CHAPTER VII

RELIGION AND THE EXPRESSIVE DOMAIN

Historically art has been an integral part of religion. On the one hand, people have found in art an effective means of communicating their religious beliefs and consciousness. On the other hand, the artistic expressions of a people can be viewed as the conveyors of the religious beliefs and practices of their community. The towers of the temples and churches, the sculptures in those towers, music played in the places of worship have a particularising tendency since the cultural resources of the community shape the artistic expressions.

Accordingly, one aspect of the indigenisation of Catholicism is in the realm of art, which we call the ‘expressive domain.’ This expressive domain is more appealing and acceptable to people and they seem to retain their identity as being part of a culture. In this chapter an attempt is made to understand the interaction between the art and architecture of Hinduism and Christianity. We focus here specifically on music, drama, art and architecture. As we shall see, music and drama are areas in which the Catholics have shown considerable interest in and appreciation for the indigenous forms, which they have adapted to their religion. However, the attempts at indigenisation in the sphere of art and architecture, initiated by a few laymen and Church personnel, have not become popular among the Catholics, especially in the rural areas.
MUSIC

In the beginning, for a long time the Catholics worshipped and sang in Latin, which was the Church-prescribed language of worship. The hymns sung at worship were as in Europe, and the music used was largely Gregorian (Michael Raj 1955:599). Indigenisation in the field of music among the Tamil Catholics came through the initiatives of a few pioneers who gave direction to the composition of music in worship. The breakthrough to replace European canticles by Tamil songs came through the Jesuits. Santiago (1848-1926), a Catholic priest, was a pioneer in composing ‘teva tottira kiirtanaikal’ (In Honour of St. Joseph), poems that could be sung during the services. He also composed a hymn to Jesus ‘cecuvin matura tiru irutayame’ (Sacred Sweet Heart of Jesus) (Caritas 1926:9-16).

In the first stage, the Latin songs were transliterated, and the worshipers could sing such songs as ‘Tantuum Erkum’ and ‘Liberame Domine’ even though they did not understand their meaning. Even today some elderly people recall nostalgically the satisfaction they had while singing these songs in Latin.

In the second stage (1950s), Tamil words set to Latin melodies came to be sung in worship. With this a certain uniformity was maintained in all the churches. But the devotees remained alienated to the cultural tradition, as the music was still alien to them (Amaladass 1988:235). It was during this period that the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) was held. This Council directed the Church to adopt an interactive approach in societies/cultures where it has taken roots. Though the Gregorian chant continued to be recognised as the official music of the Church, keeping in tune with the culture and
artistic traditions of the place other forms of music came to be allowed (Flannery 1992:48 and 49). This gave impetus to the development and use of native music in worship. Nevertheless, at this stage, while the songs such as ‘cuurian caaya kaariruL mella, cuuzntiTa yaavum ceerntiTum veeLai’ and ‘tantaaney tutipoome,’ etc., were in Tamil, the music was neither purely Indian nor purely Gregorian.

In the third stage (1970s) conscious efforts were made to drop all Gregorian tunes and to promote Sanskritised Tamil lyrics. The musical composition of such songs as ‘irukaram kuuppi, iRai unmai tozutaal’ and ‘uLLat taamaRai italilee,’ was in orthodox Carnatic tradition.

Since people found it difficult to sing pure Carnatic pieces, as they demanded a trained voice, in the fourth stage (1980s) efforts were made to simplify the songs so that they could be sung by all at worship. Songs such as ‘tamizaalun pukal paaTi teevaanaan tinam vaaza varuvaaye tirunaayakaa’ and ‘imaioru polutum enaipiriyaatu...nii iruntaaL,’ addressed God in the intimate second person singular ‘you’ – ‘nii’ ‘un,’ were composed in the tradition of Tamil Hindu Bhakti poets (Grafe 1990:256). In some songs the words used by the Hindus to address Murukan are used to address Jesus, for example, ‘tirukumaraa en yecuvey tirukumaraa.’ Thus, a kind of fusion began taking place in the church singing. Later, songs with light music like ‘talaivaa unai vanaMka en talaimael karam kuvipaen’ ‘yecu alaikkinRaar aavalai tan karattai niiTi anpaai azaikinRaar,’ etc., became popular among the people.

Finally came the introduction of folk songs, filmy tunes, repetitive type of songs and bhajans. Simple lyrics with catchy tunes have now become popular for worship, more so at pilgrim centres and in the homes of people. We hear songs such as ‘Maatave
"caranam, Amma Mariye caranam" (a song to Maata) set to the tunes of songs sung for Aiyappa, e.g., caamiye caranam, caranam Aiyappa. Bhajans are songs with refrains, with a leader leading this type of singing and the congregation repeating the same. Subrabatham is another popular form sung in the Hindu temples especially in the Tamil month of Maarkazi (December-January). It consists of a series of couplets, each couplet sung in the same sing-song tune. In recent years the Church has released audio cassettes of Christian Subrabhadam sung in the same way as its Hindu counterpart, e.g., 'Annayin Subrabhadam' (on Mother Mary) and 'pooloka raksaka yesu teva putra, poo swarkka palaka yesu putra, sri yesu tevamaparaney tapa subrabhadam' (on Jesus).

The Catholics, by and large, expect devotional songs to be sung at worship. However, they play songs set to film tunes and devotional hymns of other religions in their homes and during celebrations. Thus, the choice of music may be appropriate to the place and occasion. People do not seem to be passive any longer and they even criticise the type of singing in the worship.

It is noteworthy that the choice of music differs with age group: The elderly are not in favour of film tunes for worship and they are critical of the younger generation which shows a strong inclination to this. On the other hand, the young prefer lively music and since they play an active role in the church singing, songs with film and folk music have gained popularity.
paaskaa

The elite of the Church support and offer guidance to stage dramas on the life of Christ and the saints. Plays depicting the lives of saints, stories from the Bible and the Passion of Jesus are staged on festive days. Through these dramas the great tradition of Christianity is transmitted by adopting the little tradition of local culture. Among the dramas, the Passion play, or the paaskaa as it is popularly called in Tamil, staged during the Easter week holds a prominent place in South India.

The word paaskaa is derived from the biblical word Passover denoting the ritual that the Israelites followed on the day before their deliverance from the King of Egypt. In commemoration of their deliverance the Jews have since celebrated Passover in the first month of every year. Jesus followed the same on the night before his arrest by the Romans.

From the seventeenth century paaskaa has been enacted in Tamil Nadu. Enacted for two nights, the second night’s episode was known as the resurrection paaskaa (Caritas 1936:58), as the central theme was the resurrection of Jesus after his death. Because of the large assembly of people and the magnificence of the show, earlier people referred to paaskaa as ottalookapaaskaa (great assembly, magnificence).

As an all-night cultural show, paaskaa was an imitation of kuuttu (dramatic performance), a native genre of drama in Tamil culture. It presents the distinctive soteriological message of the gospel in Indian cultural form. In Tamil Nadu, Avoor, Idaikattur, Karankadu, Kokkurani, Kottar, Metupatti, Mylapur, Nagappattinam,
Panjampatti, Purathakudi, Rayapanpatti, Sarukani, Salem, Suranam, Thanjavur, Thuthukudi and Vailankanni, have a tradition of enacting *paaskaa*.

A Jesuit priest named Venantius Bouchet introduced this form of play between 1697-1702 in Avoor (Michael Raj 1955:598). In the beginning it did not have any human performers; statues were used as actors. In 1912, people started to act in *paaskaa*, but the character of Jesus continued to be represented by a statue, as people were hesitant to enact the role considered sacred. It is only since the 1960s that the role of Jesus is also enacted by human beings. However, the sacredness of the role is retained the person who plays the role of Jesus leads an ascetic way of life for forty days. Interestingly, though *paaskaa* is a Catholic religious play, it used to draw actors from outside the religious community.¹

The following discussion is based on a *paaskaa* which the researcher witnessed at Kokkurani, a small Catholic village in Ramnad District. The church at Kokkurani is dedicated to St. Sebastian, the saint known for his miracles in matters of health, and his shrine attracts a large number of people. Until the liberation of Goa in 1961, this church was under the Portuguese and Goan priests were its religious functionaries.

Kokkurani is a Christian area and the Catholics from the surrounding villages come to this church to take part in its Easter celebrations. They would stay back in the church compound overnight, and the *paaskaa* is presented to them both as entertainment and as a form of religious instruction. It was also an attempt made by the early missionaries to bring home the life of Christ in the form of drama which carried the imprint of the local performing art form called *kuuttu*.

During the course of fieldwork it was gathered that Kokkurani was not an independent parish till 1970 and that it came under the parish in the neighbouring
Kallatathadal village. Nevertheless, it was chosen for the performance of *paaskaa*, as it was centrally located vis-à-vis the surrounding Catholic villages and it was home to the shrine of St. Sebastian. The actors came from different villages and most of them belonged to the Udayar caste. It was almost as if it was the feast of the Udayars because of the preponderance of Udayars in the neighbouring villages. As the major landowners of the place they sponsored almost the entire show.

However, the situation changed once Kokkurani became an independent parish with a resident priest. The Kokkurani Catholics demanded that the actors should be drawn from the local parish. Moreover, since they were Parayars, considered to be an ‘untouchable’ caste, they desired a significant place in *paaskaa*, which they had been denied all these years. Thus, from the year 1970 the actors have been drawn from within the parish. But the people, especially the elderly, pointed out that the quality of the show had deteriorated as prominent actors have withdrawn from the show.

*paaskaa* is performed in an open-air theatre. The audience, numbering five to six thousand, is drawn from the surrounding villages and it consists of both Catholics and non-Christians. They are all seated on the floor in front of the stage. The show lasts for two nights – on the Easter Sunday and the following Monday: It starts with ‘creation’ and ends with resurrection and ascension of Jesus; thus highlighting the various scenes from the Bible. The episode in which the angel Michael strikes Lucifer with a sword, which is symbolic of the destruction of evil, is significantly meaningful to the audience. Here we may recall that dealing with evil is a matter of major concern to the Catholics, and their great devotion to Saint Michael derives from his role as the destroyer of evil (see Chap. 6).
The local cultural ethos determines the significance attached to particular scenes in the paaskaa. For example, there is no mention of Mary lamenting for her son in the Bible (see Chap. 3), but in the Maata puzampal scene the Catholics have allowed their imagination to recreate the feeling of a mother at the violent death of her son. In the Tamil cultural set-up the death of a son is lamented more by a mother than anybody else and the people do not seek biblical authenticity to understand mother’s sorrow.²

The costumes are more or less an imitation of the dress of Jesus’ time. However, the ornaments worn by the High Priest and Pilate are imitations of the native royal ornaments. The dress of John the Baptist, who according to the Bible was clothed in animal skins, is the same as that of Shiva (the Hindu god), that is, the Tiger skin. Thus, wherever the people could easily find a parallel dress in their native culture they have adopted it. The actors are all men, who play the roles of both men and women.

The mood of the show is well balanced: there is both singing and dialogue. The actors themselves sing and so the choice of the actors depends on the talent for singing, too. The songs are set to Carnatic (classical) music, folk music and film tunes. The familiarity with the tunes creates enthusiasm in the audience. The dialogue between Caiphus and Pilate is presented in the form of a ‘Darbar.’ The conversations involving Jesus, his disciples, and the Jewish and the Roman authorities are authentic versions from the Bible. But the scriptwriter takes liberty with regard to the conversation among the soldiers, and the Jewish and the Roman authorities. This gives considerable scope for an indigenous mode of dialogue.

As noted earlier, paaskaa is an adaptation of the native performing folk-art form called kuuttu which is enacted in almost all the villages of Tamil Nadu during the annual
village feast. In the Catholic paaskaa the Hindu mythological themes have been replaced by a Christian theme. Though the theme is Christian and the costume is Jewish, the mode and the time of its performance give paaskaa the ambience and touch of kuuttu. There is a kind of cultural fusion, yet each has its own identity: paaskaa remains a high point in the process of indigenisation where Hinduism and Christianity merge beautifully without losing their identity.

ART

The earlier attempts at indigenisation of Christian icons came through the presentation of Mary. Devotion to Mary has occupied a pre-eminent place in Catholicism down the ages. Depicting Mary as an Indian woman was attempted by an Italian missionary called Joseph Constantine Beschi in the year 1715. Beschi drew a picture of Mary and the child Jesus in her arms as a typical Tamil woman clad in sari and had it made into a statue in Manila. Once the statue reached India he adorned it with earrings and named the statue Periyanayagi Ammal (The great Lady or The Great Princess), a typical Tamil name. A similar statue is also seen in Elakuruchi (see Photo 7.1). In almost all shrines Mary is draped in a sari. This has great appeal among the Tamil Catholics and they make sari as a votive offering in her honour.

In the twentieth century an innovation was attempted in the design of Mary in Nellur, Chenkelpet District. Mark, a Jesuit priest and social worker, designed Mary as a revolutionary Tamil woman: Dressed in a sari Mary is shown holding a torch in her right hand and a globe in the left. He named her Dalit Maata (see Photo 7.2). The Bishop of Madras objected to the name and suggested that she be called Vitutalai Maata (Our Lady
of Victory). The reason behind his objection was that the official sanction of it would create a kind of competition within the church with each caste claiming their Maata. Initially, the elderly were not in favour of such a depiction of Mary and they even objected to it saying that such a figure does not inspire veneration. While in the course of time the village has come to accept the portrait of Mary, it has not gained popularity among the neighbouring villages.

During the field study it was gathered that the Catholics have a definite idea of a Mother figure in Christianity. As the mother of Jesus, Mary is graceful, benevolent, understanding and people can not picture her as Dalit Maata who is ferocious, revengeful, and fearful being. This is what they object to. As regards Mary being draped in the sari, people seem to view it as a sign of their close link with Mary: ‘as a votive offering to Mary, we can only think of a sari, for that is the dress of a woman in our culture.’ Also, as they say, ‘puTavayai kaTTuvatinaal Maata maaruvatuillai’ (Mary does not lose her status because of sari). In other words, the sari is viewed as a peripheral symbol whereas the statue itself (physical appearance of Mary) is the essential symbol which cannot be altered.

As a result of the revival of the Indian spirit in the early twentieth century, a number of Christian artists tried to discover their cultural identity in art (Elavathingal 1990:221). Angelo da Fonseca, a Goan pioneer in Christian art, regarded Indian culture as the birthright of Indian Christians and ventured through his art to integrate Indian culture with Christian faith: Defending his depiction of Mary in sari and Jesus in kurta, he argued that Christian faith has established a family relationship with god and people which is brought out through art which portrays earthly resemblance.
Further motivation came from the Second Vatican Council: ‘New art forms adapted to our times and in keeping with the characteristics of different nations and regions should be acknowledged by the Church’ (Flannery 1992:868). With this efforts at indigenisation of Christian art led to the depiction of Jesus and Mary as Indians. As Sahi (1986:74) notes, to present Jesus and Mary as having Indian features is to appropriate them for India and view them as one of us.

In what follows let us discuss the work of two Bangalore-based contemporary Christian artists, namely Sr. Claire, a Catholic nun and Shri Jyoti Sahi, a layman. Sr. Claire, who hails from Andhra Pradesh, is an internationally acclaimed pioneer in Indian-Christian painting. She has had a unique religious and cultural background, being the sole Christian member in a Hindu family. Her art becomes meaningful against her background of Hindu origin and Christian faith. She has attempted to synthesise the East and the West in depicting Jesus and Mary.

Sr. Claire has presented a large number of paintings of Jesus and Mary in Indian cultural settings. In one of her paintings, she portrays Jesus as a yogi, wearing saffron tunic and seated in a padmasanam (Indian posture of meditation). In her painting of Last Supper (see Photo 7.3), the Bread and Wine are placed on a banana leaf. The disciples taking part in this sacred meal are seated on the ground and they are depicted as typical Indian ascetics clad in saffron outfit. The background is filled with native lights and decorations.

In depicting Mary’s earthly life with Jesus, Sr. Claire has painted Mary as a sari-clad Indian woman. According to her, in her earthly life Mary is part of history, and adaptation at this level is limited to the extent that it does not distort the authenticity of
that history. However, while depicting Mary’s status in the heavenly world, she merges the Hindu goddess image with that of Mary. Here, as a devotional figure Mary transcends history and hence historical specificity is not emphasised. For example, the Church acknowledges Mary as the seat of wisdom, and Sr. Claire presents Mary as the personification of wisdom in a typical indigenous style (see Photo 7.4): Seated on a lotus, Mary’s left hand is in *varamudra*, keeping the left palm with fingers joined and pointing to the ground. Mary’s right hand is in *abhayamudra*, holding the right hand lifted to the shoulder with the palm turned towards the people. All the elements are represented in the painting: earth, water, air, sun (wisdom radiating like the sun) and ether (*akasa*). In the Indian tradition the lotus represents the ‘womb of creation;’ Mary seated on the lotus is symbolic of her bringing forth Jesus to the humankind. The lotus is also an epithet of the goddess Lakshmi who is the Hindu goddess of wealth; Jesus is the wealth that Mary brought to the world. The lotus flower grows on a long stalk and stands above the water while its roots remain in the muddy earth; Mary chosen among women stands above all women because of her purity.

Shri Jyoti Sahi, a well known artist in India today, is associated with the National Biblical Catechtical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC), an organisation which pioneered the indigenisation of Catholicism in India. He is a founding member and a Governing Council executive of the Asian Christian and Indian Christian Art Associations.

According to Shri Sahi (1986:6), an artist must constantly remain with the people, and consciously long to give expression to their deepest aspirations. He claims that the symbols he uses are universal and not specific to any particular religion. He goes on to add that his work has drawn not only from dominant traditions like that of the Saivites but
blissful awareness of reality in meditation and contemplation, and (2) The church at Kayavayal village in Sivagangai District of Tamil Nadu dedicated to Arulperum Jyoti (the Great Light, i.e., Jesus). Both these indigenous churches are the outcome of the need to relate religious experience with indigenous cultural symbols. 

The Saccidananda Chapel

The chapel at the NBCLC was built with the impetus given by the Second Vatican Council. It was thought that in the spirit of indigenisation the celebration of a typical Indian liturgy would be authentic if the place of worship is also in the Indian style. Situated in the metropolitan city of Bangalore, this structure, thus, was also conceived of as a model of indigenisation for the Catholics in India.

The overall theological vision and synthesis of an indigenous church came from the late Fr. Amalorpavadass, who was the founder and Director of the NBCLC. He was technically assisted by artist Shri Jyoti Sahi. Based on their knowledge of indigenous architecture they ventured to create a typically indigenous church synchronising Christian theology. Sahi’s (1998:184) approach to indigenisation is based on his understanding that

The holy and symbolic cannot be reduced to intellectual or religious property rights. The Hindu does not possess the Tirumurti, or the letter OM, any more than the Hindu possesses Sanskrit, or the Christian Latin or Greek. It is important to stress that the insights which are basic to the temple or mosque are as relevant to Christian images of God as were the forms of Greece and Rome which contributed so much to what we are now calling Christian culture.

The structure of the Chapel combines the Dravidian and the Aryan temple plans. Drawing inspiration from the Bible, where it reads ‘the plan of the city is perfectly
square’ (Revelation: 21:16, Good News Bible), the ground plan of the church is square. However, the architecture has adapted the design of the Aryan fire altar. The structure of the Chapel is based on the form of the veeti, an ancient sacrificial altar, which is supposed to represent a bird in flight with outstretched wings. In one of these wings is situated the Indian-type altar at which the priest sits cross-legged on the ground to celebrate the Mass. The vimaana (head) of the structure is located directly opposite the entrance and provides the setting for the tabernacle in the form of a symbolic pillar which represents the axis of the universe (Sahi 1998:118).

On the top of the Chapel is the koopuram or vimaana (see Photo 7.6). There are seven layers representing the cosmic tree or cosmic mountain. This symbolises the relationship between the divine and human which is depicted through the vimaana. On the top of the seven layers is the lotus-shaped kalacam (sacred vessel). The lower layer of the lotus petals is opened downward signifying the earth and the upper layer is turned upward pointing to the heaven. In the centre of the lotus is a closed vessel signifying that it contains the nectar of life.

Inside the Chapel is the tabernacle, placed in the centre of the cosmic tree. The heart shape of the tabernacle symbolises the Upanishadic experience of god dwelling ‘in the cave of man’s heart.’ A kuttuviLakku is kept burning as a sign of the presence of god. On the tabernacle are Jesus depicted as a sannyaasi and Magdalene depicted as a typical Indian woman clad in sari (Amalorpavadass 1982:15-20 and 39).

A tank is built on either side of the entrance to the Chapel. Keeping in tune with the Hindu practice of taking a dip in the river or washing feet in the tank before entering
the temple for worship, these tanks are meant to serve the purpose of purification by
washing of the legs, hands and face before entering the Chapel.

The Arulperum Jyoti church

The church at Kayavayal village was built only recently (in the year 2001). It was
designed by Fr. Arockiasamy a Catholic priest, who has a doctorate in Indian architecture.
According to him, the temples have been the means through which religion was imparted
to the people. The temples have a narrative function and on the walls of the temple one
can see mythological scenes depicted. Similarly, this church is designed keeping in view
the narrative function, with its compound walls depicting biblical stories. He has closely
followed the indigenous theology of the temple and has applied it in building the church
giving a Christian interpretation. Our description of this church is based on the
information gathered through our interview with Fr. Arockiasamy.

The very construction of the temple indicates the path to self-realisation. The
South Indian temple creates a sense of dynamism, of movement away from the profane
towards the sacred (Shulman 1980:18). There lies the sacred force contained within the
sanctum sanctorum, a dark room where there is a small oil lamp burning perpetually.
Around the sanctum sanctorum is a closed passage on all four sides. Outside this is a
wider passage with covered roof. Beyond the walls there is a still broader passage without
roof. The entrance to the temple leads to this open passage. Thus, there are three passages
leading to the sanctum sanctorum. The temples are of two types: one is kiTanta koolam
(lying posture) and the other ninRa koolam (standing posture). The church at Kayavayal is
in the standing posture and it has followed the Dravidian style of art.
The *tooraNavaayil* (the arch) is the structure at the entrance (see Photo 7.7). In a Hindu temple this depicts the character of the deity to whom the temple is dedicated. However, at this church the *tooraNavaayil* has been left plain for the present. The compound wall separates the church (the sacred) from the mundane (the profane) life of the people. As the devotee enters the *tooraNavaayil* he/she is immediately cut-off from the profane world and is enveloped in the world of the sacred. The compound wall is so high that one can not see the world outside. On the inner side of the compound wall is depicted scenes from the Bible in a sequential order. The devotee goes around viewing the scenes as a preparation to have the *dharshan* (encounter with god).

At the entrance to the church is the statue of Mary depicted as a typical Indian woman in sari, holding the Bible (see Photo 7.8). She is the *vaahana* (vehicle), the channel of divine communion. This is akin to Nandhi (bull), the *vaahana* of Shiva, placed at the entrance to a Shiva temple. As the Hindus do in their temple, the Catholic devotees circle the statue of Mary seeking her aid to enter into communion with god.

The devotees then make the third round going around the church from left to right. The reverence to the divine is expressed by keeping the divine on the right side; thus, the divine becomes ‘all’ and the devotee becomes ‘nothing’ before the divine. Behind Mary stands the *koTimaram* (flag mast); and just as the Hindus prostate before the *koTimaram* in their temple the Catholics too are encouraged to do the same.

At the main entrance to the church on either side the statues of St. Peter (one of the twelve apostles of Jesus) and St. Paul (a great missionary in the early Church) are placed. This is the replication of *dwarapalakas* (the doorkeepers) placed at the entrance to
the Hindu temple. They are in the posture of *vishmaya mudra* (god is a mystery) and *susi mudra* (one god and god is inside) respectively. There are seven steps leading to the sanctuary, signifying the seven sacraments administered by the Catholic Church. The main church is an *arta manTapam* (open hall) which has twelve pillars portraying the life of Jesus. In the *garpagiraha* (sanctuary) is the figure of cosmic Christ seated on a lotus in *arta padmasanam* (meditation posture) with his hands in *dhyana mutra* (in meditation) (see Photo 7.9). There are two lotuses: one inverted and the other open, symbolising respectively the evil and the good. The tabernacle, the sacred container having the sanctified Bread, is placed in the hands of Jesus implying that he offers life.

On the outer wall of the sanctuary are depicted a few significant scenes from the Bible. These portrayals, called the *devakostram*, include the Baptism of Jesus, Jesus receiving the Holy Spirit, and Jesus healing. On the *koopuram* (dome) are the four *vahana* - angel, lion, calf and eagle. They represent the four gospel writers Mathew, Mark, Luke and John, the vehicles through whom the message of Christ is spread.

According to Fr. Arockiasamy, the icons in the church are typically Christian, and have been retained since they are historical figures and history can not be distorted. Indigenisation of the icons is observed only with the figures of Jesus and Mary, since they are depicted not in their earthly life but in their heavenly life. From the reports of the few visitors to this church it was gathered that though it looks like a Hindu temple, one soon realises that its icons are Christian.

In the indigenous architecture of the churches that we have described there are two processes at work: One is that the indigenous symbols are given a Christian interpretation,
e.g., tooraNavaayil and koTimaram. The other is that the Christian symbols receive an
indigenous explanation, e.g., Mary, the apostles, etc. Both the churches manifest an
artistic and architectural synthesis of the Hindu and the Christian spirituality and
theology.

In every society the image which people have of the divine influences the way
their places of worship are built. Thus, every culture has its own distinct art forms
reflected in its places of worship. The art per se is not religious in nature, but it may be
used by the designer to interpret the religious and philosophic trends of the time.
Nevertheless, in the course of time people come to associate a particular art form with a
particular religion. For many centuries the Catholics have been familiar with only one
form of architecture, namely, that which was imported from the West, and they find it
difficult to accept innovations, which the Church interprets, as indigenisation. Hence, we
may conclude that assimilation of the indigenous architecture in church will be a difficult
and long drawn out process.
Summary and Conclusion

Picking up four main forms in the ‘expressive domain’ of religion, namely, music, drama, art, and architecture, we have traced the evolution of these forms in the Catholic Church from the point of view of indigenisation. We have shown how these forms, which were explicitly European in the initial stage, were consciously reformulated. This is not to deny that while implanting Christianity in India, nearly 400 years ago, the missionaries had shown no tendency to appropriate and integrate certain native elements in these expressive forms. Robert de Nobili can be cited as an example (see Chap. 2). These minimal efforts have been growing in strength especially after the Second Vatican Council.

From purely Gregorian chants, music has now reached the mode of Aiyappa bhajans. In the realm of drama, adopting the kuuttu model paaskaa has developed. In art, the fair complexioned Jesus and Mary in their Jewish attire have been transposed to brown complexioned Indians robed in dhoti and sari. In architecture, the gothic structure of churches gave way for Dravidian style temple-like structures.

Two streams of indigenisation can be delineated in the ‘expressive domain’: while in the realms of art and architecture indigenisation draws its elements mainly from the great tradition, in the realm of drama the elements are drawn from the little tradition. In music, both these elements are interwoven.

The adaptation of the great and little traditions could be explained in terms of the main actors involved in effecting the indigenisation and among whom such practices were adopted. In the realm of art and architecture, and to some extent in music, the actors were the clergy. By training they have come to acquire a certain degree of expertise to present
their faith in an intelligible relation to the great tradition. In this they remained somewhat insulated from the little tradition. In the realm of drama and the recent form of devotional music, on the other hand, the main actors were the laity, whose theological perceptions were at ease with the elements of the little tradition.

Our interviews with those who introduced indigenisation in art and architecture revealed that they infused Christian meaning into the Hindu symbols such as lotus, oil lamp, dancing posture, etc., which they incorporated. While doing so they adopted a unique approach. For instance, Shri Jyoti Sahi remarked that he did not view them as Hindu symbols at all. Rather, he saw them as universal symbols, not belonging to any particular religion. Defining the identity of religion in terms of particular symbols and meanings, according to him, would limit the depth of indigenisation.

Endnotes

1. There are references in Caritas (1936:58) to non-Christian actors taking part in the paaskaa play. In 1936, a Hindu actor played the role of Pilate. Today, the non-Christians play the role of background singers.

2. Similarly, the Filipino Catholics’ esteem and respect for women, especially mothers, is reflected in the scene of Mary meeting Jesus after he is resurrected which is depicted on Easter Sunday, a scene which does not figure in the Bible (Chupungco 1992:106-7).

3. These details are contained in the Church handouts of Konankuppam, Cuddalore District.

4. In recent years several churches have been built using the prevalent tribal architecture. One example of such a church is in Gujarat, among the Zankhva tribe (Sahi 1998:164).
7.1
Mary Adorned with Ear and Finger Rings

7.2 Mary Portrayed as the Dalit Maata
7.3 The Last Supper

7.4 Mary, the Seat of Wisdom
7.5 Dancing Jesus
7.6 The Chapel at NBCLC

7.7 The Arulperumjyoti church