

Christian Conversion Movements in the Southern Coromandel During 16th and 17th Centuries

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To my parents

Thongkhojang Guite and Hatlam Guite

Kavoujang natpi kachun le kajo
Na gol in monmo nasa nan
Na singsung miten nataimo nan
Navangchan chinpi nachapan
Ton na ipu ipan aban phahlou
Chungmangpa Pathen voujang natpin
Gol nung golseh kaphanai
Heno hepo ban na him pehdan
Lung lhadailou hinan bonamon
Pathen huna vangchan jong gmon tin
Kachun kajo damsot hen.

—Nachapa J. Guite



July 2003

C E R T I F I C A T E

Certified that Jangkhomang Guite has submitted a dissertation entitled "Christian Conversion Movements in the Southern Coromandel During 16th and 17th Centuries" in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Master of Philosophy of this University. This dissertation has not been previously submitted for any other degree of this University or of any other university.

We recommend that this dissertation may be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

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—Jangkhomang Guite

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Abbreviations

- Baldaeus: Philip Baldaeus, *A Description of the East India Coast of Malabar and Coramandel and also of the isle of Ceylon with their adjacent Kingdom and Provinces.*
- Bayly: Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings, The Muslims and Christians in South India, 1700-1900.*
- Brahmin Sannyasis: The Jesuit Fathers working among the high caste Christians.
- Converts: Christian converts of Tamil Nadu.
- Coramandel: Present day Tamil Nadu.
- Costelloe: M.J.Costelloe, S.J., (trans.), *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier.*
- Estado: Estado Da India.
- Father: Catholic Christian Priests.
- Fr. Freyre: Fr. Andres Freyre, the Jesuit father.
- ICHR: Indian Church History Review.
- IESHR: Indian Economic and Social History Review.
- Jesuits: Missionaries of the Society of Jesus.
- Letters: Letters of the Portuguese Jesuits from the Tamil Countryside.
- Local: People of the Tamil country.
- Mansilhas: Francisco Mansilhas, Jesuit brother who assisted Xavier in the Fishery Coast, ordained as priest at Goa in 1545.
- Manucci: Niccolao Manucci, *Storia do Mogor.*
- Missionaries: Christian missionaries.
- Mundadan: A.M.Mundadan, *History of Christianity: From the beginning upto the mid 16th Century (upto 1542), vol.I.*
- Mylapore: San Thome.
- Pandaraswami: The Jesuit Father working among the low caste Christians.
- Region: Coromandel region.
- Schurhammer: Geog Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Times.*
- Society: Society of Jesus
- Stephens: S.Jeyaseela Stephens, *Letters of the Portuguese Jesuits from the Tamil Countryside, 1666- 1688.*
- Tamil: The language spoken by the people of Coromandel.
- The Letters: *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier*, trans. by J.Costelloe.
- Thekkedath: J.Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India: From the middle of the Sixteenth Century to the end of the Seventeenth Century, 1542-1700, vol.II.*
- Xavier: Francis Xavier, the first Jesuit missionaries in India.

Introduction

Historical investigation on Christianity in India has been until very recently the task of the 'church historians'. Not to underscore their immense contributions in the field there was a pivotal shift in the understanding of Indian Christians since the coming of the 'historians of the church'. Indeed, the church does have a history but that history has 'meaning' and 'relevance' only in the contexts of mankind in all its fullness and variety. During the last 150 years or so the historiography of Christianity in India has witness important change. The first change is in the kinds of people involved in this endeavor. During the 19th century the historians, publishers and intended readers were all western and so far as the general histories were concerned, Protestant. During the course of the 20th century, Indians—both Catholics and non-Catholics Syrians—joined the ranks. Of even greater significance was since the dawn of 1960's when both the historians and their readers were no longer exclusively Christians.

This increased diversity of historians and readers would mean that there was a wider range of aims and perspectives and even bias being brought to bear on the subject. The churchly preoccupation of 19th century, Protestant Vs Roman Catholic, Church and State, missionary methods, *Padroado Vs Propaganda* etc. and the 20th century, indigenization, unity and mission of Indian church, are no longer the main concern of historians. The new perspective had now shifted to the study of social and cultural history of Christian communities and their relationship with the wider society, their attitudes and involvement in the Indian social and political movement, etc. This broadening of the social and intellectual apparatus had increased the complexities and therefore the more difficult choices in selecting and defining aims, subject matters and appropriate methods of research and presentation. Again, historians of Christianity are now using a far greater diversity of source materials than they had previously adhered to. Various other non-church sources such as press report, government documents, regional language literature and Hindu or Muslim religious publications were now used in order to understand those aspects of Christianity. The result has been not only a new perspective upon Christian past but also new critical problems in dealing with the evidences.

The Scope

The purpose of this study in the light of the new development will focus on the understanding of Christianity from local perspective. For the Indian Christians, Christianity is understood along with the recognition and familiarity to the larger Hindu society or the tribal world in which they

were place. It was accepted and accommodated within the larger social and belief structures. The following chapters will study Christianity in the understanding of the local people, of their conscious turnover, and their progress and prejudices. It should be remembered that there was always a wide gap in the understanding of Christianity between the preachers and the listeners. In most cases the missionaries were surprise to see things turning away from their intention. The discourses on the Christian matters were being translated and modified into their understanding of religion by the local people. Even the missionaries were accepted as part of the local ranking power relation. The accumulation of identities in the contexts of the converts was the deposits of a series of cultural traces rather than the rejection of the old one. The converts retains the marks of his earlier cultural life even as he adds on the new marks. Conversion thus becomes an Indian way of configuring religious plurality, the convert being an embodiment of several and conjoined identities and always open to new appropriations. The embededness of these cultural traits in the new community was rather shown to be efficacious to large-scale conversions.

The present day religious tensions and conflicts are the by-products of political miscegenation and the cultural myopia of the political parties. The colonial vested political interests are fabricated in order to throw the farcical communal carnage by some colonial fundamentalist—the present day Hindu, Muslims and Christian fundamentalist. Indian religious pluralism is in danger. There were already increasing fundamentalism in all the major religion of India—Hindu, Muslims and Christians. Hindu nationalism promulgated by RSS-BJP nexus is gaining ground day by day. Many “conversion” related state laws and enactments are coming up in various state in order to win political elections. To protest and fight against such unjustified moves a radical reaction cropped up everywhere. From all peripheries, the Muslim and Christian fundamentalist had responded by armed race. What will determine the future of India if more rigid and contentious religious boundaries are encouraged? The purpose of this study is to bring about the historical understanding of India’s religious challenges, its plural set up since time immemorial, its tolerant attitude towards religion *per se* and finally to bring about an explanation of ‘conversions’ in the Indian contexts.

The geographical setting

The term ‘Coromandel’ is derived from *Chola-mandalam*. This term was already in use since the medieval period (eleventh century). It is difficult to define an accurate geographical boundary for the use of the term due to its changing usage. In fact the question of regional boundary is a complex one, considering that a boundary evolves with historical changes and political necessities.

However it is generally agreed that Coromandel covers the areas ranging from the part of the coast lying to the south of the Godavari River and extending as far as Negapatnam or even to the Island of Manar.¹ However, the term Coromandel is deliberately use here very loosely. The term Southern Coromandel region is used more loosely covering an areas ranging from Madras to the south till the Tamil areas in the Travancore Coast. The term 'region' and 'Coast' are used distinctively, the first mean for the whole areas under survey and the latter only to denote the coastal littoral areas. Again, Fishery Coast is also frequently used to cover the areas from Ramesvaram to the south till the Mukkuvas occupied coastal areas in Tranvancore and also an island of Manar. Madurai Mission is also separately used as to denote the mainland in order to differentiate the religious field of the Jesuits from their areas of activities in the coastal part. These areas are mainly the region of homogenous Tamil speaking people.

The Christian Missionaries

The Christian missionaries working in the region were mainly the Catholic Missionaries who belongs to the religious orders such as the Jesuits, the Franciscans, the Dominicans and the Augustinians. However, the study mainly concentrates on the missionary activities of the Society of Jesus partly because we have more source materials recorded by them and partly because the area under survey belongs to their area of jurisdiction. The Jesuit missionaries came to the area in 1542. Francis Xavier, the first Jesuits in India was accompanied by the three seminarians who were taken to be for training after the mass conversion of 1535 and 1537 in the Fishery Coast. Later Francisco Mansilhas and one other brother joined them in the mission. The movement of Jesuit missionaries in the region was continuously, albeit in small number in the region. It should be remember that the whole of Coromandel region was put under the diocese of Cochin through out the period of our survey. The area under survey was divided into two missions—Fishery Coast and Madura Mission—under the Jesuit Province of Malabar.

The source material

The study of Christian missionary movements in Cormandel region is fortuitous as the Society of Jesus had been very prolific in producing documents, books and more importantly their consistent letters of field reports, annual reports, individual or official letters, etc., which were preserved in great numbers. It served tremendously the purpose of the study of not only Christian missions but

¹ Tapan Raychaudhuri, *Jan Company in Coromandel, 1605-1690*, (1962), p.1. see also S.Jeyaseela Stephens, *Coromandel Coast and Its Hinterland*, Manohar, Delhi, (1997), pp.23-29.

also for the other study of the region. The lack of sufficient local records had made the copious information of the missionaries simply indispensable. Frankly, the missionary literature was the only source of information the present work relied upon partly because they sufficiently served our purpose and partly because I was not able to access other sources of information and may be deemed as 'lacking' here. The present study did however make use of travelogues and factory records and used other relevant information from them. But many of the travelogues and factory records that were read in voluminous but atlas found irrelevant are discarded in the final compilation.

As most of the primary missionary letters and other information are not yet translated the present work mainly relied on English translations. Every possible means was utilized to gather as much information as possible, including from the secondary sources. For instance Thekkedath's well documented work, *History of Christianity*, (vol.II) is indispensable in gathering data of a number of conversions and some interesting incidents necessary for our analysis. Like wise Wicki's *Documenta Indica* (in Portuguese) is accessed through the notes written in English from Vol. 15–18 and other information is accessed through other secondary sources. The French work of Bertrand *La Mission Du Madure* was accessed through the reading of some relevant part by some friends from the French center (JNU).

Again, many of the missionary sources are replete with bias and eulogies. However, to reject the evidence provided by the missionaries because of its rashness would be equally rash. As such the present work tries its best to judiciously treat all the evidence provided by the missionaries although in some cases we find ourselves totally helpless and have to accept it without questioning.

The Problem

As mentioned earlier the study of Christianity has already become a mainstream subject of Indian history. This widening in perspective has all along increased the complexities in the choice of subject and the appropriate methods of research and presentation.

One of the first practical difficulties for the English educated researcher in the proposed region is the less availability of English translation of the missionary documents. The corpus of missionary records are still in the European language such as Portuguese, Latin, French, Spanish, etc. Even most of the translated works are not possible to be located at one place. To make it available one must travel far and wide.

Secondly, as is well known, all historical sources are to some extent biased, and missionary sources are no exception to that rule. Most letters deal with the life of the missionary, his activities in the mission field etc. but there was scarce information on local society. Nevertheless a fair amount of caution and critical sense may make sense out of it.

Thirdly, the study of Christianity in the context of a wider socio-economic and political change and development needs great integrity. In fact the study of social history of Christianity requires an in-depth knowledge of all the aspects of society in the region, which became most difficult a task in the short period of time.

Another problematic area in the study of Christianity is with regard to the agents behind conversions especially those of the mass movement. This issue is complex and a multiplicity of factors are involved. Besides the question of caste or social mobility, there are also other factors such as the hidden hand of the colonial state or economic and material advancement that the missionaries provided with their education, health and other self-improvement schemes. When this area of explaining conversion is not contested our emphasis in this work is something different from them. First, a comparison between the beliefs system of the local people and that of Christianity is made. Second, the correlation of mass movements with the natural as well as man-made calamities is studied. However, the difficulty lies in gathering full information on these aspects, as consistent missionary reports are not available.

Another set of problem that has been raised is the consequence of conversion. Some have regarded it as the reason for identity formation as in the case of the Northeast where the birth of Christian print culture in a multi-lingual scenario of northeast is linked to identity formation. Another set of arguments on the consequences of conversion is on the issue of upward social mobility of the lower castes. When the economic and social improvements were taken for granted, an analysis is made here on the missionary impact on identity formation and its related tensions in the region. In order to succeed in this, an in-depth understanding about the caste background and particular details of those converts become necessary.

What are the events that took place before conversion? What are the socio-economic and political developments in the region? What are the existing belief and cosmology of those particular groups and how much this helps them in solving out the crisis of confidence? How far did the new development in the groups been related to their conversion to Christianity? What proportion of these were outcastes and what proportions of the caste aspect were actually given up in the new faith? To what extent did the particular group allocate a place in the church or in the village settlement? What sort of changes could one see in their dress, eating habits, health and

sanitation? Which particular caste groups were able to gain most from the process of urbanization, education, employment and other government and religious establishment? Did the status of womenfolk improve in the new identity? And so on.

These are the various issues and challenges that could be covered by the study but the lack of sufficient information on them make us totally disgruntled. One of the main concerns of this study however would be the study of social history of Christianity in the context of and to the wider socio-cultural issues of change and dynamism in the complex society of the Coromandel coast.

The method

Studies on Christian conversion movements in India have produced some excellent monographs and articles. When most of the studies emphasise on the sociological aspect of conversion there is also a trend in the religious (belief) dimensions as well. In most readings, transition to Christianity is primarily situated in the initiative of the western mission/missionary rather than in the experience and sensibility of the local converts. Inquiries on the agents and consequences of conversions dominated the historical writing on Indian Christians. When the entire social group changes its religion, voluntaristic explanation of the phenomenon prove inadequate, because this societal transformation requires a sociological understanding of the condition under which it emerged. Further, that sociological explanation will not focus only on the religious aspect but will attempt to place religion in the total life of the group. We must, therefore, ascertain when a group becomes available for conversion and also what kind of groups set out to convert. As such the study would begin with the critical survey on the correlation between conversion and those events that may lead to the crisis of conscience. The survey will also set out to specify the social background of those converts. The survey will also incorporate various reactions of the larger society to those conversions and to the converts. As such the proposed study, while it also dealt with the missions and missionaries per se will also focus mainly on the local perspective. As matter to these facts we may draw some of the imaginative studies as a conceptual apparatus for our work.

A historian cannot presume a smooth transition when the low or out caste and the tribal leave behind time honored worldviews and embrace a new faith. Robin Horton's² study on role of ideas in African conversions has interesting findings pertinent to this discussion. Horton sees that the pre-existent worldviews—a double-layered cosmology where polytheism is overlaid by a

² Robert Horton, "On Rationality of Conversion" *Africa*, 1971.

transcendental divinity—played a vital role in African conversions. Africans, who were living in a period of rapid social change gradually came to feel that their traditional worldview was no longer adequate as a method of explanation, prediction and control. Therefore, a more satisfactory cosmology, which they found in Islam and Christianity, helped them in the new social scenario.

Similarly, Richard Eaton's³ study on the conversion to Christianity among the Nagas, in the North East region of India is an interesting finding. The 'Traditional Naga Cosmology' concept of ideas had greatly facilitated towards the process of Christianizing the tribal Nagas. In the two-tiered layers of traditional Naga cosmology, Eaton has shown that, the lower tier, which constituted 'a host of minor spirits', was overlaid and subsumed by the upper-tiered supreme divinity. This was brought about by the new development set in motion by the expansion of British Empire in the Hills. The localization of Christian God into the local one, the building of roads, the knowledge of the world through the world maps brought in by the missionaries, and various other new developments in the locality had brought about the break-down of Naga cognitive realms. Eaton has shown that the preaching and practice of the missionaries to a certain new notion of God who is more powerful and all benevolent gradually led the Naga to convert to Christianity.

George Oommen's⁴ study on tribal conversion movement among the Malayarayans of Kerala is also another interesting case. Though the two-tier structure of African cosmology does not fit in the Malayarayans pre-existing belief system which was both multi-tiered and at the same time an integral whole, Oommen has shown that the preaching and practice of the missionaries to a certain new notion of God/Spirit who is more powerful, led the Malayarayans to convert to Christianity. According to him the socio-economic changes set in motion by the plantation, diseases and epidemics, created crises of confidence in adjusting to or adapting with existence and environment. He said Christianity and certain related ideas came to them in such a predicament. Oommen sees that the Malayarayans converted to Christianity "because of some of the Christian cosmological understanding which were in continuity to their previously held notions of Spirit and a God/Spirit who could deal with crisis and change.

F.S. Downs⁵ and Dick Kooiman also view the mass conversions in a different perspective. Downs has presented his finding on the apparent correlation between large-scale conversions

³ Richard Eaton, 'Conversion to Christianity among the Nagas, 1876–1971' *Indian Economic and Social History Review*, (IESHR), 21, 1, (1984), pp.1-52.

⁴ George Oommen, 'Re-reading tribal Conversion Movement: The case of the Malayarayans of Kerala, 1848-1900', *Religion and Society*, 1997.

⁵ F.S. Downs, *History of Christianity in India*. Vol. V part 5.

movement and crisis. He goes on to refer to calamities such as earthquakes, bamboo famines, and failure of political rebellions. According to him conversion invariably followed “traumatic experience of either a natural or political sort”. For Kooimen⁶, in his study in 19th century South Travancore, three possible results of famine and cholera on the populace of the region, In his study Kooimen shows that the 1860 famine was attended by an increase in London Missionary Society membership, the 1870 famine with a fall in numbers and the 1881 one with a standstill. Kooimen

concludes that (a) changes of religion as a strategy for survival is not a one-way solution. When people try and ward off the dangers threatening their existence they may give priority to ancestral beliefs and practices. (b) that famines and other cases of emergency merely create a kind of ‘rush hour’ in an already religious boundary traffic.

Susan Bayly⁷, while agreeing to the involvement of many factors involved in the case of Christian conversions, has put her attention focused on the issues involving a desire for upward social mobility. She shows that a group of cultivators, fishermen or traders became Muslim or Christian or even in a sense Hindu in order to elevate their standing within the locally recognized scheme of ceremonial rank and precedence. While she rejects the idea of reproaching Christian or Muslim converts for their adherence to the superstitions of previous religious affiliation, she sees that converts continue to share a common cultural identity and remain within the indigenous hierarchy and social system. She said if a group failed to win new rights and shares in a locality’s ranking schemes as Hindu, they convert to Christianity, re-stage their campaign for new honors and hope to win on the next round. No one involved in honors disputes had intention of liberating himself from the Hindu caste system. Thus Bayly try to project the idea that conversion for the locals would mean more to social status than any other factors.

Bayly has also shown that the Christian Paravas in the process of upward social mobility had started to incorporate the various manifestation of the festival of neighbouring Hindus. The golden car festival, for instance, is the replication of the Hindu utsavams staged at the great Sri Subramanyasami temple at Tirrecentur. Bayly while showing the resilience of the group’s caste institutions and ritual precedence has also shown that the widening of the economic apparatus and reinforcing the caste hierarchy, the society of Paravas tended to loosely divided into two

⁶ Dick Kooiman, ‘Mass Movement, Famine and Epidemic: A Study of Interrelationship’, *Modern Asian Studies*, 1991, pp. 281-301.

⁷ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings, The Muslims and Christians in South India 1700-1900*, (New Delhi : Cambridge University Press , 1992).

categories- Mejaikarar (the economically sound upper class) and the Kamarakkarar (the mass common folks).

In the same vein Hardgrave⁸ case study among the Nadars of Tamilnad has also shown that the main motive behind conversion is upward social mobility within the regional caste system. Hardgrave shows that the Christian Nadars were not only determined to adopt higher caste forms of dress but initiated and sustained the caste literature of the new (higher caste) mythology, claimed traditional Kshatriya status and took the title Nadars. While he also underlines the way in which Christian Nadars continued to inter marry with Hindus from the same community and to distance themselves from Christians of lower status, Kooimen's more recent research has produced further evidence, which shows that Christian Nadar attempts at upward mobility also included the practice of living in houses wearing jewellery and head dress and walking on public roads normally reserved for people of higher status.

While Bayly and Hardgrave's findings may apply to the specific groups this may not be generalized as such. While social mobility may not necessarily apply to caste mobility we need to for other avenue of increasing social respectability? This led to the second argument about the nature of social mobility among Indian Christian as neutralization and opting out. Lionel Caplan⁹ has discussed this issue in Christian of Madras in 1950's but the clearest and most effective exponent of the idea as it applied to Christian in the 19th century is Rudolph Fischer¹⁰ who examine Basel Mission experience in south Kanara and Malabar. Oddie¹¹ has substantiated this latest idea in his discussion on the issue of social mobility in south India. Oddie has raised the possibility of diverting the idea from the dominant and most important way mass movement converts gradually improved their social standing by gradually opting out and not by remaining within Bayly indigenous moral order. This involved the process of ritual neutralization, increasing castelessness the gradual adoption of class characteristic.

Patrick Roche¹² in his study of the Parava community in the fishery coast has also shown the resilience of the group caste identity during the rapid economic and political change in the

⁸ Robert Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad: The Political Culture of the Community in change*, Bakerley, 1969.

⁹ Lionel Caplan, 'Social mobility in metropolitan centers: Christian in Madras city', *Contribution to Indian Sociology*, 1977, pp.193-217.

¹⁰ Rudolph H. Fischer, 'Christianisation and social mobility in Nineteenth Century South Kanara and Malabar. A look at the Basel Mission Experience', in G.A.Oddie (ed), *Religion in South Asia*, Delhi, 1991, pp.125-54.

¹¹ G.A.Oddie, 'Christianity and Social Mobility in South India 1840-1920: A Continuing Debate', *South Asia*, 1996, pp.143-159.

¹² Parick.A. Roche, *A Fishermen of the Coromandel Coast: A Study of the Paravas of Coromandel*, New Delhi, 1984.

region from 16th to 19th century. Almost 300 years of Portuguese and Dutch rule, although they have different objectives and approaches, the political and economic interest of both rendered the Jati even more insular, stabilizing and strengthening older based jati identity such as sondhadeshyam, jati-rajyam and tholil. The introduction of Catholicism into the Parava settlement established the emergence of religion as a pivot base of Jati identity through the fusion of indigenous and European religious practices into Parava ritual, festivals and social life.

On the other hand Roche sees a different sort of impact on the different segments of the Parava populace during the British rule. While the outlying Catamaran-based fishing hamlets were relatively untouched, it profoundly affected larger port *urs*, destroying the economy of most and centralizing major part of Coromandel commerce in Tuticorin. This led to the demographic upheaval, disintegration of solidarity and corporate communal economy. External factors such as administrative measures, political and economic change affected the internal structure of the Jati. However, Roche, sees the coming of Bharatha caste conference as a new strategy of the community to adapt with the change.

Chapterization

In the first chapter we examine the expansion policies of the Portuguese in the Indian Ocean and the driving force behind their coming into the region. It is seen that the first motive behind Portuguese expansion in the Indian Ocean was purely commercial. But the progressive policy during their expansion period had incorporated many other enterprises in their policies such as military conquest and also more importantly their spiritual or religious conquest. When their state support are openly declare we also look onto their relationship with the missionaries. We have seen that many of the Jesuits who were in the region of partially influence by the Portuguese Estado acted as the political agent of the state in various ways. We also see that missionaries were always in competition with the Portuguese captain in the region for the control of power in their hand. The connection of the state in this region was actually seen not by practical deployment of the Portuguese naval forces but by invocation. In the contending leadership in the region the Jesuit emerged as the undisputed leaders and helper to the local Christians.

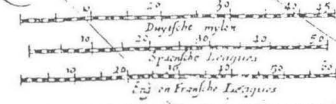
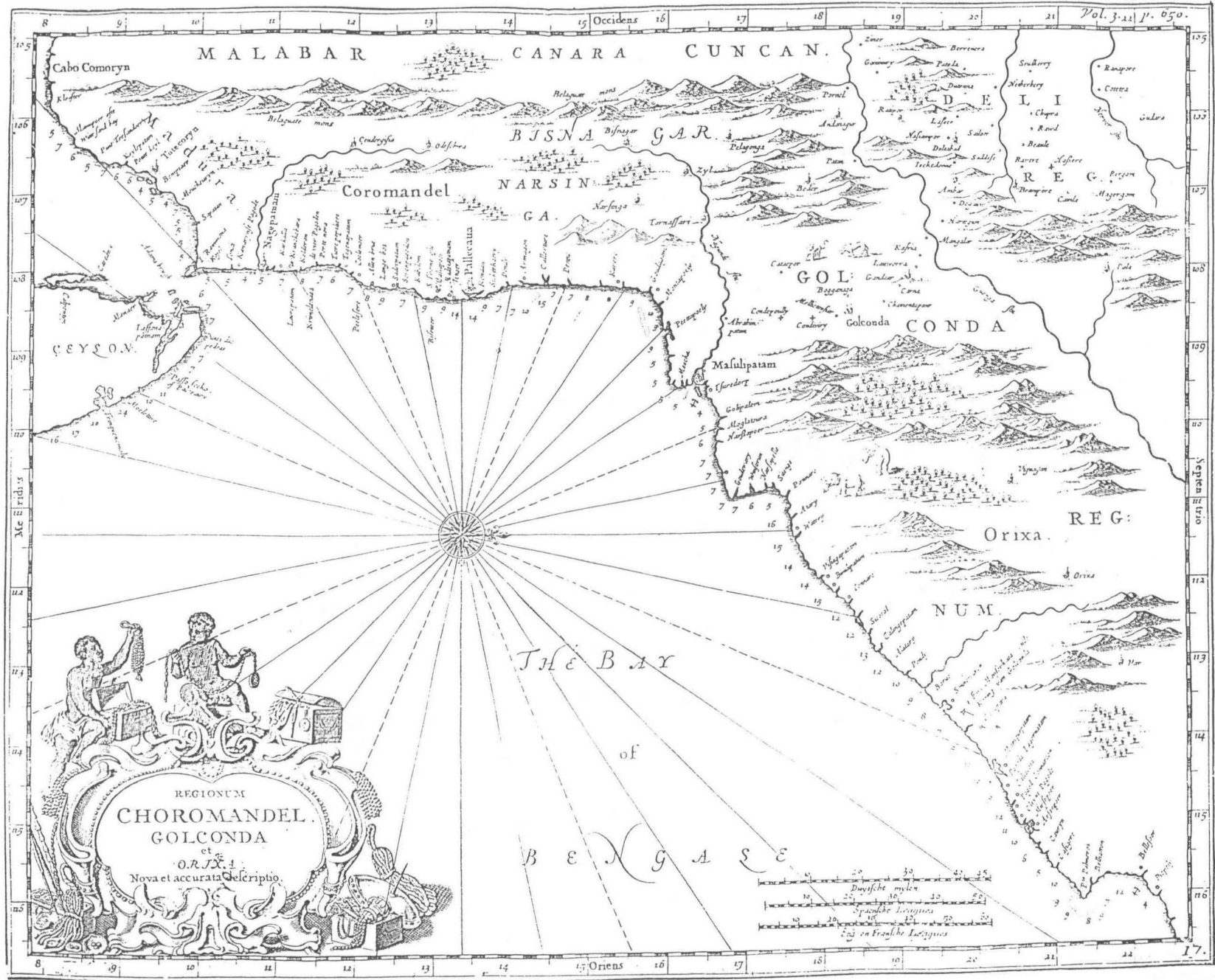
In the second chapter the progress of conversions during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are seen separately. The various regions such as Fishery Coast, Nagapattinam, Mylapore (San Thome), and Madurai Mission are looked into. It is seen that conversion progress had not increased substantially in the Fishery Coast, since after the mass conversions of the 1530s and 1540s. However, in Madurai Mission we will see the spectacular rise of conversions during the

later half of seventeenth century. In Nagapattinam we have also seen that the coming of the Dutch in the town stalled the progress. Similarly in Mylapore we have seen that when Golconda force destroyed the towns all the Christians fled to Madras and some other places. The restoration of the missionaries and Portuguese did not bring back the exiled Christians. When the progress of conversion was generally stopped in the coastal part of the of the seventeenth century we have seen the contrary in the hinterland in Madurai Mission.

In chapter three an explanation for the spectacular rise of conversions to Christianity is given. It is seen that the apparent similarities and understanding of the local Hindu cosmological structures or beliefs system with that of Christianity was one of the driving forces behind conversion of the local people. The notion of one Supreme deity, the concept of after-life, the apparent similarities of some of the outward manifestations such as saint or goddesses worship, the use of images, incense, rosaries, colorful procession ceremonies etc. worked in favors of the missionaries. Significantly, the use of force for conversions was ruled out.

In chapter four an attempt is made to identify the apparent correlations of conversions and crises such as wars, famines and epidemics. Our contention here is that although these calamities were not the cause of conversions it contributed towards the process of immensely. The spectacular rise of conversion in the Madurai Mission during the later half of 17th century was co-terminus with the constant wars and frequent famines and epidemics in the region. Especially significant was the period of 1670s and 80s where we could also have regular accounts of missionaries reports from the fields.

In the concluding assessment an attempt is made to ascertain that identity formation in the process of Christian missionary movements was to give its negative impact of tensions and conflicts in the local society. A contention is made that conversion in itself is a harmless movements of people towards their mental needs but when religion is colluded with politics conversion could turn into the central stage of conflicts and confrontation between the various religious communities. The present day concept of Christianity as something 'un-Indian' must have its humble beginning during this period when the state's active participation in religion had brought about tensions and conflicts into the local society. But when there are no westerners and the religion became a part and parcel of Indian culture and traditions would the injunction of Christianity being a 'Western' or 'Un-Indian' have any meaning at all?



The Socio-Political Context: The Relationship Between the Rulers, Missionaries and Converts

The Religious concern of the Estado

In the history of the expansion of the Portuguese around the Indian Ocean littoral the dissemination of religious beliefs is generally considered to be an important part of their expansionist movement. The accounts of contemporary Portuguese chroniclers as well as the environment in which these people set out had contributed to such a vision. These contemporary chronicles with an emphasis on the idealistic side of the endeavor to pursue the aims such as Faith and Empire have greatly influenced the writing of Portuguese history. It is true that the world in which the Europeans set out on the sea-routes that led to the discovery of 'others' was a feudal world in which the dominant meaning and framework was provided by their religion—Christianity. As a consequence religion was the dominant force and politics, kinship and economics found their place in relation to it. However, an examination of the Portuguese expansion in India infer assume that they had no pre-existent plan to conquer India in the religious sphere just as they did not have a plan to conquer it militarily.¹

The progressively expansionist policy of the Portuguese had begun with the plan to conquer Morocco during the later decades of the thirteenth century. The strategic hunt for Prester John progressively gave way to a mercantile enterprise, the conquest of North Africa and their later participation in Indian Ocean trade.² In the process of this development the majority of the Portuguese ruling classes now opted for commerce as a form of expansion, which was safer and much cheaper than actual warfare. On the other hand there was another group, represented by the king, who favored a crusade-like enterprise in the Near East. The idea of extending the commercial network in Indian Ocean was supported by the Genoese and Florentine merchant communities settled in Portugal who earnestly desired to compete

¹ For a clearer treatment see Luis Fillipe Thomaz, 'Factions, Interests and Messianism: The Politics of Portuguese expansion in the East, 1500-1521', *Indian Economic and Social History Review* (IESHR), 28, 1(1991), pp. 97-109.

² *Ibid.*, pp.98-99.

with Venice in the spice trade. In a tacit agreement with the opposing groups in the court Dom Manuel eventually dispatched Vasco da Gama to the Indies in 1497 who landed at Calicut in 21 May 1498. It is thus seen that the first motive behind da Gama's voyage was apparently to defuse an internal crisis in Portugal and not only an attempt to gain the riches of the Indian spice trade.³

The motives behind the voyage of da Gama has usually attributed to the famous sentence of the Portuguese messenger at Calicut: "We came in search of Christians and Spices".⁴ Spices, here is usually identified as a metaphorical term for the entire nexus of political and economic linkages, ties and alliances which were made with merchants and local rulers. But undoubtedly Dom Manuel had not always cherished a dream of military conquest because India was believed to be a Christian nation then. While the interest of the Italian merchants was to control the spice trade, for the king it was more than that. Besides securing liquidity from the control of spice trade, the king was also on the look out for the potential Christian allies in India for his larger project of conquering the Near East. A list of the military forces that could be raised up by each Christian kingdom in India that exists in the epilogue to the 'Diary' of the da Gama voyage give credence to the existence of such project.⁵ In fact none of the military conquests in India during the first half of sixteenth century were truly royal initiatives. The conquest of Goa, Hormuz and Malacca were carried out under the orders of Afonso de Albuquerque. Albuquerque while on Asian soil realized that in order to control the Muslim Near East and the Indian Ocean trade effectively a well-grounded position in India was necessary. This unilateral action of the governor in India in fact led to his dismissal. The 'trade lobby' at the court finally gained control and even D.Manuel had to abandon his crusading plan.⁶ The idea of the very existence of the Estado da India came up for serious discussion in Portugal twice during the 16th century in 1542 and again in 1570.⁷

The 'search for Christians' is also often linked to Portuguese desire for the evangelization of India. However this appeal for Christianization was not the prime motive in the beginning. As stated earlier, India was believed in Portugal, to be peopled mainly by Christians. It was because of this pre-set notion that da Gama and his entourage mistakenly

³ Ibid., p.97.

⁴ A.M. Mundadan, *History of Christianity in India*, vol. I (1989), p.247, where he cites from the *Diario da Viagen de Vasco da Gama*.

⁵ Thomaz, *Factions*, pp.100-101.

⁶ Ibid., p.104.

⁷ Ibid., p.98.

took the Hindus they met at Calicut as 'Christians' and Hindu temples as 'Churches'. The author of the 'Diary' described the city of Calicut and its people as:

This town of Calicut is of Christians...they wore on the *frontanel* tufts (*kudimi*), as a distinguishing mark of Christians...They took us to a big church, in which were the following image, which they said our Lady. And in front of the principal door of the church, along the walls, were seven tombstones. Here the captain-general and all of us, who were with him, offered our prayers. And we did not enter this chapel, because their custom is not to allow any one to enter in it except a certain set of people who served in the churches, whose they called *quafees*. The *quafees* wear some threads, drawing over the same over their left shoulders and under their right arms just as the deacon wear the stole. This minister offered us holy water. They gave us also a kind of clay, which the Christians of the land are accustomed to smear on their necks, and on the superior part of their arms... There were many, many other saints along the walls of the churches, and their painting in diverse manners, the teeth being very long and each saint having four or five arms. And below this church there stood another, equally big; so also many other churches along the way were shown to us...we visit one of them in which also there were things similar to those described above.⁸

This mistaken impression in its entirety was informed to the D.Manuel, the king of Portugal. He was also informed that out of thirty-eight kings in India a 'greater number' were Christians but 'in the same manner as the Christians of Calicut' who were regarded as 'heretics'.⁹ In Portugal, the King soon expressed his desire to bring them back to the Catholic faith. This can be seen from his instruction to Cabral and his letter to the king of Calicut.¹⁰ D.Manuel had hoped that this would engender the king of Calicut to appreciate the friendship of the Portuguese Christians and their king and being convinced of the Christian duty of fighting Islam, would drive away the Muslims from his port and enter into good relation with the Portuguese.¹¹ It is thus seen that King Manuel was desirous of reforming the 'heretic' Christians and did not actually speak of the need for converting the Malabari population. The main ambition from him was to unite the Western and Eastern Christendom in order to accomplish the larger project of conquering the Near East.

Soon however these misconceptions were to be shattered. Cabral informed the king that da Gama's Christians were actually Hindus.¹² It was however to take almost four decades before the Portuguese king could play an active role in religious matters, which will

⁸ Mundadan, *History*, pp.248-249, where he cited *Diario*, I, pp.66-68,

⁹ The king of Portugal, in his letter to Cardinal Protector, informed that although Indian kings are mainly Christians they are 'heretics' and took to task their reform. See Mundadan, *History*, p.251.

¹⁰ W.B. Greenlee, *The Voyage of Pedro Alveres Cabral to Brazil and India*, London, 1939. pp.169-190, Fragment of Instructions to Cabral and Letter sent by king Manuel to the Zamorin of Calicut.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 169-180.

¹² *Ibid.*, pp.45, 79 &85.

be discussed in the succeeding pages. This is not to say that the Portuguese abstained from religious affairs. The king was now informed more realistically of the conditions in India. Cabral informed him of the presence of the Thomas Christians and the Tomb of Apostle Thomas in India.¹³ Elaborate investigations to the Apostle's tomb were taken in 1523 and again in 1533.¹⁴ Reformation work among the Thomas Christian was begun by 1516/1517.¹⁵ In Goa, missionary work was begun in 1517 when a group of Franciscans started to settle there. Although the state seems to have taken some interest in converting local people, they could not compromise with their profit-making enterprises. This is the reason why, until 1540, Albuquerque and his successors had to cautiously follow the policy of religious freedom in the Goa Island.¹⁶ Thus though the religious interest of the state was intertwined with politics and economics, the latter prevailed whenever there was a clash between the two. This is borne by the fact that Muslim merchants were called back to the Goa Island when trade declined following their expulsion.

The turning point in the religious policy of the Portuguese King in India took place during the 1530's. It can be attributed to the reports of the tomb of St. Thomas and the progress of conversion in the eastern coast. The Papal bull *Aequem Reputamus* of pope Paul III erected the diocese of Goa in 1534. This bull finally recognized the Portuguese king as the real guarantor of the ecclesiastical affairs in India called *Padroado Real*.¹⁷ Thus state involvement in religious matter was now openly endorsed. This brought many changes in the religious attitude of the Portuguese State in the Indian subcontinent. The first episode that seems to have moved the Portuguese king John III was the mass conversion of the Paravas in

¹³ Ibid., p.49.

¹⁴ King Manuel is said to have ordered all Portuguese going to India to inquire on St. Thomas Christians as well as the Apostle tomb. This have led to several fact-finding mission say in 1507,1508, 1523 and finally in 1533. Beside, visitors and travelers also informed the king occasionally. By 1523, by order of king John III excavation was undertaken under the leadership of captain of Coromandel Coast one Manuel de Frias.

¹⁵ Mundadan, History, pp.283-291.

¹⁶ Until 1540, when there was mass destruction of temples in the Goa island the Estado had followed the policy of religious toleration

¹⁷ *Padroado real* includes the right of presenting to the Pope a suitable candidate for the bishopric and right to present to the bishop for the four dignities, canonicates and benefices. In turn the king is bound to provide for the necessities of the dioceses:” payment for ecclesiastical officials, building and repairing of churches, chapels and monasteries and providing them necessary articles for divine worship. See Mundadan, *History*, pp.241-242.

the Fishery Coast between 1535 and 1537.¹⁸ This conversion was eventually a means to express Parava allegiance to the Portuguese as they had offered protection in their fight against the Muslims. As a consequence of this mass conversion the king was reported to have specifically requested the Pope to provide missionaries for twenty thousand Paravas who had been baptized during this period, as they had practically received no religious instruction.¹⁹ The State's concern for conversion finally was fulfilled with the arrival of the Society of Jesus in India in 1542. Francis Xavier, the first Jesuit to come to India, was followed by other Jesuit missionaries in the succeeding period. This marked a new phase in the evangelization process as well as the phase of State's active participation in religious matter. The religious zeal of John III can be best seen in his letter written in 1546 to Dom John de Castro, the viceroy of India:

idolatry...shall for the future not be tolerated in my dominions...we command you once for all to have demolish'd, burnt and rooted out; and that all imaginable care be taken to prevent the importation of idols...And, considering that the Pagans may be brought over to our Religion, not only by the hope of eternal Salvation, but also by Temporal Interest and Preferments, you shall for the future not bestow any offices, or any other places in the custom-house (as has been practis'd hitherto) upon the Heathens, but only upon the Christians. We understand also that you commonly press the Indians for our Sea-service; in which case we would have you shew as much favour as you can to the Christians...the said king (king of Cochin) bereaves such of his subjects as embrace Christianity, of all their means, you shall earnestly intercede with him of their behalf, and we will also write to him for that purpose...that Pearl-Fishery might be permitted only to the Christians, with the exclusion of the Mahometans and Pagans; and as many among the Paruas, who have embraced Christianity, met with very ill treatment from their pagan friends and relations, and are despoil'd of all; these you shall assist out of our revenues,...The furious attempts of the Tyrants of Ceylon against such of his subjects embrace Christianity, oblige us to command you, to take a slow and secure, but a severe Revenge of him, to let the world see, that we are ready to give all imaginable Protection to those poor Creatures, who have

¹⁸ Georg Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier: His Life, His Time*, Vol. II. Rome (1977), pp.256-265. See also Schurhammer, 'Letters of D.Joao da Cruz,' *Kerala Society Papers*, I, pp.304-307, reproduced in Schurhammer, *Bibliotheca Instituti Historici*, S.I, XXIII, Gesanmelte, IV, Anharge, Rome, 1965, pp.57-59. Conversion of the Paravas in the Fishery Coast was not the result of state interest on religious matter but it was more on economic or commercial concern for the control of Pearl Fishing. When the Portuguese captain could visit the place every year during the Pearl fishing no religious priest were posted to look after the Parava converts until Xavier came to the area. For detail see Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*; Joseph Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol.II.

¹⁹ M.J.Costelloe,S.J., (Trans.), *The Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier*, Anand (1993), p.xv. Phillip Baldaeus has also inform us that the king ordered his ambassador Peter Mascarenhas to request Ignitus Loyala, the head of Society of Jesus for six missionaries for the East-Indies; two were eventually granted. See P.Baldaeus, *A Description of the East India Coasts of Malabar and Coromandel and also the Isle of Ceylon with their adjacent Kingdoms and Provinces*, New Delhi (2000), p.645.

renounced their Pagan and diabolical Idolatries...It is our will, that a peculiar regard shall be had to this our Letter and the contents thereof.²⁰

State participation, as indicated above, is now clearly perceptible from the point of the royal orders. But it would be of our interest in the context of India how State policy and interests on the religious matters were actually located. In the following section an attempt is made to determine how the Society of Jesus contributed in directing state patronage into an active evangelism. The Jesuit role in local political processes and its missionary methods in the Coromandel region will be dealt with.

Politics in Conversions: Missionaries as Political Agents

One of the major preoccupations of the Jesuit missionaries in the Coromandel region was in preserving the sympathy of the local ruler, sometimes even hoping to convert them. This was mainly because the presence of the Estado da India or the official presence in the region was inconsistent and sometimes negligible. However, the 'shadow empire' of Goa, as it has come to be called, was the favorite place of refuge for the Portuguese privateers, mostly *casados* and renegades.²¹ For the missionaries it was the pasture ground for evangelizing. But the expanding influence of the Jesuits in the region coincided with the larger process of political as well as social formation. The 16th and 17th centuries in the Coromandel were marked by extreme political fluidity and a certain social crisis resulting from it. This was due to the establishment of quasi-independent rulers in the nayakdoms of Madurai, Thanjavur and Gingee during the 17th century following the decline of the Vijayanagar kingdom. In the later half of the 17th century the region also witnessed the incursions of Bijapur, Golconda, the Marathas and later the Mughal armies from the mainland, and from the sea the arrival of the English, Danes, Dutch and the French. The interest shown in the region by various political and commercial powers rendered widespread political instability. Conflicts and compromises in the light of the new developments became the hallmark of the period under survey. The Jesuits who resided along the littorals of the Coromandel in the process became an indispensable part of the political process as intermediaries between the rulers—local as well as the Estado—and the local population. In the following pages an attempt is made to

²⁰ Baldaeus, *A Description*, pp.646-647.

²¹ George Winius, "The 'Shadow Empire' of Goa in the Bay of Bengal", *Itinerario*, 7 (1983) 2, pp.83-101.

identify the role of the Jesuits as political men in the process of political and social relations in the region.

Xavier's Role in the Politics of 16th C. Coromandel

Francis Xavier, the model of Jesuit rectitude, was one amongst the several religious involved deeply in the politics of the region. Late in 1544, when the war between the local rulers Rama Varma (Cera king of Quilon) backed by his brother Martanda Varma (king of Travancore), and Vettum Perumal (Pandya king of Kayattar) backed by the *pulas*,²² in the kingdom of Rama Varma was imminent, Xavier was busy with his missionary work on the Fishery Coast. Both the parties turned to Xavier in order to obtain the assistance of the Portuguese governor in their conflict with one another. For Xavier it turned out to be necessary to mediate, as it could secure for him and his Christians the favor of the local rulers, a necessary precondition for evangelization. He thus accepted the responsibility gladly. At the beginning of the negotiations he sent couriers to the governor Martin Affonso, informing him all the matters and offers made to him by the *pulas*, the allies of Pandya king.

While anticipating their response, the agents of the Cera kings who were on their way to meet him also requested Xavier to undertake political negotiations for them. Xavier went to Levadhi, north of Manappad, in order to wait for the messenger of the 'Great King', Rama Varma because the negotiations had to be conducted in secret as the war became imminent. The outcome of this negotiation was that Xavier had to go to Tuticorin in order to transfer the Paravas of Tuticorin and Palakayal into the territory of Rama Varma as the latter had promised safety to his Christians.²³

In the meantime, Rama Varma had asked his overlord, the king of Vijayanagar for help against Vettum Perumal, who had intruded in his territory. The pillaging Vijayanagar armies (the Badagas or northerner), then caused great hardship to the Christians of Cape Comorin and threatened other neighboring villages in and around Punnaikayal. Angry, as one would be, Xavier immediately organized a band of Paravas to deliver necessary help to the fleeing Christians in the islands off Cape Comorin. But twenty *tonis*, filled with provisions, were driven back to Manappad by the forceful southwest wind. Being helpless he wrote to the 'Great king' in which he told that the Badagas should be withdrawn from the coastal region:

²² *Pulas* are the barons of the Pandya kings.

²³ *Ibid.*, p.437.

I sent a man there to this *canaquar*²⁴, who is a favourite of this king Iniquitriberim (Unnikke Tiruvadi)²⁵ with a letter for the king. Since he is the friend of the lord governor, he should not left the Badagas afflict us, for the governor would be very angry about the wrong that would be done to the Christians.²⁶

In the context of the ongoing negotiations the king honored the letter of Xavier. The Badagas, in effect withdrew from the region.

Knowing that Xavier had interceded in favor of his rival, Vettum Perumal attacked the Christians who remained in Tuticorin. The Christians including the Portuguese captain had fled to the barren islands off Tuticorin.²⁷ While Xavier was busying himself for the relief measures he received an *olla*²⁸ from king Rama Varma through three of his servants. The king promised that he would protect and support Xavier's mission if he could obtain the governor's assistance. He also invited Xavier for negotiations. This Xavier considered extremely providential and he prepared to visit the king:

I shall go on to see Iniquitriberin in order to reach an agreement with him on how they (tha Christians) may be safe in his land.²⁹

As he was preparing to see the king who was somewhere in the southern Tennivelly region, Xavier was informed that a rebellion had broke out against Rama Varma in and around Periya Talai and Christians of the areas who fled from Cape Comorin were threatened. But he was also informed that the prince Rama Varma has also come to the place, probably to subdue the rebellion.³⁰ Xavier immediately sent Fr. Francisco Coelho to meet the prince in order to insist him to control the rebellion and protect the Christians from the harshness of *adhigaris*³¹ who had prevented the supply of provisions to the coast from the countryside. He wrote:

I deemed it necessary to order him (Coelho) to make this visit so that, this land about half of which was in rebellion, might be at peace... I would in some way like to leave this coast in peace before setting out for where Iniquitriberim.³²

The prince conceded to the pleas of Coelho so that Xavier could inform Mansilhas:

²⁴ *Kannakar* is a district judge, tax collector or supervisor of a Territory.

²⁵ Iniquitriberim= Unnikke Tiruvadi=Rama Varma king of Quilon.

²⁶ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.88, doc.33.2: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 3 August 1544. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, p.444.

²⁷ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.94, doc.34, 37&38. Xavier Letters to Mansilhas, 1544. Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, pp.449-450.

²⁸ *Olla*: palm-leaf letter.

²⁹ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.96, doc.39.4: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 1544.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.95, doc.39.2: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 1544.

³¹ *Adhigaris (adigar)*: a title given to the head of a village in southern India. It also indicates other authorities as governor of the district or tax collectors.

³² *Ibid.*, p.97, doc.40: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 10 September, 1544.

The prince ... is such a great friend of ours that as soon as he heard of the evils which the *adhigaris* were doing to the Christians there, he sent one of his servant with *olla* ordering them to let all the provisions pass unhindered from the mainland and to give him and me the names of the *adhigaris* so that I could truthfully say what is happening here if I go to see the king.³³

Not only that the prince also made four men of Manappad *pattangatins*³⁴ without asking any money from them, as was customary under the *pulas*.³⁵ Similarly he also made three others *pattangatins* in other villages.

Again, three servants of the king had complained to him that a servant of the Prince had been seized by the Portuguese in Kayalpatanam.³⁶ Xavier directed Mansilhas to inform the captain how much he was distressed by the news and insisted that he free the captive at once.

I assured you that I have been so grieved by this that I cannot expressed it... if it is true, I'm resolved not to go to where Iniquitiberim is staying.³⁷

Xavier was afraid that the prince would do some harm to the Christians in revenge and more so he feared that the negotiation underway with the king would be hampered. This would mean an immense loss for him because he believed that the king would thereafter forbid him to remain and preach in his kingdom. Thus Xavier was diplomatically very careful in dealing with the king on the one hand and insisted that the Portuguese favor the king on the other.

As a part of this diplomatic move Xavier set out to Tuticorin probably to settle the problem and make all necessary arrangement for the negotiation with the king. It is not clear what was the character of the negotiations Xavier had kept in mind. But as a religious man dressed in political garb the religious concerns appeared to have been greatest in his mind. Before leaving, Xavier informed Mansilhas as follows:

As soon as I reach Iniquitiberim, I shall try to obtained *ollas* from him; and I shall sent them immediately to you so that all the *adhigaris* of the villages permit the passage of provision and treat the Christians well.³⁸

The safety of the Christians in the kingdom of the king seems to have been the biggest agenda for Xavier. Finally Xavier arrived at his destination.

In the meantime, the people in Goa had wanted to know what Xavier had written to the governor during the early part of the negotiation especially about the offer of the *pulas*.

³³ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.100,doc.42.1: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas,12 September,1544.

³⁴ *Pattangatins*: overseer of a Parava village on the fishery coast.

³⁵ During the *pulas* a payment was required for such an appointment. See Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.101,doc.42.3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.98,doc.41.1: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas,1544.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.99, doc.41.2-4: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas,1544.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.102, doc.43: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas,20 September,1544.



According to it the mother of the imprisoned Pandhya prince had promised to give treasures worth three million gold coins if the governor came to her aid.³⁹ In his answer to Xavier, Martim Alfonso had asked him for accurate information about the sincerity of the promise and if true he was willing to undertake the matter.⁴⁰ After the southeast monsoon had passed Xavier had sent further news to the governor informing him that the king's mother had promised to immediately handover 2000 *pardaos* if the governor was willing to help.⁴¹ The governor now wrote to Aleixo de Sousa, the *vedor da fazenda* in Cochin, to send reliable people to Xavier and make sure about the matter.⁴² The *vedor* then sent a man to the Fishery Coast. Messages traveled backed and forth, but nothing could be settled. During Xavier's absence Aleixo de Sousa himself went to the Fishery Coast to negotiate with the *Pulas*. As the negotiation with the *Pulas* became fruitless, Aleixo de Sousa decided to favor king Rama Varma and his brother in the name of the governor.⁴³ The message was dispatched to Xavier who later delivered it to the King at Tranvancore capital where the two brothers were staying.⁴⁴

Although the terms of the agreement are not known it can be plausibly inferred from the outcome of the event that the king in lieu of assistance that was given him would protect and support Christianity in his domain. This could come about because a religious man had single handedly manoeuvred the entire process of negotiations. The two princes in fact honored Xavier by giving him the permission to baptize the Mukkuva fishermen and also allowing anyone who wished to become Christians in their kingdoms.⁴⁵ Rama Varma had also given Xavier 2000 *fanams* for the erection of churches in his territory.⁴⁶ Thus Xavier as a political negotiator in between the two political hosts had won for himself and his Christians a lion's share of the privileges.

The whole process of the negotiation had clearly depicted the enduring role of missionaries as political men in the region. It also represents missionaries as an extension of the state. One wonders why the religious question became an outstanding issue in every political negotiation held between the Portuguese and the local rulers? This is explained by

³⁹ Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, p.460. See also Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.102, note.2.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.460.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.460.

⁴² Ibid., p.460.

⁴³ Ibid., p.462.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.461. See also Costelloe, *The Letters*, pp.102-103, doc.44.1: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 10 November 1544.

⁴⁵ Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, p.462. See also Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.104-105, doc.45.1: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 18 December 1544; &p.116.

⁴⁶ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.125, doc.50.5: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 7 April 1545.

the fact that it was the religious men who acted as the political agents of the Estado da India and it was they who had to tackle all the processes of the agreement. This in turn was because the political or military presence of the Estado was not consistent or in most cases negligible. Considering that it was the religious who predominated in the region the concern for religion was held most high. Moreover the fact that the Christians of the region were considered as an 'arms-reach prey' for the wrong done by the Portuguese also suggest that religion become the pivotal issue in all political relations. As such the local Christians became the entrapped community who were exposed to political hostility as well as to political hospitality between the two political hosts. It is not that the Estado had never thought of permanent establishment in the region but unlike the princelings in the western coast every step to make permanent settlement was prevailed upon by the powerful local rulers. Power adjustment between the two gradually gave way to a situation where both implicitly agreed on the peaceful running of trade and religious freedom in their dominions, which was to be maintained albeit tacitly by both. It is seen that whenever either failed to maintain this implicit agreement the local rulers used to fall upon the Christians whereas the Portuguese reacted by closing trade or bombarding on the Hindu temples in order to discipline them. As such the presence of the Christian community in the region sometimes was considered more of a curse than a blessing for the Portuguese and to the local Christians themselves. But for the local rulers the presence of the Christian community always became a redeemer so that the wrong or good of the Portuguese could be quickly rectified or remunerated. For the missionaries, they were a part of this community who had to suffer or enjoyed the fate of Christians in the region.

The zeal for more Christians sometimes made Xavier a restless political negotiator. While he was busy baptizing the Mukkuva fishermen he learned that the king of Jaffna had slain 600 Christians in the island of Mannar and his brother, the legitimate heir, had fled to the Fishery Coast and promised that he would convert the people of Jaffna to Christianity if restored to his throne.⁴⁷ Even before completing his labor, leaving the people of Manakkudi village unbaptised, he immediately sailed to Cochin where the *vedor* had directed him to discuss the matter with the governor. Xavier was too concerned that he set off on the look out for the governor who was said to be at Cambay in order to discuss the matter of punishing the

⁴⁷ Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, P.471-472.

king of Jaffnapatnam.⁴⁸ Xavier met the governor at Goa and asked him to send an expedition against the usurper of Jaffna and his efforts were not without results as he wrote:

As soon as I spoke to him he ordered a large fleet to be equipped so that it might capture and destroy that king.⁴⁹

However, the expedition against Jaffna could not be as prompt as he wished as it was postponed and could not come on time. Xavier's earnestness to punish the king of Jaffna made him totally disappointed. The failure of his efforts grieved him so much that he finally decided to retire to San Thome (Mylapore) in spite of his slated plan to complete the remaining labors of baptizing the Manakkudi villagers. It thus appeared that for the religious men like Xavier, it was a sin not to punish the sinners. In one of his instructions to Mansilhas, Xavier expressly states that:

It is very great sin not to punish those who deserve it.⁵⁰

The Xavierian model as followed by others

By the second half of 16th century, long after Xavier's death, the missionaries' participation in the political affairs and conflicts had become more rampant. In 1589 a serious quarrel broke out between the Shanars and the Paravas. The cause of the quarrel was that the Shanars wanted for their caste certain signs of respect from the Paravas but the latter refused. The Shanars had in response burnt a dozen churches and compelled some of the Paravas to flee to Manappad.⁵¹ In return, the Paravas destroyed the temple of the Shanars. Fr. Rodrigo Pimental wrote that:

Being in the fishery coast at a time when there was a war between non-Christians vs Christians have taken place, the Christians having no help except from the Fathers. I have been doing my best according to the received instructions helping with great exhaustion the Christians cause.⁵²

With the Paravas already helpless, the Jesuits further instigated the Nayak of Madurai to intervene in order to bring peace. The latter helped the Christians to repair the damage and granted them aid to rebuild the church. This had gained the fathers much respect from the local population as well as recognition of their role by the Nayak paving the way for the

⁴⁸ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.105, doc.45.1: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 18 December 1544. See also Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, p.473.

⁴⁹ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.118, doc.48.3: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 27 January 1545. See also Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, p.483.

⁵⁰ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.105, doc.45.1: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 7 April 1545.

⁵¹ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p...

⁵² Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, (18 vols.) Vol. XVI. Letter no. 47. Translation cited from Mahesh Gopalan (unpublished Dissertation), *Portuguese Enterprise and the Society of Jesus in the Coromandel*, p.108.

Society of Jesus to make inroads into the interior capital of the Nayak—Madurai.⁵³ However, mention must be made here that the Jesuits by now became one of the most respected figures in the locality. It is said that when Fr. Henriques died in 6 Feb. 1600 the Muslims of Kayalpatnam fasted for a day and the Hindu of the nearby places declared a two days fast in his honor and closed all the shops as a sign of respect.⁵⁴ The expansion of their religious as well as their political and social spheres had made the Society of Jesus one of the most successful religious organizations in the region.

The Jesuits had even attempted to convert the local rulers in order to expand their religious as well as political domain. It is said that Fr. Gonsalo Fernandez, who was stationed at Madurai, attempted to convert the Nayak of Madurai, Muthu Veerappa Nayak (1606-1633). Fernandez was hoping to convert the whole kingdom to the Catholic faith after converting the king. However the Brahmins of the Nayak's court prevailed upon his repeated attempts. This event is not a single episode in the history of the Catholic mission. The Jesuits had stationed some of their missionaries in the court of the local Indian kings such as the Mughals, Vijayanagar, Travancore, etc. However, all the attempts failed because it was believed that to become Christian would mean a submission to the Portuguese king. Christians were known in India as '*Paranghis*', meaning Europeans or Portuguese, used in a pejorative sense. It was this horror mindset that the people had for the Christians and their priests, which came on the way to conversion. It was because of this very notion that Nobili had initiated a reformation in the missionary method in Madurai Mission. The Christian Brahmin Sannyasis were meant to convert the higher caste Hindus including the local rulers. It was because of their failure to convert the local rulers as well as the failure by the Portuguese king to continuously protect the local Christians that necessitated the Jesuits to become as the political men of the region. They now wished to become the rulers or the little king of the Christians in the region. Their continuous assertion for power, in the process gave the missionaries a sort of despotic figure.

In the Coromandel the Jesuits asserted themselves to be the real leader of the Christian community. The Jesuits not only looked after the spiritual needs of the group but also of the temporal. Xavier had specifically requested Ignatius of Loyola (in Rome) to send missionaries who were:

⁵³ Ibid., p.106-109.

⁵⁴ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.177, where he cited Fernao Iguerreiro, *Relacao Annual*, I, p.32.

healthy young men and not old or infirm, so that they can endure the constant fatigues of baptizing, teaching, going from village to village to baptize the newborn infants and to defend the Christians from the insults and prosecution of the pagans.⁵⁵

The requirement of young men who are spiritually and physically healthy depicted the troubled situation of the region where the missionaries were required not only to teach and preach the gospel but also 'to defend the Christians from the insults and persecution of the pagans'. The fact that Jesuits keenly handled all the negotiated peace agreement between the local rulers as well as with the neighboring communities indicated the community leadership dualities in them. The *pattangattins* and other village notables became a docile entity under the missionaries. But this is not to suggest that the missionary had taken away all the power of old Parava notables. They were instead strengthened by the addition of power and privileges at their disposal given to them by the missionaries. They became not only political brokers but also the commercial, social and religious broker for the Portuguese officials as well as for the missionaries.

Valignano, the Jesuit visitor during 1579-80, credited the spectacular success of Xavier's missionary methods to his judicious mixture of threats and blandishments:

And now with the favour that he promised them at times adding some threats and fears of the harm that might come to them if the captain deprived them of their fishing and their seaborne trade.⁵⁶

Xavier had also instructed Francisco Mansilhas to be a good father of the local Christians:

I earnestly ask you to be with these people as a good father deals with his wicket sons.⁵⁷

The fact that Xavier could warn the *pattangatins* to implement his orders sincerely would mean that the latter were used as a policing agency. One example of such would suffice our argument. Xavier wrote to Mansilhas:

Tell the *pattangatins* if I learn here in the future that *urak* continues to be drunk in Punicle, they will pay me dearly... see to it that the *pattangatins* change their ways; for, if they do not, I shall send them under arrest to Cochin, and they will never again see Punicle.⁵⁸

In another instance Xavier wrote to Mansilhas that:

I am sending an olla from here to the Pattangatins of Punicle and Combuture in which I am ordering them to get ready at once with their tonis that they may go with you to fetch the Christians of the Tuticorin who are dying of hunger and thirst on those islands.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.114 doc.47.2: Xavier Letter to Ignatius, 27 January 1545.

⁵⁶ C.R.Boxer, *Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, p.76.

⁵⁷ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.75, doc.22.1.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.76, doc. 22.3&4: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 14 March, 1544.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p.93, doc.37.2: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 5 September, 1544.

It is seen that the missionaries disciplined the local notables by threats and punishments and imprisonments by the Portuguese authority. Whenever their orders were not followed the local leaders had to face punishments in this way. As such the missionaries became the undisputed leaders in the locality. On the other hand the local population were being controlled through these community leader who were but a mere puppet under them. The local people were also controlled through threats from the fearsome curse of the Divine or through diseases, epidemics and even a hell after death.⁶⁰

The undisputed leadership of the missionaries can also be seen in the way they organized the people for mass migration, a destructive decision for the local rulers who could see his income fall. Such situations were pronounced when every effort beginning from the defense of the local militia to the intervention of the Portuguese fleet was not paying dividends. Because of the continued troubles in the region Xavier was said to have even contemplated favorably to transplant all the Christian inhabitants of the Fishery coast to a utopian Christian kingdom of his governor friend, Martin de Affonso in the island of Mannar.⁶¹ This scheme was again taken up in 1560 when Constantine Braganca, the viceroy of Portuguese India, undertook the expedition against the king of Jaffna. Although Jaffna was not conquered it was decided to settle the Christians in the island of Maannar. The task of persuading them became easier because in August 1560 the Badagas led by Nayak Vishvanathan of Madurai had once again attacked Punnaikayal on the fishery coast. Nevertheless not all the Christians went there. In 1564 many returned to the fishery coast when the plague consumed many people.⁶² Few years before the close of 16th century, at the suggestion of the Jesuit Provincial, the Christian villages of Alantalai, Tamlapuri and Tiruchendur were transferred to Virapandyapatnam.⁶³ Again since 1597 the Christians of the twelve coastal villages between Cape Comorin and Manappad were grouped at the latter place because of the indifferent attitudes of the local chief, called Arya Perumal, the poligar of Vijayapati.⁶⁴

Jesuits agreed for power and asserted complete control over the subject sometime bringing them into conflict with others. In using their influence in the local society the Jesuits come into conflict first with the Portuguese civil authority. As noted earlier, when some

⁶⁰ Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, p.335-336.

⁶¹ Ibid., p.63, doc.19.4: Xavier Letter to Ignatius, 28 October 1542. See also Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, p.302.

⁶² Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, p.303, note 143.

⁶³ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.174.

⁶⁴ Ibid, p.174. where he cited L.Besse, *La Mission*, pp.400-401.

Christians refused to transfer and sided with the captain from Tuticorin, Xavier reprimanded them strongly for disobeying him and even called them as 'Christian renegade'. He was even contemplating to deprive them from the Pearl fishery:

for I am unwilling that such disobedient individuals, or, to put it more exactly, Christian renegades, should enjoy the fruit of our sea.⁶⁵

The details of the letter are crucial in showing how the Jesuits and the Portuguese authority were contesting in the race for true leadership. The fact was that some Christians going to the side of the captain had deprived Xavier of some Christian followers. This sort of embarrassment had cost him so much that any possible means had to be utilized in order to bring them to his side. Depriving them of the fruits of the pearl fishery seems to have been one of the most effective weapons the missionaries could use to discipline the local people. And this also shows that, not the captain, but the missionaries had the greater influence over the right to allow or disallow persons to fish in the sea. The contestation of such are the regular feature in the shadow empire of Goa in the Bay of Bengal. In Maanar the Jesuit Superior is at the same time the father of the Christians in the name of the king of Portugal, to protect their rights in the ecclesiastical court as well as before the civil tribunal which sat in the fortress of the island.⁶⁶ It is also seen that the Jesuits had the right to appoint and dismiss the local Jati Talaivan and other civil and religious posts available in the locality. It is thus seen that though the captains were actually stationed in the eastern coast of India the real power of the Portuguese Estado was given to the missionaries.

The increasing power of the Jesuits in the region had also drawn them into conflict with other religious orders. In the first decade of the 17th C. the Jesuits had transferred the Christians of the Fishery Coast to the 'King Island' or Hare Island as it came to be known later, in order to keep them away from the continuous troubles on the coast. The Bishop of Cochin, Andrew S. Maria, suspected this move as a strategy to withdraw Christians from his jurisdiction. Hence he ordered all the Christians to return. But the Jesuits contested the order and declared that their spiritual jurisdiction on the Fishery Coast directly came from the King of Portugal and therefore they did not depend on the Bishop of Cochin. In order to avenge this move the Bishop took recourse to arms and besieged the Island and the Christians had to be evacuated from the Island. The Jesuits seeing the power in the region waning had renounced the coast in 1609.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.103, doc.44: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 10 November 1544.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

⁶⁷ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, pp.175-177, where he cited L.Besse, *La Mission*, pp.410-418.

A critical examination of this event could lead us to assume that the battle was actually the contest for power and jurisdiction between the Jesuits and the Franciscans whose desire for greater influence in the region was a known fact. While the Jesuits thought that they were given undisputed right over the Pearl Fishery Coast the intervention of the Bishop was seen as an interference of other religious order. On the other hand Fishery Coast came within the diocese of Cochin. Taking advantage of this the Bishop, who was a Franciscan, spread his muscle to arrest the influence of the Jesuits. Again the Jati Talaivan and some local notables, who were under the tutelage of the Jesuits, had taken advantage of the events to shake off the Jesuits from the region. But this has led them to their dismissal when the Jesuits came back to the region in 1621. The Jesuits had appointed a new Jati Talaivan, a certain Henry da Cruz in order to reward him for his attachment to the Jesuits. But when the man got several of his enemies murdered, the local people accused the Jesuits for favoring him. The rector then renounced his action in public and threatened to remove him from his post. Seeing this da Cruz now sided with the vicar groups and began to clamor for the expulsion of the Jesuits. When da Cruz was murdered the Jesuits were accused of having instigated the murder. The party of Da Cruz thus expelled them from the region.⁶⁸ It is therefore seen in the contexts of the above discussion that the Jesuits never ending clamour for power had brought some sort of power crisis in the local society. The contest for more power in the region particularly during the latter half of 17th century and during the 18th century had actually begun in 16th century. This had brought much confusion in the region. The captain and other religious orders were gradually challenging the Jesuits, who had slowly wielded most of the power in their hand during the 16th century. Even the local notables began to participate in the race since the onset of 17th century.

The inconsistent presence of the Portuguese fleet and the incapability of the captain to look after the defense of all the Christians prompted both the missionaries and the local Christians to take steps for effective defense sometimes giving way to an offensive. This is not a new policy propped by the Jesuits. The safety of Christians had always become one of the main concerns for the missionaries. During his stay in the Fishery Coast Xavier had effectively introduced some pre-emptive measures in order to defend the Christians from any hostile attacks. The promotion of local militia group appears to be one such means, considered necessary by him. In the interest of defence and catechetical instruction Xavier always contemplated to group the dispersed villages during his stay in the region. The

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.177.

concern for the safety of Christians sometimes brought him into conflict with the state authority and the local groups. Late in 1544 when the war between Rama Varma and Vettum Perumal became imminent, Xavier insisted that the people of Tuticorin and its surrounding villages should move to the kingdom of the former. But the move was opposed by the Portuguese captain of Tuticorin, Cosme de Paiva, who instead wanted to seek good relations with Vettum Perumal from whom he obtained good income from the illicit horse trade.⁶⁹ By his inducement some Christians had also opposed the move. Such villages were defended by building defensive hedges and dykes.⁷⁰ But it is not clear whether the villagers were provided with Portuguese firearms. The fact that during their troubled times the Parava fishermen used to sleep near the Churches with weapons under their pillow indicates that they were equipped with some sort of weapons for self defense.⁷¹ It can also be inferred that the Parava Christians became enraged by the news of their fellow Christians being slaughtered in the island of Maannar by the king of Jaffna so that they were ready to avenge the said king even though help from the Portuguese was not forthcoming.⁷² This suggests however, that the Paravas were by no means the least to fight the king of Jaffna then. This is further given credence by the fact that when Fr. Paul do Vale was captured and deported by the Badaga soldiers at their fortress towards the end of 1551, the Parava militia had delivered him by a surprise attack one month after he was imprisoned.⁷³ Such a sense of community militancy was not new to the region but the fact that a community, considered belonging to the lower strata of the society, challenging or for that matter attacking the royal army camp seems to have been new. An attack on the fortress presumably could not take place without organized and trained men. This indicates, most plausibly, that the Parava militiamen were being nurtured since the coming of the Jesuit missionaries to the region.

The increasing militancy of the Parava community had become more offensive by the end of the century. The Parava, by virtue of their long interaction with the Portuguese had

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.103, doc.44: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 10 November 1544. and p.82, notes 2 & 11

⁷⁰ Aveling, *The first Jesuits*, London (1981), p.165; In Madurai Mission we also come across some Christian villages were encircled with mud walls as a measure for defense. For instance the annual letters of 1682 states that: 'The Christians prepared themselves to resist in a fortress made of earth which they had built...The *Kallars* in number ...gave the assault to that fortress or to be more accurate to those humble mud walls, defended by fifty or sixty Christian soldiers...for they met everywhere with a stout resistance... (they) withdrew'. Stephens, *Letters*, p.220.

⁷¹ Joseph Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, Bangalore (1982), p.163; where he cited Schurhammer, *Xaveriana* (1964), p. 231.

⁷² Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, p.472.

⁷³ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.231; where he cited Leon Besse, *La Mission du Madure*, pp381-32.

now become more militant in their interaction with their neighbors. Any insults to the community were now met with equal reaction. Even the small princelings were being rewarded with brutal action. Late in 1600 a catechist of Manappad and two other Christians were arrested at Vijayapati by the order of Arya Perumal, the poligar. They were sent back to Manappad after being whipped in public and maimed. The Paravas became enraged by the insult made to the community. In the dark of the night three hundred of them gathered and made a surprise move over the fort of Vijayapati and the offending poligar, his relatives and friends were all put to the sword.⁷⁴ The Jesuits who had been for long their godfathers had also brought some trouble to the community as well. Their influence and control over the community had suggested that any offensive or defensive move of the community was being taken only after consultation with by them. The Jesuits as political men on the one hand and as religious fanatics on the other had made them to be the most restless people in the region. Before concluding this section mention must be made that the Jesuits besides bringing many good changes in the region had also brought in trouble. It would be of worth noting that Church militancy and Jesuit arrogance had brought in much unrest in the local society. This issue will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this work in fuller detail

The ‘Rigor of Mercy’: Jesuit Missionary Methods

The Society of Jesus, founded under the papal bull *Regimini Militantis ecclesiae* of 27 September 1540, became the most successful Catholic Religious Order in India.⁷⁵ The remarkable development of the Portuguese missions from the 16th to the 17th centuries was mainly their work. The success of the Society can be attributed mainly to their convictions, to their organization, and the missionary methods they anticipated which varied according to place, time and circumstance and more particularly according to the character of the individual Jesuits. The Society, in its role as the spearhead of the Church militant made the struggle for souls as intensive and wide-ranging as was the competition for spices. Subsequently, it gave lasting results to the religious landscape of India.

To begin with, successive ecclesiastical Councils periodically celebrated at Goa from 1567 onwards laid down the main lines of missionary policy. This pioneer Council of 1567 was a particularly important one, as the post Tridentine church was then in the first flush of

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.176

⁷⁵ Costelloe, *Letters*, p.xiv.

its confident strength, and the decisions then taken were reaffirmed with slight modifications in the subsequent Councils. The deliberations were guided by three main considerations:

- a). All religions other than the orthodox Roman Catholic faith as defined at the Council of Trent were intrinsically wrong and harmful in themselves.
- b) The crown of Portugal had the inescapable duty of spreading the Roman Catholic faith, and the secular power of the state could be used to support the spiritual power of the church.
- c) Conversion must not be made by force, nor threats of force, 'for nobody comes to Christ by faith unless he is drawn by the Heavenly Father with voluntary love and prevenient grace'.⁷⁶

The injunction that conversion must not be made by 'force' or the 'threats of force' was to prove difficult in practice especially in the Portuguese controlled territory. Prompted mainly by local ecclesiastics, the Portuguese secular authorities in Goa prevented the practice of Hinduism or Islam for the express purpose of converting the local population to Christianity. These laws were supplemented by a number of other enactments to favor the converts to Christianity at the expense of their compatriots who declined to be converted. Consequently, the missionaries could make many converts in the Portuguese controlled-territory such as in Goa Island, Bassein, etc. However, the missionaries, in the region where the Estado had little inference of their laws and their presence inconsistent in time and space, could not effectively utilize the State power.

As noted, one of the principal difficulties the missionaries had to contend in the Coromandel region was the suspicion of the local rulers and other potentates. In their estimate, their subjects who had accepted Christianity tended to become more closely identified with the Portuguese colonialists than with the people of their own land. This could to some extent be attributed to the missionaries, who instead of seeking the loyalty of the local rulers, directly encouraged or used the Portuguese state power to deal with the local problems. Although laws could not really be effective the invoking of the name of the Estado and its provisions by the missionaries had a more or less similar effect. This should be understood in the light of a horror mindset created by the Portuguese colonialists on the people of India, especially those in the coastal areas. But the situation in the interior was different. Here the invoking of the Portuguese state forces could not make much of an impact. Therefore we can broadly frame two sets of missionary methods -one on the coastal strips and the other in the interior mainland.

⁷⁶ C.R.Boxer, *Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, London (1925), p.67.

In the coastal part of the Coromandel Catholic missionary movement became very successful in converting the inhabitants of the Fishery Coast in the 16th century. The mass movement of the Parava, Karaiya(Careas) and Mukkuva(Macaus) fishermen during the first half of 16th century are crucial in order to understand the methods used by the missionaries. In fact some historians considered the events that lead to mass baptism of these fishermen communities as a sort of 'tactical alliance'⁷⁷ or the result of a 'contract or negotiated agreement'⁷⁸ between the Portuguese and the Parava elders and notables. Their conversion to Christianity is strictly not conversion in the modern sense. The fact that vicar General, Miguel Vaz and the four clerics went to baptize the whole community of the Paravas during 1535 to 1537 appeared as an expedition similar to that of a military expedition where the soldiers go to prosecute the rebels.⁷⁹ Baptisms *en masse* without instructions of the principle tenets of the faith they are adopting bring to the community nothing more than the name.⁸⁰ The crudeness of the conversion was such that when Xavier, in 1542, asked them what they knew about Christianity: they said that they just knew they were Christians and nothing more, as they did not know the Portuguese language.⁸¹ Except for the captain visiting the coast once a year from Cochin during the time of Pearl fishing, no religious instructions were given to the community until Xavier came to the area. Christianity thus appeared to the Paravas as a prize or a trophy for the allegiance made to the Portuguese crown. Paravas Christianity could in the initial years be called 'trophy Christianity;' that brings them nothing except the name. This is the reason why Francis Xavier had to use all the available means in bringing them to terms with the Christian religious culture.

One of the principal difficulties Xavier had to contend upon coming in the Coromandel was the strangeness of the people he had never seen before. In his observation of the people of India, Xavier or for that matter most of the European missionaries, believed that India could be spiritually conquered only with the use of state force. The considerations that Indians are 'barbarous' and difficult to deal with specifically demanded the use of force. For instance, Xavier wrote to Ignatius in 1549 saying that:

⁷⁷ Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*, Cambridge University Press (CUP), New Delhi (1992), p.328.

⁷⁸ Parick A.Roche , *Fishermen of the Coromandel: A Social Study of the Paravas of the Coromandel*, New Delhi, Manohar (1984), p.44.

⁷⁹ Details of Portuguese conversions can be seen from the letters of J. da Cruz to king of Portugal. See Goerg Schurhammer, 'Letters of Joao Da Cruz' *Kerala Society Paper*, vol. I (1930), pp. 304-307, an extract in *Bibliotheca Instituti Historici, S.I, xxiii, Gesammelte Studia, IV, Rome (1965).*, pp.57-59. See also Schurhammer, *Fancis Xavier*, pp.362-363.

⁸⁰ Schurhammer, *Fancis Xavier*, p.295; Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.64, doc.19.2

⁸¹ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.64, Xavier's letter to his companions in Rome, 15 January 1544.

The native Indians in this part of the world are a race, in so far as I have seen, generally speaking, very barbarous.⁸²

In another letter Xavier wrote to the same he perceived that Indians:

are very barbarous and have no desire to know anything...pertaining to God or to their own salvation...very difficult it is to deal with...who neither know God nor are attentive to reason...(and) abandonment of this habit seems to be unreasonable to them.⁸³

The notion that Indians are 'very barbarous', 'difficult' to deal with and lacking 'reason' could only mean that they had to be subdued and civilized through force.

This is further given credence by his observation on the Indians attitudes towards the Catholic faith. According to Xavier Indians:

are not at all inclined towards our holy faith, but they abhor them and (are)mortally stricken when we speak to them and ask them to become Christians.⁸⁴

unrelenting towards the faith they tried to defuse meant that an alternative had to be thought about. For Xavier force became the necessary part of evangelization in the Coromandel. Coercive action was something Xavier would have liked to see in order to increase the number of Christians in the region. In his letter to Rodriguez he earnestly recommended that the former should asked the King of Portugal to direct the Governor of India in order to actively take part on religious matter in the region:

I know of only one way and route for the great increase of the service of god our Lord in these regions of India...that the king [should] send an instruction to the governor of India...[saying] that he does not rely so much upon any religious orders in India...as he does upon him for the increase of the faith of Jesus Christ in these regions of India. He therefore orders him to...look for religious in these regions, and he should be given all the power over our society...If the king give such order...these regions will in this way become Christian, but no other way.⁸⁵

He goes on to say 'I am anxious to see two things in India: the first, that governors should be subject to this law; and second, that there be preachers of our Society all the fortresses of India.'⁸⁶ Xavier's recommendation for the active presence of the Portuguese secular authority in the region is crucial in the study of the missionary methods in the region. This manifested his helplessness in dealing with the local population whom he was supposed to convert.

⁸² Ibid., p.216, doc.70.1, Xavier's letter to Ignatius, 12 January 1549.

⁸³ Ibid., p.224, doc.71.1, Xavier's letter to Ignatius, 14 January 1549.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p.218, doc.70.7, Xavier's letter to Ignatius, January 1549.

⁸⁵ Ibid., p.194, doc.63.5, Xavier's letter to Fr. S. Rodrigues, 20 January 1548.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.195, doc.63.6, Xavier's letter to Fr. S. Rodrigues, 20 January 1548. Xavier's visualized that if the Jesuits could control over the Portuguese population of the fortresses, who are the 'sources of scandals' many of the local people would convert to Christianity. He must have also felt that the Jesuits would make greater influence over the Portuguese secular officials.

Xavier realized that it was very difficult to form any Christian community among Indians and much more difficult to preserve them:

unless it was under the rule of the Portuguese or; in any region whither their power could be extended, as is the case with the sea coast, where the fleets of His Highness can cruise up and down, dealing out favours and punishments according to what the people deserve.⁸⁷

Xavier unfortunately did not find himself in any of the regions, which he distinctly favored. Reconciliating himself to the situation Xavier adopted a method that can be most accurately called persuasion-threats strategy. This can be clearly seen in his instruction to Mansilhas:

Always endure these people with as much patience as you can; when they are up to no good, make use of the work of mercy which says: "Punish one who needs to be punished".⁸⁸

The punishments Xavier visualized ranged from fines, banishments from the villages, depriving them of the church attendance and more importantly punishments and imprisonments by the Portuguese state authorities. To implement such punishments he used the village *pattangatins* and other village notables. He also used effectively the *meirinho* (a warden or justice of peace), created for such purposes i.e., to check the wrongs of the people including the *pattangatins*. In one of his letters Xavier had written to Mansilhas that:

I am sending you a *meirinho* to serve until I come there. I give him one *fanao* for each woman who drinks urak; and, further, she is to be confined for three days. Have this proclaimed to all in the village, and tell the *patangatins* that, if I learn here in future that urak continue be drank in Punicle, they will pay me dearly for it...Until I come there, see to it that the *patangatins* change their ways; for, if they do not, I shall send them under arrest to Cochin, and they will never again see Punicle, since they are the source of all the evils committed there.⁸⁹

In another letter to the same Xavier also wrote that:

When anyone make *pagoda*,⁹⁰ whether it be man or woman, you should, as a punishment, banish him, with the approval of Father Antonio, from the village in which he is living to another.⁹¹

Besides there were other forms of threats that one could employ—the threat of divine judgement and other form of evil:

In a village where you happen to be...you should condemn the vices that are found among the people with clear examples and comparisons...telling them that if they do not amend their ways, God will

⁸⁷ Boxer, *Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, P.76, where he quoted the reports of Fr. Valignano, the Jesuit visitor of 1579-80.

⁸⁸ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.83, doc. 28.3. Xavier's letter to Mansilhas, 14 May 1544.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.76, doc.22. 2&3, . Xavier's letter to Mansilhas, 14 March 1544.

⁹⁰ *pagoda* is a general term used by the missionaries to meant idols or temples of the Hindus.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.198, doc.64.18, Xavier's letter to Mansilhas, February 1548.

punish them in this life with sickness, and shorten their days through the tyrannies of the king's *adhigaris*; and that after their death they will go to hell.⁹²

It is noted that whenever persuasion did not help, the missionaries resorted to inflict punishment of various sorts to the offenders.

Out of those punishments those rendered by the Portuguese secular authorities seems to have been most feared. These included punishment by the captain, imprisonment at Cochin for life and depriving the offenders the fruits of pearl fishery. It should be remembered that this rarely took place in Coromandel save a few civil offences. But by invoking such threats the missionaries actually got the desired result from the local population as if the secular arm was actually used. This should be understood with the fearsome image the Portuguese had created for themselves in the mind of Indians especially in the coastal region.

In a few cases force was actually deployed in order to discipline the local Christians. When some residents of Tuticorin refused to shift their home in the kingdom of the Great King, Xavier imposed a punishment by depriving them of the pearl fishery:

Tell Nicolau Barbosa for me that he should not invite to the Chank Fishery those who are living in the homes of the people who were expelled from them in Tuticorin; for I am unwilling that such disobedient individuals, or, to put it more exactly, Christian renegades, should enjoy the fruit of our sea.⁹³

Such orders were actually carried out amongst Paravas in the Fishery Coast.

It is thus seen that the imposition of different kinds of punishment and also the invoking of state forces, if it did not actually force people to become good Christians at the point of sword, made it very difficult for them to be anything but good Christians. The initial instances of baptism proceeded with uninstructed or partially instructed baptism of the whole community. But within a short time they were to undergo a rigorous form of teaching and disciplining in order to attain true Christian culture. Valignano, the Jesuit visitor of 1579-80, had rightly credited the spectacular success of Xavier's missionary methods on the Fishery Coast largely to his judicious mixture of threats and blandishments:

and now with the favours that he promised them, and at times adding some threats and fears of the harm that might come to them if the captain deprived them of their fishing and seaborne trade, and

⁹² Ibid., p.196, doc.64.4, Xavier's letter to Mansilhas, February 1548.

⁹³ Ibid., p.103, doc.44.2, . Xavier's letter to Mansilhas, 10 November 1544.

finally *compellando eos intrare ad nuptias* as the Lord says, he influenced a great multitude of them to become Christians.⁹⁴

As such in the coastal area where the Portuguese fleets could cruise and cause harm to anyone, the missionaries would invoke their name in order to discipline the local Christians. These threats and persuasive methods, first employed by Xavier, underwent little modification throughout the period under survey. However the rigorous treatment meted to the local Christians must have had serious implication on their neighbors. We have seen that in spite of their long stay in the Fishery coast the Jesuit missionaries attracted very few inhabitants apart from those that had converted as a community. These groups were mostly the low caste fishermen of the coast who occupied the coastal strips where the missionaries could effectively use the Portuguese gunboat diplomacy. Another groups that had converted to Christianity on the coast were those driven from the hinterland due to wars or famine.

In order to disseminate Christianity in its true form, missionaries in the Fishery coast used the following methods of persuasion: a) to teach the local people the doctrine of Christianity in as much few words as possible so that they would memorize them. These teachings were translated, written on an *olla* and distributed in all the villages.⁹⁵ The set of instructions include: the Creed, the Our Father, the Hail Mary, the Commandments, the Confiteor, *Salve Regina* and some catechism prepared by Xavier;⁹⁶ b) In each village *kanakkapillai* or catechists were appointed to teach the villagers;⁹⁷ c) Separate days for men and women were made for two hours of divine service and instructions—men on Sundays and women on Saturdays;⁹⁸ d) Children were given preference over adults. They were to attend the catechism class daily;⁹⁹ e) Tamil or Portuguese was used as a means of communication.¹⁰⁰ The missionaries were required to learn Tamil as a necessary part of their evangelization and so on.

In the interior part of Coromandel the situation was slightly different. Although the fear of Portuguese was undoubtedly there, the invocation of their name had a different outcome. Here the Portuguese were known as '*Paranghis*' and were despised for not washing frequently, eating beef, drinking liquor and communicating freely with the persons of

⁹⁴ Cited in Boxer, *Portuguese Seaborne Empire*, p.76, where he quoted the reports of Fr. Valignano, the Jesuit visitor of 1579-80.

⁹⁵ Costelloe, *Letters*, p.67. Xavier's letter to His companions in Rome, 15 January 1544.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.65.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.67.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.67.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.66.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p.65.

despised castes.¹⁰¹ The '*Paranghis*' were considered to be on par with the untouchables and outcastes of India that anyone who joined them or received baptism from them would straightaway lose his caste. This is the reason why Fr. Gonclaves Fernandes did not make any high caste conversion in spite of his long stay in Madurai. As such a new strategy or methods has to be propounded. This comes with the astute policy of Fr. Roberto de Nobili.

Firstly, Nobili, recognizing that the Portuguese were despised, distanced himself from them by stating that he was an Italian not a Portuguese and that he was a scion of one of the princely families of Rome. To those who enquired about his country, family, etc., he replied that he was not a *Paranghis* but a Roman of the Raja (*kshatrya*) caste.¹⁰² Nobili realized that the aversion that Indians felt for Europeans, was based on certain civil customs which they held in abomination such as those of regarding marriage, the manner of eating, the custom of having food served by low caste people, etc.¹⁰³ With the permission of his superior, the archbishop of Craganore, he declared himself as an Indian *sannyasi*. So he gave up meat, fish, eggs and wine and restricted himself to one meal per day consisting of rice, milk and vegetables.¹⁰⁴ He began to live in a little mud house in the Brahmin colony and procured a Brahmin cook. In 1607 he obtained the permission to give up wearing the black cassock and put on the dress of an Indian *sannyasi*. In this way he adapted himself to the customs of the local people whom he wanted to convert.

As the Portuguese secular arm could not be used in this region the method employed here was merely of persuasion or more strictly accommodation so as to attract the local people. Nobili had clearly specified this in his treatise distributed in the Goa Conference of 1619 as:

Both in spiritual and profane matters, the Christians should, in their custom and dress, be distinguished from the gentiles, provided there be no danger in doing so. But if these emblems of clans and races, and the insignia of nobility, were to be forbidden in lands subject to gentile princes, not a single person there, as long years of experience have proved, will come to us, and if any one dare to give up his string, cut off his tuft, and join our faith, he would be forced to become an exile, lose all his goods, and be separated from his family and all relations.¹⁰⁵

Nobili was convinced that unless the converts were allowed to continue in their own customs and tradition nobody was going to convert to Christianity. Just as Christianity allowed many

¹⁰¹ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, II, pp.212.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p.213.

¹⁰³ Stephens, *Letters*, p.187, Fr. Adres to Fr. G.P.Oliva, 25 January 1682.

¹⁰⁴ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, II, pp.212-214.

¹⁰⁵ S.Rajamanickam, Roberto De Nobili *Adaptation*, Palayamkottai (1971), p.7.

of the 'pagan' traditions of Europe to continue he said he was allowing the Indian tradition into Christianity which he considered are of 'civil customs,' not religious. In his accommodation policy, Nobili incorporated into his Christianity the sacred thread, the tuft of hair, sandal paste, baths and other social customs and practices like the practice of the upper castes. He declared that these might be allowed to continue in order that converts should not run the risk of losing their caste if they wanted to become Christians.¹⁰⁶

As the number of lower caste converts had increased in the mission whose needs were attended to by the Brahmin *sannyasis*, they were seen contempt by the high caste converts because of their association. Therefore, the need to introduce another class of missionaries was felt in Madurai Mission. It was in 1640 that the *pandaraswami* class of missionaries was created. Fr. Balthasar da Costa became the first *pandaraswami*. This class of missionaries was to look after the spiritual needs of the low caste converts. A separate church was also built for them.¹⁰⁷

By converting the high caste Hindus, Nobili hoped that all the other caste would follow suit. This policy of Nobili, which may be called downward filtration policy, was a new concept in the region. He hoped when some Brahmins began to follow his religion many nayaka lineages or members of the ruling classes would begun to accept Christianity. Thus by incorporating many of the local customs and tradition into a Christian way of life Madurai Mission became one of the most successful evangelical Missions in India. Coercion or violence was out of question here, and it gave way to persuasion-accommodation methods. What the coastal priests disapproved in the coastal region was finally proved to be the most successful methods in Madurai Mission, which inspired successive missionary movements, including that of Protestant mission, in the Indian subcontinent. Fr. Andres Freye, the Jesuit provincial of the Mission, in 1682 credited the spectacular success of Madurai Mission to the methods propounded by Nobili:

From that time God was pleased that...the mission should go progressing to such and extent, that in a few years it spread to other kingdoms and provinces, and today, by the mercy of God, it numbers 80,000 Christians.¹⁰⁸

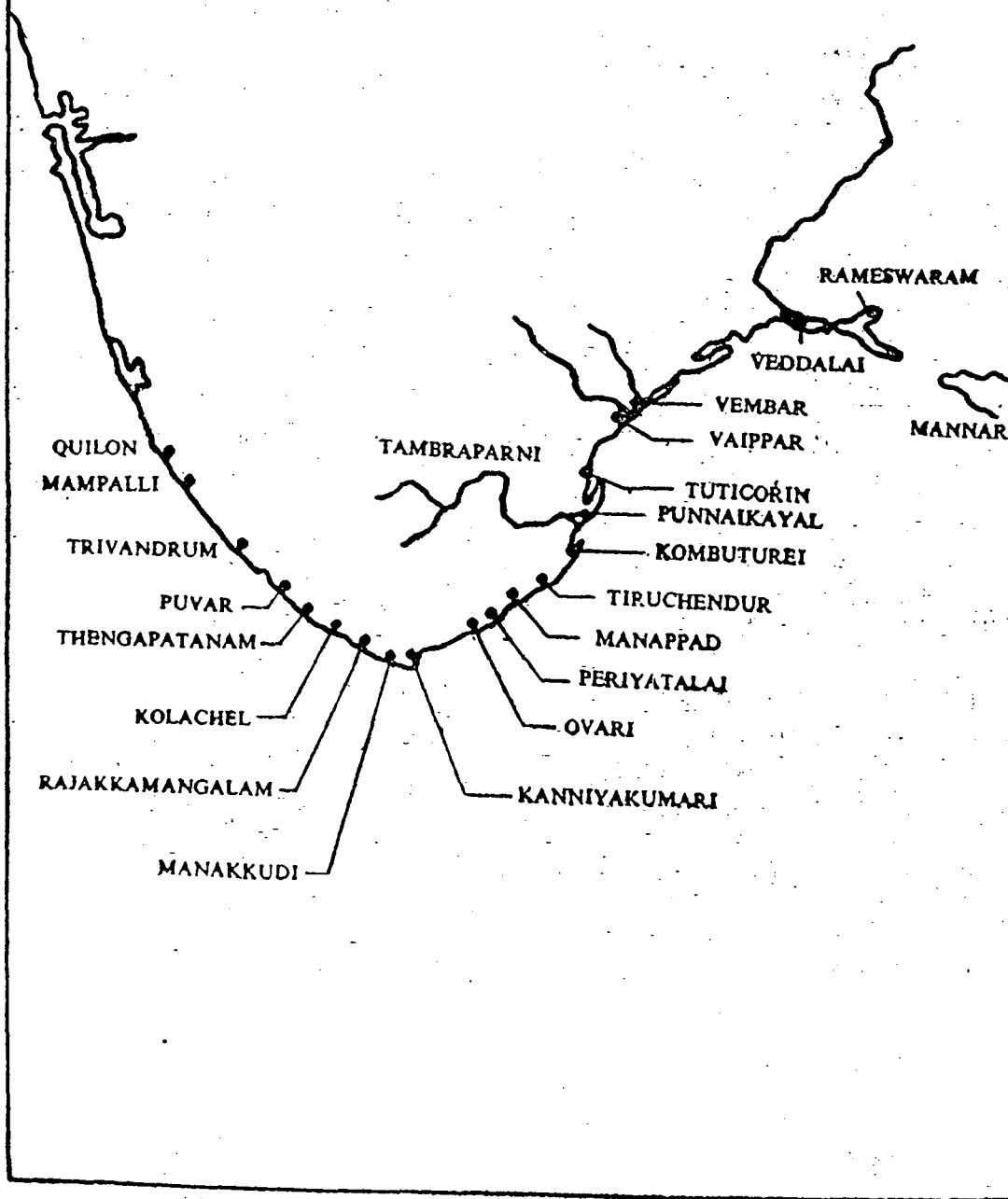
¹⁰⁶ Ibid., See the whole treatise of Nobili he distributed among the participants in Goa Conference of 1619. Nobili had clearly explained all the social customs in defense of his policy and methods in Madurai Mission. See also his dealing writing on Indian Customs, which was verified by 108 Brahmin scholars from all part of the country. Rajamanickam, Roberto De Nobili: *Indian Customs*, Palayamkottai, 1972.

¹⁰⁷ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, II, pp.216-217.

¹⁰⁸ Costelloe, *The Letters* p.188, Fr. Adres to Fr. Oliva, 25 January 1682

The missionary methods of the Jesuits as noted can be thus divided into two forms. The methods employed in the coastal region was different from the mainland Madurai Mission in that both threats and persuasions were utilized effectively in order to discipline the local Christians. To the Hindus who did not like to convert persuasion seems to be the usual norms. In the Madurai Mission persuasive means were employed in order to win over the local people. By virtue of their methods of incorporating the various tenets of local customs and tradition the Christian *sannyasis* and the *pandaraswamis* were gradually regarded as local religious figures. Judging from the point of their methods the Madurai Mission become more successful in their aim to convert the locals. The pace of progress and growth in their numbers can clearly prove this. This part will be dealt with in detail in the following chapter.

THE FISHERY COAST AND THE TRAVANCORE COAST



The Progress of Conversion During the 16th and 17th Centuries

Sixteenth Century

Mylapore

In the beginning, probably the most attractive single thing for the Portuguese in the Coromandel was the tomb of St. Thomas, the Apostle. As early as 1501, in his letter to the sovereigns of Castile, Dom Manuel I wrote that Pedro Alvares Cabral had sent him definite information that the tomb of St. Thomas was to be found “on the sea coast, in a city which is called Maliapor, of a small population, and he brought me earth from his tomb”.¹ It is of some interest to our investigation to know who constituted this ‘small population’. If we are to believe the account of Varthema, an Italian, who visited the Coromandel Coast in around 1504, this small population at Mylapore did not constitute Christians.² This was corroborated by the account of Fr. Alvaro Penteado, who visited Cranganore in 1516, where he was told by the Christian of that place that there were no Christians at Mylapore but that the city was mostly populated by some Hindus and Muslims who called themselves ‘negroes of Thomas’ (slaves or servants of Thomas).³ Although the Portuguese continued to visit the place, the first settlement, according to the Chronicler Barros, took place only in 1519 when the three Portuguese men—Antonio Lobo Falcao, Joao Falcao and Joao Moreno—went to settle there.⁴

In 1523, when the excavations actually yielded what some consider to be the relics of the Apostle, there was nothing to dissuade them from settling there. It was not long after that

¹ W.B.Greenlee (Ed.& comp.), *The Voyages of Pedro Alvares Cabral to Brazil and India*, London(1938), p.49.

² Varthema was told by few Christians he met at Nagapattinam that Christians could no longer live in Mylapore since the arrival of the king of Portugal because he killed many Muslims in that region and all were in apanic at the thought of him. Thus Christians were driven away and killed. But Mundadan said that Christians of Mylapore had left that place before the Portuguese arrived in India because of famine war or persecution. See Mundadan, *History of Christianity*,I, pp.404-405, note 29.

³ Ibid., p.406, where he cited A.Penteado Letter of 1513 in A. de Silva Rego (ed.), *Documentacao*,III,pp.543-553.

⁴ Mundadan, *History of Christianity*,I, p.415.

that a captain for the Coromandel was appointed.⁵ From this time several Portuguese *casados* especially those of an independent pioneering spirit took refuge at Mylapore and their numbers steadily grew. By 1538 there were sixty *casados* and their families.⁶ There were also a few Armenian Christians who began to settle there. Not only was the discovery of the relics of St. Thomas a powerful magnet, but the discovery of an immense potential for missionaries as well as the profiteering trade outside the domain of the Estado da India acted as a spur for both the regular clergymen and the Portuguese private traders.⁷

Antonio Penteado was known to have been the only priest in Mylapore until 1530. Through the royal connections which he had, he managed to get himself appointed as a keeper of the *Casa de Sao Tome*. But his main concern was more the upkeep of the house of St. Thomas than evangelizing the locals. He even had grandiose plans to convert the house into a monastery.⁸ But his parishioners disliked him and even the visiting clergymen in the 1530's complained that he had not baptized even a single Indian.⁹ He was substituted by a certain Ugo Nicolo as vicar of Mylapore in 1530. By 1537/38 the vicar was assisted by four diocesan priests. But we still do not have any reference of conversions taking places although the Portuguese citizenry of Mylapore had informed the king that the church services were conducted very well and they had provided for the needful sincerely.¹⁰ By this time the city had grown two-fold and because of the profitable trade the citizens became very rich.¹¹ The letter of the citizens of Mylapore in 1538 could state that they had spent between 5,000 to 6,000 *cruzados* for the construction of the church. For its support they had also founded a confraternity in honor of St. Thomas. They also claimed that generous alms were given to the poor. It is said that even the king Achyuta of Vijayanagar thanked the Portuguese residents of Mylapore for the immense services they rendered to the poor people especially during the famine of 1540.¹²

⁵ Manuel de Frias was first appointed as the factor of the Coromandel coast in 1521 and was responsible for the excavation taken at Mylapore. He was appointed as Captain of the coast thereafter.

⁶ Mundadan, *History of Christianity*, I, pp.426-426, where he cited letters of the citizens of Mylapore, 1537 & 38, in de Silva Rego, *Documentacao*, II, pp.249-44 and Schurhammer, *Quellen*, no.351. See also Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, 389.

⁷ Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, I, p.81.

⁸ Mundadan, *History of Christianity*, I, p.416.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.307-308, where he cited Sebastiao Pires letter of 1527 to king of Portugal in Silva Rego, *Documentacao*, II, p.136, 197, 356.

¹⁰ Letters of the citizens of Mylapore 1537 & 1538.

¹¹ In 1545 Francis Xavier had also seen prosperous Christian community comprising both European and Indians. See Schurhammer.

¹² Mundadan, *History of Christianity*, I, p.427, where he cited Correa, *Lendas da India*, Lisbon, IV, f.131

The first reference to conversions was in the year 1542 when some 1,800 locals were baptized in Mylapore and the vicar is said to have kept a register of their names.¹³ Franciscans had come to the town in 1540 and the Jesuits in 1550. However Francis Xavier had already been to the place in 1545 during which he saw one hundred Portuguese families there.¹⁴ He had even asked the church of St. Thomas to be handed over to the Jesuits. One Jesuit Fr. Alphonso Cypriano was the permanent resident of Mylapore till his death in 1559. One of the main obstacles in the process of conversion was the bad conduct of the Portuguese population and the indifferent attitudes of the local rulers. It was because of this slackness that one can see, during the Episcopal visitation in 1566, several of the 'sinners' standing at the door of the church of St. Thomas, dressed in rags, stick in their hand and labeling their crimes in their foreheads and a fine of 1,400 *pardaus* collected from them for various offences.¹⁵ By 1575 there were 200 Portuguese families, a vicar and two or three diocesan priests, eight or ten Friars and three Jesuits in Mylapore.¹⁶

The number of conversions went on increasing especially around Mylapore. By 1559 their numbers had increased to 2,000.¹⁷ Four years later, in 1563, the total number of Christians in and around Mylapore was 4,000.¹⁸ Between 1571 and 1575 the number of local converts were about 2,000.¹⁹ During the famine of 1583 many people from the interior came to Mylapore and sold themselves as slave or servants to the Portuguese and other Christians of the town. It is reported that during this time the Jesuits had baptized about 3,000 of those migrants.²⁰ In 1586 there were 50 new converts.²¹ In 1593 the Jesuit had also baptized 80 persons in Mylapore.²² It seems likely that the number of conversion went on increasing from both the low and high castes. The annual letter of 1597 states the process:

¹³ Mundadan, 'The Portuguese Settlement in Mylapore', *Indian Church History Review* (ICHR), 3(1969), p.111. See also Schurhammer, *Quellen*, no. 351.

¹⁴ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.200; Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.130: Xavier Letter to his Companions in Europe, 10 November 1545.

¹⁵ Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, VII, pp.202-204. The amount collected was given to Misericordia for the construction of hospital in Mylapore.

¹⁶ Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, X, pp. 486-487; XIII, p.187. See also Thekkedath, *History*, p.202

¹⁷ Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, V, p.181.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, V,p.743. Although this number is based on hearsay, as the reporter admitted, it is believed that the number includes all the local Christian population of Mylapore and its surrounding.

¹⁹ S.Jeyaseela Stephens, *Portuguese in the Tamil coast*, Pondecherry (2001), p.282.

²⁰ Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, XIII,p.502 and Rev. H. Hosten, *The Work of Rev. H.Hosten*, vol.XXI, p.127(translated type script, Vidyayoti Library, Delhi) : Annual letters of the Jesuit Province of Malabar, 1583.

²¹ H. Hosten, *The Work of Rev. H.Hosten*, vol.XXI, p.133: Annual letter of 1586-87.

²² Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*,XVI,pp.344-345

There hardly passes a day when there is not one, or two or even several baptisms, not only from the low-caste people, but even from the better classes, who give up country and relatives; and come here to receive baptism.²³

Thus Mylapore became one of the coastal entrepots where several of the immigrants from the interior took resort for physical and mental solace. The number of conversions against each year during the 16th century according to the available data may be put in the following table.(2.1).

Table 2.1: Number of Conversions at Mylapore during the 16th C.

Years	1542	1559	1563	1571-75	1583	1586-87	1593	Total
No. Of Converts	1,800	200	2000	2000	3000	50	80	9,130

Nagapattinam

In the territory of the nayaks of Thanjavur there was a Christian community in the city of Nagapattinam. The Portuguese began to settle there between 1518 and 1530. When Francis Xavier visited the place in 1545, they were under the authority of the Portuguese captain. We also have references to the presence of Thomas Christians there. Around 1504, Varthema was said to have met a few Christians at Nagapattinam from whom he obtained some information about the tomb of St. Thomas.²⁴ The missionary activities during the 16th century were mainly attributed to the Franciscans who began to stay there in the forties or in the fifties of the 16th century. By 1567, Cesare Federici, an Italian traveler, was also reported to have seen a large number of Christians there. He described the town “as a very good city and very populous of Christians of the country and partly gentile”.²⁵ Seeing no reference to large-scale conversion in the place, ‘Christians of the country’ by the account of Federici would be those of Thomas Christians amongst whom the Franciscans were concentrating their religious works. By 1577 it is clear from the account of Paulo da Trindade that when the nayak of Thanjavur attacked Nagapattinam, the Portuguese decided to flee but due to a lack of sufficient boats 60 Portuguese, 200 Eurasians and 3,000 Indians were trapped by the

²³ H. Hosten, *The Work of Rev. H. Hosten*, vol. XXI, p.134. Annual Letter of 1586-87

²⁴ Mundadan, *History of Christianity*, I, pp. 404-405, where he cited Barbosa, II, p.126.

²⁵ A. Meersman, *The Franciscans in Tamilnad*, pp. 51-53.

invading force.²⁶ This indicated the large numbers of Christians in the town then. The Jesuits come to this town only after 1597, Dominicans in 1604 and Augustinians in 1625.²⁷

Fishery Coast

In the Pearl Fishery Coast, the Pescaria of the Portuguese, we came across a large number of conversions during 1535 to 1537.²⁸ The Paravas who had populated this littoral region had converted to Christianity *en masse* to the tune of at least 20,000 people. Thus conversion here is regarded as a tactical alliance with the Portuguese Estado for the protection of their corporate economy and life from their contiguous competitors, the Muslim Kayalar.²⁹ This event marked the beginning of the active presence of the Portuguese on the Fishery Coast. But until Francis Xavier's arrival in 1542 the Paravas were left with no proper religious instructions.³⁰ Since October 1542 Xavier undertook serious religious teaching and baptized all children born after the mass baptisms of 1535 to 1537.³¹ At the outset Xavier rebuked the usual vices of the people such as drunkenness, immorality, quarrelsomeness and idolatry with the warning that God would punish them if they refused to change.³² The *pattangatins* and other village notables were used as a sort of moral policing agency to look after any transgressions of the Christians principles.³³

Xavier was also said to have converted all the inhabitants of one of the Karaiya villages called Kombuture after a woman in labor was miraculously given a safe delivery.³⁴ His journey had also won over many more Karaiya villagers to Christianity. Karaiya villages such as Pudukudi (north of Manappad), Pudukudi (south of Alantalai) and other settlements near Virapandyapatnam and Kayalpatnam became Christian in 1543.³⁵ Beyond Vember were large villages called Kilakarai, Peryapatnam and Vadalai that were partly inhabited by Karaiyas who had also been converted by Xavier. At Periyapatnam another caste group called Parivaras became Christians. In the mainland to the east of Vadalai other small

²⁶ Ibid., pp. 58-59.

²⁷ Ibid., pp.56-57.

²⁸ Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, pp.261-263. See also Schurhammer, 'Letters of Joao Da Cruz' *Kerala Society Paper*, vol.I (1930), pp. 304-307, an extract in *Bibliotheca Instituti Histroci*, S.I, xxiii, *Gesammelte Studiau*, IV, Rome (1965), pp.57-59.

²⁹ Ibid., pp.261-162.

³⁰ Ibid., p.295. Also see Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.61, Xavier Letter to Ignatius, 28 October 1542.

³¹ Ibid., p.61. See also Thekkedath, *History*, pp.156-160.

³² Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, pp.335-336.

³³ Ibid., p.337.

³⁴ Ibid., p.298. Costelloe, *The Letters*, pp.61-62. Xavier Letter of October 1542.

³⁵ Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II. P.347.

settlements of Karaiyas on the Coast of Pember Island embraced Christianity during Xavier's journey. As such by the end of 1543 the number of Christian villages on this coast rose from 22 to 30.³⁶

In the southernmost part of the Fishery Coast we also encountered another community conversion in 1544. The Mukkuva fishermen who occupied the coastal area around the tip of the Indian peninsula were mass baptized by Xavier during November-December of 1544.³⁷ The conversion of this community *en masse* numbered more than 10,000.³⁸ Thus Francis Xavier is said to have baptized or re-baptized as many as 15,000 Paravas, Karaiyas and the Mukkuvus together during his three brief stays in the Fishery Coast and it was largely through his efforts that these groups began to acquire elements of a recognizably Christian religious culture.

Even when Xavier left the region, missionary works were sincerely taken over by other Jesuits such as Fr. Antony Criminali, Fr. Henry Henriques and others. By 1565 there were six Jesuits fathers and three brothers working on the Fishery coast.³⁹ It is learned that by 1548 there was in each village a teacher of catechism and a person to gather the children everyday.⁴⁰ As such the missionary work was carried out smoothly and by the middle of the 16th century most of the inhabitants in the Fishery Coast had become Christian. The Christians of the Fishery Coast in c.1552 according to Fr. Henriques numbered more than 40,000.⁴¹ In spite of this one can still encounter references of conversions in the region, mostly of those coming from the interior or slaves bought by the Christians.⁴² In 1579 such conversions numbered around one thousand: 500 at Tuticorin and 500 at Mannar.⁴³ In 1583 six hundred locals, due to famine and want had migrated to the island of Mannar, who were baptized.⁴⁴ Fr. Valignano, the Jesuit visitor during 1579–80, had reported the existence of thirty Christian villages with as many churches and a Christian population of around forty to

³⁶ Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, pp.347-353. Added to the 22 Parava villages baptized before Xavier's arrival were those of Karaiyas of Kombutur and 6 or 7 villages in the neighbourhood of Vedailai and Rameswaram.

³⁷ Costelloe, *The Letters*, pp.104-106 & 117: Xavier Letter to Mansilhas, 18 December 1544 and to his companions in Rome, 27 January 1545. Xavier had baptized all the 11 villages of the Makkuvus fishermen except Manakkudi where he entrusted Mansilhas to baptize.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 117.

³⁹ Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, VI, p.630 & 748.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, I, p.283: Letter of Henriques 31 October 1548.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, II, p.308.

⁴² *Ibid.*, V, p. 19; VI, p.759; XI, p. 817, XII, p.719, XII, p.183.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, XI, p. 817.

⁴⁴ H. Hosten, *The Works of Rev. H.Hosten*, and vol. XXI, p.127: Jesuit annual letter of 1583.

fifty thousands in the region.⁴⁵ However, the number of Christians given in the annual letter of 1586-87 appears to be more accurate. According to it the number of Christians in the Fishery Coast numbered 43,000.⁴⁶ The same letter also reported that 700 people were baptized in Mannar. In these two years, it was reported that besides infants, 1700 people were baptized.⁴⁷ But it is not clear whether this new group of converts were included in the total number given. There were, at this time, twelve Jesuits living in five or six residences. In 1600 there were already twenty Jesuits (17 fathers, 2 brothers and 1 scholastic) in seven residences.⁴⁸ Few years before that, at the suggestion of the Jesuit Provincial, the Christian villages of Alantalai, Tamlanpuli and Tiruchendur were transferred to Virapandyapatnam.⁴⁹ Again since 1597 the Christians of twelve coastal villages between Cape Comorin and Manappad were grouped at the later place because of the tyranny and unjust exactions of one of the local chiefs, called Arya Perumal, the poligar of Vijayapati.⁵⁰

In the southernmost tip of the Indian peninsula due to political changes missionary work could not progress as much. From 1546 there was only Fr. Francis Henriques, helped at times by lay brothers.⁵¹ After a small college founded in 1549 at Quilon there were none to look after the spiritual needs of the Mukkuva Christians.⁵² As a matter of fact in two of the villages some Christians had converted into Muslims by 1553.⁵³ By 1568 there were seventeen churches and about 8,000 Christians in this part.⁵⁴ It seems likely that during the rest of sixteenth century there were no further conversions.

It should be remembered that the progress of conversions during the sixteenth century had mainly concentrated in the coastal region of the Coromandel. What is significant during this period was mass conversion on community basis. The Paravas, Karaiyas and Mukkuvas, who belonged to the lower strata of Hindu society, had converted on an almost similar pattern. Comparatively very few conversions took place beyond the realms of these communities. Those who converted from outside these groups were mostly from the interior part of the region who were driven by war, famine or epidemics. Their contact with the missionaries and the necessary help they received from them had finally taken them to

⁴⁵ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, pp.170-171

⁴⁶ H. Hosten, *The Work of Rev. H.Holsten*, vol.XXI, p.133.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴⁸ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.174 where he cited L.Besse, *La Mission*, pp. 400-401.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.174.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p.174.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.175, where he cited Besse, *La Mission*, pp.400-401.

⁵² Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, I, p.259.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, II, pp. 20*- 21*; III, pp.694-695.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, II, p.608; VII, p.446.

Christianity. We can broadly see the progress of conversion during sixteenth century in the following table.(2.2)

Table: 2.2: No. of Conversion During Sixteenth Century, Fishery Coast.

Years	Fishery Coast				Mylapore	Nagapatnam	Total
	Convert Community Groups						
	Paravas	Karaiyas	1+2+others	Mukkuvas			
1535-37	20,000	—	—	—	—	—	20,000
1542	—	—	—	—	1,800	—	1,800
1542-43	—	5000	—	—	—	—	5,000
1544	—	—	—	10,000	—	—	10,000
1552	—	—	15000	—	—	—	15,000
1557	—	—	—	—	—	3,000	3,000
1559	—	—	—	—	200	—	200
1563	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1568	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
1571-75	—	—	—	—	2,000	—	2,000
1579	—	—	1000	—	—	—	1000
1583	—	—	600	—	3,000	—	3,600
1586-87	—	—	2400	—	50	—	2,450
1590	—	—	300	—	—	—	300
1593	—	—	—	—	80	—	80
Total	20,000	5,000	19,000	10,000	7,130	3,000	66,130

It can be said that conversions during the first half of sixteenth century especially from the 1530's to the 1550's took place in a large numbers especially when compared to the decades that followed. However, in spite of the presence of missionaries in the region during the latter half of sixteenth century one does not see as many conversions as in the preceding decades. This calls for inquiry and an in depth study on the various facets of the historical context during the period. This study will be dealt with in great detail in the next chapter. But it will suffice here to say that the world-view of the Tamil coastal communities especially those of the lower caste groups had experienced crises vis-à-vis the individual as well as the community as a whole. And it was this that led them to convert.

Seventeenth Century

Mylapore

At the dawn of the seventeenth century, missionary activities had expanded further into the hinterlands of the coastal regions of Coromandel. The number of the Jesuits had also increased from seven in 1601 to ten in 1620.⁵⁵ Under the college of San Thome, residences had been extended to Tranquebar (1601), Porto Novo (1601), Devanampattinam (1574) and Pulicat. However, the establishment of the Dutch in Pulicat (1609) and the English in Madras (1640) adversely affected not only the prosperity of Mylapore but also led to the migration of a large number of Mylaporeans to Madras and other places. Until 1635 we do not see much progress in the number of Christian population at Mylapore. Trinite has informed us that the Franciscan Church of Our Lady of Light (outside the wall) had about 1500 parishioners in 1530, which shows rather an increase in numbers.⁵⁶ Bocarro has also told us that there were two hundred local Christian families inside the walled city of San Thome and about 6,000 outside in 1635.⁵⁷ However the number of Portuguese families decline from two hundred in 1575 to 120 in 1635.⁵⁸ The declining trade at Mylapore may have caused this during the second decade of seventeenth century.⁵⁹ But a significant movement of the Mylaporeans took place after the establishment of the English in Madras. This is given credence by the fact that when the English began to settle at Madras they invited the Christians of Mylapore who were well versed in the local languages, customs and manners to be useful interpreters, clerks, tradesmen etc. The annual letter of 1644 has clearly shown the declining population of Mylapore Christians. According to it the number of Christians at the church of the Mother of God just exceeds 1700; 200 children attending catechism and twelve to school.⁶⁰ However this does not mean that missionary activities are all together abandoned at Mylapore. Rather the same letter informs us that about 20 baptisms of adults used to take place every year from among those who came from the inland.⁶¹ But by 1644 it is clearly stated that all the other residences under the college of San Thome had been abandoned due to the Dutch pillages in the region. The annual letter of 1644 was concluded in the following lines:

⁵⁵ H.Hosten, *The Works of Rev. H.Hosten*, vol. XXI, Vidyayoti Library Delhi: Table prepared by Hosten showing year by year the number of religious of the Malabar province and their various post.

⁵⁶ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.203.

⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 204; Meersman, *The Franciscans*, p.15 & 17.

⁵⁸ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.204: It is learned that when Jesuit visitor, Valignano, was at San Thome in 1575, there were around 200 Portuguese families living in the town.

⁵⁹ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce in South India, 1500- 1650*, pp. 144-251.

⁶⁰ *The Annual Letters of 1644, Malabar Province*, by Fr. Andrew Lopez, Translated by L. Besse (1907), p.29.

⁶¹ Ibid., p. 28.

The college [of San Thome] had several Churches annexed to it in the Choromandel coast, from Negapatnam to San Thome; but after the arrival of the Dutch, they were all lost; and at present it has only that of Madre de Deus [Mother of God].⁶²

It is noted that by 1644 only the church of the Mother of God outside the walled city of Mylapore remained attached to the college of San Thome which had merely 1700 members. Most of the inhabitants of Mylapore had already left for another places especially to Madras. This seems to have alarmed the priests of San Thome who in order to stop the movement, started to accuse the only Capuchin Father, Fr. Ephraem de Nevers of Madras for various scandals.⁶³ A plan was chalked out to take him before the Inquisition. Tavenier informs us that when the clergy of Mylapore knew that Fr. Ephraem, the French Capuchin who arrived at Madras in 1642, drew to him many of the Mylapore Christian to Madras, they decided to destroy him.⁶⁴ During his visits to Mylapore he was arrested and sent to Goa to be punished by the Inquisition. However when the accusation was found baseless and pressure from the English East India Company and the King of Golconda getting strong he was released after two years. Adding to their woes, San Thome was besieged by the forces of Golconda in 1646.

Even though the Portuguese succeeded in defending themselves this must have cost great havoc to the populace of Mylapore especially to those outside the wall who were left unprotected. However, the Golconda forces finally captured the town in 1662.⁶⁵ Manucci had put the consequences of the capture as follows:

After forty days it dawned upon the Portuguese that they were dependent upon some one else than their king. At last they were obliged to recapitulate in default of provisions and the Mahomedans became masters of the place. They carried away such artillery as they had need of and the poor Portuguese found their families dispersed in all directions.⁶⁶

This indicates that the population of Mylapore after its capture, had dispersed to various places especially to Madras which was the nearest as well as the safest place under the protection of the English East India Company. It is said that in 1663 when the need of a sacrament of confirmation was greatly felt in Madras Mgr. Pallu, the Vicar apostolic of Tonkin, was invited for the purpose, and administered it to as many as 3,000 persons.⁶⁷

⁶² Ibid., p. 29.

⁶³ Niccolo Manucci, *Storia do Mogor or Mugul India 1653- 1708*, trans. by W. Irvine, Calcutta (1907) vol. III, and pp.408 –459. See also Abbe Carre, pp.549-554; Navarrete, p.302; Tavenier, I, pp.176-186; Love, I, p.47 ft.

⁶⁴ Tavenier, II, p. 220.

⁶⁵ Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, III, pp. 262-263.

⁶⁶ Ibid., III, p. 263.

⁶⁷ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.207.

Even when the French managed to occupy San Thome from 1672-74 the number of Christians in the town was already very less as compared to the previous period. Soon after Golconda had recaptured the town with the assistance of the Dutch in 1674. This time large-scale demolition of the fortification and several large buildings was undertaken by the Golconda forces in order to prevent the French from recapturing it. This led to an exodus of the Mylaporean population to Madras. Manucci informs us that:

The King of Gulkandah, through pressure from the Dutch Council caused the town to be razed to the ground for fear (that) the French might retake it. Not one stone was left upon another. The Portuguese removed thence to Madras, where they lived upto (16) 86, when they obtain from the king [of Golconda]...permission to take up their residence in that town. Since then they have erected buildings and established a sort of government. They hold the land at a rent and pay so much a year.⁶⁸

Although Manucci is silent about the local population throughout his narration of the region, the recapture followed by the demolition of San Thome would have led to large scale movement of the people to Madras and elsewhere as is implicitly indicated. Normalcy arrived soon after but Mylapore could not recover herself as the premier trading center, the status it had enjoyed earlier. The center of trade and commerce then shifted to Madras and the secure religious and social environment prevented many to return to Mylapore even when the Portuguese were permitted to resettle there in 1686. It is learned that around 1693 there were 8000 Christians within the bounds of Madras city belonging to the Portuguese church.⁶⁹ The majority of these Christians must have constituted the Mylaporean migrants. Although some priests and religious personnel must have surely returned to Mylapore, Manucci saw few parishioners attending the church there in 1704. He commented:

In the suburbs, where Mohammedans lived ... there are a number of churches and clergy, but few of the former are frequented.⁷⁰

Therefore, we can say that Mylapore during the last decades of the seventeenth century had dwindled into a mere township.

The cause of its fall can be mainly attributed to the shifting of trade and commercial activities and nearby Madras and the opposing political setup in the hinterland. However it should be noted here that the Golconda forces were not necessarily against the Christians. This is given credence by the fact that when Golconda force had finally recaptured the town the church of St. Thomas and Our Lady of Light were kept perfectly safe. Abbe Carre was surprise to see the door of St. Thomas church, which was locked just before the Portuguese

⁶⁸ Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, III, p.270.

⁶⁹ Frank Penny, *The Church in Madras*, London (1904), p.120.

⁷⁰ Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, IV, pp. 63-64.

had left, remained untouched as well as the properties of the church intact.⁷¹ Fr. Domingo de Navarrete had also wrote that “when the infidels took the city, they destroyed all about it, but durst not meddle with the Apostle’s Church, nor with that of Our Lady of Light”.⁷² The indifferent attitude taken by the Portuguese Estado and the prosperous business in the town had together allowed the Golconda forces to take San Thome.

Nagapattinam

To the south of Mylapore, in the kingdom of Thanjavur was Nagapattinam, which became one of the important religious centers during the seventeenth century. By 1606 the Christians of the town had five Chapels and two oratories.⁷³ There were also two different churches outside the town by 1640—St. Michael and Our Lady of Health at Velankanni.⁷⁴ According to a letter written in 1642 by the citizens of Nagapattinam to the viceroy of Goa, there were 7000 Christians above the age of seven in their town.⁷⁵ But when the Dutch captured the town in 1658 the catholic missionaries were expelled from there save that of the Franciscan priest in charge of Velankanni.⁷⁶ Baldaeus has also noted this event in his description of the town:

The Portuguese were permitted to depart with their Goods, Families, Church-Ornaments, etc, in certain ships appointed for the purpose by the Dutch Company.⁷⁷

After expelling the catholic priests the Dutch protestant priests immediately took over the missionary activities. Baldaeus had reported the first attempt to evangelize the local population at Nagapattinam by the protestant missionaries as:

In the year 1660, 14 July, I set sail from Jafnapatnam to Negapatnam, to introduce the Reformed Religion there, and accordingly preached the first time the 18th, both in Dutch and Portuguese, and administered the Holy Sacrament to 20 persons, and Baptism to several children... Mr. Frederick Fronteniu and myself had spent some time there in settling the protestant religion... Mr. Nathaniel de Pape... has settle and spread the doctrine of the Gospel in the circumjacent villages.⁷⁸

But it seems unlikely that the protestant missionaries, who till this time were occupied with the European native population, would make much progress in converting the local people. At the same time the expulsion of catholic priests from the region hampered trade and

⁷¹ Abbe Carre, p.

⁷² Navarrete, p.299.

⁷³ Stephens, *Portuguese*, p.307, where he cited Pessurlencar, *Assentos do Conselho do Estado*, vol. III, pp.55-656.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p.308.

⁷⁵ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.196; Meersmen, ‘The Origin of the Shrine and Cult of Our Lady of Vailenkani’, *Indian Ecclesiastical Studies*, (IES), 1 (1962), p.67.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

⁷⁷ Philip Baldaeus, *A Description of the East India Coasts*, p.651.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 651.

commerce of the town when many Catholic Christians began to flee the city for other Portuguese settlements. This must have, in 1670, let the Dutch allow one Franciscan priest to officiate the church of the Immaculate Conception at Nagapatnam and to look after the 8000 Catholic Christians there.⁷⁹

Fishery Coast

On the fishery coast the progress of conversion now made inroads into the interior regions. By 1602 there were five churches and 2400 Christians in the interior.⁸⁰ The village of Tirupalakudi on the Marava coast was almost entirely Christian.⁸¹ However this initial progress had been stalled by the contending conflicts and controversies that prevailed between the Society of Jesus and the Bishop of Cochin. The issue was on a jurisdictional battle on the Fishery coast leading to the retirement of the Jesuits from the coast in 1609. The Jesuits returned only in 1621 when the king of Portugal issued an order to restore them.⁸² Besides, Muthur Veerappa (1606-1623), the Nayak of Madurai attacked Parava villages for not paying the revenue from the Pearl Fishery in December 1612. This meant many Paravas migrated en masse to the other Portuguese trading stations such as Mylapore.⁸³ This was followed by a civil war among the Paravas from 1623 to 1625 when the Jesuits were for the second time expelled from the coast by the groups of the deceased Jathi-Talaivan, da Cruz.⁸⁴

Adding to their woes, a severe famine broke out in the region in 1626 that lasted for ten months. It is said that 1500 people died of starvation in the town of Tuticorin alone.⁸⁵ The 12 Jesuits presented in the region did what they could to help as many people as possible. They undertook several relief measures. Fr. Anthony Rubino, the Rector of Tuticorin, went to Tirumala nayak of Madurai in order to obtain tax relief for the Paravas. As a result of his efforts the Nayak had agreed upon his request and the yearly tax of 800 *patacas* were exempted for three years and reduced to 500 after that.⁸⁶ The activities of the Jesuit must have greatly moved the local people so that during 1626 we are informed that around 4000 people received baptism.⁸⁷

⁷⁹ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.197.

⁸⁰ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.175, where he cited Jean Castets, *Lancienne Mission du Madure*, pp. 78-79 and L. Besse, *La Mission de Madure*, p.403.

⁸¹ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.175.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p.178.

⁸³ Stephens, *Portuguese*, p. 289.

⁸⁴ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, pp. 178-179.

⁸⁵ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p. 179. Where he cited L. Besse, *La Mission*, pp. 433-441.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 441-442.

⁸⁷ S.V. Fernando, 'The Portuguese Patronage (Padroado) and the Evangelization of the Pearl Fishery Coast', *Indian Church History Review*, 17, 2, (1984), pp.94-105.

Peace was once again disturbed when the Jesuits were again expelled from the Fishery coast in 1630 who could only return by 1632.⁸⁸ But when the Nayaka of Madurai had imprisoned the Portuguese captain of Tuticorin in 1634 or 1635 the Jesuits were accused of instigating the former. Consequently Tuticorin to other places in the Fishery coast were bombarded by the Portuguese fleet causing large-scale damage to the Christians.⁸⁹ The unrest in the region has caused general hardship during the first three decades of the seventeenth century. Pearl Fishing, the Jati corporate economy could not be successfully carried out since 1604. The coast had witnessed a successful Pearl fishing only in 1638.⁹⁰ As a result of this and the war and conflicts in the region many must have left, in search of work elsewhere. It is said that the population of Christians had decreased to 20,000 by 1632 under twelve parishes.⁹¹

By 1644 their number had yet again increased to around 26,218.⁹² It is also said that during this period of quarrels and wars many of the local Christians lapsed to their former religion and some serious moral disorders prevailed among the people.⁹³ However by 1644 the general population of the Fishery coast are said to be 'firm in their faith and in the knowledge of God.'⁹⁴ As mentioned earlier, the Fathers took great pains to reduce the number of small villages to seven principal centers where they could provide regular spiritual as well as physical needs of the local population such as education, healthcare, defense and so on. There were 12 churches where 12 fathers resided in 1644.⁹⁵ Already by this year 360 children attended school and 2,834 children attended catechism daily in the whole coast.⁹⁶ This normalcy was short-lived and the region was to witness another episode of suffering during the latter half of seventeenth century.

In 1649 the Dutch made their first appearance in the region. As their demand for 40,000 *patacas* (later reduced to 15,000) were not met they pillaged the town of Tuticorin and burned a part of it and they are said to have carried away every valuable thing they found there.⁹⁷ However, during their second appearance in 1658 the Portuguese were driven out of Tuticorin and the rest of Pearl Fishery coast later. This greatly hampered the evangelization

⁸⁸ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.179.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.180.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.180.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

⁹² A. Lopez, *The Annual Letters of 1644*, pp. 15-21.

⁹³ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, pp.178-179.

⁹⁴ A. Lopez, *The Annual Letters of 1644*, p.15.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.16.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 15-21.

⁹⁷ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.181, where he cited L. Besse, *La Mission*, pp.458-459.

process of the Padroado missionaries as the Dutch forbade them to remain in the region.⁹⁸ However the spiritual needs of the catholic population were served by the same priests from the interior region where they lodged in some hut or chapels. The Paravas are said to have taken great pains walking to such places sometimes a couple of miles to receive the necessary spiritual needs. Baldaeus has informed us that:

For tho these priests (Jesuits) did not then live in the city (Tuticorin), nevertheless the Inhabitants would carry the children a great way into the country to be baptized by the priests.⁹⁹

It is said that when the Dutch tried to force the Paravas to listen to the preaching of the protestant minister, the Jati Talaivan issued a notice forbidding anyone to attend it and who ever go be considered a rebel against God and a traitor to the community.¹⁰⁰ We are told that one rich Paravas who attended the Dutch pastor's service was beheaded by the order of the Jati Talaivan.¹⁰¹ Baldaeus has also told us on the failure of the Dutch pastor as:

The Paruas ever since this union with the Romish Church are such Zealots in that Religion and there are scarce any hopes of ever bringing them over to our side... my endavours proved ineffectual by reason of the great number of Popish Priests yet remaining in that country... I was soon after employed in the business of Reformation, but without success: for when I preach'd in Portuguese, scarce anyone of the Paruas durst enter into the church, but remained in the porch, for fear of the Romish priests living among them...since the church was despoil'd of the image and other ornaments by us (Dutch) , they must look upon us enemies to their religion.¹⁰²

We also learn that the Dutch had induced the Nayak of Madurai to expel the Jesuits from his country, which the latter refused to do. By the end of this century the Dutch become more tolerant and now the Jesuits were once again allowed to stay on the coast. By 1697 there were only five Jesuits fathers serving there.¹⁰³ The absence of any reference of any conversion during the second half of the seventeenth century in Fishery coast as well as the deplorable state of the missionaries lead us to assume that the evangelization process had been stalled since then.

In the Mannar we get a similar account of a decaying conversion process during the later half of seventeenth century. However, this place had become one of the choices for refuge from the fishery coast. The number of Christians had increased in the region in spite of the political turmoil in the island. During the first half of seventeenth century, as it

⁹⁸ Baldaeus, *A Description*, p. 648, Baldaeus had informed us that the Dutch have been contented with a factory one of the three Churches when they were not permitted to erect fortification there.

⁹⁹ Baldaeus, *A Description*, p.648.

¹⁰⁰ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.182, where he cited L. Besse, *La Mission*, pp.463-465.

¹⁰¹ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.182.

¹⁰² Baldaeus, *A Description*, pp. 647-648.

¹⁰³ H. Hosten, *The Works*, see hi table of the religious of Malabar province.

happened in the fishery coast, the region had also witnessed unsuccessful Pearl fishing. However the number of Christians in the Mannar totaled 5450 and 530 children attended catechism and 87 went to school in 1644.¹⁰⁴ At this time there were five residences with five fathers living in them.¹⁰⁵ What is interesting to say here is that the Jesuit superior was at the same time the father of the Christians in the name of the king of Portugal, to protect their rights in the ecclesiastical court as well as before the civil tribunal, which sat in the fortress of the island.¹⁰⁶

On the same faith, as it happen in the fishery coast, the island was taken over by the Dutch in 1658. When Baldaeus had visited the island in around 1665 he saw not more than seven churches and the people already become very poor due to the failure of pearl fishing since the last ten years. He said:

The island was formerly celebrated for the Pearl Fishing... but no pearls having been taken there for this ten years last past, the inhabitants are reduc'd to great poverty.¹⁰⁷

However under the protection of the Dutch, Pearl Fishing took place since 1666. This may seem to have brought back the prosperity in the region. But as far as the evangelizing activities are concerned we have no reference of conversion in the island during the rest of the seventeenth century. Except for Bladaeus attempts to promote the Reformation Church as the island was kept under his care we have no further accounts of missionary activities.¹⁰⁸ However this cannot lead us to assume that the Christian community in the island was totally abandoned. No more conversions would rather mean that the missionaries now occupied themselves with the Christians population more vigorously.

In the beginning of the seventeenth century things improved among the Makkuva Christians. By 1601 the churches in the region had increased to 23 and there were two Jesuits to look after them.¹⁰⁹ We have an account of 550 adult baptisms between 1602 and 1603.¹¹⁰ In 1603 seven more churches were erected in the interior region.¹¹¹ However the situation changed suddenly when quarrels began with their neighbors, the Shanars. As a consequence,

¹⁰⁴ A. Lopez, *The Annual Letters of 1644*, pp. 21-24.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p.21.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

¹⁰⁷ Baldaeus, *A Description*, p.792.

¹⁰⁸ Baldaeus, *A Description*, pp.792-793, he has prescribed a methods to prosecute protestant system in the island such as a) To teach them the naked truth of the gospel in as few points as possible; b) To catechize frequently the young ones in the preference of their parents; c) Catechism first introduce should not be alter in any way; d) Malabar (Tamil) and Portuguese language be use as a form of communication.

¹⁰⁹ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.191, where he cited Fernao Guerreiro, *Relacao Annual*, I, p.30.

¹¹⁰ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p. 191.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

the offending villages along with 11 other Christian villages and churches were burnt by the Shanars under the orders of the captain of the king of Travancore.¹¹² The local Christians fled to Cape Comorin from where they could only return to their village in 1607 when the king assured them of protection and compensation. This move from the king comes when he felt the loss of trade after the Bishop of Cochin, Andrew de S. Maria under threat of excommunication, forbade the Portuguese to trade with Travancore. It is said that the Raja gave all the timber required to rebuild the churches and 2,000 *pardaos* for the expenses of the work along with several other privileges and favors to the Christians.¹¹³ The jurisdictional tangle mentioned before between the Jesuit and the Bishop of Cochin, which had left a vacuum in the region until two Jesuits returned in 1626. It is said that they looked after about 10,000 Christians distributed among the 23 churches.

And in the interior of the country three fathers served about two thousand Christians.¹¹⁴ Their number had increased to 14,702 Christians; 2,026 children to catechism and 112 to school in 1644.¹¹⁵ But the religious status of Christians in this region seems to have been still weak and not much conformed to Christian morals. Father Lopez deplored their conditions:

As the people are naturally rude, little obedient to the church having recourse to the authorities to the pagans to whom they pay bribes; when it follows that they are not altogether pure from idolatrous ceremonies and customs.¹¹⁶

The Fathers, in order to keep them in check obtained an order from the king that Christians of Travancore should not be issued permits to trade by sea unless the father testified that they were subject to a church and deserved it., Such an order which was in vogue since 16 century was enforced even in the 17th century.¹¹⁷ As the Dutch marauding moves did not affect this reason the Jesuit continued to labor hard. The number of Christians as a result, increased considerably but this must have been regarded as due to a natural growth for the report of 1681 expressly states that there was very little conversion.¹¹⁸

¹¹² Ibid., p. 193.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 193.

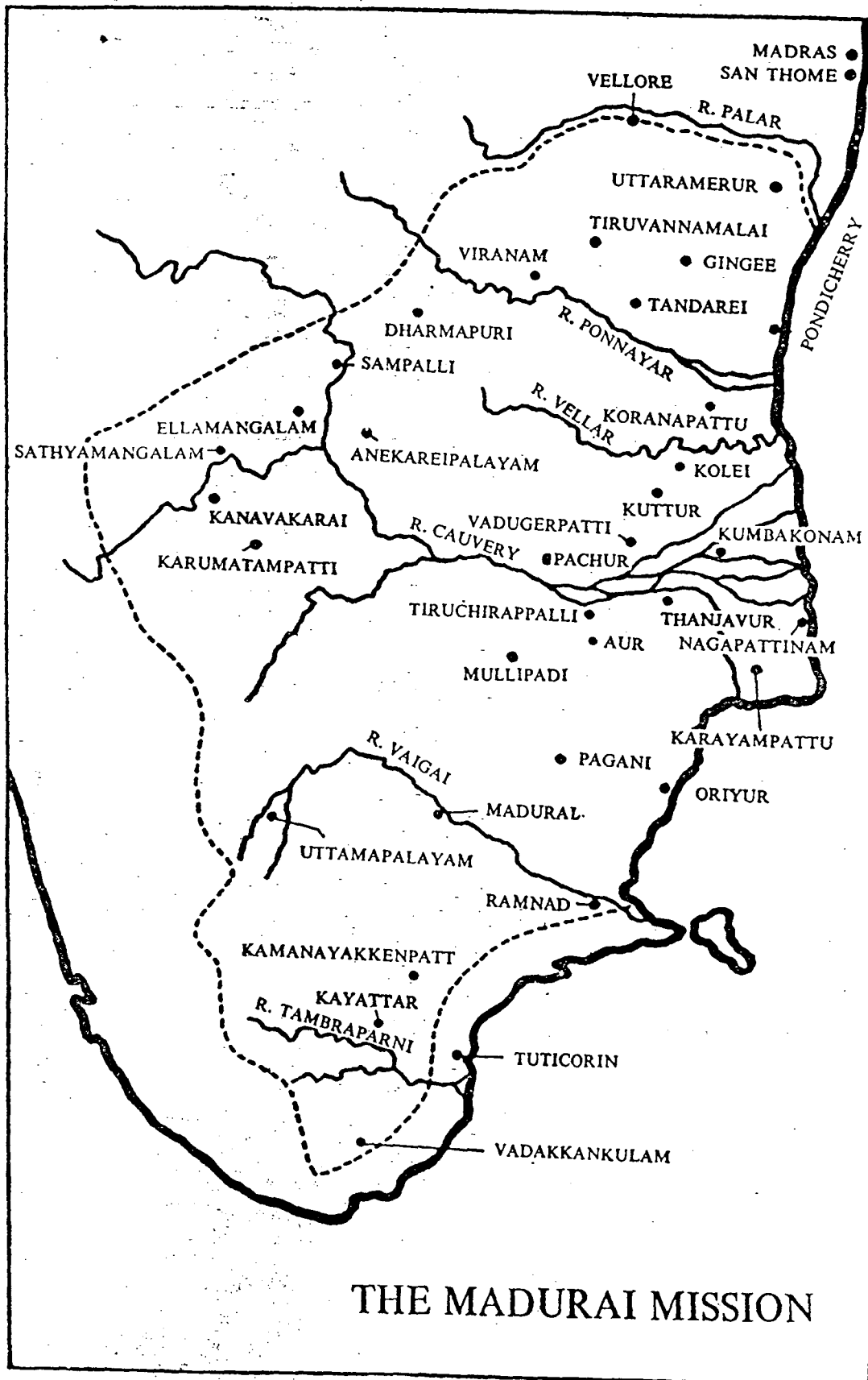
¹¹⁴ L. Besse, *History of Malabar Province*, I, p. 280.

¹¹⁵ A. Lopez, *The Annual Letters of 1644*, pp.8-14.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.8.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., p.8.

¹¹⁸ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.194, See also A. Thomas, 'Catholicism in East Indies in 1681,' Trans. by H. Hosten, *The Catholic Herald of India*, 15 (1917) p. 464.



Madurai Mission

In the interior parts of the Coromandel the Jesuits had begun to set up another mission in the beginning of the 17th century. The proposal to station Jesuits at Madurai was already in vogue during 1589.¹¹⁹ However, it was only in 1594 that the Jesuits were allowed to have a house at Madurai.¹²⁰ In 1595, Fr. Gonsalo Fernandez settled there to attend to the spiritual needs of the Paravas who were then already there. Fernandez began his mission by establishing a public Hospital where patients were given free treatment. He also started a school where one Brahmin master taught students.¹²¹ But until Roberto Nobili, we have no reference of substantial conversion in the region.

Roberto Nobili's first convert was the Brahmin teacher of the Jesuit school of Madurai. It was the former Guru of this converted teacher (called Alberto by Nobili) who urged Nobili to change his "*Paranghi*" dress and adopt "The costume in use with the guru who teach the divine law." He told Nobili that:

If you want to be a master among these people, teach them the spiritual law and gather a large number of disciples, you must as far as you can, adapt yourself to the manners, customs, and ideas of this country.¹²²

It was in 1607 that Nobili could obtain permission to put the usual dress of Indian *sannyasi*. He began to live in a little mud house in the Brahmin quarter, which was offered to him by his Hindu admirers.¹²³ Being much more adapted and accustomed to Hindu way of life and winning much respect and esteem from them some higher caste Hindu, without running the risk of social ostracisation, begun to declared themselves to be his followers.

Nobili had 10 conversions in 1607; 14 in 1608; 60 in 1609; 8 in 1610 and 16 in 1611.¹²⁴ We have no further reference of conversion during the succeeding period although the works among the Madurai population continued. This is due to the fact that Nobili's method of conversion had invited much criticism from different areas. In 1612 the provincial father forbade him to baptize but this was lifted after the death of the former in 1616. But as the intensity of opposition to him increased the issue was then brought, as per the direction from Rome, in the conference of Goa in 1619. Except the Jesuits and the Inquisitor, who were now won over to his side by Nobili after explaining his treatise, and the second

¹¹⁹ Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, XV, p.220. Fr. Pedro Luis (Brahmin) to Fr. Acquaviva January 2 1589.

¹²⁰ Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, XV, p.147.

¹²¹ S.J. Stephens, 'Societal Changes: Portuguese and the native Christians in Tamil Country, 1537-1759', in K.S. Mathew (ed.), *The Portuguese and the Socio-Cultural Changes in India, 1500- 1800*, (2001), pp. 491-492.

¹²² S. Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar*, (1972), p. 22.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, p.19.

¹²⁴ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.215; Stephens, *Societal Changes*, p.494.

Inquisitor, the Archbishop of Craganore, all the other participants declared themselves against him.¹²⁵ But the issue was struck to naught when the Grand Inquisitor of Portugal (1621) and finally pope Gregory XV decided in favor of Nobili in 1623.¹²⁶ It was after this protracted battle that Nobili could resume his apostolate.

In the mean time the Nayaks of Madurai had transferred his capital to Tiruchirappalli in 1616. Some of Nobili's converts, dependents of the Madurai Nayak, had also shifted there. As such Christianity began to spread to various other parts of Tamilnadu such as in the kingdom of Madurai, Thanjavur, Gingee and the province of Sasthamangalam and Dharmapuri. As the number of lower caste conversions began to increase the mission had introduced another class of missionaries called the *Pandaraswamis* in 1640. Fr. Balthassar da Costa was the first *Pandaraswami* in the Madurai mission. Since 1644 there were 4183 Christians in the whole mission.¹²⁷ The breakup of this can be had from the following table. There were four Jesuit Father during this time – two *Sannyasis* and two *Pandaraswamis*.¹²⁸

Table 2.3: No. of Christians in Madurai Mission, 1644.

Residence	Places	Converts under Sannyasis and Pandaraswami Fathers		Total
		Sannyasis	Pandaraswamis	
Madurai	Maduria	300	—	300
Tiruchirappalli	Tiruchirappalli	350	1633	1983
	South of Tiruchi	—	130	130
	Iroru	24	—	24
	Sorounding vill.	141	—	141
	Satiangalam	73	627	700
	Other side of river	200	—	200
	Tanjore	100	350	450
	Karur	—	230	230
	Gingee	—	5	5
Grand Total		1208	2975	4183

Source: see note.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ S. Rajamanickam, *Roberto De Nobili: Adaptation*, (1971), pp.iii-iv.

¹²⁶ S. Rajamanickam, *The First Oriental Scholar*, pp.42-46.

¹²⁷ A. Lopez, *The Annual Letters of 1644*, pp.30-32.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.29.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.30-32. Their numbers are specifically the total numbers of Christians in the Madurai Mission by the year 1644.

It should be noted that within 30 years of its beginning the mission had very less conversions. It is said that the Brahmin fathers had at the most 500 converts within this period.¹³⁰ Most of the lower caste conversion took place after the introduction of *Pandaraswamis*. It is said that Fr. da Costa had baptized not less than 2,200 lower caste adults during 1640 to 1643.¹³¹

By the year 1644 Tiruchirappalli had already become the chief center of missionary activities. But the peaceful environment of the region till 1644 was followed by a succession of war, famine and epidemics throughout seventeenth century. The Nayaks of Madurai, Thanjavur and Gingee asserted themselves against Vijayanagar. This was followed by endless wars among the Nayaks and there were successive appearance of the armies of Bijapur, Golconda, the Marathas and later the Mughals in the region. The unsettled conditions, especially in the latter half of 17th century, thereby brought political instability and social crisis in the region. Consequently one witnessed dreadful famine, drought and epidemics. This deplorable state of affairs brought about a forceful migration of people from one place to another. 17th century Tamil Nad witnesses large scale movement of population from the hinterland towards the coastal port towns. It is to be remembered that instead of disturbing the progress of conversion one could surprisingly see the fast growing Christian community in the region. This is not to say that missionary movement was not at all disturbed. In fact persecution becomes the recurring features in the religious landscape of 17th century Tamilnadu. It is thus pertinent to see the progress of the conversion during 17th century.

According to the available sources we are told that in and around Tiruchirappalli there were,500 in 1645& 300 conversion in 1648; about 2000 in 1651 –52; 1240 person in 1654-56.¹³² We also have 600 baptisms in 1644 and 1500 baptism in 1651 at Satyamangalam.¹³³ In 1654-56 there were also 606 conversions in the woods of *kallers*.¹³⁴ From 1656-59 there were 2347 baptism in Tiruchirappalli, 1192 at Kandelur, 1400 at Pachur (a new centre started in 1656) and 2268 at Thanjavur.¹³⁵ During the years 1664-66 there were 5293 baptisms in which there were around 2339 conversion in the year 1666 alone in the

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.31.

¹³¹ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.222.

¹³² Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II p.225-226, where he cited L.Besse, *La mission*, pp.10-13.

¹³³ Bertrand, *La Mission du Madure*, (4 Vols,) vol. II, pp.360-61: Letter of Fr. B. da Costa, 1644: pp. 394-99: Letter of Fr. Martins in 1653.

¹³⁴ Ibid., p.13.

¹³⁵ Ibid., III, pp.76-85.

whole of Madurai mission.¹³⁶ The number of conversions during three years from 1674-76 counts 6303 persons.¹³⁷ The annual letter of 1677 has also informed us that the number of Christians in the Madurai mission numbered roughly 50,000 but counting based on baptism since the beginning of the mission is more than 60,000.¹³⁸ There were 2076 baptism during 1677; 3259 in 1678¹³⁹; 8357 during the years 1679-81¹⁴⁰; 3881 in 1682; 4889 in 1683¹⁴¹; 13,419 during 1684-86¹⁴² and 1936 during 1689¹⁴³ in the whole of the Madurai mission. Fr. Bouchet is said to have baptized as many as 20,000 people in and around Tiruchirappalli during 1689-1700 of which he baptized 11,000 people during the five years from 1696-1700.¹⁴⁴ In 1674 there were 420 Christians in Kelamangalam, 640 at Dharmapuri and 440 at Sampali.¹⁴⁵ In the Marava country there were 252 baptism in 1663¹⁴⁶; 2,070 in 1686¹⁴⁷; 8,000 during 1691-92¹⁴⁸ and 9,000 in 1701.¹⁴⁹ In the southern part of the Madurai mission we have few reference of conversion. In 1684 there were an average of 600 conversions per year.¹⁵⁰ Thus the total number of Christians in the Madurai mission increases to 4,183 in 1644¹⁵¹; 50,000 in 1677¹⁵²; 80,000 in 1682¹⁵³ and 1,20000 at the turn of 18th century.¹⁵⁴ Number of conversion in Madurai Mission can be broadly shown from the table 2.4.

It is seen from the table that the number of conversion mainly took place during the latter half of the 17th century. It is of interest to our investigation to know why there was a spurt in conversions in spite of the region undergoing a phase of unsettled politics .It would be too simplistic to credit the missionary for all of these out come. As it is well known that very few missionaries, though zealous, worked in the region. The number of the missionaries working in the Madurai mission during the 17th century can be seen from the table 2.5.

¹³⁶ S.J. Stephens (trans.), *Letters of the Portuguese Jesuits from Tamil Countryside*, 1666-1688, Pondicherry (2001), p.62: Letter of Fr.Andres Freyre, 1667.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.100: Fr.Andres Freyre, 1667, 1677.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.100.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*,pp.147 & 180. Fr.Andres Freyre, 1678 and 1679.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.276: Fr.Andres Freyre, 14 May 1683.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.327: Fr. Joao de Britto, 9 May 1684.

¹⁴² Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.228, where he cited L. Besse, *La Mission*, p. 23, Bertrand, p.395.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp.346 & 371, Letter of Fr. Luiz de Mello, 11 November 1686 and 30 May 1689.

¹⁴⁴ Bertrand, *La Mission du Madure*, IV, p.62

¹⁴⁵ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.241.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.246.

¹⁴⁷ Bertrand, *La Mission du Madure*, III, pp.388-393.

¹⁴⁸ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.248, where he cited L. Besse, *La Mission*, pp.231-233.

¹⁴⁹ L.Besse, *History of Malabar Province*, II, p.525.

¹⁵⁰ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.249.

¹⁵¹ A. Lopez, *The Annual Letters of 1644*, pp.29-32.

¹⁵² Stephens, *Letters*, p.100.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.188.

¹⁵⁴ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.236.

Table: 2.4: No. Of Conversion in Madurai Mission during Seventeenth Century.

Residences	1648	51-52	54-56	56-59	64-65	65-66	74-76	77	78	79-81	82	83	84-86	1688	89-1700	1701
Tiuchirapalli	300	2000	1240	2347	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20000	—
& Kandalur	—	—	—	1192	2784	549	1228	222	185	764	405	—	13419	200	—	—
Vadugarpatti	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	401	540	2122	1051	1040	—	4782	—	—
& Anaikaraipalayam	—	—	—	—	—	—	1647	240	51	92	70	—	—	—	—	—
Pachur	—	—	—	1400	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Tottiyam	—	—	—	—	—	196	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kongupatti	—	—	—	—	—	272	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Madurai	—	—	—	—	—	185	184	49	67	—	—	—	—	95	—	—
Mullipadi	—	—	—	—	—	140	207	247	297	371	265	—	—	75	—	—
Sathiyamangalam	—	1500	—	—	—	514	—	129	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
& Vaniputhur	—	—	—	—	—	—	390	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Kavankarai	—	—	—	—	—	—	300	—	—	—	300	—	—	—	—	—
& Ellamangalam	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1047	360	130	—	—	—	—
Nandavanam	—	—	600	—	—	—	1198	339	504	1238	520	—	—	—	—	—
& Nandavanampatti	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	630	—	—	—	—
Thanjavur	—	—	—	2268	—	401	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Koranapattu	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	59	335	443	100	—	—	150	—	—
& Agaram	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	500	—	—	—	—
Kollai	—	—	—	—	—	—	1159	390	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
& Kottur	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	1280	2280	810	1003	—	—	—	—
Kalpalayam	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	180	—	—
Kallupatti	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	450	—	—	—	—
Kanannykapatti	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	354	—	—
Marava Country	—	—	—	—	—	252	—	—	—	—	—	1136	2070	—	8000	9000
Kuvathur	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	404	—
Total	300	3500	1840	7207	2784	2509	6313	2076	3259	8357	3881	4889	15489	1936	28000	9000

Table 2. 5: Number of Jesuits working in Madurai mission during 17th century

Years	1606	07	09	10	11	12	13	15	16	17	18	20	23	26	27
No.of Jesuits	2	2	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	4	4

Years	28	30	32	33	34	40	42	43	44	48	54	67	74	77	88	97
No.of Jesuits	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	11	8	10	8	7

Sources: See note.¹⁵⁵

But as said earlier, it would be too simplistic to allude that missionaries were the sole agents of conversion in the region. It is stated, however, that diverse agencies involved themselves in the process of converting the local people. Undoubtedly Catholicism was soon identified as a sort of indigenous thing from the very beginning. The methods, which the missionaries of the Mission introduced in the fashion of Brahmin *Sannyasis* and the *Pandaraswamis* only represent the desire of the Jesuits to express themselves as a sort of local asset. While the missionaries incorporated the locals it was the latter who incorporated them more. Christianity as we would see, represented itself as a part of or at least similar to the cosmological structure of the local people. Again the crises in the society in the wake of war, famine and epidemics which occurred frequently during the latter half of the 17th century instead of stalling the process of conversion actually contributed towards it. This will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

¹⁵⁵ H.Hosten, *The Works*, vol.XXI. Table prepared by L.Besse showing the year by year of Religious of the Province of Malabar.

THREE

Explaining Conversion I: The Religious Interrelationship

In the previous chapter we have seen the remarkable number of conversions that took place in India's East Coast. But how best can one account for the demonstrable success in the religious change that took place in the Coromandel region during the period under survey? How can one explain the uneven pace of conversion through time and space? Why were certain groups of Tamilian society more attracted to Christianity than others? If conversion to Christianity involved a repudiation of much of Tamil culture then why was it acceptable? And why did the Coromandel region become the hub of Christian conversion movement where the secular arm could not be employed as a menace or as an attraction? God, moving in a mysterious way His wonders to perform, doubtlessly provided an answer to the pious believers, but those of more mundane views might consider that there were some other factors at work. In seeking answers to these questions one is first tempted to focus on the primary agents of religious change: the Catholic missionaries especially the Jesuits who were working tirelessly in the region.

The Human Agency

While the dauntless conviction of the Jesuits in the region is undoubtedly seen as the primary agent the lack of consistent correlation between the events of conversion and the number of missionaries present in the region lead us to assume that missionaries are not the sole factor behind conversions. It is seen that conversion of the Paravas in the Fishery Coast took place during the expeditionary journey of the vicar of Cochin and four other clerics in 1535-1537.¹ Except for the guidance of a horse trader, Joao da Cruz, the Paravas had never seen any Christian Missionaries in their areas before. Even the Karaiyas and the Mukkuvas had been baptized with partial instructions, during the journey of Xavier and two other Brothers Mansillas and Coelho. In spite of the increasing numbers of Jesuit missionaries in the Coast during the succeeding period there were no substantial conversions in the areas. Whenever there were conversions they were of those from the interior who were driven to the Coast due

¹ Goer Schurhammer, 'Letter of Joao da Cruz', *Cruz' Kerala Society Paper*, vol.I (1930), pp. 304-307, an extract in *Bibliotheca Instituti Histroci, S.I, xxiii, Gesanmelte Studiaiu, IV, Rome (1965).*, pp.57-59.

to various reasons. The growing number of Christian population in the Coast was mostly due to a natural increase from those converted in the 1530's and 1540's. In fact their number kept oscillating due to the unsettled political situation forcing many to migrate. A comparison of the growth of Christian conversion and the number of missionaries can be seen from Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: No. of Missionaries and Converts in the Fishery Coast during 16th & 17th Centuries.

<i>Years</i>	<i>No. of Missionaries</i>	<i>No. of Converts</i>	<i>Estimate total No. of Christians</i>
1530's	—	20,000	20,000
1540's	2-3	15,000	40,000
1550's	2	—	—
1560's	9	—	—
1570's	15	1,000	40,000-50,000
1580's	12	3,000	43,000
1590's	20	—	—
1600's	20	1,400	—
1610's	—	—	—
1620's	17	—	—
1630's	—	—	40,000
1640's	19	—	40,920
1650's	—	—	—
1660's	—	—	—
1670's	—	—	—
1680's	—	—	—
1690's	5	—	—
1700's	—	—	—

Sources: See note²

It is seen from the above table that there is no consistent correlation between the incidence of conversion and the presence of Jesuit missionaries on the Fishery Coast. Maximum conversion took place during the 1530's and 40's when there were merely one to three priests. Between 1570's and 80's there were some conversions but these number were mostly of the migrants from the interior part who were driven by war, famine or epidemics.³ In the beginning of the 17th century we come across references of conversions but conflicts and quarrels within the Catholic religious orders had stalled this progress. The mass

² See Table 2.2 in chapter 2 of this work, p, See also table for the number of missionaries in the Malabar Province of the Jesuits prepared by L. Besse in *Madurai Varia*, Vidyoti Library, Delhi.

³ H.Hosten, *The Works of Rev. H.Hosten*, Vol. XXI, p.127; the Annual Letters of the Jesuits, Malabar Province, 1583.

conversion of 1626 is attributed to the famine that had ravaged the whole part of the region.⁴ Other than difficult times, the consistent number of the local Christians was between forty and fifty thousands. This argument became clearer from the accounts of the Madurai Mission. In spite of the war we know that there were growing number of conversions in the Mission. The number of Jesuit missionaries never exceeded eleven, their mean number being four or five Jesuits. It should be remembered that the majority of the Madurai mission converts were brought in by the *Pandaraswami* class of missionaries who were half of the total number of missionaries working in the Mission. A rough calculation in the following table 3.2 will clearly show the comparison.

Table 3.2: No. of Missionaries and Converts in Madurai Mission during 16th C.

<i>Years</i>	<i>No. of converts</i>	<i>No. of Missionaries</i>
1610's	92	2
1620's	—	3-4
1630's	500	4
1640's	4,482	4-5
1650's	12,547	5
1660's	5,293	11
1670's	11,648	8-10
1680's	20,516	8
1690's	34,240	7
1700's	9,000	—

Sources: See note⁵

It is seen that despite the maximum number of missionaries being present during the 1660's, the number of converts sharply fell to a mere 5,293 when the trend since 1650's was already crossing ten thousand. There was a steep rise in conversion during the last two decades of 17th Century but this was not so in the case of the number of missionaries available in the region. Conversely, the number of missionaries decreased to 8 in the 1680's and 7 in 1697 from that of 10-11 of 1660's and 70's.

A similar comparison may also be made between the number of missionaries working in the Fishery Coast and the Madurai Mission. It is seen that in spite of their smaller numbers (maximum eleven), in the Madurai Mission the local converts became far greater in number—80,000 in 1682 and 1,20,000 at the turn of the century.⁶ However, in the Fishery Coast the

⁴ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.179.

⁵ See Tables 2.4 and 2.5 of this work, pp.51 &52.

⁶ Stephens, *Letters*, p.188; Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.236.

number of Christians ranged between forty to fifty thousands where the numbers of missionaries working among them were from 10–20 since the second half of the 16th century.⁷ Thus one can say that besides the missionary works there were some other factors inter-playing in the conversion process. In the following pages an attempt is made to identify those other factors, which were at work in the course of conversion. But before we actually do that a brief knowledge of the local socio-religious culture is pertinent as essential background information for our discussion on conversion.

3.2. Tamil Socio-Religious Culture

The various facets of socio-religious change set in motion during the medieval South India are important in understanding the true nature of Christianity in India. Since it was the base on which the local people accepted Christianity a brief into it becomes imminent. This part is most pertinent when one considers the study of Christian missionary movements from the local perspectives. In fact religion cannot be studied in isolation if we are to achieve any useful understanding of a society and its changing cultural traditions. What is especially necessary for this work is the deep knowledge of the prevailing beliefs system, as we desired to proceed our analysis from this particular conjuncture. Therefore, an attempt is made here to identify some of the important changes that took place before and during our period of study.

However, identifying the various social parameters of the dynamic Tamil society with a mixture of castes, groups and economic divisions during the medieval period becomes one of the most trying projects in south Indian History. It should be remembered that Tamil Society had witnessed some changes during the 16th and 17th centuries. It was brought about by various new developments that took place in the region. The expansion of Vijayanagar power had proceeded on the basis of successive campaigns, largely in the southward direction, and reached its extent, militarily with the subjugation of the Tirunavelli region in the 1540's. While the conquest may have been the business of imperially raised armies, the

⁷ See Table 3.1 in this chapter.

continuance of effective domination in the conquered territories was predicated on the migratory movements of the conqueror as well as on the *modus vivendi* with the local elites.⁸

In the period from the mid-fifteenth century there was an extensive movement of persons from the Telegu region into the Tamil speaking areas. These groups, extending from warrior chieftains and cultivators to the chief mercantile castes (notably the Komattis, Balijas and Beri Chetties) spread themselves along the length of the Tamil Nad.⁹ The influx of the Badagas (northerners) were also noted by the Jesuit missionaries especially in the region of Madurai and Tirunelveli. These migrant groups, however, preferred to avoid the relatively densely settled areas with complex pre-existent social structures, but preferred to push back the frontier of agriculture into the drier interiors, over areas like Thanjavur and South Arcot.¹⁰ There were not only the long distance migration of the Badagas but also shorter distance movement from the Malabar to the Tirunelveli-Ramnad region of the *Shanars* (or nadars) taking place from an earlier period.¹¹

The expansion of the agricultural frontier into the Tamil dry zone areas had gradually incorporated the erstwhile unsettled or semi-nomadic population into the fabric of the cultivated plain society. In the process, this had brought about a new development in the religious life of the local people. Undoubtedly, the wet zone plain society had since long acquired the religious culture of the Brahmanical Hinduism due to the vigorous Bhakti movements since the eleventh century. Here, the Sanskritic Gods—Siva, Vishnu and its consorts and other representatives—had dominated the temple deities. But one can still find the existence of the local folk culture and tradition especially among the lower caste group who were by no means given privileged position in the Hindu religious orders. But as one moves away from the wet zone towards the dry areas things were different. The rise of the local deities such as *amman* (goddess) became prominent here. This development coincided with the frontier movement of agriculture as mentioned earlier.

⁸ Sanjay Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy of Commerce in South India, 1500-1650*, CUP, New Delhi (1990), pp.14-25. See also Burton Stein, *Peasant State and Society in Medieval South India*, Delhi (1980), pp.36-68; David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*, pp.50-52.

⁹ Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy*, pp.16-25.

¹⁰ Ludden, *Peasant History in South India*, pp.50-59; See also his article 'Ecological Zones and the Cultural Economy of Irrigation in Southern Tamilnadu' *South Asia* (n.s.) 1(1) 1978, pp.1-13; Stein, *Peasant State and Society*, pp.36-50; Subrahmanyam, *The Political Economy*, p.17; J.F. Richards, *Mughal Administration in South India*, pp.3-4.

¹¹ Ludden, *Peasant History*, pp.46-50.

Generally, there were six types of deities worshipped in the Coromandel region, which can be grouped into three classes.¹² The first group of deities worshipped were Siva and Vishnu, who can be considered as universal Hindu gods of the highest order. In the second category were the Murugan or Subramanyam and Ganesha who may be regarded as secondary universal deities in medieval Hinduism. The third group of deities were essentially local tutelary gods and goddesses, what Bayly called the 'blood-taking demonic beings' such as the fierce *ammans* (goddess) *peys*, *pattavans* and other male divinities who embodied divine force at its most active.¹³ But what is most striking in the religious landscape of the Tamil countryside was the rising prominence in the popular worship of the *ammans* (goddesses). This is especially remarkable in the interior dry zone of Kongumandalam and Pandimandalam.¹⁴ For instance, in the Kongumandalam the construction of temples dedicated to *ammans* was nil during 1300-1450 which rose to 35 during 1450-1550, 53 during 1550-1650, and increased further to 100 temples (shrines) during 1650-1750.¹⁵ Similarly, in the Pandimandalam this number increased from 13, 19, 49 and 75 during 1300-1450, 1450-1550, 1550-1650 and 1650-1750 respectively.¹⁶

Comparatively, the shrines of Siva and Vishnu were diminishing in proportion in the two mandalams. The dramatic expansion of South Indian goddess worship since the 14th century and well into the 18th century had featured the local belief system. It may be inferred that the centrality of the goddess tradition is explained in terms of the distinctive structure of the Dravidian kinship system. Popular tradition has shown that Minakshi is the sister of Vishnu and the bride of Siva-Sundaresvaran. This recreates the key Dravidian kinship triangle of brother-sister-groom and focuses on the figure of Minaksi as the bridge who brings about a cosmic union of the two great divine lineages.¹⁷ Thus, women are the linchpins of the system, a figure that continually renewed the connection between interlinked patrilineage. Therefore, it was this bond, which was most celebrated among the deities in the temples of South India.

¹² Stein, *Peasant State*, p.464.

¹³ Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, p.

¹⁴ Stein, *Peasant State*, p.456-465. Stein had framed a fine table showing the various temples of Tamil Nadu by deity, mandalam and district from the period between 1300-1750. This table is based on the authentic 1961 Census of India conducted in the state of Madras, *Census of India 1961*, Vol. IX, Madras State, Pt. XI-D: Temples of Madras State, 7 Vols. See also his article, 'Temples in Tamil Country, 1300-1750 A.D.' in *IESHR*, 14, 1 (1977), pp.11-45.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, table viii-4, pp.458-459.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.458-459.

¹⁷ Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, p.30. See also Dannis Hudson, 'Siva, Minaksi, Visnu- Reflections on popular myth in Madurai', *IESHR*, 14:1(1977), pp.107-118.

The goddess ammans, including Mariyamman (or Muttumariyamman)—the bringer of smallpox and fever; Durga—the spear wielding goddess who fights a savage blood drenched battle against the buffalo demon Mahisura, etc. were the most venerated deities in South India. Although all beings possessed some measure of sakti (divine power or energy) it was the goddess who actually took up the fight, which is waged throughout time on behalf of all beings in the cosmos.¹⁸ The goddess therefore possessed an extra endowment of sakti in order to contend with the demonic world. Along with other blood-taking divinities, the goddess who partook in everyday human experience could be appealed to in times of specific ills and afflictions. Not only that these power deities had a fierce and malevolent side which could cause harm and afflictions to the people. Thus they were to be always appeased with gifts and sacrifice. But why was there a spectacular rise in the worship of goddess or ammans since the 14th century?

The dramatic expansion of goddess worship was closely associated with the movement of these new migrant warrior groups into Tamil country, as noted, and to the growing power of martial local ruling groups in the area like the Maravas, Kallars etc.¹⁹ These migrant warriors and peasant groups belonged to a world of comparatively unstratified segmentary clans and tribal groupings. Their gods and social conventions were only distantly related to those of the highly Sanskritized valley people.²⁰ The new migrants were more easily adapted into the existing traditional belief system of the region. Thus Nayakas and Poligar temple builders tended towards the selection of ammans as the chief deities of newly established cult centers.

Apart from the mother goddess there were also some other deities belonging to the category of blood and power divinities whose worship was also getting prominence during the period under survey. The masculine figures such as Muni (Munisveran or Munaiyar), Lord Aiyamar, the warrior horseman, Karuppan, the club-bearing hero and Madan or Sudalaimadan, the sword-waving military man, also played an active role in human affairs as territorial boundary guardians as well as the afflicter. The lesser demonic beings included the *pattavans* and the violent and destructive spirits called *pey-picacus* who fed on human blood and on the violent passions of their living victims.²¹ Some female suicide and sati women

¹⁸ Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, p.28.

¹⁹ On Maravas see S.Kathirval, *History of the Maravas, 1700-1801*, Madurai (1977); R.S.Aiyar, *History of the Nayakas of Madura*, Madras (1924), pp.244-245.

²⁰ Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, p.25.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.32-33.

also came to be worshipped. Like the proliferation of the goddess cult in South India, the spread of these lesser demonic cult traditions was also associated with the enhanced power of local predator groups and with the immigration of the 'vadugas'.

The preference for the local deities such as the mother goddess rather than the remote Brahmanical high gods can be explained by the daily requirement of the former to the local worshippers. This is especially true to those newly absorbed communities who had more difficulties in accessing the shrines of as the high gods. It is a worthy remark that the bounded or more nucleated of the village communities were thought of as a domain of order and civilization. The village contained many dangers and beyond the locality, the residential quarters and cultivated fields was the world of the supernatural beings. There were the cremation ground and burial places with their lurking ghosts and beyond them in the unclear bushes and forest were the abode of spirits, real life predators, unsettled warriors and marauders, invading armies, alien tribute gatherers, conquerors, etc-the source of powerful and often actively malevolent outfit of demonic deities.²²

An interesting feature of the self contained-ritual unit of the village society can also be seen from their explanation of the eclipses. Manucci had enumerated that the eclipses were believed to be caused by an angry serpent god who had swallowed the greedy moon or sun. In order to restore it to its position the whole community, for one day, fasted and prayed to the serpent god to release the sun or moon. On that day they stopped cooking and forbade any food to be kept in their houses.²³ For every time they fasted and prayed or offered presents and performed rites to those particular deities who afflicted them, things used to be restored to normal. Thus South India, during medieval time tended to give the village a miniature ordered cosmos with its own gods, shrines and procession routes and a set of recognized boundaries, which were preserved by the fierce supernatural guardians such as Aiyandar and Karuppan.²⁴

There were also shrines, which housed divinities who received worship from entire localities; many villages also confined the shrines of *kulatevam* or kin group tutelary whose worship usually transcended the boundaries of the individual village. Each unit was territorially defined co-terminus with the kin group boundary. Each of them- household,

²² J.C.Heesterman, *The Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essay in Indian ritual, kingship and society*, London (1985), pp.6, 118-127; Brenda E.F.Beck, 'Symbolic merger of body, space and Cosmos in Hindu Tamil Nadu', *Comparative Indian Sociology*, (n.s) 10:2 (1976), pp.213-243.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp.31-32.

²⁴ Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp.34-35.

patrilineage and clan—had its own *kulatavam*, usually a goddess who protected the ancestral domain and whose shrine would be a place of power and pilgrimage for the group even if its members had migrated far outside its original home.

It is obvious, then that the swarms of deities and spirits, which inhabited the everyday world of the Tamilian were beneficent as well as harmful. By living closer to man and his needs these blood and power deities had been more clearly defined by the Tamil worshippers than the high Brahmanical Gods and most offerings and sacrifices were made to them. More elaborated ceremonies were therefore to be performed to keep various blood-taking deities at bay. For concerns that affected the entire village—war, famine, epidemics and so on—these local deities were generally invoked by the village ritual specialists.

However, Tamilians did also believe that there is one supreme God but because of its remoteness they found it very difficult to define it. Manucci had noted this and written:

There is not an individual among them denies that there is a God; still, they have so many different views in what they say of God that they are incompetent to find the truth. Some say that water is God...then shortly afterwards, with hardly any discussion, they will tell you that it is the air which is God...that the sun is God...there is but one God, who is called Parama Bruma (Parama Brahma)...that he is the letter O...In addition to this Parama Brahma there are, they say, three hundred and thirty millions of gods...that these Hindus have a sort of false Trinity.²⁵

What Manucci noted, specifically sketches the main features of the dryzone Tamilian cosmology. The cosmology may be characterized as a two-tiered structure. As the upper tier was the world of supreme Gods and their consorts who underpinned the universe and who, though benevolent, were vaguely understood and seldom approached because of their remoteness from the everyday concern of the village communities. These supreme Gods may constitute what Manucci called the Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Tutrin (Rudra) and other gods like Siva, Murugan, Ganesha and other Brahmanical high gods. Their abodes were in the celestial world of five heavens—Swargam, Vaikuntham, Kailasan, Brahma Lokan and Mel-ampadam.²⁶

The lower tier cosmos constituted a host of minor deities and spirits who are more sharply perceived and given greater attention precisely because they underpinned the immediate reality of the people. These deities may constitute what Manucci says of the ‘three hundred and thirty millions of gods’ such as the *ammans*, *pattavams*, *pey-picacus* and other

²⁵ Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, III, pp.3-4. See also Stephens, *Letters*, pp.278-279, Fr. Britto letter to Fr.Noyalle, 9 May 1684.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.21-23.

male divinities. Since these deities controlled the specific reality of everyday life—such as diseases, health, crops, etc—it was through their agency that these phenomena could be explained, predicted and controlled. Since they are generally also malevolent and destructive constant appeasement was needed to keep them away from bringing havoc in the locality and if it did occur at all they needed to be pacified at all means. But, how was then Christianity presented amidst such beliefs? How did it interact with the local cosmological structure? Understanding this becomes crucial in explaining conversion to Christianity. The following section shows how Christianity was presented within these local belief structures and dimensions.

Christianity and Tamil Culture

When missionaries come to the area under study, Christianity was presented to the local people as the only true religion in the world. This had led all the Christian missionaries to condemn and confront aggressively the local religion and belief system. At the same time when Christianity was presented as the only true religion, distinct and different from Hinduism they relied heavily on the local cosmological structures to explain Christian belief. Christianity was presented in certain aspects to be in tune with the local cosmology so that the local people could accept it as their own. For instance, the missionaries proclaimed the existence of one supreme God, transcendental and all benevolent, who had subsumed and liquidated the entire lower-tier of lesser deities who were then popularly worshipped by the local people.

Christianity had brought closer home the remotely or vaguely known supreme deity of the Hindus in the form of Christian Biblical God. For instance, Xavier was said to have proclaimed that Hindu belief in the existence of one Supreme God was the God of Christians, whom he had come to preach about. In a letter to his companions in Rome Xavier was pleased to inform that the Brahmans had presented him with gifts so that he may not revealed ‘their secrets’ of concealing the existence of only one God but he revealed “their tricks and deceits to the poor, simple people” until he was “exhausted.”²⁷ In the same way the presentation of the Bible as the ‘lost’ Veda of the Hindu by Nobili also presented Christianity in a manner, which was acceptable and relevant for the Hindu. Nobili told the learned men of

²⁷ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.70, doc.20.11, Xavier letter to his companions in Rome, 15 January 1544.

Madurai that the true and original Veda, which was lost, as was believed at that time, still existed in the form of the Bible, which he called *Sattia Veda* (True Veda). He told them that it had been completed and perfected by another Veda and he had come to preach all the way from Rome. All who accepted it would be saved.²⁸

Moreover, even Manucci had observed the presence of the concept of Trinity in the deities of Brahma, Vishnu and Rudra though he preferred to call it a “false Trinity”.²⁹ For the missionaries it became an easy entry point to explain the mysteries of the Christian trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit by drawing parallels from the Hindu cosmology.

Similarly, in matters concerning the ‘after-life,’ we also learned from the accounts of Manucci, which closely approximated the Biblical Judgement Day.³⁰ Manucci wrote that:

As for hell, they say it is not only underneath this world, but also below six others...In this spot, as my authors say, there exists as president and executioner of sentences a minister of Chivam (Sivam) called Yamadar Maharaige (Yamadhar Maharaj), with a scribe they call Christranguptam (Chitraguptam), who keeps an account of all the sins and all the good deeds of mankind. When a man dies they believe he is led before the president of hell, who asks him whether he prefers first to enjoy the reward of his good deeds or undergo the due punishment of his sins...If he wishes first to obtain the reward of his virtues either in Zoarcam (Swargan), or other region which he prefers, orders are given that afterwards he must return to hell to expiate his faults. But after he has given satisfaction in this said hell for his deeds, he is born again, each one according as he has done good or evil.³¹

This is given credence by Xavier’s letter that his sermon on it struck a cord in the hearts of the famous Tirucendur Brahmins who had listened to his discourse on the religious matter.

Xavier wrote to his companions in Rome that:

After I had finished the Commandments, I gave them an exhortation in their language and explained to them what paradise is and what hell is; and I told them who go to one of these places and who to the other. After I had completed my discourse, all the Brahmins stood up and heartily embraced me; and they told me that truly the God of the Christians is the true God, since his Commandments are so completely conformed to natural reason.³²

Xavier goes on to write, “I answered all their questions in a way that seems to satisfy them”. It is quite unimaginable that the proud Brahmins of Tirucendur would have agreed with Xavier, their opponent, unless something recognizable, reasonable and acceptable

²⁸ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, II, p.215 where he cited J.Castete, *L’Ancienne du Madure*, p.138.

²⁹ Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, III, pp.6-21.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.24.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.24.

³² Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.67, doc.20.11, Xavier letter to his companions in Rome, 15 January 1544.

was being spelt out. On several other occasions the two clashed which was followed by persecution of the Christians.³³ It was due to the lack of interest or enthusiasm on the part of the early Jesuits to learn the cosmology of the local people that the Christian faith was not as acceptable to the local population. Whatever may be the case it still holds that the apparent similarities between the two, as noted above, were one of the important factors at work for the hasty acceptance of Christianity in the Coromandel region. The missionaries by endowing the notion of one God with all power, might and transcendence had actually capitalized the then scattered gods and goddess of the Hindus into one supreme whole. The substitution, of course, cannot be regarded as the cause of conversion but this actually facilitated the process when the people of the Tamil speaking region began to give increasing attention to the upper half of their two-tier cosmology.

The increasing attention to the supreme deity paralleled the multi-dimensional integration of the then semi-nomadic dryzone people into the fabric of the plain society. This was brought about by the incursion of the northerners, foreigners who pushed back the frontier of agriculture into the dryzone areas. Therefore, this new development integrated the insulated localized people with the outside world that occurred since the integration of Tamil areas within the empire of Vijayanagar on the one hand and the coming of the Portuguese naval power on the sea on the other. Both these new developments in the region might have had profound intellectual and psychological effects in the areas. This amounted to certain cognitive disruptions as the confines of one's world became so enlarged that it could not have failed to have religious implication as well. Just as the advent of firepower had undermined the power of the aged old traditional weapons in the battlefield, the disasters that were caused by the newcomers undermined the command and control by those local deities and spirits. As such something larger and more powerful divinity had to be sought to explain, predict and control the new events. Therefore, greater attention was now given to the upper tier divinities. Amidst this gradual breaking down of the lower tier cosmos, were the Christian missionaries who claimed to tap a source of power, from the one God of the Bible, far greater in magnitude and far more actively involved with the entire life circle of men than any of the former deities of the Tamil world.

³³ For example, Christians in the Madurai Mission were persecuted after a long religious intercourse between Fr. Emmanuel de Britto and the Thottiam Guru, a Brahmin, at the Palayakkarar court or tribunals. The guru had instigated his followers after the two had clashed on certain issue on the two religions. For detail see Stephens, *Letters*, pp.30-33, Fr.Freye letter to Fr.Oliva, 14 July 1667.

Thus, the acceptance of the one God of Christianity was facilitated by His ability to deliver men from fears of the malevolent deities, his identification with new solutions to the old and new problems in the area of physical afflictions, and his infinite power of indestructibility inscribed in the Christian written text: the Bible. One aspect of the first, for example, was clearly spelt out by Xavier in his letter to his companions in Rome. Xavier wrote that:

they (Brahmins) know very well that there is only one God...(when) I then reveal their tricks and deceits to the poor, simple people, who are devoted to them only through fear, until I am exhausted; and many lose their respect for the demon and become Christians because of what I tell them.³⁴

After confirming the presence of the powerful supreme God in the locality, all the fears and threats of the local deities and spirits were released from the minds of the inhabitants so that many came over to Christians.

In another instance Xavier apparently drove away the fears of the local deities from their vengeance against anything wrong done to them. Xavier has once reported such instances to his companions that:

When they (children) tell me about idolatries that are being practiced outside the villages, I collect all the boys of the village and go with them to the place where the idols have been erected...the boys take the idols and smash them to bits. They then spit upon them and trample them under their feet.³⁵

This means that the missionaries now undermined the fearful outward manifestation of the gods and goddess. Consequently, when people saw that the expected revenge from those deities did not actually come the moment signifies the deliverance from the fear of that particular god or goddess being destroyed. Such incidents actually appeared to the local people as the battle between the Christian God and the local deities and therefore the winner was whom they would follow.

Similarly, a contest for allegiance between the followers of these two gods would take place in certain instances. For example, when the woman of Kombuture was in labor for three days and the *mantras* of the village specialists had been already helpless, Xavier, the white Swami, was called upon to ask his God for the remedy of the woman. It actually worked and the woman gave birth to a child after Xavier's intercession.³⁶ The news then spread immediately through out the village so that Xavier could later inform Ignatius as:

³⁴ Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.70, doc.20.11, Xavier's letter to his companions in Rome, 15 January 1544.

³⁵ Ibid., p.66.

³⁶ Ibid., pp.61-62, 28 October 1542; Shurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, p.298.

The leaders of the village were then baptized with all their households, and after the leaders had become Christians, I baptized those of the village, both large and small.³⁷

Such instances are crucial in seeing how the local deities or the lower tier cosmos were being one after another discredited by the supreme God. In fact, this particular incident had, in a later stage of Xavier's journey, won over most of their kin groups-the Karaiyas- into Christianity.³⁸

This incident had also signified how a crisis had opened the door for the newcomer with a new solution in life. By virtue of its ability to a new solution Christianity was popularly known in the locality as a religion with new form of explaining and controlling life crisis. Such instances of the discrediting of the local deities by the God of Christians in the understanding of the locals can be seen from several instances during our period of study. But two or three examples will suffice for our argument. At a place called Sathiyamangalam, a Brahmin had been persecuted by a sorcerer, who through his incantation caused the latter to finally resorted to Fr. Arcolini. The Father, taking advantage of the situation spoke to him of Christian religion and persuaded to place his trust in God instead of the deities he worshipped. The Brahmin promised to do so that Fr. Andres Freye could later inform as:

Two days later when he came back to see the Father, he was as healthy and strong as if he had never been ill, which struck the people as miraculous.³⁹

"The news of such a wonderful change" he continued to write "spread immediately through out Sathiyamangalam" so that "crowds of people rich and poor, high and low, came to the Father's house with tales of their infirmities".⁴⁰

On another occasion, at a place in Pannaikulam, a catechist Mayappan had, by his intercession to the Christian God, released a man from the control of the demon so that Fr. Freye could report:

Having been the witness of so many graces and of the great change brought in that man, I baptized him under the name of Xavier. Now all the Pagan Maravars of that village, are very much moved and inclined to become Christians, for they have noticed the helplessness of the devil who so easily deceives them.⁴¹

As in the case of Europe in late Antiquity deliverance from the fearsome spirits and 'demons' came to be an important factor for the spread of Christianity in Coromandel region. The

³⁷ Ibid., p.298; Costelloe, *The Letters*, p.62.

³⁸ For the conversions of the Karaiyas see Shurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, pp.347-353.

³⁹ Stephens, *Letters*, p.39.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.39.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.57.

triumph of the Gospel, in the information conscious society like Coromandel, may be thus attributed much on such miraculous work of the Christians.

Again, the presentation of Christianity as the religion of the poor and destitute had a great impact in the process of conversion in the region. The fact that all believers deserved heaven or the eternal life in Christianity must have greatly struck the heart of the low caste sudras and the outcaste people who, according to local beliefs, only deserved hell, eternal suffering. Manucci wrote that:

They say...that a Brahman who during life should have served and lived one month with Chutres (Shudras)...will not fail to be chastened in hell for this sin...even if the Brahman had not served that class of people, but only conversed with them, he could not avoid the same punishment.⁴²

This would mean that for the sudras and other outcaste people there is no hope of heaven at all means but they should compulsorily be tormented in hell after death. Debarred from a place in heaven would mean therefore that the sudras were open at all time to accept any religion, which offered them salvation to their soul.

This is given by the fact that most of the converts in the Coromandel region belongs to this group of people. This is especially true to the pariahs, pallars or other outcastes who were not even allowed to settle in the village of caste societies nor were they allowed to enter the temples. Fr.Joao de Britto informs us that:

In addition to those four castes there are others of the lower people consist of four divisions viz., the *Achivarathars*, the *Pallars*, the *Pariahs* and the *Sakkilyars*. All these people are alleged to be infamous and cannot reside within villages or touch those of other castes, not even their garments or their vessels, or bring them water, or serve in their houses, or enter into the temples of their gods.⁴³

Contrarily, Christianity presented to these people the company of the missionaries, the gospel, the Church to attend the divine services, the privileges to recite the Holy Scriptures, and most importantly assured them of eternal life after death.

The annual letter of 1644 had enumerated the privileged status that these people enjoyed after becoming Christians:

by becoming Christians, besides the honour they receive from adopting our holy faith, they can assemble in the churches which are a place of worship; which is an additional distinction for them; and they have got Masters of the law, who are not like themselves of low caste, but belong to an honourable caste, viz., that of Vellalas such as the Pandoram Fathers profess to be; a thing very glorious to them, no doubt, and which has never been seen till now in these kingdoms.⁴⁴

⁴² Manucci, *Storia do Mogor*, III, pp.24-25

⁴³ Stephens, *Letters*, p.281, Fr. Britto letter to Fr. Noyelle, 9 May 1684.

⁴⁴ Andrew Lopez, *The Annual Letters of 1644*, (trans. By L.Besse, 1907), p.30

What the Hindus deprived them of was now provided generously by Christianity. The openness of these groups to any religion, which could give them eternal salvation in heaven and a status of self-respect in this world, had tremendously worked in favor of the missionaries. Therefore, Christianity found wide acceptance among these underprivileged people. Besides, the non-vegetarian eating habits of Christian could also have similar attraction to these groups. This was especially significant to the coastal fishermen and the semi-nomadic groups in the dryzone Tamil hinterland whose occupation then depended entirely on fishing and hunting.

However, this did not include the caste factor employed by the Jesuit missionaries especially in the Madurai Mission. It was here, as we mentioned in the previous chapter, that the local customs and traditions were largely incorporated, including that of caste restrictions in the church. In order to facilitate the need of both the low and high caste converts separate churches were built and also separate priests such as the *Brahmin Sanyasis* and *Pandaraswamis*, a model copied from the prevailing Hindu tradition, were instituted. It was the sustenance of this tradition that facilitated the way for both the high caste and the low caste groups to convert.

For instance, in the weaver caste conference of 1667 in Sathiyamangalam, the issue was discussed in great detail: whether conversion to Christianity led to the loss of one's caste privileges? When all the caste notables who were present in the conference were told that there were many Christians belonging to honorable castes, and even to the caste of Brahmins:

it was solemnly decided that to profess the Christian faith was no disgrace of any caste, and therefore weavers could freely embrace it without fear of any interference.⁴⁵

The report, which was recorded by Fr. Freye continues to write "in consequence of this, some weavers asked for baptism, and today the members of this caste, both Christians and Hindus live in perfect harmony; which is one efficacious means of promoting the spread of our holy religion".⁴⁶ It is clear for our purposes that the introduction of local forms of religious practices in Christianity did work towards the conversion of the local people.

Christianity was also associated with new, powerful techniques for dealing with physical pain or disease. Although the main concern of the Jesuits in establishing hospitals and other medical houses in India was mainly to tackle the health of the Portuguese population, its effect on the local people cannot be undermined. In fact we learned that most

⁴⁵ Stephens, *The Letters*, pp.42-43, Fr. Freye letter to Fr. Oliva, 14 July 1667.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.43.

of the hospitals in the region under survey were flooded by the local people than the Portuguese themselves.⁴⁷ For instance, the Jesuits annual letters of 1582 stated that:

ours are also in charge of a hospital, to which the sick come from all parts of the country. This year we received an alms of 220 'aurei' for their support.⁴⁸

This account is important in seeing the role of hospital or for that matter the medicines, in the religious or social spheres of the local people. The hospital became a pivotal point of social interaction from all communities. Not only the effective use of medicines in these places worked wonders to the people but also the very new inventions in the region brought about psychological effects in them. The admiration to such new things greatly worked in favor of the missionaries. This is especially true when the Jesuits were in charge of hospital administration. The fact that Jesuits craved the control of hospitals wherever they worked speaks volume on the importance of such avenue for the purpose of missionary activity. The wide networks that hospitals could reach to diverse sort of people greatly improvised the missionary movement.

For the local people hospitals became a source of healing for their various pains or diseases. At that such hospitals were the places where the seven spiritual works of mercy were undertaken: converting sinners, instructing the ignorant, counseling the distressed, comforting the sorrowing, bearing the ills patiently, forgiving wrongs, praying for the sick and the dead. The effective use of medicine and other healing processes in the hospital have worked effectively in the thinking process of the people. These wonders were manifested in their generous donation towards the upkeep of the hospitals. For instance, the annual letters of 1586-87 reported that:

They (the local people) use every means to provide for the support and comfort of two hospitals on this coast (Fishery coast), so that they may want nothing.⁴⁹

The wonder works of medicine does not end in the hospital alone. But beyond these hospitals we also learned that the Jesuit missionaries had also with them all along their mission tours and in the residence, the Western medicine that they used for the sick and needy. For instance, when the Palayakkarar's soldiers looted Fr. Emmanuel Rodriguez they found certain medicines in his bag.⁵⁰ The medicines found were certain dried roots and

⁴⁷ Hospitals were established at Punnaikayal, Tuticorin, Manappad, Vaippar, Virapandianpatnam, Mylapore in the Coastal region. We also learned that there was a public Hospital in Madurai. See Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.263-264; Stephens, *Portuguese*, p.312.

⁴⁸ H.Hosten, *The Work of Rev. H.Hosten*, Vol.XXI, p.123, Jesuit annual letter of 1582.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.133, The annual letters of 1586-87.

⁵⁰ Stephens, *Letters*, pp.47, Fr. Freye Letter to Fr. Oliva, 14 July 1667.

various other antidotes.⁵¹ Although these medicines were not meant to be distributed among the local people, as the later missionaries did, the occasional use in certain serious cases worked towards the desire of the missionaries. It should be remembered that any medicine provided by the missionaries were imbued with the intervention of God. The local people were convinced to believe that those medicines worked if only they trusted in God or in other hand if only God willed. Unfortunately we have very little accounts of medicinal practices indulged in by the missionaries. But the existence of a good number of hospitals and references medicines carried by the missionaries wherever they went and the importance of its effect aided in the processes of conversion in the region.

One instance of the medicinal effects in the thinking process of the people can be had from the use of a certain antidote called bezoar stone. This was one of the useful medicines used by the missionaries in the region. For instances, when Fr. Freye visited the Governor of Sathiyamangalam he presented him a bezoar stone which the later:

put it immediately to the test, by applying it on the bite, which a man had just suffered from poisonous snake. The patient was cured on the spot, and the governor full of admiration uttered those words: "Now, I am convinced that whatever those *Sanyassis* are saying is the truth".⁵²

Fr. Freye continued to write that when the governor was not satisfied with one, another stone was finally sent to him.⁵³ Although the Jesuit missionaries did not use medicines to an extent that the later missionaries did probably due to lack of supply or the occasional use of some worked in favor of the missionaries. The efficacy of this medicines advocated with the supernatural power of the Christian God not only discredited the credibility of the local deities and its composite rituals but also won for the missionaries a respectable status. Once the association of Christianity and healing had become sufficiently complete in the minds of the people conversion in the context of healing could and did take place without the use of medicine at all. Thus, the healing touch of medicine, which was associated with divine power, had in the long run greatly facilitated conversion of the local people.

However, the most significant effect on the cognitive dimension of the local people was the introduction of religious text to all worshippers. It is to be noted that the local people in the Coromandel region highly respected religious texts. But the Hindu texts and canons, which were written and spelled in Sanskrit were not accessible for the general population in the region. Besides, the lower caste and the outcastes were completely deprived of reading

⁵¹ Ibid., p.47.

⁵² Ibid., p.92, Fr. Freye letter to Fr. Oliva, 8 May 1677.

⁵³ Ibid., p.92.

and reciting the holy texts of their religion, which was exclusive to the Brahmin. This facilitated the progress of Christianity in that the deprived groups were now allowed access to the holy scriptures of the Christian faith. The effects were especially forceful when the scriptures were translated into the local languages. We have seen that the Jesuit missionaries had taken great pains in learning vernaculars and translating the Holy Scriptures into them.⁵⁴ When Xavier was in the Fishery Coast the first thing he began to seriously think about was to disseminate the tenets of Christian doctrine into local language, Tamil.⁵⁵ This is also true of all the succeeding Jesuits working in the region.

Although the translation of Christian literature in Tamil characters comes during the later half of 16th century they were with the help of the local learned individuals translated into the Tamil language in Latin character during the time of Francis Xavier. It is said that in the course of three months rigorous work, Xavier was able to translate the most necessary section of the small catechism: the sign of the Cross, the Creed, the Commandments, the Our Father, Hail Mary, *Salve Regina* and the *Confiteor*.⁵⁶ In addition to these, various sermons and prayers were also translated into the vernacular. Although the translators found difficulties for the expression of Christian ideas in Tamil terms it was translated with the retention of some Portuguese words so as not to confuse the Christian God with the God of the Hindus.⁵⁷ Xavier himself learned these translations and disseminated the Christian doctrine in the local language. After completing these instructions he left behind in each village a copy of his catechism written on palm leaves and told those who knew to copy out, to learn them by heart and to recite them each day.⁵⁸ He further appointed catechists in each village to continue these teachings. The recitation of the Holy Scripture in the local languages was new to the people. This had brought tremendous change in the mind of the local people who now incorporated a more powerful and permanent supreme deity into their cosmology with the terms of the faith universalized by the Biblical message and made permanent through the medium of the Bible.

The fact that the low caste people got the privileges to learn and recite the religious canons are enough to explain the intellectual and psychological effects it could bring to these people. Especially it is true when the tenets of Christian doctrine and the other Christian

⁵⁴ Those Jesuits involved in such tasks were Fr. Henriques, Fr. Faria, Fr. Nobili, Fr. Freye, Fr. Beschi, etc.,

⁵⁵ Costelloe, *Letters*, pp.64-65.

⁵⁶ Shurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, p.308. See also; Costelloe, *Letters*, p.65, Xavier's letter to his companions in Rome, 15 January 1544.

⁵⁷ Shurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, II, p.308.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p.336.

literature of Tamil characters were available in printing form. This would mean that Christianity could be disseminated to the lowest strata of the society. Fr. de Souza had informed us that Fr. De Faria not only engraved but cast the Tamil type:

with which were printed this year (1578) the *Flos Sanctorum* (lives of the saints), the Christian Doctrine, a copious Confessionary (or prayer book), and other books in which the missionaries learned how to read and write.⁵⁹

He goes on to write that:

these countries marveled at the new invention, and pagans as well as Christians tried to obtain these printing books and prized them highly.⁶⁰

It was not only the Christians but also even non-Christians who purchased the printed Christian doctrines. This explains how the local people of the Coromandel valued written texts in any form. The marvel for those books does not necessarily signify their queries on the Christian doctrine. It should be noted that the culture of literacy was not the creation of the missionaries but it belonged purely to the region practiced for several centuries. However, once they read those texts, which inscribed the Christian doctrine, those books acted as the medium of disseminating the Christian faith to the people. It thus happened that once those books were made available in the locality God walked among the local people even without the missionaries. Thus it is held that the culture of dissemination of literature among the people had greatly facilitated the progress of Christianity in the region.

But more importantly the coming of the printed books and pamphlets in the local areas, because of its possible wider publication, immensely contributed towards the process of conversion. The marvel at the printed book and the hasty move to obtain a copy of it was the outward manifestation of the mental disruptions caused by the 'new invention'. Not only that, the low caste people could now read and recite the 'power filled doctrine' which would be 'a thing glorious to them and which has never been seen till now in these kingdoms'. Such a privilege gave a sense of self-esteem to these low caste people. Although the dissemination of Christian doctrine through written texts or printed books may not be the cause of conversion, it enormously facilitated the process of conversion to a great extent.

Another striking similarity that Christianity found with the Hindus was in its outward manifestation or the use of images, incense, rosaries, worship of saints, colorful procession ceremonies etc. Although this did not become the cause of conversion it did facilitate much

⁵⁹ Cited in Rev.C.G.Rodeles, 'Earliest Jesuit Printing in India" (trans. By L.Cardon & H.Hosten), *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*, n.s. 23(1927), p.164.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.164-165.

in the process. It is seen that every church built by the Catholic missionaries were venerated with one patron saints of the Christian pantheon and the statue of that particular saint made of wood or stone were usually placed in those churches along with the cross or the statue of Christ's crucifixion. When it is true that the missionaries did not see things in the light of local Hindu worship of images, for the local people these statues actually worked and appeared as another image imbued with divinities albeit different from the former one.

For instance, the Jesuit letter of 1667 had reported that during the drought of that year Christians began to pray to the statue of the Blessed Virgin for the rain. This was surprisingly followed by heavy rainfall on the same day when the church was consecrated to the holy Virgin.⁶¹ The report continued to state that:

Everybody witnessed this as a sign of divine protection, and the hope of a plentiful harvest was revived in their hearts...This great blessing was looked upon as a new sign of protection of the Heavenly Virgin.⁶²

The large number of conversions in the area was ascribed to the 'miraculous' work of the statue. The report continued to write that:

This large number of conversion is ascribed by everybody to the new church erected this year in honour of the most Holy Virgin.⁶³

This seems to show the percolation of local goddess worship in the Christian churches. It is true that no animal sacrifices were being used in this case. But the fact that high respect and homage given to the Virgin Mary statue would suggest a mere shifting of the worship from the local blood-taking goddesses to the Christian worship of the Virgin Mary. It is to be remembered that the worship of the Holy virgin became very popular in the religious landscape of the Tamil Christians in Coromandel Coast. Thus it would appear to us that the Virgin Mary substituted the ammans of the local worship.

Similarly, St. Francis Xavier and St. Ignatius were also seen as divine figures in the religious pantheon of Christianity in the village communities. They were worshipped in the local church as the saints of fertility, health for the child, and other favors. It was because the missionaries themselves recommended the invocation of the saints in certain cases. For instance, when the pariah couple took recourse to their spiritual father Fr. Bathasar de Costa, for their sorrow for not having any child, the latter encouraged them to pray to saint Francis

⁶¹ Stephens, *Letters*, pp.6-7, Fr. Freye letter to Oliva, 14 July 1667.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p.6.

Xavier by assuring them that he would console them and grant them a child.⁶⁴ Fr.Freye reported in 1667 that:

He (Xavier) is particularly propitious to those who are childless. Several couples obtained children through his intercession to the great astonishment of all, either because both father and mother were advanced in age or because they were looked upon as barren.⁶⁵

Although it was not the intention of the missionaries to identify the Christian saints to that of the local deities, the encouragement to invoke the saints for certain favors did actually deify the saints and its manifested statue approximated to the local deity. This is what Bayly called the 'cult worship tradition' of the local people that had entered in the Christian culture of the local people.⁶⁶ This sort of belief was so rooted in the village communities that any sign or symbols of Christianity were considered possessing divine powers such as, the cross, the statue, etc. For instance, a women, who was possessed by the 'devil' was cured by a mere sign of the cross, which her husband made on her mouth.⁶⁷

What is also interesting is that the relics of saints had worked so miraculously in the local areas. For instances, when the catechist Rayappan, in the residence of Korangapattu, was brought a girl possessed by the 'devil' he dipped the relic of the Apostle St. Thomas into water and made her drink the water. It was reported that:

At once the devil began to yell and cry out, "I am going, I am going; and left her quite free".⁶⁸

Even the living animals, which caused harm to men, were controlled this way. For instance, one certain Christian, after being quite sure that the relic of the Apostle St. Paul would work against the venomous bites, had shows to the bystanders the excellence of his relic by bravely stretching his arm in which relic was tied and seized with his hand the big poisonous snake by the middle of the body. It was reported:

The cobra without biting him, lowered his head and sniffed all over the arm, finally as if to express its terror, dropped a quantity of excrement whereupon the Christian let it go, and shortly after the serpent died.⁶⁹

In another incident we are told that Fr. Joao de Britto and his companions during their journey in the forest between Sathiyamangalam and Konur were blocked by a pack of tigers. It was reported that:

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.23.

⁶⁵ Ibid.,pp.22-23.

⁶⁶ For details of Bayly argument see *Saints, Goddesses and the Kings*, pp.379-419.

⁶⁷ Stephens, *Letters*, p.28, Fr. Freye letter to Oliva, 14 July 1667

⁶⁸ Ibid., p.157, Fr. Freye letter to Oliva, 12 July 1679.

⁶⁹ Ibid., p.157.

Arming ourselves with the sign of the cross and the Holy name of Jesus we put them to flight.⁷⁰

The forgoing accounts have clearly sketches how the local tradition of the cult and images worship had made deep inroads into the newly found religion-Christianity. As stated earlier, the belief had explained the phenomenon and the ritual confirmed the belief. Therefore, the existence of such similarities in the belief of Hindu and Christianity did greatly work for the increase of Christian converts, as it would be easier for many local Hindus to accept it. On the other hand the miraculous heal of the relics have displayed the new form of solution to their afflictions without needing all those expensive rituals and offerings another attractions in Christianity.

It was already in the later half of 16th century that such a belief had attained maturity on the Fishery Coast. For instance, the annual report of 1582 had stated that:

The churches and crosses are held in great esteem, not only by the Christians, but also by the pagans, who came from the interior to worship them, and bring great presents. Some compose in their own language various kinds of verses in praise of the most Holy Cross.⁷¹

Even the remains of the pious father become the divine relics for the local communities. For instance, the annual letters of 1583 had interestingly put in the following lines at the death of Fr. Francis Perez at Nagapattinam:

As soon as the old man had breathed his last, he [the owner of the house] saw 30 scissors busy cropping his head to secure his hairs by way of relics, and that when they had all been plucked out, he had been carried to the grave with a head perfectly bald. Some even pulled out the hairs of his beard; others cut his nails; others again plundered him of his clothes with such eagerness that whoever returned from that funeral after having secured something, deemed himself most fortunate.⁷²

What is noted above is crucial in showing how the relics of the Christians did work in solving the problems of local people on the one hand and the deep believe that those relics and other symbols had possessed divine power on the other.

In a nutshell we can say that the prevalence of such apparent similarities between the two religions—Hindu and Christianity—greatly facilitated the process of conversion in the region. The local belief system, which served as the base for the acceptance of Christianity, had also become a means to which Christianity was actually professed and practiced by the local Christians. This apparent symmetrical cosmology and its dimensions on relative practices between the two religions had assimilated each other beliefs system into the other. Thus, the co-existence and adaptability of Christianity had provided the most crucial ground

⁷⁰ Ibid., p.72, Fr. Freye letter to Oliva, 14 July 1667

⁷¹ H.Hosten, *The Works of Rev.H.Hosten*, vol. XXI, p.122, Jesuit Annual Letters of 1582.

⁷² Ibid., p.127, Jesuit Letters of 1583.

for the analysis of conversions in the region. Although the term acculturation or syncretisation may prove valid in certain cases the apparent similarities of the outward manifestations between Christianity and Hinduism had provided greatest weight in the process of conversion in Coromandel. Thus the possible influence of both the religions had finally proved the success of the Jesuit missionaries. The interplay of such a phenomenon is also discussed in the following chapter. We will, however, attempt to identify how the secular aspects of war, famine and epidemics worked vis-à-vis the interests of the missionaries and helped in the process of conversion to Christianity

Explaining Conversion II: Correlating Socio-Political events with Conversions

We have seen that the missionaries attempted to present Christianity to the locals in a framework that was familiar rather than a pattern which was different or hostile. Slightly different but closely connected to it, our intention in this section is on the aspect of religious dialogue with the physical or temporal world such as war, famine and epidemics. These are events, which involved both psychological as well as physical hardship to the people. They are also events that hold our interest, because they have a certain correlation with conversions. How did the local society respond to such intensely stressing circumstances? And for that matter, how was Christianity presented to the crisis of confidence? Whether Christianity brings new solution to the old problems or was the old solution helpless in the face of the new problems? We shall try to examine some instances and try and identify if they played role in the process of conversion. It is shown that during the pressing political, economic or social dislocations, if the ordinary precautions and remedies fail, people turned to more extraordinary religious or social outlets for their anxiety. Not only this, even the ritual propitiation of deities and the reassertion of communal values or prejudices may be important as a social therapy.

Wars, Famines and Epidemics during 17th Century

To begin with, Coromandel during our period of study was going through a long process of new political formations. The southward expansion of the Vijaynagara Kingdom during the 14th and 15th centuries had marked the integration of the erstwhile peripheral petty rulers in the empire. The reorganization of administration resulted into the virtual disappearance of the old ruling dynasties and the establishment of a powerful representative of the Central government known as the *nayaks*. The whole Tamil region was then divided into three nayakships – Ginjee in the north, Thanjavur in the middle and Madurai in the south. Under

the *nayaks* were the *poligars* who were to supply *palaiyams* or military forces to the Central Government through the Chief *nayak*.¹

As long as the Central government at Vijaynagar was strong these *nayaks* had fully acknowledged their dependence. But since the battle of Talikota (1565) the hold of Vijaynagar on the Tamil country had weakened enormously. However, the latter allegiance to the Central Government was nominally kept till the civil war of 1614-1617 when the Nayaks began to throw open opposition to the *raya* of Vijaynagar.² This was followed by constant political disturbances down to the end of the 17th century. The country of Tamil was plagued by constant warfare and plundering raids and the people often suffered from irreparable miseries.

In 1616, the Nayak of Madurai transferred his capital from Madurai to Tiruchirappalli in order to take active part in the ensuing civil war and in order to punish the Nayak of Thanjavur who supported the Vijaynagara king.³ Since then the armies of the three Nayaks fought against each other and also against their suzerain, the *raya* of Vijaynagar. This had brought great hardships in the region. Seeing this political fluidity the Muslim rulers of Bijapur and Golconda had moved southwards into the territories of the three Nayaks. For instance, a letter from the English factory at Madras dated 10th February 1646 states that:

this country is at present full of wars and troubles, for the King (of Vijaynagar) and three of his Naigues are at Variance, and the King of Vizapores (Bijapur) army is come into this country on the one side and the King of Golconda upon the other, both against this King.⁴

Another letter for the English Factory at Madras dated 1648, has also stated succinctly that:

the people suffered very much, especially because Bijapur hath brought in 8,000 freebooters who received no pay but plunder what they can; whose incursions, robberies and devastations hath brought a dislocation on a great part of the country round about.⁵

The incursions of Muslim rulers in the region led to the destruction of the Nayak of Ginjee by Bijapur. Besides these unpaid freebooters, who lived on plundering and pillaging, the wars between all these rulers devastated the whole landscape. To crown their miseries drought had brought a terrible famine during 1646-1647 particularly in the regions of Thanjavur, Tiruchirappalli⁶ and in an around Madras. It was said that thousands of people

¹ A.Krishnaswami, *The Tamil country under Vijaynagar*, (1964), pp.193-194.

² *Ibid.*, pp.267-273.

³ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.219.

⁴ Cited from C.K.Srinivasan, *Maratha Rule in the Carnatic*, (1945), p.55.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.63.

⁶ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.225.

died of starvation and people eat dogs and donkeys and other unclean animals and even dead bodies. This is followed by a devastating pestilence in 1648.⁷

It is seen that the conversions which were on the rise since the beginning of 1640's had declined abruptly during these famine period. According to the Jesuit annual letter of 1644 it was seen that out of 4183 Christians in Madurai Mission around 3,600 were converted within a span of four years (1640-1644).⁸ This was followed by 500 new converts in 1645.⁹ But during the 3 years period of Famine and pestilence (1646-1648) we have only 300 converts.¹⁰ It was only by the turn of the decade that conversion begun to get back to its previous rising trend especially in the region of Tiruchirapally and Sathiyamangalam. During 1651-52 the number of conversion in the two regions rose to about 2000 and 1500 respectively.¹¹ Again, there was a steep rise in the number of converts during 1654-1659, which rose to 9047.¹² But the 1650's witnessed constant wars among the local rulers on a much larger scale. The ruler of Mysore, Kanthiva Narasa Raja invaded the Madurai territory around Sathiyamangalam in 1656.¹³ He pressed into the country until he seized the fortress of Tiruchirapalli in 1659.¹⁴ In the meantime constant warfare took place between the Nayaks of Madurai and Thanjavur. This had brought about the invasion of Bijapuri armies in the territory of Thanjavur who captured the entire kingdom after disposing the nayak.

Following these wars was another terrible famine, which lasted two years from 1660-1662. This was particularly severe in the region of Tiruchirappalli and Thanjavur. A large number of people migrated to the provinces of Madurai, Sathiyamangalam and other port towns.¹⁵ Baldaeus had described the grim situation of this famine:

At the time of our first arrival (1660), we found the affairs of Negapatnam in no small confusion; the city having been just before besieged by the Naik... Besides this, the king of Visiapour had not long before the siege made an inroad into the country, and by destroying all the fruits of the earth, and whatever else he met with, occasion'd such a famine, that the poor country wretches being forced to fly to the city for want of rice and other eatables, you saw the streets cover'd with emaciated and half,

⁷ Ibid., p.225.

⁸ A. Lopez, *The Annual Letters of 1644*, pp.30-32

⁹ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.225; where he cited L.Besse, *La Mission*, pp.204, 10.

¹⁰ Ibid., pp.11-12.

¹¹ See table 2.4 in chapter two of this work, p.51.

¹² Ibid.,p.51

¹³ K.A Shastri (ed), *Advanced History of India*, (1971), p.428.

¹⁴ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.227.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.152.

starv'd persons, who offered themselves to slavery for a small quantity of bread...at the rate of 10 shillings a head; above 5000 of them were bought and carried to Jafnapatnam...Colombo...Batavia.¹⁶

What Baldaeus had noted in Negapattinam is also the case in the provinces of Tiruchirapalli and Thanjavur where warfare was intensely centered and the devastation of famine consumed thousands of life and dispersed the population to all directions. It is said that about 10,000 Christians died of starvation in these areas.¹⁷

However the absence of data on the number of conversions during the famine period could not suggest any outcome. We have seen that inspite of a peaceful situation throughout the 1660's we have no further accounts of conversions except for the period 1664-1666 which have 950 converts, a steep fall from 1656-59 which had 5,807.¹⁸ There was also a declining trend for the whole of the Madurai Mission during this decade, which numbered 2509 converts.¹⁹ Except in the region of Sathiyamangalam and Madurai where the region was safe from the ravages of famine we have scanty records of conversion. In 1670 the two residences in the province of Sathiyamangalam had 9,000 Christians.²⁰ But these growing numbers were mainly assigned to the migrant population from those affected areas.

During the 1670's we have seen a spectacular rise in the number of conversions inspite of severe calamities.²¹ The decade witnessed the worse natural as well as political disorder in the region. After protracted wars, the Nayak of Madurai, Chokkanatha finally captured Thanjavur and killed its ruler, Vijayaraghava Nayak in 1673.²² In response to this the Sultan of Bijapur sent his armies against the former. Ekoji, the army general of Bijapur was at first defeated by the brother of the Madurai Nayak who defended the fortress.²³ But he finally captured Thanjavur from Madurai's control in 1675 and declared himself an independent ruler later. Ekoji took possession not only of the Thanjavur Kingdom but also of a large portion of the Madurai territory as well.²⁴ The victorious Ekoji was said to have advanced till the gates of the Tiruchirapalli fortress, the capital of Madurai Nayak.²⁵

When the war between these two rulers was going on, the Maratha armies under Shivaji intruded into the region and first took possession of the Gingee Kingdom without any

¹⁶ Phillips Baldaeus, *A Description*, p.651.

¹⁷ Bertrand, *La Mission*, III, pp.16-17; & pp.123-124.

¹⁸ See table 2.4 of this work, p.51.

¹⁹ Ibid.p.51.

²⁰ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.239.

²¹ See table 2.4. of this work, p.51.

²² Ibid., p.65, Fr.Freye letter to Fr.Oliva, 8 May 1677.

²³ Ibid.,p.65.

²⁴ Ibid., p.66.

²⁵ Ibid., p.65.

resistance in 1677.²⁶ Under the pretext of paying a peaceful visit Shivaji penetrated into the territory of the Nayak of Madurai till he reached the banks of Kollidam where he raised his camp.²⁷ When Ekoji had visited Shivaji he was imprisoned by the latter. But Shivaji hastened to the north because the Mughals were closely pressing one of his sons. He left a large portion of his army to defend Ginjee.²⁸ Ekoji now invaded Gingee but the Shivaji's general defeated him. Shivaji's general in turn joined hands with the Nayaks of Madurai and invaded Thanjavur Kingdom but they were pushed back by the latter.²⁹ In the meantime the King of Mysore waged a war against Madurai in the province of Omalur.³⁰

When the wars amongst these rulers and the movement of armies in the region were almost permanent throughout 1670's, the miseries of the people were far aggravated by the dreaded famine. It broke out in the 1675 and lasted for four years especially in the region of Madurai and the Marava country. The Jesuit annual letters of 1677 reported that:

The war is going on in several parts of the Kingdom, produced a famine which lasted four years, destroying and consuming all the resources of the country. It was felt with special regour down to the Fishery Coast, throughout the Madurai country, where one cannot without heart-rending call to mind, entire population destroyed and villages completely abandoned. For very many people died and other fled to the Coast where famine was not so acutely felt.³¹

To crown it all, a disastrous flood hit the provinces of Sathiyamangalam, Tiruchirapalli, Thanjavur and Gingee during the last month of 1677. Many villages were washed down causing several deaths.³² It was followed by famine, pestilence and finally by brigandage. For instances, the field reports of the devastated residences of Mulliparai stated that:

to escape famine, which was playing havoc in the neighbouring countries, crowds of people sought refuge at Uthamapalayam and its neighbourhood. They died in such large numbers that the Lord of the Country being furious because he had to cremate them, ordered the corpses to be carried away and thrown into a crevice or natural cavity in a neighbouring mountain...But it was God's pleasure that in the midst of such a plague, not one of the Christians of this locality fell prey to any sickness, their flourishing state of health being a cause of endless wonder of the pagans.³³

In the province of Sathiyamangalam, the reports stated that:

²⁶ Ibid., p.104, Fr.Freye letter to Fr.Oliva,10 July 1678.

²⁷ Ibid., p.104.

²⁸ Ibid., p.104.

²⁹ Ibid., p.105.

³⁰ Ibid., p.106.

³¹ Ibid., p.66, Fr.Freye letter to Fr.Oliva, 8 May 1677.

³² Ibid., pp.106-107, Fr.Freye letter to Fr.oliva, 10 July 1678.

³³ Ibid., pp.130-131.Fr.Freye letter to Fr.Oliva,10 July 16787

The inundation mentioned above, which took place at the end of last year, and which was felt in the province of Sathiyamangalam more than anywhere else was followed by such violent epidemics, that whole villages fell victim to them, and lost a number of people who died without receiving any help, for the epidemics came so suddenly, that it was impossible to attend to all and give them necessary help.³⁴

Again, In the province of Madurai it was reported that:

Everything is falling to ruins, desolation and solitude reigns everywhere, and what is left of that once populous city looks like a wretched village. It is now the favourite haunt of brigands...They fill this town with their depredations and infest the whole province, where they are very numerous...they extend to many places in the Kingdom, and those who can escape that are rare...this Kingdom is in a state of anarchy, and every disorder and confusion prevail on all side.³⁵

Therefore, it is seen that the combination of natural as well as man-made calamities in the region had devastated the whole region so that fear and confusion prevailed everywhere. The people were seen moving from one place to another in order to avoid the wretches of total disorders. The fatal blow of the calamities did not spare even the missionaries.

In spite of all this it was recorded during the decade of 1670's that there was a general rise in the number of conversions in most part of the region under survey. Not to mention the permanent political disorder in the period, one could see the rising number of conversions, during the period of the dreaded famine, flood and epidemics. These calamities lasted from 1675 till 1678. During this period the missionary report recorded 6,313 converts for the period 1674-76; 2076 for 1677; and 3259 for 1678 which totaled 11,648.³⁶ This number increased steeply during the succeeding period. For instance, the reports of 1679-81 recorded 8357 new converts.³⁷ Thus, contrary to the previous decades of famines and other disorders the 1670's recorded a spectacular rise in the number of conversions.

The years of 1680's also showed a consistent trend of conversions from the previous decade despite the continuing political disorder. We have seen that the devastated wars were now concentrated in the Kingdom of Madurai, in and around the region of Tiruchirapalli, the capital. The armies of Mysore had penetrated throughout the territory of the Madurai. The concentration of all the powers began after the usurpation of the Madurai Nayak at Tiruchirappalli court by his Muslim general, Rustam Khan. Under the pretext of assisting the exiled Nayak, the king of Mysore was pressing on all sides; the Maravas who sacked a part

³⁴ Ibid.,p.137.

³⁵ Ibid.,p.152.Fr.Freye letter to Fr.Oliva, 12 July 1679.

³⁶ See table 2.4. p.51; See also the annual letter of Jesuits Madurai Mission 1674 -76; 1677&1678 in Stephens, *Letters*,. pp.65-181.

³⁷ See table.2.4. p.51. of this work.

of the town and plundered on their return journey; Sambhaji the ruler of Gingee; and finally Ekoji the king of Thanjavur, all had penetrated into Madurai territory.³⁸ For the latter two rulers their main motive was to oppose the king of Mysore, a means to protect their kingdom against the invasions from the latter. Fr.Joao de Britto had enumerated the consequences of those imbroglios as:

The kingdom of Madurai is partly under its Telegu Nayak, partly under the king of Mysore, partly under the prince of Marava, partly under Sambaji, the son of Shivaji, and partly under Ekoji, the king of Thanjavur, and...this Kingdom of Madurai is utterly ruined, for rapine, tyranny and treason are rampant everywhere. A mere trifle is enough to start a quarrel.³⁹

The king of Mysore was pushed back by the combined forces of Madurai-Thanjavur-Gingee but the kingdom of Madurai was later stripped apart amongst the rulers of Gingee, Thanjavur and the Marava Setupati leaving albeit the greater part with the Madurai Nayak.

However, the misgovernance of the rulers brought immense difficulties to their subjects. For instance, Fr. Freye wrote “murders and brigandage were seen multiplying everywhere, without anybody daring to ask an explanation, for it is said, the thieves were sharing the booty with the government.”⁴⁰ The account of Fr.Britto on the governance of Thanjavur is particularly oppressive. He wrote that:

The king (Ekoji) grants them only one-fifth of the produce, four-fifth have to be paid to him in cash at a rate much higher than the real value of that produce, so that the peasant must not sell all his harvest, but also borrow money to pay the other contributions to the state⁴¹

In the kingdom of Gingee the conditions of the people were equally miserable because of the tyrant king Sambhaji.⁴² As a result of all these tyrannies the region had witnessed another scourge of famine, which broke out in 1686.⁴³ This famine was the last one during the 17th Century. In Madras and its neighborhood no less than 35,000 out of an estimated population of 300,000 died.⁴⁴ However, due to a lack of primary sources for the rural areas during these years we cannot give accurate happenings there. But the report of 1689 in passing referred to the calamities that had afflicted the “whole of Madurai country” for some years.⁴⁵ Fr. De Mello reported that:

³⁸ Stephens, *Letters*, p.237;Fr.Freye letter to Fr.Noyelle, 14 May 1683.

³⁹ Ibid., p.284, Fr.Britto letter to Fr.Noyelle, 9 May 1684.

⁴⁰ Ibid., p.186, Fr.Freye letter to Fr.Oliva, 25 January 1682.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.284, Fr. Britto letter to Fr. Noyelle, 9 May 1684.

⁴² Ibid., p.284.

⁴³ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.152.

⁴⁴ Ibid.,p.152.

⁴⁵ Ibid.,p.353, Fr. Mello to Fr.Gonsalves, 30 May 1689.

Fr. Jerome Tellez...lives in constant danger of death, both on account of the implacable hatred of the pagans against our religion, the confusion created by war, and the long famine. Although the latter has somewhat subsided this year (1689), yet on account of the high price of foodstuffs, the incursions of raiders, and the riots among the people, the neophytes could not visit the missionary except towards the year.⁴⁶

We have seen that the famine lasted till 1689. The consequences as enumerated above must have devastated the greater part of the region under survey. In the residence of Koranapattu it was reported that all the villages in the north districts were almost deserted as:

Countless number of the inhabitants had been carried away by famine, which for some years had afflicted these parts. Those who survived that great calamity were reduced to the last degree of exhaustion.⁴⁷

In the residence of Thanjavur and Varugapatti it was reported that:

The Christians and Pagans died of starvation, and they were so reduced that they looked more like skeletons than living beings.⁴⁸

Fr. De Mello had also informed that misgovernance kept on continuing. On the governor in the region of Kandalur he wrote that:

He first made the imprisonment of all the farmers and village headmen. Having secured this he began openly and freely to take possession of the people's property, cutting down their harvest rounding up their flocks, lifting their cattle, stealing their furniture, and torturing them most cruelly to extort from them whatever money was left with them.⁴⁹

Although all the reports of the missionaries enumerated above were sometimes exaggerated the account, however, did suggest quite plausibly the events that actually took place. Especially it is true with regard to their accounts of the natural calamities and the political events to which they are of course the sufferers but neutral in stance.

As for the accounts of conversion during the eighties of the 17th century we came across the spectacular rise during the first half of the decade, which exceeded 25,000 people.⁵⁰ But the number of conversion steeply declined during the famine period, which ended in 1689. The numbers of conversions during this difficult time according to the report of 1689 were 1936 converts.⁵¹ This shows that the deteriorating political situations, although much retrieved than the previous decade, and the famine and epidemics had greatly affected the process of conversion. However, following this difficult time one can see the spectacular

⁴⁶ Ibid., p.353.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.357.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p.357.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.

⁵⁰ See table, 2.4, of this work, p.51.

⁵¹ Ibid., p.51

rise in the number of conversion during the whole course of the nineties of the 17th century. In spite of the Mughal invasion in the kingdom of Gingee the whole of Thanjavur and Madurai seems to have experienced considerable peace, since all the rulers had to concentrate now within their own territory. In spite of the loss of the Marava country, the Madurai Nayak the regent Mangammal managed to get back her territory annexed by Thanjavur.⁵² Taken together, the number of conversion during the last decade reached to around 37,000.⁵³

Mass Movement and Crises: An Interrelationship

The foregoing accounts of wars, famines and epidemics, therefore, sketch some possible albeit tentative assumptions to the occurrence of correlation between conversions and calamities or crises. But to our great regret the available accounts cannot clearly spell out what is most crucial. For instance, the non-availability of source materials for the number of conversions during the outbreak of famine and epidemics of 1646-1648 make us voiceless. Hardly one can assume that the non-availability of primary data signifies a standstill of conversions during this period. A similar handicap occurred for the great famine of 1660-1662. However, one can plausibly assume that the conversion process that had already crossed ten thousand since 1650's were not stalled by the recurring famine or epidemics. This is given credence by the fact that the total number of Christians had been estimated to be around 50,000 in the Jesuit annual letters of 1677.⁵⁴ But the recorded annual conversions had amounted to only 31,212. The difference of nearly twenty thousand must not have been recorded or that the present survey could not gather all the available material. Therefore, we tentatively presume that the distressing calamities rather contributed towards the progress of conversions.

However, the exception case in point for our critical analysis is the combined forces of the devastating wars, famine, flood and epidemics of 1675-1678. We have regular account of annual conversions from 1674-1683.⁵⁵ It was seen that during this hardship there was a continuous growth of conversions in the kingdom of Madurai where famine hit the hardest. But while it was reported that there was considerable number of conversions in other

⁵² Thekkedath, p.146.

⁵³ See table.2.4.

⁵⁴ Stephens, *Letters*, p.100. See also table 2.4 for the no. of conversions as available from the records at our disposal, chapter .2, p.51.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.64-328, Jesuit's Madurai Missions Letters of 1677, 1678, 1679, 1682, 1683 and 1684.

residences there was very few conversion in the residence of Madurai. For instance the annual letter of 1677 reported that:

It is very little indeed when compared to the fruits gathered in other residences, too little indeed if we consider that the work is harder than elsewhere.⁵⁶

But it was recorded that in the residences of Vadugarpatti and Kandalur(or Tiruchirapalli) in the Madurai kingdom, the number of conversions during the famine period (1675-1677) amounts to around 3730⁵⁷. What is more interesting is the steep rise of conversions during 1674-1676, when famine broke out. For instance, the residences of Kandalur (Tiruchirapalli) and Varugarpatti (or Araikaraipalagam) recorded 1228 and 1647 converts respectively.⁵⁸ Even in Mullipadi residence we have around 207 conversions that rose to 247 in 1677 and 297 in 1678.⁵⁹

Again the outbreak of flood followed by epidemics during the month of December in 1677 and early 1678 was also followed by the rise of conversion in many places. This is especially true in the province of Sathiyamangalam where the residences of Nandavanam had 504 converts. Although the accounts of the residences of Kavanakarai and Ellamangalam were not reported due to the death of the two missionaries working there we suspect the same number would have been converted. We also find a similar rise in the number of conversions in the kingdom of Gingee where the residences of Koranapattu and Kattur had recorded 335 and 1280 converts respectively.⁶⁰ The whole of Madurai Mission recorded 11,648 converts from 1674-78, the period of large-scale devastation by wars, famines and epidemics.⁶¹ The report of 1679-81 of the Jesuit missionaries recorded as much as 8,357 converts during the three years, that too mostly from the affected areas.⁶² Similar accounts of spectacular rise can also be seen during the famine of 1686-1689.⁶³

Therefore, in the foregoing accounts we have seen that there occurred a correlation between the conversions and that of natural or artificial calamities. Such life rending events contributed towards facilitating conversions. It is worth investigating as to why there was such a spectacular rise in the number of conversions during such difficult time? It is shown here that during the pressing political, economic or social dislocations, if the ordinary

⁵⁶ Ibid., p.98, Freye to Oliva, 8 May 1677.

⁵⁷ See table 2.4, See also annual letters of 1677&78, in Stephens, *Letters*, pp.81-89, &pp.120-133.

⁵⁸ See table 2.4. p.51.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.51.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.51.

⁶¹ See Table 2.4 in Chapter two of this paper, p.51.

⁶² Ibid., p.51.

⁶³ Ibid., p.51.

precautions and remedies fail, people turned to more extraordinary religious or social outlets for their anxiety. Undoubtedly under such stressing situations there was a disgusting mental or psychological effects that worked in favor of the missionaries.

We have seen the apparently permanent wars during the later half of 17th century. We have also seen that these wars and political disorders had not stalled the progress of conversion. But the missionaries failed to learn this progressive trend in their accounts probably due to the fatiguing effect experienced by them or may be because of their religious zeal. Rather we learned that these political disorders were on several occasions blamed for the failure of large-scale mass movement in the region. For instance, Fr. Freye had explicitly blamed wars for the little conversions in the residence of Kandalur in 1677. He lamented that:

On account of this war and the arrival of Shivaji who spread tremor everywhere in Tiruchirapalli and Kallar country, the Father at Kandalur did not gather last year, the same abundant harvest as he used to gather in the previous years.⁶⁴

It is true that Shivaji's marauding move wherever he go with his 20,000 horse and 40,000 foot soldiers have caused great hardships to the local people. But the missionaries had also failed to learn that there were immense conversions in the previous years inspite of a continuing wars between the Nayaks of Madurai and the rulers of Thanjavur and Mysore. This did also hold true during the 1680's. In spite of the concentration of all the powers in the territory of Madurai – pillaging, raiding and devastating the whole countryside – we have seen the spectacular rise of conversions. For instance, the period from 1679-1686 recorded as much as 30,546 converts out of which at least half of the converts came from the kingdom of Madurai.⁶⁵ It is true that war and political disorders may hinder the work of missionaries but in reality wars or for that matter famine, drought or epidemics rather contributed greatly towards the progress of conversion, as I have shown in the foregoing accounts. But how did it actually help towards the progress of conversion is something more difficult to explain.

Firstly, it is seen that the new solutions of the missionaries to the local problems must have greatly won over the local people especially during their helpless situations. As was said in the previous chapter, whenever the local ritual specialist failed to solve the problems of the local people the desire for an alternate means was greatly felt. This in fact was

⁶⁴ Stephens, *Letters*, p.120, Fr.Freye to Fr. Oliva, 10 July 1678.

⁶⁵ See table 2.4, p. the residence in the kingdom of Madurai includes: Tiruchirapali (kandalur), Vadugaypati (Anakanaipalayan, Madurai; Mullipadi; Sathiyamangalam (Vaniputhura) Kavanakavai (Ellamangalam), Wandavanam (Nandaranampati).

provided by the Christian way of healing or containing the crisis in life. It is true that the Christian's solutions to the crisis were not always helpful. But the attribution of physical and purely temporal solutions with that of God's involvement might have given Christianity an edge over the local solutions whenever it solved the problems.

For instance, after the great flood of 1677 crops were utterly destroyed by the invasion of caterpillars in the regions of Thattuvacharri and Kodangipatti. Some went to Fr. Joao de Britto for the remedy who reported later that:

Some pagans came to me for a remedy, and I gave them some blessed ashes in order that in the name of the Almighty, and with great faith they might sprinkle them on the crops. They did so, and all the caterpillars died and the crops were very abundant, as I could see with my own eyes.⁶⁶

It is obvious that those local people will only come to the missionaries with their local solutions – rituals and offerings to local crop deities – were already helpless. The success of the missionaries' prescription to such physical afflictions greatly celebrated the God of the Christians since it was considered that it was through the intervention of the Christian God their problems were solved.

This is not an isolated incident for the same letter implicitly refers to the use of such solutions throughout their mission fields. Fr. De Britto continued to write that:

The same thing happened to the pagan *Reddi*, to whom your Reverence gave holy water and blessed ashes for the same purpose. All the caterpillars were destroyed, in that field which yielded an abundant crops while the contrary was the case in the other field which were utterly ravaged by the caterpillars as was reported to me by the Catechises whom I commissioned to examined the truth of this occurrence.⁶⁷

This report is crucial in showing how the missionaries dealt with the local problems in the region. First, it appeared then that the missionaries employed such remedies in an organized manner throughout the region. Secondly, it explicitly declares the use of such remedies on a similar scale as they did to the 'blessed ashes' and 'holy water'. Finally, it also explained that once the new remedies of the missionaries found successful, it remained amongst them as the Christian way of solving local problems. Once the applications of such remedies were successful, as we said, it celebrated the Christian God, their 'Protector'.

Therefore, we shall see some of the important physical measures employed by the missionaries such as their methods on hygienic food, water and healthy settlement and other European or local medicines. But it should be remembered that such relief measures or any

⁶⁶ Stephens, *letters*, p.110, Fr.Freye letter to Fr. Oliva, 10 July1678.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.110.

other sort of material assistance prevailing in the coastal areas were not employed in the Madurai Mission. This was because the missionaries were seen equally helpless during those difficult times or may be because we have no accounts of distributing food and other necessary relief materials to the victims of famine, epidemics or wars. However, this cannot stop us from examining other physical arrangement made by the Jesuit missionaries during such hard time. What is especially significant to the Jesuit missionaries in the Madurai Mission was their concern for hygiene living, equally powerful measures to contain diseases and other physical afflictions.

For instance, when the great flood of 1677 had brought violent epidemics in the region of Kavanakarai Fr. Manoel Correa, inspite of himself being afflicted with the diseases went to the affected villages and attended as much Christians as he could.⁶⁸

The Christians of Kavanakarai found themselves exposed to the most terrible danger they had ever run, for everybody being ill they could get help from no one. Fr. Correa unable to bear the thought drew strength from his very weakness...went to Kavanakarai to help the Christians.⁶⁹

Fr. Correa had immediately taken up some physical measures as soon as he reached the affected areas. He first undertook to get the well dug, in order to get clean water. He also cleaned up the villages and probably the dirty houses of the local people.⁷⁰ After doing all these he wrote back to his companion, G.A.Amadio that “there will be a great improvement now”. He continued to write that:

Let your Reverence have no anxiety regarding me, for provided we get good water, this disease is not dangerous.⁷¹

The concern for cleanliness and hygienic food and water, no doubt served immensely towards the control of contagious diseases. Jesuits by their European experiences must have been quite aware of these hygienic measures.

Although forceful quarantine may not have been possible, the missionaries employed any means to isolate the patients from each other as much as possible. Attending to the sick in their house and avoiding all public or religious meeting seems to be one of the possible means employed by the missionaries to keep the people away from each other. This is given credence by the fact that Fr. Manoel Correa informs Amadio that he:

⁶⁸ Stephens, *Letters*, p.137.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.137.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.138.

⁷¹ Stephens, *Letters*, p.138, 3 March 1678.

Shall go to Ellamangalam and the feast will be celebrated where it will please God, for I do not see any possibility of having it here (Kavarakarai).⁷²

This means that Correa had even cancelled the celebration of the feast probably because he wanted to evade the meeting of people in one common place.

These sorts of hygienic and precautionary measures taken by the Jesuits were the cause of saving many lives in the region, during calamities. Correa continued to write that:

The disease is not only here (Kavanakarai), people die in equally large numbers everywhere in the neighbouring villages (and) those who die now are all pagans.⁷³

Although Correa was not aware of his successful measures it really work towards the preservation of Christians from the diseases. However, unlike the Christian communities in the region the other groups were completely deprived of any assistance from either the rulers of the land or their neighbors. It is seen that even the community feelings among the local people were lost during the time of difficulties like that of famine, war and epidemics. For instance, the Jesuit annual letters of 1679 had categorically stated that:

For, if in the days of plenty people show themselves generous, in time of famine they close their doors on the hungry who have no other alternative but to die of starvation and misery.⁷⁴

It was obvious then that the poor would be greatest hit by any disasters. For these servile groups of people there were none but themselves to help for any sort of anxiety. If nothing could solve their problems the only means they have is to escape the affected areas for their own survival. It was seen that the movement of people from one region to another became one of the regular features in the region especially during the devastating wars, famine or epidemics. But for the poorer lot they are always the victims of all the calamities, diseases, misgovernance and even the brigandage.

For instance, we learned that during 1677 many people took refuge at Uthamapalayam and its neighborhood in the Madurai region in order to escape the dreadful famine. But many of them died of plague to such a large extent that the Lord of the land became furious and therefore threw the cadavers in the neighboring mountains.⁷⁵ However, Fr. de Abreu, who reported this incident, was surprised to learn that:

In the midst of such a plague not one of the Christians of this locality fell a prey to any sickness, their flourishing state of health being a cause of endless wonder to the pagan.⁷⁶

⁷² Ibid., p.138, 3 March, 1678.

⁷³ Ibid., p.138, Fr. Correa letter to Fr. Amadio, 3 March 1678.

⁷⁴ Ibid., p.151, Fr. Freye to Fr. Oliva, 12 July 1679.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p.130, Fr. Freye to Fr. Oliva, 10 July 1678.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.130-131.

But when Fr. Abreu attributed this “due to their great spirit of the faith” he failed to recognize his great work of mercy. The fact that the missionaries insisted on the practices of healthy food and hygienic settlements to the local Christians was the main cause behind their preservation from the prey of the deadly plague. Whatever, may be the cause of their preservation the local people, especially the poor, were now convinced that the God of those Christians were the only Gods who could save His worshippers from the grudges of violent famine or epidemic. In any case under such circumstances things worked in favor of the missionaries who proclaimed such protection from ‘all powerful God’.

However, more than anything else the care and concern of the missionaries towards the local Christians especially during their miseries must have greatly moved the local people. This was especially true to the poor and needy who were deprived of everything. No doubt the missionaries were especially favorable to the poor and the needy. The great care they showed to their Christians as the godfather, protector and necessary helper must have attracted many poor and needy. This could be the reason why many poor people turned towards Christianity. Not only because of the spiritual help but also because of the physical support that the missionaries gave, they were the only available generous men to the poor people especially the outcastes who were not even allowed to enter the village of the caste people for begging, etc.

Even in times of peace the missionaries were always helpful towards the poor and needy. For instance, Fr. Vincent Duarte was said to have supported some widows and the poor who were helpless by buying:

Cotton which he deposited in his house and gave them to spin, so that they might thus earn a living.⁷⁷

We also learned that when his house was burnt the poor had lost a good provision of cotton which the good father had brought to help them.⁷⁸ Thus missionaries always remained to be the stopgap fathers in the time of life crises to the local people.

It is seen that political disorders and other natural calamities had brought about a crisis of confidence especially to the common people. However, we have shown that, in such times of need and crises of confidence, Christian works of charity did greatly play in favor of the missionaries. In fact the annual letters of 1583 clearly stated the effects of such charitable works so that:

⁷⁷ Ibid.,p.146.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.146.

Six hundred pagans, who, owing to want and famine, had retired to the Island of Manar, have been baptized. Great number for the same motive sold themselves to the Portuguese and to their Christian neighbours in the town of St. Thomas, and 3000 of them became Christians.⁷⁹

We are also told that during the famine of 1626 in the Fishery Coast, that lasted for 10 months the Jesuits did what they could to help a many person as possible. The result was that about 4,000 people turned to Christianity.⁸⁰ Way back in 1542 we also learned that due to famine that had infested the whole countryside many migrated to the city of Mylapore and 1,800 of them were converted to Christianity.⁸¹

But it would be too simplistic to explain such a remarkable number of conversions mainly because of famine or any other calamities. It should be remember that conversion is an outward expression of mental or psychological crisis or we may say that conversion is a window to one's religious, social or economic predicament. The religious, social, political or economic aspects of the Tamil world were closely interwoven so that the effect of one part will always disturbed the others. The welfare of an individual and the community, prosperity and growth, peril and calamity, disease and progress were all integrally related to the pleasure or wrath of their local deities. Consequent to such an inter-related view of natural and supernatural, and social and religious any change in one area affected the other. The socio-economic changes set in motion by wars, famine and epidemics thus created a crisis of confidence to their pre-existing agencies of control. In the new environment the local people were now striving for more accessible strategies to adjust and adapt for survival. However, here they have two options. One is provided by Christianity and certain related ideas of the Christian worldview, and the other are the reassertion of the communal values or prejudices. Both of these are vitally important as a social therapy.

To some, especially to the low-caste Hindu the adoption of the first one become a strategy as religious or social outlets for their anxiety. Christianity, as it was understood, was a religion of the poor and the needy and had enormously attracted the low caste Hindus. The fact that Christians displayed their God's very successfully in dealing with the new situation had worked very well among this group. The new form of solution to crisis had given more confidence to the local people at the cost of discrediting their old one.

This is also equally true to the mass conversions of the Paravas, Karaiyas and Mukkuvas in the coastal areas. To explain the conversions of these groups as a result of

⁷⁹ H. Hosten, *The works of Rev. H. Hosten*, vol. XXI, p.127.

⁸⁰ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, vol. II, p.179; where he cited L. Besse, *La Mission*, pp.440-441

⁸¹ Mundadan, *History of Christianity*, I, p.427, where he cited Correa, *Lindas Da India*, iv, p.131

social or materials motive may not give the true picture behind their conversions. It is true that Paravas converted to Christianity as a result of a contractual agreement reached with the Portuguese Estado for protecting their jati corporate economy. But seeing the details of the circumstances leading to their conversions it fairly indicated the importance, of course, of the jati economy of pearl and chank fishing. But we should remember that this jati economy was the base of the Parava jati identity and livelihood, which should be preserved for survival. Therefore, the question of crises of consciences came into being when their very lifeblood occupation was under serious threat from their neighboring Kayalar Muslims.

The Parava inability to withstand the superior Kayalar Muslims, militarily and politically and whose arrogance gradually led to, the trend of total extermination of the communities explained their recourse to Portuguese help.⁸² For the sake of a livelihood the Paravas accepted Christianity in order to avail the protection of the Portuguese naval forces. Therefore it is seen that Christianity came to the Paravas as a political or economic disguise in times of crisis. But when the Paravas actually consoled their jati crisis by becoming Christians and availed Portuguese protections the trend was already set alive for the other groups like the Karaiyas⁸³ and the Mukkuvas⁸⁴ who were also inflicted with crises under the changed environments.

On the other hand we also see reference of some Christians reasserting their traditional form of solutions during crisis time. This was especially true in the region where the missionaries could not go for long a time. For instance, the Jesuit annual letters of 1678 lamented that:

Because of the scarcity of workers in this mission for so many years, we deplore everyday the loss of many souls. In certain places the faith is cooling down, because there is no one to look after those neophytes who live more like pagans than Christians.⁸⁵

This suggested that some Christians had also gone back to their old religion. We have many references of such 'relapse' Christians in the Jesuit accounts of the Mission. Especially such recourse to old form occurred during troubled times. For instance, Fr. Correa inform us that:

⁸² For the details of Paravas conversions, See Schurhammer, 'Letters of Joao da Cruz', pp.58-59; See also from the same author, *Francis Xavier*, pp.258-267; & Costelloe, *Letters*, pp.60-63, Xavier letters to Ignatius, 28 October 1542; Baldaeus, *A Description*, p.645.

⁸³ On the Conversions of Karaiyas see Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, pp.294, 347-354; Costelloe, *Letters*.

⁸⁴ On Mukkuvas see Costelloe, *Letters*, pp.104-105 & to Mansilhas, 18 December 1544, p.117& to His companions, 27 Jan 1545.

⁸⁵ Stephens, *The Letters*, p.129-130, Fr.Freye to Fr.Oliva, 10 July 1678.

Charity does not permit me to abandon the Christians who are so utterly helpless. If I went away they would lose all their courage and the few pagans who came could keep away.⁸⁶

What Correa had implicitly noted was that whenever epidemics or other calamities broke out in the villages or locality or even to individuals, Christians were blamed for it because they have angered the traditional gods or deities by converting to Christianity. For instance, the annual letter of 1677 had succinctly stated that:

The number of pagans who were attacked by the disease being greater than that of the Christians, the Andis and Gurus, and usual, the rumour that this disease had broken out, because the Christians had stopped worshipping their (Hindu) gods, and in consequences, they tried to force them to apostalize.⁸⁷

Such were the manner of the discourse with which the missionaries and the local Hindu specialists dealt with the local people. Under such circumstances we have seen the constant movement of people from Christianity to Hinduism and vice-versa. This process of to and fro movement seems to be the regular feature in Coromandel region.

Therefore, our conclusion in this section could be that there was an apparent correlation between large-scale conversion movements and crises in society. However, the agents of those crises such as wars, famines and epidemics are not the cause of conversions although they did facilitated the process of conversions. They merely created a kind of what Dick Kooiman called 'rush hour' in already existing religious boundary traffic.⁸⁸ Again, the change of religion as a strategy for survival is not a one-way traffic. Many people turned to Christianity but there were also references of a return journey to their former religion. Going back to their old form would also equally meant that people in certain circumstances had more confidence in their traditional solutions than in Christianity. The suddenness of calamities makes things more hasty and the loss of confidence in what one had undoubtedly became the hallmark of conversion movements in the religious landscape of Tamil Nadu.

⁸⁶ Ibid., p.130

⁸⁷ Ibid., p.74; Fr.Freyre to Fr. Oliva, 8 May 1677.

⁸⁸ Dick Kooiman, 'Mass Movements, Famine and Epidemics: A study in Interrelationship,' *Modern Asian Studies*, 25, 2(1991), pp.281-301.

Concluding Assessment

What are the conclusions to be drawn from the study of missionary movements in the Coromandel, of their relationship with the states, of their actual evangelism, and the relative conversion process with the wider society? For one, it is apparent that there were strong links between religion and politics. The jurisdiction of the Estado over the ecclesiastical affairs had important repercussions in the colonies. Despite the initial fallacies on religious conquest, the Portuguese state's later involvement had brought about much disjuncture in the local society, which I would like to discuss in this concluding assessment. This state participation on religious matters has often been seen as the cause of conversions as the state is alleged to have used 'force'. But such injunctions did not find a place in Coromandel region. Contrary to common perceptions one can see that there was a spectacular rise in the number of conversions in Madurai Mission where the Portuguese power was negligible. In the Fishery Coast, despite the greater possibility of the use of 'force', we find that there were insignificant numbers of conversions after the mass movements of the Paravas, Karaiyas (Careas) and Mukkuvas (Macuas) during the 30s and 40s of 16th century. Therefore, the connection made between 'force' and 'conversions' used very often to engineer communal tensions does not find validity in history.

The most significant cause of conversions, as the preceding chapters show, were the apparent similarities between the belief systems of Christianity and Hinduism on the one hand, and changing socio-political contexts during our period of study on the other. Although the movements of people from one religion to another were not altogether tension-free, the interstice between the two religious belief systems was considerably peaceful and tranquil. For the local people conversion is not a means to an end. There was no final destination and the religious boundary was never a closed-door division. Rather, the movements of people to and fro between various religions were a regular feature. Therefore, the distinctions or boundaries between them actually are not really distinct. A pertinent question that emerges therefore is the notion of divisions and thereby tensions among various religious communities during a later period in the region. When did it begin or how did they originate? It is impossible to give an accurate assessment but an assumption is put forth.

To be very frank the present state of tensions and the undercurrent tendencies of religious hatred may draw its humble beginning in this period. However, the tensions in the various religious boundaries are brought about by the very collusion of religion and politics or in a modern sense 'politicization of religion'. The state participation in both the religion—Hinduism and Christianity—was openly endorsed during our period of study. The erstwhile Hindu Kingdoms of South India were generally known as the 'upholders' or 'protectors' of Hinduism and the Portuguese for Christianity. The conjunction of these two opposing state interests was an area of tensions, which actually manifested into conflicts between the two religious communities. Therefore, the connotation as 'religious conflict' was actually not religion in strict sense but mainly a political one. But how did this political tension take shape in religion?

Religious 'tensions' or 'conflicts' in the local society apparently was brought about by the colonial interests of the Portuguese, which was disliked by the local rulers. When the two state powers contended over the control of some particular group of people tensions between that group with the larger society was the by-product. Thus, such tensions were initially the tensions over hegemony. This hegemonic tension later manifests itself into religious confrontation because religion was used as the basis on which the control should be made. Therefore, the collusion of politics with that of religion had brought about 'tensions' among various religious communities.

For example, when the *Padroado* missionaries had insisted that Christian converts acquire a different and distinct identity from those of their contiguous populace it actually wanted them to be the loyal subjects of the King of Portugal. This is shown by the fact that both the captains and missionaries acted as partners in Christianization and colonization as loyal servants of the Portuguese King. The vicinity of such connections was seen as an area of tensions in the relationship between the convert communities and its contiguous populace. The initial insistence on acquiring certain new identity has in time brought about a consciousness in the minds of the local converts who may later on think themselves as a separate group.

This was not without any reaction from the other groups. In fact, the Hindus responded to such designs of the colonial raj by expelling or canceling the caste rights and privileges to those converts to Christianity. Such instances are merely a boycott to the colonial intervention into the local society. We have seen that all the Christians in India during 16th century were known as *Paranghis*, a negative remark that meant Europeans or for

that matter Portuguese. Such religious connotations on a national line are important in understanding the connection being made between religion and politics. Expelling the converts from the fold of caste privileges became one of the strongest weapons that the local Hindus used against colonialism. Such instances, at the same time inaugurated the commencement of tensions and conflicts between the two religious communities. Therefore, a brief journey into the history of religious identity formation and its resultant tensions as a consequence of political interference becomes pertinent in this concluding assessment in order that the present day perceptions on conversions would be deemed on a proper line. Our contention here is that 'religious tension' is caused by the 'politicization of religion' or for that matter politicization of conversion.

Christian identity formation process

To begin with the Jesuit input on identity, one is first confronted with the existing form of identity in the local society. In the long history of the people of the Coromandel, the construction of identity became a dynamic social fact. Diverse occupational groups, in the process of change acquired a distinct form of identity and ritual precedent. From the 8th century A.D. Hindu religious revivalism played a conspicuous part in the restructuring of identity.¹ Temples and different deities became the focal and often rival areas of allegiance and emerged as powerful base of group identity.² Since, the eleventh century A.D. Islam emerged as an extraneous agent contributing to a further splintering of the Hindu caste identity.³ But it is difficult to pinpoint, when and how did this splintering of identity actually take place in the course of history. But since the Portuguese time one can have a clearer picture of this dynamic identity changes in the area. It should be remembered, however, that identity change brought about by Christianity should be viewed in the context of this larger process of change in the region.

When the Portuguese came into the area the population of the Coromandel were grouped in separate settlement, held together by a distinctive polity, close marriage

¹ For detail treatment of identity change among the Parathar tribes see P.A.Roche, *Fishermen of the Coromandel*, pp.1-38. See also J.C.Maloney, '2000 Years of Cultural dynamic among the Parathavar', *Man in India*, 1, (1952), pp.22-34.

² Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp.34-52.

³ The emergence of Kayalar Muslim from the Parathar tribes is the case in point. See Roche, *Fishermen*, p.36; where he cited the 13th century Arabic work *Theneeri Villakam*.

network, separate temples and exclusive norms of intercourse. For instance, the Paravas spread themselves in the coastal strip of the Fishery Coast into thirty contiguous villages, held together by homogenous fishing profession, common temple and deity at Tirucendur and separate caste polity characterized by *pattingatins* (chief) and *urars* (elders).⁴ Similarly, we can also see the same form of distinctness in the Karaiyas (Careas), Mukkuvas (Macuas), Maravas, Paraiyars, Kallars, Shanars (Nadars), etc. But we should remember that tensions between these distinct groups were as old as their formations. There were religious sectarian tensions among the followers of Siva and Vishnu in the region, which greatly contributed to the restructuring of identity. We also learned through copious missionary records that certain community's identities were threatened by the emergence of other stronger group.

For examples, we have learned that the Paravas converted to Christianity when the pivotal element upholding the entire edifice of their social organization was threatened by the powerful seafaring Kayalar Muslim. Details of circumstances leading to their conversions have been recorded in the two letters of Joao da Cruz to the King of Portugal, John III.⁵ It was recorded that in order to hold the control of pearl and chank fishing in the Fishery Coast both groups seized on trivial incidents to try and oust the other from the vicinity. A bloody confrontation followed as a manifestation of this inherent contradiction between the two jati, after a Kayalar seaman allegedly insulted a Parava woman. The Paravas inability to withstand the stronger Kayalar and the concern for the preservation of their jati identity under the ensuing confrontation explains their recourse to Portuguese help. When the Portuguese protectorate had proved most possible ground to preserve the Paravas identity some more community who might have faced similar fate of disintegrating the jati identity came over to Christianity. On the other hand the control over to pearl and chank fishing by the Portuguese and their clientele, the Paravas, had brought about the disintegration of the Kayalar Muslim identity. Thus, the relative tensions and identity formation in the region was as old as the society itself.

Significantly, Christian identity formation in the context of Coromandel was seen in two possible forms. First is the continuation of the old jati identity into new forms and the other is a visible trend of colluding the individual Christians into one integral whole—the Christian community.

⁴ Costelloe, *Letters and Instructions of Francis Xavier*, p.62: 28 October 1542 and p.69: 15 January 1544.

⁵ Schurhammer, 'Letters of D.Joao da Cruz,' *Kerala Society Papers*, I, pp.304-307, an extract reproduced in *Bibliotheca Instituti Historici*, S.I, XXIII, Geranmette, IV, Anharge, Rome, 1965, pp.57-59.

In the case of identity formation on jati lines the most striking example can be seen in the Parava fishermen of the Fishery Coast. Their conversions to Christianity between 1535 and 1537 explained a search for liberation from oppression from the Muslim competitors on the one hand and preserving the jati identity on the other.⁶ Caste factor as the cause of conversion was of little relevance here because the Portuguese retained the caste structure even after their conversion. But the details of the circumstances leading to their conversion indicated the importance of the economic factor on which the jati identity and livelihood hinged. While the cause of identity formation may not be the case considered by the jati leaders for their conversions to Christianity for protection under the give-and-take agreement with the Portuguese, there were increasing religious, commercial and social 'insularity' and distinctness of the Paravas from their contiguous populace.⁷ But how did their distinctness become possible?

First, this was brought about by the interest of the new jati protector—the Portuguese. In order to stabilize the convert communities as a loyal client groups the Portuguese Estado had utilized every possible means available at their disposal. The effectiveness of the *pattangatins* and *urars* in the governance of their communities were seen especially favorable by the Portuguese colonialist. Therefore, instead of destabilizing the existing caste polity the Portuguese officialdom had rather preserved and modified them as an effective tool of governance. This had refurbished the older caste political structure by entrusting them with a religious, social and commercial policing agency.

In the interest of defense and catechetical instructions, the Portuguese strengthened the outwork of the old *urs* and encouraged Paravas from the outlying settlements to shift temporarily or permanently to the protected environs.⁸ Such measures were responsible for the transition of the old *urs* to the *Yelu Ur* (seven major havens) and *Ar Ur* (intermediate towns), which functioned as pivotal centers of security, trade, education and religious activities.⁹ Therefore developments in settlement patterns, economy of the jati and

⁶ For the conversions of the Paravas see Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, pp.258-267; see also his article, 'Letters of D.Joao da Cruz,' *Kerala Society Papers*, I, pp.304-307, an extract reproduced in *Bibliotheca Instituti Historici*, S.I, XXIII, Gesanmelte, IV, pp.57-59.

⁷ Roche, *Fishermen*, pp.37-56.

⁸ In around 1542 the Portuguese Governor of India de Affonso had even planned to transplant the Christians of the Fishery to certain Island and provided them a King among them. See Costelloe, *Letters*, pp.60-63: 28 October 1542; see also Xavier insistence of the Paravas of Tuticorin to Punnaikayal in his letters on 1 August 1544, p.86.

⁹ Roche, *Fishermen*, p.47.

caste polity indicated in part the innovative and in part the conservative traits with regard to the Portuguese impact on the Parava social and internal organization.

However, far reaching imprint of Portuguese presence on the Paravas experience lay in the sphere of religion, which in a way affected the whole structure of the Parava social and political organization. First, Jesuit measures of catechical indoctrinations introduced an entirely new structure of ecclesiastical officials into Parava society. The Jesuit missionaries had introduced the *modom*(overseer of ecclesiastical details), the *ubedesiyar*(sacristan), the *kanakipillai* (catechist), the *vathiyar*(teacher), and the *meirinho* (warden or justice of peace) under the direction the Jesuit padres.¹⁰ This group of officials emerged as an ubiquitous force complementing the authority and leadership roles of the *pattangatins* and *urars* in the social and religious activity of the settlements.¹¹ What is most striking was that these officials were paid out of the Portuguese state exchequer.¹² It was because of this ecclesiastical task force and the missionary zeal of the Jesuits that the Paravas were able to shift their attachment from Subrahmanyam and Tirucendur to an orthodox Catholic community in India

Under the overall direction of Francis Xavier diverse innovations in the sphere of both social and religious life were made. Xavier was first committed to translation of some of the basic prayers and teachings of Christianity into Tamil with the help of some 'knowledgeable' people who understood both Portuguese and Tamil.¹³ After this translation was made Xavier went 'through the entire village' with a bell in hand 'in order to assemble all the boys and men' and 'taught them twice a day.'¹⁴ On Sundays he brought all the villagers together to recite the prayer in 'their own language.'¹⁵ He left a copy of prayers in each village and ordered those who know how to write to copy them and distributed among the villagers in order that everybody learnt it by heart.¹⁶ In order to teach those villagers in his absence he left in each village a catechist and a teacher who were paid out of the state

¹⁰ Ibid., p.48.

¹¹ Ibid., p.48-49.

¹² We learned that the Portuguese governor of India had annually contributed 4000 fanoes (fanams) for these religious officials. For instance Xavier wrote to his companions: 'The governor here in India...makes a donation of four thousand pieces of gold each year...to be used for, and paid to, those persons who are diligent in teaching Christian doctrine in the villages.', Costelloe, *Letters*, p.69: 15 January 1544.

¹³ Ibid., p.63. the first translation includes Sign of the Cross, the Creed, the Commandments, the Our Father, Hail Mary, Salve Regina, the Confiteor and some prayers.

¹⁴ Ibid., p.63.

¹⁵ Ibid., p.64.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.67.

revenues.¹⁷ Xavier's deliberate choice of communal Church attendances, house visiting and also what can be called the 'street-corner evangelism' had great impact in the process of identity formation among the Christian communities of Coromandel.

Xavier or for that matter the Jesuit emphasis on communal Church attendance and practices, the rote memorization of Christian doctrine, indoctrination of children and the destruction of idols among local Christian communities had brought about the formation of a rigid Christian identity on the one hand and the 'fossilization' of the jati identity on the other. In the latter case one can see the tendencies of growing distinctness or exclusiveness of the Paravas from their neighboring populace. This was brought about by the re-assertion of some of the important old practices, political, economics or social in the new belief system. In the same manner one can also see such growing distinctness of the jati among other Christian communities such as the Careas, Macuas, Pallars, Paraiyas, Maravas, etc.

In the second case of identity formation process we also see that a common form of belief system and practices to all the Christians, cutting across the caste barrier, had given them a sense of solidarity and responsible toward other Christians. This had been brought about by the common Christian culture spread among all the Christians by the missionaries. Such tendencies of forming Christian communities can be seen from the various instances of community feeling prevailing among the different groups of Christians in Coromandel. For example, when the Christian Karaiyas (Careas) of Maanar Island were slayed by the King of Jaffna the Christians of the Fishery Coast, obviously the Paravas and Karaiyas, were all said to have been enraged by the news so that if the Portuguese naval help did not come they themselves would set out to revenge them.¹⁸ In another instance, the Parava Christians gathered relief materials and set out with 20 tonis in order to help their co-religionist neighbors, the Mukkuvas (Macuas), who took refuge to the Islands off the Cape Comorin when the Vijanagara armies (the *badagas*) ransacked their villages.¹⁹ Such instances of community feelings are crucial in showing the initial formation of Christian solidarity among the erstwhile isolated caste groups.

The feeling of Christian solidarity can also be seen in the various reports of the Madurai Mission. The Christians in this area belonged to all sections of the Hindu caste structure. Unlike in the Fishery Coast where the whole community converted *en masse* the Christians of Madurai Mission were composed of a mixture of individuals or groups. As such

¹⁷ Ibid., pp.67-69.

¹⁸ Schurhammer, *Francis Xavier*, p.472.

¹⁹ Costelloe, *Letters*, pp.84-86: Xavier's letter of 16 June 1544 and another letter written on 30 June 1544.

the formation of identity on the basis of jati organization did not take place here. But the growth of Christian identity was striking as most of the converts were expelled from their caste groups. Therefore, an examination for the cause of this formation will be interesting in the light of a concluding analysis on conflict and tension between the two communities.

One of the significant features in the region during our period of study was the constant movement of people from one place to another. Movement or migration of people temporarily or permanently was caused by several factors such as wars, famines, epidemics, persecutions, etc. There were also frequent movements of Christians from one village to another due to lack of sufficient missionaries for confessions or baptism and also for the festival celebrations. Again, the touring of the missionaries from one place to another was the regular activity undertaken by the Jesuits in the region. But how did this movement contribute towards identity formation?

Undoubtedly, it could disintegrate the corporate jati identity but this movement had facilitated the chance of interacting with people from different backgrounds. For instance, we know that when the famine broke out in the region of Tiruchirapalli and Thanjavur 1660 many people including Christians migrated to the region of Sathiyamangalam and Madurai.²⁰ But what is interesting here is that these Christian migrants were given asylum by their co-religionist group in the area by the insistence of the missionaries. Not only that, necessary foodstuffs and various other needs were provided by the local Christians. Interestingly this had inaugurated the integration of the then erstwhile diverse individuals or groups into their common new religion—Christianity. The Christians in this area were scattered among 130 villages with 25 churches.²¹

Beside these calamities, the missionaries had also arranged a means to pull together all the Christians of one or more residences on certain occasions. For example, the annual letters of 1677 enumerated the celebration of annual festivals in the regions of Sathyamangalam. It says:

The Christians of Kavanakarai are more than those of Vaniputhur, but both together have nearly nine thousand Christians. When they assemble together for festivals, you would take them for an army. As the church cannot contain so many people, it is our custom on those occasions to celebrate Mass in the open air.²²

²⁰ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, II, p.152; Bertrand, *La Mission du Madure*, III, pp.119-120.

²¹ Stephens, *The Letters*, p.37: Jesuit Annual Letters of 14 July 1667.

²² *Ibid.*, p.92. Fr. Freye to Fr. Olivia, 8 May 1677.

The details of the cited instance is crucial in showing how the local Christians used to come together on certain occasions. First, it signified the communal attendance of all the Christians of one or more residences on some important occasions. Secondly, it also explains that such occasions were held annually in all the residences. Thirdly, it also implicitly illustrates that such occasions were marked by the attendance of all caste background because the report did not specified separate festivals for the low and high caste Christians.

The local Christians took such communal celebrations of Christian festivals very seriously. For instance, the annual letters of 1679 had illustrated the Christmas and Easter celebrations in the residence of Koranapattu. Fr. Freye had reported that:

Having therefore settled at Koranapattu where we had built a Church eight or nine years ago, I celebrated there the feasts of Christmas and Easter amidst a considerable concourse of people. Some came from very far and at the cost of great fatigue, their feet being swollen and covered with sores, on account of great distance, they had to travelled.²³

Apart from some annual festivals, the Christians had also attended the Church services regularly. For instance, the annual letter of 1667 had recorded that:

Daily at nightfall, they gather in their churches, and after reciting the litany of our Lady, they make the examination of conscience...reading the prayers connect with the Mass on Sundays, and feast days.

The missionaries also strictly enforced group church-going. In case of negligence the local people were threatened with depriving them of the Holy Communion, sermons, church-going and other Christians ceremonies. For instance, when the people of a certain village did not turn up to the daily church service because of a tiring day-work the Priest had them debarred for the next service. When the people heard this, all the villagers came to the Priest and begged him not to take such an action. It was a period of long repentance that the father re-allowed them to the church services.²⁴

While the intention of the missionaries may not actually be towards the formation of Christian identity in the region such communal celebration of festivals on a very large-scale and the regular church attendance in the village had actually brought about community identity formation in the region. When the people from different background come together to profess a similar cultural trait of Christianity the feeling of responsibility towards one another would mark the beginning of solidarity out of this interaction. Such

²³ Ibid., pp.153-154, Fr. Freye to Fr. Olivia, 12 July 1679.

²⁴ Ibid., p.

relationships on the basis of annual celebrations, in time would surely brought about community feelings in later stage.

In some case the missionaries were responsible for the formation of a village community mainly of Christians from diverse Hindu caste background. For instance we learned that the isolated villages of Kavanakarai, Kandalur, Nandavanam, Koranapattu, etc were gradually growing into a very big village during the course of the 17th centuries. These villages were mostly situated in the jungles, a deliberate choice of the missionaries for a quieter place so that he could work without much intervention from nayaka officials and the Hindu priests. Although the founding of some villages were for the sake of the *pariahs* who could be administered with secretly from the high caste it gradually became the place for both the high and low caste. A good example of such villages was Kandalur where the reports of 1677 stated that:

This place, at first exclusively intended for the used of the *pariahs*, is at present the best and most convenient of our stations, and is used for all castes.²⁵

Whatever may be the reason behind the founding of such villages they were gradually crowded by the Christians, and always acted as a place of refuge and the pivotal point of Christian interaction. The best example of the crowding of the erstwhile isolated village can be seen in the village Kavanakarai. According to the annual report of 1678:

Because of the large number of Christians who crowded there, and the convenience of the place for the exercise of all our ministries, it soon became a big village almost exclusively Christians...so thickly populated...well frequented...renowned on account of its festivals...famous because of the presence of the *Brahmin* Fathers.²⁶

This would especially serve as the place of refuge for some Christian converts whom their family and kin group rejected. Most of the annual Christian festivals were held in these villages where the father resided. Therefore, its role of uniting, interacting and forming the community of Christians of diverse caste background is vital in understanding how Christian identity was formed gradually in the region. However, what was most striking in the region of Coromandel was the formation of identity on the basis of the residential mission region.

Thus one can say without doubt that Christian identity was being gradually built up in the region with the input of the Jesuit missionaries. The fact that this identity

²⁵ Ibid., pp.81-82, Fr. Freye to Fr. Olivia, 8 May 1677

²⁶ Ibid., pp.136-137, Fr. Freye to Fr. Olivia, 8 May 1678.

could not be strictly formed into one integral whole was explained by the retention of the caste system among the Christian communities as a strategy to win over more converts especially the upper caste Hindus.

But the gradual formation of Christian identity in the region, which were seen by the larger Hindu society as colonial injunction, was equally responded with similar consciousness by the Hindus. The age old hatred between the worshippers of Siva and Vishnu was gradually waning and many of the local deities were now brought about in the precincts of Hindu high Gods and temples.²⁷ The incorporations of the erstwhile caste deities within the temples of the Hindu high gods were actually seen as the manifestation of the growing tendencies towards Hindu solidarity in the region in the face of Christian or Muslim identity formation. In this parallel growth of identity formations there was a gray layer where occasional tensions and conflicts between the two occurred due to faulty interpretation by some vested interests. The misinterpretation of this gray area was the cause of tensions in the region.

The many face of conflicts

A study of religious conflicts and tensions as a by-product of colonial participation in the affairs of religion has been understood in the light of certain communal fights and tensions in the period under survey. My intention here is to come to the understanding of the possible consequences that may come out of the politicization of religion. We learned that some Jesuits had actively participated in politics as agents of the king of Portugal in their missionary field. This had brought about many changes in the local society. First the local people were made to regard the Portuguese king as their sole defenders and protectors in their homeland. Second, the local Christians were molded in such a way that they are very distinct from their contiguous populace since after their conversions. It appeared then that local Christians were made not only to change their faith but also their identity as a loyal citizen of Portugal.

A kind of shifting loyalty to the colonialist was strongly opposed by the local rulers. It should be remembered that in most of the persecutions that had taken places in the

²⁷ For instance, the caste-deity (*kulatevam*) of the Kallar, Karuppanncami, is regarded as the guardian of the Alagar Temple, where his main shrine is the door of the main gate. See Dennis Hudson, 'Siva, Minaksi, Visnu—Reflections on a Popular Myth in Madurai,' *IESHR*, 14, 1 (1977), p.112.

Coromandel the punishment was pointed towards the missionaries rather than to the local converts. We have learned that many missionaries were expelled by the rulers from their areas of jurisdictions but this was not so to the local Christians. This would suggest that the 'persecutions' towards Christianity was actually the persecution of the western missionaries who were seen as the representatives of the colonial rulers. But the migration of local Christians as one could see very frequently during our period of study was mostly due to their spiritual needs being unable to be administered to by the missionaries after their expulsions. This is given credence by the fact that many Christian individuals and family stayed or dwelled together with their Hindu counterparts in the same settlements although some difficulties are bound to take place because of their conversions. For the Hindu Tamilian defending Christianity would mean a defense against colonialism. As such we will see some of the important instances of conflicts that had occurred between the two religious followers in the period under survey.

In the Fishery Coast we have seen several instances of clashes between the two communities. For instance, in 1589 a serious quarrel broke out between the Shanars and the Paravas on certain caste privileges.²⁸ The Shanars wanted to exact certain signs of respect from the Paravas. But as the Paravas had become richer by now and proud of their newly acquired status in the region, they refused to recognize the superior position of the Shanars. The consequence was that the Shanars burnt down a dozen churches and compelled many Paravas of those villages to fled to Manappad. In retaliation the Paravas had also destroyed the temple of the Shanars. The situation was prevented from worsening when the *nayak* of Madurai intervened. All conflicts were now taking a religious tone. This instance was important in understanding the new changes that had taken place in the region. First, the incident had explained that the Paravas were no more Hindus but Christians, their newly acquired identity, and were not subject to the caste structures of the Hindus. Second, the Paravas had now been subject to the missionaries but not to the interpretation and whims of the Brahmin priest. Thirdly, the incident had also illustrated that any conflict or clashes of social or political sorts were now expressed and interpreted in a religious color. Lastly, the events had also indicated the tensions of power relations within the local society.

Similarly, towards the end of 1572 a serious fight took place between the Mukkuva fishermen and their neighboring Hindu Shanars when the later made some insult to

²⁸ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, II, p.172; where he cited J, Castets, *L'Ancienne Mission du Madure*, pp.73-74.

the latter.²⁹ It was said that the Shanars had won over the favors of the raja and defeated the fishermen after killing two persons and some Christian villages and churches were burnt down. In retaliation the Mukkuvas had also killed many Shanars and sought the Portuguese help. In response to the plight of its client the governor of Portuguese India, Antonio de Noronha, issued an order that no one should trade with the kingdom of Travancore. Peace was consequently made between the two political hosts in 1574 and the Christians began to rebuild their churches. This instance is especially significant when both the local rulers and the Portuguese Estado would have intervened for the cause of trivial incidence in order to defend their client or more radically their subjects.

We have similar instance of such state participations in the local conflicts. In 1604 when the Mukkuva fisherman had beaten some Shanars the raja sent his captain to punish the offending villagers. With the help of the raja's captain the Shanars had burnt down the offending Christian villages along with seven other villages and churches. The fight could only be stopped when the Shanars were driven back by the Christians of Thengapattanam. In a similar manner as before the Portuguese responded by close trading ties with the kingdom, which was reopened in only 1607 when the rajas assured Christians safety within his territory.³⁰

It is interesting to know why such unrest frequently took place in the region. It should be remembered that the Mukkuva fishermen were by caste lower than the Shanars but after their conversions to Christianity they also become more secure in their self-esteem and status under the Portuguese protection. This brought about conflicts with their neighbors. Like the Paravas who now disowned the Hindu caste relations, the Mukkuvas also started to claim a different sort of identity with their contiguous populace, which became the source of their conflicts with them. When competition and assertion for distinct identity became the way for the local Christians they started to keep as far away from them as possible and any trivial issue of contestation would likely turn into communal fights. Therefore, the fight was not actually for the cause of religion but rather more to display or assert of their newly acquired status. It was in a way the continuation of the age old conflicts over identity and status where one try to oust the other from the vicinity.

We also learned from the first chapter that the Christian community had become more militant in their relationship with their neighbors. This was due to the

²⁹ Thekkedath, *History of Christianity*, II, p.189; see also Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, IX, p.514.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.192-193.

increasing acquisition of their distinctness from their neighboring populace. Every insult to the jati was now met with an equal response. We have learned that in 1600A.D, some 300 strong Paravas, in the middle of the night, invaded and slaughtered the Arya Perumal of Vijayapati when the latter had maimed and whipped a catechist of Manappad.³¹ This trivial incident of insult to the jati had taken an enormous toll on the people. When the Nayak of Madurai heard the killing of Arya Perumal he first demanded large amount as compensation to the deceased poligar, which the Paravas paid. However, in the second demand of more sums the Paravas hesitated. Making an excuse to this refusal the nayak attacked Tuticorin in 1603 but returned only when the Portuguese captain of Mannar threatened to bombard a temple on the coast. This instance had indicated that the local Christians had now even openly opposed the orders of the local rulers because they believed that the Portuguese power would rescue them in case they were punished by the local rulers. Such instance of recognizing the colonial power was the main cause of conflicts in the region. Although the former custom and traditions were retained in the local Christian culture the fact that they actively support the colonial rulers rather than their local one must have greatly contributed towards their misunderstanding with the wider society.

In the Madurai Mission we also come across several instances of conflicts and clashes between the two. For instance the annual letters of 1682 reported that the Christians of Mayilagam village had defended their village by a mud fortress. When the Kallars invaded the village they resisted with much vigor and pushed them back. The report stated that:

The Christians prepared themselves to resist in a fortress made of earth which they had built. They gave to their different bastions, names of the saints, as St. Peter, St. James, etc., and full of confidence that God and His saints would gave them victory over their enemies...The *Kallars* in number 500 who were very strong, came and gave the assault to that fortress or to be more accurate to those humble mud walls, defended by fifty or sixty Christian soldiers. But they were not long before they realized how futile way their attempt, for they met everywhere with a stout resistance and had to withdraw.³²

This incident took place when the Christians refused to pay their stated tributes to the Kallars who ruled the country. It is seen that the Christians by now began to pride themselves in their newly acquired status. By virtue of the missionaries assistance they could now make several arrangements for self-defense against any unjust exaction and torture. The increased

³¹ Ibid., p.176.

³² Stephens, *Letters*, p.220; Fr. Freye to Fr. Olivia, 25 January 1682.

militancy of the Christians was caused by a feeling of insecurity amidst the dominant Hindus in the locality.

We also have several accounts of persecutions and imprisonments of the Christians including the Jesuits. For instance, a quarrel broke out in the residence of Kongupatti between the two communities. The cause of the fight was that two washermen, who belonged to the followers of a Brahmin teacher generally known as *Thottiam Guru*, converted to Christianity. In order to win back these two washermen the guru instigated several means from persuasion to the tribunal of the Palayakkarar. But as he could not succeed he finally concurred the false means of accusing the Christians from the local populace. The report of such instances recorded that:

Thottiam Guru and his disciples to make us (Christians) still more odious to the populace and excite them against us, collected together various bits of idols, which they themselves had broken to pieces. They place them on an ox and carried them in a procession exhibiting them through the town, proclaiming with hypocritical tears, saying that we were the people who had broken them.

The report continued to write that:

At this sight the populace got very angry against the Christians and their religion. Those who worship *Vishnu*...and those who worshipped *Siva*, all gathered and declared against us with a renewed fury.³³

The consequence was such that after securing permission from the Palayakkarar, the guru arrested the two washermen and expelled the father from the kingdom. It is clear from the above case that the false accusation of each other from doing something wrong to the other had immensely contributed towards the creation of religious tensions in the local society. It also specified that although some particular local Christians were targeted the main purpose of persecution was to expel the missionaries working among them. The local Christians were allowed to live peacefully however.

In a nutshell we can say that the participation of the state in the affairs of religion had brought about tremendous change in the local society. By virtue of colonial protection and help the local Christians had gained an enviable status in society, which had brought them into conflict with their neighboring populace. However it should be remembered that the accumulation of identities in the context of the converts were the deposit of a series of cultural traces rather than the rejection of the old one. The converts retained the marks of his earlier cultural life even as he adds on new symbols. Conversion thus becomes an Indian way

³³ Ibid., p.32.; Fr. Freye to Fr. Olivia, 14 July 1667.

of configuring religious plurality, the convert being an embodiment of several and conjoined identities and always opens to a new appropriation. The embeddedness of their cultural traces in the new community was rather shown to be efficacious in large-scale conversions, which lay in the points of familiarity and recognition between the two communities in the areas of belief system, rites, festivals and other forms of outward expressions. Finally in the consciousness of many Indians this still loosely related conjoint of identities were being gradually dissipated by the force of farcical abhorrence. If the increasing rigidity of religious boundaries and contentions are given full chance of survival what will determine the future of India's religious plurality? Religion should be keep independent of politics and make it grow on its own dynamic course of change in order to create a decent society.

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