CHAPTER I

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

Scholars hold different views regarding the origin of Christianity in India. Tradition attributes its origin to St. Thomas, one of the apostles of Jesus Christ.\(^1\) His Tomb at Mylapore and the St. Thomas Mount in the vicinity of Mylapore bear witness to his advent.\(^2\) It is believed that this apostle of Christ came to India in 52 A.D.\(^3\) Not much factual information on his life and mission in India is available. However, there are many traditional stories that remain unsubstantiated even today.

**St. Thomas Tradition**

A few songs like the Rabban Pattu, the Veeradyan Pattu, Margam kali Pattu and some Folk Songs of the people of Kerala substantiate the fact.\(^4\) In Kerala the St. Thomas Christians tenaciously maintain the

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3. C.B. Firth, *Indian Church History*, Bangalore, 1961, p.3.
apostolate of St. Thomas and they resent any expression of doubt regarding
the same.\textsuperscript{5} They believe that St. Thomas came through the sea-route and
landed in Cranganore in about A.D. 52 and converted some high caste
families in Cranganore and established churches. Then he moved to the East
Coast. While preaching at Mylapore he was killed.\textsuperscript{6}

Written records of greater antiquity and authenticity than those
of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are very scanty.\textsuperscript{7} No book or
inscription or monuments of the first or second century remains in support of
Tradition. Hence there is much uncertainty about the actual history of St.
Thomas.\textsuperscript{8} But it is a historical fact that Quilon in the south, like Cranganore
in the north, remained as a prominent centre of St. Thomas Christians. Yet,
the circumstance under which he came to India and founded the churches
here remains unknown.\textsuperscript{9} Tradition among the Syrians says that St. Thomas
landed at Cranganore and started preaching the gospel and converted some of
the high caste Hindu families of Cranganore. He founded seven churches in
different places of Travancore in Kottarakara, Palayur, Kokkamangalam,

\textsuperscript{6} L.M. Pylee, \textit{St. Thomas Christians and the Arch Diocese of Verapoly}, Cochin,
\textsuperscript{7} A.M. Mundadan, \textit{Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggle for
Autonomy}, p.3.
\textsuperscript{8} C.B. Firth, \textit{op.cit.}, p.3.
\textsuperscript{9} A.M. Mundadan, \textit{The Sixteenth Century Traditions of St. Thomas Christians},
pp.105-106.
Niranam, Chayal, Quilon, Cranganore \(^{10}\) and a half Church at Thiruvithamcode in the South.

This Tradition being strong, definite and still living was borne out by the written testimonies of the Portuguese in the beginning of the sixteenth century. Even Hindus bear testimony to the tradition which connects the apostle's work with definite places and families.\(^{11}\) St. Thomas ordained presbyters for the churches from the Brahmin families of Sankarapuri, Kalli, Pakalomattan and Kaliankal.\(^{12}\) Then he crossed the East coast to reach Malacca and China. Finally he returned to Mylapore in the present Madras city.

One day while he was on his way to the little mount at Mylapuram, he saw some Brahmins performing sacrifice in the temple of Kali. The Brahmins wanted him to take part in the sacrifice. But St. Thomas, with the sign of the cross, destroyed the temple. The aggrieved Brahmins pierced him to death with a lance.\(^{13}\) The year of his martyrdom is said to have been about 72 A.D.\(^{14}\) His body was buried in a holy shrine at

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12. C.B. Firth, *op.cit.*, p.3.
Mylapuram.\textsuperscript{15} Since then the place has gained great historical significance and attracts thousands of pilgrims from all over the world.\textsuperscript{16}

St. Thomas established a church on the Malabar coast and so the converts on the coromandel coast migrated to Malabar.\textsuperscript{17} The converts of St. Thomas are called St. Thomas Christians and the churches are called Syrian Churches. However, expansion of the Christian faith and the formation of congregations as well as establishment of the churches began as a regular feature since the advent of the Portuguese.

**Arrival of the Portuguese**

On 21 May 1498 Vasco da Gama landed at Calicut and yet the religious influence of the Portuguese could be felt only after 1516.\textsuperscript{18} The arrival of Vasco da Gama was a setback to the Arabs. After the Portuguese capture of Goa on 25\textsuperscript{th} November 1510 Portuguese Christianization became a State enterprise.\textsuperscript{19} Under the Portuguese administration in Goa construction of churches and charitable institutions went on unhindered. In 1534 Goa was made the seat of a Portuguese Bishop. He was made the head

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{15} A.M. Mundadan, *The Sixteen Century Traditions of St. Thomas Christians*, p.32.
\bibitem{16} A. Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in India*, Manchester University, 1926, p.77.
\bibitem{17} V. Nagam Aiya, *op.cit.*, Vol.I, p.156.
\end{thebibliography}
of a regular ecclesiastical organisation in India. In the same year the
Diocese of Goa was established by Pope Paul III. By the Papal Bull of
1493 issued by Pope Alexander VI the disputes between Portugal and Spain
were settled. Thereby Portugal got the right to go farther East. The
foreigners had their own policies in the administration of religion in India.
This led the Indian Christians to split their church into the Catholic and the
Jacobite sects.

In 1514 Pope Leo X granted the ecclesiastical right of Padroado to the king. The St. Thomas Christians came under the Latin
jurisdiction of Portuguese Padroado. Thus the king took over spiritual
administration of the Christians in the far off lands. In 1502 Vascoda Gama
came to India for the second time. On his arrival in 1502 a deputation of
Syrian Christians met him at Cochin. They asked for the assistance and
protection of the Portuguese to which he responded favourably. In the
meantime Portuguese king John III felt that Catholic faith was declining in

22. Bull is an Edict issued by the Pope.
23. A.M. Mundadan, Indian Christian Search for Identity and Struggle for
Autonomy, pp.29-30.
24. Padroado: Means the right to present candidates to bishoprics and other
ecclesiastical offices and correspondingly an obligation to maintain staff and
equip churches and mission.
25. A.M. Mundadan, Indian Christians Search for Identity and Struggle for
Autonomy, p.31.
the colonies. To uphold the same from decline he decided to send Francis Xavier\(^{27}\) to India and made all arrangements for his voyage.

**Francis Xavier**

Francis Xavier landed with his disciples at Goa in 1542. Then he came to work for the Cape Comorin mission\(^{28}\). Later he proceeded to Tuticorin and visited many villages on the way. After gaining proficiency in Tamil he spent more than a year visiting the villages and baptizing the natives.\(^{29}\) Francis Xavier came to South Travancore in 1543 A.D. mainly to work among the fisher converts of Father Miguel Vaz\(^{30}\) at Cape Comorin.\(^{31}\) He made Kottar his principal residence in South Travancore.

Xavier came into contact with the other fisher folk called Arasars.\(^{32}\) Already in 1537 the Raja of Travancore had permitted Fr. Miguel Vaz to convert the fishermen of his kingdom, on condition that the Portuguese would supply him with horses for his cavalry.\(^{33}\) Xavier visited places like Poovar, Kollencode, Vallavilai, Thoothur, Poothurai (all these

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27. Francis Xavier was born on 7 April 1506 at Navarre in Spain. He studied Philosophy and Theology. His colleague and friend Ignatius Loyala led him to religion. King John III of Portugal made all comforts for his voyage to India. A unique personality, he was profoundly concerned with the spiritual needs of he people and made spiritual contribution to the spread of Christianity in South India. (S. Venancius, Thiruthalam Kottar, Bangalore, 1988, pp.2-3).


30. Fr. Miguel Vaz was the Vicar General of Goa.


32. Arasars: A Fishermen community. They were called Mukkuvas.

33. V.J. Villavarayan, *op.cit.*, p.15.
places are now under the Diocese of Trivandrum) Thengapattanam, Enayam, Midalam, Vaniakudy, Colachel, Kadiapattinam, Muttom, Pallam and Manakudy and baptized many people. He worked in the Cape Mission and constructed 20 churches at a cost of 20000 Fanams taking advantage of the Vadagar Incursion of the period.

**Vadagar Incursion**

Vadagars were the officers and soldiers of the Vijayanagar prince Vittala who ruled over Madurai from 1547 to 1558. This Hindu Empire stood as a mighty power to stem the rise of Islamic Expansion from the North. The Vadagar troops of Vijayanagar came to the South in July 1544 to aid the king of Travancore against the Pandyas who were supported by the Portuguese. The Pandya ruler and his allies were humiliated by the Vadagars. Then the Vadagars turned against the Christians of the fishery coast, who were the supporters of the Portuguese. The people rushed to Cape Comorin in large numbers in search of protection. On hearing the news Xavier reached there to save the starving poor Parava Christians.

After the withdrawal of the Vadagar Army the forces of Pandya king Vettumperumal got ready to attack Travancore. Now the Portuguese changed sides and supported the king of Travancore. The king Unni

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34. Ibid., p.16.
35. Ibid.
Tiruvadi was very happy and allowed the Mukkuva Hindus to be baptised in 1544. Xavier started baptizing them from Poovar.\textsuperscript{39} In 1557 Goa was raised to the status of Arch Diocese, Cochin. The pearl fishery coast and the territory of Kottar came under the Jurisdiction of Cochin.\textsuperscript{40} Its second Bishop Dom George Themudo O.P. visited the South in 1566. He was very happy to see the Cape mission flourishing.

Since the time of Xavier the young church of Kottar knew no priests other than the Jesuits. But all the Jesuits under the Portuguese were imprisoned as well as suppressed by the order of Pope Clement XIV in 1773. Similarly a Royal decree from the Portuguese Queen Maria I dated 28 April 1777, backed by the Travancore Maharaja asked the Franciscans to vacate their perishes.\textsuperscript{41} The church of Kottar took more time to recover from this shock. In 1833 there was yet another rupture between Rome and Portugal which led to the coming together of the two sees of Cochin and Cranganore under the jurisdiction of the new vicariate – Verapoly. The the present diocese of Kottar passed into the vicariate of Veropoly in 1842.\textsuperscript{42}

In May 1845 the vicariate of Verapoly was provisionally divided into three vicariates of Verapoly, Mangalore and Quilon. Then Kottar became a prominent part of the Quilon ecclesiastical unit.\textsuperscript{43} Later

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Villavarayan, op.cit., p.17.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Ibid., p.26.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid., p.27.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ibid., pp.27-28.
\end{itemize}
when Quilon became a separate diocese on 1, September 1886 with Ferdinand Ossi O.C.D as its first Bishop the present diocese of Kottar came within the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Quilon. Subsequently by a concordate of 1887, a few villages along the coast of Vilavancode taluk were transferred to Cochin. After the death of Ossi, Bishop Benziger assumed charge of the Diocese on 14 September 1930. Under his able leadership the diocese saw further development. Benziger divided the Diocese into convenient districts. More care was given to the southern districts for education. Every Parish had its primary school. To train Catholic teachers he opened St. Francis Institute at Nagercoil in 1907. Knowing the importance of an English training school in 1922 he opened the Carmel English middle school at Ramanputhoor in Nagercoil in 1922.

Benziger had special regard for the southern part of the Quilon Diocese. Once in five years he visited all the southern Parishes and in person solemnized the annual feast of St. Francis Xavier at Kottar with Pontifical Mass and vespers. The long distance he had to travel, and the difficulties in transportation compelled him to work out a plan to make the south a Diocese. So he appealed to Europe for funds on behalf of this region. To that effect he wrote a letter to his Carmelite provincial in 1902 stating the

44. J.R. Narchison, op.cit., p.38.
45. Ibid., p.40.
47. Villavarayan, op.cit., p.29.
condition of the mission in the southern part. He sent a proposal to Rome on 24 May 1929 to divide the diocese of Cochin into three parts namely Quilon, Trivandrum and Kottar, to be entrusted to a native clergy man. The letter sent to Rome had a favourable response. Accordingly a papal letter dated 26 May 1930 permitted to constitute a new diocese named Kottar consisting of the revenue taluks of Vilavancode, Kalkulam, Thovalai and Agasteeswaram with a native clergy man.

On the eve of the formation of the Diocese, out of the 32 priests that worked in the parishes, 28 were secular priests. All of them were Indians. Seven came from within the territory of the new Diocese. With this unique feature Kottar appeared as the third Diocese in India to be entrusted to the native clergy. Its first Bishop was Lawrence Pereira. He was consecrated as the first Bishop of the Diocese of Kottar on 5th October 1930. Thus an ancient church became a Diocese. At the time of the formation of the Kottar Diocese its southern region was divided into three districts viz, Thiruthuvapurum, Kottar and Colachel.

Kottar District consists of 11 parishes, namely, Cape Comorin, Karangad, Rajavoor, Kottar, Madathattu vilai, Manakudy, Mankuzhi, Mel-Assaripallam, Mulagumoodu, Manalikarai and Matravilai. Besides these

49. Ibid.
51. Ibid.
52. J.R. Narchison, op.cit., pp.41-42.
53. Villavarayan, op.cit., p.31.
Parishes it has seven sub-churches namely Kurusady, Vadasery, Sitapaul, Thittu vilai, Ettamadai, Aramboly and Kalkad. Vicar Forane Very Rev. Paul O.C.D. was the in-charge of the District. Fr. Paul and Fr. Mary E Gomex acted as the Parish priests.  

On 10\textsuperscript{th} December 1930 the Diocese was divided into four administrative divisions. Accordingly Kottar, Colachel, Mulagumoodu and Thiruthuvapuram became the new districts. Kottar district had the following parishes of Kottar, Kurusadi, Covalam, Cape Comorin, Puthentrurai, Manakudi, Sare!, Rajakamangalam, Mel-Asaripallam, Kil-Asaripallam, Mathal, Christ the King, Ramanadicemputhur and Rajavoor. This District was presided over by Vicar Forane very Rev. Fr. S. Barnabas.

\textbf{St. Francis Xavier Church, Kottar}

Kottar had the credit of being the sole commercial town of South Travancore. With the establishment of the St. Xavier’s Church of Kottar, the place became a commercial cum religious centre. Today the church is a Cathedral where the Bishop of Kottar Diocese conducts the Holy Mass. This church is situated at Kottar, one mile north-east of Nagercoil. Travellers from different places drop in for a few minutes at this spot for worship and then proceed. To many a people it is a pilgrim centre which has

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54. Ibid.
56. Ibid., p.41.
57. C.M. Augur, \textit{op.cit.}, p.211.
earned the title “Second Goa” where the body of St. Xavier is kept. This Kottar church, built in honour of the great Apostle of India, St. Francis Xavier, stands on the Kanyakumari highway. However, with the establishment of protestant Christianity on a firm footing in the beginning of the 19th century, Nagercoil began to emerge as a known centre. Since then despite the twin significance of Kottar, it has drifted to a subordinate position.

The church of Kottar dates from 1535. It is understood from the letters of Francis Xavier that the mission centred around the church was named as the “Mission of Cape Comorin”. This name was based on the Southern tradition that Francis Xavier first visited Cape and there he constructed a church in honour of the Lady of Joy. The then ruler of Travancore named Verumankonda Buthala Vira Sri Vira Kerala Varma also known as Unnikerala Varma (1544-1551 A.D) was a friend of Xavier because of the saints miraculous help when the king was in deep trouble.

In September 1544 the Kaithar Pandian Emperor Vettumerumal suddenly masterminded an attack on Travancore. Unable to withstand the enemy’s onslaught the Travancore king requested St. Xavier to save the kingdom from Peril. Responding to the request St. Xavier received

59. J.M. Villavarayan, op.cit., p.34.
60. Ibid., p.15.
61. Ibid., p.16.
Portuguese help to ensure the victory of Ramavarma. Thus with the help of Xavier the native ruler won the battle as well as captured Vettumperumal as war prisoner. In return for Xavier's help the ruler Ramavarma allowed the priest to have dominion over the entire coastal fishing areas as well as sanctioned 2000 panams to raise a church in the area. Out of that a small chapel was built at Kottar to begin with.

**Small Chapel**

A contemporary letter from Portugal dated 22nd October 1545 confirms the existence of a chapel at Kottar. The letter reads "A Rajah has given orders throughout his kingdom that all are to show obedience to his brother the Great Father" though the king also gave him much money, but the generous Xavier distributed it among the poor. Along the coast line he built 45 churches. One among them was the chapel of our Lady. Tradition says that the small chapel of our Lady near the Cathedral became his residence and there Xavier offered the Holy sacrifice at an alter of the Bl. Mary. From these traditions and assumptions it is believed that Xavier had a residence in the village of Kottar largely inhabited by the Paravas.

63. Ibid.
65. Ibid.
Church historian Augur also supported the view that at Kottar Xavier had a dwelling house and a small church. Tradition says that the non-Christians set fire to Xavier's house and reduced it to ashes. But they were struck with awe when they saw the Holy man on his knees devoutly praying, not in the least touched by the flames. To mark the incident a cross was put up at the place of fire. From the moment of the consecration of this church, a lamp was kept to burn perpetually. Non-Christians also go there and make vows and pour oil and miracles are recorded then and there. In the real sense this worshipping house had the appearance of a shrine with a well near the building.

**Perumal Panical**

The miracles that the pilgrims witnessed in the shrine spread its popularity at the highest esteem. Some of the miracles have become almost proverbial and one of them is related to Perumal Panical. Fr. Andreas Buccherio celebrated St. Xavier's day. Near the Kottar church there lived a Chovalakaran named Perumal Panical. He knew Catechism well and Fr. Andreas aimed at his conversion made him the Kanakkapillai of the church. But Andreas could not succeed in his endeavour. In course of time Perumal was affected by the disease of leprosy. The poor man prostrated before the

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68. C.M. Augur, op.cit., p.211.
69. Ibid., p.212.
70. S. Venancius, op.cit., 1988, p.36.
portrait of Xavier and praised him with songs and prayer.\textsuperscript{71} As the next step of adoration he smeared his body with the oil taken from the lamps burning in front of the shrine. To his surprise he began to recover from the disease and got complete cure. Thus he became a Christian and was given a new name Francis D. Kuruz and was appointed as Kanakkappillai of the church.\textsuperscript{72}

Many others also had the same experience, but never came forward to embrace the new faith.\textsuperscript{73} As miracles were reported there soon it became a centre of pilgrimage to be called Saveriar Curusadi.\textsuperscript{74} In front of this shrine there existed a state developed garden. Later Kulasekara perumal Maharaja gifted this garden to Buccerio\textsuperscript{75} to build a church in.\textsuperscript{76}

**Gift of Kulasekara Perumal**

In 1600 with Portuguese help, Kulasekara Perumal won the battle against the Madurai Nayak. In recognition of that the king granted permission to the Jesuits to build churches in 20 villages at the first instant. He also gifted land and sufficient timber for the construction of the biggest of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{72} T.R. Agniswamy, op.cit., pp.4-5.
\item \textsuperscript{73} T.D.C., Report of the Nagercoil Mission District for the year 1860, p.18.
\item \textsuperscript{74} J.M. Villavarayan, op.cit., p.18.
\item \textsuperscript{75} Fr. Andreas Buccerio was a priest of Society of Jesus. He belonged to Italy. He was the founder of the first Church at Kottar in 1603. He built it by clay and wood (S. Venanchius, op.cit., p.24).
\item \textsuperscript{76} Dinamalar, Nagercoil dated 25.11.2004, P.7.
\end{itemize}
the 20 churches at Kottar. Hoping to receive the land Patta Buccerio started the construction work of the first church.

**First Church**

On 17 January 1603 Buccerio started the construction work of the church with the help of Nadar Christians of Pallam. The Christians of Rajakkamankalam and Periapara helped with the construction of the priest house. Following that the Christians of Manakudy constructed a shrine with a cross in teak wood. It is said the construction work of the church, the priest house and the shrine were started simultaneously. Local opposition was also there for the construction of the church. But in the teeth of opposition a part of the church was completed on 19.01.1603 and on the following Sunday the new church was dedicated. The priest house was also constructed. The new church attracted a large number of Christians and Hindus as they had never seen such a church and a priest before. This church of great antiquity is found within the Nagercoil municipal town. The small original church constructed out of clay and wood in honour of the Holy mother is kept inside the Xavier’s church.

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78. S. Venancius, *op.cit.*, p.27.
79. Ibid., p.29.
82. Ibid., p.50.
The king’s permission enabled Fr. Andreas Buccherio to construct seven churches in seven villages where Nadar Christians and chovalakkars were in majority. The seven churches are in Kottar, Martanda Nallur, Vadasery, Thazhakudi, Kalluthurai, Thiruvithancode and Kalkulam. It is said that during the second stage in 1604 he constructed another seven churches in the interior parts. To all the churches, the Kottar church became the Head Quarters Church. But the then ruler Vira Ravi Varma turned against the religion.

Reaction of Vira Ravi Varma (1595-1607)

Kulasekara Perumal was succeeded by Vira Ravi Varma. In the beginning he appeared as a patron of Christianity. Later due to the evil advice of the Brahmins he turned against the Christians and persecuted them as well as destroyed their churches. But Kottar escaped from this danger as it served as a common worshipping centre of both the Christians and others. Later a new stone church was built in the place.

New Stone Church (1640 A.D)

Buccherio, the founder of the first church at Kottar died on 24.01.1617 in the Jesuit house at Madurai. The next priest Antony Aranjis assumed charge of the church in 1622 after a gap of five years. In this five

84. S. Venancius, op. cit., p.50.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid.
88. S. Venancius, op. cit., p.43.
year period from 1617 to 1622 the Cochin Bishop was in charge of the administration of this church.89

In 1622 the Jesuits again assumed the management of the church, and in 1640 saint hood was awarded to Xavier. To commemorate this occasion people demolished the old clay church and in its place built a new stone church called St. Xavier’s church.90 This construction had taken place at the time of John Philip, the third priest of the church.91 After the establishment of the new church at Kottar the sacraments of Xavier and Ignatius92 were served in a grand manner.93 The Kottar congregation steadily grew in strength. Hence its income, mainly drawn from offerings, became more than sufficient for the maintenance of the church. The surplus income of this church was spent on the maintenance of the interior churches under the Jesuit jurisdiction of Cochin.94

The Jesuit records of 1644 read that the Kottar church was made of stone in 1640 and the stone church retained the wooden altar of the

89. Ibid.
92. Ignatius was a Spaniard. He was the colleague and friend of Xavier, and lead Xavier to religion. He founded the society of Jesus on August 15, 1534 at Montmartre, Paris for the defence and propagation of the faith. Its members came to be known as Jesuits. To honour him a shrine was constructed in front of the Xavier Church.
94. S. Venancius, op.cit., p.47.
old church. The then Kottar Parish church had a congregation of 530 and Martanda Nallur, Alur, Kalkulam and Thiruvithancode came under this Parish. The seventeenth century saw the rise of anti-Catholic Dutch power in India, and the Catholics of the Cochin jurisdiction had to go through trials and tribulations under the Dutch. In short, the Dutch domination over Cochin in 1663 adversely affected the Catholic church in Travancore, Kottar being no exception. Despite this difficulty, Kottar went ahead with the construction of the second stone church.

**Second Stone Church in 1698**

Every year the number of devotees grew in number. So the first stone church appeared insufficient to accommodate all the devotees at a time. To overcome this difficulty in 1698, the Jesuit Priests constructed a huge church of stone with tiled roof on the side of the small church built by St. Xavier. The construction work of the new church is mentioned in the letter of Fr. Andrew Gomex, the provincial Head of Cochin, from Thope to society of Jesus, Rome, dated 9-8-1698. The church was extended twice in response to growing needs for space.

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95. Ibid., pp.53-54.
96. Ibid., p.52.
99. Ibid.
Extension work of the Church in 1713 and 1865

Extension work of this church was carried out in 1713 as per the decision of the Jesuits. The Jesuit report for the year 1733 reads that there was a big and broad church at Kottar. It acted as the Head Quarter of all the other villages. A large number of Hindus and Christians attended this church. While Deva Sahayam Pillai was under custody at Peruvilai, Fr. Thomas de Fonseca, the vicar of the Kottar Parish church often visited him. After attainment of martyrdom a few carefully gathered bones of Martyr Devasahayam Pillai, were brought to Kottar and solemnly interred within its sanctuary. Dom Demente S.J. Bishop of Cochin while paying a glowing tribute to the Martyr, mentioned that his bones were laid to rest in the cathedral of Kottar. And what the bishop said about the Martyr remains fresh in the memory of the Kottar devotees.

In 1865 the Kottar church was again enlarged by transforming it into a cruciform building, with new wings and a sanctuary. The old tiled roof was removed and a dome was raised straight above the altar. On either side of the church arches and small domes were constructed.

101. S. Venancius, op.cit., p.54.
103. Ibid., p.24.
105. J.M. Villavarayan, op.cit., p.35.
of our Lady, standing on the spot where Xavier used to offer the holy sacrifice, was also then renovated and vaulted over.\textsuperscript{107}

The floor of this chapel is a couple of feet below the level of the surrounding land shows its antiquity.\textsuperscript{108} It is presumed that with the passage of years the outside ground was raised with the accumulation of sand and dust caused by wind and storm. The second bishop of Kottar Diocese Fr. Thomas Roche Anjiswamy (1939-1971) was buried in the chapel of Bl. Mary.\textsuperscript{109}

**Ornamental Alter**

An altar of proportionate size was found indispensable to match the extension of the church. Hence it was decided to construct an altar of a proportionate size. The construction work of the proposed altar was entrusted to an artist by name Jockin Fernandus of Quilon.\textsuperscript{110} The ornamental altar was made at Quilon and brought to Kottar in parts and assembled by the artist and installed.\textsuperscript{111} The main altar was consecrated on 23\textsuperscript{rd} August 1874.\textsuperscript{112} Chiselled leaves, flowers and also a relic of the Saint added additional beauty to the altar. The whole altar is gilted and it is in the floor of the altar the mortal remains of the first Bishop of Kottar

\textsuperscript{107} J.M. Villavarayan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.35.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Inscription in the Chapel of Bl. Mary, St. Xavier’s Church Kottar, Nagercoil.
\textsuperscript{110} The artist name was engraved on the alter.
\textsuperscript{112} J.M. Villavarayan, \textit{op.cit.}, p.35.
Rev. Dr. Lawrence Pereira were buried. It is said that the beautiful statue which adorns the main altar has been brought from Goa.

**Stone Mandapam**

In the nineteenth century the front portion of the church was extended with the construction of a stone mandapam. The whole edifice consisting of floor, wall and roof was built out of stone. For the construction of the mandapam huge stone blocks were brought from the Aralvaimozhi mountains with the help of the native king's elephants. For this purpose the Travancore king lent a couple of elephants to this church. The mandapam was designed and built by John Louis Fernandos, an engineer in the Travancore Government. To honour his memory, his body was buried in the stone mandapam.

In 1930 the area from Kanyakumari to Neerodi was separated from Quilon Diocese and a new diocese in the name of Kottar was formed with the Kottar church as the Cathedral church. In 1942 in commemoration of the fourth centenary of St. Xavier's arrival in India a beautiful tower to the small shrine to Ignatius was constructed in the Cathedral premises. The works were done through the donation of

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113. Inscription on the Floor of the alter St. Xavier's Church, Kottar.
114. J.M. Villavarayan, op.cit., p.35.
115. Ibid.
117. Ibid.
In 1955 the Kottar Diocese saw its Silver Jubilee. In commemoration of the same the Church was extended. The then Parish priest Fr. Barnabas started the work of enlarging the sanctuary of the Cathedral. The new extension was completed and blessed by H.E. Dr. T.R. Agniswamy S.J. (1939-1971) the Bishop of Kottar on 24 November 1956.

The huge structure of this church with a sky-high tower bearing a cross at its top is a pleasing sight and attracts all the passers-by. At this juncture, is is well worth discerning its artistic beauty.

Art

The church sports many styles of architecture. The painting of the church is artistic and a good masterpiece. The Travancore Royal family was greatly attracted by the paintings of this church. The artist Raja Ravivarma painted the portrait of St. Mary and presented the same to the church. The old church and its vaults are Romanesque. The extension with high pointed arches is Gothic art and the fine stone mandapam in front is purely Indian.

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121. S. Venancius, op.cit., p.56.
122. Ibid.
123. Interview with Sekar, Joint Secretary of the Kottar Parish, dated 7.9.2003.
124. S. Padmanaban, op.cit., pp.11-12.
Annual Festival

Every year the annual festival of the church which lasts for ten
days is held from 24th November to 3rd December. The car festival on the
ninth day is most important. During these days the shrine attracts people of
all castes and religions from all directions. The tenth day of the festival is
declared a district holiday. Within the limits of the Nagercoil town this
church has branches at Vetturnimadam, Kurusadi and Pudukudiyiruppu.

Christ the King, Nagercoil

Christ the King Church at Vettoornimadam in Nagercoil is a
Latin Catholic Church, which comes under the St. Xaviers church, Kottar.
The congregation of the Christu Nagar Church hails from the villages of
Puthukudiruppu and Aruguvalai. Formerly these villages were found under
Mel-Peruvilai of Asaripallam Parish and people of this area used to go to
Kottar for Sunday Mass. People, in the long run, did not like these
arrangements and longed for a church in their centre at Vettoornimadam.
Hence they appealed to Bishop Benziger and with his approval they
purchased a plot of land for the church at Christunagar. The construction
of the church was started and blessed in 1930. Fr. Victor Rodriguez, the

127. Ibid.
128. Inscription on the wall of the church, Christ the King, Vettunimadam,
Nagercoil.
Director of St. Francis Boarding was put in-charge of this station. Following the closure of the Boarding in 1940 the church came to be attached to the Kottar church. Within two decades the congregation grew in strength and the extension of the church became imminent. The foundation stone for the extension was laid on 25 April 1966.

**Kurusady Church**

Panchavancadu was the original name of the place where Kurusady church stands now and it was a dense forest for about three centuries ago. This place is situated on the Rajakkamangalam Thiruchenthur high way. There are stories about the origin of Christianity in this place. It is said that one fisher woman after selling fish spent a night alone in this strange place. Being a devotee of St. Antony she prayed for the saint's protection at night and saw a light at night. She believed it was a divine protection and pleaded with the parish priest of Kottar to erect a cross on the spot. Thus started the religious significance of the place.

This place became popular and many passers by along the Rajakkamangalam-Thiruchenthur road started taking rest here. Following that, a few families from Ramanputhur and Konam came over here to settle.

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130. Ibid.
131. Inscription on the wall of the church, Christ the King, Nagercoil.
For their benefit Fr. Elias built a small chapel. This chapel attracts many pilgrims.

The church grew day by day and the crowd increased steadily. Hence the people of the parish wanted a big church. Construction work for a new church was started and completed in 1911 and following that Kurusady became a sub-station of Vadakkankulam. This church developed in strength and became an independent Parish with Christunagar, Carmel Nagar, Rajavoor, Ramanathichen Puthur and Aramboly as its branches. A new church was erected by Bishop Lawrence in 1936. When it was bifurcated from Kotar in 1940 it held jurisdiction over twenty two villages.

**Puthukudiruppu Church**

The people of Puthukudiruppu while attending the church at Christunagar developed a desire to have church in their native place. To start with they put up a small thatched shed in 1925. Hence a new church was built in 1950. Subsequently, the extension work was started and completed in 1965.

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136. Inscription on the wall of the Kurusady church.
139. Inscription on the wall of the Puthukudiruppu Parish.
140. Ibid.
The appearance of the Asaripallam church on the western side of the Anandankal makes the passer-by to see it as a Nagercoil Church. But in location it is stand outside the area of our study. Those Churches of the Catholic denomination found in Nagercoil have large numbers of adherents from almost all the communities. However, in Nagercoil the L.M.S Churches are dominant.