school system during the Portuguese and Dutch period, the reasons to establish schools by the American missionaries, the first university type college Batticotta, the school for women, and the benefit of education as the Tamils got employment easily in the British rule.

Chapter Four deals with the American Mission hospitals especially the Green Memorial hospital and the McLeod hospital and in Chapter Five, I discuss the lessons for today's church of Sri Lanka, how the American missionaries burned out like candles, lessons from the American missionaries, and finally, I propose a Rule of life for the churches in Sri Lanka.

## **CHAPTER ONE: THE ABCFM MISSIONARIES ARRIVING IN JAFFNA**

In Chapter One, I will review the establishment of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) and the American Ceylon Mission and its developments in Jaffna. Protestant Christianity was introduced into my country, Ceylon, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century by missionaries who came from Europe and America. These missionaries belonged to different denominations. There were missionaries from the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, Baptist missionaries, from The Salvation Army, London Missionary Society, the Church Missionary Society, and Methodist (Wesleyan) missionaries from England, and Presbyterian and Congregationalist missionaries from the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, who came from the United States of America.<sup>13</sup>

### *The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM)*

The students at Williams College in Massachusetts, in the USA, were interested in inaugurating a movement to send Mission to foreign lands. Samuel Adams joined Williams College as a student in 1806. He and four of his friends used to gather for prayer at the haystack on the college premises. After two years these students organized a society to establish a mission to spread the Gospel for people who do not know Jesus in distance places. To achieve their goals, they joined the Andover Theological College and pursued a Master of Divinity degree. Some other students at Andover Theological College also joined these enthusiasts. When the Congregationalist Churches assembled in Massachusetts in 1810 for their convention, these students submitted a memorandum requesting that the convention should undertake the work of

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<sup>13</sup> Church Missionary Society, *The Church Missionary Atlas: Containing an Account of the Various Countries in Which the Church Missionary Society Labours, and of Its Missionary Operations*, New ed. (8th ed. (London: Church Missionary Society, 1879), 168.



organizing a mission for evangelical work in foreign countries. The Church convention appointed a committee of three members in response to this memorandum to examine the possibilities of undertaking such a work. The committee accepted the proposal contained in the memorandum and recommended that a mission be instituted for this purpose by the Congregationalist churches. Consequently, the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) was established in Boston, Massachusetts on June 29, 1810. A Directorate of nine members was set up to organize the mission.<sup>14</sup>

A hard-working and pious group of New Englanders became convinced that it was their responsibility to spread the Gospel, especially after hearing of the millions of people in the British Colonies that had never heard about Christianity.

The ABCFM sent two teams of missionaries to minister to the people of South India.<sup>15</sup> Among them was Rev. Samuel Newell and his wife.

***The American Missionary Rev. Samuel Newell Arrives in Ceylon Accidently***

After a six month voyage, Rev. Newell and his wife arrived in Calcutta on June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1812, but they did not stay there for long. At the time, Great Britain and the United States were at war in what was then the British Colony of Upper Canada. When they arrived on Indian soil, the American missionaries were promptly ordered to leave the country by the British East India Company which governed large parts of India and was greatly opposed to missionary activities. Rev. Newell, determined to follow his missionary call, continued to Mauritius.

There, his wife and young daughter died. Yet Mr. Newell's spirit was not broken. In 1813, Mr. Newell set sail for Bombay in response to letters from missionaries there. Along the way, the

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<sup>14</sup> Subramaniam, *The American Mission and Modern Education in Jaffna*, 7.

<sup>15</sup> Cyrus Tishan E. Mills, *A Brief History of the American Ceylon Mission in Jaffna based on the Manuscripts of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions 1816-1947*, accessed January 19, 2021, [www.ceylontamils.com/acm](http://www.ceylontamils.com/acm), 4.

ship docked in Colombo, Ceylon. The British Governor of Ceylon welcomed Mr. Newell to start an American mission in Ceylon. To begin his work, Newell concluded that Jaffna was the most suitable field for missionary work probably because he was impressed by the peaceful atmosphere that prevailed there. In his letter to the ABCFM, he outlined all the principal considerations for selecting Jaffna as the most suitable place. Newell's letter impressed the ABCFM so much that they displayed a great interest in undertaking work in Jaffna.

### ***ABCFM Asked to Establish a Mission***

Rev. Newell strongly recommended establishing a mission in Ceylon and for five specific reasons. The first reason was the friendly attitude of the Ceylon Government. The Governor, the Chief Justice, the Royal Chaplain, and many others of position and authority united cordially in welcoming the work of missionaries among the native people. The second reason was that the number of inhabitants was small, somewhere under three million souls, all freely accessible. The third reason was that there were only two languages used; in these the Scriptures were already printed, the complete Bible in Tamil and the New Testament in Sinhala. The fourth reason was there were eight missionaries on the Island: five from the Wesleyan missionaries, one from the Baptist mission and two from the London Missionary Society.<sup>17</sup> The fifth reason was the opportunity offered for reaching the millions of Tamil speaking people in South India through the medium of a strong work among the Tamil community of Ceylon.<sup>18</sup> His Excellency Governor Brownrigg said that he was authorized by the Secretary of State for the

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<sup>17</sup> Tracy. J, *History of American Missions to the Heathen from their Commencement to the Present Time* (Worcester: Spooner & Howland, 1840), 84.

<sup>18</sup> Helen I. Root, *A Century in Ceylon: A Brief History of the Work of The American Board in Ceylon 1816 -1916* (Chennai: Asian Educational Services, 2004), 4.

colonies to encourage the efforts of all respectable ministers. It was very much in consequence of this encouragement that the mission to Ceylon was undertaken by the American Missionaries.<sup>19</sup>

Soon after the conclusion of peace between the United States of America and England in 1814, the Prudential Committee of the ABCFM took necessary steps to send missionaries for that island.<sup>20</sup>

The Prudential Committee of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission tended to take other religions as based on superstition as mentioned in the letter sent to the American missionaries on May 26, 1816: "The great object of your mission is to impart to those who sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, the saving knowledge of Christ. In order to do this, it will be a matter of primary attention, to make yourselves acquainted with the language of the people with whom you are to converse, and to whom you are to preach. You should not however, neglect any opportunity or means of doing them good even before you can use their language; but you should give yourselves wholly to your work and use all care for its furtherance and success. The deplorable ignorance of the poor heathen will continually be on your minds, and deeply affect your hearts."<sup>21</sup>

Mr. Edward Warren, an unmarried man, and Messrs. James Richards and his wife Sarah Richards, Mr. Bardwell, Dr. Daniel Poor and his wife Susan Poor, and Benjamin Meigs and his wife Sarah Meigs, all sailed from Boston in August 1815, after impressive ordination services at Newport, Rhode Island. They sailed from Massachusetts, October 23, 1815, and arrived at Colombo on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 1816.<sup>22</sup> On arrival in Colombo, they met a warm welcome from English missionaries who had by that time settled in Ceylon. Rev. Chater, of the Baptist Mission, proposing to sing at their first meeting, "Kindred in Christ, for His dear sake, A hearty welcome here receive." Governor Brownrigg granted permission for mission work and assured his protection for the missionaries. They hired a house in Colombo, lived there together as one family from a common fund and joined in the work of the English missionaries there. By this

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<sup>19</sup> Tracy, J, *History of American Missions to the Heathen from their Commencement to the Present Time*, 84.

<sup>20</sup> Root, *A Century in Ceylon*, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Subramaniam, *The American Mission and Modern Education in Jaffna*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Root, *A Century in Ceylon*, 5.

time, the American Missionaries were looking for a permanent location for their mission. They remained in Colombo about six months and then proceeded to Jaffna where they first commenced missionary operations in October 1816. Mr. and Mrs. Bardwell went to Bombay to strengthen the work there and others decided to settle in Jaffna. The Jaffna peninsula extends into the Indian Ocean at the extreme north of the island, a garden spot, low-lying, of coral formation, rich in agricultural resources. There were only two seasons, namely dry and rainy. The people were Tamils by race and Hindus by religion.

Rev. Edward Warren was the first to reach Jaffna on July 11, 1816 in a palanquin, after a laborious journey through the inhabited central portion of the island and through long forest roads north to the old Elephant Pass, then over a causeway across a wide lagoon to the Jaffna peninsula. The others joined him soon and took a house in Jaffna. Wesleyan missionaries from England were by this time established there in Jaffna and this fact influenced the decision of the Americans to press out into the open country which was thickly settled and wholly unreached by Protestant Christian influences. On October 15, 1816, Messrs. Poor and Warren took up their residence at the village of Tellipalai where, along with James Richards and Benjamin Meigs, they began the American Ceylon Mission in Jaffna.<sup>23</sup> The Sri Lankan map and the Jaffna map are given in the Appendix section to find the location.

### *American Ceylon Mission in Jaffna*

Only Mr. Warren was unmarried; the rest arrived with their wives. He exhibited symptoms of pulmonary disease to which he was constitutionally inclined. In April 1818, he went with Richards to Cape Town South Africa with the hope of benefiting his health, but he died at Cape Town August 11, 1818. Mr. Richards was first stationed at Batticotta, remained

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<sup>23</sup> Root, *A Century in Ceylon*, 6.

there till June 1821 when he was removed to Tellipalai. He died of pulmonary disease on August 3, 1822. After his death, Mrs. Richards married the Rev. Joseph Knight of the Church Mission Society and the founder of St. John's College, Jaffna where I teach now. She was married on September 25, 1823 and died April 26, 1825.<sup>24</sup>

Mr. Meigs was stationed at Batticotta, where he remained till February 28, 1833, when he was removed to Tellipalai. He left on a visit to the United States January 16, 1840, and, leaving his family in the United States, returned to Jaffna in April 1842, where he was stationed at Batticotta. He remained there until April 12, 1844, when he was removed to Chavagachery. He was removed from Chavagacheri to Manipay April 2, 1846, and from Manipay to Tellipalai March 8, 1849. Mr. Poor was stationed at Tellipalai and lost his first wife, May 7, 1821; he was again married January 21, 1823, to Miss A. K. Knight. He was removed to Batticotta to take charge of the Seminary, May 16, 1823.<sup>25</sup>

Here the American missionaries were able to enter into a work that had been begun by the Portuguese, passed over to the Dutch. The American missionaries were able to use the buildings abandoned by the Dutch for their mission work to support their own activities: for public worship, for schools, residences for the missionaries, and gardens with fruit trees. A good translation of the Scripture into the Tamil Language had been in existence for years. There was less need of a printing press. Beyond these outward aids the Americans inherited little from the previous missionaries. The Dutch had made Christianity compulsory, driving the people to church; the English on taking possession abandoned all religious effort. The so-called converts apostatized, and the American missionaries found Christianity disgraced in the eyes of the

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<sup>24</sup> Root, *A Century in Ceylon*, 6.

<sup>25</sup> American Ceylon Mission, Burnell T.S ed., *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852* (Jaffna: American Mission Press, 1853), 4.

natives.<sup>26</sup> The religion of this people was Hinduism. Religious festivals were seasons of the ritual activities and beginning with bathing and dressing the idols and ending with a rough brawl over the distribution of coconuts for the feast.

The operations of the mission were confined to the Northern Province of Ceylon at eight stations: They are Tellipallai, Batticotta (then Vaddukoddai), /Oodooville (Uduvil), Manepy (Manipay) Panditerripo, (Pandatheruppu), Chavagacherry, Varany and Oodoopitty (Uduppidy). There were also six out stations: Atchuvely, Moolai, Karaidivu, Velanai, Kaytes and Poongiduthevu.<sup>27</sup>

The ABCFM sent over 125 ministries to Jaffna and many of them gave the best years of their lives to missionary work in Jaffna during 1816-1972. Rev. Miron Winslow who arrived in Ceylon in 1820 had these words for an outgoing group of missionaries at the Bowdoin Street church in Boston in 1835:

Profit by the experience of those who have gone before you. Enter readily and humbly on the most humble and self-denying labors. let your precepts be embodied in your actions. You should stand before the Hindus more in the character of witnesses for the truth, giving your simple testimony in its favor, than as champions for it by the weapons of argument... They will be quick to discern your character; and they will give weight to your testimony in proportion to the holiness of your life.<sup>28</sup>

American missionaries always believed that they should win people over by their actions and not simply their words. The American missionaries brought with them a pioneering spirit from America and made an incredible contribution to the religious and social well-being of the people of Jaffna.

The Protestant mission that so influenced my life began with these Presbyterian and Congregationalist missionaries who came to Jaffna in 1816. They, and the missionaries who

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<sup>26</sup> Strong, *The Story of the American Board*, 22.

<sup>27</sup> American Missionaries, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 2

<sup>28</sup> Mills, *A Brief History of the American Ceylon Mission in Jaffna*, 8

came after them, propagated the Christian faith in my region and were deeply involved in the life of the region, providing educational, medical, and other social services. These missionaries said that they came to save the heathens from hellfire, but with that mission, they taught my people to be ethical, God-fearing, and concerned for the well-being of all people. The American Presbyterian and Congregational missionaries were not confined to Jaffna. They also served in Tamilnadu, Maharashtra, South East Asia, the West Indies, and among the Indigenous Peoples settlements in North America.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Subramaniam, *The American Mission and Modern Education in Jaffna*, 10.

## **CHAPTER TWO: ENCOUNTERING THE TAMIL HINDU CULTURE**

### **Understanding of Culture**

The term culture comes from the Latin word *colere*, meaning cultivate.<sup>30</sup> According to Soong-Chan Rah, culture is a shared socially learned knowledge, and behavior patterns. Culture is tradition, acquired knowledge, and lived experience that helps us navigate the society we live in, and provides guidelines for our interaction with others. Culture is a social system shaped by the individual, and that can also shape the individual.<sup>31</sup> Katherine Tanner says culture is not self-contained. Multicultural interactions create it. Values from other cultures are brought inside and transform the culture. Culture is not stable because this process is happening all the time.<sup>32</sup> Culture is human patterns of life responding to the social environment.<sup>33</sup> Tanner says that culture is understood as a human universal. The fact of culture is common to all, but the particular pattern of culture differs among all.<sup>34</sup>

Paul Hiebert states that the Real Culture consists of the patterns of actual behavior and the thoughts of the people.<sup>35</sup> Culture embodies beliefs, values, attitudes, and rules for behavior. Culture is the performance of rituals that bind a culture's members together to provide them with a participatory way of embodying and enacting their histories and values. Culture is material artifacts and symbolizations that become a source for identity: language, food, clothing, music,

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<sup>30</sup> Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago: Moody, 2010), 23.

<sup>31</sup> Rah, *Many Colors*, 38.

<sup>32</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *The Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology: Cultural Theory* (NY, Oxford University Press, 2007), 527-542.

<sup>33</sup> Robert Stewart Heaney, *From Historical to Critical Post-Colonial Theology: The Contribution of John S. Mbiti and Jesse N.k. Mugambi*. African Christian Studies Series, 9. Eugene (Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 42.

<sup>34</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, Guides to Theological Inquiry (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), 26.

<sup>35</sup> Paul G. Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1983), 47.



and the organization of space.<sup>36</sup> Culture includes images, secrecy/ritual, narrative, and syncretic developments. It is important to understand what we mean when we say culture, because the American missionaries and those who came before them, and Dutch and the Portuguese, had very different understandings of the word culture.

### *Portuguese and Dutch Period*

Though the Portuguese had ruled over the other provinces for over a century, they only ruled over Jaffna from 1620 through 1658. In the time of the Portuguese, the rule was in the hands of the Portuguese Government. The Portuguese left the propagation of religion in the hands of the Jesuits and the Franciscans (two orders of monks). The first sustained encounter between Christian education and Jaffna's native population set the foundations for a Catholic community that remains into the twenty-first century. The Dutch in 1658 succeeded the Portuguese in the rule of the maritime province of Ceylon. The Dutch administration was in the hands of the Dutch East India Company. They ruled from 1658 through 1798.<sup>37</sup> Over the course of the century and a half, they invested in an educational system that included an addition to the Jesuit Seminary established by the Portuguese and a network of thirty-four loosely supervised parish schools that taught the Dutch Reform catechism as a memorized text.<sup>38</sup> Despite these efforts, according to the Dutch, the parish schools failed to provide more than basic literacy among their students, and the local Tamil schoolmasters were considered largely unfit due to skepticism over the sincerity of their professed Christian beliefs.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Rodríguez, Jeanette, and Fortier, Ted. *Cultural Memory: Resistance, Faith, and Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 107, Accessed November 9, 2020.

<sup>37</sup> Bishop Sabapathy Kulendran, an article on *Dutch Christianity*, got this article through Bishop Jebanesan.

<sup>38</sup> De Silva, *A History of Sri Lanka*, 121.

<sup>39</sup> van Goor, Jurrien, *Jan Kompenie as Schoolmaster: Dutch Education in Ceylon, 1690–1795*, *Historische Studies* 34 (Groningen, Netherlands: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1978), 109–44.

### *The Challenges during British Colonial Rule*

Under British rule, the indigenous religion was finally released from all official constraints. In the absence of missionaries, during an interregnum of roughly twenty years after the fall of the Dutch, Hindus had become unaccustomed to the open profession of religious devotion, and temple-building, therefore, became an index of their new freedom. In the early nineteenth century, the British and American missionaries counted around twelve-hundred Hindu temples in the Jaffna peninsula, a four-fold increase since the collapse of Dutch power.<sup>40</sup> The political conditions of Ceylon were unfavorable to the American missionaries. Edward Barnes, who became British Governor in 1821, was hostile to the American missionaries and did not consent to issue them a charter to establish a college. When the American missionaries set up the institution on a modest scale, the British Governor continued to restrict its development. During the Napoleonic wars, Barnes was Wellington's lieutenant. He never forgave America for siding with the French during that war. Because of this, Barnes imposed a ban on the arrival of American missionaries to the Island during the period of his Governorship (1821-1832). When James Garrett, the American missionary, came to the island with a printing machine, he was promptly ordered to leave the island.<sup>41</sup> The British government at that time did not show any favors to the American missionaries. The American missionaries tolerated all these challenges and continued in their service in Jaffna.

### *Encountering the Jaffna Tamils*

At first the native people had in their recollection the proselytizing power of the Dutch. Some thought the American missionaries had come among them to gain money or in some way to better their own condition and were on the lookout for the development by the missionaries of

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<sup>40</sup> Young and Jebanesan, ed. *The Bible Trembled*, 46.

<sup>41</sup> Subramaniam, *The American Mission and Modern Education in Jaffna*, 35-36.

some scheme for acquiring wealth. The free social intercourse which the different mission families had with each other, especially the attention bestowed on the ladies of the mission, was, according to the forms of European politeness, scandalous and against their notions of decorum and good breeding. These feelings however gradually wore away as they got better acquainted with the missionaries and observed and experienced their kindness.<sup>42</sup> When the proposition was first made to native parents to give up some of their children to the direction of the missionaries, they formed the wildest conjectures as to its design. Some thought that the children were to be enslaved; others that the boys were to be sent into the interior of the island or to some foreign country as soldiers. None could understand why these people (the missionaries) of another nation should come to them and offer to feed, clothe, and educate their (native) children.<sup>43</sup>

Jaffna was filled with native villages, grain-fields, and little groves of valuables trees. The American missionaries commenced the study of the language, having hired as an instructor and interpreter, Gabriel Tissera, a Tamil of the Chettyar or mercantile caste (this caste called Colombo Chetty who were money lenders, doing business came from India lived in the western province),<sup>44</sup> a Catholic from Colombo who had turned Protestant<sup>45</sup> at Batticotta (now the name of the village, now Vaddukodai) on October 15, 1816. Gabriel Tissera was raised a Roman Catholic; but was candid, desirous of instruction, and had more than usual talents. At the village of Tellipallai, Francis Malleappa was engaged as an interpreter. He was the son of a native clergyman, preparing for the ministry, and showed some evidence of piety. On the Sabbath, October 20, 1816, about 30 natives came to hear what the missionaries had to say. The next Sabbath, about 60 attended worship with them and expressed a desire to hear preaching every

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<sup>42</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> Bishop Jebanesan, An Interview on WhatsApp on Feb 21, 2021.

<sup>45</sup> Young and Subramaniam, ed. *The Bible Trembled*, 47.

week. On the next Wednesday, 10 or 12 boys, requested instruction, and began to learn the English alphabet.<sup>47</sup>

### *The Obstacles and the Caste System in Jaffna*

The caste system forms the distinct backbone of the Hindu social order and as such has significant presence in South Asian society. The term “caste” is Portuguese in origin, derived from the Latin *castus* (meaning chaste, the unadulterated, pure breed), and came into common usage during Portuguese colonial rule. Caste, as an expression, was used by the colonial authorities to designate the complex social system, as it did not fit into the early classifications of the European anthropologists. The designation became consolidated during British colonial rule of the Indian subcontinent in which racialized ethnography was used as a tool to classify the complex caste system during several censuses. Paul Hiebert states that people are born into social classes but in later life, these can be changed by individual effort and choice.<sup>48</sup> But the caste in our society cannot be changed by individual effort or choice unless the attitude of the people changes.

In Jaffna various historians have counted the number of castes as between 24 and 150 depending on the various sub-divisions that are included. This complex system of castes and their relationship with each other was entrenched into Jaffna society and the American missionaries saw its negative effects in their missions. In many cases, high caste Christians refused to eat food cooked by low caste people and demanded that low caste people always sit on the floor in schools and churches while they sat on chairs. The people who belonged to the lower caste in the society were treated as slaves through generations by the high caste natives and this did not immediately change with the arrival of the American missionaries.

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<sup>47</sup> Joseph Tracy, *History of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*. Compiled chiefly from the published and unpublished documents of the Board (New-York: University Press, 1842), 63.

<sup>48</sup> Hiebert, *Cultural Anthropology*, 182.

When the first missionaries began their work, one of the greatest obstacles in the way of their progress was the caste problem.<sup>49</sup> The caste division was an 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 overcome by native parents. The boys at Batticotta seminary were at first unwilling to eat on the mission premises. A cook house was built for them on an adjoining piece of land which belonged to a Hindu, where they were permitted to take their food for more than a year. When the establishment was moved inside the mission enclosure, several boys left the school, but most of them soon returned. Water was also an issue. Students who refused to use water from the common wells on the mission premises because of caste issues decided to clean out a well and reserve it for their own.<sup>50</sup> But it had never been the intention of the missionaries to swerve from what they deemed right out of deference to caste. Sitting together on the same mat in church, and especially drinking wine from the same cup in the celebration of the Lord's supper, are acts opposed to the observance of caste according to the perspective of the high caste people. From the beginning, the American missionaries took the position that caste had no place in the Christian church. Because of the pioneering work of these missionaries in changing locals' attitudes toward caste, generations later, the caste system is denounced by many Tamil Christians and even many Hindus of Jaffna.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Printing Press and The Morning Star Newspaper Publication in Jaffna***

In addition, American missionaries worked tirelessly to spread a reading and book culture in our region. A printing press was set up in 1834 at Manipay, Jaffna, and millions and millions

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<sup>49</sup> Kanagasabai Wilson, *The Christian Church in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: The Study Centre for Religion and Society, 1975), 58.

<sup>50</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 10.

<sup>51</sup> Mills, *A Brief History of the American Ceylon Mission in Jaffna*, 8.

of pages in Tamil and English were printed and distributed among the people of this region. The American Ceylon missionaries who served in Jaffna published a newspaper called *The Morning Star* from the year 1841.<sup>53</sup> The first volume was issued on January 7, 1841.<sup>54</sup> It was the second oldest Tamil Newspaper in South Asia, the first Tamil newspaper in Sri Lanka, and the second in English (the first being *The Ceylon Observer*).<sup>55</sup> This paper was published in the Tamil language, with occasional articles in Tamil and English. Each edition had 8 pages and was published on the first and third Thursday of each month at the American Mission Press in Jaffna, published, at one shilling a quarter devoted to Education, Science and Literature and to the dissemination of articles on Agriculture, Government and Religion with a summary of important news:

The reasons for establishing this newspaper were several. First, most of the useful sciences and arts before alluded to are not to be found in the Tamil language. Second, the few that were to be found, are confined to the instruction of the higher classes of society and Brahmins but are inaccessible to the rest of the community. Third, the people in general, have not facilities for acquiring an education – a few youths excepted, who have the privilege of attending the English Schools which have been commenced since the English Government was established. Fourth, there is no way by which the learned, the unlearned, the young, the old, or any class of people who are chiefly engaged in their secular avocations, can inform themselves of the constantly transpiring events in the active world.<sup>57</sup>

The product of the press in Jaffna was in amount and influence almost beyond belief. By 1850, Miron Winslow and his associates had finished the translation of the entire Bible into Tamil and it had been published in Madras, India.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Subramaniam, *The American Mission and Modern Education in Jaffna*, xiv.

<sup>54</sup> *The Morning Star* 1, no. 1 (1841), Accessed January 18, 2021, doi:10.2307/saoa.crl.23626448. South Asia Open Archives, 2.

<sup>55</sup> Subramaniam, *The American River of Love that Flowed into Jaffna*, 62.

<sup>57</sup> *The Morning Star* 1, no. 1 (1841), Accessed January 18, 2021, doi: 10.2307/saoa.crl.23626448. South Asia Open Archives, 2

<sup>58</sup> Strong, *The Story of the American Board*, 34.

By this time, there was a sorry coincidence. Just as the young missions in India were being enlarged and the outlook seemed bright for advance, there fell upon America the great business depression of 1837. Its effect was disastrous in the mission field, particularly in Ceylon, where 171 free schools had to be closed. Over 5000 pupils were thus suddenly dismissed, to the grief of the missionaries who had toiled hard to win them. The boarding schools at Batticotta and Uduvil were kept from closing only by a timely donation from the Ceylon government. The Hindu natives exulted over the supposed collapse of the mission; native converts were discouraged and scattered; confidence was lost.<sup>59</sup> The only bright feature of the disaster was the noble behavior of some of the native teachers in the schools, who voluntarily kept to their task, though their small stipend was greatly reduced. So, the work was kept from disintegration until the churches in America rallied again to its support. Fire, famine, and plague were recurring causes of distress. When cholera broke out in Jaffna in 1846 most of the Christians escaped, but some were stricken; there was general panic; schoolwork and all mission appointments were interrupted because the time and strength of the missionaries was being devoted to ministering to the sick and afflicted. In spite of obstacles, inexperience, and mistakes, as they had sought to follow the leading of God, they had already been able to accomplish what to human eyes seemed impossible.<sup>60</sup>

### *Publication of Dictionaries*

There were no dictionaries for the Tamil people in Jaffna before the missionaries arrived. The people of Tamil had something like a thesaurus which was a collection of many words for one word. The first attempt at compiling dictionaries was not by the American missionaries. That credit belongs to an Anglican missionary stationed in Nallur, Joseph Knight, who devoted his

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<sup>59</sup> Strong, *The Story of the American Board*, 32.

<sup>60</sup> Strong, *The Story of the American Board*, 33.

energy to work on both the Tamil to English and English to Tamil dictionaries. But Joseph Knight travelled to England often due to his health issues and died in England before he completed his dictionaries. So, the responsibility fell to the hands of the American missionaries. The American missionary and the eminent scholar Levi Spaulding translated several tracts and hymns. Spaulding launched his Tamil dictionary printed by the American Mission Press in 1842 under the patronage of the Jaffna Book Society. This dictionary had 58,500 words. Spaulding said the dictionary would benefit not only those studying the Tamil Bible but also students pursuing higher education. This dictionary was called Levi Spaulding's *Tamil Dictionary* and later *Manipay Dictionary* and *Jaffna Dictionary*. His dictionary explains the common words with different meanings. For example, "Ohdu" is defined as the shell of a tortoise, broken pottery, an instruction to run, and roof tiles.

Spaulding translated John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*. After reading his book, Henry Alfred Kristnapillai, a well-known poet in the Tamil Language, converted to Christianity from Hinduism. Even after conversion, Kristnapillai retained his Hindu surname. After his conversion, he wrote the "Iratchanya Yathirigam" (Journey of Salvation) in poetic form.

The English Tamil dictionary was printed in 1844 by the American missionary Rev. Miron Winslow. He used the words from the *Webster's Dictionary*, which was an American dictionary published in 1822, to compile his English-Tamil dictionary. A second edition was printed in 1852, again by Miron Winslow. It was a milestone in the history of Tamil. It gives the explanation in English for a Tamil word and then provides a line from an ancient Tamil text as an example. In the introduction to *A Comprehensive Dictionary of High and Low Tamil*, Winslow states: "It is not perhaps extravagant to say that in its poetic form, Tamil is more polished and exact than Greek and in both dialects with its borrowed treasures more copious than



Latin, in its fullness and power it more resembles English and German than any other living language.”<sup>61</sup> The Low Tamil (colloquial) were used in the primary schools and the high Tamil (Academic) were used in the seminary.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Subramaniam, *The American River of Love that Flowed into Jaffna*, 70.

<sup>62</sup> Bishop Jebanesan, An Interview on WhatsApp

## **CHAPTER THREE: THE ENCOUNTER CONTINUES: AMERICAN MISSION SCHOOLS IN JAFFNA**

### *School System During Portuguese and Dutch Period*

During the period of Portuguese and Dutch rule two types of educational institutions continued to flourish. One was the system of parish schools organized and conducted by the colonial administration, while other were the traditional Tamil village schools.

In Dutch times opportunities for education were offered to all, but the education offered through church-affiliated schools was at an elementary level. School buildings were plentiful, and each church had a small school attached to it. There were 34 schools in Jaffna. It was estimated that about 20,000 children attended school.<sup>66</sup> In each of these schools, there were two teachers. Boys and girls received instruction until the ages of 12 and 10, respectively.<sup>67</sup>

When the British occupied the country, these parish schools were closed because the British government did not have resources to maintain them.<sup>68</sup> And also, the British government did not consider it to be their responsibility to educate the people of their colonies. For example, the Church at Chundikuli where I had been an Assistant Priest was converted to a cattle shed by Barbot, the Chief British Officer in Jaffna.<sup>69</sup> But the native Tamil schools continued to flourish. Traditional Tamil education was confined to a narrow circle of families who had positions of influence and wealth in society. This system was transmitted from generation to generation.<sup>70</sup>

### *The Reasons to Establish Schools by American Missionaries*

There were several reasons for American missionaries to get involved in the field of Education. First, schools opened to reach the locals to spread the Gospel because American

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<sup>66</sup> Sinnappah Arasaratnam, *Dutch Power in Ceylon, 1658-1687* (Amsterdam: Djambatan, 1958), 32.

<sup>67</sup> Goor Van J. Jan Kompanie, *School Master: Dutch Education in Ceylon 1690*, 17.

<sup>68</sup> Bishop Jebanesan, An Interview on WhatsApp on Feb 24, 2021.

<sup>69</sup> *Missionary Herald*, May 1826, 38.

<sup>70</sup> Subramaniam, *The American Mission and Modern Education in Jaffna*, 16.

missionaries started their evangelism with the Students, parents, and teachers. Second, American missionaries believed in the teaching of John Calvin that we should engage with others logically, show them the truth and then convert them, never forcing religion upon them. The Protestant Christian's belief was based on the Bible and they preached the Bible. Therefore, American missionaries thought, it was impossible for a person to be a Protestant if he/she could not read and write. American missionaries believed that it was only through education that one could affirm their faith. So, they began to build schools.

The account of Miron Winslow, the American missionary who served in Jaffna between 1820 and 1836, describes the nature of education provided by the native schools: The children, at their first attendance, did not usually know their letters. Only the sons of the more respectable men are taught in the country schools, supported by the natives, and kept, perhaps, under a tree, or in the verandah of a small house where high caste children studied. But the American missionaries travelled to all corners of Jaffna, while in contrast other missionaries such as English CMS missionaries and Methodist missionaries limited their work to the cities. American missionaries established schools in every village to provide education for everyone despite caste and gender. "Provide education and they will embrace Christianity was their motto."<sup>71</sup>

In 1818, they established the first primary schools where most instruction was in the Tamil language, the vernacular language of Jaffna. After that, primary vernacular schools were set up by these missionaries in almost every village of Jaffna. According to a report in 1848, there were nearly 150 primary schools and 16 English medium day schools with over 600 students in various villages. These day schools acted as feeder schools to the boarding schools for older students (secondary school). In the first 40 years of the mission alone, these schools

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<sup>71</sup> Subramaniam, *The American River of Love Flowed into Jaffna*, 14.

educated more than 30,000 students. It was through these schools that the American mission reached out to the native Hindus and their families.<sup>72</sup>

***First University Type College, Batticotta Seminary now Jaffna College***

After seeing the ability and enthusiasm of the students, the American missionaries organized a secondary school in a mission compound. In 1823 they set up the university college at Vaddukoddai (name of the village) then called Batticotta Seminary now Jaffna College.<sup>73</sup>

This institution helped Jaffna reach the upper echelons of the learned world. The seminary was a great resource for the primary and middle schools, providing trained teachers. The first indigenous clergy persons of Sri Lanka were the products of this seminary. The graduates worked hard in the production of Tamil Christian literature and the composition and singing of Tamil Christian hymns. The seminary training also included preaching in the Tamil language and conducting liturgical rites in Tamil.<sup>75</sup>

The great object of the Batticotta Seminary was the propagation of Christianity; the Bible had always been a prominent subject of study and was regarded as the textbook on morals and religion. Science was taught, principally, as an auxiliary to this subject. There was nothing more appropriate than the demonstrative and experimental sciences.<sup>76</sup> The main design of the Seminary was to bring forward competent native agents for the missionary work.<sup>77</sup> This was the first institution providing higher education in English in all South Asia. A few students were sent to the USA for higher education as well.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Mills, *A Brief History of the American Ceylon Mission in Jaffna*, 5.

<sup>73</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 5.

<sup>75</sup> Subramaniam, *The American Mission and Modern Education in Jaffna*, 164.

<sup>76</sup> American Ceylon Mission, Burnell T. S. ed. *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 7.

<sup>77</sup> American Ceylon Mission, Burnell T. S. ed. *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 6.

<sup>78</sup> Bishop Jebanesan, An Interview on WhatsApp on Feb 15, 2021.

American churches, individuals, and social committees like the Female Mite Society of Baltimore, Maryland, and the Ladies Association of Salem, Massachusetts, made \$20 donations to sponsor a child's annual living and educational expenses. Between 1817 and 1837, 98 percent of the \$44,916 donated for the ABCFM's overseas educational activities was sent to Jaffna.<sup>79</sup>

There are two American Mission schools in my village, namely Uduppiddy American Mission College, which is a school for boys, and Uduppiddy Girls' College. Some of the mission schools now have Hindu names, but most still carry the name of American Tamil Mixed Schools, which means boys and girls study together.

### ***The American Missionaries Establish School for Women***

The American missionaries were the pioneers of educational work among girls.<sup>81</sup> When they arrived, there was strong local opposition to the education of women. Women were the property of their husbands and their primary role in society was to be a housewife and to bear children. According to the records of the American Board, in 1816, only 3 women in Jaffna knew how to read and write.<sup>83</sup>

The effort to provide education for girls began in a small way, by the reception of a few girls into the care of the missionary ladies at the different stations. Girls were received at from six to eight years of age, and generally remained in the school until they were married.<sup>84</sup> Girls were being housed, clothed, and fed by the mission; if married with its approval, they received a dowry of \$25.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> "Catalogue of Pupils Supported at Mission Schools by Special Donations," *The Missionary Herald*, vol. 34 (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1838), 126–35.

<sup>81</sup> Wilson. *The Christian Church in Sri Lanka*, 58.

<sup>83</sup> Strong, *The Story of the American Board*, 28.

<sup>84</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 8.

<sup>85</sup> Strong, *The Story of the American Board*, 28. The dowry system is still practiced in our culture. Women are supposed to give a dowry to the bridegroom's party. Some do not practice it, but most people still follow this practice. As I do not accept this dowry system, I did not receive a dowry from my bride's party. The dowry became an additional burden to parents who have daughters. This affects the family and creates women discrimination.

Girls were taught to read and write in the Tamil Language and to recite from memory the Christian Catechism, a synopsis of the Scripture history and portions of the Sacred Scriptures, elementary arithmetic, geography, and Tamil studies.<sup>90</sup> These were purely Tamil and English schools. Students were not allowed to wear ashes or other marks of Hindu ritual signs on their bodies while in the school. Students were required to attend public worship on the Sabbath, and to meet every week at an appointed time at the station for examination and instruction by the missionary. No objection was offered either by parents or children to the study of Christian lessons and, when well taught, the pupils appear nearly as much interested in them as in other studies.<sup>91</sup> The difference between the Dutch schools, that forced all who attended to conform to certain dress and practice, and to attend without consent of the parents, and the American missionary method of gaining consent from parents.

The American missionary Dr. Daniel Poor succeeded first in obtaining three or four girls to live at the mission premises at Tellipalai and receive instruction. One of them was named Mary Poor. After she had learned to read and write, the headman of the parish came one day to the house to get her signature to a deed, transferring some land belonging to the family. The custom was for females to make their mark or cross on the deed, and then for some other person to write the name. When the deed was handed to Mary, instead of making her mark, she wrote in a fair hand her name in full. The headman (the village leader who work for government -now Grama Niladhari) looked on as one amazed. He had never seen such a thing before. "Well," said

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Because of this, normally, parents including mothers do not like to have daughters. Many women are unable to get married because of dowry because they are not able give because of financial difficulties. If the family of the bride give to their daughter with good heart, then it would be acceptable, but bridegroom party should not demand to get dowry.

<sup>90</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 4.

<sup>91</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 5.

he, “is good. Now I will send my daughter to school to learn to read and write.” He did so, and others soon followed his example.<sup>92</sup>

The Oodooville Female Boarding School, now known as Uduvil Girls’ College, was established in 1824 by a missionary named Harriet Winslow. It was the first female boarding school in Asia and one of the first schools for women in Asia. The aim of this school was to increase the moral and intellectual improvement of women and to find suitable companions for the young men educated in the Batticotta Seminary now Jaffna College Vaddukoddai. The primary object to impart to the pupils was a good knowledge of the Bible. Besides this, they attended to reading and writing their own language, Tamil, both on the ola and on paper.<sup>93</sup> They also studied reading and writing in English; the outlines of popular geography, astronomy, and arithmetic; and a little of common needle work.

Harriet Winslow’s life is a good example of the sacrifices made by the American missionaries. Born in Norwich, Connecticut, she married the Rev. Miron Winslow on Jan 11, 1819 and the two of them traveled to Ceylon. She labored for thirteen years in Jaffna. She gave attention to the education of girls and took them into her own family. She often suffered from sickness and weakness. Five of her children died of cholera during their stay in Uduvil. But Mrs. Winslow was strong in faith and her missionary activities. In 1832, with a lot of tears and prayers, they sent their eldest son Charles Winslow to America to continue his education. His ship was caught in the cyclone and on arrival in America he also died. The news of his death was too much for his mother to bear. Harriet Winslow died on January 17, 1833, at the age of 37. Two of her sisters who came to work with her also died, and all three were buried in the Uduvil

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<sup>92</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 14.

<sup>93</sup> Ola is a leaf or strip from the leaf of the talipot palm used in Jaffna for writing paper.

Church graveyard. They burned out like candles and gave education, medicine and book culture and life skills to our Tamil people.

American missionaries opened the gates for girls towards Education. Our society did not accept women's Education. The community thought Education would destroy the four virtues of coyness, simplicity, timidity, and modesty. But American missionaries believed that Education was more important for women than men. American missionaries believed in the saying of Rev. Christian David that "it was more important to convert one woman than converting six men."<sup>94</sup> Women would spread the Gospel more effectively than men because the women usually do not keep the secret with them. They always share with neighbors and friends. Second, when we look into Christianity's history, we can see that the man of the house converted to Christianity; the conversion did not last long. When the father was a Christian, and the mother was a Hindu, the children would undoubtedly be Hindus. But in the homes where the mother was Christian, the children were always pious Christians. American missionaries learned this truth very early in their days and decided to make women their primary target group. The American missionaries were determined to create an educated Christian Tamil community. There were some schools for girls only before the American missionaries arrived, but only primary Education. Higher Education for women was not desired and not accessible.

At the beginning of the mission in 1816, the desire of the natives for education was so small, and their prejudices against missionary operations so great, that it was not easy to find respectable natives willing to engage in teaching in common schools. Though the whole expense of the schools was borne by the American missionaries, it was not easy for the missionaries to persuade parents to send their children to schools. Their objections were still stronger to the

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<sup>94</sup>Subramaniam, *The American River of Love Flowed into Jaffna*, 18. Rev. Christian David- a German missionary and the first state preacher in Jaffna and the first pastor of St. John the Baptist Church Chundikuli



system of boarding schools, by which the pupils would be removed from their parents and brought under the sole direction of the missionaries.<sup>95</sup> In those days, Vellalar caste (high caste) were interested to study. In 1821, there were some half dozen little girls, the daughters or near relations of the teachers, and a few others whose parents were extremely poor, who could be induced by the present of clothes or some other little reward to attend the schools. There was no motive for education which the people could appreciate, except the pecuniary advantage they or their children were to derive from the schools. Children were secured either by the personal influence of the teacher or by the reward they themselves received for attendance.

The caste system was a strong challenge for the missionaries' efforts to provide opportunities for education. In the beginning, the pupils received into both the Seminary and Female Boarding school were from poor, but respectable families; many of them from families possessing considerable property. They had been, with few exceptions, of the Vellalar caste, which is a high caste. But few students of other castes had applied for admission, and consequently, few had been received.<sup>96</sup> However, the American missionaries were firm that the caste differences and conflicts should not be encouraged at the Seminary or in the Female Boarding school.

I would like to mention an incident that happened at Batticotta Seminary (now Jaffna College). A student named Jacob from a low caste community joined at Batticotta seminary. After seeing the low caste student in the class, the high caste students gave their opposition to the missionaries and they left the school. After hearing this incident, the missionary principal said, "where is Jacob. He is in the classroom. That is great. Let us run the class with Jacob. No worries about the high caste students. Let them go if they want. After some days, the high caste students

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<sup>95</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 11.

<sup>96</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 15.

joined the school.”<sup>97</sup> This is what we Tamil praise American missionaries how they touched and shaped our lives in our community. On the other hand, when a student from dooby caste (the people who wash clothes/who do the laundry work) joined the Methodist school (Wesleyan school), the high caste students opposed this and the Methodist principal asked the dooby student to leave the school. Then that dooby student went to Roman Catholic school in a distant place. This incident was criticized by the Arumuga Navalar in his writings.<sup>98</sup>

As the Protestant missionaries believed that education was the principal instrument of conversion, their evangelical work became confined to the people of one caste only because of the high opposition from the upper caste people.<sup>99</sup> The high caste (Vellalar) of Jaffna already had traditions of excellence deeply rooted among themselves. The American missionaries offered opportunities to their children where they could acquire an English education and seek gainful employment. And other caste people were educated in the villages, if they were very talented and worked hard, to then move to the schools. American missionaries were able to educate the low caste people in the village schools in the midst of opposition from the native high cast people. American missionaries gave equal rights to high and low caste people to sit and study together. Because of this, Hindu extremists left and started Hindu schools in order to educate high caste people in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>100</sup> For example, The Jaffna Hindu High School was founded in 1886 by a group of Hindu people who wanted an English language alternative to the Christian missionary schools. For the American missionaries, acceptance of the Hindu caste system was a direct obstacle to acceptance of the Christian faith.

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<sup>97</sup> An interview with Bishop Jebanesan, on WhatsApp March 2, 2021

<sup>98</sup> Arumuga Navalar, *The Situation of Jaffna Religion, Written in 1872* [in Tamil] (Jaffna: Hindu Society, 1937), 21.

<sup>99</sup> Subramaniam, *The American Mission and Modern Education in Jaffna*, 70.

<sup>100</sup> Rev. Tharmakulasingham, Interview on WhatsApp, December 28, 2020.

***The Tamils Got Employment Easily Because of the Education Provided by the American Missionaries***

We Jaffna Tamils who were the beneficiaries of the American missionaries are proud to say that the British colonial government recruited numerous Tamil graduates of Batticotta seminary and American schools into the civil service of its colonies in Malaysia and Singapore in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Many worked as administrators in the Malay Railways, some in positions of authority in the civil service and rubber plantations. Many of the first doctors, engineers, and teachers in colonial Malaya and Singapore were of Jaffna Tamil descent, among them Dr. S. S. Thiruchelvam, the world's first Asian surgeon. Because of the American Mission Schools Education System, Tamils in Jaffna enjoyed advantages in employment opportunities disproportionate to their share of the island. By 1956, eight years after independence, Ceylon Tamils comprised 30 % of the Ceylon administration service, 50 % of the clerical service, and 60% of engineers and doctors, despite making up just 11% of the total population. Subsequently, legislation was passed to redress the imbalance. By 1970, the share of Tamils had plummeted to just 5%, 5% and 10% respectively, thereby sowing the seeds of ethnic conflict.<sup>101</sup>

As Tamils, we must salute and be thankful to the American missionaries who came to us and shared the love of Christ, and they shared their gifts and talents with us to raise the standard of Education of the Jaffna people. Until today, we have been enjoying the privileges established by these devoted American missionaries. The American Schools have been functioning well in all Jaffna villages. Today, nobody talks about caste in public because of the education, and people are now civilized. The Low caste people are doing well in studies and they in higher position not only in Jaffna but also in Sri Lanka and Worldwide. Today, Jaffna Tamils are doing

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<sup>101</sup> <https://prayandbeready.wordpress.com/2019/01/05/the-education-of-jaffna> accessed on January 5, 2021.

well in their studies and living worldwide for higher education and higher positions because of the American missionaries' seed. Because American missionaries played a significant role in raising the Tamil people's standard of Education in Jaffna. Today Jaffna is one of the high literate districts in Sri Lanka because of the American missionaries. I doubt that anybody will deny or challenge the conclusion that the American missionaries encouraged our men and women and shared their wisdom and knowledge with our community and brought light into our Tamil Community through the Education.

## CHAPTER FOUR: THE ENCOUNTER CONTINUES IN AMERICAN MISSION HOSPITALS

The American Presbyterian and Congregationalist missionaries did not stop with their revolutionary changes to the education system in Jaffna, Ceylon. They were also the pioneers of Western medical establishments in Jaffna. When the American missionaries arrived in Jaffna, there was always one missionary trained in medicine at the mission house to take care of the missionary families. Later the missionaries noticed that there was a great need for medical attention among the local people and also a need to train native-born doctors. Before that time, the people of Jaffna had no knowledge of Western medicine. The only type of treatment available was what was called Ayurvedic treatment (Indigenous Medicine) which did little good for any sick person. In 1817, Rev. Edward Warren established a small hospital at Tellipalai. He describes his medical work as follows:

Our attention has been called to the sick around us. Many flocked to our doors for medical aid as soon as they were informed 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. It affords us an opportunity to recommend the great Physician to many from different parts of the district whom we should probably otherwise not see. We may converse with them in the most favorable circumstances to leave a good impression on their minds. Our morning prayers are often attended by many who come for medical aid, at which time we preach to them Jesus Christ.<sup>103</sup>

### *Dr. Samuel Fish Green and his Medical Service*

In 1819, Dr. John Scudder began his labors as missionary physician at Pandeterrippu and Chavakacheri. A few young men were trained to practice Western medicine. In 1833, Dr. Ward opened a medical practice at Vaddukoddai. In October 1847, Dr. Samuel Fisk Green assumed

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<sup>103</sup> Mills, *A Brief History of the American Ceylon Mission in Jaffna*, 5.

charge of the Medical Department at Manipay and it was enlarged by him.<sup>104</sup> Between 1847-1873 the medical work under Dr. Green was expanded. Sixty native physicians were trained, and 4000 pages of standard medical books were translated into Tamil. In 1886, 1376 patients were registered at Station Dispensary. (Station means American missionaries where they stayed and served in Jaffna) Between 1873–1880, the medical classes continued under native instructors. Some dispensary work done under trained native physicians. In 1893 Drs. T. B. Scott and Mrs. Mary E.M. Scott re-opened the medical work at Manipay. Between 1893-1913, a period of large growth and service of Hospital and Dispensary at Manipay under Dr. and Mrs. Scott, the number of patients grew from 35 in 1894 to 1166 in 1911. Dispensary patients 3,670. Work largely self-supporting. In 1898 S. F. Green Memorial Hospital opened at Karaidivu.<sup>105</sup>

#### ***Leitch Sisters and Dr. Isabella Curr Medical Services***

In 1898, the American Missionaries started McLeod Hospital at Innuvil in Jaffna which was for women and children. From 1893-1898, the Misses Leitch brought to fruition the McLeod Hospital at Innuvil, a women's only medical mission.<sup>106</sup>

American missionaries were sad to see the suffering of the Tamil women during pregnancy and wanted to establish a hospital for women. First, there was the belief that the reason for their sickness and sorrow was predetermined from higher powers. This kind of thinking was not limited to women. Second, the women would not agree to consult a male doctor or submit to be examined even if he was a local doctor. The women chose to be looked after by midwives during labor. The midwives were from a low caste with little medical knowledge.

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<sup>104</sup>American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Mission in Ceylon 1884* (Jaffna: Strong and Asbury Printers, 1885), 6.

<sup>105</sup> Chas W. Miller, *The Centennial Year in Ceylon: Report of the American Mission* (Jaffna, Ceylon 1916), 63.

<sup>106</sup> Miller, *The Centennial Year in Ceylon: The Report of the American Mission, Jaffna, Ceylon*, 63.

Delivery was considered infectious and taboo for mother and the baby. The baby and mother stayed in a shack outside the home for the first 31 days because they were considered unclean. Women faced several other issues. For an example, when a baby is five days old, there was the risk for the baby that the ghost *Kothi Pey* would take it. This was the local belief. So, natives had some rituals. Natives split a coconut shoot and made a lamb. They took food for the ghost's needs and, along with the particular baby's mother's mat pillow and clothing, disposed of them in a faraway place near the cemetery by burning. They took the mother's own food as well. They used to check all the corners of the house and call on the ghost not to stay there just in case it was hiding somewhere. On reaching the destination, they put out the flame and returned home. The natives feared if the fire was still burning the ghost may return home with them. Even now there are places in villages designated as ghost corner *Kothi moolai* that are used to discard ghost offerings. It was hard for the women to live with it all.<sup>107</sup>

Margaret and Mary the Leitch sisters (American missionaries) had seen the hardship of the women in Jaffna and wanted the women to have a happy pregnancy and enjoy family life. They went to England and spoke about these women and raised funds. They returned with funds and started their work at Innuvil with 10 acres of land where the present McLeod Hospital stands on the Kankesanthurai road. Dr. Isabella Curr came from England to serve as a doctor for the women at Innuvil. Her first patient, however, was a cow. Dr. Curr delivered the calf successfully. Natives brought another cow in labor. That was also a successful delivery. Dr. Curr said, "I did not come here to treat the cows, but I came to treat the women in labor." Gradually women began to come to the Innuvil hospital in big numbers. Patients came from the north, from the south of the peninsula and from nearby islands. Jaffna women will always remember the medical

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<sup>107</sup> Bishop Jebanesan An Interview on WhatsApp Feb 25, 2021.

services rendered to them by Dr. Curr in her forty years at the hospital. In addition to the Maternity Hospital, Dr. Curr ran a nurses training center at Innuvil. The hospital was able to meet all expenses without a grant from American Board because they had charged patients who were able to pay for medicine and treatment so that the income increased over \$2200.<sup>108</sup>

On September 24,1898, the McLeod Hospital formally opened under the charge of Dr. I. H. Curr. A new surgical ward part of the women's mission opened at Innuvil. In 1911, a new Maternity ward at McLeod Hospital was completed. The entire cost (Rs. 10,000) for constructing this unit was met by gifts of grateful patients and their friends. The daily average number of inpatients for the year was 1,871, while the number of beds in the hospital was 70.<sup>109</sup> There were 24 in the Nurses' Home, mostly Tamil girls who had been educated in different Mission Boarding Schools, with a few Sinhalese and Burghers. Nursing became one of the first professions for women in Jaffna. In this way, the medical mission made contributions to the advancement of education for women.<sup>111</sup>

In 1900, a branch dispensary opened at Chavakacheri and continued for two years. It should be noted that non-American missionaries rarely served in Jaffna. Dr. Curr came from England to serve for Jaffna Women from 1898 through 1938. Rev. and Mrs. McLeod donated ten thousand British pounds for the construction of the Innuvil Hospital. With gratitude, the American missionaries named it McLeod Hospital.<sup>113</sup> We must remember that Leitch sisters started this and Dr. Curr dedicated herself to the hospital. The Leitch sisters continued serving in Chavakacheri and ran a clinic there.

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<sup>108</sup> Hitchcock, *The Ninety Fourth Annual Report of the Ceylon Mission of the American Board: The ABCFM in Jaffna Ceylon, 1909* (Tellipallai: American Ceylon Mission Press), 62.

<sup>109</sup> Chas. W. Miller, *The Centennial Year in Ceylon: Report of the American Mission, Jaffna, Ceylon 1916*, 66. The Sinhalese are the majority ethnic group in Ceylon. Tamils are minority. Burgher people, also known simply as Burghers, are a small Eurasian ethnic group in Sri Lanka descended from Portuguese, Dutch, British and other European men who settled in Ceylon and developed relationships with native Sri Lankan women.

<sup>111</sup> Miller, *The Centennial Year in Ceylon: The Report of the American Mission, Jaffna, Ceylon*, 63.

<sup>113</sup> Bishop Jebanesan An Interview on WhatsApp Feb 22, 2021.



Dr. Luxman who is a present doctor at the Teaching Hospital Jaffna says that it was Dr. S. F. Green who trained and sent the doctors for this Friend in Need Hospital, now it is known as Jaffna Teaching Hospital.<sup>114</sup> The first batch of doctors there were all graduates of Green's medical school.<sup>115</sup> The dream of Dr. Green was for the Tamil doctors to think in Tamil and uphold their Tamil cultural values. That is why we Tamils call him a man of prophetic vision. In an interview Dr. Green said, "why do you follow Western ways of life? Be true to your culture. Maintain your lifestyle." He truly admired the local culture and wished for the locals to be non-European doctors. He wrote in his diary: "I believe changes will continue to evolve from *verti* to trousers, from *shawl* to a shirt, from being vegetarians to non-vegetarians and from cottages to places."<sup>116</sup>

Dr. Green became one of the few Westerners to become fluent in Tamil and even published a Tamil Dictionary for Medical Science. Dr. Green was a great gift to the Jaffna Tamils. Through him, medical knowledge was enhanced. While serving as a doctor, Green wrote books and tracts about medical care and faith. At a time when cholera was spreading widely, and people were dying in the hundreds, Dr. Green wrote tracts on prevention methods and treatments which were very helpful and encouraging to the community. Dr. Green continued his practice especially helping other missionaries. His life was about simplicity, purity, reverence for God, and good behavior. Samuel Green came to us as a shining light. He never moved to India but stayed in Jaffna right to the end of his life. Only in his old age did he return to his homeland in the USA, and there he died. Green also wrote prolifically about the habits and culture of Tamils.

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<sup>114</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852, 1849*, 26.

<sup>115</sup> Subramaniam, *The American River of Love that Flowed into Jaffna*, 43.

<sup>116</sup> Subramaniam, *The American River of Love that Flowed into Jaffna*. 44.

The Sri Lankan Government recognized his contribution by issuing a stamp with his portrait in 1998 in honor of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his arrival on the island.<sup>117</sup>

Sir John Anderson, Governor of Ceylon, said at the centennial celebration of the American missionaries in 1916, that the missionary hospital was admirably managed and accomplished what the government could not provide: medical care and training to the people of Jaffna.<sup>118</sup> During Dr. Scott's absence it has been increasingly evident to all that it is essential that a missionary physician be in charge in order to maintain the high standard and large Christian influence which the Green Hospital ought to have especially among the men of the community.<sup>119</sup>

At present, these hospitals continue to serve the general community of Jaffna on a small scale because the church does not have resources, there is division in the church, and also there are larger more modern hospitals available in Jaffna. Now parishes do not offer any kind of health education or medical service in villages.

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<sup>117</sup> Subramaniam, *The American River of Love that flowed into Jaffna*. 45.

<sup>118</sup> Miller, *The Centennial Year in Ceylon: The Report of the American Mission, Jaffna, Ceylon*, 65.

<sup>119</sup> Miller, *The Centennial Year in Ceylon: The Report of the American Mission, Jaffna, Ceylon*, 70.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: TODAY'S CHURCH OF SRI LANKA IS COMPARED WITH AMERICAN MISSIONARIES**

We have many things to learn from the example of the American missionaries and their work in Jaffna, Sri Lanka. The American missionaries wanted to show the Tamils the truth and convert them, but they never forced their religion on our culture.

### ***The American Missionaries Burned Out Like Candles***

The American missionaries suffered a great deal facing loneliness, disease, and death. Most saddening for the missionaries was the separation from their children. The American missionaries surrendered their lives for the glory of God, and they burned out like candles and gave education, medicine, book culture, and life skills to our Tamil people in Jaffna.

### ***Lessons from the American Missionaries***

The most important lesson to be drawn from the work of the American missionaries in Jaffna is the way they won people over by their actions and not simply their words. Bishop Jebanesan has recently pointed to the most significant challenge for Christians in Sri Lanka today: the good qualities of non-Christians and the bad qualities of Christians.<sup>120</sup> We as Christians at some point, are ashamed to stand in front of other faith communities, because of bad actions of leaders, such as sexual harassment, fraud, smoking and drinking, and bad leadership which is not service minded, but prefers a lifestyle of luxury. The entire Christian community in Sri Lanka is affected because other religious communities look at us as Christians. The other religious people do not know much about the different denominations such as Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, CSI, and American Ceylon Mission Church and so on. Therefore, the present churches in Sri Lanka are called to live as true disciples of Jesus, and our words and

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<sup>120</sup> Jebanesan, Interview on WhatsApp, October 12, 2020.

actions should go together like those American missionaries who inspired our community through their actions in Jaffna.

The American missionaries worked tirelessly to spread a reading and book culture in our region. Today there is more work to be done: The Sinhala and Tamil communities do not have all the materials in their own languages. So, the church should take the initiative to translate necessary books. For an example, we do not have a full translation of the prayer book in Tamil or Sinhala. We have only an order of service book for our Sunday services. I think the church should consider translating the Prayer Book of the Church of England in Tamil and Sinhala so that the ordinary people will be able to meditate and strengthen their faith at home with their family members.

Today I see a lot of improvements in education in Sri Lanka but there are still poor and unprivileged children hidden in the villages. The Church should help the poor and lowly by educating them and bringing light into their lives as the American missionaries did. The American missionaries travelled to all corners of Jaffna and established schools in every village to provide education for everyone regardless of caste or gender. Rev. Miron Winslow who served in Jaffna from 1820–1836, states that at the beginning the native children did not usually know their letters. During those days, only the high caste children studied in the Traditional Tamil School from generation to generation. American missionaries developed a comprehensive system of education with primary schools, a secondary school, and a university college. Batticotta Seminary was the first university type institution providing higher education in English in all of South Asia. Because of the American missionaries, the Jaffna Tamils were able to get white-collar positions in the British empire in Ceylon and become translators, teachers,

engineers, doctors, superintendents, and administrators not only in Ceylon, but also in South India, Malaya, and Singapore.

The American missionaries were the pioneers of educational work among women in Jaffna. Uduvil Girls College was the first boarding school in Asia and one of the first schools for women in Asia. The American missionaries educated women in order to raise their social position in the society. They saw the difficult condition of women in the society. The women were treated like property of men bearing children and looking after children and household things, but the American missionaries changed this situation and uplifted the condition of women in our community through education. Today women are doing well in studies and have developed themselves in all fields. The entire credit should go to the American missionaries for creating the foundation for women's development in Jaffna. The American missionaries shared their gifts and talents with our Tamil community to raise the standard of education of the Jaffna people.

The American missionaries were the pioneers of western medical establishments in Jaffna. Before, the people had no knowledge of western medicine. Dr. Green was as a shining light to Jaffna people, because of him, the medical knowledge was enhanced in Jaffna. Native physicians were trained. 4000 pages of standard medical books were translated into Tamil. The American missionaries had seen the suffering of women during pregnancy and established a hospital for women and children in Jaffna. Dr. Curr served for 40 years in that hospital. She was like Mother Teresa for Jaffna women. Nursing became one of the first professions for women in Jaffna. Today these hospitals are functioning slowly in a small way because of lack of resources and also the division of the church. The church should be faithful to the legacy of the American

missionaries and should continue to serve the community through dedication, commitment, and selflessness as American missionaries did.

The American missionaries who left their comfort zone, their families, relatives, property, and loved ones to bring light to the Tamil people in Jaffna, Sri Lanka labored and were buried in our land. These American missionaries went through so much hardship while they were serving in Jaffna. Today, our Christian ministers are reluctant to go to remote areas to serve the people. Most clergy persons prefer to serve in the capital city in order to get good facilities such as cars with unlimited petrol allowances and to educate their children in leading schools. One of the former Archdeacons of Jaffna, the Venerable S.P. Nesakumar, once said at one of the Diocesan Council Meetings, “Dear Bishop, If you make every clergy person an Archdeacon, then they will be happy to go to remote areas to serve, as the facilities are good for Archdeacons.”<sup>121</sup> We should ask ourselves, are we called to serve people or are we called to enjoy the privileges in the name of ministry? (Read 1 Corinthians 9:1-27). The Present churches in Sri Lanka should learn the sacrifice, dedication and selflessness, and service mindedness of American missionaries in order serve our own community better.

The American missionaries taught Tamil people to be ethical, God-fearing, and concerned for the well-being of the people. American missionaries gave to the natives *a Rules of Life in the form of a familiar exposition of the Ten Commandments*. The Rules of Life was translated into Tamil and distributed to the natives by the American Missionaries. You can read the whole rule of life given to the American missionaries in Appendix B. These rules of life show how American missionaries guided the native Tamils in their behaviors, in their integrity and their faithfulness of their calling in the community. One of the rules, states that “You should

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<sup>121</sup> I attended this meeting. A comment by the Ven. S.P. Nesakumar at the Diocesan Council, Diocese of Colombo, Church of Ceylon, 2017.

not observe any distinctions of caste among yourselves but live as the members of one family.”<sup>122</sup> This shows how American missionaries were against the caste system in the society.

The caste system was yet another challenge to their ministry in the native community. Low caste people were treated as slaves through generations by the high caste natives. From the beginning, the American missionaries took the position that caste had no place in the Christian Church. Today it is evident that we see a lot of improvements in the society in terms of caste. The American missionaries educated the low caste people in order to bring them equal to high caste people. Arumuga Navalar was a Sri Lankan Shaivite Tamil language scholar, polemicist, and a religious reformer who was central in reviving native Shaiva Tamil traditions in Sri Lanka and India. Navalar was against missionaries’ activities and condemned the missionaries for keeping the high and low caste people together and eating with them together.<sup>125</sup> In the midst of challenges, the American missionaries were serving our Tamil Community in Jaffna.

The American missionaries who served in Jaffna were highly educated people who studied in the best universities in the USA. If they had thought selfishly, they could have lived in the USA and earned a lot of money and earned a lot of property on this earth. but they came and spent their entire lives with our community for the sake of the love of Jesus Christ to serve and share skills and talents with our community. In our churches in Sri Lanka, the well-educated clergy persons and church leaders demand more privileges from the church and prefer to serve only in the wealthy parishes and in the capital city in order to enjoy its facilities. The example of the American missionaries teaches us to go to the lowly, down, and trodden dark places to bring light to those who live in darkness. The American missionaries saw the darkness in our community, such as the caste system and the condition of women, and they worked hard to bring

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<sup>122</sup>American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 34.

<sup>125</sup> Arumuga Navalar, *The Situation of Jaffna Religion*, 22.

light to them. Are we living members of the body of Jesus Christ, the so-called church of Sri Lanka, ready to serve and bring light to the people who are going through so many hardships in terms of injustice inside and outside of the Church?

For those of us who run schools in Sri Lanka today, these schools may be established by missionaries of many faiths. Christian schools or not, this question is primary: are we operating schools only for the gifted students and wealthy? Or are we running schools also for the slow and poor? Are we operating schools only for those who can pay the fees? Or are we operating schools for everyone? If these schools are for everyone, we must learn from the example of the American missionaries who went to every corner of the villages of Jaffna peninsula to educate our community. As we are living members of the body of Jesus Christ,<sup>126</sup> what is the answer if we are truly the caretakers of this missionary legacy?

The American missionaries had experienced loneliness, disease, and deaths and the stress of working with strangers in terms of race, language, and cultures. But they learned our native language Tamil in order to serve our community better. This encourages us as Tamils that we should learn the Sinhala language and Sinhalese should learn Tamil in order to serve better in the churches in Sri Lanka. Church leaders should encourage not only the clergy persons but also the whole of the members to learn their brother language, either Tamil or Sinhala. This will develop mutual understanding between two communities. We Tamils and Sinhalese have bitter experiences due to civil war and the conflict between the two communities. The conflict between the two communities is still going on. God invites us to carry on God's mission on earth, which Scripture sums up as the work of reconciliation.<sup>127</sup> This is a God given opportunity for the

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<sup>126</sup> Cynthia Bourgeault, *Mystical Hope: Trusting in the Mercy of God* (Cambridge: Cowley Publications, 2001), 14.

<sup>127</sup> Lambeth Conference (2020: University of Kent at Canterbury) *God's Church for God's World: A Practical Approach to Partnership in Mission*. Edited by Robert Stewart Heaney, John Kafwanka, and Hilda Kabia (New York, NY: Church Publishing Incorporated, 2020), 23.



Christian churches to build bridges between the two communities and to strengthen the relationship between the two communities in order to bring a peaceful atmosphere in the country, mutual understanding and a brotherhood relationship among the Sinhala and Tamil communities.

The American missionaries appreciated Tamil culture and encouraged our community to maintain our culture. For example, the American missionaries wore our Tamil clothes such as *Verti, Saalvai, Thalaipahai*. This showed that the American missionaries recognized our cultural dress and identified them with Tamils by wearing the native people's clothes. This reminds us that as we live in the multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural society, we are called to recognize each other's culture and live among them peacefully.

On the other hand, the American missionaries had it in their heads that other religions were darkness: only Christianity is the light. The American missionaries were exclusivist in their relations to other religions. I will not blame the American missionaries because they did not force the natives like the Dutch missionaries did. They wanted to share the love of God with the people who did not know about Jesus. The American missionaries did not achieve in evangelizing as they expected because the natives were cheating the American missionaries by following Christianity in the schools and following Hinduism at home.<sup>128</sup> The natives were very concerned about English education in order to get employment in the British empire.

I understand that the present world church understands how important it is to live with other religions. We as Christians affirm that God created all men and women in God's image, and that God wishes all to enjoy that fullness of life in God's presence which we know as salvation.<sup>129</sup> When we consider the work of God throughout human history, we need to

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<sup>128</sup> Arumuga Navalar, *The Situation of Jaffna Religion*, 19.

<sup>129</sup> Lucinda Allen Mosher, *Toward Our Mutual Flourishing: The Episcopal Church, Interreligious Relations, and Theologies of Religious Manyess*. Studies in Episcopal and Anglican Theology, Vol. 3. (New York: Peter Lang, 2012),172.

acknowledge that God's plan of redemption has been at work before the church even existed, that God is present in different places, different cultures, even before the Western missionaries come to in our land. The *missio Dei* is God's activity that embraces both the church and the world and in which the church may be privileged to participate.<sup>130</sup> The term *missio Dei* arises out of the biblical-theological understanding that mission is God's initiative. Mission means sending and it is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God's action in human history.<sup>131</sup> As we are living in the multi-religious context, we are called to understand the implication of *missio Dei* that we acknowledge the power of God and richness of God to work in all cultures.

Even though I did not meet the American missionaries in person, I read about them in books, in the annual reports of the missionary activities, in magazines such as *Missionary Herald*, in newspapers such as *The Morning Star*, and learned about them through interviews, digitalized resources, books and Internet library archives and understood their spirit. I intend to continue studying the American missionary activities which brought light to our Tamil community in Jaffna and to know more about their spirits. I always remember and experience the same love and heart of the American missionaries when I look around the Virginia Theological Seminary community. I see the community of VTS as the descendant kindred spirits of the American missionaries. The VTS community keeps the presence of God in our midst. The VTS community shares what they have with me and with the international community. They share their wealth, their buildings, their eminent scholars, their wisdom, and knowledge. This is a wonderful community, the likes of which I have never seen in my life. I feel like I have lived in paradise for three years.

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<sup>130</sup> Soong-Chan Rah. *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church*. Chicago: Moody, 2010, 30

<sup>131</sup> Rah. *Many Colors*, 29.

Now that I have lived and studied with the descendants of the American missionaries at VTS, I would like to propose a Rule of Life for the Churches in Sri Lanka and for the people of Jaffna: lessons learned from our American Protestant Ancestors.

### **CONCLUSION: A RULE OF LIFE FOR THE CHURCHES IN SRI LANKA**

As American missionaries wrote and distributed a rule of life for the Tamil people during the mission days (see Appendix B), I would like to offer a rule of life for the Sri Lankan Church, based on what I have learned both from the missionaries and from my time at Virginia Theological Seminary:

You should live as the members of one family as we are one in Christ whether we are rich or poor, high caste or low caste. Treat everyone equally. The Church should provide necessary training for the community.

You should not observe caste with each other during marriage or any kind of appointments. The Church should be firm on this.

You should not demand to get dowry unless the bride party donate to the couples. The Church should educate the community through seminars.

No one should commit suicide as the life belongs to God. The Church should provide an awareness program for the community.

You should not bear false witness.

Try to solve the problem through discussion but do not increase the problem.

Never ever allow violence to take place and provide peace education and conflict management to the younger generation.

The Church cannot be silent when any injustice act occurs inside the church or outside of the church.

The Church should suffer with the suffering and wipe the tears of the people.

The Church should fulfill the basic needs of the people.

The Church should protect nature and appreciate nature and all the creation of God and provide necessary training for the community.

The Church should educate the community to avoid superstitions.

The church should educate the unprivileged, lowly, and downtrodden in the community.

Read the Bible. Read the Newspaper and Pray and Meditate. Be Prayerful and Surrender to the hands of the Lord.

Read good books and update your knowledge.

Words and Actions should go together.

Be happy and making others happy.

Speak politely.

Do not respond or make any decision when you are angry.

Forgive each other; no revenge.

Use time wisely.

Share work responsibility with each other.

Be punctual. In case of emergency, let someone know.

Help each other whenever needed. Never be tired of doing good.

If there is any need to criticize somebody, first tell something good and praise about that person then offer your critique. It makes the hearer more receptive to the criticism. Remember “You catch more flies with honey than with vinegar.”

Be kind to each other including animals.

Be honest.

Be generous.

Be truthful.

Be tolerant.

Instead of being jealous, rejoice in others' good gifts.

Be disciplined.

Do not be judgmental. Mother Teresa said, "If you judge people, you do not have time to love them."

All parties should contribute (Both ways contribution).

Continue learning your whole life.

Always be ready to give: if you are in need be ready to receive but take only your share and leave enough for others.

Say thank you for everything, big or small.

Say sorry for even for small mistakes.

Always appreciate, encourage, and motivate each other.

Always acknowledge the work of others. Give the credit to the person who did that work.

Do not be a barrier to the growth of others.

Do not gossip. Once an American Missionary said, "Only in Jaffna, do I see men gossip."

Do not insult anybody in front of others.

Provide good hospitality for each other.

Respect the dignity of each other.

Respect the privacy of others.

Make plans for yourselves daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly.

Listen with compassion.

Develop your talents.

Be a versatile person/multi-skilled person.

Take days off and plan for two weeks annual leave for yourself and your family.

Do exercise, at least 30 minutes of walking every day.

Work hard in your life.

Give full attention to all your work.

Eat healthy food.

Do even a small thing with a great heart and in great ways.

Always be ready to offer voluntary service to others.

I am not saying that the above qualities are not present in my community, this may be applicable for every community, however we are called do a self-evaluation of how we are behaving ourselves. God Almighty invites us to remember the following Scripture verses: “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Matthew 7:12); and “Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16).

## Appendix A: The District of Jaffna

Jaffna is one of the districts in the northern part of Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka was once called Ceylon. Sri Lanka is an island, and it is known as the Pearl of the Indian Ocean. Our country gained independence from the British in the year 1948. It is a multi-ethnic country. There are Sinhalese, Tamils, Muslims, Burgers, and others. The Sinhalese are the majority and Tamils are the minority. I am from the Tamil community. There are four main religions in Sri Lanka. They are Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity. Buddhism is the major religion as around 70 percent of the people are Buddhists. Our country, Sri Lanka, was ruled by the Portuguese (1505 to 1658),<sup>132</sup> the Dutch (1640 to 1796), and the British (1796 to 1948), one after the other. With the arrival of the Portuguese, the Roman Catholic religion was introduced in Ceylon.<sup>133</sup> The Dutch Reformed Church was established by the Dutch<sup>134</sup> and Protestant Christianity was introduced into our country by the missionaries who came from Europe and America.

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<sup>132</sup> James Emerson Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon: Its Introduction and Progress under the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British, and American Missions: With an Historical Sketch of the Brahmanical and Budd* (London: John Murray, 1850), ix.

<sup>133</sup> Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon*, 7.

<sup>134</sup> Tennent, *Christianity in Ceylon*, 39.

## **Appendix B: The Rules of Life Given by the American Missionaries**

Rules of Life given by the American missionaries to the Tamils (Given by way of a familiar exposition of the Ten Commandments. Numerous Scripture proof texts are added in the Tamil).

1. You are bound to leave all idol worship; the worship of the saints of the Roman Catholics, and what the Tamil people call gods. You should not go to their temples, nor make any offerings to them, nor give anything for their support, nor rub sandalwood, or ashes, nor use any heathenish ceremonies, enchantments, or prayers at a wedding, a funeral, the birth of a child, while cultivating the land, when going to buy or sell, or when doing any other work. You should not have anything to do with such customs, neither should you observe lucky or unlucky days or signs, nor use sorcery, nor consult the shastras. All these you are bound to leave, and to live without the least leaning to heathenism.
2. You should not observe any distinctions of caste among yourselves but live as the members of one family. In reference to office and other worldly distinctions, the inferior is to honor the superior, each walking humbly, and esteeming others better than himself.
3. Take not the name of God in vain, neither swear by the head, nor any other part of the body, nor take an oath upon any other name, nor use vain and idle words, nor quote the Bible in an irreverent manner.
4. Remembering you have covenanted to keep the Sabbath day holy, you should make every necessary preparation for the Sabbath beforehand, so that neither you, nor your workmen, nor your cattle, may have anything to do on that day; but both you and your family must abstain from all worldly business and conversation, and desires after worldly things. you must not buy, sell, journey, read books on worldly subjects, nor spend the time idly, but read and hear the scriptures, and talk about them; meditate on the great concerns of the soul and on heaven, go to church and worship God, and pray with your family at home.
5. Children ought not only to obey and honor their parents, but when they are old, or in want, to support them. Parents too should treat their children kindly, instruct them in the word of God, and pray with and for them. Servants should obey and honor their masters, and masters should be just and kind to their servants and give them suitable instruction. Wives should obey and reverence their husbands, and husbands love their wives. Each ought to be in subjection to kings and rulers and live-in peace and love with all men.



6. No one should destroy his own life, or that of another, nor kill anything without substantial reason, nor treat beasts with cruelty, either in sport or in anger, nor allow their children to do so. No one may cause abortion, nor be guilty of drunkenness, gluttony, anger, hatred, envy, malice, cursing, quarrelling, oppression, or any such crimes.
7. You must not commit adultery, nor use obscene language, nor learn bad songs, use indecent gestures, associate with unchaste company, nor go to dancers or plays. You should not intermarry with near relatives, nor with idolaters. Each husband should live in love with one wife, and never leave her except for the crime of adultery.
8. You must not steal, assist a thief, nor allow stolen goods to be in your care. Use no fraud in buying and selling, nor deception in weights and measures; receive no bribe, take no unlawful interest, neither forge bonds, gamble nor commit any such sins.
9. You must not bear false witness, and as church members, you should not go to law with each other, nor assert anything to be true which you do not know to be so. Do not slander, nor speak insidiously, nor think evil of others, nor speak reproachfully of the faults of your brethren; but if you see a fault which duty requires you to make known, do it with love and tenderness.
10. You must not covet your neighbor's goods nor be envious of the increase of your neighbor's property but be contented with such things as you have. It is not only a duty to refrain from doing evil, but everyone is bound continually to do good. You should love your brethren, comfort, exhort, pray for, and reprove them; bear with and forgive their faults, and be ready to confess your own. As far as you are able, feed the hungry, clothe the naked, administer to the sick and poor, constantly desiring that neighbors, children, and friends should live a godly life. You should make known to them the scriptures, and exhort them to reform; pray for them, and in this way continually strive that the glory of God may be made manifest by the spread of the Christian religion. Moreover, you should as the Christian religion direct, set a good example before all, and shine as lights among men, considering that as Christ has bought you at unspeakable price, you are not your own, but his, and are bound to serve him with both soul and body, and to rejoice in his glory, giving diligence to make your calling and election sure. If you do these things you will not stumble, but an abundant entrance into the kingdom of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ will be administered to you.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> American Ceylon Mission, *Report of the American Ceylon Mission for 1852*, 34-36.

### Appendix C: A Missionary Story

The place where the missionaries lived was unsafe meaning snakes and old buildings. One day a young missionary conducted a prayer meeting at Manipay. It was around 6 PM in the evening. Because of the hot weather the missionary kept her infant on the entrance of the cottage. The mother missionary was inside the cottage conducting prayers for native women while watching the infant. Suddenly mother missionary saw a Cobra snake was going towards to the child. She prayed to God not to harm the child by the snake because she was afraid to make any noise because snake may bite her child. By God's grace the snake went away climbing on the child without biting her baby.<sup>144</sup> This show how missionaries' faith was and how they trusted in the Lord while there were serving in a strange place. Their culture was not used to the climate.

After some years, Daniel Poor's wife Susan died. Then Daniel Poor married Ann Hoover, the sister of Joseph Knight the CMS missionary working in Nallur in Jaffna. Dr. Daniel Poor died of cholera in 1855. His colleague, Benjamin Meigs wrote about his death in *Missionary Herald Magazine*. Poor seems to have said: I did not know it was so easy to die. Had I known it I would have died long ago. Meigs wrote that Dr. Poor's last words were *Anantham, anantham* (Joy, joy ) *Alleluia* spoken in perfect Tamil. Dr. Daniel Poor was an eminent scientist, had a great faith, and told the world of the joy he found in his love for Christ. He was also an astronomer. Hindu Astronomy is made the foundation of a vast system of Astrology. Hindu Astronomy viewed as a system is exclusively Mathematical, or Practical.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> I attended this service. A story mentioned in a sermon by Dr. Dhanan Senathirajah in June 2017.

<sup>145</sup> Subramainam, *The American Mission and Modern Education in Jaffna*, 269.

Miss Harriet Thevany, a Tamil, was a Bible woman who did the evangelical work in the hospital. The following extracts taken from Miss Harriet Thevany's report:

I speak daily to all that come to the hospital of the love Christ, and of His sufferings and death for our sins and pray for them. Many were interested to hear of the love of Jesus, and they listened to the words spoken to them very earnestly. I often visit those who were laid up in bed, read to them either the Bible or some religious storybooks and speak to them about Jesus. Books were lent to those who can read, and they were interested in reading them. I visited the patients who came to the Dispensary every morning, read and explained some Bible stories to them. Four hundred Gospels were sent by a friend in Colombo to be given to the patients who came to this hospital. Besides these, one hundred other Gospels, four Bibles, and some story books were sold to patients. I was encouraged to see that several women were convinced of their sins and wished to accept Christ as their Savior.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Miller, *The Centennial Year in Ceylon*, 68.

## Appendix D: Global Map indicating the location of Sri Lanka

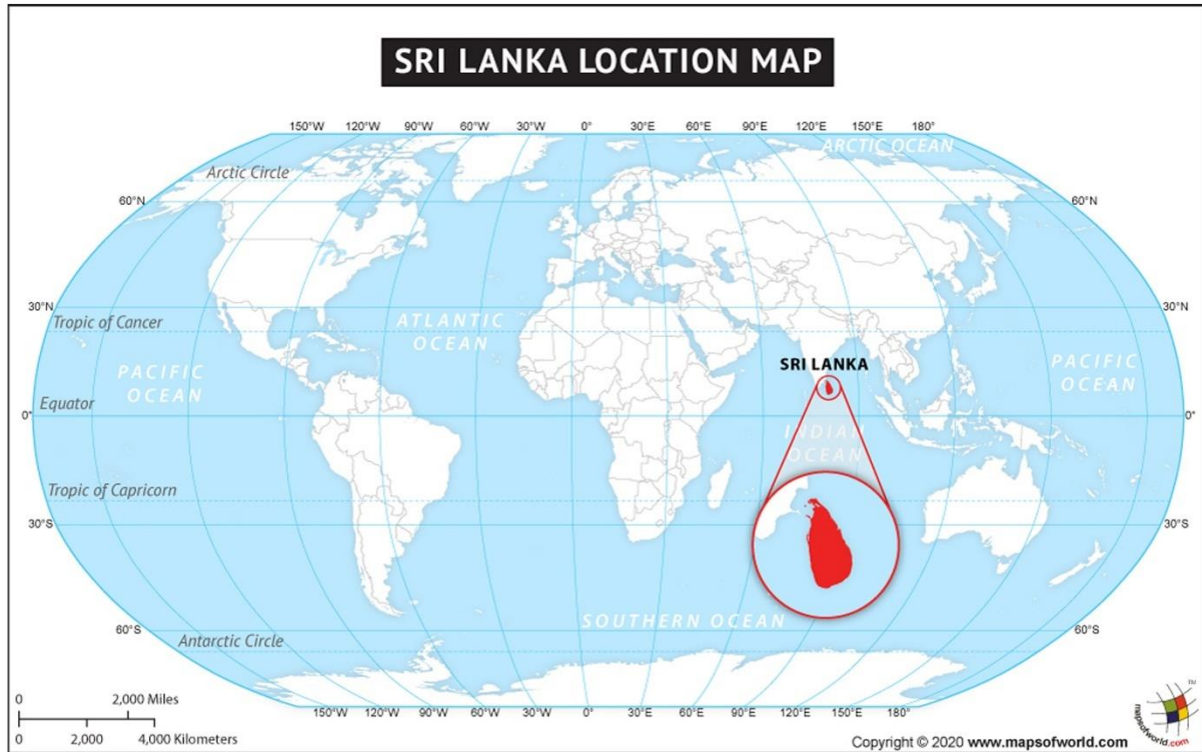


Figure 2: This map was taken from Google, marked by Kirusath, arranged by my wife Betsy Karunya under the guidance of me.

**Appendix E: Sri Lankan Map with Nine Provinces and 25 Districts.**

**Sri Lanka**  
*Province Districts*

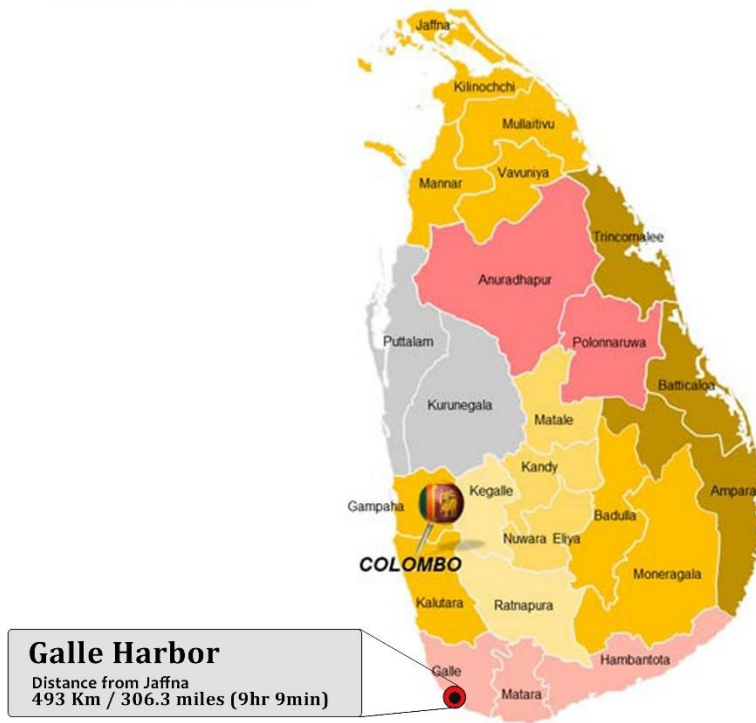


Figure 2: This map was taken from Google, marked by Kirusath, arranged by my wife Betsy Karunya under the guidance of me.

## Appendix F: Travel duration from Galle to Jaffna.

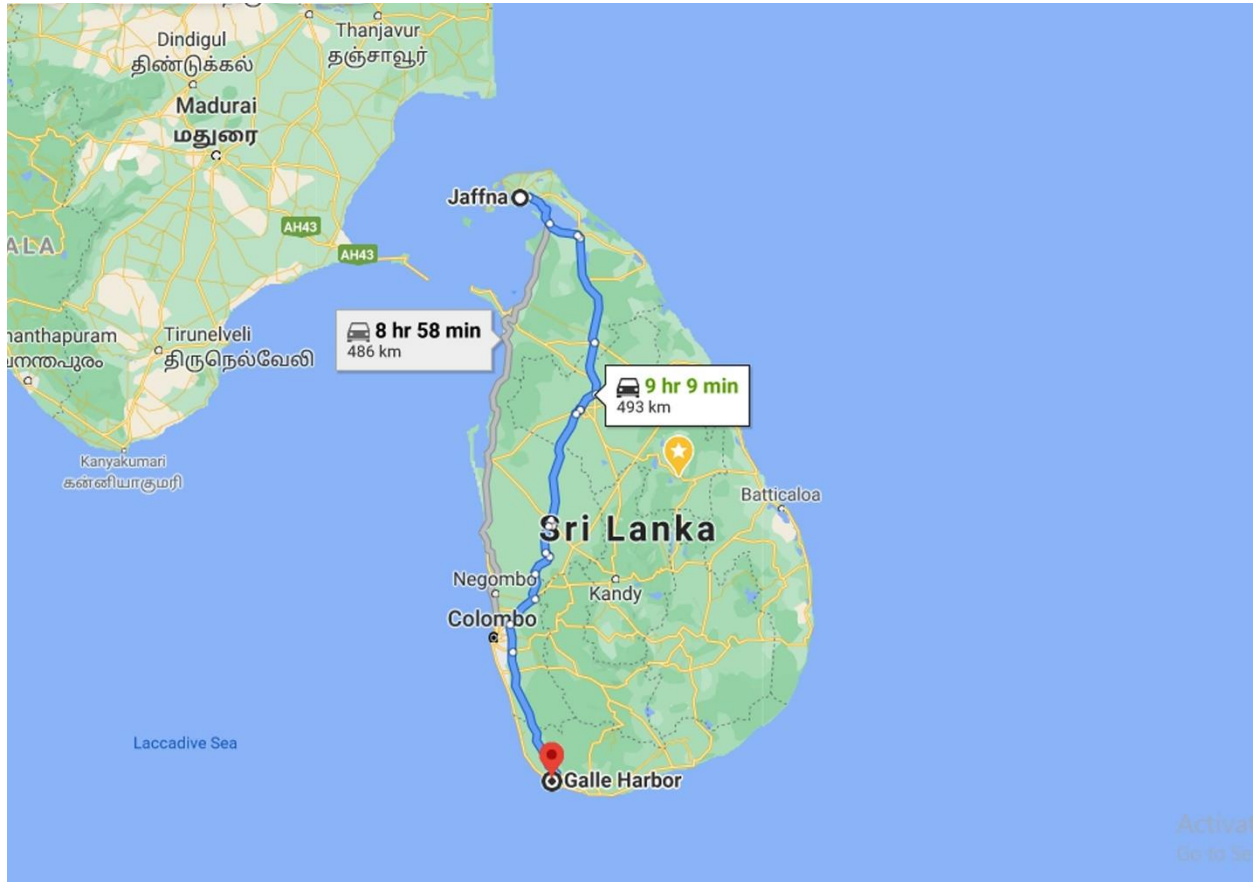


Figure 3: This map was taken from Google, marked by Kirusath, arranged by my wife Betsy Karunya under the guidance of me.

## Appendix G: Distance from Tellipalai to other Villages

### DISTANCE FROM TELLIPALAI

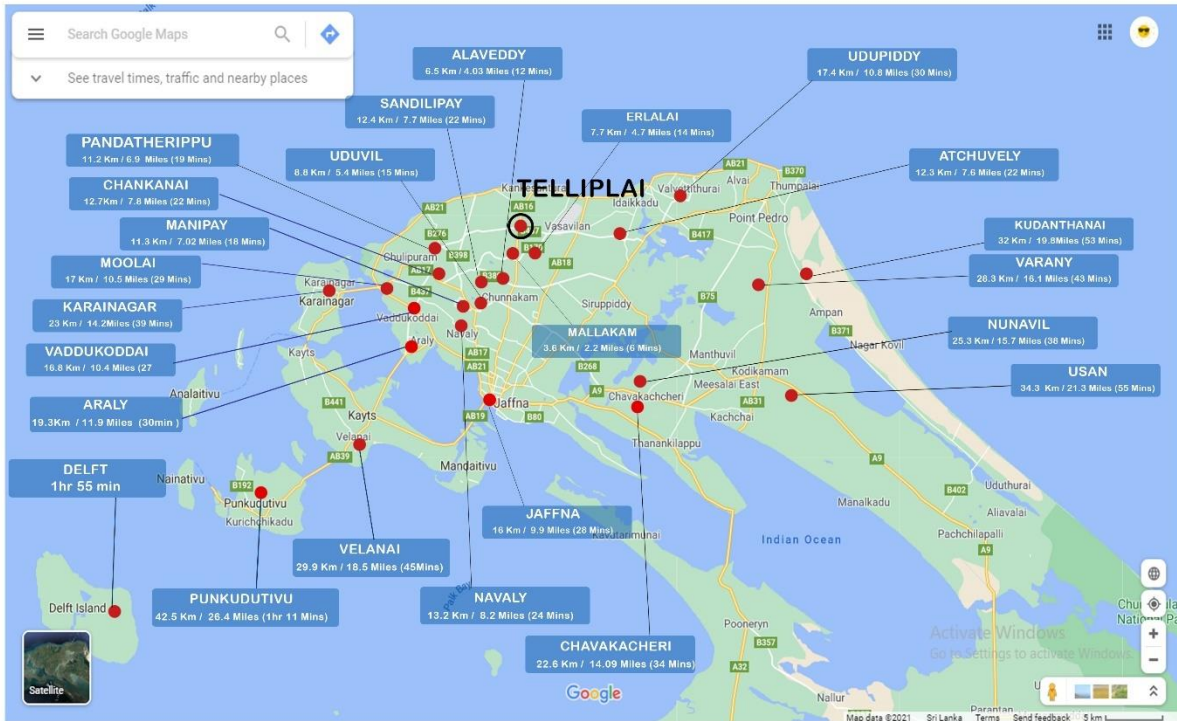


Figure 4: This map was taken from Google, marked by Kirusath, arranged by my wife Betsy Karunya under the guidance of me.

## Appendix H: A Map showing the Distance from Jaffna Town to Other Villages

### DISTANCE FROM JAFFNA TOWN

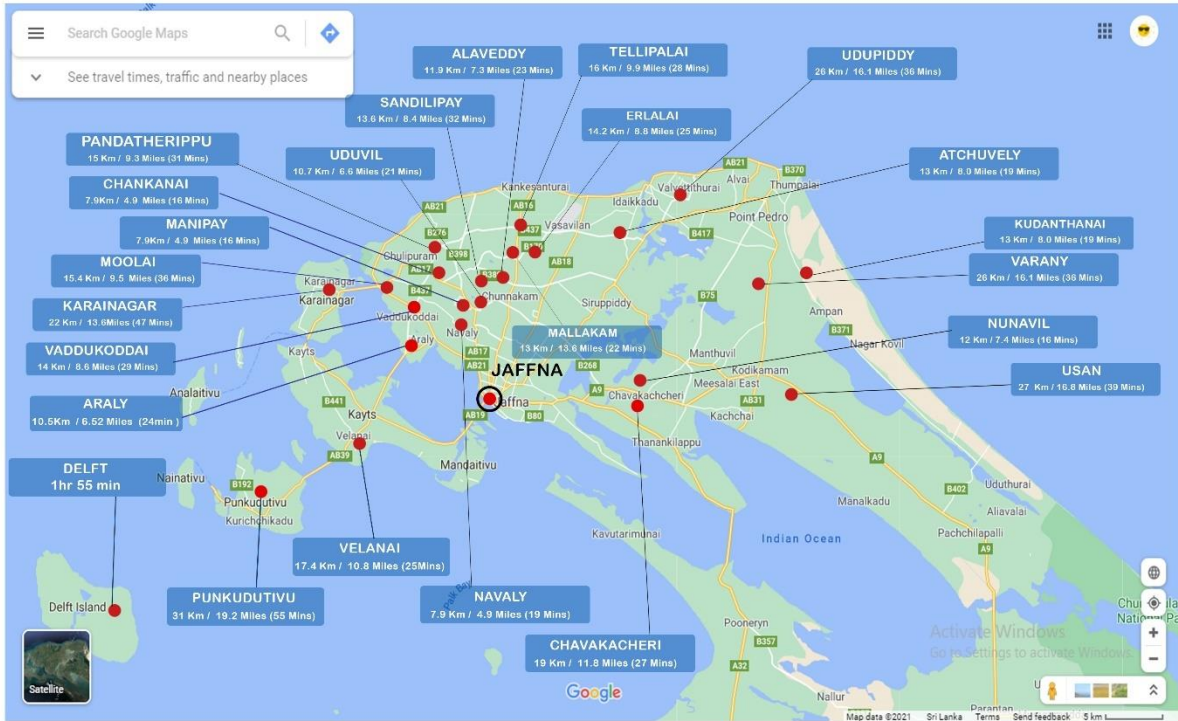


Figure 5: This map was taken from Google, marked by Kirusath, arranged by my wife Betsy Karunya under the guidance of me.



**Appendix I: American missionaries in Tamil Cultural Dress**



Figure 6: This picture from tamilculture.com.

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