Indenture Papers: Studies on Girmitiyas
2023 Journal First Published: 11 Oct 2021
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Religion and Indentureship in Trinidad, 1868-1920

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To cite this article: Teelucksingh, Jerome, (2023), 'Religion and Indentureship in Trinidad, 1868-1920', *Indenture Papers: Studies on Girmitiyas,* Vol. 3: 39-58. https://girmit.ac.fj/wp-content/uploads/ip-2023/teelucksingh.pdf

Date Published: 29 November 2023
Other articles in this volume: https://girmit.ac.fj/current-issue/
Editorial Board: https://girmit.ac.fj/editorial-board/
Notes for Contributors: https://girmit.ac.fj/notes-for-contributors-2/

Abstract

This paper examines the positive and negative impacts of missionaries from the Presbyterian Church (Canada), who worked among the Indians and their children, during indentureship in the British West Indian colony of Trinidad in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Rev. John Morton and other Canadian missionaries sympathetically understood the plight of the Indians and their lack of interest in colonial education at the ward schools. His arrival in the colony in 1868, increased his social awareness of the need for education among thousands of illiterate East Indian children. By 1868, there were approximately 20,000 East Indians in the colony of Trinidad without an educational future. Schools were established in such rural villages. This paper focuses on the perceived benefits of offering a westernized education to Indian children. Education also had its drawbacks during the colonial era. Islam and Hinduism and their accompanying beliefs, rites and customs were often denigrated to win converts to Christianity. Undoubtedly, certain segments of the East Indian population in Trinidad bitterly resisted these conversion attempts. The Muslims seemed more overtly protective of their religion and culture than the Hindus. This reaction influenced the missionaries' concentration of outreach activities among the Hindu element of the Indians.

Keywords: *missionaries, Canada, conversion, indentured, Presbyterian Church*

Introduction

Due to a lack of oral sources, it is often difficult to make an accurate assessment of the transformation and impact of religion during indentureship. For some persons, conversion was crucial for social mobility but for others it was a loss of cultural identity and severing of religious ties.

In 1869, Patrick Keenan's *Report Upon the State of Education in the Island of Trinidad* revealed the deplorable state of education among the girmitiyas and their children:

> The Coolie's mind was left a blank. No effort was made to induce him, through the awakening intelligence and dawning prospects of his children, to associate the fortune or the future of his family with the colony....I cannot call to mind any other case of a people who, having voluntarily come to a strange land which they enriched by their labour, were morally and intellectually-so completely neglected as the Coolies have been during the past twenty-four years (1869: 48).

East Indian parents refused to send their children to ward schools. By 1868, there were approximately 20,000 East Indians in the colony of Trinidad without an educational future (Kalloo, 1996: 72).

Rev John Morton

The arrival of Rev. John Morton (1839-1912) in Trinidad in 1868, increased his social awareness of the need for education among thousands of illiterate East Indian children. On 3 March 1868, the education of three East Indian children on the doorsteps of the home of Rev. Dr. John Morton heralded an endeavour which would supplement the educational mission of other denominational schools. This simple gesture exemplified the willingness of Morton to sacrifice his home and time for the children of poor, uneducated, indentured labourers. This act was symbolic of the Church's future commitment and dedication in an uphill task of reforming education in Trinidad.

Morton sympathetically understood the plight of the East Indians and their lack of interest in colonial education at the ward schools. In 1869, he appealed to Governor Gordon for financial support for schools for the East Indian immigrants. Morton had a profound impact because the government enacted the Education Ordinance of 1870, which established dual control of primary schools. This meant that the local administration financially supported two types of elementary school - denominational and government ones.

On 22 November 1870, Rev. Kenneth Grant (from Scotch Hill, Pictou County in Nova Scotia) and his wife Catherine Copeland (of Merigomish in Nova Scotia) arrived in San Fernando, South Trinidad. In 1883, Rev Grant held the first school class under a samaan tree on Carib Street in San Fernando. Grant also gave instruction in subjects which were not being taught in the Canadian Mission Indian (CMI) schools (later known as Canadian Mission or CM schools) (Letter from the Elders, 1907). At that site the Susamachar Presbyterian Church and Grant Memorial Presbyterian School were built.

By 1870, religious bodies were allowed to establish schools which would be financially assisted by the government which administered the public schools. This was subsequently followed by the opening of the first government-supported East Indian school in San Fernando in 1871. In accordance with a provision in the school law, every Thursday, Morton was given the responsibility to oversee religious instruction at the ward schools. Furthermore, all teachers employed in schools throughout the colony were to be ranked and certified by the Board of Education.

In his memoirs, Morton assessed the educational impasse that had developed" 'The children were all black and coloured. Owing to race prejudice there was scarcely an East Indian child to be found in schools in the whole island' (Morton, 1916: 41; see also Grant, 1962: 82). Donald Wood in *Trinidad in Transition* supported the view that among East Indians there was a, 'social and religious reluctance to have their children educated with those of a different faith and a different race' (Wood, 1968: 231). Also, Keenan was aware of the proselytism that would occur and emphasised that education in Coolie schools should be accessible to everyone and the pupils should not be exposed to evangelisation. The Presbyterian Church in Canada was fully aware of the need to educate their missionaries in Indian thought and gain practical training in India, before appointment to the British West Indian colonies. Thus as early as 1854, '...the Canadians had sent a missionary to India to study its philosophy; before Canadians were sent to work in the Caribbean they had to undergo training in Indian thought; there was the constant importation of Christian Indian literature by Presbyterians in the Caribbean' (Samaroo, 1987: 49).[1]

In Trinidad the long-awaited reformation in education was ushered in by the Presbyterian missionaries. An obvious challenge to the missionaries was the establishment of schools to cater for the special needs of these East Indian children. Their educational thrust and persistent efforts focused on rural areas

[1] Reports by missionaries who served in India revealed that public meetings were conducted in Hindi and there were bhajan singing (Samaroo, 1982: 94-95).

where the East Indian immigrants had settled. One notable feature of this pioneering effort was the willingness of these Canadian missionaries to work in tandem with the existing colonial government in educating a wide section of the population. The salaries of teachers and maintenance costs were usually borne by the government, whilst the Canadian missionaries were in charge of the schools' administration. The amount of aid a school received was determined by the reports of school management, salary scale of the teaching staff and performance of pupils in annual examinations.

In 1878 there were an estimated 30,000 East Indians in a population of 100,000 (*Presbyterian Record* December 1878). In 1889, thirty-one of thirty-eight Indian schools were receiving government assistance. By 1890, the Education Ordinance abolished financial assistance on the basis of examination results and three-quarters of teachers' salaries were paid by the government. Furthermore, the Ordinance of 1890 gave the Board of Education greater power in establishing schools for East Indian children, denominational schools would be under strict inspection and their continued financial assistance would be determined on adequate fulfilment of the colony's educational requirements (Great Britain, Colonial Office, 1891; Trinidad and Tobago, 1890). In 1891, the Roman Catholic Church comprised approximately 42% of Indian Christians. Among the other Christian denominations, 30% of the Indian Christians belonged to the Church of England, and 27% were Presbyterians (Ramesar, 1994: 107).

One of the outstanding characteristics of the mission was its rapid educational expansion. Mission schools blossomed in rural villages throughout the colony including Barrackpore, Coora, Fyzabad, Rousillac, Santa Cruz, Cumuto, Biche, Plum Road, Morichal, Cunaripo, Cumuto and Lengua. Central Trinidad was not excluded and in the 1870s the following schools were established- Esperanza CMI School in June 1871, Sevilla CMI School in April 1872 and Exchange CMI School in June 1873. These schools served an important function as it was reported that by 1880, only 590 East Indian children were enrolled in estate schools (Williams, 1964: 207). The success of the educational drive was evident from the fact that in 1896 Presbyterians had 38 schools with 3,041 students on roll and an average daily attendance of 1,888 students (Annual Report, 1897). In 1898, the number of schools had increased to 44 and the average daily attendance was 2,137 students (Annual Report, 1899).

During the 1890s, other schools were erected - in Las Lomas in 1891, in Chin Savanna in 1894 and on St. Helena Estate in 1890. The schools were built in areas which lacked proper roads. John Morton travelled by a horse-drawn buggy to Sangre Grande and Sangre Chiquito. In areas as Cunaripo which was mostly forested, some of the roads were mud tracks (*Sunday Guardian*, 2004).

In 1904, Rev. Joseph Gibbings used a donkey, mule and later a buggy with two horses whilst serving Biche, Coal Mine, Fishing Pond, Guaico-Tamana and Plum-Mitan (Kemp, 1960). After the railway was extended from Arima to Sangre Grande, Morton established a mission in Guaico. He used this as a base to extend the mission to Caratal in 1901 and Cunaripo in 1904.

As a result of the lack of proper infrastructure, schoolhouses were built for Head-teachers nearby the CMI schools. For instance, Cunaripo and Biche CMI schools, built in 1904 and 1909 respectively, each had a 'schoolmaster's house,' 'headmaster's house' or 'teacher's house.' Sometimes in areas where there was no church, the headmaster's house served as the place for Sunday worship. At Morichal CMI School the headmaster's house served this dual purpose until 1939.

In addition to the accommodation for teachers, there was often a separate residence for the catechist. Near the CMI schools at Guaico and Piparo there was a 'catechist house.' At the Aramalaya Presbyterian Church, in Tunapuna, there was the Mission house, Minister's manse and the catechist's house (*Brochure*, nd: 7). In most rural areas, the missionaries built a house near the school for the use of the head-teacher or schoolmaster. There was a schoolmaster house at Felicity Presbyterian School but due to a lack of use it was eventually demolished. Schoolmaster houses also existed in the 1940s and 1950s at St. Helena, Maracas, Tacarigua, Tunapuna and Curepe Presbyterian schools (Interview with David Sukha,2006).

In addition to assistance from the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the planters in Trinidad supplemented the resources necessary to continue the educational mission. Morton noted that at the end of 1873 there were 12 CMI schools of which the government and the Canadian mission supported one each whilst ten were supported by planters (1916: 101). Jordan Hill CMI School was opened on 1 April 1873 in a room that was donated by an estate owner. Schools in the district of Couva were heavily supported by planters (*Home and Foreign Record,* June 1871; Turner, 1968: 22-23). Among the owners of sugar estates who supported the Canadian mission were Sir Charles Tennant, J. Cumming, W. Burnley and J. Lamont. Additionally, Charles Stollmeyer had donated half an acre of land in Santa Cruz in which the mission built a church and school. The Acono school in Maracas (later known as Maracas CMI School) was initially made of bamboo. Subsequently, in 1897, the owners of Cadbury Brothers of England who had purchased land in Maracas, assisted in the building of a new CMI school in Maracas (Morton, 1916: 335-6). In 1906, the founding of Coal Mine CMI School, later known as Grosvenor CMI School, received considerable assistance from owners of a cocoa estate.

Even among churches such as the Aramalaya Presbyterian Church, 'Planters on neighbouring estates gave ready and generous assistance in carting materials' (Morton, 1916: 274). Some of the owners of the sugar estates in Couva offered to defray the bulk of the missionary's expenses ('Foreign Missions of…', nd: 33). Thomas Christie, a Canadian missionary, who arrived in Trinidad in 1873 and served Couva for nine years, could have attested to this fact.

As a result of this badly needed financial assistance and land from the planters, the Canadian missionaries did not condemn indentureship. Any criticisms of the treatment of Indians by planters or attempting to intervene in disputes between Indian labourers and planters would have affected the peaceful existence of the mission. Thus, the missionaries accepted the unjust system and ignored complaints. Locally trained Bible Women and catechists also adopted a similar stance. The missionaries were also grateful to the planters for allowing them to visit the estates to spread the Gospel among the Indians. The planters would have also seen the influence of the mission as having a socialising effect that would have reduced the incidence of protests.

Some CMI schools initially did not receive government assistance. For instance, it was only a few years after being established that the Santa Cruz CMI School (founded in 1902) received financial assistance from the government. Similarly, the San Juan CMI School (established in 1901) began receiving government aid in 1906. In one instance, A. Agostini, was sent by W. Guppy (the Inspector of Schools) to visit the 'Coolie School' at Mt. Stewart with the intention of providing financial assistance. However, Morton warns Grant that Guppy 'carefully abstains from committing himself in writing' (Letter from Mortonto Grant, 28 March, ynd). He also advised Grant that during his visit to the governor of the colony, he needed to be careful and not implicate the Inspector of Schools because 'it would be very awkward to perhaps bring down the Governor on him' (Letter from Morton to Grant).

At the turn of the twentieth century, the government began to recognise the work of the schools. By 1900, there were sixty CMI schools serving 7,557 East Indian children from an East Indian population of 85,000 (*Presbyterian Record,* July 1900; March 1901). During this period, the CMI schools were staffed with 70 pupil teachers, 52 certified teachers and 16 graduates of its training classes (P*resbyterian Record* February 1901; see also Samaroo, 1982: 100-101). This was substantial proof that the Canadian Mission had been keenly interested in providing quality education to the Indians.

Conversion

Despite the perceived benefits of offering education to East Indian children, it was given at a price. Islam and Hinduism and their accompanying beliefs, rites and customs, were often denigrated to win converts to Christianity. Undoubtedly, certain segments of the East Indian population in Trinidad bitterly resisted these conversion attempts. The Muslims seemed more overtly protective of their religion and culture than the Hindus. This influenced the missionaries' concentration of outreach activities among the Hindu element of the East Indians. The tension existing in the evangelisation drive was acknowledged in the correspondence of one of the Canadian missionaries:

> We have had our anxieties, and you will admit that they were not groundless, when I inform you of the existence of a secret, crafty, organized and active opposition by Mohammedans, which was designed to thwart our efforts and break up our Mission. Nearly every convert was tampered with, and in some cases fair promises of reward were made if Christianity were renounced (*Foreign Missions of the…,* nd: 32).[2]

Despite this concern among the missionary, the Canadian mission did not ostracise the Muslims. In 1878, Morton reported on the attendance at the mission school in Tacarigua which had 'some 70 children all of whom came out of Hindu and Mohammedan Homes (Letter from Norton to MacGregor, 1 January 1878). Religious instruction was provided in all CMI schools to all races and religions.

Interestingly, Hindus and Muslims gave substantial donations to the building of the Susamachar Presbyterian Church in San Fernando: 'The East Indians themselves, composed of Mahommedans and worshippers of Idols, for then there were few Christians, contributed about £150 sterling' (Clark, 1892: 12; see also Grant, 1962: 97). This philanthropic gesture was probably because their children attended the mission schools. Others who contributed to the building fund of the Susamachar Church were Chinese, White merchants and planters (*East Meets West in Trinidad*, 1934: 93).

In 1901, Niamat Khan, a *mullah* (Muslim priest) from India was baptized and converted to Presbyterianism in Trinidad. Upon his conversion, he had his name changed to Paul Niamat. This event was unfavourably received by the

[2] One of the booklets owned by Rev. Grant was *Proof of Prophet Mohammed from the Holy Bible* (Georgetown: The Muslim Society).

Muslim community and increased the resentment against the Presbyterian missionaries. This would have fostered the belief among missionaries as Rev. K.J. Grant, that Hindus in Trinidad were 'much more approachable and amenable to Christian instruction' (Grant, 1962: 70). However, often there was hostility from both non-Christian groups. In 1899, Joseph E. Gibbings, a former Head Driver of a sugar estate, became a catechist and later was ordained a minister by the Canadian Mission. In 1903, he confronted obstacles during his work in Chaguanas: 'Hindoos and Mohommedans were aggressive there, and frequently challenged him to debate. He was threatened with violence. Kalloo Maharaj once ran at him with a sapat….' (Kemp, 1960). It is such incidents which would have influenced the view of Winston Mahabir, a Presbyterian, who felt it is a 'solid historical fact' that the Canadian Mission were guilty of 'raiding the ranks of the Muslims and Hindus' (1987: 5).

Often the missionaries were approached by individuals who willingly and genuinely sought a new religion. Morton recounted in 1879, for instance:

> We have also a boy, Geoffrey Subaran, who is learning to be a cabinet-maker, but gives his evenings to study. Subaran asked Miss Blackadder for a book that would make him "feel sorry." "I like to feel sorry on Sunday," he said. I suppose he meant a book that touched his feelings; so, Indians have feelings and like a book that moves them. We greatly wish to see them moved to better thoughts, feelings and purposes (Morton, 1916: 185).

Furthermore, Adella Archibald noted that there was no forced conversion: 'There is a "Conscience Clause" posted on the walls of every day school, to the effect that there must be no coercion in the matter of Religious Instruction: but the children love the Bible Stories and the singing of the Christian hymns so they seldom or never retire' (Archibald, nd: 9).

The work of the Presbyterian missionaries among Hindus and Muslims generated controversy among scholars. Brinsley Samaroo highlighted the derogatory remarks made by the first pioneer of East Indian education, Morton, who condemned East Indians as worshippers of false gods: 'Brahma was a liar, Vishnu an adulterer, Siva a drunkard, Krishna shameless, and even Ramchandra, one of the best, violent and murderous, while the character of Christ is our strong point' (Samaroo, 1975: 46; see also Morton, 1916: 232, Samaroo, 1982: 98, and Ramlakhan, 2003: 17-18). In 1878 Morton in correspondence to Rev. MacGregor, of Canada, eagerly reported on the 'progress' being made in conversion:

> [All] through Leviticus and Hebrews the advantage of this lesson

> was felt by us all. All these young men had taken some part in heathen sacrifices + some of them as Brahmins were intimately acquainted with the Hindu ritual….And when I pointed out how accurately the Apostle Paul describes the heathenism of India when he says "The things that the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to deotas + not to God" a murmur of approbation ran around the class. In treating of the plagues of Egypt they entered with zest into a comparison of the idolatry of Egypt and India... (Letter from Morton to MacGregor, 4 April 1878).

Furthermore, Samaroo commented on the work of Morton and compared him with another outstanding missionary, 'Morton made no attempt to understand the people who came to these shores from India. Rev. Grant ...went among the community learnt Hindi and developed a programme of education for East Indians' (Speech, 1995). For some Presbyterians this would appear as a harsh interpretation of Morton's efforts to reach out to the Indians. Nevertheless, there is some prejudice displayed by Grant in one of his observations of the Indians: '…it must not be inferred from these statements that the Hindu shows an ardent desire for spiritual truth' (Grant, 1962: 73).

Despite criticism of Morton, Samaroo acknowledged the monumental work of Morton, who made some effort to understand the new language that the missionaries encountered. All Canadian Mission schools had reading and writing in Hindi during the Religious Instruction period. By 1870, Bibles and literature in Hindi were being imported from India by the Presbyterian missionaries in Trinidad (Samaroo, 1982: 96). Morton had established the first Hindi press in the basement of his Tunapuna manse and his booklets were being used in day-schools and churches. His wife, Sarah, aided the cause by publishing a Hindi prayer book - *Garland of Prayers* (Ratna Mala) Trinidad (Samaroo, 1982; see also Harricharan, 1976: 29; Morton Memorial Presbyterian… nd: 11). In 1896, a high caste immigrant from India and convert to Presbyterianism, Rev. Babu Lal Behari[3] reportedly sold 5,000 books and tracts in Hindi. Behari was appointed by the Mission Council as one of the instructors in 'Hindi Literature Books' and was familiar with the Mahabharat, Valmiki Ramayan and Sukhsagar. Knowledge of such works was vital to 'refute objectors who drew their arguments from these sources' (Clark, 1892: 33). An illustration is Morton's correspondence to MacGregor:

> And in dealing with Indians one has to be prepared for questions that would not be brought up by young men at home. Our text book in the principal class will be the Hindu Bible… If we succeed in opening up to them the Scriptures as a wide and very interesting field with a well defined purpose…to be explored at their leisure we will have attained the object we set before ourselves (Letter from Morton to MacGregor, 6 March 1878).

[3] For more information on Behari, see Seesaran (2002: 116).

East Indian men such as Andrew Guyadeen, who were high caste Hindus, assisted in bridging the language and cultural barriers. East Indians belonging to all castes including the Brahmins and Kshatriyas (both high castes) were openly accepted in the Presbyterian Church (Clark, 1892: 9).

Morton's work was continued by his son, Harvey, who in 1901 used the Hindi press at Tunapuna to print a Hindi hymn book (Geeta Mala), International Sunday School lessons and various religious literature in Hindi 9Doodnath, nd: 28; Ramesar & Bhupsingh, 1988: 34, 26; Trustees of K.E. Mahase, 1992: 11, and Samaroo, 1982: 95-97). Two of the booklets published by this press were *Presbyterian Manuel of Forms in Hindi* in 1908 (Jamieson, 1908) and the *Hindi Second Book* in 1923. Furthermore, Morton and other missionaries took the initiative in holding church services in Hindi and other native tongues of the congregation - 'An occasional service was conducted in the Tamil dialect or in Chinese for the benefit of those who could not understand otherwise' (Harricharan,1976: 28; Doodnath, nd: 21).

At CMI schools there was mandatory secular instruction for four hours which was required by the government. After this was completed, the missionaries had freedom to conduct any form of religious instruction (Morton, 1916: 100). Agnes Morton, daughter of Rev. Morton, was fluent in Hindi and served at the Orange Grove School during the period 1882-1888 (Morton, 1916: 355). At the Iere Home, Hindi was a prominent item on the institution's timetable. Each morning began with Hindi hymns and cathecism whilst Hindi writing and reading was conducted later in the day (Diary of Archibald, vol. 1: 7; see also Guyadeen, nd: 112).[4] Marianne Ramesar noted that English was the language used in schools but Hindi was used by the missionaries in adult church services. She describes this as 'an important anglicizing and socializing process' (Ramesar, nd: 106).

The recent converts took the initiative in bridging the language barrier. At the mission school in Couva, the language of the Indians was offered: 'Good progress is made by the children here, George Jagganath, one of the teachers, recently a heathen but now a Christian of high caste and well educat-

[4] Mrs. Morton had a Bible class in English and Hindi as well (Morton, 1916: 349).

ed in Hindustani, teaches the Hindi in the school', noted Clark (1892: 47). Similarly, Charles Prayag, a catechist, benefitted from a class conducted in a humble setting: 'Mr. Tilucksingh started a hindi (sic) class which I attended in his cattle pen every evening which he conducted after his work from the estate' (A Brief Sketch…, nd).

The missionaries' effort in translation of Hindi texts would have served to highlight some of the parallels between Hinduism and Christianity and not necessarily to denigrate the religion of the East Indians. The Presbyterian Church undertook other tasks to ensure the bridging of the cultural and language barriers. The teachers employed in its primary schools were persons selected from the East Indian community who were versed in English and Hindi. In 1886, the Monkey Town CMI School, serving Barrackpore, Patti Hill, Monkey Town and Transfer, adopted a teaching method tailored to the interests of their pupils: 'An integral part of the church school curriculum was the teaching of Hindi and the East Indian culture of beating tassa drums and the singing of bhajans. Jeffrey Mungal and Edward Bissoo taught Hindi at schools' (*Krist Mandli…,* 1986: 7). In its early editions, *The Trinidad Presbyterian* (first published in 1904) printed a Hindi version in April 1906 in which issues such as the evils of drug abuse and alcoholism were discussed. By 1900, schools such as the San Juan CMI School, opened at the Aranguez Estate under the catechist Henry Hanooman, initially taught Hindi. Similarly, at CMI schools at the Bon Intento and Fairfield Estates, there was an evening class of religious instruction and Hindi.

It seemed that one of the underlying objectives of education provided by these mission schools was to act as an agent for social transformation, thus providing a desired stability for the volatile plantation society. In 1885, Rev. Morton's report on the mission in Trinidad revealed the positive impact of Christianity on the native population: 'Christian schools and Sunday schools are the special agency of the young and through the children they have a leavening effect upon their parents' (*Presbyterian Record,* 1885: March). Likewise, Grant identified the positive influence of the Canadian teachers: 'Their Christian life and character gave a high tone to the schools over which they were placed...' and that '[e]very teacher is a Christian worker, and on every Sabbath day provision is made for using him in Sunday School work' (Grant, 1962: 88, 138). These observations suggest that conversion from one religion to another, from one culture to another within the education system, made the Presbyterian schools appear as agents of deculturalisation, westernisation and socialisation. The transition from Hinduism and Islam to Presbyterianism suggested a partial loss of their 'Indian identity'. One ordained minister of the Presbyterian

Church, Roy Neehall, believed that if the East Indians were not introduced to education by the missionaries their 'mobility would have been slower' (*Express,* 4 April 1995). An illustration of this occupational mobility can be found in the island's early legal system as the five East Indians who were jurors in 1890 were Madrasi and belonged to the Presbyterian Church (Seesaran, 2002: 196).

The manipulative use of education as a tool for purposes other than simply education has been supported by Samaroo whose evaluation of the syllabus of the Canadian Presbyterian primary schools led him to classify these institutions as agents of socialisation (1996: 23-38). Ralph Premdass, a sociologist based at UWI, and Rev. Harold Sitahal, a retired Presbyterian minister, examined the wielding of an English education by the Canadian missionaries stating that 'Morton and other Canadians to follow, set about breaking down the defenses of the Hindu and Muslim community by offering an English education through the mission' (1991: 343). However, to interact with the Africans and experience social mobility in the colony, the Indians needed to learn English.

These converts to Presbyterianism did not alienate themselves from their former religion. For instance, in the Woodbrook Debating Club, Patrick Akal, the headmaster of the Woodbrook CM School, presented the topic 'A History and Derivation of the Hindi language' (Seesaran, 2002: 195).[5] There is the assumption that Canadian ministers spearheaded the evangelisation drive but natives played a major role. For example, in 1900 at Penal, recent Presbyterian converts were instrumental in founding the Presbyterian Church and school (Penal Presbyterian Church, 1990: 7).

The benefits of a primary school education contributed to the social and occupational mobility for many marginalised East Indians. Kathleen Kassiram, a retired teacher who taught in both primary and secondary Presbyterian schools, noted:

> The Government had found it necessary to employ bi-lingual Indians to act as interpreters for Hindi-speaking Indians in important business matters. In 1878 Rev. Morton made recommendations to Government for a training programme for Interpreters. In 1883, he was appointed Examiner of Hindi interpreters, a post he held until his death (nd: 9).

Additionally, in his position as Government examiner of interpreters,

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[5] The evening's topic was *An Evening with Mother India.* Another paper presented was 'The Indians in Trinidad'.

Morton was able to successfully seek the appointment of educated East Indians to recognised posts in the colony (Seesaran, 1993: 15). Among these interpreters in the 1880s was David Mahabir, a prominent elder of the Presbyterian Church. The positive impact of Morton's work was evident in 1918, as among a total of 40 interpreters employed in the Civil Service, 35 were East Indians (Seesaran, 2002: 212). An illustration is William Dwarika who was born in India in 1897 and at the age of 6 travelled to Trinidad on the *S.S. Ganges*. He was educated at Princes Town CM School and Naparima Training College. Dwarika attained the positions of ward officer, interpreter and bailiff. He also served as a member of the East Indian National Association (EINA) and treasurer of the East Indian Friendly Society. Thus, provision of an English education by the mission schools was compatible with the desired social advancement which some East Indians were seeking.

It could be argued that despite the fact that the Canadian missionaries operated through the educational curriculum in hastening the socialisation and integration of the East Indians, a religious input was important in the development of the immigrants. By 1899 the Secretary of the State introduced agricultural training at primary schools, but Rev. Morton had already boldly initiated this practice in the CMI schools.

Neither integration nor religious conversion was easily achieved as there was friction between the traditional teachings of Christianity and of East Indian culture. The missionaries were attempting to enrich and improve social and moral aspects of the lives of both the indentured labourers and their children by relying on the Bible. Thus, though the missionaries appeared to be offering an education with the 'hidden agenda' of evangelism, Manraj argues that the majority of the East Indians were not coerced into accepting Presbyterianism (Manraj, nd: 14). In this context, the CMI school could be seen as the evangelising arm of the church (Mathers, 1964: 24).

Certain criteria existed which created a link between conversion and occupational/social mobility for East Indians. Stephen Mathers, a Canadian minister, added credibility to the view that conversion to Christianity was one aspect of mobility. He cited the fact that only those Indians who were baptised Christians could serve as teachers (Mathers, 1964: 48). E.B. Seesaran supported the argument of education's importance:

> Since education had always been a lever for upward social mobility, and primary school teaching a base from which the less wealthy could ascend, some Indians accepted conversion to gain comparatively lucrative, comfortable and prestigious jobs in the schools of the three established Christian churches, especially the Presbyterian Canadian Mission (Seesaran, 2002: 215).

This could be interpreted as subtle pressure by the missionaries for conversion to Presbyterianism as a means of socially advancing under the Crown Colony system. There is the argument by Premdass and Sitahal that some East Indians feigned conversion to gain employment in the mission schools (1991: 344-5). This was supported in the field work of Morton Klass for a doctoral thesis during 1957 and 1958. He examined a predominantly Indian village in Central Trinidad which he dubbed as 'Amity' and discovered that most of the student-teachers, upon selection or soon after, at Amity CM School had become 'voluntarily' converted to Presbyterianism. He also found that the prevailing belief in Amity was that Christian teachers had a better chance than the non-Christian teachers in being appointed to a respectable school or for promotion (Klass, 1961: 140). In stating that the non-Christians 'converted' to obtain jobs, Klass indirectly implied that the non-Christians were cunning, opportunistic and materialistic. It was simply a means of survival and escape from poverty.

Likewise, Arthur Niehoff argued, 'Conversion to Christianity offered quick rewards and mission schools were readily employing teachers' (1960: 9). Turner, nd: 8) also supported this view. Selwyn Ryan also shares the view that conversion offered an opportunity for social mobility (1996: xxi).

The attraction to these mission schools was not merely for monetary rewards but for escape from plantation life as well. Bridget Brereton writes: '…there was the old fear of conversion - but there were no Moslem or Hindu schools, and education for most Indians was the only route which led away from the plantations' (2005: 41). Additionally, the established link between the planters and missionaries increased the chances of procuring employment for graduates of the Canadian mission schools (Seesaran, 2002: 15). However, scholars have failed to realise that if the motive of providing education was evangelism and the East Indians were not attracted to Presbyterianism, then why did the Canadian missionaries continue building schools? Why were Presbyterian churches being established across Trinidad if the conversion rate was so disappointing? Apparently, there were sufficient converts to inspire the Canadian missionaries and teachers to continue and the possibility exists that the missionaries had witnessed the social benefits of providing education to the maligned immigrants.

Many have also failed to appreciate the fact that conversion was an option for students and teachers. Influential evidence for scholars would include an early report on the opening of the first East Indian school in San Fernando on 28 February 1871, which reported that '[a]fter six months, there were only

three or four converts there' (East meets West*,* 1934: 94).

The Canadian missionaries were ably assisted by family members, catecists, Canadian women, local Bible women, elders, pupil teachers and headmasters who served as missionaries, counsellors, humanitarians or philanthropists and were genuinely interested in improving and uplifting not only East Indians but the other downtrodden and despised masses. Indeed, the missions extended their work to others who were alienated and ostracized in the Caribbean colonies.

Race and a Presbyterian Education.

Despite the educational achievements and reforms initiated by these early Presbyterian missionaries, in mainstream literature, there are seemingly damaging criticisms of the Church's divisive impact on education which concentrated on the education of East Indians and excluded Africans. Scholars such as Bridget Brereton provide evidence that the Canadian mission schools were not an integrating agent in the nineteenth century: '… it was a segregated education, for the teachers and pupils at their schools were almost exclusively Indian. They were not institutions in which young Indians met young Trinidadians of other races' (2005: 42). Likewise, Samaroo noted that important areas of social interaction were blocked, '[c]onducting classes and religious services in Hindi was helpful in reaching the East Indians but was hardly conducive to the attraction of non-East Indians. Hence an important area of social interaction was blocked' (Samaroo, 1975: 53). In contrast, Carl Campbell argued that the 'Indian community was already separated by culture from the rest of society, and would have continued in this condition with or without the Canadian Presbyterian church' (Campbell, 1992: 81). Even though there was an initial emphasis on East Indian children, the Canadian Mission schools, established in mainly rural areas, welcomed all children. Indeed, there were no caste, ethnicity/race, religious, gender or class barriers in the CMI schools. Prior to the work of the missionaries, many Indians were illiterate and thus did not correspond with their relatives and friends in India. However, due to the work and encouragement of the missionaries thousands of letters were despatched to India (*The Mirror* 20 July 1907).

Despite this apparent favoured status of the Indians, other races, especially the Chinese, were given an equal opportunity. There is evidence that Chinese shopkeepers in San Fernando contributed financially to the upkeep of the nearby Presbyterian primary schools (Grant, 1962: 97; Adhar, 1899: 20). During the first year of its existence, the San Fernando CMI School in 1871

had six Chinese students (Morton, 1916: 100). Furthermore in 1877, Jacob Corsbie, of Chinese descent, was sent to Galt, Ontario to be educated in teacher-training courses. Corsbie holds the distinction of being the first local of Trinidad to be sent abroad to further his education by the Canadian mission (*Presbyterian Record,* April 1878). During 1890-1891, in the Canadian mission's Sabbath school in Tunapuna, non-Indian students were in attendance: 'The Sabbath-School was held in the afternoon, composed of the young Hindus and Chinese, in all about 210, under twenty or more intelligent native teachers' (Clark, 1892: 17). Additionally, the remarkable ability of these students was praised by a visitor to the school, '...five little girls, Hindus and Chinese, repeating distinctly the 52 titles and Golden Texts of the lessons, in English, without missing a word, which was truly, no small effort for little ones under nine years of age' (Clark, 1892: 17). Most villages had a retail shop owned by Chinese, and their children often attended the nearby CMI schools.

Dennison Moore, a Canadian-based academic critically assessed the CMI schools and the work of the missionaries as promoting segregation between Africans and East Indians. He contends that Hinduism was mocked by the missionaries in the classrooms of the CMI schools (1995: 172, 186, 354, 274). Moore strongly condemned the work of the Presbyterian missionaries among the East Indians: 'The most vigorous and sustained attack on Hinduism was mounted by the missionaries of the Presbyterian Church of Canada whose schools were heavily supported by the colonial government' (1995: 172. This is a generalisation that could be easily dismissed. The schools were also funded by the planters, the Presbyterian Church of Canada and individuals. Additionally, there is ample evidence suggesting that the missionaries sacrificed time and resources to learn Hindi, print booklets and ensure there were East Indian catechists to preach and sing in the native language of the immigrants. Statistics from the Fyzabad and Woodbrook CMI Schools would reflect a greater African presence. Secondly, Moore did not take into consideration persons of Mixed race and of Chinese descent who also attended these schools.

Conclusion

The underlying intention of scholars and researchers to discredit the work of the Presbyterian Church (and other denominational schools) has often muddied the contributions of Canadian missionaries to education. The colonial era unleashed socio-economic forces contributing to a fractured and dysfunctional society. The traumatic immigration process and the uprooting from their homeland India created alienation among the East Indians. The Presbyterian mission sheltered these vulnerable minds and acted as a buffer against the

harsh social conditions. Indeed, the Presbyterian Church played an inestimable role in the acculturation and assimilation of the East Indian immigrants in the society. This was crucial in a colonial society in which divide and rule was the modus operandi.

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