

Origin and Growth of Christian Missions in Theni Block a Historical Study

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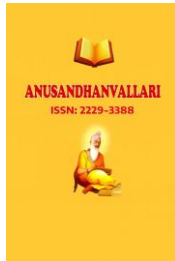
Abstract

In this article we deal with a brief history of the spread of Christianity in Tamil Nadu with particular reference to the diocese of Madurai. The impact of St. Thomas on Christians was very rare in Madurai during the 16th century A.D. The Portuguese made Tuticorin their mission center. Later, in the 17th century, they began to spread their religion within Tamil Nadu. The first Catholic mission in southern India was led by St. Francis Xavier, who arrived from Portugal in 1542. This article explains the important role of Christian missionaries in India, especially in Theni, India, Tamil Nadu.

Keyword: Spread of Christianity, impact on religion and culture

Introduction

The spread of Christianity in India, Christianity spread in three waves. First through the Eastern Orthodox churches in the early centuries with merchants from Syria and Persia reaching the Malabar coast, secondly through Catholic evangelization along with the Portuguese invasion, and thirdly through British colonialism through missionaries Protestants supported by Western Christian missionary commissions. While Protestantism took shape in the 16th century in Europe and England, Roman Catholicism was already engaged in missionary work in India. Perhaps, due to their early arrival and intense missionary work, Catholics make up the largest group in India; nearly half of the total Christian population. Protestants make up 40%, 7% come from Orthodox churches and 6% belong to other sects. The first organized Protestant mission in the south was launched in 1706 by the Lutherans under the patronage of the King of Denmark in Tranquebar (now Tanjore district in Tamil Nadu). The German Lutheran pastors, Ziegenbalg and Pluetschau participated in this mission. It was not until the end of the 18th century, during the period of expansion and consolidation of British rule, that the north of the country saw a significant growth of Christian missionary activity. In the northeastern region, where Protestantism dominates, Christianity is largely the product of conversions in the 19th and 20th centuries. Protestant churches have an immeasurable debt to evangelical revivals in the broad sense of the term. The Second Evangelical Awakening crossed the Atlantic from America to Great Britain in 1858. This produced the new phenomenon of the 19th century, the interfaith or nondenominational missionary society. By the turn of the century, all so-called Christian countries and nearly all denominations had begun to participate in supporting the missionary cause. While missionaries from England could work the East India Company, the 1833 charter opened India to the missionary activity of other nations. In 1852, the American Methodist Church felt the need to send missionaries to other countries and formed the Methodist Missionary Society. His mission in India began in 1856.



Origin and growth of Christian missions in southern India

The universal character of Christian churches and Christian missions has undergone a uniform metamorphosis according to southern social and cultural standards. The missions of the Catholics are the Syro-Malabar Catholics, the Latin Catholics, the Syro-Malankara Catholics and the Jesuit mission of Madura. As the number of churches and the Christian population increased, the Christians of the respective denomination organized themselves under their respective missions. Despite the presence of egalitarian ideas of universal brotherhood, the division of the first(2) missionary residence in Goa in 1548.²⁰ The Dominicans preached the Christian faith in parts of the islands of Goa, in Mahim and Tarapur.²¹ The Augustinians arrived in India in 1572. Soon they built churches in Goa, Cochin, Bassein, Salsette, Doman and Diu. But his main mission field was orders such as the Carmelites, Capuchins and Theatines arrived in India during the 17th century. The Bengal. In the years 1572 and 1626, some 138 Augustinians left Lisbon for Goa.²² Other religious Carmelites were in charge of the Vicariates of Malabar. The Capuchins worked in Surat, Madras and Pondicherry. The Theatines were entrusted with missions at Golconda.²³ The contribution of these groups to the Christianization of India had an impact on religion and culture.

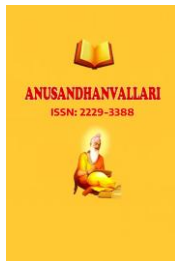
Francisco Javier, the first Jesuit missionary

Saint Francis Xavier, 'the second apostle of India' arrived in Govaon on May 6, 1542. It marked the beginning of the active missionary service in India in general and in southern India in particular. With his little bell he called the people of the street. From Gova, Francesco Saverio left extreme south of the Indian peninsula.²⁹ Since its cradle, the Society of Jesus, in the person of San with three indigenous Christians to start working in pearl fishing off the Comoros coast; in the Santo Domingo and San Francisco de Assisi, and began his missionary work in Goa and along both Francisco Javier and his brothers, has followed in the footsteps of its elders, the sons of San Agustin, coasts of southern India in 1542. There were five missions extending from Cape Comorin to Tibet,

namely,

1. The Goa mission,
2. Malabar's mission,
3. The Madura Mission,
4. The Mysore Mission,
- and 5. The Carnatic mission.

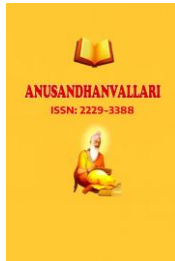
Later they were grouped into the "provinces" of Goa and Cochin. What is now the Diocese of Tiruchirappalli was then the Costa Pesquera Mission, the southern half of the Madura Mission, and a common "sphere of influence" between the two, the so-called Marava region, east of Madura. Christianity has found virgin ground here. The Christians who claimed St. Thomas as their apostle lived in Travancore, but were unknown in southeastern India. We always have this territory, the Madura Mission, in sight. Those French Jesuits worked and died inside it, but above all Portuguese and Italians, whose exploits remain the wonder of their successors. When Francis Xavier arrived in India on May 6, 1542, with a letter from the Pope appointing him Apostolic Nuncio (messenger special or ambassador of the Pope), 32 Pedro Gonsalves, vicar of Cochin, personally handed over the mission. Thus, Francisco Javier began the first Jesuit mission in India, on the fishing coast of southern India. It was developed by the Fathers De Nobili, Giovanni De Britto, Beschi and others. Francis Xavier "stands out above all from those who followed him for his sympathy for the poor and humble, for his energy of spirit,



for his absolute fearlessness in the face of danger and his supreme faith in his mission. His apostolic zeal led him to endure all the difficulties and barriers to defend the Kingdom of God and consequently the number of Christians increased and many dioceses settled in places such as Cochin, Mylapore and Cranganore. Francisco Javier devoted a large part of his life to missions in Asia. In 1542 he set out for his first missionary activity among the Paravar, Katesarkadaiyarpattamkattiyars (chief of the fishing coast) and Mukkuvar, fishing fishermen along the eastern coast of southern India, north of Cape Comorin. The Parava of this region lived as fishermen. and pearl seekers. Francisco Javier discovered that there was no organized Christian community on the coast. During his four years in India he laid the solid foundations of the Church. He went to the fishermen's coast to take care of the Paravas who lived in villages of Cape Comorin and Tuticorin. When he went to Travancore, in November and December 1544 he baptized a large number of fishermen called Mukkuvars. At the end of the 16th century, the Jesuits managed (3) to gather Christians in sixteen large villages. All the Parava casts became Christian.40 Later, a large number of Parava emigrated to Madurai. The Portuguese Jesuit priest Fr. Goncalo Fernandez SJ was charged with providing for his spiritual needs. Francis Xavier founded the Cape Comorin Mission as he found the Travancore region more receptive to his teachings and later made Kottar his place of residence. He baptized about 20,000 parava and founded the "Fishermen's Mission". He then went to Japan and returned to Goa in 1552, finally dying on December 3, 1552, on the island of Sanchen, near Canton, when he founded the Chinese Mission. The conversion of the Parava family had its impact on the suburbs of Tirunelveli and within Madurai, home to Brahmin culture and culture. The Catholic Mission of Tanjore showed greater interest after Francis Xavier.44 At the end of the sixteenth century the Jesuits began their missionary activity in Mylapore in 1595, in Nagapattinam in 1597, in Ginigi in 1598 and in Tanjore in 1598. Protestantism and the situation of the Catholics became somewhat difficult to serve in some parts of India.

History of the diocese of Madurai

In 1776, the Holy Father handed over the Madurai Missions and the Malabar Missions to the care of the MEP Fathers. In 1785, Bishop Chapenois, deputy. Rome entrusted the Superior of the Malabar Mission with the responsibility of taking care of the entire Mysore Mission, of which the former Diocese of Salem was a part. In 1794 he was the first bishop to visit the diocese of Salem, leaving Abbot Dubois, MEP, who tried to bring out the work of the Church. This region continued to depend on the Coramandal Missions and, later, on the Apostolic Vicariate of Pondicherry, which became an Archdiocese in 1886. This institution continued until 1930, with the exception of Hosur Taluk, who had been entrusted since 1861 to the care of the Mysore Missions. ... On August 3, 1930, the diocese of Salem was erected. Due to the vastness of the diocese of Salem, the district of Thheni was separated and declared a diocese by the Holy Father John Paul II on 24 January 1997. The Most Reverend Joseph Antony Irudayaraj, SDB, Salesian was appointed First Bishop. After serving 15 years of his ministry, because of advanced age, he retired 13 January 2012. Dr. Bishop Lawrence Pius is the second bishop. And he was installed at the See of Thhenion on February 20, 2012. Under his leadership, following the motto "Announce the good news to the poor", the diocese has seen continuous development work in many fields. This diocese is the fifteenth diocese in the Tamil Nadu region. The history of the diocese of Salem is closely linked to that of Salem, from which the diocese forks in 1997. In the year 1623, Christianity was born in the diocese of Salem through the famous Jesuit father Robert De Nobili, his successors and later through the Portuguese Jesuits of the Madurai missions. In 1654 the Italian Jesuits of Mysore had their residence in Tenia and began preaching the gospel in the region up to Tirupattur in the North Arcot district. In 1674, San Giovanni De Britto visited Thénion on his way to Kolei. He remained in Thheni with his brothers, accompanied by Fr. Antonio Ribero. In 1687, the work of the Church of Mysore began spreading and preaching the gospel in



the present districts of Salem and Dharmapuri. Despite the Pombal decree, which repressed the Jesuits, they continued to work under the jurisdiction of Cranganore. In 1711, Father De Cunha, a father, was killed by the locals as he was riding his horse back to the Church's workplace near Hosur.

District location of Theni

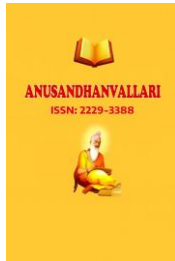
The Theni District is one of 38 districts in the state of Tamil Nadu in India. The Theni district is located near the Madurai district. The city of Theni is the seat of the district. The district is divided into two natural divisions: the mountainous areas consist of parts of the five taluk Theni, Bodinayakanur, Periyakulam, Uthamapalayam and Andipatti with dense vegetation and perennial streams from the hills on the western side and the flowing Cumbum valley found(4) in Uthamapalayam taluk. In 2011, the Theni district had a population of 1,245,899 with a gender ratio of 980 women to 1,000 men.

People

An official detail of the 2011 census of Theni district of Tamil Nadu, was released by the Directorate of Census Operations in Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu District Census officials also listed with a gender ratio of 991 women to 1,000 men, well above the national average of 929. The district has a total majority of Tamil. [12] A total of 119,661 were under the age of six that is, 61,873 men and 57,788 women. The caste recorded and tribes recorded representing respectively 20.72% and 0.15% of 72.99%. The district had a total of 338,112 families. There were a total of 591,642 workers, of the population. The district's average literacy rate was 69.84%, compared to the national average other workers, 61,051 marginal workers, 1,996 marginal farmers, 39,576 marginal agricultural workers, 2,225 marginal workers in domestic industries and 17,254 others. marginal including 36,371 farmers, 275,585 main agricultural workers, 12,714 in domestic industries, 205.92 workers. workers. At the time of the 2011 census, 79.03% of the district's population spoke Tamil, 12.75% Telugu and 7.86% Kannada as their mother tongue.

These people do not have the basic necessities of life. The poor are politically powerless, globalization has aggravated the situation. Over the past decade, the Indian economy has made socially discriminated against and culturally deprived. The process of economic liberalization a unequal distribution of wealth. Poverty is not caused by the wickedness of some rich, but by the significant progress, but this has not led to any reduction in poverty. This clearly indicates a functioning of a socio-economic and political system, which allows the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, while condemning others to a life of poverty and misery.. The Hind social organization is made up of various castes. Each caste is made up of several sub-castes. The sub-cast itself is divided into several smaller exogamous groups. Some important castes to which the people of the Theni district belong are the Brahmins: the Brahmins of the Theni district are heterogeneous in character. Sarma (2023)

There are many sects and subsets among them, such as the Telugu Brahmins, the Kannada Brahmins and the Tulu Brahmins. Non Brahmins: The main communities of Salem are non Brahmins. The Velar, Vanniyar, Agamudayar, Udaiyars, Reddiars, Kammalar, Komatiars, Janappars, Kavarais, Chettiars, Devangar, Sourashtra, Idaiyars, Kurumbar, Nadar, Sembadavar, Vettuvur, Kusavar, Pallars, Pariyarsd communities are important. With the spread of literacy and social awakening among the masses, the rigidity of caste barriers is gradually disappearing. Caste marriages are also common. Tamil is the main language they speak. The other languages spoken this region are Telugu, Kannada, Urdu, Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Sourashtra, Gujarati, English and



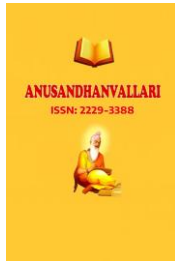
Sindhi. It is a polyglot neighborhood. The influence of other languages can be traced back to the Tamil spoken in this district.

Christians and castes

the caste founded on the principle of inequality was carried on precept, Christianity is an egalitarian religion. It proclaims the equality of all people in the sight. Aside from language, the dividing factor of local origin in the Indian church is caste. God expects its adherents to practice and promote equality, brotherhood and social justice. In church. From the beginning, Indian Christians had faced the problem of caste. Western missionaries by converts to the caste question. Some of them vehemently opposed the tolerance of caste practices within the church who converted the locals to Christianity also had ambiguous attitudes and approaches to the caste. Others distinguished caste as a cultural practice that is better ignored than condemned. Some others(5) adopted caste divisions with the aim of winning higher caste people into the fold of the Church. In general, Dalits and tribes have responded more positively to missionary work and joined the Christian church to a large extent. The reality of castes within the Christian community today is a stark reality, although most Christians do not want to admit the same. More than half of the total Christian population in India and Karnataka today are Dalits, but they prefer to hide their lower caste origin. Others considered superior to the Dalits in caste rank flaunt their caste labels, even more so if they belong to the higher caste background. However, there is no caste enumeration in the church membership records. The only indication of the caste antecedents of Christians is found in historical accounts of conversions to Christianity during the missionary period. It is also possible to link one's caste identity to one's denomination, as there was a tacit agreement and agreement among the denominational mission councils for each to limit their missionary work to particular geographic areas and between particular caste groups.

New Mission Madurai

It has never been made clear to what circumstances the Christians of Madura, Marava and the Costa Pesquera owed their restoration to the Jesuits. Launay, M. refers to many letters from Bishop Herbert to the Congregation of Propaganda Fide, asking for the help of the missionaries to come to the aid of the Madura Mission; but no one mentioned the Jesuits by name. However, there is no doubt that these repeated requests prompted Rome to seek a religious Order to assist the Mission. The idea of the election of the Jesuits had to come from other sectors. One conjecture is that Abbot Dubois, the director of the missionary seminary in Paris, suggested and approved the choice. It is not surprising that this is the case, given the cordial relations that the veteran missionary had with the first Missionaries of Madura. But whatever secondary form the idea may have emanated, it was ultimately the Supreme Pontiff who approved it and passed it on to the Rev. P. Roothan, the first Superior General of the restored Society of Jesus, who made it available to the Jesuits. At the request of Pope Gregory XVI, J. Roothann, Superior General of the Society of Jesus, entrusted the Madura Mission to the provincial of Lyon in France, Francis Renualt SJ, who immediately sent four French Jesuits in 1837. Joseph Bertrand (1801-1884), Louis Gamier (1805-1843), Louis du Ranquet (1806-1843) and Alexander Martin (1749-1840). These pioneer Jesuits arrived in Pondicherry on October 24, 1837. The New Madurai Mission was cared for by the Lyons provincial for only fifteen years (1837-1852). When the province of Toulouse in southern France was created in 1852, the Madura Mission was placed in the care of Toulouse.



Spread of Christianity

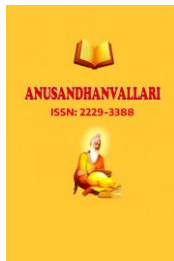
Jesus Christ is the hinge on which the doors of history open. Centuries are measured from birth. He faced a humble birth and a bloody death to bring salvation to humanity. The public life of Jesus lasted only three years, from 30 to 33 AD and concentrated on the land of Palestine of which Jerusalem was the most important city. He brought the message of salvation to God's chosen people, that is, the Jews. He had come as the savior of all humanity. It was with his suffering and death that he would grant grace for the salvation of souls. Since he could not be physically present in the world until the end of time to give grace, the most important thing on his mind during these 3 years of public life was to establish some sort of company to continue his work in the world until his second .next. It was this idea that enabled him to found a church⁸. The institution of the sacraments, a necessary means of receiving grace, required someone to administer them to those who sought them. He provided for this in the establishment of the church. The first thing Jesus did was choose 12 men from among his disciples whom he called "Apostles". After his resurrection, his apostles collected all the doctrines of Jesus Christ called the holy gospel and spread them to different parts of the world. There were 12 apostles of Jesus, they were 1. Simon Peter, 2. Andrew, brother of Peter, 3.

(6)

James, son of Zebedee, 4. John, brother of James, 5. Philip, 6. Bartholomew, 7. Matthew, 8 Thomas, walked in different directions administering the sacraments for the cause of Christianity. Of these 12 9. James son of Alphaeus, 10. Thaddeus, 11. Simon, the Zealot and, 12. Judas Iscariot These apostles disciples, Jesus chose Simon, whom he rebaptized. Peter or the Rock, as the head reads in the Gospel of St. Matthew thus: "I for my part declare to you; you are the Rock, and on this rock I will build church and the jaws of death will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys to the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you declare loose on earth will be dissolved in heaven. "1 Before his ascension into heaven, Jesus said to Peter on the shore of the Sea of Galilee in the presence of six apostles:" Feed my lambs, feed my sheep. "Here" the lambs represent the faithful and the sheep for the bishop. "Thus, Peter became the God-designated head of the church. St. Peter spread Christianity in Rome, where he also founded a church and became the first inspector. 11 He lived to see the religion of Jesus spread to all known countries at that time. . he saw the church prosper in Rome. There he established the center of the church. After the death of Peter in 67 AD, all those who followed him as bishops of Rome were like him the leaders of that Papal church. the credit for popularizing Christianity in Syria, Jerusalem, Palestine and Greece belongs to St. Paul. With the death of the last apostle, John in the year 100 AD and 3rd Suc. Because of Peter, Clement I in 101 AD, Christianity had spread from Palestine to Syria, in Asia Minor. Saint Francis Xavier, a pioneer of missionary efforts in Asia in the 16th century, travels tirelessly to distant countries such as India, Srilanka, Malasiya, China and Japan. It has many epithets related to its name. He is known as the "Defender of the East" "Protector of Goa" and also "The Apostle of the Indies" (the Indies are the countries extending east from the Cape of Good Hope in Africa, including India, Srilanka, China, Japan and Indonesia). Also on December 14, 1927, Pope Pius XI declared him protector of the mission and missionaries throughout the world.

Saint Francis Xavier in a Short Period of Ten Years

St. Francis Xavier in a short span of ten years (December 1552) traveled many thousands of miles. He had visited many countries, preached the gospel to countless people from so many nations, and had managed to baptize them. God had worked miracles through him, and his incomparable apostolic zeal made him the greatest Christian missionary since the time of the apostle Paul. Some historical forces abruptly stopped the work of the



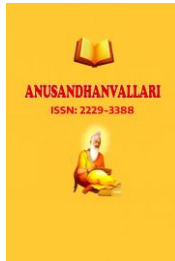
first Mission. A period of disorder followed in which the ancient Christian communities were left alone without any pastoral care. It is therefore no wonder that some of Tiruchirappalli's grieving Christians sought refuge among Protestants. The advent of the various Protestant groups in the early 19th century that entered South India was a factor to consider. With vast resources at their disposal, they built churches, schools, hospitals and orphanages. Thus the first formidable task of the New Jesuits was to revive and continue the unfinished work of the Mission. Upon their return to the Mission in 1838, the Jesuit pioneers could still find some Christian communities clinging to the faith that the fathers of the first Mission had planted in the ground. The first propaganda project, announced in the letter from the Cardinal Prefect to Monsignor Herbert, was intended to constitute the New Mission as an Apostolic Vicariate. The Congregation of Propaganda had already conferred on the Superior of the New Mission, Fr. Joseph Bertrand, the dignity of Apostolic Vicar. But Fr. Bertrand hastened to decline the post and asked the Sacred Congregation to allow him to continue that work with a simple title of Superior of the Madura Mission, keeping its constitution and separate limits, was entrusted to the Society of Jesus, Mission under the jurisdiction of Bishop Herbert. Everything was resolved accordingly; and the inspiring growth and expansion. The Christian population of approximately 98,000 in the Mission but under the dependence of the Vicariate of Pondicherry. The story of the new mission is an epic of area in 1838 saw a phenomenal increase to a record high of 285,000 in a century. The boundaries of the Mission together with the population were subject to delimitation every time new dioceses were(7) created. Raising an Indian clergy and gradually handing over the Church to them was the ultimate goal of the Jesuit Mission.

Conclusion

This goal has been achieved progressively. The new missionaries went on missions to three main districts, the north, the center, and the south. Trichinopoly Madurai, Salem and Palamcottah were the respective capitals of these three districts. Madura's new missionaries have faced constant opposition from Goa's sponsored priests. Although the Jesuits returned to the Madura mission with the appropriate Holy See credentials, the Goa priests refused to accept them. The second opposition to the Jesuits came from the various Protestant sects who were actively involved in missionary work in the same region. Even some Hindu groups such as Arya Samaj and the Theosophists were suspicious of Jesuit missionary activities. Above all, the region's color poverty, economic backwardness, ignorance, superstition and the dominance of the caste system were the other enemies against which the Jesuits had to fight. In the words of one of the Jesuit pioneers, "the Missionaries, who had sown with tears, had begun to reap with joy.

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