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CATHOLIC CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

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Abstract

The Catholic Church in India has a long history, beginning with the Apostle St Thomas. It is made up of three major Rites: the Syro Malabar, Syro Malankara and Latin. In the following pages, we shall survey briefly the rise of these three Rites in India, discuss the relation between them, and finally look at the overall picture of Catholic Christianity in India. The presence of the Church is not uniform in the whole country; the South has greater number of Catholics compared to other parts of India. In this paper I attempt to give a brief history of the growth of the Church in India, beginning with the St Thomas Christians of Kerala. After a brief history I attempt to show the contribution of Catholics to the country and the challenges faced by this community today. It is regrettable that the Dalits who had come over to the Christian community in order to free themselves from the caste oppression still continue to face discrimination in the Church, especially in the Southern regions. It is a challenging task for the Christians to become a true Church in India where people of various castes and other groups would feel welcome, respected and treated as equals.

Keywords: Asian Christianity, Indian Church, Latin Rite, Syro Malabar Rite, Syro Malankara Rite

Introduction

Though many people in India believe that Christianity came to India in the 16th century with the Portuguese and later the British, the

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fact is that Christianity in India has a long history, spanning from the first century (AD) to the present. Catholics are found in all states in India and belong to all sociological groups, but their presence and history are not uniform in every part of the country. Each area has its own history of the beginning and development of Christianity. Some like the South has a longer history than the rest of the country. Till about the 12th century there was only one Christian community: the St Thomas Christians, living primarily in the southern state of Kerala, hardly affected by Western Christianity. Some areas like Mumbai have very westernized Catholics; there are the Tribals, Dalits and other indigenous groups which are not much affected by the western ways.

The Catholic Church in India consists of three distinct Individual Churches (Rites¹): Syro-Malabar, Latin and Syro-Malankara. In the following pages, we shall survey briefly the rise of these three Rites in India, discuss the relation between them, and finally look at the overall picture of Catholic Christianity in India.

The Catholic population of India according to the *Catholic Directory of India 2013* is 17535429. A unique feature of the Catholic population is its uneven distribution. About 63 % of Catholics live in the southern states of Kerala, Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh. Kerala has about one third of the total Catholic population. The Northeast zone, with about 17% has the second largest concentration, followed by the Chottanagpur belt.² The Catholic Church has 30 ecclesiastical provinces with 166 dioceses, 10715 parishes, 22451 priests, 94025 women Religious and 2592 Religious Brothers. It runs two universities and over 360 university colleges, 1782 Higher Secondary schools, 3578 High Schools, 4079 Primary schools, 4498 Nursing colleges, 678 Training colleges, 449 professional colleges and 681 Vocational Training Centres. It has 1012 orphanages, 2871 Hostels, 637 Hospitals, 1002 Dispensaries and 380 publications.

The basic structure of the Catholic Church in India is the following: There are four distinct Bishops' Conferences. The main one is the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) for all the Rites, the Conference of Catholic Bishops in India (CCBI) for the Latin Rite, the Syro-Malabar Bishops' Synod (SMBS), and the Syro-Malankara Bishops' Conference (SMBC). The CBCI and the other Conferences

¹"A Rite is a heritage made of liturgy, theology, spirituality and discipline in a heritage that is differentiated by the culture and the circumstances of the history of the peoples and is expressed by each church *sui juris* (autonomous) in its own manner of living the faith" (*The Code of Canons for the Oriental Churches* CCEO, Canon 28/1).

²CBCI, *The Catholic Directory of India 2013*, Bangalore: Claretian Publications.

function through various commissions. There is also The Catholic Council of India, which is the “Church in Council where all sections of the people of God gather as a family to live, pray and work together to evaluate and plan the life and work of the Church.” The CRI (Conference of Religious India) is an association of women and men religious, having national and regional centres. The CPCI (Catholic Priests’ Conference of India) is the association of diocesan priests. The Catholic Church has over 150 minor seminaries for the early training of candidates for the priesthood, (without counting the formation houses of men’s congregations which are more than the diocesan seminaries) and about 60 major seminaries for philosophy and/or theology. There are also seven Ecclesiastical Faculties of theology, which confer doctorates in theology, Missiology, Canon Law, Biblical studies and Philosophy. There are also many Institutes of Spirituality for spiritual formation.

The Catholic Church in India is very vibrant. Though conversions are not as numerous as in the past, they are not completely absent in spite of the anti-conversion laws in a number of States. This is also evident from the fact that India has already six saints: Gonsalo Garcia, Alphonsa, Kuriakose Elias Chavara, Euphrasia, Joseph Vaz and Mother Teresa and a few in the process of being declared a Blessed or a Saint. It sends out many missionaries (nuns, brothers and priests) to all parts of the world; a good number of international religious congregations (of women) have Indians as their Superior General.

1. The Syro-Malabar Church

The three Rites I mentioned above are found primarily in Kerala: the Syro-Malabar, the Syro-Malankara and Latin. The Syrian Christians claim St Thomas as the founder of their Christianity. They preserve a strong tradition that St Thomas the Apostle landed on the Malabar Coast near the ancient port of Muziris (Cranganore) in AD 52. He converted several families to Christ and founded seven Christian communities (churches) in Kerala. He died a martyr at Mylapore, in the present Tamilnadu.³

Authors claim that the St Thomas Christians lived in the cultural, socio political context of Kerala, but in the ecclesiastical world of the East Syrian Church of Persia. From the 3rd or 4th century the Indian

³Bishop Gregory Karotemprel, *The Syro-Malabar Church Today*, Rajkot: Deepti Publications, 2008, 24.

Church became very dependent on the East Syrian Church for its liturgical life. The East Syrian Bishops ruled over the Indian Church for about eleven centuries.⁴ The Indian Church did not become a branch of the East Syrian Church, but preserved its own distinct identity. The Indian Christians developed what is known as the “Law of Thomas” distinct from the “Law of Peter.” The Indian Church developed its own quasi-synodal system called *Palliyogam* or Church Assembly, which enjoyed the powers of the ancient provincial synods. The Archdeacon together with the *yogam* formed a kind of “Christian republic.”⁵

The St Thomas Christians always remained in full communion with the Pope, though often without much communications owing to political, geographical and ecclesiastical circumstances. Towards the beginning of the 16th century the Portuguese took notice of the St Thomas Christians in Kerala. They found many things in the liturgy and governing system of the Syrians different from theirs; hence there were serious misunderstandings about their orthodoxy; many considered them as belonging to some heretical sects. As the Portuguese saw their version of Christianity as the only true form, they considered the Indian Christians as imperfect and they “had to conform to the Portuguese in everything.”⁶ The Portuguese did everything possible to bring the St Thomas Christians completely under their (Latin) rule. A period of massive latinization followed. Latin Bishops were appointed over the Syrians. The forced latinization by the Latin bishops and the delimiting of the boundaries of the Angamaly diocese led to an open revolt by the Syrian Christians, which culminated in what is known as the *Coonan (Bent) Cross Oath* of 1653.

The rejection of the Latin rule by the St Thomas Christians brought many divisions in the Syrian Church. The Jacobites, Syrian Orthodox Church of India, the Marthomites, the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church of India and the *Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church* and Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church of India are some of the Churches that came to existence due to these divisions.

Pope Leo XIII separated St Thomas Christians from the Latin rule in 1896 and created three vicariates of Changanacherry, Ernakulam and Trichur with Syrian Vicars Apostolic. In 1911 the Vicariate of

⁴A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India, Vol 1: From the Beginning up to the Middle of the Sixteenth Century*, Bangalore: TPI, 1984, 78, 115.

⁵Karotemprel, *The Syro-Malabar Church Today*, 33.

⁶Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India, Vol 1*, 287.

Kottayam was erected for the Suddists of the Syro-Malabar rite, descendents of the colony of emigrants from Syria around A.D. 325 under Thomas of Cana. After 230 years of Latin rule, in 1921 Pope Pius XI established the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy in India with Ernakulam as the Metropolitan See. The Syro-Malabar church came under the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches, which Pope Benedict XV had erected in 1917. From 1950 onwards many more dioceses were erected in Kerala. For those Syrian Christians living outside Kerala eparchies were created. Following this development Pope John Paul II promulgated the *Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches* in 1991. The Syro-Malabar church was constituted a Major Archiepiscopal Church in 1992, and more metropolitan provinces and dioceses were erected. The name *Syro-Malabar* came to be used to distinguish the St Thomas Christians who are in allegiance to Rome, as distinct from the Jacobites and other St Thomas Christians who are not in communion with Rome. Today the Syro-Malabar Church has a membership of about 4600000 in 31 dioceses and 1 exarchate.⁷

2. The Latin Rite Catholics in India

At present there are various opinions regarding the Kerala Latin Rite Catholics. "Perhaps the most aggressive..., is that the nucleus of those Christians was formed already in the first half of the 16th century itself by those St. Thomas Christians who adopted the Latin rite."⁸ The first instance of conversion of a Hindu occurred at Calicut in 1500.⁹ "... it may with good reason be affirmed that the Latin Rite Christians had their origin in the many conversions made by the Portuguese in the first half of the 16th century from various sections of the Muslim and Hindu population of Kerala."¹⁰ The first Latin Christian communities were formed around Quilon, Cochin, Calicut and Cranganore.

The *Pulayas* (a Dalit group) of Kerala, a forest tribe who had settled down in the plains, were oppressed and enslaved for centuries by the caste Hindus. They saw a change of religion as the only way out of their miserable oppressed condition.¹¹ The conversion of the *Pulayas*

⁷Karotemprel, *The Syro-Malabar Church Today*, 53.

⁸Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India, Vol 1*, 351.

⁹Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India, Vol 1*, 355.

¹⁰Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India, Vol 1*, 389.

¹¹J. Pallath, "From Oppression to Liberation: A Case Study of Pulaya Conversions," in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An*

took place in the Chirakkal region of Kerala since 1938; this provoked severe opposition from the Hindus and Muslims; but the converts withstood the opposition; they fought for their freedom to be human beings, and the number of Christians rose. "The history of their conversion to Christianity is a history of their fight for freedom and dignity."¹²

It is generally accepted that a small group of Syrian Christians established themselves in Mylapore at the very beginning of the Christian era. But it did not expand in anyway; finally the Padroado took up the Christian mission. Dr Mundadan claims that in 1536/37 there took place a great mass conversion of the fishermen of the Parava Coast east of Cape Comorin.¹³ The *Paravas* of Tamilnadu were an oppressed and exploited lot; many of them accepted the Christian faith. Though from 1535 people were baptized it was only after the arrival of Francis Xavier and the Jesuits that there were some 45000 fervent Catholics.¹⁴

In 1606 Roberto de Nobili attempted a bold venture of inculturating the Christian faith in what is known as "The Madurai Mission." Dressed as a sannyasin, with excellent knowledge of Tamil and Sanskrit, he worked among the so called high castes (Brahmins, Nayaks) and had some success. He allowed them to keep their own cultural customs; they remained as Hindus within the Christian society.¹⁵

After de Nobili, John Britto carried on the work; and after his martyrdom, Joseph Beschi, a Tamil scholar, took up the challenge. The Madurai Mission, which had grown steadily over the years during the times of de Nobili, Britto and Beschi, suffered a fatal blow with the suppression of the Jesuits in 1773. Then there were over 250000 Catholics in Tamilnadu. When the Society of Jesus was restored, the Madurai mission was entrusted to them and it had a phenomenal growth. By the time of the First World War, the Madurai

Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 33.

¹²Pallath, "From Oppression to Liberation: A Case Study of Pulaya Conversions," 37.

¹³Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol 1, 391.

¹⁴S.M. Michael, "Catholic Mission in the Region of Tamilnadu," in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 53f.

¹⁵S.M. Michael, "Catholic Mission in the Region of Tamilnadu," 63, 64; L. Fernando & G. Gispert-Sauch, *Christianity in India, Two Thousand Years of Faith*, New Delhi: Penguin Viking, 2004, 96f.

Mission had grown to be around 400000. In the 20th century there have been conversions also from other caste groups like the Nadars, who too were looking for the uplift offered by the Church. The Vellalas, a land owning caste, embraced Christianity in the 19th century.¹⁶

A great number of Dalits have been converted and the *Dalit Christian Liberation Movement* with its motto, "Tamil Church is Dalit Church; Dalit is dignified," keeps up the struggle for equal rights in the Church and often comes into conflict with the official Church authorities.

It is claimed that as early as 1400 AD there was a Catholic community at Anekal in Bangalore district. Franciscans and later Jesuits worked in the Mysore Mission and by 1686 there were some 30,000 Catholics there. Migration from Goa is also one of the sources of Christians in Karnataka. In 1674 Rome appointed Thomas de Castro the vicar apostolic of Kanara under the *Propaganda Fide*.

Between 1784 and 1799 the Christians of Karnataka suffered a severe persecution under Tipu Sultan; many were forcefully converted to Islam.¹⁷ Apart from Mangalore, Bangalore and to a certain extent Karwar the presence of Catholics is minimal in Karnataka. The conflict between the Kannada speaking and Tamil speaking Christians has been a great problem in the Catholic Church in Karnataka.¹⁸

"Jesuit missionaries from Pondicherry (1700-1773) were the first AP missionaries."¹⁹ Since 1800 the PIME has taken over most of the region. Even after 2 centuries of evangelization the Catholic Church in AP is less than 1.5%. About 80% of the Catholic population in AP is from the poorer sections of society. The caste and social barriers have thus obstructed the growth of Christianity in AP.²⁰ In the 1770s the efforts of the Jesuits of the Carnatic Mission had some success among the local high castes. The arrival of other mission societies like MSFS, PIME, MHM (1845) gave a great thrust to the work in Andhra. At the

¹⁶S.M. Michael, "Catholic Mission in the Region of Tamilnadu," 53, 58, 59, 61.

¹⁷J. Mattam, "Persecution of Christians in India: A Historical Survey," in J. Mattam & R. Gabriel, ed., *In the Shadow of the Cross*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2002, 13-44.

¹⁸A. D'Souza, "Catholic Church in Karnataka," in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 94.

¹⁹Bishop Johannes Gorantla, "Catholic Mission in the Region of Andhra Pradesh," in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 97.

²⁰Gorantla, "Catholic Mission in the Region of Andhra Pradesh," 102.

end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th there was a mass conversion movement.²¹

The Thane region close to Bombay was evangelized by the Dominican Jourdain de Severac. In 1329 he became the bishop of Quilon and this region came under his jurisdiction.²² In the 16th century after the Portuguese conquered a number of regions on the western coast, the Jesuits and Franciscans came to Vasai and Bombay. In 1665 the Islands of Bombay were formally ceded to England. In 1850 Bishop A. Hartmann brought in the Jesuits; they reached Bombay in 1853. The *Jesus and Mary Sisters* were called in for women's education.

In 1886 the Indian Hierarchy was established. By a concordat between the Holy See and Portugal, the Bombay Vicariate was made an archdiocese. The conflicts came to an end in 1928 when the archdiocese of Bombay came into existence, without Daman and Diu. Later on Bombay was divided into various other dioceses. The Catholic population of Bombay is primarily descendants of the early converts in Bombay, Goa and Mangalore; later on Dalits, Tamils, and people from the Syro-Malabar rite too have entered Bombay; now they have their own diocese at Kalyan, with about 100,000 Syro Malabar Catholics.²³

The history of the church in Goa is bound up with the arrival of the Jesuits in 1542; later came the Dominicans and other missionaries. A great number of Goans of all castes, from the highest to the lowest embraced Christianity. By 1662 Bardez, Tiswadi and Salsette were almost fully Christianized.

In 1557 Pope Paul IV raised Goa to a metropolitan archdiocese with Cochin and Malacca as suffragans. Goans were ordained as diocesan priests from 1558 onwards, but no religious order took any Goan in their order till 1675. From the 17th century onwards, Goan priests reached out to every corner of the world, working primarily in the Portuguese colonies. By 1759 the Portuguese expelled the Jesuits; in 1835 all the other religious orders were suppressed in

²¹P. Chinnappa, "Mission of the Church in Andhra Pradesh: Challenges and Opportunities," in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 114, 115.

²²J.V. Velinkar, "Catholic Mission in the Region of Bombay," in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 148.

²³Velinkar, "Catholic Mission in the Region of Bombay," 149-151.

Goa. The missionaries through paintings, art and architecture, writing grammars and dictionaries contributed to the enrichment of Goa.

In 1961 Goa was liberated from the Portuguese rule; it affected the church very much, as till then Christians had a lot of privileges in the country.²⁴ The Church had to respond to various challenges that arose with the independence of Goa.

Gujarat as a separate state came into existence only in 1960. Fr Echaniz, SJ holds that about the end of the twelfth century, Christianity was flourishing among the South Gujarat coast and had many churches.²⁵ The present day Catholic Church in Gujarat has a history of over a century. The first baptisms of Gujarati Vankars (a Dalit group of weavers) happened in Bombay in 1891, and the first Catholic community was born at Mogar, Anand in 1893. From 1894 German Jesuits, despite the opposition from the caste people, worked for the uplift of the Vankar community which was almost at the bottom of the caste structure, by starting schools for the Vankar children and through Credit Cooperative societies. The German Jesuits were interned during the First World War; by 1921 Spanish Jesuits took over; in 1933 the Ahmedabad Mission was separated from Bombay and the mission grew rapidly. In the 1960s work was started among the Tribals both of the north and the south.

Something similar to what was done earlier by de Nobili in the Madurai Mission was attempted in Gujarat. In the 1960s bishop Charles Gomes, SJ sent M. Garriz, SJ, a church historian, to evangelise the caste Hindus of Mehsana Dist. Following the ideas of Brahmabdhadhav Upadhyaya Garriz believed in keeping the people socially Hindus and on the faith level followers of Jesus. The followers of Jesus do not give up their socio-cultural patterns, but they have to promise not to discriminate anyone on the basis of Caste. There is no *dharmaparivarthan* (change of dharma, religion) but only a *panthswikar* (acceptance of a *panth* – way). He did not call them “Christians” as the term “*khristi*” (Christian) has a pejorative connotation in Gujarat, signifying a person from the

²⁴Cosme Jose Costa, “Catholic Mission in the Archdiocese of Goa and Daman,” in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 133-134.

²⁵I. Echaniz, “The Broach Mission,” *Navajuni*, 1, Ahmedabad, 1972, 20.

lower castes. Hence he called them “*Isupanthi*” followers of the “Jesus’ Way.”²⁶

The Saurashtra region was entrusted to the Carmelites (CMI) in the 1970s and eventually that region became the Rajkot diocese in 1977. Like other regions, Gujarat too, saw great changes in the post-Vatican era.²⁷ Now Gujarat has over 171000 Catholics.

Thanks to the religious tolerance of the Mughal emperor Akbar and the *Ibadat Khana* (the parlour of religious discussions) that he set up in his court at Lahore, three Jesuits went to his court in 1580. In 1594 Jerome Xavier, a nephew of Francis Xavier, and a few other Jesuits reached Lahore. By 1600, with the permission of Akbar churches were built in Lahore and Agra. The friendly and tolerant attitude of Akbar followed by his son Jahangir, was changed in the time of Shah Jahan. In 1650 he ordered the destruction of the churches and stopped the allowances to the priests. After the suppression of the Jesuits, Carmelite priests from Bombay and the Capuchins succeeded them in Agra.²⁸ By 1784 the prefecture apostolic of Tibet-Hindustan was handed over to the Capuchins. The slow growth of the Catholic Church in this area finally resulted in the creation of Delhi-Shimla archdiocese in 1937. Eventually three more dioceses were created in the North. Ethnically, the Catholics in this area belong to various groups: Tribals of Chottanagpur, Keralites, Tamilians, Goans and Punjabis. Now this region has over 131000 Catholics.

In 1769 some 62 Christian families, 5 catechumens and some priests came from Nepal to Chuhari; their descendents, called ‘Bettiah Christians,’ are a vibrant community in Bihar today. However, “the present Christian community of Patna [Diocese] is largely a Dalit Church.”²⁹ In 1821 Rome created the prefecture of Tibet-Hindustan as a vicariate. Subsequently the Patna vicariate was erected in 1845. Patna became an independent diocese in 1919. From

²⁶J. Mattam, “Christian Identity: Is Baptism an Event of Separation or of Human Solidarity?” in *Sharing Worship*, ed. P. Puthanangady, Bangalore: NBCLC, 1988, 440-444.

²⁷J. Mattam, “Catholic Church in Gujarat,” in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 156-175.

²⁸K. Kattuthara, “Catholic Mission in North-West India,” in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 249.

²⁹J. Velamkunnel, “Patna: A Mission Moulded from Mud Houses,” in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 196.

1930 North American Jesuits took care of the diocese. The first missionaries and the Dalits themselves saw conversion as liberation. The nearness and acceptance by the missionaries gave the people a sense of dignity and worth. But today in most areas the Dalits are distancing themselves from the church. Now Bihar has a sizable Catholic population.

Though there have been migrant Christians in the North East for some time, real missionary work began only in 1890 with the arrival of German Salvatorian missionaries. Their movements were restricted by the British and in 1915 they were expelled; then for some time the Jesuits of Bengal took care of the Christians there, but it was in 1922 that the Salesians of Don Bosco accepted care of "the Assam Mission." The Catholic Church grew rapidly and by 1934 the number of Catholics had risen to some 50000. The missionaries worked among many tribal groups, and after the independence of India work spread also to other states like Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur. The Tribals of Chottanagpur are the more recent arrivals to the North East; now they are a big group of Catholics of over 300000. The post-Vatican period saw a great expansion of the mission, with Indian missionaries at the forefront. Apart from the great contribution in the field of education, the Church helped to bring about an affirmation of their own cultural identity. The Catholic Church had to face a lot of obstacles both from the governments and from other Christian denominations, like the Presbyterians and Baptists. The Catholic community in the North East is expected to reach the million mark soon.³⁰

One of the reasons for the conversion, especially in the northern regions, is the support the missionaries gave to the exploited Tribals in fighting for their rights and their land. The Scheduled Castes also found Christianity as a means of escape from the oppression they suffered for centuries under the caste system. Though the Lutheran missionaries had started work among the Tribals of Chotanagpur in 1845, it was with the arrival of Constant Lievens, SJ (1856-1893) in 1885 that the work among the Tribals became a movement. Lievens took up the cause of the exploited Tribals and liberated thousands; they on their own flocked to the missionaries. John Baptist Hoffman who succeeded Lievens started Co-operative Credit societies, besides continuing with legal aid. The Ranchi Mission before its

³⁰G. Kottupallil, "Catholic Church in North-East India," in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 289.

division into a number of other dioceses had a total of over 414000 Catholics.³¹

The large state of Madhya Pradesh does not have a significant Catholic population. The first catholic presence came through the foreign Catholic employees in the court of Akbar. After Akbar the atmosphere of friendliness ceased and hostility began against the Christians. Hence around 1710 Francis Bourbon fled from Delhi to Marwar and settled there and eventually a mission station was started there with a Jesuit priest Mathew Rodrigues as chaplain. This community continued till 1778 when the local king massacred almost all the members of the Bourbon family; a few escaped to Gwalior, and subsequently settled down in Bhopal.³²

With the arrival of the British, there was some increase of Christian presence in this region. The success of the struggles for the rights of the Tribals in Ranchi area led to a mass movement towards Catholicism in Raigarh. The news of the success of Father Lievens in Ranchi encouraged the Oraons, Mundas and Kharias of MP to invite the priests to Ambikapur in the 1890s. Up to 1905 no Catholic priest could enter the region of Raigarh. The Catholics are mostly in the dioceses of Ambikapur and Raigarh. The missionaries kept intact the Tribal identity of the people, and they helped preserve their languages. Though the majority of Catholics in MP are Tribals, there are also Dalit Christians who were exploited by the caste people and moneylenders.

In 1933 a large number of *Adivasis* of Udaipur (Rajasthan) became Catholics. The Udaipur rulers ruthlessly opposed conversions and did not allow missionaries in that area. The fear was always the same: the hold over the *Adivasis* would be lost if they became Christians. In spite of the opposition, or thanks to it, a large number of them became Catholics and now in these Dioceses of Raigarh and Udaipur there are over 263000 Catholics. The missionaries had hoped that after the Independence of India better conditions would emerge, but the foreign missionaries were banned in most States, especially in MP. But this led to the arrival of missionaries from other parts of India like Kerala, Goa and Mangalore.

³¹P. Tete, "Catholic Mission in the Chotanagpur Region," in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 211, 212, 215.

³²C. Srambical, "Church and Mission Dynamics in Madhya Pradesh," in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 227.

The real opposition to Missionary work comes from the Hindu fundamentalist groups like the RSS, Arya Samaj, the Hindu Mahashaba and others grouped as the *Sangh Parivar*.³³ Their reason for the opposition is clear: through education and social uplift the Tribals and Dalits resist the exploitation they suffer; they claim their rights – the upper castes do not tolerate this. Hence they use the bogey of conversions. So far there have been a number of anti-conversion laws in a number of States like MP, Orissa and Gujarat, all euphemistically called “Freedom of Religion Bill” denying all freedom.

The Christians came to the seaports of Bengal in 1514 with the Portuguese traders. By 1574 one finds Catholic priests in that area; Jesuits, Augustinians and Dominicans were the primary evangelizers of the region. In 1834 the vicariate of Calcutta was created under the care of the Jesuits. The church in Bengal gave a great impetus to the Indianisation of the faith, with the efforts of Brahmabandhav Upadhyay (1861-1907), followed by the “Calcutta School of Indology.” Jesuits like P. Johanns, G. Dandoy, and others with their *Light of the East* series of publications³⁴ proposed dialogue with Hinduism. The Mother Teresa phenomenon was an important development in the 1950s. Now the archdiocese of Calcutta has five suffragan dioceses. Bengalis, Santals and Nepalees are the main groups in this region.³⁵

In Orissa too Christianity began with the Portuguese traders and afterwards the mission has seen various developments, especially among the Tribals. The Catholic population constituted of Scheduled Tribes and Castes is about 0.88 percent of the population in five dioceses. Though rich in minerals and other resources the Tribals and Dalits of Orissa are mostly illiterate and poor. The Church did a great deal to emancipate them; this is not pleasing to the upper caste Hindus who constitute the *Sangh Parivar* outfit. Orissa witnessed large scale violence on the Christian community in August 2008. Kandhamal was the epicentre of the anti-Christian violence in Orissa. More than 4500 houses, 236 Churches and 36 Church related institutions were completely destroyed. 81 people were killed; more than 50000 people of 450 villages of Kandhamal were displaced; a religious nun was raped and publicly humiliated; about 20 priests and pastors were brutally

³³Srambical, “Church and Mission Dynamics in Madhya Pradesh,” 233ff.

³⁴J. Mattam, “Interpreting Christ to India Today: Contribution of the Calcutta School”, in *Journal of Indian Theology* 1, 3 (2008) 6-24.

³⁵G. Pattery, “The Catholic Mission in West Bengal,” in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 265.

assaulted and several offices of developmental organizations were reduced to ashes. The process of rehabilitation is so tardy that majority of the affected people are still to return to their respective places.³⁶

3. The Syro-Malankara Church

The Syro-Malankara Church has a separate history only from 1930. Members of the Malankara Church argue that they are the original Church founded by St Thomas, as there is a tradition of his landing at a place called Malayankara near Kodungalloor. Dr Chediath claims that the original name of the St Thomas Christians was *Malankara Nazaranikal* and *Mar Thoma Nazaranikal*.³⁷ Archbishop Mar Ivanios of happy memory (1882-1953) led the historic *Unity Movement* in India in 1930 that brought the Malankara Orthodox Jacobite Churches to the full visible and canonical communion with the Catholic Church. They were allowed to keep their own liturgy and way of life. The Malankara Catholic hierarchy was established in 1932, with Trivandrum as the archdiocese. After this the Malankara church received many from the Jacobite, Orthodox, Mar Thoma, and Thozhiyur Church. Mar Philoxenus of Thozhiyur entered into full communion with the Catholic Church in 1977.³⁸ There are at present two archdioceses and 8 dioceses and 1 exarchate, 14 bishops, more than 500 priests and about 400 000 faithful. The Malankara church has a few religious congregations: the Order of the Imitation of Christ (OIC-Bethany), Sisters of the Imitation of Christ (SIC-Bethany) and the Congregation of the Daughters of Mary (DM Sisters).

4. The Contribution of Catholics to the Country's Culture and Languages

Catholic scholars, especially the Jesuits, have made enormous and memorable contribution in the fields of language, history, cartography, culture, economics and science. They have made significant contribution to various languages in India in terms of composing grammars, dictionaries and writings considered classical by now. There are many Jesuit scholars in various languages of India: Sanskrit, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, Marathi, Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali and others. I give just a few of the many names: Jean Calmette and Antoine in Sanskrit; Robert de Nobili and Constantius Beschi in Tamil; Ernst Hanxleden (Arnos Padri) in Sanskrit and

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³⁷G. Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, Kottayam: Bethany Sisters, 2003, 13.

³⁸Chediath, *The Malankara Catholic Church*, 112, 120-121.

Malayalam; Thomas Stephens in Marathi and Konkani and Miguel d'Almeida in Konkani; Peter Lalane in Telugu; Leonardo Cinnami in Kannada; Camille Bulcke in Hindi³⁹ and Carlos Valles in Gujarati.⁴⁰

Other Jesuits still remembered are: Fr H. Santapau, first director of the Botanical survey of India; Fr Charles Racine, Mathematician of repute who was honoured posthumously in 1987 at the Maths-Science Institute, Madras, as one of the ten eminent mathematicians; Fr Henry Heras, historian, Archeologist and founder of the Heras Institute of History in Bombay. Fr Monserrate (1536-1600) was the first European since Ptolemy to make a map of India. Jesuits were invited to set up two observatories in Delhi and Jaipur. Fr Tieffentaller (1719-1785) a great scholar in languages, astronomy, mathematics, Geography and natural sciences published the *Historical Geographical Description of India*, containing accurate accounts of the fauna and flora of India.⁴¹ Jesuits were also the first to introduce western method of printing with movable types in India setting up the first press in Goa in 1556, using the Roman script.⁴²

5. General Observations about the Catholic Church in Its Post-Vatican II Phase

The II Vatican Council had a lot of impact on the Catholic Church in India. With the All India Seminar at Bangalore on "The Church in India Today" in 1969, followed by another at Patna in 1972 a whole lot of changes happened. With the setting up of the NBCLC (National Biblical, Catechetical and Liturgical Centre) at Bangalore, NVSC (National Vocation Service Centre) in Pune and similar centres elsewhere there has been a renewed effort to make the Bible more popular with the people, catechism more up-to-date and liturgical celebrations more contextualized. The *Clergy Monthly* which was for the clergy became *Vidyajyoti Journal of theological Reflection* for all Christians; *Biblebhashyam*, *Jeevadhara*, *Journal of Dharma* and a host of other journals gave a thrust to Indianizing theology, liturgy and Biblical studies.

³⁹His Hindi-English Dictionary is in its 3rd ed. He received the *Padma Bhushan* in 1974.

⁴⁰C. Valles, a Spanish Jesuit, received the highest awards in Gujarati literature for five years in succession that the Academy made a rule that no one may receive it more than five times, lest Valles takes away all the awards!: J. Teotonio de Souza and J. Charles Borges, ed., *Jesuits in India: In Historical Perspective*, Goa: Xavier Centre of Historical Research, 1992, 103.

⁴¹A. Amaladass, ed., *Jesuit Presence in Indian History*, Anand: GSP, 1988, 290f.

⁴²J. Teotonio de Souza and J. Charles Borges, ed., *Jesuits in India*, 103, 104.

In spite of being a minority community, the Catholics provide a plethora of services to the wider community, especially in education, social justice concerns, health related services, and creating new awareness. Besides direct evangelisation and education, Social Service has always been a priority in the apostolic activities of the Catholic Church. The struggle began by C. Lievens and other Jesuits in the 19th century against the exploitation by moneylenders and *Zamaindars* (land owners), and against the suppression of Dalits, has been continued over the years in different contexts. In the post-Vatican II era, there has been a shift from charity, relief-oriented and welfare approaches to developmental projects and awareness building and to empowerment for collective action. Action for the liberation of the oppressed received great attention: Dalit liberation movements, women empowerment and self-help programmes, creating awareness among the oppressed, empowering the poor through political action, several economic, agricultural and income generating projects of different kinds, adult non-formal education and institutional and primary health care training. The Jesuit "Indian Social Institutes" in New Delhi and Bangalore have done yeoman service to the cause of the promotion of justice by seminars, publications (like the *Social Action*) and taking up cases in the courts.⁴³ The Catholic Church in India has helped the uplift of the poor; the emancipation of Dalits and Tribals through education and organization has given them a new sense of identity, a sense of their dignity and self-respect and are able to demand their rights in many parts of the country.

The new evangelistic thrust is proclamation through the mass media, promotion of justice and formation of human communities, instead of merely Christian communities and joining hands with secular forces working for human rights.⁴⁴ The elite institutions traditionally at the service of the privileged sections of the population are re-oriented to play a supportive role to the above apostolic efforts.

⁴³J. Mattam, "Mission as Social Concern – in Official Church Documents and Recent Missiological Literature," in J. Mattam & S. Kim, ed., *Mission Trends Today*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1997, 55-76; J. Velamkunnel, "REAP: An *Antyodaya* Experiment in the Empowerment of Musahars," in J. Mattam & P. Parackal, ed., *Creative Ministries*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2004, 77-98.

⁴⁴J. Mattam, & J. Valiamangalam, ed., *Building Solidarity, Challenge to Christian Mission*, Delhi: ISPCK, 2008.

Free Legal Aid is one of the many projects started in the 1970s and has spread widely all over the country.⁴⁵

The Catholics took a lot of interest in the ecumenical movement; there are some ecumenical groups like the *Church History Association of India* (CHAI), *Fellowship of Indian Missiologists* (FOIM), *Association of Ashramites* and the like. But of late one notices a lack of enthusiasm, due primarily to the mushrooming of small new Christian sects who are aggressive evangelizers. This is an area that needs our attention.

From the seventies of the last century inculturation has been an area the Church has paid much attention, but the success in this area has been limited. Most of the attempts have been in terms of the Sanskrit culture and background, which is foreign to most of the people; the Tribal communities have done well in introducing some of their cultural riches into the liturgy; but Dalit cultural patterns and their wealth are mostly ignored. At the level of art and architecture creditable contributions have been made.

Dialogue with other religions has been an area of interest for the Catholic Church; not only official "dialogue centres" have been set up, but often meetings are arranged in many parts of the country to facilitate inter religious dialogue; one is not sure of the success of this venture but serious efforts are made by many in most parts of the country. This spirit has been alive especially when common problems are addressed together with believers of other religions.

Another contribution is in theologizing in India. The Catholic theologians in India have given a thrust towards an Indian Christian Theology, with many publications,⁴⁶ degree programmes in the Theological Faculties like Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth in Pune, Vidyajyoti in Delhi, Dharmaram Vidya Kshetram in Bangalore and other centres. Seminary formation too focuses on Indian Christian theology, in contrast to the past when Catholics followed the Thomistic theology as in the West. Contextualization has been one of the major thrusts in theological formation.

⁴⁵J. Idiakunnel, & J. Mattam, "Free Legal Aid – Reflections on an Experience in Gujarat: Retrospect and Prospect," in J. Mattam & K.C. Marack, ed., *Missiological Approaches in India: Retrospect and Prospect*, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 1999, 151-172.

⁴⁶One of the latest contributions has been *Journal of Indian Theology*, Edited by J. Parapally, Bangalore. Some of the major contributors to Indian Christian theology are Jesuits like Soares Prabhu, Samuel Rayan, S. Kappen, M. Amaladoss, and others like Raymundo Panikkar, D.S. Amalorpavadass, Felix Wilfred, Jacob Parapally and many others.

The women religious in India do excellent work, especially among girls and women; and the Catholic Church has done much to emancipate women through education, women's organizations and self-help groups. However there are many who feel dissatisfied since the ministerial priesthood is denied to them.

As is normal with Catholics everywhere, the Indian Catholic Church too has many shrines and pilgrim centres which draw thousands of devotees each year; the most popular ones are: the shrine of Our Lady at Velankani (Tamil nadu), Mount Mary in Bandra (Bombay), Infant Jesus in Nashik and Bangalore, Our Lady's shrine at Bandel (Bengal). Practically every state has one or more pilgrim centres which are more or less prominent.

One of the movements after the Vatican II period is the rise of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal centres. This is fairly well spread in the country; it has helped in the interest for the Word of God, prayer and healing. Along with these charismatic centres, retreat centres like Potta in Kerala are also doing a lot of good work for the renewal of the community.

Due to its numbers and the prominence of the CBCI the Catholics have a greater voice than other churches, and the Catholic Bishops take the lead in addressing any national event of importance like the attacks on Christians, or the killing of Muslims and the like.

6. Concerns and Challenges

The Church has done much for Dalits and yet it is a sad fact that one of the problems facing the Catholic Church in India is the fate of the Dalit Christians. Most of them left their own original community to become free of the caste oppression, but in many subtle ways, they continue to experience discrimination and kind of oppression at least in some parts of the country, especially in the South; this is a serious problem.⁴⁷

The Clergy-Laity disparity is a serious concern in the Catholic Church which has become overly clerical, with all the power and authority in the hands of the clergy with the laity having practically no voice and responsibility in the community, except in the Syrian churches where they have very important roles to play. The lay

⁴⁷P. Chinnappa, "Mission of the Church in Andhra Pradesh: Challenges and Opportunities," in Augustine Kanjamala, ed., *Integral Mission Dynamics: An Interdisciplinary Study of the Catholic Church in India*, New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 1995, 117-118.

Catholics do not see the mission of the church as their mission and they remain more in a pietistic trend of faith. In many places they are turning against the clergy. However there are also signs of hope: some lay people take much interest in the building of “small Christian communities,” and many are beginning to see the mission of the Church as theirs, not merely of the clerics. A lot more participatory leadership model has to be worked out.

The Church has depended on foreign contributions to a great extent, and has not sufficiently tapped our own resources. Tithing has rarely been a custom among the Catholics, as is common among other Christian communities; this could be introduced or re-introduced.

There is an unfortunate tension between the Syrian and Latin Rite Churches. Vatican II recognised officially that the universal Church is a communion of individual Ritual Churches.⁴⁸ Vatican II documents also recognise the equal rights of these Rites, and “Therefore, attention should everywhere be given to the preservation and growth of each individual church. For this purpose, parishes and a special hierarchy, should be established for each where the spiritual good of the faithful so demands.”⁴⁹ Based on these recommendations, the Bishops of the Syrian Rites want to establish parishes and even dioceses where there are a large number of Syrian Catholics outside Kerala. In many ways this is opposed by the Latin hierarchy. Efforts are being made by the different Bishops Conferences to resolve the tension.

The growth of religious fundamentalism among the followers of the majority religion in the form of Hindutva is one of the major challenges the entire Christian community is facing today. These people have been attacking Christians in different parts of the country; the recent instances are those in Orissa and Karnataka.

The Catholic Church needs to move towards becoming a servant Church, open to the never failing, never forcing Spirit; the whole community needs to become an evangelising community, concerned less with orthodoxy, rituals and structures borrowed from the West but more with life and its wholeness for which Jesus lived and was killed. Every member of the community needs to become a witnessing member, bearing witness to the Kingdom Jesus lived for and proclaimed.

⁴⁸Karotempel, *The Syro-Malabar Church Today*, 6-7.

⁴⁹Vatican II: *The Decree on the Catholic Oriental Churches*, no 4.