“Civilizing” the Village: Protestant Missionary Writings and the Civilizing Mission in Colonial South India

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In 1813 the addition of the “Pious Clause”[1] to the East India Company Charter removed barriers that had previously prevented Christian missionaries from settling in India. Although both Christianity and Christian missionary groups had long been present on the subcontinent, the removal of these restrictions ushered in a new era of missionary societies. In South India, where the Danish Protestant missionaries at Tranquebar had been present since 1706, the Pious Clause heralded the entry of numerous new Protestant missions. Reminiscent of the Tranquebar mission, these new missions centered their evangelical projects on the low-caste devotees of village religions and dutifully recorded their findings in letters, autobiographies, and other non-fiction works. The writings of both missionary eras focused on similar topics, with many pages devoted to the discussion of village Hinduism and its relation to caste, disease, and ritual. However, there is a clear shift in tone and style that differentiates the writings of the two eras; although the earlier writings do not promote village religion or even react to it in a neutral fashion, their anthropological style is markedly different from the emotional details and need for rescue that are emphasized in the later writings. I argue that this shift can be partly attributed to the development

1. The Pious Clause states, “Whereas it is the duty of this Country to promote the Interest and Happiness of the Native Inhabitants of the British Dominions in India and such measures ought to be adopted as may tend to the Introduction among them of useful Knowledge and of religious Improvement . . . it is expedient to make provision for granting Permission to Persons desirous of going to or remaining in India for the above Purpose” (Eliza Kent, *Converting Women: Gender and Protestant Christianity in Colonial South India* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2004], 42). Prior to this time, missionaries were “actively discouraged from entering the East India Company’s burgeoning dominions because it was feared that their proselytizing would give rise to the suspicion that the British intended to impose Christianity by force or stealth” (Ian Copland, “Christianity as an Arm of Empire: The Ambiguous Case of India under the Company, c. 1813–1858.” in *The Historical Journal* 49 (2006): 1031.

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of the civilizing mission; while both eras of missionary writings detailed the so-called "un-civilized" acts of Indians, the change in the writings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflects the need to legitimize the civilizing mission.

I will begin with a brief introduction to the civilizing mission and village Hinduism in South India before discussing the Protestant missions of South India, focusing on the pre-Pious Clause Tranquebar Mission and the post-Pious Clause American Madura Mission. Finally, I will use writings from both eras that focus on caste, disease, and ritual to prove that the change in tone and style found in the later writings served to promote the civilizing mission. The excerpts included come from various Protestant South Indian missions, including the Tranquebar Mission, the Church Missionary Society, the London Missionary Society, and the American Madura Mission.

The Civilizing Mission and Village Hinduism in South India

The notion of the civilizing mission can be traced back to the ideologies of the French *mission civilisatrice*, which "implied that colonial subjects were too backward to govern themselves and that they had to be 'uplifted'."[2] The British civilizing mission "uplifted" its subjects through the promotion of western education, speech, and dress, as well as a concerted effort to end religious practices that were not "civilized" according to the western Christian worldview. The emphasis on civilizing, which was presented as "a moral duty to . . . ameliorate the lowly condition of its [sc. India's] cowed, ignorant peoples by introducing them to the uplifting alchemy of Western – or more specifically English – civilization,"[3] became the solution to questions concerning the legitimacy of British rule on the subcontinent.[4] The colonial government, which had previously cited a policy of non-

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2. Michael Mann, "'Torchbearers upon the Path of Progress': Britain's Ideology of a 'Moral and Material Progress' in India. An Introductory Essay," in *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission: Cultural Ideology in British India*, ed. Harald Fischer-Tiné and Michael Mann (London: Wimbledon Publishing Company, 2004), 4.
3. Copland, "Christianity as an Arm of Empire," 1039.
4. Mann, "'Torchbearers upon the Path of Progress'," 10.

interference in religion as reason for the prohibition of missionary activity, soon promoted Christianity as the best means to accomplish civilization[5]; it was believed that its mere presence would cause the disintegration of Hinduism and the demise of its associated rites and rituals.

For many, the civilizing mission was recognized as the key to the continuation of the British Empire, which had found itself diminished following the loss of the American colonies in 1776.[6] In 1820 Lieut. Col. John Macdonald stated:

> In referring to the pages of the histories of the great and polished nations of antiquity, I perceived that they *civilized* in proportion as they conquered, by *imparting a knowledge of their language, arts, and literature.* The more I studied this highly interesting subject, my conviction rose higher and higher, that ultimate conversion to Christianity, as well as the consolidation and secure maintenance of British dominion in India, could only be achieved and completely effected by a plan not only humane and liberal, but sanctioned by all past experience.[7]

Thus, until “civilization” was attained, the continued rule of the British in India was legitimized. Consequently, however, if the civilizing project *did* succeed and the Indian nation was deemed “civilized,” the British claim to India would no longer exist.[8] It therefore became necessary to emphasize not only the current uncivilized nature of the Indian subjects, but also their inherent inferiority when compared to the British, in order to prove their eternal need for the presence and guidance of the colonial government.[9]

The writings discussed in this paper focus on village Hinduism and, particularly, on the goddess Māriyammaṉ, whose rites and rituals are traditionally associated with village Hinduism. In the missionary literature,

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5. Ibid., 7.
6. Margret Frenz, “‘A Race of Monsters’: South India and the British ‘Civilizing Mission’ in the Later Eighteenth Century,” in Fischer-Tiné and Mann, eds., *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission*, 52.
7. John Macdonald, *Some short arguments and plain facts shewing that the civilization and instruction of the natives of India furnish the surest means of upholding the stability of our oriental empire and of the introduction and speedy progress of Christianity, without arming the superstitious prejudices of the country against that cause: with an alphabetic-cipher table for secret correspondence and a few requisitive animadversions to subjects becoming daily more prominent and commanding* (London: C. Roworth, 1820), 6–7. India Office Records and Private Papers, British Library, London.
8. Mann, “‘Torchbearers upon the Path of Progress’,” 5.
9. Frenz, “‘A Race of Monsters’,” 53.

village Hinduism is often discussed in opposition to the Sanskritic Hinduism with which many Europeans were familiar. Susan Wadley notes, "While Sanskritic Hinduism implied pan-Indian deities and the salience of ideas such as *karma* and *dharma*, local Hinduisms might involve the worship of deities known only to that community and a lack of reference to concepts such as *dharma* and *karma* as guiding principles of people's lives."[10] Within the Protestant mission, the historical and textual nature of Sanskritic Hinduism was often admired and the Brahmins who practiced it marked as society's superiors, even as they were simultaneously understood as unable or unwilling to see the "truth" of Christianity. Contrarily, practitioners of village religion were marked as the best prospect for conversion; while their practices were perceived of as "irrational" and "barbaric," they were also recognized as being outside of the bonds of Sanskritic Hinduism and thus easily "molded" to the Christian religion. Additionally, due to their lower societal status and the nature of their practices, their conversion could be framed in light of the goals of rescue and civilization. This narrative relied on the notion that "pure" Hinduism consisted solely of the Vedic texts; vernacular and village traditions were "either ignored or decried as evidence of the degradation of contemporary Hindu religion into superstitious practices that bore little or no relation to 'their own' texts."[11]

Many of these "superstitious practices" were connected to the worship of the goddess Māriyammaṉ, a village goddess known for her equally fierce and protective nature. She is traditionally the goddess of smallpox and is recognized as both its cause and cure; the disease indicates her presence in the body and it is through worship of her that it is removed.[12] For the missionaries, however, it was her fierce nature that was paramount, particularly where it was on display in rituals involving blood and bodily mortification, including *tīmiti* (fire-walking), *tīccaṭṭi* (the carrying of the fire

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10. Susan Wadley, "Grama" in *The Hindu World*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene Thursby (New York: Routledge), 436.
11. Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India and 'The Mystic East'* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 101.
12. Elaine Craddock, "Reconstructing the Split Goddess as Śakti in a Tamil Village," in *Seeking Mahādevī: Constructing the Identities of the Hindu Great Goddesses*, ed. Tracy Pintchman (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 146.

pot), and hook-swinging.[13] In their writings, we can see that the missionaries clearly understood the connection of Māriyammaṉ and disease, but what is not apparent is evidence of Māriyammaṉ’s grace, or her “power to heal, grant children, [and] make the village rich.”[14] Rather, only her fierce aspects are represented; the devotees’ love of Māriyammaṉ is neither expressed nor, it would seem, understood.[15] This is evident in the following quotation from Edyth Hinkley and Marie Christlieb, missionaries with the London Missionary Society, who note the connection of Māriyammaṉ, disease, and ritual, but give the impression that the goddess is never a welcomed guest.

> What was that gleam of whiteness through the dark? Only a Mariamma, an idol some villagers had carried out and provided with food and cooking utensils, thus courteously indicating their desire that the deity might make itself at home at a distance from their dwellings. Probably they had cholera or small-pox in the village, and were thus seeking to rid themselves of the trouble.[16]

As we will see throughout this paper, accounts of the fierce Māriyammaṉ and her uncivilized worship were common within the Protestant missionary writings. In representing Māriyammaṉ in this light, the Protestant missionaries were able to characterize her devotees as a people in urgent need of rescue from their religion, and thus show the continued need for the civilizing mission.

Early Protestant Missions: The Danish Tranquebar Mission

The earliest Protestant mission in South India dates to the arrival of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg and his colleague Henry Plütschau at the Danish settlement of Tranquebar in July 1706.[17] Ziegenbalg and Plütschau entered

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13. Heather Elgood, “Exploring the Roots of Village Hinduism in South Asia,” *World Archaeology* 36.3 (2004): 338; Eveline Masilamani-Meyer, *Guardians of Tamilnadu: Folk Deities, Folk Religion, Hindu Themes* (Halle: Franckesche Stiftungen zu Halle, 2004), 56.
14. Masilamani-Meyer, *Guardians of Tamilnadu*, 57.
15. Craddock “Reconstructing the Split Goddess,” 146.
16. Edyth Hinkley and Marie L. Christlieb, *A Struggle for a Soul And Other Stories of Life And Work In South India* (Philadelphia: The Union Press, 1907), 29.
17. Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, *Genealogy of the South Indian Deities: An English Translation of Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg’s Original German Manuscript with a Textual Analysis and*

during a tense period, only two years after Jesuit missionaries had tried to take control of the region. In the year after he arrived, Ziegenbalg was preemptively imprisoned by the Danish commander, who feared that the King of Thanjavur would interfere if Christian preaching took place at Tranquebar.[18] Nevertheless, the Tranquebar mission remained active from 1706 until 1845, during which time it hosted fifty-four German missionaries.[19] Although their primary goal was to convert a large number of the "heathen" Indians to Christianity, missionaries were also expected to study Tamil culture, religion, and social systems and to write to Europe with this information. The Protestant missionaries approached their study and proselytization in a new way; whereas the Jesuits privileged the written Tamil of the high-caste Brahmins, the Protestants focused mostly on spoken Tamil, even in their translations of European devotional works and the Christian Bible.[20] It was believed that the missionary enterprise could be successful only through understanding the local culture and presenting the Christian gospel "meaningfully," that is, in terms that would be understood in the Indian context. Ziegenbalg followed these tenets closely, producing *Genealogy of the South Indian Deities* (1713), an anthropological work informed by written correspondence with Indian scholars as well as Ziegenbalg's own observations, which classifies the numerous deities of south Indian Hinduism. Portions of this work will appear in translation throughout the remainder of this paper.

Later Protestant Missions: The American Madura Mission (AMM)

In 1834, approximately 130 years after Ziegenbalg and Plütschau came to Tranquebar, the American Madura Mission (AMM) arrived in the Madurai district of modern-day Tamil Nadu. At the time, numerous Roman Catholic Indians could be found in the region, a result of the Roman

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Glossary, trans. Daniel Jeyaraj (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 23.

18. Eugene F. Irschick, "Conversations in Tarangambadi: Caring for the Self in Early Eighteenth Century South India," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 23 (2005): 255.

19. Ziegenbalg, *Genealogy of the South Indian Deities*, 23.

20. Ibid., 24.

Catholic missionaries who had been present in Madurai since the sixteenth century.[21] Shortly after arriving, the AMM began to set up free schools for local children, which by 1836 included thirty-seven schools in Madurai and fifty-six in the surrounding areas.[22] Although the schools were run by the missionary society and included lessons on Christianity, they were not considered to be missionary schools in the sense that they did not have a Christian mission. In accordance with the AMM's overall sentiment against civilizing missions, conversion was not required to attend, and classes were taught in the Indian style.[23]

In 1852 the mission's policies on education underwent a major shift. Prior to this time, boarding schools had been open to both Christian and non-Christian children, with non-Christian children coming from only one caste. In the annual report, it is noted that while the purpose of the schools had previously been to educate non-Christians, the new schools intended to educate a class of "Christian helpers."[24] In 1855 a deputation from Boston resulted in the near abandonment of English education in favour of education in the vernacular, because "English education tempted graduates to seek non-mission jobs."[25] Soon after, the majority of the mission's English schools were closed.[26] By 1860, however, the mission had realized that in excluding non-Christians from their schools they were preventing them from exposure to Christianity; by 1863 non-Christian pupils were encouraged to come to the schools and, soon after, English returned as well.[27]

At this time, the mission began to adopt practices that were more in line with the "civilizing" notion of missionary work. Schools that had focused on Indian-style education were replaced with missionary schools focused on western education and customs, while projects aimed at social

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21. Mary Schaller Blaufuss, *Changing Goals of the American Madura Mission in India, 1830–1916* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), 81.
22. Ibid., 86.
23. Melissa Lewis Heim, "Making a Life in India: American Missionary Households in Nineteenth-Century Madurai," Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 1994, 87.
24. Ibid., 234
25. Blaufuss, *Changing Goals*,102.
26. American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *American Madura Mission: Jubilee Volume, 1834–1884* (Madras: American Madura Mission, S.P.C.K.Press, 1886), 31.
27. John S. Chandler, *Seventy-Five Years in the Madura Mission* (Madras: Lawrence Asylum Press, 1912), 239–40.

and economic issues became increasingly popular.[28] "By 1875, mission goals . . . had changed in ways that made the primary concern of mission, not individual conversions and church membership in indigenous churches, but rather a more social perspective that addressed the physical as well as spiritual needs of individuals."[29] This included a medical mission run by Frank Van Allen, who "believed that an evangelist could use the people's positive feelings about the hospital to gain audiences for preaching and to influence people to accept the Gospel."[30]

In her study on the AMM, Mary Schaller Blaufuss argues that the ideologies of the mission can be divided into two distinct periods. The first, which ran from 1830–1875, was church-centered, wherein churches were promoted as "voluntary gatherings of individuals through a system they called village congregations. These groups provided a half-way stop for people between denouncing their former religious system and being baptized and becoming a members [sic] of the church."[31] By contrast, the second period, from 1876–1916, was society-centered, wherein "[t]he effects of the mission outside the church 'bettered' Indian society, furthered Christian ethics, and made social conditions more favorable for other individuals to join the church."[32] The mission itself remained active until 1934, when the AMM transferred its authority to an organization that eventually joined the South India United Church. Although some Americans continued to work within the church in South India, this is considered by most to be the end of the mission.[33]

On Caste

The issue of caste and how it should be managed was the subject of many debates among Protestant missionaries across India. While some viewed caste as a social institution similar to the European class system and unconnected to religion, others understood it as "an integral part of

28. Heim, "Making a Life in India," 134.
29. Blaufuss, *Changing Goals*, 129.
30. Ibid., 133.
31. Ibid., 176.
32. Ibid., 183.
33. Heim, "Making a Life in India," 496.

Hinduism which must be opposed" in order to successfully convert Indians to Christianity.[34] While Protestant missionaries in North India had disallowed caste in Christian settings since their arrival on the sub-continent, the South Indian missions allowed caste distinctions, such as restrictions against communal eating, to continue within the church even into the 1840s.[35] By 1850, however, the majority of missionaries agreed that caste was incompatible with Christianity and worked to develop ways of removing it.[36] After the mutiny of 1857–1858, this view was strengthened, as missionaries and colonialists alike viewed the revolt as resulting directly from fears over the loss of caste. As Nicholas Dirks notes, "many missionaries sought to seize the moment, suggesting that Christianity should be imposed on India as a treatment, if not a punishment, for the revolt."[37]

While the British maintained their official policy of neutrality on issues relating to native religions, missionaries sought to banish caste in their converted communities, partly because it was thought that by maintaining caste the convert was also maintaining a connection to Hinduism, which would then quickly lead them to other Hindu customs and eventually away from Christianity.[38] The Protestant missions now agreed that caste within Christianity must be abolished, but they were still, in many cases, unsure of how to accomplish this. Their efforts concentrated mainly on low-caste converts, because it was believed that high-caste Christians had already lost the social benefits of caste due to their association with lower-caste Christians. "Perversely, it was this very suffering, this ordeal by fire, that made high-caste converts 'pure' in the eyes of missionaries, as they did not gain anything materially by converting."[39]

Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, the missions looked for ways to successfully remove caste from the church, including requiring a renunciation of caste at baptism

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34. Duncan B. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India* (London: Curzon Press, 1980), 6.
35. G. A. Oddie, "Protestant Missions, Caste and Social Change in India, 1850–1914," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 6 (1969): 262.
36. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 42.
37. Nicholas B. Dirks, *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001), 131.
38. Forrester, *Caste and Christianity*, 37.
39. Kent, *Converting Women*, 44–45.

and not allowing those who adhered to caste to hold an office within the church.[40] Additionally, at the AMM the "missionaries voted to require anyone attending the communion service [to] first take part in a common meal, prepared by a pariah cook. Only about one tenth of the catechists and other Indian mission workers chose to participate in the common meal. . . . Thirty-eight out of fifty-three catechists and teachers lost their positions because of refusal to break caste."[41] Missionaries often found their parishes drastically reduced as a result of these endeavors.

Reference to caste is found throughout missionary writings, mostly concerning the issues of Hindus who want to convert but do not want to lose their caste status, and the ease with which lower-caste Hindus can be converted to Christianity. On the first point, Harriet Wilder, author of *A Century in the Madura Mission, South India, 1834–1934*, transcribes a conversation between Dr. Chester, a missionary with the American Madura Mission, and an unnamed mission-educated Brahmin. The Brahmin concedes that Hinduism is a false religion and that Christianity is the one true religion, to which Chester asks why he does not then convert. The Brahmin replies:

> Sir, I cannot forsake my caste and family . . . It is the dread of the suffering I would have to undergo if I should join the despised low- and out-caste people who are among you. After I had eaten with them and sat near them, my very shadow would be an unbearable pollution to my caste relatives. If by any means the whole Brahmin group in my many villages could be induced to become Christians together and join you in a body, no one would be rejoicing more than I. . . . But alone I can never accept the Christian religion.[42]

With regard to the latter point, Robert Caldwell, a missionary with the London Missionary Society writes:

> It might naturally be supposed that a pure and spiritual religion, like Christianity, would make little progress among a people who are so besotted as to worship devils; yet in Tinnevelly and the neighbouring provinces it has made greater progress among demonolaters than amongst the followers of the higher Hinduism. The exceeding greatness of the contrast between the fear and gloom

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40. Oddie, "Protestant Missions," 269.
41. Heim, "Making a Life in India," 100.
42. Harriet Wilder, *A Century In the Madura Mission, South India, 1834–1934* (New York: Vantage Press, 1961), 152.

> of devil-worship and the light and love of the Gospel is found to attract their attention, and it is generally found to be easy to convince them of the debasing character of their own superstition, and of the great superiority of Christianity.[43]

These two examples can be seen as representative of the understanding and use of caste in the writings as a whole. The high-caste Brahmin, although he will not convert, is shown as intelligent and self-aware, even if bound to the custom of caste. By contrast, the lower castes' "devil-worship" and low place within Indian society makes them the ideal prospect for conversion; the implication is that they have a primitive mindset and do not have the fear of conversion that would be associated with losing a high caste status. It is for these reasons that the lower castes and their religion become the focus of the civilizing mission.

On Disease

The nineteenth century was party to some of the most vicious smallpox epidemics, which reoccurred with a vengeance nearly every five to seven years and in Calcutta alone claimed 11,000 lives between 1837 and 1851.[44] Although the smallpox vaccine developed in 1796 was made available in India, it was not until nearly the end of the nineteenth century that it became somewhat common for it to be utilized.[45] As has been mentioned, in many village traditions, smallpox and other maladies are understood to be both caused and cured by Māriyammaṉ, whose fierce nature and grace are found within the pox.[46] As a result, devotees feared that use of the vaccine would cause the goddess to view them as impious, and her resulting anger would increase the severity of the disease.[47] To combat this reticence, the colonial government instituted various policies to encourage use of the vaccination, including compulsory vaccinations for infants, prisoners, and military men,

43. Robert Caldwell, *Lectures on the Tinnevelly Missions, Descriptive of the field, the work, and the results; with an introductory lecture on the progress of Christianity in India* (London: Bell & Daldy, 1857), 49.
44. David Arnold, *Colonizing the Body: State Medicine and Epidemic Disease in Nineteenth-Century India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 117.
45. Ibid., 120.
46. Craddock, "Reconstructing the Split Goddess," 146.
47. Arnold, *Colonizing the Body,* 123.

thus representing the colonial government as a humane and benevolent entity with "sympathizing hearts and healing hands."[48] Although these programs were somewhat successful, vaccination rates remained less than total even into the 1950s.[49] The British, however, did not focus on the specific reasons behind the resistance to the vaccine, but rather conceptualized "Indian society as static and traditional; immobilized by an age-old aversion to change and innovation. Moreover, having lived for so long under oppressive and despotic regimes, the Indians were not capable of understanding the benevolent motives of the British regime."[50]

For missionaries in India, the threat of illness, particularly cholera and smallpox, always loomed large; within the missionary records and diaries there are numerous references to members who succumbed to the diseases. It is perhaps for this reason that missionary writings concerning the interactions of the natives and disease are so prevalent; these rituals mark one of the few instances in which both Indians and Europeans were experiencing a similar threat. Perhaps more importantly, issues of disease were a simple venue through which both missionary and colonial groups could emphasize the need for rescue through a civilizing mission. Niels Brimnes notes, "This decontextualized construction of an irrational, non-scientific 'other' provided the civilizing mission with a target: an extensive population capable of occupying the position of reluctant beneficiaries of the blessings of European medicine."[51]

Missionary writings on Māriyammaṉ as she relates to smallpox are varied. Some simply mention the association between the two, others involve elaborate descriptions of festivals and rituals undertaken to appease the apparently angry goddess, while still others narrate their own involvement in rescuing the heathens from these "horrific" scenes. Perhaps one of the most descriptive writers is Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, of the Tranquebar mission, whose writings discuss the understanding of and response to Māriyammaṉ within the village context. In 1713 he said of Māriyammaṉ:

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48. Ibid., 136; Niels Brimnes, "Coming to Terms with the Native Practitioner: Indigenous Doctors in Colonial Service in South India, 1800–1825," *Indian Economic Social History Review* 50 (2013): 91.
49. Arnold, *Colonizing the Body,* 155.
50. Niels Brimnes, "The Sympathizing Heart and the Healing Hand: Smallpox Prevention and Medical Benevolence in Early Colonial South India," in Fischer-Tiné and Mann, eds., *Colonialism as Civilizing Mission*, 202.
51. Ibid., 203.

> She is one of the principal protective goddesses and is considered to be the goddess, as the poets say, from whom smallpox and measles come and by whom they are again removed. If anyone among the South Indians[52] gets smallpox, of which there are three kinds, they immediately say that Māriyammaṉ is angry with this person. In some places, those who suffer from smallpox are left alone [by friends and relatives] so that the anger of Māriyammaṉ might not come over them also. Many people die of a kind of smallpox and measles which is indeed very dangerous.[53]

He continues:

> If someone gets smallpox, that person then worships Māriyammaṉ and requests from her healing and, for this reason, brings her offerings, because it is believed that such a worship and offering ward off these ills. Since they come from her, she can also remove them without harming those who get them, provided that they worship her and honor her with offerings.[54]

Ziegenbalg’s writings on Māriyammaṉ differ both from later missionary writings as well as his own, earlier writings concerning South Indian religion. Each of these excerpts reads as a straightforward description of the goddess and her role regarding diseases in the village context. Additionally, he references Māriyammaṉ’s ability to remove the smallpox “without harming those who get them,” indicating her ability to heal the afflicted. At the time of Ziegenbalg’s writing, the smallpox vaccine did not yet exist, nor did the mission to combat smallpox. Perhaps as a result of this, his writings differ from the majority of later missionary writings, which discuss rituals concerning smallpox as a defect of a weak and uncivilized people.

In 1857 Robert Caldwell of the London Missionary Society stated:

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52. In his review of Daniel Jeyaraj’s translation, Will Sweetman notes that “in translating Ziegenbalg’s text Jeyaraj has adopted a number of principles that give the work in translation a very different flavor. The most notable of these is his use of ‘South Indian’ (or, sometimes, ‘Tamil’) for ‘Heide’ or ‘*heidnisch*’, and of ‘South Indian society’ for ‘Heidentum’ (although he sometimes uses ‘heathendom’ where the context would make ‘South Indian society’ non-sensical).” (Will Sweetman, review of *Genealogy of the South Indian Deities: An English Translation of Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg’s Original German Manuscript with a Textual Analysis and Glossary,* trans. Daniel Jeyaraj, *Contemporary South Asia* 16 [2008]: 111–12.) Therefore, the use of “South Indian” in this excerpt should be understood as “heathen.”
53. Ziegenbalg, *Genealogy of the South Indian Deities*, 121.
54. Ibid., 123.

> There is much ceremony, but little sincerity, in the more plausible religion of the higher classes; but the demonolaters literally 'believe and tremble.' In times of sickness, especially during the prevalence of cholera, it is astonishing with what eagerness, earnestness, and anxiety the lower classes worship their demons.[55]

Then, in 1887, he noted that

> Cholera and small-pox, the most dreadful of all pestilences, are inflicted by them [*Ammans*] alone; and what is specially extraordinary is, that small-pox is invariably called by the common people 'the sport of the *Amman*.' When a person is stricken by small-pox the expression the people use is 'the *Amman* is taking her pastime over him.' Mari-Amman is the special title of the cholera goddess, and *mari* means death personified. . . . There is no difference between the *Ammans* and the devils in regard to their appetite for blood. They all alike delight in bloody sacrifices, and all alike require frantic dances to be performed in their honour, especially in times of pestilence.[56]

Caldwell's writings portray the devotees of the goddess as simple-minded and unable to understand the true nature of the sickness they are experiencing. His language reinforces the view of the devotees as "uncivilized"; they believe the disease is "the sport of the Amman" because they are uneducated, they perform "bloody sacrifices" for the goddess, and their religion is based on the worship of devils. Additionally, he invokes the need for a rescuer as he represents their own fear (they "believe and tremble") and the anxiety their religion causes them.

Wilder, writing about the AMM, presents a narrative that begins with a devotee's understanding of Māriyammaṉ, followed by a missionary response. It is presented as follows:

> "The Brahmin pujari has caused the spirit of Mariamman to take her residence in this one. We are breaking coconuts and burning camphor incense before her, because only thus will she be appeased and leave us and our children in peace. Many of us are suffering from smallpox and cholera because of her."
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> "How very foolish to believe such stories! Don't prostrate yourselves before things made of clay or stone, instead of before the true God and Creator of the

55. Caldwell, *Lectures on the Tinnevelly Missions*, 49.
56. Caldwell, "On Demonology in Southern India," *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Bombay* (1887): 94.

> world! Look here, if I break these with my stick, what will happen? Will these images have any power to protect themselves, much less to injure you and your children?"[57]

This type of narrative is common within the literature, as it presents the "ignorant native" in contrast to the "modern westerner." Here, Māriyammaṉ worship is not represented as a demonolatry, but rather as idolatry; it is the devotees' continued insistence on worshiping stone figures of the goddess that marks the need for civilization. These passages tend to lean more towards story-telling and were most likely meant for fellow missionaries or missionary supporters to read; the second paragraph in particular shows the easily identifiable frustration of the missionary at the perceived irrational behavior he was encountering.

A similar vignette is narrated by Edyth Hinkley and Marie Christlieb on the thoughts and feelings of the native practitioner in response to the Christianity that had settled within the village. The village mentioned had been free of disease for the past two rainy seasons, but the disease returned, causing devotees to question how they had angered the goddess. Speaking as the devotee, the authors question whether her anger could be due to the "low-caste Malas" who "cut themselves off from Hinduism by having water poured over their heads while he [the Christian] muttered incantations."[58] The narrative continues as the goddess-worshiping native blames the missionaries, their school, and the converted Christians for the presence of disease in the village. The converted Christians are shown as questioning the words of their leader, but nonetheless do not stray from their religion. In the following year, when cholera returned with a vengeance, a young girl who was a pupil at the Christian school died, which eventually led all of the converted Christians to renounce the religion and to return to their former traditions. What is most interesting, however, are the final words, "But when next year's rainy season came round—though the old insanitary conditions continued—*there was not a single case of cholera in the village!*"[59] This seeming change of heart occupies an ambiguous place within our understandings of literature on the topic. Throughout, the authors' views on the worshipers of the goddess are apparent, but the

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57. Wilder, *A Century in the Madura Mission*, 40.
58. Hinkley and Christlieb, *A Struggle for a Soul,* 121–22.
59. Ibid., 128 (emphasis supplied in original).

ending at first appears to comment on the efficacy of the goddess; once the devotees returned to Hinduism, the disease disappeared. However, when this is understood in the context of their other thoughts on village religion, the remark appears to be more sarcastic in nature; they are poking fun at the villagers' understandings of disease and the belief that disease can be controlled through village rituals.

On Hook-Swinging

Throughout colonial India hook-swinging was one of the most vociferously condemned rituals, likely due to its very public presence at festivals and the bodily mortification involved. Although the process varied regionally, hook-swinging generally consisted of the insertion of two or more hooks in the back of the devotee, who would then be attached to a pole and raised from the ground.[60] In south India, the majority of swingers were low-caste men, but there are records of women as well as high-caste men taking part in the ritual.[61] Hook-swinging was most often performed in propitiation to Māriyammaṉ, as both a blood sacrifice and a manifestation of the swinger's devotion to her. "When a true devotee enacts the sacrifice by swinging on the hook, Māriyammaṉ herself appears, drawn by the devotion of her worshiper."[62]

Missionaries took issue with hook-swinging not only because it was contrary to their own mission of proselytization, but also because it was an "un-civilized" action on display in public, colonial space; they feared that it would be understood as a condoned, rather than condemned, ritual and would hamper the spread of Christianity and, thus, civilization.[63] Missionaries and colonial institutions alike often depicted hook-swingers as victims of Hinduism, suggesting that the swinger was drugged and forced to take part, "thus dispensing with the need to worry the issue of agency."[64] By the mid-nineteenth century hook-swinging was in an apparent decline and

60. Geoffrey A. Oddie, *Popular Religion, Elites, and Reform: Hook-Swinging and its Prohibition in Colonial India, 1800–1894* (Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 1995), 14–15.
61. Ibid., 32.
62. Craddock, "Reconstructing the Split Goddess," 155–56.
63. Dirks, *Castes of Mind*, 153, 157.
64. Ibid., 152.

heavily discouraged by the colonial government, but it was not until 1894 that it was subjected to an outright ban.[65]

As in the case of smallpox, Ziegenbalg’s depiction of sacrifice and festival is rather tame when compared with later portrayals. Concerning a Māriyammaṉ festival, he wrote:

> At this festival the people are accustomed to playing all kinds of tricks and games. Some of them allow a hook to be fastened to the flesh of their backs and pulled up on a pole lying on a tall mast [framed like the wooden structure] like in a draw-well. It must cause much pain and harm.[66]

The difference seems quite obvious when it is contrasted with the following excerpt from Wilder:

> The wretched man caught hold of the rope hanging before him, to ease the strain, but soon let go and hung by the hook, bent almost double, his head and feet hanging, the muscles of his back pulled to their utmost tension. Hundreds of men drew the car over the rough ground around the temple, the victim shaken and tossed from side to side for an hour, his face the picture of exhaustion and distress. . . . He suffered little the first day. . . . On succeeding days, he had to be guarded lest he commit suicide to escape the pain.[67]

The difference in the language involved in these two depictions is immediately apparent. Ziegenbalg’s writing is anthropological; he observes the phenomenon and the bodily harm it must cause, but does not include the negative descriptive elements that are found within the second. Wilder’s language, including the references to the “wretched man” and the “victim,” reinforces the need for rescue; the hook-swinger is not represented as having agency and there is no mention of his reasons for taking part in the ritual. While Ziegenbalg indicates that the hook-swinger “allows” the hook to be inserted, Wilder represents the entire act as a violation of the devotee’s body. Additionally, while Ziegenbalg discusses a group of people (“the hook-swingers”), Wilder focuses on one specific man and his experience. Her account—which is based on a version written by Dr. Noyes, a missionary with the association—does not contain any first hand discussions with the so-called “victim” until the last few lines, which read as follows:

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65. Oddie, *Popular Religion, Elites, and Reform*, 4, 26, 99.
66. Ziegenbalg, *Genealogy of the South Indian Deities*, 121.
67. Wilder, *A Century in the Madura Mission*, 155–56.

> Some weeks later, Burnell met the man, with the scars of the hooks in his back.
>
> Said he, "Aiyo! It is sad to think the ceremony has been forbidden! That is the reason the rains fall so often. My ancestors for seven generations back have swung, from father to son. But the succession must stop with me. Aiyo! Aiyo!"[68]

The lack of commentary after this quotation is telling; it implies that these words give all of the information needed to understand the situation that has occurred. By placing this at the end of the chapter, Wilder has led the reader to her conclusion: the hook-swinger was injured and almost at death, yet he still did not understand why hook-swinging should be outlawed. The hook-swinger's belief that the rains are effected by his swinging is meant to show his lack of education and serve as a reminder of why the civilizing mission is necessary. Unsurprisingly, neither Ziegenbalg nor Wilder focus on the possibility of any positive ritual outcomes.

One of the most complete descriptions of hook-swinging comes from the Reverend Henry Fox of the Church Missionary Society. He notes that the hook-swinger was "a man of the very lowest of all the subdivisions of castes" and "was employed as a substitute by some richer man who cared more for his skin than for his money, and who had during the past year, been induced by illness to make a vow to the Ammaváru, that he would swing at her festival, in case she cured him.[69] The hook-swinger is immediately defined by his caste and a perceived lack of agency; he is not taking part in the ritual entirely of his own volition, but rather, in exchange for a monetary reward. In the Christian context, this act of paying for the blessings of the goddess serves to increase the depravity of the situation and the individuals involved; the richer man, in particular, is implied to be of low moral character.

Fox continues his narration of the events as the "poor victim" prepares himself to be swung. Although the spectators believe the man to be in a possessed state, Fox notes that he was "altogether presenting a very disgusting and degraded appearance," which was made worse by "the liquor and excitement."[70]

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68. Ibid., 156.
69. Henry W. Fox, *Chapters on Missions in South India* (London: Seeleys, 1848), 79.
70. Ibid., 80.

> After a short time, during which one sheep was swung, and another had its head cut off at a blow, as a sacrifice to the idol, it came to the man's turn to be swung; the car was rolled back a couple of hundred yards from the temple, the man dancing and skipping before it all the way; he was then brought under the end of the horizontal beam, and the executioner drew near with his hooks. He first struck, but not smartly, the part of the back which was to be pierced, and then pinched up the flesh two or three times, in order to get a good hold of it: after fixing on a little moveable lancet to the hook, he ran it through the skin of the small of the back of the man, taking up the flesh about an inch wide and a quarter of an inch in depth; with a little twisting and wrenching, in consequence of the shanks of the hooks being joined together, the second hook was similarly inserted. At this time several men with drums kept up a great noise, and the crowd round about shouted as they saw the hooks applied. It is their belief, and common saying, that the man does not feel any pain, in consequence of the protection of the good goddess; but on this occasion I heard the cry of pain which the poor man uttered as the hook entered his skin, clear above all the noise of the bystanders; and the expression of pain in his face, was not to be concealed by all the daubing upon it.[71]

Unlike Wilder, Fox includes a full description of the person undergoing the ritual, the reasons for the ritual, and the perceived efficacy of the ritual. Fox's inclusion of the hook-swinger's background—and the important detail that he is not doing it for his own edification, but for a wealthy man who will receive the benefit of the ritual—serves the focus of a civilizing mission well. In contrast to Wilder's portrayal, Fox's "victim" would be less sympathetic in the Christian view; first, Fox makes it clear that the hook-swinger is under the influence of alcohol, and second, he shows the hook-swinger as "dancing and skipping" before the hooks are applied. Fox does show some sympathy for the hook-swinger when he says that he heard the "cry of pain which the poor man uttered" and when he refers to the hook-inserter as "executioner." However, I would argue that where Wilder creates a sympathetic victim, Fox's intent is to show the reader that the Hindu people need to be saved from *other* Hindus, such as the depicted hook-swinger and the priest who is conducting the rite. While it may be too late to save the hook-swinger from the depravity of the ritual, he serves an important role as a marker of the ignorance of the lower castes and their need for rescue by the west. The additional focus on the wealthy man who is swinging by proxy, meanwhile, becomes indicative of India's lack of morals and civility as a whole, implying

71. Ibid., 80–81.

that the civilization and rescue of the lower castes of India will only take place through the work of western missionaries.

On Animal Sacrifice

Similar to hook-swinging, missionaries saw animal sacrifice as a marker of the degradation of Hinduism. The practices involved, including the beheading of the animal and the placing of it before an image of the goddess, were taken as evidence for the innate, demon-like, and bloodthirsty nature of both the goddess and her devotees. By extension, those who took part in these rituals were often denigrated as "savages" due to the anomaly these traditions presented when compared with those found in the missionaries' Christianity. However, rather than avoiding scenes of "devil-worship," missionaries devoted large portions of their work to detailing and discussing the acts of sacrifice. Ritual animal sacrifice was most likely practiced more often than other rituals, including hook-swinging, which may also explain the ubiquitous nature of writings on the subject.

In his early twentieth century book *The Village Gods of South India*, Reverend Henry Whitehead devotes an entire chapter to the "Modes of Worship in the Tamil Country." The twenty-three pages are focused almost entirely on depictions of animal sacrifice from various Tamil regions in South India. Whitehead discusses the rituals of fifteen different locales, focusing on the shrine of the local goddess as well as any festivals dedicated to her and the animal sacrifices that occur as part of her worship. Whitehead often points to the perceived ignorance of the devotees. For example, he states, "The idea, so naively expressed . . . that the goddess actually drinks the blood of the victims, is not uncommon."[72]

Although there are hints of his disapproval of animal sacrifice, they are rarely stated overtly. This can be attributed to the intended audience of the text, as Whitehead does not need to convince his western readers that animal sacrifice is an inappropriate action, rather, his purpose is to show its widespread nature. Thus, passages similar to the following two are quite common:

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72. Henry Whitehead, *The Village Gods of South India* (Calcutta: Association Press [Y.M.C.A.], 1921), 94.

> People who have made vows, in times of sickness or distress, or in order to secure some boon, bring their victims [animals] to the shrine. . . . If the animal is a sheep or goat, it is then seized by the offerer and his friends, some of whom catch hold of its hind legs . . . and its head is cut off with one stroke of the chopper by one of the pujaris.[73]

> At the festival of Mariamman . . . [w]hen sheep are sacrificed, the blood is collected in earthen vessels, mixed with boiled rice, and then sprinkled in the enclosure of the shrine and in the four corners of the main streets.[74]

Ziegenbalg offers similar statements:

> At this festival swine, goats and cocks are sacrificed in her honor; in front of her temple the heads of animals are cut off and the blood flows out. Her devotees give the heads to the priests and eat up the rest.[75]

Robert Caldwell offers a more thorough understanding of the reasons for ritual sacrifice. He notes that the sacrifice is performed as propitiation to the goddess in order to remove or prevent hardships.

> The sole object of the sacrifice is the removal of the devil's anger, or of the calamities which his anger brings down. It should be distinctly understood that sacrifices are never offered on account of the sins of the worshippers, and that the devil's anger is not supposed to be excited by any moral offence. The religion of the demonolators, such as it is, has no connexion with morals.[76]

Caldwell's explicit statement that the sacrifices are not motivated through a need for penance immediately serves to separate Christian practices from the 'demonolatry' of village religion. In so doing, he prevents any identification with the Hindu devotees and instead marks them as an "other" in need of conversion. With regard to the ritual itself, Caldwell notes that "the rationale of the rite is sufficiently clear. It consists in offering the demon life for life—blood for blood. . . . Accordingly, a goat is sacrificed; its blood is poured out upon the demon's altar, and the offerer goes free."[77] Although he does not agree with the efficacy or appropriateness of the action, he points towards a reason behind it, suggesting that the devotee is not simply

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73. Ibid., 93.
74. Ibid., 94.
75. Ziegenbalg, *Genealogy of the South Indian Deities*, 121.
76. Caldwell, "On Demonology in Southern India," 103.
77. Ibid., 104.

following custom (as Whitehead suggests throughout his book), but rather that the entire ritual is the result of a reasoned process. This is an important distinction in the context of the civilizing mission, as it implies that the lower caste Indians are capable of reason, and by extension that if they are introduced to Christianity they will be easily converted.

Conclusion

The increasing reach of the colonial enterprise in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was mirrored within the missionary networks on the subcontinent. As missions quickly changed their purpose from one focused on conversion to one focused on the civilization of the natives, missionary interactions with the people of the village and their religion changed as well. Within the missionary writings of the time, we can see key points on which the narrative of "civilizing" was predicated, including the notions of the ignorance of the village devotee, the medical need of the smallpox ridden, the depravity of village rituals and, above all, the obligation to rescue through conversion to Christianity.