

Caste, Culture and Conversion from the Perspective of an Indian Christian Family based in Madras 1863-1906

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Krupabai Sathianadhan, in her first novel, *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Life* (1894) describes how her heroine, only child of a Brahman sannayasi and recluse and a runaway Brahman heiress, gradually realises that the sudra girls minding the cattle on the mountainside where she grows up are different from her, and yet as she treats them kindly, they can all play together and help each other.(1) A very different world confronts her when she goes as a child bride to the Brahman quarter of the local town. In fact the novel turns around the conversations she and the other unhappy girls have around the Brahmans' well. Temple festivals and pilgrimages provide the only escape, until her cousin Ramchander acquaints her with her true circumstances following her father's death, her estranged husband dies shortly after her infant daughter's death, and she can devote herself to 'unselfish works of charity'.(2) There is more than an echo of George Eliot in the story, not surprisingly since Krupabai studied and admired her works, including, presumably, *Middlemarch*. She also writes from the perspective of a teenage idealist who, like Krupabai herself, is intensely patriotic but achieves far more, in practical terms, than Dorothea Brooke. Unlike Eliot's heroine, Kamala cannot bring herself to defy convention when she is widowed. Like any respectable woman from the 'twice-born' castes, her life is forever bound up in her husband's dharma, according to the Laws of Manu, and she cannot accept Ramchander's offer of marriage and live 'happily ever after'.(3) Interestingly Sai, the woman who might be cast as the principal villain of the story if that role does not belong to Kamala's abusive mother-in-law, since it was Sai who alienated her husband's affections, is pitied for allowing her western education to corrupt her. Their unconsummated arranged marriage rejected by Ramchander when he adopted ascetic life, Sai turns to a life of blackmail and crime. Yet she is given a 'keynote' fighting speech defending the tribal people, Bheels and Gonds, who are now her clients and henchmen.(4) As in *Middlemarch*, the old world is passing away, but it is far from clear what will replace it. Likewise in *Kamala Sathianadhan's* stories (5), anxiety is expressed that

traditional Sanskrit learning will disappear, and with it moral values and even Indian culture itself.

George Eliot wrote *Middlemarch* in order to explore how a modern Teresa of Avila would react to the England of the Great Reform Act (1832). Krupabai's heroine derives little comfort from trying to emulate Sita or Savitri.(6) Her suffering is located as much in self doubt and low self esteem as in her husband's ill-treatment of her. Though all too well aware of his weak character and laziness, bound by the convention of the Dharmasutras she treats him as a god and blames herself for his infidelity.(7) Unlike Sita, she cannot literally become a sati, (8) but rejecting Ramchander's offer is, she declares, self-immolation, and like Sita her integrity is vindicated. Like the version of the Ramayana where Sita is swallowed up by her mother earth, justice for the heroine does not bring a happy ending. The epic hero Ram and the fictional Ramchander respectively fulfil their dharma. The latter, having oscillated for years between life as an ascetic practising herbal medicine and his obligations as manager of the family estates, finally decides where his duty lies.(9)

In the 1998 edition of *Kamala, A Story of Hindu Life*, the editor, Chandani Lokuge applies a modern feminist perspective, and signals the importance of the book for producing a genuine Indian heroine and for thus pioneering a genre. However, it is equally possible to see the book as a Dickens type exposure of social conditions, an indictment of Brahmanical culture and caste, a lament for unfulfilled lives: Kamala's father's search for enlightenment ended only by death, her mother who dies when Kamala is two because they are far from a doctor when she is suddenly taken ill, her husband, Ganesh who does no more than procure a dead end office job with his western education, Sai the courtesan, who longed for children and respectability despite her cherished 'independence', her mother-in-law who loses her son despite all her machinations, the ill-treated child brides slaving for their in-laws and yet growing up like their mothers-in-law and so on. Kamala and Ramchander pay a terrible price in suffering before they find serenity and meaning in life. At one point Kamala's position as a rejected wife seems so impossible that she contemplates suicide, but then she spots her baby daughter gurgling and reaching out for the stars on a beautiful moonlit night. The sight gives her hope and strength, not to flee to her father, as tradition required, but to go and confront her father-in-law concerning his erring son and shame him into righteousness as it were. Only to her deepest regret, Ganesh dies before there can be a reconciliation, victim of that great scourge, cholera. Even then, she blames herself and the author allows no hint of just deserts for his relationship with Sai.

Caste and culture are inextricably linked in the story, which is why I have begun there, making it a kind of case study. However, Krupabai, telling a story in which the heroine shares some traits with her own mother, a Marathi Brahman convert, and when losing her child, relives Krupabai's own anguish, nevertheless does not resolve the characters' dilemmas by conversion. The redemptive feature is rather her beloved India.

For Krupabai's most exquisite writing is devoted to describing the glories of the Deccan countryside, the changing seasons, the breath-taking scenery of the western ghats, and even the beauty of the people themselves, whatever their caste. Chandani Lokuge attributes it to the influence of Tennyson, (10) but I think her imagery and emotion resemble rather the writings of her contemporary, the Marathi Brahman Christian poet, Narayan Vadam Tilak and his wife

Lakshmibai (11) or the greatest poet of the 19th century Bengal, Michael Madhusadhan Seal.(12) Not English romanticism transposed to India but love of Bharatma! When wracked by doubt and anxiety about God (13) and their dharma, a concept Krupabai uses frequently, the characters sense the numinous in nature. The Lord is not Krishna the charioteer on the battlefield, revealing eternal truths to them as to Arjuna in the Bhagavadgita, but is a voice within. They turn to the Divine within the parameters of Hindu philosophical traditions, but there is always an unresolved tension between renouncing worldly materialistic values for this spiritual quest and the felt value of good works and kindly deeds.

Kamala has a transcendent quality about her, a Christ-like nobility in suffering, but her all too human craving for love, chronic abuse-induced lack of self esteem and naivety preclude too close a comparison. Lokuge criticises Krupabai for her occasional Evangelical use of a derogatory epithet, but some Brahmans criticise 'idol worship', more in the tradition of Ram Mohun Roy than Carey, Marshman and Ward.(14) In fact when Kamala first appeared critics in Madras questioned whether a second generation Indian Christian, married into a distinguished church leader's family, would accurately describe Hindu life. Those who actually read the story without dissent acclaimed not only her powers of social observation, but her depiction of how Hindus feel.(15) A hundred years later, my own reading and field observation would suggest accuracy, but the point I am trying to make is that the book perfectly illustrates the integration of caste and culture in the Hindu dharma. Understanding this integrated perspective on life is essential if we are to locate the third component of our alliterative title, conversion.

For it is important to remember that Hindus do not practise their religion in the way that Catholics are held to do in popular discourse, but simply by 'having their being' (in the immortal phrase addressed to James Cameron) are Hindu, the embodiment of their caste and culture. Characters in Saththianadhan fiction not surprisingly therefore, are conscious that this eternal dharma governs their whole outlook on life, every action in every single day, and their eternal destiny, and distinguish their approach from that of the poor misguided Christians they encounter. Conversion is therefore seen as a total disaster, a family pollution, an aberration which may mean an individual's doom but certainly involves cultural alienation. For this reason also conversion to Christianity may involve intellectual conviction, or Quaker-type convincement, but for the convert it is primarily a bhakti experience, involving the experience of the love of God and devotion to Jesus, come what may.(16)

If Hindus belong to a world faith community which derives from the Indian religious traditions and is held together by culture, language and shared values based on a common understanding of revelation and spiritual experience, the sense of belonging to a local community is still a core experience, be it the extended family, the jati (sub-caste) or the village (17) not least because it is these groups who by their ability to inflict sanctions on the dissident, enforce orthopraxy. Typically, in the Saththianadhan stories, characters identify themselves or are identified by their jati and devotional tradition, Saivite or Vaishnavite, as they themselves do in their autobiographical writings. This sense of identity is re-inforced by knowledge of the Vedas. It should be noted that in the case of the Saththianadhans, W.T., who was the convert formerly known as Thiruvengadam, his son Samuel, and his daughters in law, Krupabai and Kamala Saththianadhan were knowledgeable in the Sanskrit scripture, while Annal Arokium, his wife, clearly had access to Tamil sacred writings. Like many missionary writers they refer vaguely to

'the Hindu sastras' as defining revelation even when this is from the context of the reference, more likely to be the Laws of Manu or Sankara's commentaries. The education of Hindu women, classical and modern, is a sub-text in their writings as well as the professional occupation of generation after generation of Saththianadhan women.(18) Padmini Sen Gupta (nee Saththianadhan) even wrote a biography of the reformer, Pandita Ramabai.(19)

The Saththianadhan family are an exceptionally distinguished dynasty, in terms of their contribution to the growth of the Anglican church in South India, to the history of the ecumenical movement and the Church of South India, to the development of education in India, especially for women, to literature and to the policy making of the Indian National Congress and the first governments after independence.(20) For the purposes of this paper, however, a line will be drawn after the death of Samuel Saththianadhan in 1906.

Conveniently for one whose knowledge of Tamil is rudimentary in the extreme, they corresponded with their friends in English, edited their own journals in English and published a variety of literature in English as well as Tamil. Use of a foreign language clearly shapes thought and identity, but W.T.Saththianadhan got very angry when treated as an exotic bird for wearing Indian attire in England, and Samuel and Kamala Saththianadhan complain of missionaries who discriminate against Indians who, for whatever reason decide European clothing suits them better.(21) Cultural alienation was a very sensitive issue in the family, not surprisingly when one is often told that marrying a foreigner makes an Indian 'foreign'. From the family tree which Bishop Sundar Clarke, W.T.Saththianadhan's great grandson, gave me it is clear that from his grandparents' generation onwards, a number of his cousins married English or French citizens and settled in Europe, where they effectively appear to have become lost to history or at least the family history. His elder sister married a Swiss domiciled in India. He himself has children working in Australia. Notorious for a little paperback book, Let the Indian Church be Indian, and for wearing khadi jibber and lungi with only a pectoral cross to distinguish him from a DMK(Tamil nationalist party) politician, Bishop Sundar Clarke was surprised to learn in 1994 that his great grandfather in the 1880s took a much more radical line in his arguments for an for a self-governing and self-financing Indian National Church.(22)

This was probably because the Saththianadhans oscillated from generation to generation between Anglicisation and what they viewed as Indian traditions. In this they are a paradigm of many Indian families, Hindu and Christian. They are also acute observers of the Indian scene, and social critics. Hence it comes as no surprise to see on sale alongside Kamala, The Story of a Hindu Life, W Saththianadhan Clarke's Ph.D. thesis, an excellent study of a dalit community.(23)

The Saththianadhan family is interesting because in terms of the family tradition and spiritual heritage, it is essentially matrilineal. So one finds a succession of matriarchal women proudly maintaining the Christian tradition while marrying first generation converts. The attached genealogy hopefully makes this clear. In the case of Samuel Saththianadhan was this trend reversed. Even here, when he died suddenly of a heart attack at the meeting of the W.S.C.F. in Tokyo in 1906, his widow Kamala Saththianadhan did not look to her relatives for support for herself and her two young children, but, her daughter Padmini says, followed the family tradition of strong independent women and took a post as Sanskrit tutor to a rani.(24)

I began studying the family after I found a striking portrait of 'Anna John aged 14' in a sketchbook kept by Miss Caroline Giberne while she was running a school for girls and teacher training institute at Kadachapuram, where 'Anna's' father, Revd John Devasahayam was district missionary, the first Indian Anglican clergyman to hold such a charge. Miss Giberne, who arrived in Kadachapuram in 1842 after four years' service with the Female Education Society in Colombo, Sri Lanka, served in Tinnevely 1842-48, and then in Madras 1852 -62 when ill-health forced her to retire to England, her schools eventually being handed over to her former pupil, Anna, now Mrs W.T. Sathianadhan.(25) Miss Giberne had kept newspaper cuttings, letters from her pupils and notes about their progress, but what fascinated me was an immaculately stitched child's silk stocking 'Anna' had made and a typical Victorian sampler- but the bible verse was in Tamil. Miss Giberne did not produce the usual flat stereotypical missionary portraits of converts. She was an artist, and each face, even of the little orphan girls who died young, had such character, that I resolved to research the family further. She had, however, anglicised her name. Anna turned out to be Annal Arokiam, 'child of grace'.

Her father's origins lay in a respectable trading Vaishnavite family in Mayaveram where the Royal Danish Mission which was based in Tranquebar, had an out-station. Born in 1785 to Christian parents he found his vocation through the influence of his Lutheran missionary teacher, Revd C.S. John,(1747-1813) after whom he had been named. Subsequently he taught in the Danish schools, then helped administer them, became an evangelist, and as the Lutherans gave way to Anglican missionaries, he was ordained deacon in Madras by the short-lived Bishop Turner in 1830. When Revd C.T. Rhenius went into schism in 1836 he remained loyal and was ordained priest in the ensuing re-organisation.(26) So Annal Arokiam grew up in a mission compound, her mother Muthammal being through her mother the grand-daughter of Aaron, the first Indian minister (son of Sockananda Pillai, a Cuddalore merchant, baptised 1718 by Ziegenbalg after his conversion, ordained 1733).(27) She trained as a teacher with Miss Giberne, but significantly, although she had four brothers, two of whom became quite prominent clergymen it was she who accompanied her father on his visits around a parish as vast as an English diocese.(28) Then like so many a Victorian heroine, she married her father's curate.

Like a romantic hero, William Thomas Sathianadhan was tall and handsome, and after his ordination adopted the large traditional Tamil turban and a long coat-tunic such as Muslim teachers wore. After his death, Krupabai produced a kind of 'docu-drama' account of his conversion which will be considered later as it had certain archetypal features. The facts, briefly, are that Thiruvengadam born c 1830 in Sinthapathurai, Tirunelveli, into an ultra strict Vaishnavite family of the Naidu (sudra) caste, was sent at the age of 13 to Palayamkottai to the CMS secondary school. There he came under the influence of an outstanding blind Anglo-Indian teacher and after arguing hard for three years became convinced of the truth of Christianity. His family grew suspicious and hastened his long arranged marriage, but on the night before the wedding he fled, saying he had heard a divine voice calling him. The missionaries who sheltered him sent him to the veteran missionary, John Thomas, in Megnanapuram. He was dragged before a magistrate by his family, who maintained he was only 14, but he convinced the court he was of age and knew what he was doing. He was baptised in 1847, when he changed his name in tribute to his mentors. Two years later he married Annal Arokiam, becoming the lowliest of church workers, a 'mission agent' on Rs 7/- p.m. so it could not be said that conversion was to his material advantage. However in 1855 he was able to resume his education, when he was sent to

Doveton College, Madras where he carried off a gold medal for his examination results in 1857. This English medium education laid the foundations for his literary work. Further academic success was pre-empted by a summons from the Church Missionary Society to go to a remote village in North Tirunelveli to join one of the most remarkable evangelistic teams ever assembled, led by a great man of prayer, and a former Cambridge don, Thomas Ragland, afterwards referred to by Sathianadhan as 'the sainted Ragland.'⁽²⁹⁾

The North Tinnevelly Itinerancy, as it is known, was directed at an area where the CMS had not had much success. Nor were the Evangelical missionaries who camped out around the district preaching and directing operations much more successful now, Of crucial importance, however, was firstly the way they organised themselves into a team with Indian co-workers. These were not mission agents but pastors and young volunteers sent and supported by South Tirunelveli parishes in a system of monthly rotation. This gave Indian Christians confidence they could organise and fund their own evangelistic efforts, and the Itinerary continued until 1940. W.T. kept a journal, from which it is clear he grew in confidence too, though he was shattered, as all were, by Ragland's death, closely followed by those of two other missionaries, C Every and M Baerenbruck.

Secondly, the Itinerancy had a remarkable effect on women. A Welsh-style, almost Pentecostal, revival began among the schoolgirls in the mission schools. Although Anna Sathianadhan, as she now called herself, was now a young mother with demanding 'under fives', she appears in journals as the one called out at short notice, sometimes in the middle of the night, to calm hysterical girls, stabilise the converts, explain things to anxious relatives and organise prayer groups and bible study. In later years these girls were to marry Christian converts and provide a vital element of congregational leadership. The second, rather extraordinary feature of the North Tinnevelly Itinerancy was the impact made on the goldsmiths' jati in Sivagasi, an ancient market town dominated by a famous Siva temple. No very convincing theory yet has been found to explain why a great many women from this very respectable social group were converted, but they formed a kind of secret underground church of largely unbaptised believers. Their menfolk knew about this but tolerated it so long as the facade of Hinduism was preserved. There is a tradition, very strong in some regions, of underground bhakti cults, usually inspired by a charismatic leader in which the devotees ignore social norms such as distinctions of caste and gender, but why a Christian movement? It persists to this day, but has proved, by its very nature, to be resistant to academic research.⁽³⁰⁾ The Sathianadhans drew on these experiences when they moved to Madras in 1862/3, working to create an independent evangelical church.

W.T. Sathianadhan was called to Madras as a result of two Evangelical missionaries wishing him to have an independent charge. He was assigned to two churches. One, John Pereira's, was an old predominantly Anglo-Indian congregation originally founded for servants and their families. The other, created in 1843, was very strategically sited in Chintadripet on the edge of Napier Park, at the head of a street of traditional houses in the gold merchants' quarter. Although the returns show year on year increase for the former, ⁽³¹⁾ the latter church was developed by W.T into a large and prestigious Tamil Church, which he renamed Zion Church and which is now almost a family chapel, full of monuments to his descendants, since successive generations of Sathianadhans held the charge. His daughter Katie played the organ there for years, but more to the point, it was ideally situated for evangelising educated caste Hindus.

With great difficulty and by exerting much patience, Anna Sathianadhan developed schools for caste Hindu girls and began zenana visiting. A report penned for the Madras Christian Observer in April 1865 ends with the words:

'If God be pleased to use us in any measure as instruments in his hands, not only in diffusing the blessings of Christian education in this large city, and in sowing the seeds of religion in the young hearts of these dear little ones, but also in raising our poor countrywomen from the depth of degradation in which they are sunk and carrying light into their dark dwellings and bringing them to knowledge of Him whom to know is eternal life, and whose favour is better than life, we very well have cause to magnify and adore the love and grace of Christ throughout eternity.'(32)

Stripped of the Victorian verbiage of pious spirituality, this paragraph reveals the connection seen between education and evangelism in bringing enlightenment and liberation to secluded caste Hindu girls, now and in eternity, a matter affecting the Sathianadhans' salvation, too. With so much at stake, in theological terms, for the Sathianadhans, one can see why in 1877 W.T. refused to move back to Palayankottah to be acting head of the little seminary there and chairman of a district, though the reasons he gave were the impossibility of working under Bishop Sargent and the damage such a move would do to his sons' education. He added in his letter to the CMS:

'But the difficulty is increased when we take into consideration the large and important work in which my wife is engaged. She has six girls' schools, four of which are for Hindu girls, in all comprising 400 children, and the number of zenanas under her charge is 45, the result of her own voluntary efforts. She moves among the highest native ladies in this city as she does among the Europeans, and exercises a great influence for good. Were she to leave Madras and go to Megnanapuram or Kadachapuram or even to Palamcottah (Palayankottah), her influence and usefulness would be greatly removed. Besides I think I may state, though at risk of supposed egotism, that the whole family is bearing a humble part in representing the Native Church of the CMS both to Europeans and to natives residing in this city in a manner, I trust, not unworthy of the great society to which they have the honour to belong.'(33)

This statement reflects the prejudice against 'native Christians' both on the part of the English establishment who excluded them for decades from government services, and on the part of caste Hindus. They were held to be renegades who imperilled the communal stability of the Raj, or from the Hindu point of view, a source of pollution and adharmā -immorality and misfortune. However, it also reflects the priority the family gave to women's education, the four surviving Sathianadhan daughters becoming involved in their turn.

Almost immediately after this agitation began to have W.T. and four colleagues from Itinerancy days made assistant bishops for Tinnevely, which was a vast area, and the ailing Sargent needed co-adjutors. The situation was complicated because Sargent was Evangelical, so at this point in its history the expanding Diocese of Tinnevely had two bishops, the representative of Anglo-Catholic missionary tradition being the great Tamil linguist and scholar Robert Caldwell, who was obviously going to have to retire. The other problem was that until 1876 there were legal

obstacles to the consecration of an Indian bishop. W.T himself did not want to see an Indian, either himself or anyone else, lording it over the church in the way the Anglican bishops did as government employees. He wanted bishops paid salaries Indian churches could realistically afford to pay, with a humbler lifestyle.(34)

Whether W.T was prepared to go to Bishopsthorpe, Palayancottah, or not, there was opposition to him because as a member of a Sudra jati, it was alleged he would not be acceptably in a predominantly Nadar church.(35) I have not been able to establish whether he was aware of this whispering campaign or not, but he vehemently objected to racism as he encountered it in church, mission and state. At this point he and his wife visited Britain for six months to promote the cause of female education. At the Annual Meeting of the British and Foreign Bible Society in London in 1878 they met Bishop Adjai Crowther, the Yoruba bishop on the Niger who had found favour with an earlier generation of CMS administrators, especially the great Henry Venn. (36)

Henry Venn, but was now being harassed and persecuted by a younger generation of missionaries and administrators. The Saththianadhans were presented to Queen Victoria and undoubtably were being scrutinised with a view to episcopacy, but the view appears to have prevailed that the Crowther experiment was a failure, and should not be repeated in South India. M.E. Gibb, the historian of the Church of England in India insists W.T.Saththianadhan was not made Bishop of Tinnevelly because Bishop Gell of Madras could not think of any way to replace Mrs W.T Saththianadhan, who was a close friend of his sister, the most active member of the Church of England Zenana Mission Madras Committee, who were by now funding Mrs Saththian .Fenn in May 1865, he wrote that although its spirit is dying away, the form is kept up by the members of the educated classes who fear losing the respect of their orthodox countrymen if they do not conform. He quotes with approval a speech by the university chaplain, Richards, asserting that education '... would end that fearful system of caste which darkens the whole land today holding the masses in the most abject thralldom and crushing every upward exchange of natives.' (39) However, responding to a question about caste in the Church he mourned that there were in Madras 'who boast more of their caste than of their Christianity. As examples he gives the 'Jaffna Christians'(40) most of them able men, university graduates in science and philosophy, holding high government office who were ignorant of' the ABC of Christianity', and Christians connected to 'the Leipzig Society', a Lutheran society which tolerates and fosters caste. It was perfectly true that missionaries of this society, which had succeeded the Royal Danish Mission in areas of Tamilnadu had not condemned caste practices nor endorsed ecumenical statements condemning caste, believing that it would only wither away gradually. The result was that Indian Christians who would not break caste transferred to the Lutheran Church. (41) He laments the seeming impossibility of uniting these Christians with Christians who have no caste (ie are dalits) or have rejected their caste background. On the other hand he finds no sectarian feeling among native Christians, but a growth of co-operation in the Body of Christ. The statement in this letter is borne out by evidence given in letters and reports of later years. Sadly it also co-incides with research I did in the 1970s into the then situation in the Church of South India.

To demonstrate that the North Tinnevelly revival was genuine, W.T Saththianadhan notes that catechists who previously would not allow the white missionary in their house lest he defile it, now welcome him with enthusiasm.(42)

The constraints of this paper do not allow of detailed analysis of all his writings. His approach to the observance of caste practices within the church is completely at one with the approach of the American Congregationalist missionaries in Madurai, his home town, who saw it as diametrically opposed to the Gospel and introduced 'love feasts' to the church to test converts' sincerity. (Kamala Saththianadhan, in a story published after W.T.'s death points out the unfairness of American missionaries removing the insignia of caste and then criticising converts who felt they had lost their culture and adopted European dress and ways.) However, it should be noted that his solution to the problem of caste observance inside and outside the Church is different. Rather than a head on confrontation, it is based on creating a culture of education, voluntary work and economic self help in church and state, because the culture of dependency.

The education of caste girls is a key part of this strategy, though one might think that 650 girls in zenana and related schools in 1865 was a small fraction of the total population of about 200,000 (guestimate) From the minutes of the meetings of the C.E.Z.M.S Madras Committee referred to above, one can also see with what difficulty and effort that number was increased, the work being frequently disrupted or ceasing when the European missionary or voluntary worker had to return to Europe, or, as in the case of Krupabai Saththianadhan in Ootacamund, the Indian lady directing the work had to move because her husband was transferred to another station.(43) Nevertheless, for W.T Saththianadhan, it was this voluntary effort that was so important. Self government and self finance were the key to his whole strategy for the church, though he could be very critical of the CMS for the haste with which they sought to implement a money saving device. For in conference paper after conference paper he advocated changing the system of recruiting, employing and paying Indian clergy to attract more graduates.(44) A key part of his work was encouraging the mushrooming educational clubs and religious societies as a means whereby not only people could improve their minds and thus their lives by education but Christians could explain their faith, and he and his friends could give talks of general interest, but with a sub text that was the Christian message. To this end he built a lecture hall on the corner of the compound and got it endowed with a library. In the 1870s he founded the Satya Vedam Society - True Scripture or True Veda Society to counter the activities of the Tamil Veda Society, which was working to reclaim educated Tamils for a reformed Hinduism, though in a more flexible, less 'churchy' way than the Brahma Samaj for both Keshub Chunder Sen and the Unitarian educationalist Mary Carpenter had influenced many on their visits to Madras. In this work he and his friends presaged the work of the Y.M.C.A, established in Madras in 1892, after his death, something Samuel Saththianadhan embraced, becoming its representative at international level.

More modestly, Anna created the Half Anna Society from her girls' meetings, so called because each girl, if she could, contributed two pice to a fund for charitable work to spread the Gospel. Piecing together their stories from her letters, one can with justification apply the words of S Radhakrishnan that Padmini Sengupta applied to Kamala Saththianadhan:

'India in every generation has produced millions of women who have never found fame, but whose daily existence has helped to civilise the race, and whose warmth of heart, self-sacrificing zeal, unassuming loyalty and strength in suffering, when subject to trials of extreme severity are among the glories of this race.' (45)

In creating this culture, Anna Sattianadhan, who had strong views on child nurture, in 1878 wrote down her recipe for a happy family (of whatever faith) in a small but highly popular book, *The Good Mother*, translated into English and the main South Indian languages. A better translation might be 'wise' mother.(46) It purports to be a series of letters from an experienced mother with a number of growing children to a new mother, overwhelmed by the new responsibility, which includes the child's salvation. A by no means perfect Christian family is presupposed, but a great many of her illustrations are drawn from her visits to Hindu families, her attempts to encourage mothers to adopt sensible health and hygiene practices and from popular moral stories. Many of her stories seem to be illustrations of Tamil proverbs eg:

A son who does not help his mother is worthless to all men.

She reared her child with meat, while she ate bones.

Will not the creeper bear the weight of its fruits?

A child that will not obey its mother is like a rag in a dog's mouth.

He considers his mother the goddess of ill-luck and his wife the goddess of good luck.(47)

In fact there is a sense in which the book reads like a social worker's casebook. She usually balances a case of good practice with one of tragic mistakes. It is fascinating also to see from the references to towns and villages in Tamilnadu how widely she has travelled despite the primitive communications. Presumably the cases cover many years. It is a vivid picture of life in small town India in the 1870s, but many of the issues raised are real today, and depict immediately recognisable dilemmas.

In many ways Mrs W.T. is ahead of her time. She is unconditionally opposed to corporal punishment, advocating taking the offending child aside, sending it to its bed and reasoning with it, with no supper as the ultimate sanction! Hitting a child will only encourage it to hit others, and to believe that violence is right. She warns parents about demanding too much of their children, but she stresses repeatedly the dangers of spoiling children, especially boys, of not giving them their medicine (with fatal consequences), letting them play with dangerous objects and showing disrespect. Lying and stealing clearly must be nipped in the bud, as a little fib may lead to much worse. If a traveller lets his camel stick its nose and then its head into his te d another(no favouring the boys!) will strike a chord with every mother.

Letters on a mother's authority, which harmonise with Hindu beliefs, are balanced by letters on a mother's responsibilities and a mother's mistakes. Yet in her first paragraph she insists that although a mother is primarily responsible, she must not allow her husband to say that domestic affairs are women's matters, but get him to share responsibility when he is at home. However, nurture of the child in knowledge of God is what really matters, and helping them to face death without fear. She herself died a 'holy death' without fear (48) in October 1890. W.T. was devastated, and found it difficult to continue without her. In February 1892 he succumbed to a

chest infection in Palayancottah after a visit to his birthplace to secure his inheritance, which it was then found he had bequeathed for evangelistic work among his people.(45)

In her second novel, Saguna Krupabai incorporates her own experience of coming to Madras to study medicine, being met at Madras Central Station by W.T, and living with his family for a year. One day the family's youngest son, of whose existence she had been but dimly aware, returned from Cambridge after graduation there, and a rapid romance brings the novel to a close. In real life the Sathianadhans blessed this inter-caste marriage in accordance with their principles, for Krupabai was the daughter of Revd Haripant Kristy, a notable Marathi Brahman convert, but in human terms it was not a happy ending. Krupabai's medical condition, which had prevented her studying in Britain, worsened and she had to give up her ambition of being a zenana doctor and emulating Pandita Ramabai. She finally succumbed shortly after the death of her infant son in 1892. Most of her work was published posthumously. Samuel Sathianadhan then had an arranged marriage to Kamala Krishnamma daughter of Oruganti Sivarama Krishnamma whose maternal grandfather Garu Ratnam was also a Telugu Brahman convert of Dr Robert Noble of Marsulipatnam. Unlike Krupabai, Kamala's childhood had not been happy, as she had been brought up by her maternal step-grandmother but she liberated herself through education, and only agreed to the marriage on condition she could still take a B.A. degree. She achieved this ambition in 1898, when with her husband's support she published her first collection of stories. She then became the first Indian woman M.A. graduate. Her stories reflect the clash of culture converts experienced. They anticipate the style of N.R Narayan.

One could devote much time to studying these vignettes of Indian Christian life, with the repeated theme of conversion but time is running out. the themes are very similar each time. Doubts are sown in a young person's mind. There is a relatively long period of intellectual struggle, and then a situation like an impending marriage which precipitates a decision, often without any foreign missionary intervention. Dreams and visions may play a role. The convert's family is alienated, but then after some years there may be a reconciliation. Yet the loneliness of the convert, and the lapses are also included. The stories present a complete culture of Indian life, conversion and negotiation with caste. They are also one with the experiences of W.T. Sathianadhan, both as found in his own accounts and her 'docudrama' account published together with posthumous tributes to him.(49) Those who were reclaimed by their families suffered in ways reminiscent of teenagers caught up in new religious movements and 'de-programmed' by their relatives. There is no attempt to gloss over the fates of these tortured individuals.(50)

One is aware in presenting a paper like this that many tangential questions are raised which cannot be answered: for example, one thing that fascinated me is why the Sathianadhan women wrote such powerful stories, but W.T and his son Samuel wrote non-fiction(in an unending flow) The distinction is even maintained in W.T's literary newspaper, and Kamala's magazine. (The Indian Ladies' Magazine 1901-13)

More central to the theme is the extent to which their vision of the future has been realised, a hundred years later Indian women are now highly educated, but their opportunities are limited by caste and class. Caste is now a central issue in church, society and state - they must share credit for beginning the debate, but caste inter-marriage still rarely happens even in the church though

both in Christian doctrine and in the Indian constitution negative discrimination on the basis of caste is condemned.(51) Indian identity and culture are still hotly debated though increased affluence has meant more eclecticism. It has also meant an even greater gulf, culturally, between urban and rural cultures. Economic dependence continues nationally and in the church, though the kind of self-confidence the Saththianadhans display is now the rule rather than the exception.

My question is whether there is ever such a thing as total conversion as caste washed over into the church and remains there.(52) An inverted form is found in the dalit struggle. Is conversion a simply a change of direction, with far too many converts failing to apply the radical critique of the Gospel to the presuppositions of caste, culture and social status?(53) As true Evangelicals, leaving aside the metaphysical supernatural dimension of salvation, the Saththianadhans found conversion experience brought them great joy personally, whatever the cost. Converting misery to joy and happier lives justified cherishing the experience, as the fictional Kamala's love and good works justified A Hindu Life.

This paper was originally presented at the Third Annual Colloquium on the History of Christian Missions in Asia, hosted by the University of Derby (UK) 14-15 July 1999 on the theme 'Caste, Culture and Conversion in India since 1793.' It is based on initial research in Tamilnadu, South India in 1994 and the CMS archives, the University of Birmingham, UK which was facilitated by St Martin's College, Lancaster UK and J. Sainsbury's plc, which is acknowledged with gratitude.

ENDNOTES

(1) Lokuge, C(ed) Kamala. The Story of a Hindu Life by Krupabai Saththianadhan OUP Delhi 1998. p34, p86 The original title of the 1894 edition was Kamala A Story of Hindu Life. cit. as Kamala

(2) Kamala p156, p171. Lokuge feels the phrase may be inspired by a visit Kamala made to Pandita Ramabai's boarding school for young widows, but it could equally come from the Bhagavadgita.

(3) Ibid p 157. W.T: Saththianadhan reported to Bishop Gell in 1867 that there were no former caste Hindus in his congregation in Madras who wanted to re-marry, and the question of re-marriage of widows, taken as a yardstick of adherence to caste, simply had not arisen. Gell, Frederick. Inquiries by the Bishop of Madras regarding the removal of caste prejudices and practices in the native church of South India. Madras. 1868 p5

(4) Kamala p80 , p123. Sai is shown as trying to escape her status as a Brahman by identifying herself with them by living among them, settling their disputes and, it is implied, running a protection racket.

(5) Saththianadhan, S and Saththianadhan, K Stories of Indian Christian Life. 1898. Madras p54f

(6) For a discussion of the way in which Hindu girls are urged to emulate these heroines, see V Narayanan in Becher, J Women, Religion and Sexuality, London, 1990. P 72, 79f

(7) Kamala, p126, p135, p142, p147.

(8) Kamala, pp155-6

(9) Kamala, p125, p156.

(10) Kamala, p12.

(11) Tilak, Lakshmi Bai, I Follow After. Ahmednagar, 1925; Jacob, P.S, The Experiential Response of N.V.Tilak. Madras 1979. Winslow, J.C. Narayan Vaman Tilak : The Christian Poet of Maharashtra. Calcutta 1923.

(12) Born in the Jessore area of modern Bangladesh and educated initially at the General Assembly's Institution in Calcutta, he was converted by Gopinath Nundi and baptised 4 January 1833. Rated more highly than the Tagore family by the Calcutta intelligentsia I knew in the 1980s, even in translation his poetry is distinguished by its lyricism.

(13) While it is not wholly appropriate to use the term 'God' in a Hindu context, Tamil spirituality has been influenced so much by the 11th cent. philosopher Ramanuja concept of qualified non-dualism that many believe in a personal supreme Being to whom they can direct love and devotion. It is no co-incidence that many converts, including several members of the Sathianadhan family came from this tradition. Raghavachar, S.S. The Spiritual Vision of Ramanuja in Hindu Spirituality Vol. I Vedas through Vedanta ed. by Krishna Sivaraman, SCM 1989; Aleaz, K.P. Christian Thought through Advaita Vedanta. ISPCK Delhi 1996. Kamala pp 106-7, p148f

(14) See 'A Translation of an Abridgement of the Vedanta, or Resolution of the Vedas, the most celebrated and revised work of brahmanical theology, establishing the unity of the Supreme Being, and that he alone is the object of propitiation and worship ' by Ram Mohun Roy, quoted in the Circular Letters of the Serampore Mission 1816. Also Collett, S The Life and Letters of Ram Mohun Roy. Calcutta 1962.

(15) Preface to Saguna, a Story of Native Christian Life. The source of this report, however, is her husband Samuel, a not unbiased witness.

(16) Stories of Indian Christian Life, p46f, p137f etc.

(17) A good illustration of this is Mohanti, P My Village, My Life: Nanpur. A Portrait of an Indian Village. London 1973

(18) Kamala, p43, p59, p75, p100 etc. Closing chapter of Saguna, A Story of Native Christian Life. Madras 1895. Cp Miller, W Female Education in Southern India. Madras 1878.

(19) Sengupta, Padmini Pandita Ramabai Saraswati. Bombay 1970

(20) Sengupta, P Portrait of an Indian Woman Calcutta 1956. Professor Samuel Sathianadhan himself, by virtue of his post at Presidency College, Madras and as Vice President of the Y.M.C.A of India had considerable influence on the development of higher education in India.

(21) Stories of Indian Christian Life, p62, p219f. W.T. Sathianadhan to Revd Gray, CMS dated 28 Feb 1879. CMS archives, University of Birmingham

(22) Interview, March 1994. W.T.S on 'the native church', Letter to Revd Gray 26 Feb 1879. W.T. Sathianadhan, The Native Church in South India, paper given to the General Missionary Conference held at Allahabad, 1872-73. Report pp 250-258 Madras 1873.

(23) Clarke, S.C. Dalits and Christianity. OUP India 1998.

(24) Ibid. Portrait of an Indian Women. Kamala Sathianadhan also edited an influential Ladies Magazine, in which some of the women leaders of the pre Independence Congress party such as Sarojini Naidu, wrote articles.

(25) I am much indebted to Meline Nielson of the Orchard Learning Centre, the University of Birmingham, for drawing my attention to these remarkable documents. The scrapbook was donated to the Selly Oak Colleges' Library by Miss Giberne's niece, Helen Neave, nee Pearson.

(26) C.T. Rhenius's letters and journals are preserved in the CMS archives. Rhenius could not accept the use of a Book of Common Prayer in the churches he had founded. Some of his colleagues joined the LMS mission in Nagercoil but most of his supporters were reconciled after his death in 1839. M.E Gibb, The Anglican Church in India. ISPCK Delhi 1973. pp 101-2, 134-7. P Appasamy, A Centenary History of the CMS in Tinnevely. Palayankottah 1925; G.Pettit, A History of the Tinnevely Mission of the CMS. 1851.

(27) J.G.Fenger, A History of the Tranquebar Mission Madras 1906 p122f. A Lehmann, It Began in Tranquebar. Madras 1956.

(28) Appasamy, p106, pp116-20, Stock, E A Centenary History of the Church Missionary Society. II/p179f; Gibb, M p145. Sathianadhan, S Sketches of Indian Christians. Madras 1896.

(29) The Revd W.T. Sathianadhan B.D. A Brief Biographical Sketch by S Sathianadhan, to which is Appended The Story of a Conversion by Krupabai Sathianadhan. SPCK Madras 1893; John, S A Brief Memoir of the Revd John Devasagayam, First Native Minister of the Church of England in South India. Madras 1895.

(30) op.cit. Gibb p 159-62; S.C. Neill, A History of Christianity in India 1707-1858 CUP 1985, Dhanasekaram, F.J. The North Tinnevely Itinerary. Unpublished M.Th thesis UTC Library, Bangalore. Wingate, A The Secret Christians of Sivakasi, Tamilnadu: One Pattern of Conversion in a South Indian Town. In Religion and Society, March 1986 pp73-87, further discussed in his recent book, The Church and Conversion. ISPCK 1997.

(31) In 1865 Zion Church had 207 baptised persons, 18 Unbaptised and 87 communicants. John Periera's had 76 baptised and 42 Communicants.(Report dated 13 Dec 1867.) In 1867 there were 298 baptised members in the two congregations, 94 communicants, the drop in communicants being due to migration and possibly W.T's stand on caste. In 1868 there were 282 members, 116 communicants. He claims to have baptised 101 adults, and admitted 27 to communion in a decade's ministry. In 1879 there were 397 baptised members, 176 communicants and 30 baptised that year. The transient nature of the congregation due to migration in search of work made it difficult to assess progress. CMS archives, Birmingham

(32) Giberne papers, Orchard Centre, Selly Oak.

(33) Letter to Revd Gray, 2 April 1872. CMS Archives, Birmingham.

(34) op.cit. p216 Gibb quotes a letter from Bishop Gell objecting to the Saththianadhans leaving Madras on the grounds that Mrs Saththianadhan was irreplaceable. This is at variance with her statement(p254) that 'CMS still hankered after the consecration of an Indian bishop. Apparently somewhat to Sargent's surprise, he discovered that Saththianadhan, a Sudra from Palayamkottah, would not be acceptable to a predominantly Nadar church.' In an undated address, The Missionary or Pastor, adapting himself in India to the Peculiarities of Native Thought, W.T. confronted the issue unflinchingly, telling these European candidates for ordination that their work would be vitiated in India if they did not treat all races equally under God and show respect where respect was due in Tamil society.

(35) On the Nadars in the Tinnevely Church, see Caldwell, R records of the Early History of the Tinnevely Mission, Madras 1881. Pp71-100, Neill, S.C. A History of Christianity in India. 1707-1858 Cup p216f, Forrester, D Caste and Christianity, Curzon 1980 p84. On Caldwell's own contribution to the development of Nadar conferences (1935, 1940,1952) see Grafe, H History of Christianity in India Vol IV/2 Tamilnadu in the 19th and 20th Centuries. Bangalore. p212.

(36) Webster, J The African Churches among the Yoruba 1888-1922, Oxford 1964 p11f. the connection with the crowther case is made by Revd J Barton in a letter quoted in Saththianadhan, S, The Revd W.T. Saththianadhan. p43.

(37) Gibb. M.E(1973) p216 The Minutes and correspondence of the C.E.Z.M.S Madras Mission Corresponding Committee are to be found in the archives of the United Theological College, Bangalore. S.India.

(38) Op.cit p343. Azariah's reaction: Mott, J Edinburgh World Missionary Conference 1910 Vol IX p315.

(39) Saththianadhan, CMS Madras Mission papers, University of Birmingham.

(40) Jaffna Christians were originally Sri Lankan Tamils educated by the CMS and the American Board of Foreign Missions who migrated to Madras in search of professional posts. They seem to have been upwardly socially mobile Sudras. Ironically, W.T.'s daughter Katie

married Edward Hensman, a pillar of this community who gravitated to Zion Church in such numbers that in the 1960s it was known as 'the Jaffna Church' according to a long-standing member interviewed March 1994. Annual Report received July 1865 , Question 6 CMS archives Birmingham.

(41) Grafe p 113f. My own interviews with families living in Lalgudi in 1985 substantiated his findings.

(42) Journal entry 31 May 1860 CMS archives.

(43) C.E.Z.M.S. Minutes Vol I entries 20 August 1884 and 26 September 1884. In the latter entry it was noted that the Bishop spoke very highly of her work and it would be hard to replace her. UTC archives, Bangalore

(44) Report of the General Missionary Conference held at Allahabad, 1872=73 pp 250-258.

(45) Radhakrishnan, S Religion and Society pp 197-8 in Sepngupta, R Portrait of an Indian Woman. pp197-8

(46) A photocopy of the Kannada version printed at the Wesleyan Press, Mysore 1928 was kindly sent to me by the archivist, UTC and admirably translated into English for me by the Revd Dr Joseph Basappa.

(47) Jensen, Hermann, Tamil Proverbs. A Classified Collection. Madras 1897. Reprinted Delhi 1982

(48) Sketches of Indian Christian Life p 45. E Stock, Centenary History of the Church Missionary Society Vol III, p460 quotes an (undated) obituary in the Hindu, 'Her simplicity of character, her self-sacrificing love and care for others, her single-hearted devotion to her work have attracted the notice of all with whom she came in contact. She occupied a unique place in the Native Christian Church in Madras.'

(49) op.cit. A Brief Memoir. Compare W.T.'s own account as related at the CMS Anniversary Meeting 1878, pp5-7. Bible Society Monthly Reporter, Sept 2 1878

(50) op.cit. A Brief Memoir, There is however, an account of the reverse situation, a Hindu bride Radha, being kidnapped by her Christian brother-in-law and not being allowed to return to her Hindu home in Saguna, a Story of Native Christian Life. Ch 4

(51) Stories of Indian Christian Life.

(52) Gell, F Inquiries by the Bishop of Madras regarding the removal of caste prejudices and practices in the native Church of South India. SPCK 1868 p5

(53) The situation should be viewed in the context of W.T. Sathianadhan's comment in his Six Months in England. Madras 1878, that in England, despite Christianity being a holy religion

which strikes at the root of evil, there were constant warnings against pickpockets, and many Christians were unconverted nominal Christians.

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Northern India had a long tradition of spasmodic disorder and resistance to government. These upheavals would probably have become more intense in the mid 19th century, but could have been contained if the British had not alienated a group of people on whom their security depended.Â Within the constraints of a colonial order, a modern India was emerging by the end of the 19th century. British rule of course had an important role in this process, but the country that was emerging fulfilled the aspirations of Indians, rather than colonial designs of what a modern India ought to be. [Top](#). [Find out more](#).

Making Merit: The Indian Institutes of Technology and the Social Life of Caste. *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 57, Issue. 02, p. 291. 6 The definition of legal culture used here refers to those values about law, structures and rules of dispute processing, and links between these structures and relevant social and political structures in a wider society and culture. This follows from discussions in Friedman, Lawrence M., *The Legal System: A Social Science Perspective* (New York, 1975), p. 15 and chs. viii, ix, and x. Published after this article was written, *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge, 1987), by Dirks, Nicholas B., discusses the relationship between kinship and rule in Pudukkottai, pp. 203–84.