CHAPTER X

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Understanding indigenisation of Catholicism in South India was the broad objective of this thesis. To realise this objective and to answer the lead questions raised in the study we collected data from the field sites in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere in South India. These data have been presented in the preceding thematic chapters. We shall, in this chapter, put together logically the main findings of the study by way of conclusion.

First and foremost, sketching the history of indigenisation in Tamil Nadu, we highlighted the fact that in the course of 400 years of Christianity in Tamil Nadu, Catholicism has interacted with the native religion and has undergone a process of indigenisation, making it an unique phenomenon. While several of its aspects have changed, Catholicism has come to adopt several aspects of Hinduism, and in this process several persons have played a significant role. The study has shown that indigenisation is not a recent phenomenon as it is generally believed to be. It has been an incessant process going on since the time Christianity was founded in India.

For analytical convenience, we can divide the history of indigenisation into three phases: (1) the early period of colonialism, (2) the latter period of colonialism, and (3) the post-colonial era. Each of these phases had its own character. In the early period of colonialism, Christianity approached the local culture from an Euro-centric attitude and encouraged (and often coerced) the native converts to abandon their traditional socio-religious practices. In the later period of colonialism, with a view to overcome the hesitation of the natives to convert to Christianity due to the fear of losing their native
customs, Christianity 'tolerated' some of the local traditions to co-exist with Christian practices. Around the middle of the twentieth century, that is, in the post-colonial era, almost all the colonies attained freedom, and Europe had to reckon with the assertion of different nationalities, their cultures and religions. Hence, a spirit of religious pluralism began to take roots in Christianity and the churches in the former colonies, including India, were encouraged to incarnate the Christian faith in their respective cultures. Intense debate and resistance marked all these three phases of Christian history and these go on even today. The important point that emerges from the history of indigenisation in Tamil Nadu is that the early missionaries created a favourable environment that led the natives to retain most of their socio-cultural practices.

Moving from the history of indigenisation of Christianity in Tamil Nadu to the converts' lived experience of religion of Catholicism, we identify two reciprocal life domains: the religious and the socio-cultural. In order to understand the nature and extent of indigenisation we traversed the various aspects of the religio-cultural life of the Catholics in rural Tamil Nadu.

In considering the religio-cultural rituals of the Catholics, we observe that they relate to both the religious and the socio-cultural domain of the believers. The socio-cultural domain pre-existed Christianity and therefore had its autonomy in terms of rituals, symbols, agency and meanings. It is a terrain where the interaction of people is largely centred on the temporal aspects of the converts. Under the religious domain, the interaction is directed towards the 'Absolute' and to the 'Almighty Power.' The symbols and rituals that are enacted in the direction of the 'Absolute' are considered sacred, which are performed as a community. The persons who perform these rituals are considered
sacred persons. Considering the nature and the sphere of these rituals, we can make three main lines of distinction:

- There are two sets of rituals: the Church-prescribed and the native. The Church-prescribed rituals are specifically religious, and are narrowly defined and least flexible. They give little scope for indigenisation. The native rituals are exhaustive, and are all encompassing and incorporating in meaning. They are people oriented and more flexible. They give greater scope for indigenisation.

- There are two spheres in the performance of these rituals: the church and the domestic.

- There are two categories of actors: the official religious (clergy/priest, and *kooyilpiLLai*) and the ordinary religious (laity) as the key performers of the rituals.

**Levels of Indigenisation in Various Spheres**

We may recall the lead questions raised in the introductory chapter in order to identify the patterns of indigenisation of Catholicism. In the first place, what are the native cultural symbols that have been retained by the converts? We observe that there is a good deal of native rituals and symbols in the Catholic Church. The density of these rituals and symbols is not, however, even in various spheres of the Catholics’ life. It is high in the spheres of the rites of passage, agriculture, quotidian life, shrines and ashram, and is low in worship and in the expressive domain.

The first ritual sphere considered in this thesis concerns worship and celebrations, both of which fall in the religious domain. Among Catholics, the Mass is the most important form of worship, and it also happens to be the most protected sphere when it comes to indigenisation. From the time Christianity was established in India, the rituals
observed during the Mass have retained their special character, and these rituals are known as the Latin Rite. While the Church permitted many indigenous practices in other aspects of the Christian life, it never allowed any change in the rituals followed in the Mass until 1965.

After the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), by the initiation of the Church, the Mass was the single most important element of Catholic religious practice that was sought to be substantially altered by the incorporation of indigenous religious elements. However, as our study has shown, even this effort by the Church has been limited to some centres, such as the NBCLC and Catholic ashrams, and it hardly made much headway in the rural areas. When it became public it was, in fact, resisted fiercely by groups of Catholics under the banner ‘Save the Faith Movement.’ Not surprisingly, most churches still stick on to the elements of the Latin Rite.

The main reason for not accepting or partially accepting the indigenisation of the Mass was the perception that the Mass constitutes the kernel of the Catholic faith and that indigenising it in toto dilutes the kernel of the faith. This is not the case with other religious practices, about which we will discuss shortly. This shows that there are core and peripheral rituals in any religious community. While the believers are not willing to dilute the core rituals, they may be flexible with regard to the peripheral rituals. Even when the believers selectively adopt some indigenous elements, as in the case of the worship in rural communities, they are keen that the main structure of the ritual is maintained. For example, in the case of the Mass, they want to maintain the prayer of forgiveness and the breaking of Bread. However, they may light an oil lamp instead of a candle, do the aaratti, use the local language, and sing in local tunes. Over the years,
there has been a slow but steady permeation of these indigenous elements in different
churches. It is noteworthy that lighting *kuttuvilakku*, instead of candles, and doing *aaratti*
have been slowly incorporated into the Mass, as they do not affect the basic structure of
the Latin Rite.

In this context, it is important to observe that resistance to indigenisation
generally occurs only among the elite. The common people show more flexibility
vis-à-vis indigenisation. Also, from the response of the people to the indigenisation of the
Mass, we notice the difference in the understanding of indigenisation that is held by the
people and the Church. For the Church, it is the theology which needs to be Christian
while the symbols can be in tune with the native culture. For people, on the other hand,
theology is too vague, and they look for symbols which are typically Christian, those
which are different from those of the religion from which they have converted. Thus, the
Church’s perception of and approach to indigenisation is different from that of the people.

This, however, raises the question: why does the Church seek to indigenise the
Mass at all. From our interviews with the clergy, we gather that from the point of the
Church, the Mass is a sphere that is exclusively under their purview and that
indigenisation of Catholicism is meaningful only when this core ritual defining the
essence of this religion is indigenised.

The second set of rituals within the religious domain consists of the many
Catholic calendrical feasts. As compared to the Mass, this sphere is observed to be less
protected. Despite these rituals being part of the Christian liturgical celebrations, they
have accommodated many native elements. This is evidenced in the case of the
celebration of Christmas, the practices during the Lent. The consideration for allowing
such changes was the compatibility with the Christian faith of such indigenous beliefs and practices as lamentation (*oppaari*) and eating of *akatti kiirai* on Good Friday. At the same time the norm of preserving the structure of the Roman liturgy was not compromised.

The third set of rituals in the religious domain relate to the *uur tiruvizaa*, which is the sphere least protected from indigenisation. This is because it is the sphere of the Catholics as people belonging to a larger geographical entity called the village, which also consists of the Hindus. At the same time, it is not an independent sphere since it concerns religion. The dilemma of the Catholics being members of the larger village community and at the same time belonging to a religious community (i.e., the Catholic Church) has been resolved by the latter by lending some of its own symbols and rituals to be incorporated into the Hindu way of celebrating the annual village festival. To be sure, this was not the creation of European Missionaries. Such practices existed in the local culture, as is evident from the annual village festivals celebrated with similar features by the Hindus in Tamil Nadu.

Over all, in the religious sphere we observe that when the *new* religion brings with it a definite set of core rituals (e.g., the Mass), it limits the scope for indigenisation. On the other hand, the adherents of this *new* religion relate its rituals to their existing cultural practices (as, e.g., in Christmas and the Lenten practices). However, in areas where the *new* religion does not offer any prescribed set of rituals, there appears to be greater scope for indigenisation (as, e.g., *uur tiruvizaa*).

Moving from the religious to the social-cum-religious (or the semi-religious) domain, we find that the rituals fall into both domestic and the church spheres. In the
social-cum-religious domain, we first considered the rituals relating to rites of passage. The rites of passage constitute the second most important space for religious expression. They are concerned about the ‘self’ and its need to cope up with the crises contingent upon the different stages of life. Dealing as they do with the life-cycle rituals of an individual-in-community, they relate to the individual and the community at the same time. As such, they seem to address both psychological and social needs. They invoke the religious spirits as and when needed and blend them with social imperatives followed in the community.

As individuals and a community the Catholics had been following certain rituals rooted in their socio-religious milieu before embracing Christianity. After becoming Christians, they had to reconcile their life-cycle rituals with the symbols and rituals of the Church. Obviously, the situation is complex, as the Church has its own set of life-cycle rituals evolved in the socio-religious milieu of Europe. The case of puberty ritual exemplifies this complexity. Though it is not a religious ritual per se among the Hindus, it is accorded a high degree of importance in the Hindu culture. Whereas, in European Christianity, this ritual is important neither in religion nor in culture. Similarly, baptism, which is of cardinal importance in Catholicism, has no significance to the Hindus.

At this sphere, the rituals are more elaborate, lending greater scope for indigenisation. We have earlier presented them in the order of their performance in the church and in the domestic spheres, highlighting the similarities and the differences. The rituals that are carried out in the church are Church-prescribed, though some native elements (e.g., taali, niirmaalai, etc.) are added to it. While the rituals that are performed in the domestic sphere are similar to those of the Hindus, the Catholics have Christianised
the native rituals (e.g., puberty). Moreover, even while retaining the native rituals the Catholics have been selective: They have given up those which are explicitly religious in orientation and retained those that are basically social in nature. In the ritual configuration of the community, the Catholics have also made simple substitutions (e.g., candle in place of camphor) and additions (e.g., Christian prayer while performing the native rituals).

In the agrarian socio-economic life we observe that Christianity did not present an entirely different set of rituals for the Catholics, as it did not alter the occupational pattern of the people drastically. The rituals retained are generally symbolic devices adopted by human communities to deal with forces that are beyond their control. They deal with these forces by pleasing and by appealing. Survival is the basic need of human communities and nature is viewed as a force beyond the control of the human beings. People generally believe god to be the ultimate force controlling the uncontrollable nature. An agricultural community, such as the one we studied, is replete with rituals seeking to please god to ensure timely and sufficient rains, protection of crop and for a good yield. While the Catholics grant a space for their native rituals, they combine the same with the Catholic religious symbols.

Like in the rituals related to agricultural operations, the quotidian life too remained outside the purview of the Church. The notions of auspiciousness, inauspiciousness were not part of the Catholic theology. The same was the case with the notion of casting evil eye. The absence of a clear-cut official policy concerning these gave the people the freedom to adopt in totality the practices of the Hindus. Thus, 'replication' has been one of the ways of indigenisation of Catholicism. However, this
has been achieved by transferring the form and content of certain Hindu practices and placing them within the Christian paradigm.

One point that emerges from our study is that Christianity has not been comprehensive in meeting the spiritual and social needs of the native Christians, as the latter are determined entirely by the local socio-economic and cultural contexts. For those needs, the native Christians have been at liberty to draw from the local religious symbols and rituals and Christianise them wherever possible. The official Church seems to have conceded to this process as long as it did not violate the principles of Christianity. In brief, when a religion fails to address their existential beliefs, the people may take recourse to alternatives to handle them. This may or may not be in keeping with the official teachings of the religion.

Thus, it is important to note here that at the level of pastoral monitoring the Church did not employ adequate or effective mechanisms to assist and supervise the converts as they developed their own methods of coping with life-crises. Thus, in this sphere, in the absence of well-articulated official practices coupled with considerable freedom available to them, the laity had no difficulty from the beginning to retain or replicate almost in totality the religio-cultural practices of the Hindus.

The rituals referred to in the foregoing paragraphs were observed within the context of the villages covered by our study. However, the rituals considered under pilgrimage lie outside the locale of everyday existence of the Catholics. It is observed that pilgrimage provides a conducive ambience for effective indigenisation of the Catholic faith. This is because the rituals observed during pilgrimage come close to the native religious practices. Furthermore, though they fall within the sphere of the church, they
remain beyond the purview of the official religion and are free from any monitoring by the official agency. Hence, in pilgrimage there is a free mixing of different religions and interplay of different religious symbols, rituals and practices.

Based on a participant observation study of the Vailankanni pilgrimage, it is observed that the Catholics have adopted the entire structure of the Hindu pilgrimage and replaced some of its elements with typical Christian elements. Wearing ‘rosary’ instead of the typical Hindu *rutraaksa maalai* during pilgrimage is an example. The rituals carried out in the pilgrim centre reveal that the Catholics have retained those practices that are devoid of any core Hindu symbols like the icons of the deities. Thus, for example, tonsuring, going bear foot, etc., are adopted in toto.

Dealing with the expressive domain, we note that later Christianity came to India as a fully evolved religion, with its forms of worship reflected in its art, architecture, music, etc. This meant that Christianity offered a new set of religious expressions for the converts, e.g., the church replaced the temple, the Christian music replaced the indigenous-religious music and the Christian art and architecture replaced the indigenous art and architecture. Since Christianity has its set of well-defined expressive forms, at this level indigenisation had to be a more conscious effort on the part of the Church rather than a felt need of the laity.

In the expressive domain we observe that different elements experience different levels of indigenisation. In the sphere of architecture, there is a mixed reaction considering the response of the laity. Some have associated the art that was imported from Europe with distinctive Christian symbols. Thus, they are not prepared to give up this distinct Christian art and architecture, which substitute the temple as their place of
worship. Others appreciate the indigenous architecture, but look out for the Christian symbols such as the cross on the top of the place of worship and the Christian icons in the place of worship. To them, the core element in the church is the symbol of cross and the Christian icons. Thus, while the structure of the place of worship could be altered, the Christian divinities cannot be transformed, as it would lead to distortion of the sufficiently relevant elements.

Lastly, we dealt with Catholic ashram as an instance of indigenisation. We observe that the clergy, who had already adopted the monastic way of life in keeping with the Catholic tradition, played a pioneering role in this sphere. It was exclusively an effort of the clergy, with the lay Catholics having no role in it at all. Since celibate religious life is a voluntary option of only a few, it is only a few among the clergy who embraced the monastic way of life, known for its total exclusion from the common people. As men who spent much of their time in prayer, reading and reflection, they provided an elaborate intellectual articulation to their initiative. Seeking a way to indigenise their faith and way of life, they adopted the ashramic life in the high tradition of Brahminism with its established system of philosophy. This is another feature that distinguishes the Christian ashram as in the instance of indigenisation from the efforts of the common people in this regard.

In the way the clergy engaged with the native ashramic tradition, we find them playing a pioneering and crucial role. If we consider all the features of the Saccidananda Ashram, we realise that a good number of them have been incorporated in their original form. The architecture of the church, the ritual objects such as camphor, timings of worship, etc. are clearly Hindu in nature, and are totally alien to Catholicism. Even the
superimposition of Christian icons, such as the four beasts, the saints, etc. are drawn out of the Hindu belief-system. Because of the compatibility of their philosophies governing monasticism, the Catholic monastic life gave way for total incorporation of many of the symbols and rituals found in the Hindu forms of worship and *ashramic* way of life. By the same token, wherever possible, the Christian symbols were merged with their Hindu counterparts. This is evident in the way the place of worship has been designed in these Ashrams. Some peripheral aspects of monastic life were dropped in favour of native aspects. For instance, the idea of abbot was dropped in preference to that of the *guru* in these Ashrams. Thus, the process of indigenisation initiated by the clerics is altogether different as compared to the process adopted by the laity.

The laity draw from their local religio-cultural practices in the process of indigenising their life-cycle rituals, agrarian and quotidian life, etc. In this they give importance not to theology, but to lived experience of religion they profess. For the clergy, indigenisation meant the expression of the Christian religious experience in theology, spirituality, liturgy and symbols which are drawn from the indigenous culture. In their quest they drew from the tradition of ancient Hinduism; the formation of the Catholic *ashram*, and the establishment of the Indian Rite Mass are typical illustrations.

Analysing the extent or levels of indigenisation of Catholicism in various spheres, we find Nadel’s (1969: 31-35) distinction among ‘core,’ ‘peripheral’ and ‘sufficiently relevant’ elements with reference to role analysis to be an useful conceptual tool. Indigenisation has been a spontaneous process when it has to do with the peripheral elements of Christianity. This is so because when native elements are incorporated at the periphery it does not affect the perception or effectiveness of the Christian ritual that is
being performed. But, there has been a certain degree of resistance to any change of the core elements. This is so because the core makes up the character of any given ritual. In worship, for example, the core element is the Mass, while the native music which has been introduced in worship is an example of the peripheral element. The native music that is incorporated in worship has not resulted in any loss or distortion of the core element. The same applies to the paaskaa, a Christian drama that is performed in a native dramatic form, namely, kuuttu. What is sufficiently relevant in the drama is the Christian theme. Thus, the core is distinctively Christian and the adaptation of peripheral native forms does not affect the perception or effectiveness of the Christian worship or the Christian drama.

It must be noted that in indigenisation, the Catholics are faced with two types of native cultural elements. Some elements are mainly social and others are heavily loaded with religious meaning. Those that are social are retained in toto (e.g., naleer kaTTutal, naalLvitai eTuttal). However, they are quite reluctant while considering the latter, and they ensure that such elements are either not included or are altered at the material level. For example, while accepting the religious significance of wearing beads during paatayaattirai, the Catholics find a parallel in their own repository (rosary). Same is the case with taali with a cross as a marriage symbol, or with ciluvaikampuvaittal while performing the last rites for an individual.

From our interviews with the Catholics it is understood that while the Church-prescribed rituals are necessary, they are not sufficient. For example, in marriage and in death, the elaborate rituals consist of native rituals which are Christianised since the Church-prescribed rituals are minimum though significant. The areas not addressed by
the Church are covered by the cultural rootedness of the people, as in the agriculture and quotidian domains.

Retention of the native rituals either in toto or partially reveals that conversion does not mean a total break with the past. The past continues even after conversion, as in the case of the rituals associated with agricultural operations and also a few special events such as construction of houses. It is noteworthy that the Church has not prescribed any rituals regarding these. In the absence of prescribed Christian rituals, the Catholics, spontaneous response has been to retain their native rituals. In doing so, the Catholics felt the need to relate some of these rituals to their newly acquired faith and began to Christianise them. Subsequently, they sought and got the services of the kooyilpiLLai (see Appendix 10.1) for some of the rituals, thus giving scope for indigenisation.

Furthermore, we make a point that indigenisation is not limited to certain rituals or completed at one point of time. What emerges from our study is that there is a ‘process,’ an unending dynamism, an urge and a need, that enables the Church to integrate people and their beliefs and practices amidst differences. And people, on their part, retain their distinctive Christian identity and Christianise their native rituals, beliefs and practices, and indigenise the Christian ones.

**Modes in Indigenisation**

Our second lead question was: what are the modes adopted by the Catholics and the Church in the process of indigenising Catholicism? This question sought to probe the ways in which the indigenous symbols and rituals travelled or crossed over to the Catholic Church. Our study has established that indigenisation has taken different modes:
Parallelism is observed when the rituals carried out by the Catholics are similar to those of the Hindus. The similarity is primarily observed in the patterns, for example, the Catholics have replaced the OM generally found in Hindu wedding cards with the sign of the cross in their wedding cards. The unity can be observed at the level of meaning, too, for example, both the Catholics and the Hindus feel the need to wear a special dress while going on a pilgrimage. Thus, the pre-existing unity in belief is one of the important contributors in indegenising a religion.

Retention and reproduction are the easiest options, since the Catholics are familiar with their native rituals and their choice for them is automatic. It involves retaining the native ritual configuration. This is observed in employing the same ritual functionaries (e.g., the Vannaan and Ampataien) and the use of the symbolic materials in marriage, death, and puberty; in their beliefs about the dead, and in their ideas about evil forces. They have been very selective in that only those native symbols that do not have any explicit symbols of Hinduism are retained. The Catholics themselves have assumed certain degree of responsibility for this mode of indigenisation. Exorcism is a typical illustration. The Church has maintained a distance, except when the official functionaries involve themselves in actively promoting these practices.

Transference of certain symbols from the Hindu religious repertoire is also a method by which the Catholics have sought to maintain their social link with the Hindus even while conducting the ritual in the Christian way. Applying turmeric paste on the corners of the invitation card or on the envelope is an example. While playing the role as containers of evil, Catholics have adopted the familiar mode of transferring the typically
Hindu practices to Catholicism and _superimposing_ Christian forms and content. The St. Anthony _yantra_ could be cited as an example.

Yet another mode of indigenisation is _reversion_, that is, going back to the native rituals when the new religion does not help handle their needs. For example, the Hindu practice of setting the evil spirit on one’s enemies, which is locally known as _pilli cuuNiyam vaittal_. The very nature of the action implies the cover of secrecy. When the Catholics resort to this practice they have an additional reason to do so. They are aware that the official Church will not permit it as it involves keeping an association with the devil. This is supposed to pollute the person. Despite the disapproval of the Church, this practice continues to be followed by some Catholics. When they want to ‘punish’ someone, they seek the help of the Hindu _puucaari_. We may call this ‘indigenisation under the cover of secrecy.’

Religious _syncretism_ is another mode through which indigenisation has occurred. It is the process of religious fusion, irrespective of the presence of fusion in its advanced sense (Hultkrantz 1969:15). The term syncretism is used here to denote the mixture of two religions, whereby the elements from one religion (Hinduism) are fused into another (Catholicism) without basically changing the character of the latter (see Ringgren 1969:7). Specifically, with reference to the Catholic _ashram_, and pilgrim centres we observe that the religious traditions of Hinduism and Catholicism have almost merged to form a syncretic tradition. There does not seem to be any opposition to this, because what is incorporated is not opposed to the religious elements of the religion that is absorbing these aspects.
The differences in the modes of indigenisation can be explained by reference to the density of the Catholic rituals and symbols in different spheres of life. In those spheres, like worship, where the Catholic rituals are densely present, the mode of total abandonment of indigenous practices has occurred. In the same way, where the former was present least, as in agrarian and quotidian spheres, total retention is noticeable.

Thus, there is complete to partial retention of native rituals. When the symbols are neutral, without a religious association, and where the Church has not prescribed specific rituals, there is complete retention. There is partial retention when the native rituals are employed along with those prescribed by the Church. Devising parallels to Hindu rituals and symbols from within the Catholic religious repertoire is yet another way indigenising their religious beliefs.

Overall, we observe the following forms of indigenisation:

Native form + Alien content - E.g., taali with a cross, symbol of Christian marriage, etc.
Native content + Alien form - E.g., to ward off evil by keeping the cross in the house, etc.
Alien form + Alien content - E.g., Holy Communion.
Native form + Native content - E.g., aalaatti (waving of light), belief in auspicious time, etc.

Thus, drawing a conclusion on the modes of indigenisation, we find that the process of adaptation follows a multidirectional course. It was never comprehensive in the sense that it did not reach every aspect of the old culture. The converts played an active role in the way they adapted the Hindu and the Christian practices. They were selective and their social context determined what they adopted and what they
abandoned. The process of adaptation was not confined to rituals and symbols. Furthermore, the process was not confined to one or a few in the community of converts. Every individual had to go through this process. What was once adapted did not remain unchanged or abandoned. Those native elements that cannot be accommodated as part of the official Catholic religion are allowed in the privacy of the homes of the converts.

The Agencies in Indigenisation

The third lead question focused on the human agency in the process of indigenisation. The Catholic Church in India, as elsewhere in the world, has a highly organised and well-established structure of authority. There is a closely-guarded gap between the vast majority of lay believers or the laity and a small section of the clergy which exercises religious authority over the laity. How did these segments within the Catholic Church involve themselves in the process of indigenisation in South India, was the question raised.

As regards indigenisation, our study notes a distinction between the Catholic Church as a religious institution and the converts to Catholicism as a community of believers. Furthermore, this study has foregrounded the converts as a community occupying a middle ground between the Catholic Church and the Hindu religion: As converts, they have moved away from Hinduism; yet, as laity, they still maintain a distance from the institutional Church, which for all practical purposes has not been able to absorb them completely. By emphasising the relative autonomy of the converts, this study has shown that the indigenous symbols and rituals have found their location in the Catholic Church by a selective process.
In this selective process, the laity played a significant role in specific spheres of life depending on the extent to which the official Church wielded power. Wherever the official Church was not present in terms of either its rituals or its actors, the laity played an independent role. While the laity brought in the native Hindu elements into Catholicism, they gave a Christian interpretation to all their native practices and explicitly Christianised them. Often, they also sought some religious sanction by roping in the *kooyilpilla* to assist in the rituals. The laity are flexible to that extent of limiting their practices to the domestic sphere when they are social in nature, and take only the essentially Catholic rituals to be performed in the sphere of the church. On its part, the official Church has been found to give legitimacy to the indigenisation that laity had earlier carried out on their own. There had been some occasions, no doubt, when the official Church interfered in the autonomy of the laity resulting in conflict between the two, as for instance, with reference to the caste-based *maNTakappati*.

Thus, we observe that in the process of indigenising Catholicism, the Catholic converts and the official Church occupy two different terrains and seek to merge them without losing their significance. They have done this by deploying different strategies. While insisting on the ritual of baptism, the official Church has affirmed the socio-cultural roots of the laity by Tamilising the foreign sounding Christian names. Similarly, in the socio-cultural ritual performed on a girl attaining puberty, the Catholics lead the girl to the church and make her seek the blessings of the Christian deities. Neither does the priest intercede in nor does he object to the ritual being held in the church. Another strategy employed by the laity to obtain religious recognition for any socio-cultural ritual is to solicit the services of the *kooyilpilla* who occupies a middling position in the ritual
hierarchy. He is lower than the parish priest, but is 'eligible' to perform non-official rituals and officiate on occasions that do not fall within the prescribed sacred categories.

Dealing with the rites of passage, we observed that the Church had its own set of life-cycle rituals, and the laity and clergy have jointly negotiated the native rituals and evolved a style of their own. In the case of agricultural operations, the Catholic Church has no ritual of its own. Finding this ritual space free, the Catholic converts filled it by 'transferring' some of the native practices. Mary (the mother of Jesus) taking the place of Mariamma (a goddess in the Hindu pantheon) as rain-goddess is an example of this kind. During such transference, they Christianised some of their native practices. The official Church did not challenge this transferring, as it had no alternative to offer.

What we observe here is that the laity became the sole agency in this process of indigenisation. It is important to note that the Church, which had hitherto remained largely passive to this process of indigenisation of the Catholic faith by the laity, began to play a more active role after the Second Vatican Council. Nowadays, in many parishes, the priests themselves organise the poMkal (harvest festival) celebrations with many innovations. It must be clarified that indigenisation has been an on-going process within the Church; it is not to be viewed narrowly as involving only the adoption or abandonment of a particular ritual or symbol once and for all. The same ritual can go through many changes in the course of time in terms of its form or meaning, or its actor or beneficiaries. The celebration of poMkal becoming an important rituals in the official Church is a case in point.

With regard to the agency which has played a crucial role in replicating the Hindu practices, we observe a difference. In rituals relating to agricultural practices, it is
difficult to pinpoint the agency. Since the whole community is engaged in these practices we hold that it is the ‘community’ that has acquired the role of an agency and has introduced many adaptations. While doing so the community has got the rituals legitimised by getting the *kooyilpILai* perform them. In the case of quotidian life, we could identify some specific actors known as exorcists, soothsayers, etc., in the community. These constitute the third type of agency in the process of indigenisation in South India. The woman who is considered to be the medium of Mary in the shrine of Vailankanni is a case in point.

A pilgrim centre like Vailankanni draws not only Catholics, but also a large number of Hindus. It is possible that initially only the Hindus ‘transported’ the practices followed in the Hindu pilgrim centres, such as offering cradle, tying of saffron thread, etc. A Catholic, who is familiar with the meaning of these symbols and associated practices, follows the same when he or she is faced with similar needs thus endowing them a Christian character. From the point of the agency, the Hindus who visit the Catholic shrine too contribute to the indigenisation of the practices carried out in the shrine. Thus, the Hindu pilgrims constitute yet another agency of indigenisation though their role is marginal.

In the expressive domain, both the laity and the clergy have played their role in indigenisation, though there is difference in what is adopted. The laity, while indigenising drama, and music, draw from their local culture which is conceptualised as the ‘little tradition.’ The clergy have heavily drawn from the ‘great tradition’ while indigenising the place of worship, music and art.
The prime agency in the indigenisation of Catholic monastery is a small section of the clergy and women religious. In their venture, as in the expressive domain, they have also drawn heavily from the 'great tradition.'

Focusing exclusively on the agents of indigenisation, we observe that when the clergy initiates indigenisation of Catholicism it is done consciously. For example, national centres, such as NBCLC, are set up to realise this objective. The explicitly European forms have been consciously reformulated in the case of church art, architecture, music, and in the celebration of the Mass, etc. The laity have done so largely without a pre-planned strategy guiding them, at the same time consciously incorporating the Christian symbols along with the native rituals they have retained. This has been the observation from the findings presented in Chapters 3 to 8.

We have identified five different agencies in the process of indigenisation. They are: the Catholic priests (clergy), the lay believers (laity), the kooyilpIILai, the soothsayers and exorcists within the Catholic community, and the Hindu pilgrims. Each of these has a definite location/sphere from which they have initiated indigenisation or contributed to the process. The clergy plays a prime role in the sphere of the church; the laity primarily in the domestic sphere, and marginally in the sphere of the church; and the soothsayers and exorcists and the Hindus play a limited role in the sphere of the church and the domestic circle.

As regards the reasons for the clergy to adopt the 'great tradition,' we note two streams of indigenisation in the post-Vatican period. When the first wave of indigenisation took place after the Second Vatican Council, it directed itself towards a stream of Indian culture shared by people occupying the upper layers of the society. This
wave of indigenisation was confined to the clergy who had been largely the earlier converts from the upper castes. In a way, this can be described as the ‘Sanskritisation’ of Catholicism. In the recent years, however, the wider society has witnessed a good deal of debate on the rights of the people belonging to the lower layers of the caste order. The Church also has gone through its impact. The forms of art in possession of the people belonging to the lower layers of the society are gradually finding a place in the expressive domain of the Church.

**Response to Indigenisation**

From the point of view of the Church, we note four different types of response to the indigenisation of Catholicism by the laity. First is the *approval* of certain practices like rituals related to agriculture, marriage and death, as they are considered to be purely cultural, and exorcism, as there is reference to the evil spirits in the Bible. Second is *tolerance* towards the observance of (in)auspicious time, space and directions, and animal sacrifice, tonsuring, tying a cradle in the church compound, bathing in the sea, etc., since such practices are viewed as being neither good nor bad. The third response is *opposition* and *total disapproval* from the Church: for instance, setting an evil on someone is considered morally unacceptable, and belief in sorcery is unacceptable as it is directed against persons and is destructive in intention. The fourth type being *ambivalence*: for instance, with regard to the practices associated with the notions of auspiciousness, inauspiciousness, the disposition of the Church reflects some ambivalence. These practices are perceived to be superstitious and, therefore, they are tolerated hoping that when the believers are educated such practices will disappear.
On their part, the laity have particularly resisted the indigenisation of the Mass by the Church. This again is largely confined to the urban-based and educated Catholics than the believers in the rural communities. In terms of the familiar concepts of change and continuity in understanding indigenisation, changes take place largely in the peripheral elements, while continuity is characteristic of the core elements. However, resistance to change is not universal.

The role played by the lay believers in the indigenisation of Catholicism is noteworthy. The official Church has only responded to the demands of the people. In fact, the Church has played a prominent role only in the third phase of indigenisation, that is, after the Second Vatican Council. This is perhaps explained by the social character of the clergy who represented the official Church. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the European missionaries had invincible influence on the functioning of the Church. In the post-Vatican period, the clergy were largely Indians and they were familiar with the cultural moorings of the faithful. They were able to understand the demands of the lay believers and they had the power and resources to respond positively. In areas where the laity showed resistance, as for instance, in the introduction of Indian Rite Mass, the Church brought in certain indigenous elements of this Rite only after securing a consensus from the laity.

Considering the ‘movement’ that has taken place in the Church after the Second Vatican Council, it can be expected that more and more traditional practices performed in the domestic and social spheres will be brought into the religious sphere. The modern theology of incarnation of faith and the openness of the Church may expedite this
movement.’ This Church is now identifying the parallels for traditional rituals, which had been done successfully by the laity initially.

From this study it becomes clear that indigenisation is an inevitable process in the evolution of an implanted religion. The implanted religion cannot easily subdue the native religio-cultural practices. Indigenisation is an indication of the way people belonging to a particular culture can absorb and accommodate the new religion they have come to profess. At the same time this new religion confers on them a different identity. No wonder, indigenisation has never been a perplexing issue for the Tamil Catholics, as it has been to the Church!

On the whole, as a community, we find the Catholic Church in South India to be well integrated with the local religious-cultural system. It has come to be so through a sustained process of indigenisation carried out in complex ways by both the official Church and the lay believers. The way Christianity is lived in Tamil Nadu is not the same elsewhere where Christianity is practised. That is, indigenisation can also be viewed as a process through which an universalistic religion gets locally particularised.