Chapter VI

Role of Auxiliaries in the Promotion of Gospel Work

Auxiliary forces are an integral part of the evangelization process. They came in handy to the Missionaries who were in need of subordinates, similar to captains who need soldiers to win a war. Generally, the Catholic Missionaries in other places had auxiliary men/women to assistance. The M.E.P. Mission too followed the same method. The M.E.P. Mission's evangelisation work was affected due to want of Missionaries. The early Catholic centres in the Nilgiris were situated only in urban areas; the rural areas were outside the purview of effective missionary supervision. It should be noted that majority of the immigrant coolies and tribal people were living in the rural, remote distant estates and even in the inaccessible forests. Occasional visits of Missionaries to these areas would not bring the fruit of conversion for which a follow up was indispensable. Local support was required for the Missionaries in order to have access to the tribal womenfolk; shy in nature who were encircled by various community barriers; to interact with the illiterate immigrants and scriptless tribal. Besides, they needed helping hands in the work connected with the parochial church.

Generally, these auxiliary forces rendered two types of services to the M.E.P. Mission. The primary function of each and every force including the religious congregations was to assist the Missionaries in the Parish activities directly, like, teaching catechism, preparing the adults for baptism and sacraments, singing songs, giving training and conducting the church choir, taking care of the upkeep of the church, working in or guiding the pious associations or Bajanai Sangams and taking part in different organizations and boards etc. Their other functions differed from
congregation to congregation on the basis of their congregational constitution, economic resources, and strength of personnel, area of evangelisation, standard of living and the problems of the people in their area of work etc. Among the lay people, the literate served through educational and charitable institutions; rich were involved in philanthropic measures, the remaining coolies rendered physical services.

This chapter elucidates the assistance rendered by different auxiliary forces. These forces are classified into two heads - namely I. Religious forces and II. Non-religious forces.

**Religious Forces**

The religious Societies of Catholic order are classified into three categories:

1. Religious Congregation of Priests
2. Religious Congregation of Brothers
3. Religious Congregation of Sisters

In Nilgiris district all the above three societies rendered remarkable assistance and co-operated with the main Mission – M.E.P. to achieve its goal of Christianization. The trio contributed their mite to the M.E.P. Missionaries and here their services are elaborated chronologically.

**1. Religious Congregation of Sisters**

Ten different Sisters' organizations descended on the Hills one after the other during the period under review and established their institutes sporadically. They are:

i. Institute of the Blessed Virgin – Loreto
ii. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary
iii. Franciscan Sisters of the Presentation of Mary
iv. Sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes
v. Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate
vi. The Sisters of Charity
vii. Ursuline Sisters of Mary Immaculate
viii. Teaching sisters of the Holy Cross
ix. Canossian Daughters of Charity
x. Carmelite Sisters of St. Theresa

i. **Institute of the Blessed Virgin-Loreto**

This congregation was founded by Mary ward at St. Omer, France in 1609. “Her chief work was the education of girls to preserve and strengthen their faith against the onslaughts of the Reformation”\(^1\). Mother Frances Teresa Ball opened the Irish branch in Dublin – Ireland in 1821, and the first group of sisters was known as Loreto\(^3\). They came to India in 1841 and started their educational services by opening a convent with a school at Dacca – Presently in Bangladesh, in the same year. But their progress was hampered by financial difficulty. Hence they were looking for a more promising place.

As mentioned earlier, with the formation of Coimbatore Vicariate in 1845, Mgr. Bonnand, then Vicar Apostolic of Pondicherry and administrator of Coimbatore, felt the need of English schools on the Nilgiris as the number of English settlers and Anglo-Indians was steadily increasing. But it was delayed due to two fold difficulties – want of funds, and lack of English teachers. However around 1850s, Mgr. Bonnand offered an invitation to different sisters’ congregations to open a convent with English

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3. Ibid.
medium school in the Nilgiris. The Loreto Sisters accepted the offer in 1853 on condition that the Mission should bear all expenses including their transportation. The Mission did not accept this offer on economic reason. After a gap of three years, again the sisters renewed their offer. Now the Mission gladly accepted the offer, as its financial status was better. The Coimbatore Mission purchased a bungalow for Rs.6000 in Ootacamund near St. Mary’s church, to accommodate the school and convent of the Loreto. Another Rs.4000 was spent to furnish and equip the building. The travelling expenses amounting to the Mission also met Rs.1667. Thus the Loreto Sisters were brought to the Hills at a cost of Rs.11,667. The school started its function on August 2, 1856.

Mother Benigna Egan became the Superior of the Loreto convent and started their educational activities with ecclesiastical bindings. Unfortunately, the new institution did not prosper as the Sisters failed to win public support and to overcome competition from the Protestants. To add to the woes, they ran short of funds. An appeal for aid was made to the Society of Propagation of the faith but it was refused on principle. The M.E.P. could not offer any more aid to sustain their work. With no help coming from any quarter, the Sisters of Loreto were forced to leave Ootacamund in November 1856 and shifted their apostolate to Hyderabad.

5 R. Baikie, The Nilgherries: Including an Account of their Topography, climate, soil, and Productions 2nded (Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1857) Appendix P-XXVII. Note: The embedded name board of Loreto Home can be still seen on the front wall of the present Bethlehem Teacher Training School.
Three years later in 1859, they once again tried to stage a comeback. But it was declined as Loreto Sisters were found to be money-minded and unstable. In this way the first effort of the Coimbatore Mission to bring an auxiliary force to the hills proved to be a non-starter. Nevertheless, it helped the Mission to deal with other auxiliary forces with caution.

ii. Franciscan Missionaries of Mary (F.M.M.)

An auxiliary force called the order of Marie Reparatrice, which was an associate of Madurai Mission, was split in 1874 owing to internal problems. A group of eighteen nuns under the leadership of Mother Marie de la Passion left the Madurai Mission and took shelter at Ootacamund in 1874. Unlike the Loreto Sisters, they appealed to the Coimbatore Mission without any pre-condition to provide them an opportunity to run an English school at Ootacamund. The M.E.P. Mission complied with the request. They were accommodated in a bungalow known as 'White House' donated by Mr. Ryan, resident of Ootacamund, for the noble cause of establishing a convent with a school in 1874.

In 1875, they opened a chapel and an English school within the premises. They also appealed for the approval and recognition of the Pope, to function as a separate congregation under the name of Franciscan Missionaries of Mary. (Hereafter referred as F.M.M.) The effort of the institute fetched approval from the Pope Pius IX on January 6, 1877 and the final recognition from Pope Leo XIII on April 24th, 1884.

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After this, Mother Marie de la Passion, Foundress of F.M.M., was reelected as the Superior of the new congregation.

In the meantime, before getting the final recognition, Mother Marie de la Passion expressed her gratitude to Bishop Bardou. She promised to continue their services to the M.E.P Society. Since then this congregation has been working as the main auxiliary force of the Coimbatore Mission in all spheres by opening nine convents on the Nilgiris alone; it continues to function till today as per the constitutions of the F.M.M. The congregation clearly emphasizes that missionary work means opening of schools, orphanages, nurseries, dispensaries, preparation for the sacraments, assisting the church activities and other social works etc.

Their foremost work was to educate the girls and therefore they opened two schools at Ootacamund, namely Nazareth and Bethelehem schools, for English and Tamil speaking girls respectively. This aspect has already been discussed in the previous chapter. After opening the schools, the Mission felt the need for an orphanage with boarding school for girls. Initially the Catholic orphans were sent to Coimbatore with much difficulty, though the Protestants in the Nilgiris had their orphanage. Besides many Catholic parents did not come forward to send their daughters to Coimbatore due to distance and hot climate. Hence an orphanage within the convent campus was necessary. They made arrangements for the maintenance of


destitute girls since 1884 — the first inmate was a Hindu girl child called Minachi, and the orphanage was formally opened in August 1894.\footnote{Orphanage Admission Register No. 1, Nazareth Convent, Ootacamund.}

Though this orphanage was meant for girls, boys aged below 7 years were also admitted since there was no separate orphanage for Catholic boys. A perusal of the admission register of the orphanage shows that it functioned without any break. Admission was open to all. Along with the Catholics, a good number of Hindus, Protestants and a few Muslims were also benefited. See table 3 of appendix-I for particulars about the strength of the orphanage.

In this orphanage, Sisters took individual care of each and every inmate based on their age and health. A health register was maintained containing particulars regarding vaccination, sickness and treatment. In addition to school education, religious exercises were also given. Good manners were inculcated in them. In the religious exercise, catechism ranked first. Regarding non-Christian students they were not forced to undergo religious instruction, but they were taught a course of moral instruction based on stories. However, a small dose of Christianity was taught slowly through Bible stories.\footnote{Personal Interview with Mrs. Ceilena Violet, a retired teacher, aged 69, Former boarding student of Nazareth Convent, dated Aruvankadu, August 10, 2001.} While the Protestant orphanage of the Basel Mission insisted on the conversion of every entrant, the F.M.M. did not do so. Their humility and merciful deeds caused voluntary conversion.\footnote{A. Perumal, Endeavours of the Protestant Missionaries on the Nilgiris: 1826 – 1947, Ph. D., Thesis, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, 2001. p. 122.}

The Mother Superior and other Sisters never hesitated to stretch out their hands for alms from Government servants, soldiers and rich people were able to meet the expenditure of the orphanage completely, however help from M.E.P. Mission was
forthcoming whenever demanded\textsuperscript{15}. In 1921 the honourable Rao Bahadur, Minister for education paid a visit to this orphanage and appreciated the services of the Sisters. It was reported that he was astonished at the functioning of the orphanage without any Government grant\textsuperscript{16}. The Government of Madras Presidency recognised the work of the F.M.M. only in 1925 and grants began to trickle from that year onwards to all orphanages meant for Tamil speaking people. Nevertheless the Government grant was too small to meet the cost as shown in the table.

**Income and Expenditure of the orphanage between 1932-33 and 1936-37**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Total Expenditure</th>
<th>Management contribution</th>
<th>Government grant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1932 – 1933</td>
<td>27465</td>
<td>24864</td>
<td>2621</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933 – 1934</td>
<td>28754</td>
<td>25939</td>
<td>2815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934 – 1935</td>
<td>20585</td>
<td>17201</td>
<td>3384</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935 – 1936</td>
<td>19439</td>
<td>16644</td>
<td>2995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936 – 1937</td>
<td>21523</td>
<td>19069</td>
<td>2456</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Proceedings of the Director of Public Instruction, 1932 - 1937.

**Health Services**

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, the M.E.P. Mission could not afford to open dispensaries of its own. So it requested the F.M.M. congregation to open dispensaries in their convents and promised assistance. Encouraged by the Mission, the F.M.M. sisters started the first Catholic dispensary at Nazareth convent in 1879\textsuperscript{17}. The poor sick people came from different places even in the absence of transport and thronged at the narrow Veranda of the small dispensary to get treatment for their various ailments. The dispensary was too small to hold such a large crowd.

\textsuperscript{15} L.M.C. 1911, Vol. 43, p. 307.
\textsuperscript{16} File: Nazareth Convent, Ootacamund.
\textsuperscript{17} CRSME 1880, Vol. 12, p. 91; 1901, Vol. 38, p. 259.
Ootacamund witnessed private initiative in running dispensaries. Mr. Hamnett – a retired European – Inspector General of Registration and Births and Deaths, had started one dispensary at Kandal in 1893, known as Hamnett dispensary. Having known the dedicated services of F.M.M. sisters and their poor dispensary at Nazareth convent, he came forward to give his dispensary to F.M.M. Sisters in 1900, free of cost. The Hamnett dispensary was located in 4 cents of land with building, furniture, fixtures and medicines, besides a small operation theatre. The congregation appreciated the generosity of Mr. Hamnett and continued their medical service through both dispensaries at the convent and at Kandal. The dispensary records show that patients from far of places like Wellington; Coonoor, 18 km away from Ooty came to the dispensary ignoring the Government hospitals.

As mentioned earlier, St. Bartholomew hospital was initially started by Government and later handed over to a Hospital Committee. The Government defrayed 50% of its expense and the Ootacamund Municipality and the District Board sanctioned an annual grant of Rs. 2000/- and Rs. 750/- respectively. Inspite of these grants, the hospital charged ¾ annas per patient for treatment and medicine. But the two dispensaries run by the F.M.M. sisters provided free treatment and medicine to all those patients who came. Neither government grant nor support from local bodies was forthcoming. The Sister’s congregation and the M.E.P. Mission meted out the entire cost.

18 Deed of Gift, by Mr. Hamnett to Mother Mary Annonciade, Superior of F.M.M. Convent, Ootacamund, dated Ootacamund, July 24, 1900.
20 The South of Indian Observer, English Daily, Madras, October 10, 1914, p. 7.
But unfortunately, their good work was interrupted by the outbreak of the First World War. The stoppage of funds from France and lack of medical assistants- Sisters - forced the F.M.M. to close their dispensary at Kandal temporarily. Nevertheless it was reopened in 1923 and began to function normally. On appeal, the Ootacamund Municipality came forward and sanctioned Rs.150 per month since 1924, and it was enhanced to Rs.210 in 1926, on condition that they should send annual report and subject themselves to verification\textsuperscript{21}. The Hamnett dispensary was kept open 6 hours from 9 a.m. to 12 a.m. and from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. in the weekdays. It functioned till noon only on Sundays and other holidays.

Besides medical and surgical advice, medicines and treatments, minor operations were also done free of cost by a registered medical practitioner with the assistance of two European Sisters and an Indian servant. Generally patients entered into the dispensaries with various ailments like fever malaria, influenza, eye complaints, leprosy, skin diseases and many diseases related to digestive and respiratory systems\textsuperscript{22}.

In this way, the Hamnett dispensary at Kandal served the medical needs of the villages situated in the periphery of twenty-four km. It provided an healing touch to all those who came without any religious bar\textsuperscript{*}. The following table shows the performance of the dispensary.

\begin{table}
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
\textbf{Year} & \textbf{Patients}
\hline
1924 & 123456
1925 & 234567
1926 & 345678
\hline
\end{tabular}
\caption{Performance of the Hamnett Dispensary}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{21} Chairman, Ootacamund Municipality, Letters to Mother Superior Nazareth Convent dated February 11, 1924 and February 24, 1926.
\textsuperscript{22} Annual Medical Report on the Administration of the Hamnett Dispensary Kandal, Ootacamund for the year 1924.

\* This dispensary was closed in 1960's, when there was no more need. Hence it was converted into a school building and St. Antony's Primary School has been functioning since then.
Kandal Hamnett Dispensary, Consultation Statistics

From 1930 to 1935 Religion wise

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hindus</th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1931</th>
<th>1932</th>
<th>1933</th>
<th>1934</th>
<th>1935</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11440</td>
<td>12960</td>
<td>13127</td>
<td>13507</td>
<td>11684</td>
<td>11524</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Christians</td>
<td>6481</td>
<td>8926</td>
<td>10862</td>
<td>13416</td>
<td>13500</td>
<td>11011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Muslims</td>
<td>3202</td>
<td>3515</td>
<td>4238</td>
<td>5015</td>
<td>5422</td>
<td>5665</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21123</td>
<td>25401</td>
<td>28307</td>
<td>31938</td>
<td>32022</td>
<td>29310</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Medical Report on the administration of Hamnett Dispensary.

Whenever epidemics broke out in the Hills, the F.M.M. sisters never failed to provide a helping hand to Local authorities to cope with the situation. When plague affected the Nilgiris in 1903 and 1906, the Government established a plague camp for those stricken with plague. In this camp, the Sisters came to rescue the abandoned patients and nursed them with maternal affection. In appreciation of their services, the Municipality came forward to foot up their boarding and other expenses.

The Bartholomew hospital run by the Hospital Committee also wanted to utilise the services of the F.M.M. Sisters and requested them to serve and nurse in its hospital. Though the Sisters had accepted the offer, it could not take off, as the Hospital Committee was unable to afford basic amenities to the Sisters as per their congregational rules.

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24 President, St. Bartholomew Hospital Committee, Letter to Fr. L. Robin Chaplain of Nazareth Convent, dated Ootacamund, September 26, 1907.
Economic Upliftment of Women

Mother Marie of the Passion was greatly concerned about the economic status of women on the Hills. She spent her time and energy in raising their standard of living and asked her fellow sisters to strive to do the same as much as possible. According to F.M.M constitution, training of young girls and women in any work that could enhance their status, so as to make them artisans of their own development and liberation, formed their objective. So this congregation opened either workrooms or technical schools or agricultural farms in each and every convent. In the workrooms, first they introduced lace making. The foundress of the F.M.M designed 'Duchess lace'. Besides this less elaborate lace, the Indian girls also did towels and Cluny embroidery. Next to the needlework, embroidery, weaving, painting, engraving on metal plates and binding etc were also taught. The F.M.M. Sisters bought all the materials including clothes and gave them to the women. The Sisters sold the finished products and the proceeds were used to sustain their charity activities. Many convents opened agricultural and cattle farm wherever lands were available. In this way F.M.M. Sisters made women earn during their leisure time in a useful way. Further the Sisters moulded their personality, morality, discipline, and punctuality and gave them a Christian formation.


26 CRSME 1927, Vol. 68, p.156.

Child Care Centres

Running a baby care centre was also another activity of the F.M.M. with a view to helping the mothers either working in the workrooms or farms and estates. Generally, working mothers left their kids in the morning and took them back in the evening. Though the admission was between the age 3 and 5, in certain cases very young children were also looked after28. Here they were given free food, milk, ragimalt, biscuits and chocolate everyday. The children admitted in the centre were taught rhymes moral stories, and alphabets. Admission was open to all, irrespective of religious denomination. The first such type of childcare centre was opened at Nazareth convent on July 28, 190629. The table 4 of appendix-I illustrates the number of beneficiaries of the childcare centre.

Miscellaneous Services

Apart from the philanthropic services, they did many more services also. When a major famine broke out in the Madras Presidency during 1877-1878, the F.M.M. Sisters rendered yeoman service to the affected population particularly to womenfolk. The Nazareth convent was chosen one of the seven famine relief agencies of the Nilgiri district by Ootacamund Famine Relief Committee30. This convent served as an asylum for the feminine flock. It accommodated sizeable destitute women - exact number could not be ascertained - belonged to different caste and religion whose cases were not within the scope of government relief. Here they were

30. Proceedings of Ootacamund Local Committee for Famine Relief Fund, October 11, 1877.
fed and housed by the sisters. Though the Government gave a per day capitation grant of 2 annas, it was not enough to maintain them. Hence the congregation for these relief measures raised Rs.4595. In addition to these, a group of sisters were employed to visit different villages on foot or by train. During such visits, they had contacted people of different communities and religious denominations. They treated the sick, shared their sorrows, consoled the starving, and encouraged the children to study by words and deeds. They even discussed family problems, gave solutions, patched up the misunderstanding, made them aware of their rights, and the need of education, taught alphabets and importance of hygienic etc. These were the important works alone by the sisters during their first few visits. After acquainting themselves with such type of spadework, they started their evangelical work gradually whenever and wherever possible. These efforts paid off and several came forward and embraced the Christian faith. This subsequently led to opening of convents at several centres.

Opening of new convents

After establishing the philanthropic sections such as boarding schools, orphanage, dispensaries, workroom, childcare centre, the F.M.M. sisters extended their area of operations by opening convents in some other new centres with the support of M.E.P. Mission. Thus new convents at Kotagiri, Ketti, and Lovedale were opened in 1921, 1925 and 1948 respectively and charitable institutions also started.

32. Personal Interview with Mrs. Francina Susheela, a retired teacher, (aged 71), and Catholic turned Badaga Protestant convert, dated Shanthoor, July 10, 2001.
their work subsequently\textsuperscript{33}. These units played an important role in adding to the number of baptism, first communion and confirmation, which were registered every year from the convents. Among these charitable units, dispensaries were considered to be the cradles of conversion. For example the Hamnett dispensary at Kandal and convent dispensary at Ootacamund were instrumental in converting 550 and 950 people in 1927 and 1928 respectively\textsuperscript{34}. It brought thousands of people to the mission compound every year even those who opposed Christianity. Moreover, this was a suitable place, where the sisters found it easy to convince all by their humility and services. The following table explains the number of patients.

\textbf{Number of Patients treated at Hamnett Dispensary, Kandal from 1931 to 1941.}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of Patients</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of patients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>25401</td>
<td>1937</td>
<td>28638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>28307</td>
<td>1938</td>
<td>26851</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1933</td>
<td>31938</td>
<td>1939</td>
<td>43970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1934</td>
<td>32022</td>
<td>1940</td>
<td>45116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>29310</td>
<td>1941</td>
<td>46028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1936</td>
<td>28200</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Annual Medical Report on the administration of Hamnett Dispensary.

In this way F.M.M. congregation served along with M.E.P. Mission in the field of education, medical and charity as they instructed and thus they cleared the bushes and prepared the land for easy sowing of Gospel and early harvesting of conversion in the hills. They fulfilled the expectations of the M.E.P. Mission and ranked first among the all-auxiliary forces.

\textsuperscript{33} File: Diocese of Ootacamund Archives Op. cit.,
\textsuperscript{34} CRSME 1928, Vol. 169, p.159; Registers of Baptism, St. Mary’s Church, Ootacamund and St. Michael’s Church, Ketti.
iii. Franciscan Sisters of the Presentation of Mary

This was the first indigenous Sisters' congregation of the Coimbatore Mission. M.E.P. Missionary Fr. Joseph Louis Ravel sowed the seed for this institute on November 21st, 1853 at Karumathampatty. It is interesting to note the origin of this organisation. An eighteen years old girl called Saveriammal of Karumattampatty wished to dedicate her life to the service God like M.E.P. Missionaries and Priests. But she had seen neither a nun nor a convent. There was no Sisters' congregation in the Mission during those days. She expressed her desire to Fr. Ravel. Seeing her good dispositions, Missionary guided her to follow religious instruction. In the next year another three including a young widow also joined the group. After the completion of their probation, they were allowed to make the vows of chastity, poverty and obedience. Having in mind the status of the female education in its infancy which was mainly due to lack of religious personnel to teach in the girls schools, Fr. Ravel designed the object of this new order the Franciscan Sisters of the Presentation of Mary, henceforth referred to as Presentation Sisters. Indian Sisters were not only to foster the ideal of religious life and the observance of the evangelical counsels, but also to promote the education of Indian girls. It was also intended to secure religious personnel for girls' schools, orphanages and other charitable institutions.

The Presentation Sisters entered into the Nilgiris in 1875. Their founder Fr. Ravel opened the first Catholic school for Tamil girls at Coonoor called St. Mary's.
and it was entrusted to them in the same year. This marked the saga of their service in the cause of female education in the Nilgiris. The success of the first school prompted Fr. Foubert to entrust St. Joseph’s Girl’s school at Wellington to them in 1902. Further Fr. Gudin handed over the management of Sacred Heart School at Ootacamund to them in 1911. It should be mentioned that they have been fulfilling their goal by producing disciplined students with all round potentiality in all the three schools till today.

iv. Sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes

This congregation was founded in France by Mother Marie des Anges in 1843. In 1882 it was introduced in India at Bangalore. Nursing the sick, educating children and youth, social work, pastoral works are the principal apostolic activities of this order. As discussed in the previous chapter, lack of teachers to run English medium school at Coonoor forced Fr. Denis Peyramale to bring this institute to the Nilgiris. In February 1900, a group of Sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes namely Rev. Mother Flavie, and Rev. Sisters Margaret, Anna Marie, Nemais and Dolores came to the Nilgiris. Sr. Anna Marie was selected as the Mother Superior and they took charge of the new unit namely St. Joseph’s convent school on March 1, 1900 in ‘Dublin Cottage’ which was

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* Miss. J. Angeline Mary, a retired teacher, aged 81 who won the best teacher award from Government of Tamilnadu in 1969, recalled that she had to discontinue her schooling at St. Joseph’s Girls School, Wellington. Thanks to the encouragement of Presentation Sisters, she continued her education. Later, she became a teacher at St. Antony’s School at Kotagiri and served there for 37 years.
donated by Mr. L. O. Reilly, retired military officer. In this way, they started their educational endeavours at Coonoor.

In 1910, another English medium school named St. Gabriel was opened to cater to the needs of poor Anglo Indian girls. Subsequently, a boarding as well as an orphanage were attached to St. Joseph’s convent and St. Gabriel’s school. Within a span of two decades, the institution had made significant strides in education by the dedicated service of the congregation and currently more than 1200 girls are receiving education from this institute. In order to provide tertiary education to the girls of Kotagiri, Coonoor and Wellington areas, the same sisters started Providence College in 1966, which sent out nearly 300 graduates every year. In this way, this order has been serving to educate the girls of the district from kindergarten to graduation through English medium.

In addition to their educational and church activities, the Sisters devoted their leisure and holidays in visiting homes, improving the living condition of economically and socially backward people of Gandhipuram in Coonoor. Such a type of work is still carried out by the sisters of the same order.

v. Salesian Missionaries of Mary Immaculate (SMMI)

Canon Henri Chaumont founded this congregation, which is otherwise known as Catechist Missionaries of Mary Immaculate in 1872 in Paris. S.M.M.I. congregation is entirely for missionary activities including teaching catechism,

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visiting the villages, running dispensaries and mobile clinics, orphanages, home for the aged and handicapped, schools of various types and social works in the villages. This order came to India in 1889 and to the Nilgiris in 1943. In 1942 Bishop Rene Jean Baptiste Feuga, Bishop of Mysore Diocese and few Missionaries of Nilgiris felt the need of one more zealous Sisters' congregation to the Nilgiris. There were many villages such as Nanjanad, Ithalar, and Emerald left without Christian touch and a Catholic convent was possible. Resolution was passed in the Diocesan Council to invite Salesian Missionaries to the Nilgiris and to give some land with buildings at Fingerpost, Ootacamund to establish first a convent. In this way the SMMI order reached the Nilgiris and opened its first unit at Fingerpost under the name of St. Francis De Sales in 1943. They started their services by opening a small dispensary there. Subsequently they took charge of a primary school at Kakathope, which was run by some lay people. Then they opened needlework centre, workroom for women, baby care centre, nursery schools, plastic industry and button packing sections one after another.

In the meantime, Salesian Missionaries started another convent with dispensary namely Our Lady of Fatima at Ithalar in 1953; grant of land and monetary help were extended by the Mission to the Sisters with the intention of spreading the word of God to Ithalar and surrounding areas. Their service at the new dispensary brought thousands of patients including a good number of Badagas to their premises every year. This contact and consultations paved the way for more Badaga baptisms.

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45 Resolution of Diocesan Council, dated Mysore, December 29, 1942.
46 File: History of St. Francis De Sales Convent, Fingerpost, Ootacamund.
and conversion, and the formation of new Catholic centres at Emerald, Nanjnad and Ithalar one by one. In this way, the SMMI order also served as an apt auxiliary force to the M.E.P. Mission to reach its aim of Christianization.

vi. The Sisters of Charity

The order of the Sisters of Charity was established by two sisters - now saints - namely Bartholomew Capitanio, and Vincenza Geroza on November 21, 1832 at Lovere in Italy. This congregation is also called as “Sisters of Maria Bambina” The exercise of charity both, spiritual and corporal, in its entire extent is the main aim of this organization. The first group of Sisters of this order landed in India at Krishnager, Bengal, on March 17, 1860. The first convent of this order on the Nilgiris known as ‘Villa Capitanio’ was opened in 1930 at Wellington. Subsequently branches were started at Gudalur and Pandalur in 1955 and 1957 respectively. The first convent served as the rest house for sisters who could not put up with the summer heat of the plains.

Alcoholism, drug addiction, moral degradation, misunderstanding in the families, and the worst economic condition of socially backward classes, persuaded them to undertake charitable work at Wellington and its outskirts since 1952. To begin with they opened St. Joseph’s dispensary in the same year, at the request and the help of Fr. L. Bechu and relieved the distress of the poor and sick of this area. Medicines and treatment were given free of cost. Running hostels for working women and school students, orphanages for destitute, abandoned and unwanted babies,  

providing training and employment in tailoring and other needlework. working in the Mission schools are the primary charitable duties of this Sisters community. Besides this, they devoted their time to house visits. During such visits, they shared the sorrows of the neglected, gave solutions to their problems and tensions, guided the parents regarding the upbringing of their children, took care of the broken families and patched up their differences by counselling, such are the social activities of these Sisters. In this way, they influenced many towards Christianity and helped the Mission in moulding them into true Christians.

The other Sisters congregations that worked on the Nilgiris were Ursuline Sisters of Mary Immaculate at Wellington in 1953, Canossian Daughters of Charity at Wellington in 1953, Teaching Sisters of the Holy Cross-at Kotagiri in 1935 and Carmelite Sisters of St. Theresa at Kotagiri in 1955. In the beginning these convents were used as novitiates. Now they are concentrating on social and charitable activities. Table 5 of appendix-I shows the recipients of the munificence of all the sisters’ congregation in a particular year, 1954.

2. Religious Congregations of Brothers

The Brothers congregation also assisted the Mission in many ways, especially in the field of education and other social activities. These congregations took the responsibility of boys’ education from the M.E.P. and helped them to concentrate fully in the spread of Gospel. The following are the three important Brothers orders, which served during the period under review.

i. Society of Brothers of St. Patrick
ii. Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel
iii. Franciscan Brothers of St. Francis of Assisi

i. Society of the Brothers of St. Patrick

Bishop Dr. Daniel Delany founded the institute of the Society of the Brothers of St. Patrick, also known as "Patrician Brothers" in Ireland in 1808. In India the first house with orphanage and school was established at Madras in 1857. The aim of the congregation is the sanctification of its members in the service of the needy especially by way of Christian education. As already discussed in the previous chapter, St. Joseph's school, Coonoor was started by M.E.P. Mission and handed over to the Patrician brothers in 1898. It freed them from the preoccupation of educating hundreds of European and Anglo Indian children and to concentrate on the areas untouched by Christians.

The Introduction of Telegraph Training class in 1919 during the principal ship of Rev. Brother L. Forde, witnessed the development of this educational institution all over India. The students who received telegraphic training here found more employment opportunities all over India. From the beginning to 1947 this school prepared boys for high and middle school examinations of the Madras Presidency and for the examinations of Cambridge School Certificate and Junior Examinations.

After India's independence, it has been serving the needs of Indian students who like to study in English for Madras Anglo Indian school leaving certificate and in the +2

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Tamil Nadu state syllabus. By various methods this Patrician brothers have been imparting a sound religious moral, literary and scientific education leading to the whole development of boys. The Inspector of Anglo Indian schools, Madras reported, "the pupils both in the school and boarding are growing up in ideal surroundings, getting a very wholesome education and training for life. The students are fortunate to study in an institute like this run on genuine efforts".

ii. Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel

St. Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort founded this order at Saint Laurent-sur Sovre, France in 1705. In 1825 it was re-organized by Rev. Fr. Gabriel Deshaycs. After the death of the latter in 1841, the brothers changed the name of the congregation as Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel. Teaching in schools, providing general and technical education for handicapped, managing orphanages, and social services are the important works of this institute. This congregation came to Pondicherry on September 11, 1903, and started their first unit at Tindivanam in Tamilnadu in 1904. First of all they learned Tamil and started their apostolic work gradually. Three of them were sent to Ootacamund and they took charge of St. Joseph's school from the M.E.P. Missionaries in 1906. Introduction of typewriting course in the school in 1908 was the important work of the Brothers. But

58 File: "Montfort Punitha Gabriel Sagotharar Sabai Varalaru", (Tamil) type script.
unfortunately they had to leave Ootacamund in 1909 temporarily due to lack of workers in the plains\textsuperscript{60}.

After a gap of twenty-one years, again the order of St. Gabriel brothers offered their services to the M.E.P. Mission in the field of education. M.E.P. Mission accepted their offer and decided to hand over St. Antony’s High School at Coonoor. A bungalow called ‘Tipperary Cottage’ was purchased in 1930 with a view to providing quarters for the brothers; the school and the total management were transferred to them in 1931 and 1934 respectively\textsuperscript{61}.

It was under Rev. Bro, John of God that the school made giant strides. Many classrooms were added and the number of students increased from 237 to 650. Within a decade, this school became the nucleus of Gabrielian activity. The juniorate was started in 1939, followed by the novitiate and scholasticate in 1943, to these was added a training school in 1944. But within a short period, these were shifted to plains for reasons unknown and the brothers fully concentrated in school activities and a little bit of social service also\textsuperscript{62}.

Once again these brothers took charge of St. Joseph’s school at Ootacamund and helped with M.E.P. Mission in all possible ways from 1942 to 1959. After 1959 they have been serving in St. Antony’s school, with boarding facilities till today and ministering apostle of liberating the economically, educationally and culturally less favoured in the society at Coonoor surroundings.

\textsuperscript{60} L.M.C. 1908, p.401; Platinum Jubilee Souvenir of Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel in India, 1903 – 1978, p.25.
iii. Franciscan Missionary Brothers of St. Francis of Assisi

The Franciscan Brothers of Mount Poinsur, Bombay was established by Rev. Bro. Paulus Mortiz and canonically erected at Nagpur in 1901 and placed under the "Propaganda fide" congregation in 1921. The aim of this order includes running schools and orphanages, industrial training and agricultural establishments in addition to the evangelical works. Fr. Tignous took effort to bring these Brothers to Ketti with a view of establishing an orphanage with an industrial school and an agricultural establishment. As a part of this effort, a Brother named Michael, Superior of Mylapore in Madras unit of this congregation paid a visit to the Nilgiris in 1926 and agreed to send two Brothers, one European and one Indian to Ketti.

The Badaga orphans who were sheltered at Coimbatore were transferred to Ketti in the newly started St. Michael's orphanage, and the management was entrusted to the Brothers in 1926 thanks to Fr. Tignous. The Brothers who already knew English and Tamil languages started to learn Badugu language to interact with the Badaga tribe. A skilful carpenter was employed and carpentry was taught to the inmates and steps were taken to establish an agricultural farm. In addition to these they carried on some other apostolic works such as visiting the nearest Badaga villages very often and preparing more neophytes for confession and sacraments. But unfortunately the greed for money among a few Badagas and the presence of Protestant stronghold at Ketti Valley did not facilitate evangelization as they expected.

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65 CRSME 1928, Vol. 69, p.159.
and made them to leave to plains in 1929.

Though their service was only for three years, we couldn’t ignore it as far as Badaga conversion was concerned. They did the spadework in all possible ways helping the Catholic Missionary who was in charge of Ketti church.

3. Religious Congregation of Priests

The Society of the Salesians of Don Bosco and the order of Friars Minor Capuchins are the two religious’ congregations of priests, which arrived on the Nilgiris before 1955 apart from the M.E.P. Mission. The former order reached Kotagiri in 1946 and their activities were limited with their society alone and they did not mingle with the natives. Here their establishment functioned as a seminary to train the brothers for priesthood. The latter congregation, the Capuchins started its functions at Kotagiri in 1949 and assisted the M.E.P. Mission in all possible ways.

Order of Friars of Minor Capuchins (OFM Cap)

St. Francis of Assisi founded the Franciscan order between 1182 and 1226. There are three divisions in the first order:

1. Order of Minor Friars.
2. Order of Friars Minor Conventuals.
3. Order of Friars Minor Capuchins.

The third order is also known as Secular Franciscan Order. (SFO) This was meant for both sexes, married and even for Priests. The aim of this order is to lead a

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Note: They came back to the Nilgiris in 1948 and started a Novitiate at Kotagiri and continue to train the Brothers of the same congregation with a minimum of social work.
life of close imitation of Jesus Christ combining the contemplative and active life and striving above all through self-sanctification to spread the kingdom of God on earth.  

The Franciscans came to India as early as 1250 AD, but the Capuchins as a distinct branch of the Franciscans arrived in India only in 1632 and to Madras in 1642 respectively. The friary at Kotagiri namely St. Joseph’s Friary was opened in 1949. The seminarians in the theological center were very nearly like the Missionaries, when they were free from their studies, they went out and helped the priest and also preached to the lay people.

The Parish ministry includes assisting the Missionaries and Priests in the Holy Mass and church activities, teaching catechism, handling Bible classes, giving sermons, training to sing devotional songs, arranging slide shows and staging dramas based on the Bible. The village ministry covers visits to the tribal areas located in the Kotagiri taluk – such as Panchathotam, Kokalthurai, Athikombai, Ellada, Pudur, Kottakombai etc. Sharing the problems of the downtrodden, giving counselling and solution to their problems and difficulties, creating awareness through cultural programmes and mini dramas, providing food and cloth, meeting medical expenses, taking tuition to the pupils and affording school needs including dress are the important services of the seminarians through village ministry. They are also working in tea factories during their holidays and vocations in order to raise fund to meet the aforesaid charity.

69. File: The History of Friary, Kotagiri (type script).
Besides, the Priests of this order serve as chaplains and confessors to various convents in Nilgiris and also hearing confession of the lay population, giving sermons and conducting retreats at all levels to preserve the flock as true Catholics\textsuperscript{70}. In this way the Priests as well as the seminarians have been rendering a dedicated assistance to the Mission in spreading the word of God in the Nilgiris.

**Non Religious Forces**

In addition to the sacrifices and services of religious orders, the non-religious forces such as catechists, teachers, and lay population also rendered yeoman services and assistance to the M.E.P. Mission through their deeds and generosity.

**The Catechists**

In the field of evangelisation, the catechists must be ranked the most valuable auxiliary force among the non-religious force. A zealous catechist was an explorer, sentinel and teacher. He pointed out the opportunities to the Missionaries and paved the way for conversion.

As far as church history of Tamilnadu is concerned, St. Francis Xavier made a catechist from his first converts in 1542 to take care of the catechumens in and around Madurai region\textsuperscript{71}. Like the Jesuit Mission, the M.E.P. Mission also felt the need of good catechists in the field of evangelisation. The first synod of Pondicherry held in 1844 recommended employing catechists as much as possible based on need\textsuperscript{72}. Different Bishops and Missionaries of M.E.P. Mission including Mgr. Godelle opened

\textsuperscript{71} Thozhan. Tamil monthly, ed. Fr. Arumai Swamy, Tindivanam, July 2001 pp.3-8.
a centre to train or recruit catechists took efforts. However the Missionary Rev. Fr. Thomas Gavan-Duffy achieved it in 1921 at Tindivanam.

The catechists who accompanied the Missionaries during their village and house visits proved themselves most helpful due to their fluency in their mother tongue, their knowledge of Indian mythologies and their ability to engage in persuasive arguments with non-Christians. Regarding conversion they approached the potential converts who would otherwise hesitate to visit the church, and invited them with kindness to the ceremonies of the church. Besides, the catechists were the companions of the Missionary in his apostolic visits and sick calls. He taught prayers and catechism to catechumens and prepared them for sacraments. They took notable part in the funeral ceremony including the procession till the graveyard. In addition to this they settled the disputes among people and families.

Fr. Denis Peyramale reported from Coonoor, “The catechist of Hulikal – (sub station of St. Antony’s church Coonoor) namely Mr. Francis visited regularly the plantations in which about four hundred Christian workers are scattered all over. There was no contact between them and the Missionary. His visits encouraged those who were sick; he called the Priest near the dying, buried the dead and carried the children for baptism.” Fr. Crayssac from Ootacamund viewed, that the apostolate among the non-Christians was not yet intense as he expected due to lack of catechists. The above statements of Missionaries cleared the need and necessity of

73 Circular of Mgr. Godelle Vicar Apostolic of Coimbatore to M.E.P. Missionaries, dated Coimbatore, May 29, 1862; Personal Interview with Mr. R. Joseph Raj, Catechist, St. Joseph’s Church, Wellington, on October 12, 2001.
76 CRSME 1896, Vol. 30, p.316.
77 CRSME 1918, Vol. 58, p. 118.
catechists, and how they assisted the Missionaries as an important auxiliary force to the M.E.P. Mission.

Messrs. Ganapragasam Reddy, Marianna Chetty, Joseph, Manicka Thevar, Rayappa Chetty, Bastin, Anthony Muthu, Francis and Gabriel were some of the important catechists of various churches at Coonoor, Kotagiri and Ketti whose services were appreciated by the Missionaries. Many service minded rich persons also worked as catechists, and showed their generosity in other charitable activities. Mr. Ganapragasam Reddy – former catechist of St. Antony’s church Coonoor, bequeathed to the church a legacy of Rs. 4023 in 191778. In that way, they worked as Fr. Bechu quoted “a catechist is the eye, mouth, ear, hands and feet of the Missionary”79.

Teachers

Next to catechists, teachers of both the sexes devoted their precious time in assisting the Missionaries to achieve their primary aim through education and religious teaching. The teachers bridged the parents of non-Christian students with Missionaries that paved the way for future conversion. That is why Missionaries opined a good teacher was precious for the instruction of religion to the non-Christian pupils80. Catholic teachers used their leisure time and took extra hours before and after school hours to teach prayers and catechism, to prepare willingly the Catholics for sacraments. Besides, they attracted the non-Christian students towards Christianity by moral stories and also by their behaviour deeds and help. Their teaching had more impact than the preaching of Missionaries, because the pupils and their parents respected the teachers more than anybody. They had the opinion that the teachers would not misguide them, as they knew more about the doctrines of Hinduism and Christianity than the ordinary illiterates. Moreover teachers were one

80 CRSME 1929, Vol. 70, p. 213.
among them (Indians) and many belonged to their community also. For instance Mr. John the first Badaga Catholic was a schoolmaster. His conversion influenced many more Badagas towards Catholicism viz., four and eighteen Badagas embraced new faith in 1890 and 1892 respectively.

Teachers namely, Ms Theresa, Roseline Jebamalai of St. Joseph’s School Wellington, Ms Ambrosia, and Ancheline Mary of St Antony’s School Kotagiri, Ms Kamala Mary of Bethlehem School Ootacamund. Messrs. Mr. Stanislaus and Michael Pillai master and head master of St. Antony’s school Coonoor were few examples that motivated the non-Christian pupils and their families towards Christianity by their politeness, simplicity, proper guidance and monetary aid for further studies and employment. In this way the literate flock also helped the Mission to increase the number of Catholics in the Nilgiris.

Lay People

Numerous lay people also devoted their time, energy and their wealth to the advancement of Gospel on the Hills. As noted in the second chapter, many lay people assisted the Missionaries in all spheres through pious associations, Bajanai Sangams, Church Panchayats and other different committees as guided by the Missionaries. Besides, they stood by the Mission in all its troubles and tribulations. To quote an example a retired apothecary came to the rescue and offered his service as schoolmaster in St. Antony’s Primary School Coonoor in 1870 when it was about to be closed due to lack of teaching personnel. Further the exemplary conduct and generosity of the Catholics who were guided by the tenets of Christianity were a good influence. They influenced the neighbouring non-Christians to have some leanings towards Christianity without any effective preaching.

81. Register of Baptism, St. Joseph’s Church Wellington.
82. Centenary Souvenir, St. Antony’s Church, Coonoor, 1886-1986, p. 3.
In addition to their moral, mental and physical efforts, many people donated their belongings, lands to construct church, chapel and schools. Some offered their buildings to the above purposes or to run orphanage, temporary dispensaries and to provide resting-places to the Missionaries and their auxiliary forces during their evangelical visits. The rich and the middle class opened their purses to construct churches, chapels and schools or to offer statues of many saints. The following table exhibits their generosity to St. Antony’s church Coonoor between 1867 and 1940.

**Generosity of English speaking lay people to St. Antony’s church Coonoor between 1867 and 1935**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S.No.</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name of the Donor</th>
<th>Nature of Charity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1867</td>
<td>Mr. Lawrence O Reilly</td>
<td>Major Subscription for the construction of St. Antony’s church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1875</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>Presented a bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1881</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>Statue of our Lady of Lourdes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1885</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>Rs. 1000 to construct the nave of the church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1892</td>
<td>“</td>
<td>A Cottage named ‘Dublin Castle’ to establish an English School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1908</td>
<td>Mr. De La Haze Jousselin</td>
<td>Marble altar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>1909</td>
<td>Mr. De La Haze Jousselin</td>
<td>Stations of cross</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>1922</td>
<td>Mrs. Mr. J.T. Hawke</td>
<td>Victory bell</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Mrs. Mr. J.T. Hawke</td>
<td>Built Sacred Heart chapel on their estate at Singara.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Dr. Fernandez</td>
<td>Statue of St. Theresa’s of Infant Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>1927</td>
<td>Mr. Waldeck (Superintendent of Wood-Land estate)</td>
<td>Built the chapel of St. Lourdes at Woodland Estate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Mr. Mrs. N. Renaux planter Erinkadu estate</td>
<td>Prominent benefactor to build St. Theresa’s chapel at Selas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Madame. Ehny</td>
<td>Statue of St. Bernadette</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Mr. Snaize</td>
<td>Pedestal in rose granite.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Generosity of Tamil speaking Lay people to St. Antony’s Church Coonoor between 1867 and 1935

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S. No</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Name of the Donor</th>
<th>Nature of Charity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Mr. Ganapragasam Reddy, former Catechist.</td>
<td>Rs. 4023 to buy a group of houses to the church and church developments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1920</td>
<td>Mr. G. Lourduswamy Pillai</td>
<td>Baptismal font.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>1925</td>
<td>Mr. Sinnappan</td>
<td>A piece of land to the extent of 82 cents to build a chapel at Sholattikarai</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>1928</td>
<td>Mr. Savarimuttu Pillai</td>
<td>Flag Staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1929</td>
<td>Mr. G. Anthony Pillai</td>
<td>Statue of St. Francis Xavier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>1935</td>
<td>Mr. G. Anthony Pillari</td>
<td>Statue of St. Philomina and the cost of erection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: St. Anthony’s Church records, Coonoor.

Summing Up

Various sisters’ congregations that came to the Hills one by one in order to assist the primary Mission M.E.P., took care of educational network, dispensaries, orphanages, child care centers and workrooms. Several of the Brothers orders also followed suit. The lay people also contributed their mite towards the philanthropic involvement of the Mission. In toto, all their selfless and yeomen service had gone a long way in accepting the presence of the Mission among them. This, in turn, furthered the cause of the Missionaries among the people of the Nilgiris.