



## CONTRIBUTION OF REV. DR. DANIEL POOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF AMERICA MISSIONARIES EDUCATION DURING THE PERIOD OF BRITISH JAFFNA(1816-1855) - A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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### **Introduction**

Sri Lanka is a country well renowned for its long educational heritage. Particularly Jaffna goes a step further up and has an individuality of its own in this respect. In such a long educational reputation, three European races also had an intermittent role to play. They were the Portuguese, Dutch and the British, who influenced Jaffna last of all (179-1948). Though Jaffna saw some changes in its educational systems, it was actually after the arrival of the British that, a new upheaval was witnessed in the field of Education. The education they provided through the American missionaries brought in several changes among the people of Jaffna and in their life styles. The work of Rev.Dr.Daniel Poor, who visited Sri Lanka on behalf of the American mission was of great importance. The magnitude of his sacrifices and services were incomparable. He came to Jaffna in 1816. Unto his last, he lived as one of those here, rendering clerical as well as educational services, whereby he earned great fame.

### **Education activates during the Period of Jaffna Kings**

At the outset, it is very important to understand the educational system found in Jaffna before the arrival of Portuguese in Jaffna and later their control and implementation of their system of religious education. At that time Jaffna was in the Hindu atmosphere having the traditions based on Hinduism and the Hindu educational system. One can observe the influence of Hinduism in the cultural aspect of peoples' life. The educational pattern of Jaffna before the arrival of the Portuguese in Sri Lanka was not an organized one. Moreover the people of Jaffna, did not have the habit of writing on papers Generally the educational system of Sri Lanka was based on ancient Hindu education in the Tamil area while in the Southern areas it was based on Buddhism. Sometimes, these were known as native systems of education. At the initial stages, the education was in the hands of the Brahmins and others. The residences of the teachers were the main centers of education. This was the traditional system of education called the Guru- Kula Education. After the introduction of Buddhism in Sri Lanka in the 3rd century B.C the Buddhist monks took the responsibility of education (*Haivasam, D.P.J, 1969*). The Hindu education in Jaffna was seen at Nallur, Uduppiddy, Puloly, Velanai, Araly, Atchuvely, Karainagar, Varani, Chunnagam, Thellipalai, Kopai, and Madduvil. A small category of people in the Jaffna society received this type of education and they passed their knowledge to others (*Sasikala, K, 2001*). The subjects taught were Tamil literature, Tamil grammar, Hinduism, Logic, Astrology, Sanskrit, and Ayurvedic medicine. But after the 13th century during the times of Jaffna kingdom, the kings took the responsibility of providing education and considered it as their duty (*Ambikaipagan, K, 1969*).

This traditional pattern of education fulfilled the needs of the Jaffna people to some extent. It was accepted that the people of the society based on agriculture were expected to read and write. In the latter period the village schools provided the primary education to Jaffna people. This system of education in Jaffna was closely linked with the Hindu tradition as Jaffna was having close contacts with the south India. In this background the educational pattern closely related to Hinduism was prevalent in different parts of Jaffna. The general objectives of education were developing Tamil language and literature, imparting the religious values and moral character. The *Brahmanical* or Hindu education included the reading and writing of Tamil language, the study of Tamil grammar and Tamil literature. Besides, the students were trained in religious worship and good conduct (*Sivalingaraja, S, 1983*). But this native educational pattern declined after the Portuguese brought Jaffna under their control and some people showed interest in Catholicism (*Arumugam, V, 1976*).

### **The Education activities of the Portuguese in Jaffna**

Jaffna was under the complete control of the Portuguese for 37 years (A.D 1621 - 1650). During this period there were many changes in education. Before the arrival of the Europeans in Jaffna, South India influenced mostly the social life of the people. The European civilization philosophy and education influenced by the Greek civilization guided the people of Europe. This had its influence in the contemporary Jaffna civilization, and the educational activities based on the Catholic religion made changes in the life of Jaffna people. In this respect, following the Catholicism of the Portuguese, several changes took place among the people of Jaffna in their life styles civilization and educational activities. The changes took place in the educational activities of the people of Jaffna combined both the traditional and new perspectives.

They divided the Jaffna peninsula and the adjacent islands into 32 divisions (Kovilpattu - as the divisions were attached to particular Kovil-here church)(*Sasikala, K., P.83*). According to Portuguese sources these Friars were at first engaged conversion to Catholicism in Jaffna. A good number of people in Mannar became Catholic. The education provided by the



Jesuits had three stages, namely, the primary, intermediate and higher education. (Santhirasegaram, S., Karunanithi, M., 1993). Generally education and conversions were inseparable during the period of European rule. The idea that all must be educated is an important factor for the economic prosperity of a place is found in Christianity. Thus the Europeans carried on their administration by incorporating education and religion. In this background the conservative society of Jaffna with the desire for new ideas had to change.

The arrival of the Portuguese made many changes in the history of Jaffna. Many schools were firmly established and they were well administered. The salary of the teachers depended on the attendance of the students. Therefore the teachers worked hard to increase the students' attendance. Many studied here shedding all differences in caste and religion. Women also had opportunities to learn in schools. Therefore the concept of female education had started and all accepted that the women had right for education. The village students who had no facilities for education were able to learn in the educational institution found in their places.

### **The Education activities of the Dutch in Jaffna**

In 1658 Dutch captured Jaffna from Portuguese. As a result of this all the churches and Kovil pattu schools established by Portuguese were converted into protestant Churches and educational centers for Protestant priests. Since Dutch were more interested in merchandise / commerce they did not interfere much with the activities of the natives.

Since this approach was not a hindrance for the development of Tamil Hindu tradition of the natives both traditional education imported in the Thinnai and Kovil Pattu education system were continued for their administrative purposes, Dutch divided Jaffna peninsula into Kovil Pattus and built a primary school in each of these kovil pattus for their educational activities (Sivalingarajah, S., P.13). Protestant religious education was prominent in these centers where they also taught some basic methods of how to read and write. Liberal policy was followed by the Dutch. They gave priorities also for appointment to the natives who were good in education. As a result of this, education was developing in this period too.

Even though the education that was brought up from the period of Jaffna kings kept on continued during the times of Portuguese & Dutch, it was influenced by Christianity. But during this period it was difficult for all to get the education and the higher educational system too was hard to follow. Hardly anyone paid attention regarding to the education of women even though the Dutch paid little attention to women's education. Under these circumstances American missionaries made some noticeable changes through their educational services during the British period.

### **Conquest of Sri Lanka by the British**

The English East India Company was founded by Queen Elizabeth in London on December 31st, 1600 (Kemal, R., 1986). The Queen gave monopoly in trading rights to this company. The English East India Company was engaged initially in trade with the countries in the East but dragged into politics of South Asia soon. The first English man known to have landed on the mainland of India was Thomaste Phens.

The English East India Company had to come to know about Sri Lanka and its trade on spices. Sri Lanka was then under the control of the Dutch. Nevertheless, the British did not like to take over Sri Lankan administration immediately, because of their friendship with the Hollanders in Europe. By the end of the 18th century, the Dutch had lost their influence in Sri Lanka. This prompted the British to evince interest in Sri Lanka.

The British entered Colombo on February 16th 1796, having the Hollanders move out of Colombo (Hulugalle, H.A.J., 1963). Thereafter Sri Lanka was ruled for 130 years by the British. During the period of the Governor Robert Browning (1812-1820), Kandy was captured in 1815 and the Nayak King and last King of the Kandy named Sri Vikrama Rajasinha (1798-1815) was arrested and sent to India by the British. Then the whole part of the Sri Lanka was brought under the control of the British.

### **Arrival of American Missionaries in Jaffna**

Prior to their arrival in Sri Lanka, the American missionaries intended to have India as their main base for religious propaganda. However, the British East India Company which was dominating India at that time did not permit their activities, as they felt that this might hinder their trading activities. At the same time, the doors of Sri Lanka were open to the missionaries. In 1812, the ship "Harmony" left Philadelphia harbour carrying Hall, Rice, Nott and Mrs. Nott, who had set off towards India for the purpose of spreading Christianity. (Jebanesan, S., 2007). More or less at the same time, two couples, viz: Judson and Newell also had been despatched to India in the ship named. 'Caravan' for the purpose of propagating their



religion. As already mentioned, the British East India company which was contemporarily engaged trading activities in India, imposed a total ban on the activities of the American missionaries. (Nadarajah, G.,2005). One of them viz: Newell, in order to fulfil the purpose of their mission somewhere, somehow or other, attempted to visit Mauritius in order to engage in religious propaganda. At the eve of his departure he happened to lose his wife and child. So his visit was diverted to Sri Lanka.

Thus the arrival of Newell may be regarded as the beginning of the activities of the American missionaries in Sri Lanka. Robert Brownrigg who was governor of Sri Lanka at that time extended his co-operation to the activities of the missionaries. (Root Helen, I.,1996). He also made arrangements for the propagation of Christianity in Sri Lanka. He stayed in Sri Lanka for ten months out of which, nearly 45 days were spent in Jaffna. Following this he selected Jaffna itself as the base for religious propaganda. The reasons he gave in his letters to the head quarts, for selecting Jaffna interested them considerable and made them to send another group included Rev.Daniel Poor and some other missionaries.(Velupillai, C.D.,1984). They left by the ship named 'Dryad' on 23 October 1815, and reached Jaffna after about 5 months. They too were cordially welcomed by Robert Brownrigg who was governor of Sri Lanka at that time. Before going to Jaffna they wanted to stay in Colombo and learn some Tamil.

For quite a long time before Jaffna came under British rule, it was under the influence of the Portuguese and the Dutch. (Arunthavarajah, K.,2014). However, as they were intent mainly on exploiting the land and propagating their religion, they were interested neither in improving the social life nor welfare of the people. Hence, they could not bring about any significant changes in the life style of the people. Particularly, out of the cultural remains left behind by the Portuguese only their religion and some religious characteristics have stood up to date. Likewise, the Dutch who followed also did not attempt to break the cultural traditions of the people of Jaffna. They could not even do it. It may be noted that they who composed the laws of Sri Lanka Tamils, administered Jaffna in keeping with the caste system prevalent here.

Poor had great love and respect towards his mother. This is seen from the letters he wrote to his mother. He was born on June 27,1789 in the state of Massachusettes in America. He completed his Degree at a university in the same state in 1811. There after he made all efforts to become a clergyman. For this. he studied theology at Andover Newton college. Following this he concentrated in doing the duties of a priest.

Out of the activities undertaken by the American missionaries, their educational services were great, particularly those of Rev.Poor. They were led by the ideas of Thomas Jefferson who was president of America. He was captivated by Thomas Jefferson's views which held that education is the basis for every improvement in a person's life. (Jebanesan, s.,1989). At this background he accepted the notion that education was of primary importance to the progress of the people in Jaffna. He also knew that people should have at least the ability to read if religion was to be propagated among them. He believed that a person should be willing for conversion and that it was not fair to convert him by force. It was at the background of this belief, that attempts were made to establish Tamil schools. Thus, the first Tamil school was inaugurated by him in Thellippalain 1816. (Ambihaipahar, R.,1998). He himself took all responsibilities pertaining to this school. At the beginning there were about 30 students, learning in this school. After some time he established another Tamil school at Mallakam. Though the schools in Thellippalai and Mallakam were both known as Native Free schools, English was also taught there. (Jebanesan, S.,1989). He continued to establish further schools in this area and engaged himself in the propagation of religion. In 1824 the number of missionary schools increased to 90 while the number of students rose up to 3477. (Nadarajah, G.,2005).

The very purpose of the missionaries in establishing schools was religious propaganda. Already the Portuguese and the Dutch who, preceded them, adopted a rouse to propagate their religion by establishing schools. Rev.Daniel Poor also followed their footsteps. In fact religion itself became the cause even for the appointment of Saiva teachers in such schools. (Jebanesan, S.,2007). That is to say that those who did not want to learn under mission teachers, came forward to learn from Saiva teachers. Only the children of those who worked in these schools were an rolled as students at the beginning. These schools were initially housed in buildings constructed by the Dutch. In the course of time they became cadyan thatched sheds. Teachers were paid only according to the number of students who attended. (Jebanesan, S.,2007).

Another school was formed by him to the north of Maviddapuram. S.Jebanesan says that some details about this school founded in 1818 could be gathered from his diary. (Jebanesan, S.,2007). He further states that the same source reveals the beginning of another American mission school which was started June 1831. Following this, further schools were established by him in places like Mylittly, Varuththalaivilan, Mallakam and Vasavilan and were used as tools for religious propaganda.



Students were taught to write on sand and also to write on Palmyra leaves and to read, in schools started by him. Soon after learning to write, students had to memorise certain sections from the holy bible. They were also taught Tamil grammar and literature. The students had to learn for at least for one year in the primary schools.

In 1821 he began to establish schools with hostel facilitation. They were first formed within mission premises. Particularly they were established in places like Manippay, Thellippalai, Pandatharippu and Vattukkottai. However after the opening of the seminary at Vattukkottai, all schools with hostels were closed except the one Thellippalai. Leaving Thellippalai in 1823, Rev.Poor, settled in a home at Vattukkottai. In 1821 when he was living in Thellaippalai, he lost his wife. Thereafter he married a lady by the name Anne. It was during the time of Rev.Poor, in Jaffna, that the American mission realised the need for a school to improve the education of the women folk. It was at the background of this nation, that Uduvil Girls' school was started in 1824. This is supposed to be the first school with a hostel for girls in Asia. (*Jebanesan, S.,2007*). Educated women were rarely seen at the time of the arrival of the American missionaries. Rev.max one of the American missionaries, says that he saw 2 women who could read and write, during his visit to Jaffna.

Again, Rev.Daniel Poor made his attempts to establish a Higher educational Faculty system. Preparations were being made from 1823. Hand in hand with him stood people like C.Miched, Myran Winslow, John Sudder, and Woodward.

It was at the background of this objective that Vattukkottai Seminary appeared in 1823. The first principal of this seminary was Rev.Poor. Though lessons were conducted here in the English medium, prominence was also given to the teaching of Tamil language. Poor showed much interest in the teaching of subjects like geography and Tamil literature. Keeping in mind the benefit of the students, he wrote some books also. Subjects like mathematics and Christianity were also taught by him. Thus it will be seen that his services were contributed to Tamil and education together during his time.

For 32 years Vattukkottai seminary under took various activities among the people of Jaffna. It is said to have produced 670 scholars. They have later done great service to Christianity and education. Several books were also written by them. Arnold Sathasivampillai is one of such scholars.Likewise,Nevins Sithambarapillai, Harold Visvanathampillai, and C.V.Thamothara - mpillai are some of those who studied there. Among the students who learnt here, most were Jaffna Tamils. Though the descendants of the Portuguese and the Dutch, learnt privately from the missionaries, they did not join the seminary. Students from Jaffna came and studied here.

It cannot be said that they came from all parts of Jaffna peninsula. Most of them came from places where the American missionaries conducted hostel schools. The hostel school at Thellippalai functioned as the primary school that prepared and sent students to the seminary in Vattukkottai. However in the course of time, students from various parts of the peninsula also came and learnt here. Through the missionaries had declared that students from all caste could join here and that no caste destination would be tolerated, they could not achieve this noble ambition. Though they criticised caste distinction, they were quite happy about high caste people joining in their educational scheme.(*Jebanesan,S.,2009*).

His work brought about several changes in the life style of the people of Jaffna. He was much concerned about the illiteracy, false beliefs and drinking habit that prevailed among the people at that time. He ventured in full swing to free the people out of such evils. The people at that time lacked the capacity to distinguish between the good and bad in anything. They were completely immersed in their traditional customs. In fact at the beginning the ideas of Rev.Poor were looked upon rather ironically by the people of Jaffna. They did not accept scientific truths. But as time went on, people realised the truth in his ideas. Rev.Poor, in order to eradicate such social evils, published pamphlets and also engaged in preaching. (*Jebanesan, S.,1989*). He inaugurated a prohibition society against alcohol. Through this society he started a newspaper and conducted his campaign against alcohol, using this newspaper.

Observing that the habits of reading and writing were less among the people of Jaffna. Rev.Poor, began to publish books. Soon after his arrival in Jaffna in 1816 he made arrangements to establish a printing press. By 1820, James Carrot came to Sri Lanka with a printing machine. Unfortunately the then governor Edward Barnes did not grant the permission to install that printing machine. The missionaries were able to establish this press only in 1837 after the Colebroke constitution. Books on various subjects were then published through this press. With the view to improve Tamil language skills, he gave practice to students who learnt at Vattukkottai seminary in writing articles. (*Jebanesan, S.,1989*). Thus Tamil essays were given by him to suit various syllabuses. Translation activities were also undertook the collection and preservation of ola scripts. The credit goes to him for preserving and rendering such manuscripts to the next generation. Deep belief in god, very high faith in religion, excellent educational thought and general knowledge were all features abounding in him.



His Tamil language development scheme was implemented in a western university style at Vattukkottai. The programs included:

1. The collection of Tamil manuscripts
2. Forming a Tamil society and conducting research studies
3. Establishment of libraries
4. Comparing Tamil with other languages(Jebanesan, S.,1989).

In 1835 the situation warranted his presence in Matturai. Permission hitherto denied to the missionaries to enter India had been just allowed. Following this, their activities commenced in Matturai. Matturai was selected as the main place for religious propagation because other missionaries were already carrying out their propagatory activities broadly in all other areas. Rev. Poor was principal of the seminary, at the time he was requested to go and help at Matturai. While going to Matturai he took his wife and also some of the students who studied under him. (Jebanesan, S.,1989). In Matturai too, he engaged himself in educational and religious propagatory activities. Due to his dedicated services in Matturai for over 6 years, the fame of the mission increased immensely in this area. Again after returning to Jaffna he continued his services in Thellipalai and Jaffna. In 1855 he passed away due to an attack of cholera.

### Conclusion

The arrival and activities of the American missionaries in Jaffna brought in various changes in the Life of the people. At the beginning of the 19th century, requested permission to enter India, they stepped into Sri Lanka. The services they offered and the sacrifices they made are of great significance. Rev. Daniel Poor was one of them. He, who had been sent mainly for religious propagation, played an active role also in the growth of their education, in addition to the propagation of religion. He rejected their illiteracy, false beliefs, customs and addiction to liquor etc. Feeling sorry for their backwardness, he worked for the development of the Tamil Language. He created many student societies. He started his work in 1816 and visited his mother country only once during his entire period of service in Jaffna. There can be no second thought to the effect that if an educated society had been formed in Jaffna and had the ability to represent itself in Parliament, the credit should go to the relentless effort of Rev. Daniel Poor. Even today, if Jaffna excels in English education, it is but due to the foundation laid by the American Missionaries.

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