CHAPTER - IV

THE ROSARIAN SERVICES TO THE PEOPLE IN CHENGLEPUT & VADAKKANKULAM
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4.1 The Ashram Way of Life and the Rosarians

The Institution of the Ashram is a precious treasure of India to be shared with the people of the whole world. From time immemorial it has been considered to be an effective instrument for reaching the ultimate reality. In quest of the Absolute one comes to live a life of prayer in silence and solitude. In this age of science and technology, many are tired of the external things of religion; the rites, rituals; dogmas and doctrines; ceremonies and celebrations, and they wish to experience the presence of God as their hearts. To fulfill their desires, they 'Come and See' the spiritual power house of prayer, the Ashram, to experience the Lord. The Rosarian way of life too calls to 'maintain within ourselves an atmosphere of silence and inner peace'. In the midst of a busy world and 'the daily pressures of anxiety', the spiritual resources is "in the prolonged silence of prayer... in which they let themselves be moulded by the Lord and find in Him the inspiration of their conduct." Men ready to forgo everything and the desire to cooperate with him draws to know him more deeply, to identity with him, to let him live." Like an Ashram, 'Rosarian house will welcome those who wish to come and see' and thus experience of first hand what Rosarian life is like, discern... what special grace he offers them. If Ashram life is an effective means of attaining union with God, in no way can the Rosarian affiliation be hindrance to the way of life.

1 Bharath Dhiyagavani, An Half Yearly Private Circulated Journal, No.21, January - May 1993, Madras, p 49.
2 Ibid., p. 49.
3 Ibid., p. 50.
4 Ibid., p. 50.
A spirit of simplicity and joyfulness

Ashram life cannot fail to impress by its style of simplicity, "one reality without a second and one activity that matters" is the highest value of life in the ashram and it demands a very simple life-style. It is the antithesis of the consumer world. People who have the tendency of acquisitiveness are challenged by the simplicity and joyful heart of the ashramites. It is a powerful weapon to bring about a change in society. Ashram life silently plays an important role in solidarity with the poor and in fighting against the social injustice. By reducing the human needs to a minimum they become a sign of God's kingdom. The quality of being utterly simple is model of a community of love, peace and joy, because it is filled with God's grace. In the Rosarian way of life, their apostolic activity... "responding to the call of the spirit, some identify themselves with the poor, sharing their life Rosarians and commitment to justice, are present where decisions affecting the future of the poor are being made. Hence the Rosarian Ashram plays a vital role in manifesting solidarity with the poor and protesting silently, against all the evils of world, especially the material world, by its spirit of simplicity and joyfulness.

Rosarian Ashram is an open community

In Rosarian way of life, Rosarian hospitality plays a very important role "to radiate the warmth of the Gospel to the people. The houses, therefore, while reserving certain sections to the community, are

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5 Ibid., p. 51.
6 B.A. Thomas, God and We, Pushpavanam Ashram, Manapparai, 1988, p. 35.
7 Bharath Dhiyagavani, op. cit., p. 52.
characterized by a special sense of hospitality.\(^8\) Again it never closes its doors to anyone who wants to experience the Rosarian way of life "Our houses will welcome those who wish to 'come and see'.\(^9\) Since they live in an apostolic community 'houses Rosarian and their hearts are open to all who seek help and conseil'. Therefore, the Rosarian ashram draws people of all walks of life to be in restful awareness, like the mustard seed which when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches.

'Mauna' - Silence and Shanthi' Peace

What attracts the visitors to an ashram is the quite and peaceful atmosphere. In the midst of an ecological crisis where nature is being polluted by the advance of science and technology, people, especially those who come from cities where they are deprived of being one with the peace of nature long to set apart time to be in 'mauna' and 'shanthi'. Silence and peace.\(^10\) Tagore gives a beautiful description of an ashram atmosphere. "It must have been an ashram where men have gathered for the highest end of life; in peace and nature; where life is not merely meditative but fully awake in its activities... where the sun rise and sun set and the silent glory of the stars are not daily ignored; where nature's festivities of flower and fruit have their joyous recognition from man, and where, the young and old.\(^11\) The teacher and student sit at the same table to partake of their food and the food of eternal life. According to the Indian tradition 'Shanthi', Peace is the

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\(^11\) Bharath Dhiyagavani, *op. cit.*, p. 53.
outcome of Dhyana.\textsuperscript{12} Meditation, in a Biblical tradition is the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The Rosarian way of life calls to 'maintain within themselves an atmosphere of silence and inner peace to seek His presence.'\textsuperscript{13} To acquire inner peace in the inmost depths of being and to share this with others and nature at the end of 'Dhyana', meditation is practised in the Rosarian ashram.\textsuperscript{14}

4.2 Entry of the Congregation into the Indian Soil

The lives of the Monks were being more edifying and inspiring. The Ashrams in Sri Lanka were considered as the centres of prayer and contemplation. They were respected as the spiritual resource centres of the Diocese. Impressed by the simple and prayer life of the Ashramites, many Bishops came forward to encourage the congregation to open Houses in India.\textsuperscript{15} The first house in India was started at Vadakkankulam. Situated in the Southern most corner of Indian peninsula. Slowly it spread over to other parts of India.\textsuperscript{16} All these religious vocabulary as Ashrams are known for their contemplative and ascetic life and at the same time adoptive to the Indian culture, India with lot of vocation. The Christian youth who are ready touched at least in the peripheral level by the Indian religious practice of asceticism are very much taken up by the contemplative and ascetic life and join in the Rosarian congregation.\textsuperscript{17} Many admire at the incense of

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., p. 53.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 53-54.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 54.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 219.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., p. 220.
vocation to this hard life of peace. Really it is a miracle that number of youngsters in the modern consumeristic world which look for all comforts and enjoyments prefer to join the congregation which by its nature is austere and unique in the whole continent of Asia. The Sirumalar Ashram was founded within the limit of Tiruchirappalli Diocese, with the blessings, of the Bishop. This Ashram is placed in an area 30 acres out of which 18 acres are converted into agricultural land and the remaining still arid.

Fr. Thomas occupations which were ever increasing, could not be easily realised. A mere glance at his efforts for the community at large would tell little. For all the load of care and the sense of increasing illness which made it more burdensome, he always set to work with an almost feverish activity. Especially, in this century of religious indifference, nothing is so necessary as impressing the minds of men and women, and forming their conviction by the knowledge of religious truth, insisting on the shortness of life, the eternity of weal or woe, the vanity of earthly things when they do not help for salvation.

On 14th October 1942, Fr. Thomas made a new provision. It should seem severe in principle, yet could be easy and sweet because the severity is rather for the soul than for the body, and because love always sweetens the cross which it offers. Is not the love for Christ and His Holy Mother at once the pivot on which everything turns and the goals to which everything tends? Fr. Thomas used to announce after Holy Mass. "In order to keep up the spirit of the congregation and as a safeguard against human tendency to

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a mitigated mode of life and to power, it is very desirable to have in the congregation, anchorites also, monks (priests and lay brothers) living in cells apart as Carthusians do.\textsuperscript{19} Deserving members will be given only one chance and that not before the completion of at least five years of perpetual professed life.

Again, a year later he proposed, "The future scope of the activities of the Rosarians will be more extensive than at present, even as the present is far beyond what one could have conjectured a few years ago.\textsuperscript{20} In addition to the anchorites, there will be:

1. Priests and lay brothers who direct the various activities of the congregation;

2. Secular priests, either joining the congregation after ordination or ordained here, living here, but going out to do mission works;

3. Laymen who will live a quasi, religious life;

4. Lay catechists who will here, receive training here, and return here periodically for instructions and retreat after helping missionaries of the outlying missions.\textsuperscript{21}

His Holiness Pope Pius XI had requested the founding of indigenous contemplative institutes towards a special objective, 'to pray for the missions'. Whenever Fr. Thomas gave retreats, recollections, spiritual talks or sermons, he made a special reference to this intention. He used to say,

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., p. 74
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., p. 75.
'The Mighty Love, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace should reign in India and Sri Lanka'.\(^{22}\) It was not the profoundities of philosophy or the novelty in his theology or linguistic and dramatic excellence, but the spirit of piety and religiosity that exuded from him, that brought people towards him. They experienced him as a man of God and his instructions made a deep impact on them.\(^{23}\)

"Sanctity", he said, "even of the highest degree is within the reach of every man. It is very easy. The weakness of man, is not a hindrance at all. The more weak a man realize himself to be, the greater, is his chance to be a great saint."\(^{24}\) He further added, "Sanctity or greatness of character does not consist in anything external nor does it depend on it; it is to be found entirely in the interior.\(^{25}\) The presence or absence of things, good or evil fortune, easy circumstances or hardships health or sickness, protection from or exposure to the inclemency of the elements or the perverse will of men, these things is themselves cannot take from or odd to us. What counts is how we bear ourselves in presence of them to what account we turn.\(^{26}\)

The Lord who had kept him so long hidden under the bushel, soon put him upon the candle-stick and exposed him to public gaze. God wished his work to expand. Rt. Rev. Dr. Roche, S.J., Bishop of Tuticorin, visited Tholagatty on 19th July 1943.\(^{27}\) He was lost in his admiration over what he

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 52.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., pp. 52-53.
\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 53.
\(^{25}\) Ibid., p. 53.
\(^{26}\) Ibid., p. 53
\(^{27}\) Philips Jesuthasan, op. cit., p. 5.
witnessed and expressed his happiness and delight in his visit and stay at the monastery. He was so deeply impressed that he requested Fr. Thomas in very strong terms that a foundation be made in his diocese, by all means. He had even acquired permission from the Jaffna Bishop towards this end. Fr. Thomas rejoiced greatly at the new prospects.28

His choice, however, fell on Fr. Susainathar. Fr. Susainathar was born and brought up in Tuticorin and had served as a priest in various parishes in the diocese of Tuticorin for many years and had joined the Rosarian institute much later.29

On the 27th October, Fr. Thomas blessed and sent Br. Swaminathar, Br. Gnanapragasam and Br. Sebastian along with Fr. Susainathar at the time of sending them Fr. Thomas exhorted the community on the role of a superior:

1. God's Government of the world ought to be the Supreme Model of all Government, including the Government of a Religious House and that of a diocese or an ecclesiastical territory.

2. The Superior must never forget: i) That men are persons and not things. ii) That no two persons would react exactly alike under the same circumstances. iii) That his first and foremost duty is to assist those who are under his charge to surrender themselves to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, with all the ardour of their soul. iv) He must be constantly on his guard against the following.

28 Ibid., p. 76.
29 Ibid., p. 77.
Domineering over them, seeking to dominate them, by his own will, dealing with them as mere tools of his own mind, judging of them by his own subjective rule of life and conduct, basing his judgement or conduct, on the report made of one religious by another, being impatient with the defects and failures of those under him, being too eager for success, being more occupied with correcting others than correcting himself, losing sight of the truth about himself; that of himself he is nothing; he is capable of nothing but sin and folly, that he deserves nothing but disgrace, disappointment, instant death and eternal damnation.\textsuperscript{30}

Neglecting to strive daily to love those under his charge more and more in union with the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to pray that his folly may not destroy as spoil or in any way impede the work of grace in their hearts.\textsuperscript{31}

They set out to India on 7th November 1943, and reached a village called Panagudy. On the following 11th they began their contemplative life on a hill near Panagudy. Later, due to certain inconveniences, they moved to Vadakkankulam and opened a new foundations, 'Fatima Giri Ashram' (Monastery of the Mount of Fatima) on 13th February 1944. Today this house serves as a formation centre for candidates from India and Sri Lanka.\textsuperscript{32}

Fr. Thomas vision about his institute was that it would slowly, by the grace of God, evolve, into a clerical congregation. On 10th June 1930, which was celebrated as the Feast of Holy spirit, he made an official

\textsuperscript{30} B.A. Thomas, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{31} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 38.
\textsuperscript{32} K.P. Xavier (Ed), \textit{op. cit.}, p. 36.
announcement 'A majority of the monks in Rosarian monasteries must be priests'.

The Vicar of missions of the Oblates in Sri Lanka, Fr. Perrot, OMI wrote to Fr. Thomas on March 21st 1932, "The friars must be ordained, as many as possible (if found suitable) so that the institute is filled with priests. Each priory must contain at least fifty inmates and most of them must be priests." The Oblate superior general during his visitation in 1937, strongly advised Fr. Thomas that "if in the future this institute is guided by priests from other religious orders, then the charisma of the Rosarian may change, so care should be taken to select the right candidates for priesthood so that the order may abound with priests who themselves will steer the order, faithful to the charisma of the founder."

This marked a new phase of the order. Special attention was given to pick out the right candidates for priesthood and special training for the scholastics added to the already heavy load of duties of Fr. Thomas. The first batch was ordained priests, on 7th October 1944 by the Bishop of Jaffna, Dr. J. A. Guyomar, OMI. The first batch consisted of two candidates, Fr. L. Francis, CR and Fr. K. John, CR, Fr. Thomas had to spend hours, despite, his heavy commitments and ill health, in teaching the scholastic philosophy and theology. Fr. Bizien, OMI, certified that the two

33 Ibid., p. 36.
34 Ibid., p. 37.
37 Ibid., p. 45.
scholastics were well read in the academic discipline of philosophy and theology, not withstanding the fact that the medium, in those pre-Vatican days, was Latin. He also certified as to their all-round formation and maturity required for the sublime status they aspired for.\textsuperscript{38}

Fr. John, CR reminisces how Fr. Thomas took personal care to train them, "When we failed, Fr. Thomas used to correct us with paternal care and concern." Bro. J. Peter, CR and Bro. J.B. Packianathar, CR were trained for priesthood by Fr. Thomas and were ordained priests on 6th January 1949 by the Bishop of Jaffna, Dr. J.A.Guyomar, OMI in the Cathedral church.\textsuperscript{39}

It is indeed a giant leap that a small prayer house, begun with a little band of ordinary, uneducated labourers should bloom into a clerical congregation. It shows how the firm hand of God was at work throughout Fr. Thomas, who was extremely careful, not to allow a dilution of the charisma. The purpose of the congregation was to pray for the mission and the primary objective in requiring priests was for the liturgical needs of the congregation. He established the congregation as a strictly contemplative one.\textsuperscript{40} He did not want the Rosarian priests to go out even to celebrate Holy Mass, her confessions, dispense sacraments or preach a retreat. He was guided by the Holy Spirit in all these things.\textsuperscript{41} Of course contemplative life is difficult, and instinctively, any man would like to go out into society and mingle with people; but that is the very vocation of a Rosarian. With this in

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 46.}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 46.}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 26.}
\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 26.}
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mind and to avoid any complications in the future in the matter of taking up any active ministry outside the monastery, he was uncompromising. It is very surprising to note at this juncture how meticulously he laid out the course of action for the Rosarians following the original inspiration that had led him to traverse such arduous paths.

Fr. Thomas, untiring in his efforts as he went, tried to start a second order for women, but his efforts were disappointingly frustrated. But he would not be discouraged. In spite of stiff opposition, failures and strong apprehension he ventured again and again. The first attempt was made in 1928, a few months after the congregation of the neighbouring parish of Vasavilan asked Fr. Thomas to teach them how to pray like the Rosarian brothers. Seven of them were accommodated in the dilapidated mission houses of Vasavilan and were asked to follow a rule similar to that of the brothers, Fr. Thomas visited them daily to give them instructions and to see their spiritual and temporal needs. He was the father and mother to them but he could not stay with them as a mother. After a brief trial, this tentative convent was closed in 1930.

It was during this first attempt that the Vasavilan aspirants were transferred to a rented house in Jaffna town for a short time owing to a harassment by the girl's parents and relatives.

The second attempt was made in 1935, when one Miss Kendal, a Jewess from Austria to Sri Lanka through Palestine and was given

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42 Ibid., p. 27.
43 Ibid., p. 9.
44 Ibid., p. 10.
hospitality by the Holy family nuns of the Jaffna convent. This time a group of young women was installed in Jaffna. The Austrian Jewess left after a short trial, and the Holy family nuns and Fr. Thomas helped her to return to Europe.\footnote{Ibid., p. 10}

The third attempt was made a few years later when a young woman from Belgium, erstwhile Goa, who had been prepared for some time by a sort of correspondence course, came to Jaffna to start a convent of Rosarians sisters.\footnote{Ibid., p. 11.} Before long she was joined by two more young women, one from Mangalore and the others from the original batch of Vasavillan girls. Fr. Thomas got the necessary permission from the Bishop of Jaffna and installed them in a shanty plot of land donated by the chiefman of the village of Vasavillan. Both the Indian girls left after a few months as found in the Rosarians life too hard for them. The Vasavillan girl remained alone. However she was soon joined by another girl from the original batch and they asked Fr. Thomas to give them another chance. He allowed them to live in the shanty.\footnote{Ibid., p. 11.} Five more girls joined them in the course of 1946 and 1947. In 1948, the Bishop of Jaffna got a sister of the congregation of the Holy Family to help Fr. Thomas in establishing a convent of Rosarian sisters. The Holy Family sisters, Sr. Jean Marie, was in poor health when she took charge of the nine aspirants as their Mother Superior, on 8th of September 1948.\footnote{Ibid., p. 12.} Thus the birthday of Our Lady became the birthday of the Rosarian Sisters. Fr. Thomas encouraged the sickly Mother with these words "My
dear child, you will enrich the new congregation by your sufferings and you will be a powerful instrument in the hands of God."\textsuperscript{49}

The new community was accommodated for the time being in the old mission house of Vasavillan (which had served the same purpose earlier) until such time as a new house was built in place of the shantily. Fr. Thomas himself went daily to offer Holy Mass for the new little community and again in the evenings he went to give them conferences and lessons in Latin which was needed in those days to chant the Divine Office.\textsuperscript{50} Very soon adoration of the Blessed Sacrament was begun in the church of Vasavilan. There were no doors to the church at the time and so the Blessed Sacrament was reserved for the night adoration in the place. The Bishop officially inaugurated the congregation on August 22nd 1950. Mr. Lionel de Fonseca who had been very generous in financial assistance towards erecting the convent willingly, accepted to be the god-father for the convent on Fr. Thomas' request.\textsuperscript{51}

Right from the beginning Fr. Thomas consecrated the second order under the special care of St. Joseph. Later as years rolled by and many good souls were brought into share the contemplative life of prayer and penance and the convent branched out to other dioceses and even to the Indian Sub-continent.\textsuperscript{52} Fr. Thomas attributed everything to the powerful intercession of

\textsuperscript{49} Letter written by Fr. B.A. Thomas on 6th September 1948
\textsuperscript{50} I.S.R. Alphonse, \textit{Aasiyavil Oru Athisayam} (T), Rosarian Generalate, Bangalore, 1986, p 429.
\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 430.
St. Joseph. Fr. Thomas held St. Joseph as an ideal for a pure, spotless and chaste life and exhorted the brothers and sisters to develop a deep devotion to this saint.

The inception of a second order, doubled Fr. Thomas responsibilities. He had to form them and guide them according to the charisma of the Rosarian and also try to wean them away from the financial assistance of Tholagatty. After having gone through the excruciating process of beginning a first order he still had the will and power to go through all the hardships a second order entailed. This daring and courage is much to be wondered. Today when religious fervour is easily lost and even priests and nuns get frustrated at a certain point, Fr. Thomas stands as a model with his firmness of character. He knew his goal quite well, so he set forth persistently. The strength of his will and the zeal of his faith are to be admired much. How a man of extremely poor health, with death always waiting to knock at his door, could bring himself to act with such robust courage and vigour will always be an unperceived phenomenon to a causal audience - the key to unravel this mystery is his faith. Fr. Thomas bears witness in very strong terms that 'Faith can move mountains' is not a mere Gospel rhetoric but words of life.

Surprisingly enough, Fr. Thomas had many a secret admirers and well-wisher and at the same time a good number of men who scoffed at him openly. Especially his radical views about caste system, irritated many and the so-called 'high-caste' citizens abused him using foul language. When

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54 Ibid., p. 15.
they came cycling and saw him go along the road, they shouted, "Bald head you are a disgrace to our caste, False beard. You are a half caste creature." Shouting these words, a couple of cyclists came riding fast and banged on him and fled. Fr. Thomas raised himself up from the dust smoothed out his habit, wiped the dust of the scratches he had incurred and went his way praising God.

One day there was a knock at Fr. Thomas door. He released the latch from inside and opened the door. A few men from the neighbourhood had come. They greeted him solemnly and after a few formal exchanges, maintained an uneasy silence. One of dug other with his elbow and murmured, "Come on thrash it out!" The other man replied, "No, no. I can'. You proceed!" A third man spoke, " Father people are speaking ill of you in such unimaginable and unbelievable fashion. It really rends our hearts. So the best thing to do is, please leave this place and go away to Jaffna, never again to return to this horrid place". The man was profuse in tears. Fr. Thomas was a bit puzzled and looked at them searchingly; then he asked, Is that so, or do you have anything more to add? Again an uneasy silence prevailed. Then one of them blusted out. "Father, the poor and low caste people are employed in your monastery and they have been changed by your training and good food in the monastery. They are no more afraid of us, they don't respect us. Their way of going about is annoying us. Aren't you too a

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55 Ibid., p. 15.
57 Ibid., pp. 102-103.
Fr. Thomas waited patiently till the man had exhausted himself, then he looked around, smiled at them and spoke in a clear tone, "Children, I've been sent by the Bishop to reform you and the poor people, I will never leave this place. If you wish, feel free to complain to the Bishop against me," saying so he blessed them and returned to his room.

One would understand this episode in all its implications only in the context of the historical situation of the low caste people. History reveals instances of inhuman treatments rendered to the low caste by the high-caste people. They are not just sporadic instances, but a continuous state of oppression and deprivation, and like a submerged ice-berg occasionally surfacing, such extreme cases of suppression and dehumanizing behaviours now and then come to light. The low caste people have always been deprived of decent living and hence forced to live in slums with access denied to all public facilities of the society. They were given an inadequate remuneration for the hard labour extracted from them.

Illiterate and socially ostracized they were forced to live and die in grinding poverty. Any kind of effort towards their economic upliftment initiated either by themselves or directed by some well-wishers, were immediately checked by the high caste people. The growth of the low caste people was a threat to the social standing of the high caste since the latter

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58 Ibid., p. 103.
59 Ibid., p. 104.
60 Rosary Alphonse, op. cit., p. 433.
61 Ibid., p. 434.
could logically be considered high only if there were relatively lower one. Economically again, the high caste could thrive only when the lower castes were kept satisfied with a bare minimum of wages.

In a historic situation where social consciousness was just in its primal stage of emergence, though some conscientious people felt for the suppressed low castes but greatly feared to express their views or take any concrete actions for fear of social ostracization, Fr. Thomas proved himself a social thinker of not mere words, but deeds. His was a holistic approach, he provided for their temporal needs with food and pay slowly refined them by giving them frequent talks on good living and general instructions.\(^{62}\)

Fr. Thomas saw and respected the human personality in every man and not his caste and he never enquired of the caste of any of the candidates. He fought casteism tooth and nail. His 'children' were forbidden to speak about caste. This was unacceptable to many. It was his uncompromising stance on his issue that made him a victim of vicious calumnies. But he stood firm.\(^{63}\) The servants and people in the neighbourhood at Tholagatty were predominantly low caste. Once he was giving instructions to a servant boy. The boy was given a chair and was seated in front of him. Would others have done, so those day? One would wonder! On another occasion, neighbour unjustly tampered with the ashram fence. The Brothers wanted Fr. Thomas to take action, to report to the police.\(^{64}\) "Then what is the difference between you monks and a man in the street?" he queried. That


\(^{63}\) Ibid., p. 17.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., p. 18.
silenced them. The police officers were his friends, yet, he would not resort to such means. Fr. Thomas drew strength for all these from his spirit of renunciation.

4.3 Rosarian Congregation in Tamil Nadu

Congregation of the Rosarian is built upon the incorporation the rich treasure that are Ridden in the Western Trapist monastic life specially prayer contemplation and penance with the best of Asian Ashramite spirit of prayers and asceticism as found in Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism. It supposes the already existing western monasticism assimilate into itself, some of the best. Asian Ashramite practices and expresses a new religious entity to the Asian soil which is exposed to accept our particular mode of living easily. Thus our congregation is best described as 'Asian Trauist' or 'Asian version of the western Trapist.' The Rosarian live a life of Silence and Solitude, Prayer and Penance in reparation for the sins of the mankind. A monk divides a day into three equal parts:

- 8 hours of prayer
- 8 hours of manual labour
- 8 hours of other needs and rest.

Prayer includes perpetual adoration of the Eucharistic Lord and a continuous recitation of the Holy Rosary except during other liturgical

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66 Ibid., p. 3.
celebrations.\textsuperscript{68} The canonical hours are kept and the divine office of the
curch recited. A night vigil is observed by two monks at a time praying
before the Lord in the exposed Blessed Sacraments. Penance includes
fasting and abstinence. The diet is entirely vegetarian and simple. Silence is
all pervading.\textsuperscript{69} In short the Rosarian derive their spirituality from Trappist
enriched by Indian religious traditions. It is eminently suited to India with
its traditional respect for renunciation and contemplation.\textsuperscript{70} The monks
labour is manual and it includes making of candles, syrups, making wine,
poultry keeping and small farming. In addition to the household routines
like cooking, collecting fire wood, cleaning the house and its surrounding,
washing, bath, taking care of the old sick, and visitors, purchase of
vegetables and others items of articles required for the Ashram etc.\textsuperscript{71} No
servants are hired for the house maintenance. The entire works connected
with the house keeping are done by the monks themselves and they are very
happy to do them.\textsuperscript{72} Though the congregations a clerical alone, brothers are
more and they all live together as one community in brotherhood without
any discrimination whatsoever.

4.4 Features of Scholasticate Formation

The whole formation programme is oriented towards formatting the
brothers as monastic life as envisaged by the founder, Fr. B.A. Thomas,
OMI, and by the congregation at large. The formation programme is worked

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., p. 16.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., p. 18.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., p. 19.
out in various stages and in the form of different activities which will briefly spelt out here.

**Academic Studies**

The brothers would attend classes for their academic studies in the colleges. Students who perform well in their studies will be awarded of B.Ph. and B. Th. degrees in Philosophy and Theology respectively. The seminary has stipulated that the students of philosophy must have B.A. as their basic degree, recognized any one of the secular university. The seminary curriculum is sufficiently geared to the intellectual and pastoral formation of the students.

**Spiritual and Liturgical Life**

Liturgy is life centered and geared to pervade their life and activities during the day. In keeping with the religious heritage of Indian meditation is regarded as a powerful means of communion with God. Different techniques of meditation are introduced to brothers. The Scholasticate formation is rooted in the culture of the land and its milieu. Indian music and some elements from the culture and religious of the land are harmoniously introduced into the Eucharistic celebration. The liturgy is daily celebrated seated on the ground in a small circle where the word and the bread are broken and shared.

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74 Ibid., p. 47.
75 Ibid., p. 48.
Conferences

Brothers meet once a week for regular conferences. The talks are designed to build up their faith, their religious commitment and to strength their interpersonal relationship. The monthly recollection provides another opportunity for the students to reflect on their life and vocation in the light of faith.

Spiritual Direction

Young persons growing in religious life need direction. They need the help of a Spiritual Director to review their lives in the light of faith against the background of their vocation. Besides regular direction, the brothers meet the Superior of the house at least once in three months, to review and evaluate their progress. The members of the staff manifest keen interest in helping the students individually in their various needs.

Community life

Community life becomes the vital element of the Ashramite life. Learning to live together as brothers, supporting each other, encouraging each other bearing up with each other are dispensable ingredients of community life. The daily programmes are arranged in such a way that the members are helped to grow in healthy interpersonal relationship and to access their suitability to the Rosarian way life.

76 Ibid., p. 31.
77 Ibid., p. 32.
78 Ibid., p. 30.
79 Ibid., pp. 48-49.
games, monthly picnics, and community get together on feast days and birthdays serve to create a family atmosphere.

Every Monday after supper, brothers have a forum to express themselves freely among themselves and find ways and means to build up their interpersonal relationship and community life as a whole.\textsuperscript{80}

**Manual Labour**

The brothers as sons of the soil must share in the sweat and toil of the masses. (The majority of the people labour in their lands or in-factories and small industries)\textsuperscript{81}. The brothers every day except on Saturdays and Sundays work in the garden. They also shoulder many responsibilities in the smooth running of the brothers manage and maintain important departments like the Library, Sacristy, Refectory, the visitors rooms and the various academics.\textsuperscript{82} Thus the dignity of work is cultivated and the spirit of responsibility developed. Regular manual works, organised team works provide opportunities to interact among themselves and make them aware of their own strength, self worth, dignity and make them grow into responsible and matured persons.

**4.5 Rosarian Monastery at Tuticorin**

Providentially on 22nd of May 1949, His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. Roche, SJ, Bishop of Tuticorin came to Sri Lanka for Episcopal consecration of Msgr. Emilianus Pillai and the same evening, he came to

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., pp. 50-52.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., p. 40.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., p. 40.
visit the Infant Convent at Vasavilan. He gave proofs of his great interest he had for our little congregation. In July 1954, His Lordship Most Rev. Dr. Thomas Fernando, the new Bishop of Tuticorin came to visit the convent and he negotiated with the Founder for a monastery in India. At that time Mother Jeanne Marie had been in Europe and was informed by the Founder of the steep they were going to take Mother wrote back asking to wait as they were just after the Novitiate. But Bishop Thomas was so enthusiastic that he had taken responsibility over all the temporal and spiritual needs of the Sisters. Mother Jeanne Marie returned on 4th of October, she had time only to give them some motherly advice.

On 7th October 1954, a group of Sisters chosen for the Indian foundation were given the last advice by the Founder, Rev. Mother appointed office bearers. Sr. Visitation as Prioress, Sr. Theresita as Sub-Prioress and St. Catherine as Bursar. Others were Srs. Arul, Sr. Jacintha, Sr. Agatha, Sr. Dominica, Sr. Jebamalai, Sr. Pauline and Sr. Martina. All were ten in number. On 8th October, they had their departure from Vasavilan Convent. Rosarian Brothers at Fatimagiri Ashram at Vadakkankulam had meals ready for the group Rev. Fr. J.B. Packianathar, CR, took responsibility of arranging the temporal house for the Sisters to live. On 13th October, Bishop Thomas Fernando came for the inauguration of the convent. He had

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84 Ibid., pp. 36-37.
85 Ibid., p. 37.
87 Ibid., p. 23.
been very understanding and lovable. He wanted their prayers for the diocese. The Sisters were there until 1969, Bishop Thomas had a big monastery built in Tuticorin at Ritammalpuram and established the community as he promised. Sisters began host making for the diocese which was the main source of income for the community. A big plot of land was given to the Sisters for cultivation.

The Novitiate house for India is at Tuticorin. It is worth while to mention that in the town of Tuticorin, there were certain families who had tremendous appreciation of the prayers perpetually raised in the Rosarian Chapel. These devotees lavished the convent with sufficient gifts and financial aid too. Upto now the Tuticorin community is living on alms received from generous benefactors.

4.6 Vadakkankulam Fatimagiri Ashram

In order to bring salvation to the Indian church, the seed for the congregation was brought from Sri Lanka by Rev. Antony Soosainathar and Brothers Swaminathar Ganapragasam and Sebastian on 5th November 1943. Like nomads they were roaming here in the jungle of Panagudi hills and fighting with wild animals. Since, the place was not suitable for religious rite they came to Vadakkankulam on 13th February 1944. The

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89 Ibid., p. 24.
90 Ibid., p. 24.
92 Ibid., p. 37.
Parish Priest Fr. Navamany gave two acres of land near Amalivanam and the monks started their works and lit the light of Fatimagiri in India.\footnote{As per the land bond record, which is taken from the Vadakkankulam Ashram Documentation Centre.}

Rev. Fr. Anthony Susainathar, the Founder of Fatimagiri was well known in the shrine parish. With the help of Tuticorin diocese he brought four acres of land and constructed a small chapel and a living quarters.\footnote{I.S. R. Alphonse, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 487.} On 13th February 1944, this was blessed by Rt. Rev. Dr. Gabriel Thircius Roche, SJ, the First Bishop of Tuticorin. With the help of many local benefactors again Fr. Susainathar bought thirty acres of land for cultivation.\footnote{Codex Historicus of Vadakkankulam Ashram, 1951.} On 25th February 1952, Fr. Thomas came to India to see his loving children at Fatimagiri. With the permission of Holy See and with due permission of the Bishop of Tuticorin, the Novitiate was started. On 14th August 1954, it became a Regional house for India.\footnote{Codex Historicus of Vadakkankulam Ashram, 1952.}

Many vocations came from different places. A new foundation for the cross model church was laid on 6th June 1957, and Rt. Rev. Dr. Thomas Fernando blessed it. Rev. Fr. Singarayar Fernando, Mr. C.I.K. Machado, Mr. Harry John and Mrs. Schilling were the important benefactors\footnote{Platinum Jubilee Souvenir, \textit{op. cit.}, p 37.} for this chapel. In memory of the Golden Jubilee of the founder of Rosarian Congregation, on 6th January 1962, a big house was constructed for the brothers and the candidates.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 37.} In this time, the second Vatican Council made so many changes in the sacred liturgy and they were introduced in
Fatimagiri first, to celebrate the Holy Mass facing the people. The Relics of St. Thomas were kept inside the altar and the Most Rev. Dr. J.R.Knox, DD, the Apostolic Internuncio blessed it.  

There is a heavy drought in Fatimagiri for the past 12 years, since the monsoon completely failed and all the wells are dried up completely. So agriculture was an utter failure and many of the trees are dried up and were used for fire woods. Fatimagiri is one of the important formation centres earlier and even now. Many of the apostolate students and aspirants were given training according to the Rosarian way of life and the Gospel values.

4.7 Assumption Convent, Periyapalayam

Rt. Rev. Dr. Arulappa the Archbishop of Madras who had a tremendous devotion to the Blessed Sacrament and to the Blessed Virgin Mary, invited the Rosarian Sisters to his diocese. Magnanimously he offered a plot of land to the Sisters and erected a building for them to settle down at Periyapalayam. On 8th September 1972, the convent was blessed and given to the Sisters. Bishop Arulappa considered the convent of the Rosarians as a power house for his diocese. At every crucial moment, he

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100 Interview with Fr. Amalanather on 11th May 2005, at Vadakkankulam
103 50 Years of Rosarian Harvest, op. cit. p. 33.
104 Ibid., p. 33.
105 Letter written by Bishop Arulappa to the Priorress of Assumption Convent on 8th September 1975.
used to write to the Sisters for prayers. The first prioress was Rev. St. Jepamalai.

4.8 Rosarian Monastery of Immaculate Conception, Ravathanallur

Archbishop of Madras Rt. Rev. Dr. Arulappa was not satisfied with one prayer house. He wanted another one. This time he selected a Catholic area 20 miles way from Madras and constructed a new building attached to the parish church. The opening was in 1977. The first Prioress was Rev. Sister Rita.

The Sisters work every hard for their living like poor among the poor. They work in the field and lead a penitential life. People wake up early in the morning at 5 a.m. as soon as they hear the church bell and the Loud Speaker which gives sweet music of Sacred hymns.

Many people participate at the rosary including small children. Blessed sacrament is exposed day and night and the fervent adoration is going on invoking the blessings of the Lord.

4.9 R.N. Kandigai Annai Ashram

The Archbishop of Chennai-Mylapore. The Most Rev. Dr. Arulappa who had already two convents of the Rosarian Sisters in his diocese wanted that Rosarians monks should also come to his diocese. As the Archbishop is very well known as the Eucharistic Bishop, he was so eager to have the

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106 50 Years of Rosarian Harvest, op. cit. p. 34.
107 Ibid., p. 34.
108 Ibid., p. 34.
Rosarians in his diocese for perpetual Eucharistic Adoration. Hence he met very Rev. Fr. Bernard CR, the Prior General and requested him to start a Rosarian monastery of monks in his Archdiocese.

His invitation was willingly accepted by Very Rev. Fr. C. Bernard and consequently on 30th May 1978, Fr. Francis, Bro. Swaminathar and the Regent Bro. James were sent as pioneers to start the new Ashram. They went to Chennai, got the blessing from the Archbishop and were guided to go and remain with Fr. Vallabanathar, then Parish Priest of R.N. Kandigai.

Meanwhile a new building was being constructed by the Archbishop at Ullampakkam for the Rosarian. After some time a small hut was put up near the new building site at Ullampakkam for the Rosarian monks. The monks were living there until the new building was completed. By the grace of God and the maternal guidance and protection of the blessed Mother Mary on 7th October 1978, the feast of Our Lady of the Holy Rosary. The new building of the Rosarian monks was inaugurated and blessed by the Archbishop of Chennai-Mylapore.

Now, there are one priest, ten brothers and 12 novitiates. They own 70 acres of land in which they administer dairy farm and a retreat centre. They

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110 Ibid., p. 40.
111 Ibid., p. 40.
112 Letter written by Fr. C. Bernard, General of the Rosarian Congregation on 30th May 1978.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
cultivated sugarcane, groundnut, rice and other products. The regular life of the Rosarian was formally started with day and night adoration coupled with the meditative recitation of the Holy Rosary for the conversion of sinners in reparation for the sins committed against the divine majesty and for the extension of the kingdom of God. Everywhere and in particular in one's own country and diocese.

4.10 Primitive and Modern Rules to the Rosarian Sisters

The Rosarian sisters underwent many changes in their convent life. But they are all minor in nature not affecting the basic of Rosarian way of life. With regard to prayer, when Sisters were to mount hard the Blessed Sacrament two sisters had adoration. On feast days four sisters had their adoration with all solemnity. The rosary blessed by the Holy Father went from hand to hand round the clock before the blessed sacrament and the Sisters were faithfully observing the perpetual recitation of the rosary. There were nine Sisters who had been selected for the choir. They chanted the office solemnly in Latin. They had to wear a special mantle for those liturgical hours. Three o'clock early in the morning that group had Matins and Laudes. Little hours at 9 a.m. vespers at 3 p.m. Sisters prayed three rosaries in common. One at 5 a.m. second one at 11.15 a.m. third rosary was prayed in the evening at 6.30 with the blessed sacrament exposed with daily

118 Ibid., pp. 40-41.
120 Ibid., p. 31.
benediction. Now, there is an option to say the prayers either in English or Latin or regional languages.\textsuperscript{121}

Recreation was given only on Sundays and feast days, whenever a distinguished ecclesiastical visitor came to the convent ten 'Deo Gratias' were offered which means ten days of recreation for the sisters to enjoy in honour of the person who visited the monastery.\textsuperscript{122} There was no recreation at all in the refectory except at Christmas night and Easter night.

Sisters had pure vegetarian diet. A pudding was allowed on feast days. Meat, fish, dry and eggs were avoided. Even the Maldive fish was not used in any dish to get an extra taste to the palate.\textsuperscript{123} Sisters had to fast all through the year except on Sundays, feast days, during Christmas season and Easter season. There was no drink at 10 o'clock. Evening tea was served without any solid food on ordinary days.\textsuperscript{124}

The Sisters observed strict silence. In the beginning the sign language was used for ordinary communication. For example, if a sister wanted to meet the prioress she kept her finger in the middle of the forehead.\textsuperscript{125} If it was the Novice Mistress she kept her finger on the right side of the forehead. In case a sister needed to say something in the night hours, she wrote it on a piece of paper and passed it. The sisters were not permitted to go home for any reason, not even for the death of the parents. Now, this

\textsuperscript{121} Ibid., p. 31.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid., p. 52.
\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p. 10.
\textsuperscript{125} Constitution of Directory, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 33.
practice slightly modified.\textsuperscript{126} They are permitted to go home for unavoidable reasons. Monthly provisions were supplied with the help of shop keepers by sending the list of things needed.\textsuperscript{127}

**Some monastic customs**

The sisters had a custom to recite the rosary while working, at common washing, while they washed the clothes. They used to pray the rosary.\textsuperscript{128} The little ejaculatory prayer, "Immaculate Heart of Mary refuge of sinners pray for us" was on their lips while two persons engaged in preparing meals.\textsuperscript{129}

As the sisters began the day's work, soon after 'Ave Regina' before the statue of Our Lady, sisters would kneel down for the blessing. Prioress blessed them with holy water.\textsuperscript{130} At night before going to bed, the same procedure was repeated. When the Sisters broke silence there and then they stopped the work and knelt down before the statue of Our Lady and said one decade of the rosary for penance. If they happened to behave against charity, they would kneel down in the refectory just before the lunch and go round in a symbolic way of kissing the feet of every Sister in the community.\textsuperscript{131}

The Sisters never delayed for common prayers. If a Sister happened to be late for prayers a special act of penance was to be observed. There was a

\textsuperscript{126} 50 Years of Rosarian Harvest, *op. cit.* p. 17.
special meeting on Friday once a month, where one Sister knelt down when all others used to accuse the Sister in public. It they had seen her breaking any monastic rule. Whenever a Superior or Mistress blamed a Sister for any misdeed, silently she had to prostrate on the ground until her admonition was over. Whenever a sister wanted to meet the Prioress first she knocked at the door and when she heard 'Ave' sound from inside, she entered the room saying 'Maria'.

A Sister could never go to see the Visitors alone. Always another Sister accompanied her, when a Sister had a visitor in the parlour, first she went to the Prioress and knelt down and received the blessing before seeing the visitor. Once the visitor left the Sister, she went to the Prioress and shared with her of important matters.

In the community there was no discussion, no dialogue, no faith sharing on any session of that type to save the Thursday conference and Sunday catechism by the Prioress. On monthly recollection day also a Sister had to work upto 1.00 o'clock in the morning. It was only at 10.30 she went to the chapel and very often she took more time for scripture reading and stations of the cross. There are routine practice and primitive customs of the Rosarian adopted and practiced in the Rosarian Convent with some necessary changes.

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133 Ibid., p. 39.
134 50 Years of Rosarian Harvest, op. cit. p. 18.
135 Ibid., p. 18.
136 Ibid., p. 18.
137 Ibid., p. 18.