CHAPTER - I

SPREAD OF CHRISTIANITY IN SALEM

Historical Background

Location

The Salem district is situated between 11°0 and 12°55 of north latitude and 77°28 and 78°50 of the east longitude with an area of 5245 sq.miles. It is fourth biggest city in Tamilnadu. It is bounded on the north by Dharmapuri district, on the south by Tiruchirapalli, west by Erode and east by South Arcot district. The city of Salem is believed to have been established by Cheraman Peruman, Kongu Chera\(^1\) thus giving rightly the epithet “Cherlam” meaning the place of Chera. Sieving through the etymological interpretations and conflicting claims regarding the origin of the word Salem, one is confounded with an array of meanings of the word – land of Cheras, land of mountains, land of weavers etc., The term Salem could have been also derived from the word Jerusalem.

According to “Puranamooru” a Chera king called “Seralam” ruled this Seralam which in due course came to be called as Salem.\(^2\) It is the contention of some people that the word “Sailem” which in Sanskrit means a mountain might, possibly be the etymological source of Salem, because the city and its vicinity as it is seen today is surrounded on all sides by small hills and mountains. It is also internationally well known for its delicious mangoes that find their enormous growth in the soils of Salem. Salem is fortunate to have many number of historical and tourist places of


interest such as Mettur, Taramangalam, Kolli Hills, Yercaud, Kandasaramam and Agraharam. Taramangalam is a historical centre where there is a 400 years old Kailasanathar temple well known for its admirable monuments of sculptural art and beauty. Kandasramam a place dedicated to the worship of Lord Muruga, like that of kumaragiri, is situated among small hills in Salem District.

The Shevaroys, a hill resort located in Salem district, was referred to in old Tamil literature as the mountain of the ‘Sera’ kings. Salem was once the capital of North Kongu Nadu what remains of it, called the “fort” now in Salem was once under the kingdom Tipusultan, and of the Nawab of Arcot. The place where they had kept their guns can be seen even now in Fort, Salem.

**People**

According to the 2011 census the population of Salem was 50,40,157. The bulk of the population is Hindus. The next largest religious group is the Muslims. The Christians come third. According to the statistics taken in the year 2013 the Catholic population in the district is 87,235. The rest of the population consists of a few Zoroastrians, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists and others. Indian society suffers from inequality with regards to the distribution of economic resources. In Salem district still a large section of the people depend on agriculture, the primary occupation. About 45% of the total areas of the district is under cultivation. The majority of them are under the clutches of the moneylenders. The major part of the secondary employment in the district is contributed by small and cottage industries, which are generally, underpaid occupations.

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4 Catholic Directory of Salem Diocese, Salem, 2013, p.4.
The non-agricultural class consists of persons who derive their principal means of livelihood from primary industries - mining, quarrying, processing, textiles, manufacturing of leather, metals and chemicals, tertiary occupations and commerce, transport and communications, health, education and public administration. Hence as elsewhere about 20% of the rich exploit 80% of the people and half of them even remain below the poverty line. They are powerless, marginalized and dehumanized by the rich. The real cause of poverty is inequality, injustice, illiteracy and oppression.\(^5\)

There is the abysmal poverty of the masses in India. More than 30% of the population, that is, some 350 million people, live below the poverty line. These people do not have the bare necessities of life. The poor are politically powerless, socially discriminated against and culturally deprived. The process of economic liberalization and globalization has aggravated the situation.

During the last decade, the Indian economy made remarkable progress, and yet this has not led to any alleviation of poverty. This clearly points to an unjust distribution of wealth. Poverty is caused not by the wickedness of some rich people but by the operation of a socio-economic and political system, which allows the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a few, while condemning others to a life of poverty and misery.

The Hindu social organization is composed of several castes. Each caste consists of several sub castes. The sub caste itself is divided into a number of smaller exogamous groups. Some important castes to which people of Salem district belong

\(^5\) Inigo, *Sounds of His Voice*, p. 93.
are the Brahmins: The Brahmins in the district are heterogeneous in character. There are many sects and sub-sects among them, such as Telugu Brahmins, Kannada Brahmins and Tulu Brahmins.

Non Brahmins: The major communities in Salem are the Non-Brahmins. The Velars, Vanniyars, Agamudayars, Udaiyars, Reddiars, Kammalars, Komatiars, Janappars, Kavarais, Chettiars, Devangars, Sourashtras, Idaiyars, Kurumbars, Nadars, Sembadavars, Vettuvars, Kusavars, Pallars, Oddars, and Pariyars Communities are important. With the spread of literacy and social awakening among the masses, the rigidity of caste barriers is gradually disappearing. Even inter-caste marriages are common.6

Tamil is the major language spoken by them. The other languages spoken in this region are Telugu, Kannada, Urdu, Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi, Sourastra, Gujarati, English and Sindhi. It is a polyglot district. The influence of other languages is traceable in the Tamil spoken in this district.

Political Background

Salem District was never an independent political entity. In early times the north of it was ruled by the Pallavas while the south was included in the Kongu kingdom. In the 9th century the Chola kings annexed the whole and subsequently, it passed under the Hoysalas. In the 14th century the Hindu kings of Vijaya Nagar Empire conquered it, where their sway was acknowledged till the beginning of the 17th century when the district came under the Nayak rulers of Madurai.

6 A. Ramasamy, Madras District Gazetteers, p.118.
The rise of the Wodeyar rulers of Mysore was a turning point in the history of Salem region. The whole of Salem came under the Mysore rule during the time of Chikka Deva Raja [1673 –1704 A.D]. In 1761, Haider Ali became the ruler of Mysore. The whole district fell to the East India Company at the end of the Third Mysore War in 1792 A.D. Subsequently it became an administrative division of the British territories in the Madras Presidency. It came into existence first as the district of Baramahal and Salem. The district capital was first located at Dharmapuri. In 1860 the head quarters was shifted to Salem. The district was divided into two districts namely Salem and Dharmapuri in 1965. The district of Namakkal was bifurcated from Salem in 1997 A.D. Some of the eminent leaders like Salem Ramaswami Mudaliar, Sri. C. Rajagopalachari, Dr.VaradhaRajulu Naidu, Sri. E.V.Ramaswami Naicker and Dr. P. Subbarayan played a major role in the political and cultural transformations. Their participation in the political movements in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century and other activities brought the Salem district into the lime light.

\textbf{Spread of Christianity in Salem}

Jesus Christ is the hinge on which the doors of history swing. The centuries are measured from his birth. He faced a humble birth and a bloody death to bring salvation to mankind. The public life of Jesus lasted only three years, from 30 to 33AD and was centered on the land of Palestine in which Jerusalem was the most important city. He brought the massage of salvation to the chosen people of God, namely the Jews. He had come as the saviour of all mankind. It was by his suffering and death that he would bestow grace for salvation of souls. Since he could not be

physically present in the world till the end of time to give grace, it was upper most in
his mind during these 3 years of public life to establish some kind of a society to
continue his work in the world till his second coming.

It was this idea that enabled him to establish a church. The establishment of
the sacraments, a necessary means to receive grace, needed someone to administer
them to those who would seek them. He made provisions for this in the institution of
the church. The first thing Jesus did was to select 12 men from his disciples whom he
called “Apostles.” After the resurrection, his apostles collected all the doctrines of
Jesus Christ called the holy gospel and spread them in different parts of the world.

There were 12 apostles of Jesus, They were

1. Simon Peter
2. Andrew, the brother of Peter
3. James, son of Zebedee
4. John, brother of James
5. Philip
6. Bartholomew
7. Mathew
8. Thomas
9. James the son of Alpheaus
10. Thaddaeus
11. Simon, the Zealot and
12. Judas Iscariot

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8 P.C.Thomas, A Concise History of the Church, p.7.
9 The Life and Teachings of Jesus Christ were written by four saints namely St.Matthew , St.Mark
These apostles went about in different direction administering the sacraments in the cause of Christianity. Out of these 12 disciples, Jesus chose Simon, whom he renamed. Peter or the Rock, as the head we read in the gospel of St. Mathew thus; “I for my part declare unto you; you are the Rock, and on this rock, I will build my church and the jaws of death shall not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven. Whatever you declare loosed on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

Before his ascension into Heaven Jesus told Peter on the share of Lake Tiberias in the presence of six apostles, “Feed my lambs, feed my sheep” Here “lambs stand for the faithful and the sheep for the bishop.” Thus Peter became the divinely appointed head of the church.

St. Peter spread Christianity in Rome where he also established a church and became the first Bishop. He lived to see the religion of Jesus spread through all the countries known at that time. He saw the church thriving in Rome. He had established there the centre of the church. After the death of Peter in 67 AD all who followed him as Bishops of Rome were like him the heads of the church called the Popes. The credit of popularizing Christianity in Syria, Jerusalem, Palestine and Greece goes to St. Paul.

With the death of the last apostle, John in 100 AD and third successor of Peter, Clement I in 101 AD Christianity had spread from Palestine to Syria, Asia Minor,
Macedonia, Greece, the Peloponnesus, Italy, France, Spain, North Africa, Persia and India.

India came under the spell of Christianity since the arrival of St. Thomas one of the disciples of Jesus Christ in 52 AD. Ever since the dawn of research whether historical or otherwise, the history of St. Thomas the apostle in India has taken a predominant place among Christian and non-Christian scholars as well. Benjamin walker, while writing about the origin of Christianity in India has said, “Christianity is of a greater antiquity in India than in any other country, in the world except Palestine it is older in India than in Rome itself.” Pandit Jawharlal Nehru, in his well documented book, “the Discovery of India” has given the date of St. Thomas coming to India as 52 AD.

The history of Christianity in South India in general and in Tamilnadu in particular goes as far back as the first century AD. St. Thomas landed at Cranganore on the west coast, and after a brief stay at Cochin he came to the Coromandel Coast. The Apostle preached his faith to the natives of India both on the west coast of the peninsula and on the Coromandel Coast and made converts of them. Thus the earliest Christian settlements in India are to be traced in parts of the Malayala country.

He came to India at the invitation of King Gundophorus an Indo-Parthian king who ruled over Kabul to spread gospel. He carried out his evangelical work in the

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kingdom of Chera(Kerala) with much vigour. He converted the upper class Hindu families in Cranganore, Palyur Chayal, Nirranam and Quilon. He consecrated priests from some of these families. He also converted a large portion of Perumal(Raja) and built seven churches in Nirnam, Quilon Chayal, Kokoamangalam Malankara (Cranganore) Kottakavu and Palur, which though after rebuilt, remain on the original sites to this day.17

He came to Tamil country to continue his preaching through the kingdoms of the Pandiyas and the Cholas, winning over large number by his saintly life and the wonders he performed. The success of his mission was bound to rouse the hostility of the priests who, having vainly tried to discredit him, at last put him to death near a temple of kali, on the little mount (Thomas Mount) near Mylapore, Madras, on 3rd July 72 AD a man loved and revered by all from the king to the people of lower strata of the society.18

The martyrdom of St. Thomas at Mylapore led to the rapid spread of Christianity in South India. In recognition to the historical importance, Mylapore was erected as a first diocese in Tamilnadu on 9th January 1606 A.D. by Pope Paul V. It was elevated to an Archdiocese on 1st September, 1886.19 Thus South India offered hospitality to the Christians from the earliest decades of the Christian era.

Observing on the significance of St. Thomas Mission, Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India said, “Remember St.Thomas came to India when many countries in Europe had not yet become Christian and so these Indians who trace their

17 Aloysius Soares, *Catholic Church In India*, p.8.
19 B.Shobhanan(ed.), *History of Christian Mission In South India*, p.54.
Christianity of him have a longer history and higher ancestry than that of many of the European countries and it is really matter of pride to us that it so happened.” For a long time there was little contact between the Christians of India and their co-religionists in Europe. Christian travellers in the middle ages occasionally complained of paucity of Christians in South India. Friar Jordanus (1321 – 1330 A.D) wrote enthusiastically of the great scope that India offered for missionary activity in the cause of Christianity. Reference in Marcopolo John of Monte Corvino and Sir John Mande prove the presence of Christians in India before the coming of the Portuguese.

The Portuguese came to India in about 1498 AD. They occupied a few trading posts. Soon all the Portuguese trading posts along the Indian coast from Bombay to Tuticorin were made as the Catholic Christian Centres. In 1531, Goa was created a Bishopric. They wanted to win, not a temporal empire in the East, a task beyond the power of a nation with a population of barely one and a half million, but an empire for Christ of all the western nations which sought wealth and power in the east, the Dutch, the French and the British Portugal alone worked steadily for the evangelization of the newly discovered lands and spent much energy and great resources to this end.

The Portuguese then started to spread their business across various parts of India-Kanyakumari or Cape Comorin, Cannanore, Goa, and Bombay to the west

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20 As per Tradition, St. Peter’s founding of the Roman Catholic Church and St. Thomas founding of the Malabar Church are equally distinguished in terms of chronology and their pioneering characters.
22 K.A.Nilakanda Sastri, The History of South India, p.441.
Orissa, Bengal and Assam in the East; and Delhi in the north. In 1551 Alphonso de Albuquerque occupied Goa.

Albuquerque had encouraged the Portuguese to marry local Hindu and Muslim women and the generations born of these marriages came to be known as the “Casaros”. Most of the Anglo Indian people in the Latin Rite Catholic community in Kerala are said to have emerged from this group.  

In the beginning, the Christian centres in Tamilnadu were controlled by Goa Bishopric. The Popes repeatedly urged the Portuguese Kings to make it their duty to send missionaries to the newly discovered areas for evangelization.  

In response to the call of the Popes, the Portuguese kings sent a number of secular and religious priests to India. In the 17th century, a new department known as Propaganda Fide was established in order to send the Franciscans, the Jesuits, the Dominicans, Theatines and Augustinians missionaries to India for evangelization. Due to the indefatigable zeal of these missionaries, Christianity spread in Konkan, Kanara, Malabar coasts and later their sway was extended to Tuticorin, Kanyakumari, Kongu and Bara Mahal and Madurai regions. The sincere and strenuous efforts of these missionaries contributed enormously for the rapid change of social, economic and cultural conditions of Tamilnadu. The beginning of the Counter Reformation and the foundation of the Society of Jesus formed a brilliant chapter in the history of the Roman Catholic Church. The Jesuit priests involved actively in spreading the Gospel to many parts of Tamilnadu.

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24 George Marangoly, St. Francis Xavier, p.28.  
26 Jetley, History of Jesuit Mission in Madura, p.189.
The Missionaries of Society of Jesus played a prominent role in the missionary work in India. St. Francis Xavier, a Jesuit was the pioneer among the Jesuits who visited Tamil Nadu. When he visited Tamil Nadu it was also the time of reformation in Europe. New revolutionary ideas were sweeping across the land, shaking up the minds of students and teachers alike at the University of Paris as it did everywhere else. This had a considerable impact on the thinking of Francis Xavier. The revolutionary ideas of Martin Luther of Germany, Ulrich Zwingli from Switzerland and John Calvin from France were creating havoc in all of Europe.

They had questioned the basic of Catholic faith that had prevailed and been believed in by many for centuries. The Papacy, the priesthood, the sacraments, the immaculate conception of Mary the concept of purgatory, and prayers for the deceased- all these were analyzed and questioned by the new reformation group. Many rulers, who were looking for change, embraced these new ideas and openly out of the Catholic Church. The Church was divided into two- Catholics and Protestants. During this critical juncture in Christendom, with the permission and full support of Pope Paul III. St. Francis Xavier came to India to spread Christianity and revitalize Catholic Faith in the newly colonized territories of the Portuguese in South India.27

In those days people who lived in the area of pearl fishery coast extending from Cape Comorin to Rameswaram were fully dependent on the sea for their livelihood. All were very poor and illiterate, their ability to dive into the sea and collect pearls was brazenly exploited by the local rulers. Incidentally, the Manner

27 George Marangoly, op.cit., p.11.
Gulf area was very famous for pearls and hence this sea coast was called the pearl fishery coast by foreigners.

The Arabs used to come and do business in this area since very early time. They purchased pearls from local king but later on they started to settle down in the south and in the north and still, finally, the sea coast from Calicut to Rameswaram came completely under them. They traded in spices, pearls and horses.\textsuperscript{28} It was at such a time as this that in 1542 St. Francis Xavier arrived in Goa and later he visited Tuticorin and Kanyakumari.\textsuperscript{29}

He converted many people in the Pearl Fishery Coast of the far South which consisted of Kanyakumari, Kuttapalai, Kuthankuli, Kooduthalai, Alantalai, Manapadu, Perumanal, Palayakayal, Punnaikayal and Tuticorin. He converted more than 10000 people in these regions within a month.\textsuperscript{30} No wonder the arrival of St. Francis Xavier affirmed their faith in Christianity. Besides, the Portuguese missionaries also continued to preach the Gospel to Indians on the coast but soon penetrated into the interior regions. Particular mention has to be made of the mission started by B.L Rudolf Acqcearia and three companions in 1579 in the dominions of Akbar the great Mughal.\textsuperscript{31} The sincere and strenuous efforts of these missionaries contributed enormously for the rapid change of social, economic and cultural conditions of Tamil Nadu.

\textsuperscript{28} \textit{Ibid.}, p.35.
\textsuperscript{29} R.Caldwell, \textit{History of Tinneveli}, p.75.
\textsuperscript{30} J.M.S. Thangasamy, \textit{Thiruchabai Varalaru}, p.368.
St. Francis Xavier who pioneered the missionary effort in Asia in the 16th century, travelling tirelessly to countries as far apart as India, Srilanka, Malasiya, China and Japan. He has many epithets attached to his name. He is known as “Defender of the East” “Protector of Goa” and also “The Apostle of the Indies” (the Indies are the countries spread to the east from the Cape of Good Hope in Africa, including India, Srilanka, China, Japan and Indonesia). Also on 14 December 1927 Pope Pius XI had declared him the protector of the mission and missionaries throughout the world.\(^\text{32}\)

St. Francis Xavier within a short span of ten years (May 1542 to December 1552) covered many thousands of miles. He had visited many countries, preached the gospel to countless people from so many nations and succeeded in baptizing them. God had wrought miracles through him and his incomparable apostolic zeal made him the greatest Christian missionary since the apostle, St. Paul.

**Works of Madura Mission**

After Xavier one of the most brilliant Catholic missionaries in India was Robert de Nobili, (1577-1656) an Italian Jesuit. He entered the Jesuit order in 1595 and came to India in 1604. He began learning Tamil from the Paravas of the Fishery Coast in Tamilnadu. In Tamilnadu 1606, Alberto Laerzio the Jesuit Provincial sent Nobili to the inland town of Madura. This is considered a new departure with the patronage of the Kings of Portugal, Robert de Nobili founded the Madura Mission.\(^\text{33}\) He soon noted that only the communities of the Pearl Fishery Coast and Travancore had been drawn

\(^{32}\) George Marangoly, *op.cit.*, p.97.

to Christ. Conversion to Catholicism was at a complete halt among the Hindus of inland districts, especially among Brahmins or high-Class Hindus.

Since his earlier methods could not bear fruit, he began to adopt himself to the indigenous way of life. He adopted the customs and habits and the language of the Brahmins to convert them into Catholicism. Under the patronage of Pope Gregory XV, he started separate missions for the Brahmin and the untouchables. He reached Madurai in 1606 when it was ruled by Tirumalai Nayak. Robert de Nobili adopted the mode of life of Hindu Sanyasis in order to attract higher caste Hindus to Christianity. By his adoptive method he converted many Hindu high caste to the Christian faith.

As a result of his unique way of conversion, Christianity was accepted in the southern parts of Tamilnadu by low caste and high caste people.34

He spread the gospel in the neighboring regions. He established Churches wherever he visited. Special mention should be made here about John de Britto who followed Robert de Nobili’s native method in converting many people of his mission stations in Southern Tamilnadu which consisted of Madura, Tanjore, Marava country and Cauveri delta.35 Robert de Nobili established congregations wherever conversion took place in large numbers. In 1623, he toured through many parts of Tamil country. During the course of the tour he visited Tiruchirapalli, Senthamangalam and Salem.36 In June 1623 A.D, he arrived at Senthamangalam, the capital of Ramachandra Nayak,

34 He wore the sacred thread on the shoulder and presented himself in Madurai and other parts of Tamilnadu as Tatwa Bodha, a Brahmin from far off western Rome; M.S.Jesudass, History of The Church, p.372.
36 Jetley, op.cit., p.197.
the Vassal of Thirumala Nayak of Madurai.\textsuperscript{37} Ramachandra Nayak offered him a site to build a church and a presbytery but after consulting God in prayer, Robert de Nobili declined the offer.\textsuperscript{38}

At Salem Nobili met Tirumangala Nayak, the elder brother of Ramachandra Nayak and also the dethroned ruler of Senthamangalam. Robert de Nobili followed Tirumangala, a small town in Dharampuri and baptized him there along with his family members on 25th December, 1625.\textsuperscript{39}

On July 31\textsuperscript{st} 1626, Robert de Nobili received the visit of a Pandaram hailed from the sect of Saivism and a man belonged to valluvar caste. The latter one was impressed by Robert de Nobili’s Tamil book, “Sign of True Religion” and got himself baptized with the name “Mukthi Udayan” (Blissful one).\textsuperscript{40} His conversion had a tremendous impact on the evangelical service rendered by Robert de Nobili in Salem region. Maramangalam became an important Christian centre with 40 neophytes. As this centre was then well established he could leave for other places to continue to preach the gospel. So he invited Fr. Martins and put him in charge of Salem, Maramangalam and Senthamangalam which numbered between 100 and 150 Christians.\textsuperscript{41} In 1627, he left for Tiruchirapalli. The little congregations he established grew from strength to strength.

Due to the efforts of Robert de Nobili and Fr. Antonio Vico, a church was built at Maramangalam in 1628 and another one at Salem. Subsequently the Christian

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item[37] W.Francis, \textit{op.cit.}, Vol.II, p.45.
\item[40] \textit{Ibid.}, p.350.
\item[41] \textit{Ibid.}, p.354.
\end{itemize}
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Mission centre was established in various places in Salem region. Robert de Nobili also established a mission centre at Koilur in Dharamapuri. By 1665 A.D., there were a large number of Catholics at Kongupatti, Ilupuli, Anaikarapalayam, Omalur, Sankagiri, Anthiyur, Mathiyampatti and Ilanagar.

Gradually, a group of young Jesuits joined Robert de Nobili’s Madura Mission. Living simply on rice, milk, and herbs, they expanded their activities into the districts of Mysore, Marava, Tanjore, and Gingi, where they made some 1,30,000 converts. Although Robert de Nobili was often attacked in his lifetime by Catholic leaders who did not understand or approve of his daring method, he is revered today as a great missionary innovator and founder of the accommodation method.

**Role of Mysore Jesuit Mission in spreading Christianity**

The foundation of the Mysore Jesuit Mission by Fr. Leonardo Cinnami in 1650 formed a turning point in the history of spread of Christianity in South India. The geographical adjacent of Salem to the Mysore kingdom and the urge to spread Christianity led the Jesuit missionaries of Mysore mission to concentrate in Salem region. In the beginning the missionaries belonging to Mysore Mission continued their evangelical work in and around Salem along with the collaboration of the Madura Mission.

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42 W.Francis, op.cit., Vol. II p.45.
44 Thomas Pothacamury, op.cit., p.56.
45 Anthony Sumo, History of Arch Diocese of Bangalore, p.4.
46 Most of the Jesuit Missionaries who came to Mysore where the Italians. They were sent by the Province of Naples in Italy. In their status as Mysore missionaries they belong to Jesuit Province of Goa, Idem.
Since 1687 the Mysore Mission had alone involved in the missionary activities of Salem. Fr. Vincent Durake, Fr. Rodriques, Fr. Cinnami, Fr. De Paiva, Fr. Cunha and Fr. Francisco Dos Reys were important Mysore missionaries who laboured tirelessly for the spread of Christianity in Annaikaraipalyam, Kakeveri, Senthamangalam, Koviloor and various other mission stations of Mysore missionaries.

Fr. Cinnami started a mission centre at Jumpuli Kottai (Sampalli) between 1650 and 1660 A.D. He permitted Royan the catechist to construct a church at Novalpatti. This was the first church erected by Mysore mission in Salem. He also established a mission centre at Dharmapuri in about 1661. St. John de Britto, a renowned Jesuit missionary reached Kolai on 30th July, 1674 after passing through Vanniputhar (Bhavani), Sampalli, Martalli and kaveripuram. Cretineau Joly makes an affirmation that it was John de Britto who opened to the Jesuits the road into Mysore.

Since the missionaries of Mysore showed keen interest in the development of kannada speaking Christians, the Tamils of these regions went to Idappadi for their Easter service. According to the census taken in 1674 A.D., after 24 years the Mysore missions was started, there were 300 Christians at Capinagati and 400 Christians at Sampalli.

Annaikaraipalayam in Salem District was the most important mission centre of the Mysore Mission. In 1676 Fr. Vincent Durake built a presbytery there. This Church was destroyed by a fire accident in 1678. Fr. Rodriques took charge of

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Annaikaraipalayam and rebuilt the Church. By 1679 there were 7 mission stations functioning under Annaikaraipalayam, Omalur, Manali, Elanagar, Mathiyampatti, Senthamangalam and Salem. During the year 1680 A.D. Fr. Manoel de Souza took charge of Kakaveri Mission Centre. Later Fr. De Paiva ministered this region from 1690 to 1693 A.D. He baptized nearly 4,100 people in 1696. Due to the request of Fr. Paiva, the provincial at Goa sent two missionaries named Fr. Alvaro Rodrigues and Manoel Leis to Kakaveri.\textsuperscript{50} In the year 1702, Fr. Francisco Dos Roys built a presbytery at Vellaiyanpet near Dharmapuri. Later on it came to be known as Koviloor. The Congonti Mission Centre was developed under the spiritual leadership of Fr. Mannel de Cunha. He rebuilt a church at Congonti, which was pulled down in a raid by the Muslims.\textsuperscript{51} He also incurred the displeasure of the Dazars and Brahmins of Congonti. Fr. De Cunha was put to death by Dazars on 1\textsuperscript{st} of June, 1711 A.D.\textsuperscript{52} He was the first Jesuit martyr of Mysore mission in Salem. In the middle of eighteenth century, the Mysore mission reached its zenith.

The Mysore Jesuit Mission had 11 missionary residences in Salem of which two centres were found in the kongu region where Tamil was spoken and the remaining 9 were found in the North where kannada language was spoken. There were about 6 priests looking after various mission stations in and around Salem. The missionaries were assisted by the well-trained catechists. A few of them were Brahmin converts and some of them belonged to other communities.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{50} D. Ferroli, \textit{Jesuit in Mysore}, p.110.
\textsuperscript{51} M.S. Joseph, \textit{op.cit.}, p.36.
\textsuperscript{52} D. Ferroli, \textit{op.cit.}, p.130.
\textsuperscript{53} M.S. Joseph \textit{op.cit.}, p.66.
The Indianization of Christian rites and the incorporation of Hindu customs were subjected to pontifical disapproval at different periods. Ultimately on 13th September 1744, Pope Benedict XII issued the bull of Omvims Sollicitu Dirum declaring Jesuit Mission proceedings to be impious and unlawful.54

The suppression of the Society of Jesus and the decline of the missionary activities of the Mysore Mission had a drastic impact on the Christianity in Salem region. The suppression of Society of Jesus by the Portuguese Government in 1760 A.D. was a true disaster for Christianity in general and the Jesuit Mysore Mission in particular. Hence the Jesuit Missionaries of Mysore joined the other religious orders. Some of them returned to their native lands. At the time of suppression of the Society of Jesus by the Pope, the Mysore Mission had 40 missionaries.55

Missionary Activities of the Paris Society of Foreign Mission

In 1776 the Mission of Mysore was entrusted to the priests of the Paris Society of Foreign Missions with Pondicherry as its headquarters in India. The mission worked hard in various mission stations of Salem, Madurai and Mysore under Msgr. De Tabraca, the Supervisor of Paris Mission. They started a seminary at Pondicherry in order to train the priests to spread the gospel to the areas entrusted to them.56 Their primary aim was to start the local church with the help of the natives. But before Paris Missionaries initiated their reconstruction work, persecution of Tippu Sultan caused a serious blow to the Christianity in Salem.

54 R. Sobhanan, op.cit., p.85
55 D.Ferroli, op.cit., p.194.
Tippu Sultan hated first and foremost the English and next to the English he hated the Christian Missionaries. His persecution began in 1784 and continued till 1787. He ordered the Koviloor church near Dharmapuri to be destroyed. Missionaries were expelled. Mission work was in a mess. He suppressed the missionaries and Christian communities established at various mission stations.

He gave them a choice between “Honour of Islam or Death.”57 The Christian community at Capinagati vanished. However, the settlements at Idappadi, Kakaveri and Kadgathur remained unaffected during the persecution.

With regard to the untold sufferings met by the Christians in Tamil country in general and Salem in particular, F.R. Richards in his famous Salem Gazetteers writes, “A misfortune felt as irreparable to the present day, for the mission of India founded at the price of so many privations being deprived of their missionaries. Many Christian communities were lost and it was not till the beginning of 19th century that the work could be seriously taken on hand.” Fr. Jean Antoine Dubois, the renowned Paris Missionary was responsible for the re-establishment of Christian religion in Salem.

He took up his missionary work in India laboring at first in Madras Presidency and later in Mysore State. He was in close contact with high caste Hindus and had written down much valuable information about the institutions he observed and the customs of the people. The Abbe Dubois formed a most pessimistic picture of Christians in India of his day. He felt that the conquest of the country by the Europeans was a disastrous event so far as the advance of Christianity in India was

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concerned. Nevertheless, the Abbe Dubois and his followers continued in their efforts to bring Christian truth to the people of India.

He came to Salem in 1792 to accomplish his mission work and he remained in Salem till 1799. It is Fr. Dubois who was responsible for strengthening the Catholic Church in Salem founded by Robert de Nobili. Mgr. Champenois, Vicar Apostolic, Pondicherry entrusted to him the responsibility of the re-establishment of Christian religion and administration of Tirupattur, Krishnagiri, Idappadi, Salem, Kakaveri, Nammakkal, and Kalangaud.58

Fr. Dubois profited by the influence he was having with the English officials to get help for the numerous works and also for the construction of new churches. He built a church and chathram in Idapadi and Dharmapuri. The British Government gave him an annual grant of forty two rupees for the Kovilloor church near Dharmapuri and Tirupattur. Among other benefits which he conferred upon his flock may deserve special mention here.

His zeal in establishing agricultural colonies and also introducing vaccination to eradicate small box, in which inspite of the extraordinary tenacity of the people, he succeeded in his mission. During 1803 – 1804 a total of 25, 432 natives of Salem were vaccinated.59 In memory of his noble service, the natives still remember him by the title Doddhaswamiyar.60 M. Launay in his book, “Historic Des Mission De L’Inde” said that in some parts especially at Karumattampatty, he is considered as the

58 D. Ferroli, op.cit., p.231.
60 J.A.Dubois, Hindu Manners Customs and Ceremonies of India, p.106.
prince’s son and the noblest of Europeans. According to the account of Fr. Dubois there were 4000 Christians in Salem region.\textsuperscript{61}

After the defeat of Tippu Sultan in 1798 by the British, the French Missionaries extended their activities to Mysore and Coimbatore. One of the most illustrious Missionaries was Bishop Bonnand, launched India into the Catholic movement.\textsuperscript{62} He pressed into service various means for a deepening of the religious life of Catholics and for a wider propagation of the Faith-the Press, Educational and Charitable institutions.

The History of the Catholic Mission of 19\textsuperscript{th} century witnessed a steady progress, Pope Gregory XVI established the Vicariate Apostolic of the coast of Coromandel in 1838 A.D., Rev.Frico Alias Susainathar, an apostolic priest came to India. Soon he became the Parish Priest of Salem. He visited the mission stations of Salem and wrote a brief account of Salem district in 1838. Pope Leo XIII established Indian Hierarchy in 1886 for effective administration of the well developed mission stations in India. He organized them into a number of ecclesiastical each under an Archbishop who had one or more suffragan Bishops within his jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{63}

In 1887 Pondicherry became a metropolitan Province with Mysore and Coimbatore as suffragans. Kumbakonam was cut off from Pondicherry in 1899 and Salem in 1930 and constituted into new dioceses. Thus Salem came into existence as

\textsuperscript{61} D. Ferroli, \textit{op.cit.}, p.212.
\textsuperscript{62} Aloysius Soares, \textit{op.cit.}, p.27.
\textsuperscript{63} Thomas Pothacamury, \textit{op.cit.}, p.60.
a newly created diocese in 1930 with a Catholic population of 17,600.\textsuperscript{64} Foreign Mission Society took upon themselves the heavy responsibility of rendering missionary services in these areas.

Thus the painstaking efforts taken by the Madura Mission, Mysore Jesuit Mission and the Paris Society of Foreign Mission were responsible for the spread of Christian religion and the establishment of churches during the early days and the consolidation of Christian community till the creation of the Diocese of Salem. During the early days, the missionaries faced a series of problems especially from Tippu Sultan, the ruler of Mysore. Due to the tireless and sincere efforts of the dedicated missionaries the church establishment was strengthened mainly for serving the cause of the local people.

**Impact of the Missionaries on the Socio – Economic Life of the People of Salem Region**

Salem accepted Christianity due to the relentless effort of missionaries in the first half of 16\textsuperscript{th} century. They made indelible mark on the socio – economic life of the people of Salem region. The early missionaries who labored in and around Salem region for evangelization took to the ways of living, mode of dress and customs of the people. They even took Tamil names. Through their influence the Catholic population steadily increased. They lived as the poorest of the poor and poured the waters of baptism over many thousands and purified their souls in Christ overcoming many obstacles in their relentless mission. In the words of Robert de Nobili, the founder of Christianity in Salem “The earlier missionaries had roared against the

\textsuperscript{64} Platinum Jubilee Souvenir, 2005, Diocese of Salem, p.26.
pagodas. They had attacked from the front and had little progress.” He proposed to accept the idea of caste, the key stone of Hindu social – religious system. The newly converted Christians tolerated the Catholic faith so long as that faith did not interfere with caste.

The missionaries in this region lived in object poverty and loneliness. Their living conditions in the remote villages of Salem, Namakkal and Dharmapuri were much lower than that of the poorest paid priests of their faith in Europe. They toiled hard to spread the gospel at the expense their poor health and inclement weather. They gave utmost care for the physical and spiritual welfare of those committed to their charge. Sometimes they fell as victims to the wrath of local people and their chieftains. In 1640, Robert de Nobili was arrested for the cause of Catholicism by the Nayak of Madura and was forced to retire from Madura mission activities in 1654.65 He died soon blind and old in a little cabin near Mylapore in 1656.66

The catholic missionaries of various religious orders in Salem pioneered the study of many modern Indian languages compiling the first bilingual dictionaries as well as grammar in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and other south Indian languages. The inadvertent benefits of Indian secular learning and international communication of Christian missionary labour thus proved to be of considerable utility.67

One of the chief contributions of missionaries has been the great service they have rendered to the development of vernacular literature of the land. The translation

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66 J.Chartres Molony, A Book of South India, p.132.
of the Bible as well as the creation of Christian literature in Dravidian languages gave an impetus to their development in a wide variety of fields such as drama, prose, fiction, grammar and lexicography.  

Referring to the distinctive aspect of the work of missions, Nehru observes, “The desire of the Christian missionaries to translate the Bible into every possible language thus resulted in the development of many Indian languages.” Robert de Nobili was perhaps the first to initiate Biblical studies in Tamil prose early in the 17th century. Though it was meant for evangelical purpose, it helped the evolution of Tamil prose into easier means of communication. His book entitled “Signs of True Religion written in a lucid Tamil prose style won the admiration of a Hindu who belonged to Valluvar caste in Salem region. Later he got baptized by Robert de Nobili. This incident stands as a monumental illustration of how Robert de Nobili utilized his eloquence in Tamil language for evangelical service as well as for the rapid growth of vernacular literature in Tamil Nadu.

Along the gospel message of the missionaries there came the rise of a new culture that deviated the new convert from their roots giving them new Christian names, new habits and customs, even new languages. Their liturgy was the Latin Liturgy; their Churches were built in Gothic and Baroque styles, their religious art, paintings and music were cheap importation from the west.

69 Jawaharlal Nehru, The Discovery of India, p.376.
71 Teotonior de Souza(ed.), Discoveries, Missionary Expansion and Asian Cultures, p.139.
The Portuguese were the first to bring Western education to India establishing schools in their settlements.\textsuperscript{72}

In due course of time the local patasalas (schools) were replaced by parish schools throughout the mission stations and the churches became the centres of learning in the wake of conversion to Christianity in Salem mission territory.

The Foreign Christian Missions were great agents in the East – West cultural contact. Besides this, they were the first to tackle the outcaste problems in India. When one says that the spirit of caste reigns in a society, one means that the different groups, of which that society is composed, repel each other rather than attract. The Indian society remains static for about three thousand years with the result that the untouchable were not permitted to use public wells or enter temples.\textsuperscript{73}

Today caste is an all-pervasive reality in the life of our people. Whatever might have been the historical origin of these caste system, it has for centuries contributed to the stability of the Indian society. But it has also caused deep divisions among the people. Today our society is divided into two groups – a minority of the privileged consisting mostly of the higher castes and a majority of the underprivileged consisting of the lower castes and the outcastes. The caste system is mainly responsible for keeping a large section of the Indian populace backward, socially, economically and educationally.

\textsuperscript{73} S.M. Ajay, \textit{Sociology}, p.234.
The caste system was a great barrier in the way of conversion to Christianity. It was the normal framework of Hindu society closely woven with religious observations. It was because of the hindrance that formal entrance in the Christian religion by baptism involves. Social ostracism and many other harassing inconveniences, such as the denial of concessions to convert to Christianity from the lower castes. However the early missionaries of Salem region were against this unjustifiable and discriminating caste system prevailed in our society. They admitted the subaltern class into the fold of Christian faith in large number and enable them to come out of their ghetto mentality.

An important activity such as the Ramakrishna movement in its orientation in 19th century derived from Christian missionaries. They also embarked on projects for digging wells, laying roads and providing fertilizers, pesticides and organizing co-operations for the uplift of the converts and other people. In short the missionaries of Madura, Mysore and foreign Mission Society who labored hard in Tamil Nadu in general and Salem in particular inculcated a sense of humanization which transcended the traditional limits and opened people’s eyes to entirely new channels of service.

It is beyond doubt to affirm that in the matters of humanitarian service, social reform and creation of society based on the worth and dignity of the individual, these missionary ideals exerted a beneficent influence on the thought and aspiration of enlightened classes in Indian society.

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74 Santhosh Thomas, *Christianity and Culture*, p.166.
75 S.Panneer Selvam, *New Evangelization In the Parishes*, p.55.
What has been discussed in the preceding sections has enabled us to comprehend that the history of spread of Christianity has its roots in Mission history of the church as the Church history has always been an integral part of the world history. Mission history is divided into 7 eras in order to have deeper understanding of the rapid spread of Christianity and its impact on the world culture in general and Tamil Nadu in particular.

1. Mission history starts with Jesus and Apostles in the Roman Empire between 1 A.D. and 310 A.D.
2. Era of Christianized Roman Empire 310 and 500 A.D.
3. Era of Christianization of Europe 500 A.D. – 1500 A.D.
4. Era of colonization and Discovery 1500 A.D. – 1800 A.D.
5. Era of consolidation of Missions 1800 A.D. – 1965 A.D.

Jesus came into the world bringing the good news of great joy for all. The early church which was community of disciples was very active and alive. Edict of Milan issued by Roman emperor Galerius in 311 A.D. gave freedom of conscience to Christians. In 313 A.D. Constantine made Christianity as ‘State Religion.’ Reformation movement in 16th century made the church to be more Roman with greater uniformity. European kings created Diocese and granted financial support. Roman Catholic mission and protestant missions were very active during the Era of Consolidation of Missions between 1800 A.D. – 1965 A.D.76 About 478 mission

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76 Julian Saldauha S.J., Patterns of Evangelization in Mission History, p.21.
bulletins and many missionary periodicals were published from 1860 A.D. to 1963 A.D.\textsuperscript{77} There were 10 world major Missionary conferences held. World Council of Churches was formed. Young Churches in Asia and Africa were under the control of the west because of funds. During 1910 – 1940. Rome appointed first local Bishops. Christian population in the western Church in Europe in on steep face while the church expands in the Eastern countries.

During the period 1965 – 2000 about 160 nations had Indian missionaries and nearly 50 nations had Japanese missionaries.\textsuperscript{78} This is a testimony for the deep rooted faith. There are grass root missionary movements and more than 427 worldwide independent missions involving in the evangelical mission now.

However, in the wake of new evangelical mission what John Paul II reiterated in the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, Ecclesia in Asia in 1999 is gaining importance in the present context in our country. In the wake of proclaiming the gospel in our land he strongly advocates inter-religious dialogue the service of human promotion and preservation of human rights. Justice, option for the poor and peacemaking. All the forms of ministries of Salem Diocese be they pastoral work, education, health services, or social involvement are directed towards the fulfillment of a variety of renewed church mission work in this region during the modern times.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., p.108.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid., p.64.
Robert de Nobili (1577 – 1656)
Founder of Christianity in Salem
Spread of Christianity in Madras and South Eastern Region in India
Map of South India during Francis Xavier
THIRD MILLENIUM

2000 AD | ERA OF NEW EVANGELIZATION

1965 AD | ERA OF LOCALIZATION

1800 AD | ERA OF CONSOLIDATION

1500 AD | ERA OF COLONIZATION

500 AD | ERA OF CHRISTIANIZING EUROPE

311 AD | ERA OF CHRISTIANIZED ROMAN EMPIRE

1 AD | ERA OF JESUS AND APOSTLES

7 stages of Mission History