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A table of contents for *The Baptist Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bq_01.php

The Indian Press and Missionaries

DR. ERNEST A. PAYNE has pointed out that John Mack's funeral sermon on William Carey,¹ is not mentioned in Whitley's *Baptist Bibliography*, nor by any of Carey's biographers.² His source is the copy preserved in the Royal Library of Copenhagen. Under the title 'The Late Dr. Carey' the *Bengal Hurkaru* (Calcutta), the major English-language newspaper in India in this period, of 14 August 1834, printed Mack's complete funeral sermon, probably from a copy furnished to the editors by the Serampore Press. Earlier that year, immediately after Carey's death, the *Hurkaru* had praised the 'eminent and able' leader of the Serampore missionaries who collectively were 'the leaders of reform' in India—"They are," it concluded, "to India what our early Patriots were to England."³ Mack's sermon, as Dr. Payne indicated, is of considerable interest to the historian. In it, for instance, Mack states that he had never heard of a Hindu or a Muslim converted to Christianity by Carey's preaching and, indeed, that in the period of Mack's residence at Serampore from 1821 only once did he see Carey "address the gospel to the heathen." Other methods had been 'instrumental in the conversion of many'; chiefly Carey's Biblical translations and personal example:

"Wherever Protestant missionaries have gone, they have adopted the course of Dr. Carey in translating the Sacred volume; and a great proportion of them are indebted to the stimulus given by his example, both for the direction of their own zeal, and for the support which they have received in their labours."⁴

Many of these informative Indian newspapers and periodicals, including the *Bengal Hurkaru*, are available in London at the India Office Library. With few exceptions, the details they contain on missionary activities have been left untapped by mission historians.⁵

One looks in vain through the journals of the day for any notice of the arrival of Carey and John Thomas in India late in 1793. Only in the regular shipping intelligence of the Calcutta *Gazette* is any notice taken, and this mentions no names other than that of Captain Christmas: "A Danish Ship, the Princess Maria, Capt. Christmas, arrived in the River on Monday; she left the Channel the middle of June."⁶ The cargo was listed as 'Sundries.' Following the growth of a more active press in the 1820's more attention, favourable and otherwise, was given to Serampore's activities. John Mack, who began in December 1823 to conduct chemistry classes both in Serampore and Calcutta, won some comment from a short-lived periodical called

The Trifler. On one occasion Mack tried to freeze water and to produce light. Though failing in both experiments, "Among the several performances of the evening the produce of steam by sulphuric acid and that of brilliant and change of other colours, were attended with success."⁷ Early the following year the *Quarterly Oriental Magazine* pronounced the missionaries at Serampore 'foremost' in efforts to educate the youth of India. With Serampore College, "they . . . boast of an institution dedicated to this purpose, which in extent and splendour of building, almost bids fair to vie with the famed academic bowers of Oxford and Cambridge." After describing, in equally extravagant terms, the donations they had received from India and England the magazine continued: "the confidence placed in their zeal, their industry, and their integrity, is perhaps without a parallel, in the history of charitable institutions."⁸

Though generally supporting the educational and benevolent activities of missionaries, the periodicals reflect to some extent the opinion towards their more direct evangelical operations of other Europeans among whom the Baptists worked. The *Bengal Hurkaru* in 1833 editorially reviewed the 16th Report of the Calcutta Benevolent Institution (founded by the Serampore Mission); praising the Institution's achievements for the past quarter of a century and urging its readers to give their support.⁹ Less than two weeks later the *Samachar Darpan* (the first Bengali-language newspaper—begun at Serampore in 1818) was credited by the *Hurkaru* with stimulating Indian use of the press and thereby "rendering incalculable service in accelerating the moral and intellectual elevation of the people . . ."¹⁰ In speaking of missionary evangelism, however, the same paper adopted a different tone:

"A Missionary Preacher would soon call in the strong arm of the Police to his assistance if his own religious exercises were interrupted by an attempt, however conscientious, on the part of a Hindoo to convince him that he was a fool and an Idolator, and that he and his ancestors were condemned to eternal perdition for their belief in a false creed."¹¹

Criticism of Hinduism by the missionaries sometimes drew response similar to the following which, signed by 'A Native of Calcutta,' appeared in 1826: "It's [the Serampore Mission's *Friend of India*] friendship has been manifested in anything but the qualities which dictate 'good will and charity to mankind'.¹² A reviewer of *Memoirs of John Chamberlain* (missionary from 1803 until his death in 1821) by William Yates charged that "one would sometimes think, from Mr. Chamberlain's own journal and letters, that he was rather sent to his countrymen in India, to make them Baptists, than to the heathen to make them Christians,"¹³ in resentment of the emphasis Chamberlain had placed on missionary work among European soldiers in India.

Editors rushed to give advice to the missionaries. This advice is sometimes of interest in that, once again, it reveals general European

views regarding missionary technique and strategy. In 1824 the *Bengal Hurkaru* dismissed brusquely discussion on the extent to which the missionary should attempt to mould his customs, manners, clothing, etc. on those of the people whom he served. It was felt that "the natives rather despise than admire the European, who for their customs lays aside his own" and "that whatever the Missionaries may think of personal humility, and the equalization of themselves with the natives, the latter have much too high an idea of worldly riches, and rank, and power, to give a preference to the doctrine which would persuade them to despise them all."¹⁴ The next month the same newspaper declared the "means of conversion" employed by the missionaries "unsound almost *in toto*; from the preachings in the streets to the translations in the closet, and the best proof of this is to be found in the results which they have produced."¹⁵ Despite convincing denials from the missionaries themselves (which I discuss at length in my book), the *Hurkaru* doubted that Serampore had in the two and a half decades of its activities made twenty "converts from principle . . . who are stedfast [*sic*] in the christian faith," and its editors declared they would rather hire for any service "the man who burned his Mother from the honest conviction that he was acting rightly, to almost any convert on the Serampore list; and we are very certain that nine-tenths of our readers will agree."¹⁶ Though demonstrably false, these views were often repeated in the Calcutta press of the day. In 1827 the *Hurkaru* returned to the theme of berating Christian converts. With delight it quoted an extract from the orthodox Hindu newspaper, the *Samachar Chandrika*, which had observed that the "intelligent and respectable natives" would never embrace Christianity; only "the scum of society . . . from the lowest and most ignorant classes of the people who might be prevailed upon to do anything as a blind man may be dragged any way the leader pleases"¹⁷ would be open to conversion.

These views did not lessen the standing of the men of Serampore. Joshua Marshman (1768-1837) was to the *Bengal Hurkaru* (23 October 1823) one "whose attention, kindness, and philanthropy to all who may need his care, are too well known to need any comment." The death earlier the same year of William Ward (1769-1823) was considered by the *India Gazette* to be "an event which will be heard of with regret by every one to whom eminent learning and piety are dear and is, we fear, an almost irreparable loss to the cause which he served so zealously and ably."¹⁸

The social reform activities of the Serampore Mission and its publications on such practices as *sati* (or *suttee*—the burning alive of a Hindu widow with the body of her husband) obviously reached a wide audience, as they were often reprinted in their entirety in the *Hurkaru* and other Indian newspapers, as well as in periodicals dealing with Indian matters published in England.¹⁹ In an obituary on Carey *The Englishman* of Calcutta stated categorically that his "exertions

first led to the prevention of infanticide at Gunga Saugor" (1802) and that he "was among the first who engaged in seeking the abolition of Suttees, for it was through his exertions that the Marquis of Wellesley left a minute, on his retirement from the Government of India [1805], declaring his conviction that Suttees might and ought to be abolished."²⁰

Other sources not generally used by Carey's biographers and by mission historians, and yet very necessary to gain historical perspective, include the mass of official documents available in the India Office Library of the East India Company's government of India. The series entitled Bengal Letters Received, Home Miscellaneous, Bengal Public Consultations, and Bengal Despatches are among those which, with patient plodding, yield much valuable information. Also of use are the private papers of various of the Governors-General. Two collections especially useful to anyone interested in Carey or the history of the Serampore Mission are those of Lord Minto (Governor-General, 1807-1813) in the National Library of Scotland, and of Lord William Bentinck (Governor-General, 1828-1835) in the Duke of Portland Collection in the Library of the University of Nottingham. Of course the main sources of mission history have been and will remain the extensive collections of letters and diaries in mission society archives and especially, in this case, the archives of the Baptist Missionary Society in London. Even these materials, however, have been inadequately studied by missionary historians, not to speak of general historians.

NOTES

¹ "Carey and His Biographers: A Postscript," *Baptist Quarterly* (July 1966), xxi, 328-31.

² Brief extracts from it are used in my *British Baptist Missionaries in India, 1793-1837: The History of Serampore and its Missions*, Cambridge University Press.

³ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 12 June 1834.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 14 August 1834.

⁵ A partial list of early 19th century Indian periodicals which were consulted by the present author include *Asiatick Researches*, *Bengal Hurkaru*, *Calcutta Christian Observer*, *Calcutta Courier*, *Calcutta Gazette*, *Calcutta Morning Post*, *Delhi Gazette*, *The Englishman* (Calcutta), the *Friend of India* (quarterly, monthly, and weekly series), *India Gazette*, *The Trifler*, and the *Unitarian Repository and Christian Miscellany*.

⁶ *Calcutta Gazette*, 14 November 1793.

⁷ *The Trifler* (Calcutta), 14 December 1823.

⁸ "Education in India," *Quarterly Oriental Magazine* (March 1824), i, 79-80.

⁹ *Bengal Hurkaru*, 3 May 1833.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 14 May 1833.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7 December 1832.

¹² *The Indian Gazette*, 23 March 1826.