CHAPTER - I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE DIOCESE OF KOTTAR

The territorial limit of the Kottar Diocese consisted of almost with the present Kanyakumari District of Tamil Nadu with the exception of a portion of Azhappapuram and seven coastal villages from Eraimanthurai to Nerodi.\(^1\) Kanyakumari was formerly known as the granary of Travancore.\(^2\) The historicity of the area was not only owed to the economic prosperity but also to the religious sanctity it has maintained from times immemorial. Geographically it lies on the tip of the southern part of India. Traditionally Hinduism flourished in this area before arrival of Christianity and Islam. One has to go deep into the social and cultural history of the people as to understand the historical context of the Kottar Diocese. The first prime minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was of the view that a few people could understand that Christianity came to India as early as the first century of the Christ.\(^3\) There is strong tradition of the spread of Christianity from the days of St. Thomas Arapalli at Thiruvithancode and the church at Kumari

\(^2\) Political, File No.223/49, Directorate of Archives, Trivandrum, 2 – 7 – 1949, p. 3.
Muttam are specific evidence to denote the history of Christianity in Kanyakumari.⁴

Kanyakumari though having an area of 1684 square kilometers, at the turn of the nineteenth century still remains feudal in character. The most interesting and repressive characteristic of feudal structure was the division of the society in terms of caste. The caste system, in all its severity and rigidity, divided the Hindu society into a number of groups mutually antagonistic towards each other, cooperating only to degrade one or the other caste. It was the caste which divided the nature of the social relationships between the individuals. The principles of caste system made the majority of the people mere slaves of the dominant or privileged castes. In Kanyakumari, the Brahmins and Nairs formed the privileged classes or the caste Hindu groups. The Nairs or Sudras, who were below the Brahmins, formed the nobility and the magistracy as well as the administrative arms of the Travancore Government.⁵ As the ruling class, the Nairs enjoyed a great many economic and social privileges. The unprivileged or oppressed classes of the population, consisting of the Nadars, the Ezhavas, the Parayas, the Pulayas, etc were kept by the upper

⁴ Maria David, A., Beyond Boundaries: Hindu-Christian Relationship and Basic Christian Communities, ISPCK, Delhi, 2009, p.2.

castes in perennial subservience, poverty and ignorance. They were systematically excluded from all positions of power and were subjected to exploitation and humiliation. This attitude of the caste Hindus drove the lower orders to the more welcoming folds of a newer religion, the Catholic faith. From 1900 to 1930 Religious Communities of Pontifical right - Jesuits, Franciscans and Carmelites - were able to convert and establish churches at Travancore.\(^6\)

Before going into the celebration of the growth of Christianity in Kanyakumari, one has to peep into the religion and culture of the people of this area before the arrival of the Portuguese and after. Among the world religious tradition the Tamil tradition is an impressive one. The religions of the Tamil society comprised of two diametric by opposite types such as great tradition (Vedic) and the later tradition (Folk). In Kanyakumari these two traditions were existed side by side. The worshipers of great tradition belonged to high caste and whereas the folk tradition people belonged to lower caste. The economic geography of the area extended an agrarian class structure coincided with the caste hierarchy.\(^7\) The caste Hindus were lowed owned land and the lower caste Hindus were tormented, as and labourers. Varnasahrama Dharma was strictly followed. Hence, it extracted


a just in the religious tradition of the lower castes. The political set up of the area also turned the division of the society, since they were not allowed to enter into temple since 1963.  

Religion to the lower castes related to life and nature. The religious concept of the people of this area is noted anthropologically and sociologically. Anthropological tradition has studied religion very elaborately and proposed evolutionary theories on religion. For Auguste Comte, religion originated from fetishism, for Herbert Spencer from ancestor worship, for Tylor from animism and for Robert Marret from an impersonal force. According to Frazer, religion arose when human beings began propitiating and conciliating with supernatural powers, external and superior to them. Sociological tradition has concentrated on the functional aspect of religion. Religion is a part of social process. Peter Berger a sociologist has viewed religion as “the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established”. Saurab Dube of the view that religion is to be understood as an inherently historical set of signifying beliefs and practices. Hence, religion is said to be created by human being for his

existence when and where he felt insecure from the nature. As a result, the folk religion springs from the human need for security purpose.

The coastal people who inhabited 68 kilometers from Cape to Nerodi were exported to the vagary life due to risks involved in sea fading. Uncertainties in life and land to mouth existence made them to take shelter in the numerous. Similarly the Palmyra climbers whose occupation is climbing, exposed to dangerous situation. The main occupations of the Mukkuvas and the Nadars are always risky. Their religious experience is wrapped in the world or sprits. These spirits are present in the most ordinary things of daily life. Most of the deities of these people are Goddess. Kadalamma, Patrirakali, Yaksi or Yecakki, Muppitiari and various varieties of Amman are their goddess.\(^\text{12}\) They are symbols of vibrant power. The temples built for these deities were generally small, and contained only the ritual artifacts like sword, spear, trident, dress of the shaman, etc.

The social process of the origin of religion of the folk people of Kanyakumari related to nature. They lived with reality of the difficulties of life. Therefore their style was of life, normally we call it ‘culture’ is wrapped with their environment. An explanation of the term culture will

\(^{12}\) Patrick, G., *op. cit.*, p. 33.
make it clearer. The world culture derived from Latin word colo (colere) with its root meaning ‘to cultivate’ refers to pattern of human activity. Edward B. Tyler has defined it as a complex whole knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and habits of man as a member of society. But a UNESCO document in 2002, stated that culture encompasses everything what man experiences through life styles, ways of living together, value systems, tradition and beliefs. A common way of understanding culture is through values, norms and artifacts. Values comprise ideas about what is life seems important. Norms consist of the expectations of low people will face life in different situations. Artifacts refer to things or materials. Therefore, the culture of the non-caste Hindus of Kanyakumari District raised out of the geographical factors in which they were compelled to live or free to live. Generated in the life style of the hard working community, sustained through ages which found expression in norms, practices and fine arts is called culture. Prof. Wilfred says, “culture is fluid precisely because a culture grows out of constant encounter with other people and

14. Ibid.
15. UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural diversity issued on international language day, 21 – 2 – 2002.
groups. It is a kind of osmosis that accounts for the vitality of any culture”.

A. The cultural profile of the coastal people

The ancient Tamils noted that the habitable parts of Tamilagam could be divisible in five natural regions. They named each region as ‘Tinai’ or eco-zones. Tinai seems to be derived from 7 root ‘tin’ or ‘tit’ which means a sketch of land. The word ‘Tinai’ is also used to refer to a geographical environment with people and their behaviour. There were five Tinai or eco-zones such as 1. Kurunji, the lilly country and 2. Mullai, the foot hill regions, 3. Marutham, revering regions and 4. Neithel, the coastal area 5. Paalai, the dry waterless region. The people who lived in the coastal region are called as Paravas in the fishery coast and Mukkuvas in the Kanyakumari coast. Since the Mukkuvas totally took the arm of Christ it is better to discuss their life pattern. The coastal belt from south to north in Kottar Diocese is about 48 kilometers. Along this sandy strip of land lie some 38 villages where the majority of the peoples attention have

---

20. Fishery coast refers Tuticorin to Cape coast.
21. Kanyakumari coast is from Cape to Nerodi about 14 villages.

27
been living traditionally on fishing.\textsuperscript{22} The ancient Tamil literature called the coastal region as Neithel. In the Neithel, fishing was the natural occupation. They used ‘cattumarams’ (built of joining three or four floating type of wood together, and Thoni (Boat made of wood) for fishing. They used to catch fish very near the coast at the outset, and gradually proceeded far in to the sea. It was from the Paravas that arose, in due course the famous sailors, who later carried the Indian goods in boat to foreign countries like Malaysia, Indonesia and China in the East and to Arabia and Africa in the West. They earned their lively hood by selling fish and salt which were the principal products of their region. They took fish also in the interior of the country and parted them for other kinds of food stuff. There are plenty of references in the Sangam literature how they sold their products in the interior.\textsuperscript{23} Some times they specialized in boat building too.\textsuperscript{24}

The God of Neithel region was Varunan, the God of the sea. They worshipped Varuna and other goddess before their conversion. Their

\textsuperscript{23}  Pillai, K. K., \textit{A Social History of the Tamils}, Vol. I, University of Madras, Madras, 1975, p. 165.
\textsuperscript{24}  \textit{Ibid}. 
dependence upon sea made their craving to God and goddess they lived in small huts made of coconut palm and palmyra leaves. Since their quarters were very nearest to sea, they are very often subjected to the inversion of the waves and sea erosions. Their stable food was rice and tappicco which they bought after selling their products in the interior areas. Since the Hindu religion was based upon caste system, the fishermen were considered as lower caste. They were considered as untouchables mainly because of their profession. Though their occupation is adventurous and even dangerous at times, it does not redeem them from the stigma of untouchability. Even their conversion to Christianity did not help them much. This cruel practice affected only those fishermen who used to come to the quarters of the fisher caste for selling their products mostly their insular life style saved them from this evil practice of the caste system. It was a sin that like other lower castes, they were also allowed minimum dress and women were not allowed upper garments.

It is true that caste system served some economic function but it segregated the society and was one of the strong forces that kept one major section of the population in seven bondages. The Mukkuvas were

considered as avarnas.\textsuperscript{27} Similar to the Paravas of the fishery coast, they were subjected to the oppression of the Muslim traders, upper caste men and the people of the inland. Portuguese victories in the western coast led to the planting of cross in the eastern coast. Religion and politics were mixed by the capture of Goa in 1510, the Pope was so pleased in 1514, A.D., to the King of Portugal the right of patronage over all religious matters in the coast.\textsuperscript{28} Thus it started the Portuguese padroado or Patronage system.\textsuperscript{29} Territories were also placed under the Portuguese patronage system. The patronage system is nothing but the complete authority of the Portuguese in this settlement both spiritual and political. Accordingly, even Pope led a defector authority over the spiritual matter of the Portuguese settlements seemed the East. The king of Portugal was enjoying the defector authority of appointing Bishops and sending missionaries. The Portuguese gave financial assistance from the trade income.\textsuperscript{30}

The political network of the spiritual colonialism was based upon three types such as the dare authority of the church, the defector authority

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 49.
\textsuperscript{28} Sundararaj, T., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 78.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
of the Portuguese government and the Mukkuvas. The common link was catholic religion. It is a fact that the Mukkuva Christian considered Francis Xavier, not only a part being a missionary he was also the Ambassador of the Portuguese king in India.\(^{31}\) Hence, Francis Xavier was considered the first agent of the spiritual colonial setup. The insular chartered and the comparative result of the caste by the Travancore rulers caused easy information of the Portuguese, Kanyakumari coast was subjected to the political authority of Travancore. The conversion of the Paravas in the fishery coast in 1535 had an impact upon the Mukkuvas of the Kanyakumari coast too. The social exclusion and poverty made the people cause under the care of the Portuguese. Francis Xavier asked Martin Alphonse Desoula, the governor of Goa to support the cause of Travancore king Ramavarma. As a result, he gave permission to preach Gospel at any part of the coast and gave 2000 favours for the construction of churches.\(^{32}\) Hence, fourteen villages of south Travancore coast in Kanyakumari, extending from Cape Comorin to Vallavilai, had been brought under the spiritual protection of the Portuguese. Of the fourteen villages 12 belonged to Marthandavarma and two villages to Ramavarma.\(^{33}\) When Xavier got

\(^{31}\) Letter of Fr. De Nobili to Fr. Fabius De Fabius dated 8 – 10 – 1609.


the permission of local rulers, they acted so strongly even compelling the people for conversion. He threatened that their refusal to conversion would involve serious consequences and they would never be allowed to fish in the sea. Following this Xavier was able to baptize 1000 people in 1544.34

The priests in the Kanyakumari coast acted as a go-between the rulers and the Portuguese.35 In Travancore, the king frequently demanded Portuguese support and whenever the priests could not comply with his request, communal riots were created by him.36 In 1572, Pope was a serious riot and it finally ended in 1574, owing to the appeal of Fathers to Portuguese protection.37 One of the reasons alleged for segment communal riot was the basking of the Raja who feared that the churches may be used as the fortress of the Portuguese.38 More over the political and

34. *Ibid.*, p. 186. Fr. Michael, the Vicar of the Bishop for south India came to India in 1530 with several other Portuguese priests. Later he sent Francis Xavier to Travancore in November 1544. He went to Trivandrum by land and had audience with the Maharaja, who received him with honors, treated him with kindness and gave him permission to preach the Gospel in his kingdom and to baptize those of his subjects who would desire to become Christians, Lawrence, V., *History of Catholic Church in Kanyakumari*, Nagercoil, 2002, p. 61.


36. Very often the communal riots were between the Nadars and the Mukkuvas (*Ibid.*, pp. 186-187)


religious networks of the Portuguese created a separate identity to Mukkuvas. It gradually took root and the identification of the Mukkuvas with Portuguese and catholic religion, became a reality. They were economically backward. The little tracts of land which they inhabited did not belong to them. They were the property of the church. There was a striking difference between the people of fishery coast and Kanyakumari coast. The former was more Portuguese in spirit and the latter was more indigenous. At the same time the treatment of the foreign and indigenous clergy over Mukkuvas differed under their patronage. So a colonial setup continued. They looked upon the believers as subjects and treated them as slaves.\(^{39}\) This trend is also inherited by the present generation. The local priests are also Mukkuvas. But their attitude towards their fellow Christian is more like the ruler and ruled. Practically the Mukkuvas for all their social and religious life practically viewed, the priests could unite the people easily, and negatively the priests can indoctrinate the people of think and act in accordance with the decisions the priests take, even in the formation of the ‘Anbiams’, and this attitude of the church has still a strong role to play.

---

\(^{39}\) Personal Interview with Maria Sebastian, dated 25th. June 1999.
B. The profile of the Catholic people of the interior

The people of inland have different cultural and social characteristics compared to the coastal people. Always the physical features of the inland and the caste in which they belong determine the cultural behaviour of the people. The Catholics belonged mostly to the Nadar caste and once they mainly engaged in agriculture. Traditionally they engaged in palmyra climbing, most of the fertile lands were enjoyed by the Nair land lords. For the dry land the patta was possessed by the Nair land lords. It seems there was a heavy past to the Nadars. Like other Dravidian communities, the Nadars also had a rich and veritable heritage. Being the true son of the sail, they held a predominate status. In the beginning they were known channan the modernized version of the term candor which means learned or noble man. According to historian, the candors were rulers as the term Nadar means those who ruled the land.  

As noted the traditional occupation of the Nadars was palmyra climbing. Most of the dry lands either the climber or his master held on tenure basis got from the higher caste land owners. Slowly the moneyed subaltern masters purchased the land from the caste land owners.  

40. Patrick, G., op. cit., p. 27.  
the climber worked on the palm grooves of his own caste. More over the palm grooves were the dry land where scarcely any other crop other than palm tree and topiaco grow.\textsuperscript{42} Topic co was the stable food of the climbers, which gave enough strength.\textsuperscript{43} The climbers lived in palm grooves. They did know the time of taking juice, usually the work starts in the month of August and goes till March. A period of eight months of climbers had to be virtually spent at the grooves. The climbers started the work in an auspicious day.\textsuperscript{44}

The climbers should have the articles for their operation 1. A country wooden rod (popularly called Murukkuthadi), 2. Thilap (a bond), 3. Aruvapetti (box), 4. Palai (as to keep calcium powder), 5. a brush, 6. a knife, 7. kaduppu (a wooden cutter with two blades) etc. The operation he has to do to take juice from the palm is scientific. The jagery juice is subjected to gain scientific operation to make jagery and keep them above wooden terrace usually which is above the over. The jagery that is kept in

\begin{itemize}
  \item Personal Interview with Mr. R. Sundaram, aged 70, Palmyra climber, dated 20 January 2011.
  \item In a changing generation economy and culture the dry areas of the Palmyra grow converted for Rubber plantation.
\end{itemize}
the wooden terrace can be there without melting for at least one year and more. The jaggery which kept in the terrace will be tasty and durable.45

The product produced by them is mostly palm tree products. They are used for many purposes. The juice is used for the creation of jagery or toddy. The palm leaves one used for making auspicious boxes and used for writing.46 The trunk is used for house construction and fire wood. The tender fruit (Nonkku) is a cool drink during summer stages.47 If the ‘Nonkku’ becomes ‘pananka’ they will be placed off and buried under earth up to three months, these become roots called ‘panam kizhanku’. It has medical and commercial value. The semplung will be taken for finish culture through this process.48 The socio-economic and cultural fabric of the society based on Palmyra and Palmyra product is called Palmyra culture.49 The liquefied or the wax like kandi before drying had been used for construction of bridges.50

45. Ibid., p. 429.
46. Ibid., pp. 430 -432.
47. Ibid., p. 428.
48. During human chicken pox or view fever will be common in southern Tamilnadu at that time tendspalm fruit will be wed as a colorant. Now a days each nuke is cost Rs. 10.
49. Personal Interview with Mr. V. T. Chelam, Founder President, International Centre for South –East Asian Studies, Gandhinager, Nagercoil, dated 21 May 2012.
50. Ibid.
The political movement for separating the district of Kanyakumari from Travancore and merging with Tamil Nadu was a significant movement of liberation of the people. In this movement all other castes except Nairs participated. However leadership remained in the hands of Nadars. The trend brought a sense of autonomy to the people, awakened them, made them realize their strength and slowly leadership merged from in and every walk of life. These had been a new cultural, political and social renaissance and affirmation of the Tamils. The merger weakened the hands of the land lords and the farmers began to acquire lands to cultivate them for themselves.51 People paid much attention in educating their children and aspired for better occupation. The change of events have boosted up the general educational standard of this rural district.

The people in the interior are in general hard working and do not spend money lavishly but try to save as much as they can by making sacrifices. A good number of people at present take various other professions such as carpentry, masonry, business and other small professions. Some of them also went to Gulf countries to pursue their jobs and they made use of every available opportunity and are ambitious to

succeed in life.\textsuperscript{52} The churches of the interior were built by the financial assistance of the Diocese. In due course the trend has changed and churches and community halls were built by rising namely from the local people.\textsuperscript{53} The people on the interior do not depend on the churches and ministers for arranging their social life. In this they are different from the coastal people.\textsuperscript{54}

Formerly a few ministers were available to work in the interior. Therefore prominent laymen were selected to look after the spiritual needs of the people. They are called as ‘Muduthams’. They were the prominent men of the parish. These posts became hereditary. But in due course people selected their Muduthams. Various factors like the growth of education and the emergence of new leadership made the people to maintain the conservative style of the function of the church.\textsuperscript{55} However all these remained with in the catholic spirit. In the interior parishes, some problems with regard to marriages are arranged. One of the partners of the marriage may be a Christian or Hindu. As they give more importance to


\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{54} Personal Interview with Mr. V. M. Selvamony, aged 55, Professional Catechist of Kottar Diocese, dated 1 November, 2011

\textsuperscript{55} Narchison, J. R., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 142.
caste, conversion was not a problem. Some of these conversions would sustain even after marriage, and some faded away.\(^\text{56}\)

The first conversion among the Nadars in Travancore was made by Fr. Peter Morato in 1697. In the dress of an Indian saniyasi Fr. Jean Mayard who was then in charge of Kottar went about doing missionary work. He succeeded in baptizing the Nadars here and there.\(^\text{57}\) In the year 1699, Fr. Benard- De chose Vadakkankulam as his first quarters. Then with the permission of the local chief Chiravalipillary he built a church and a house at Marungoor about eight miles east of Kottar.\(^\text{58}\) Fr. Saverio Borghese joined Fr. De-Saa in 1701. He was inspired to penetrate deep into Travancore and started a mission at. With the help of Sathia Nathen, he succeeded in baptizing many including a Hindu Guru. The Nadars who were convinced of the Christian principles, wanted church perfection faced by the fathers in the interior which had been reduced and disappeared the people by and large adopted the Christian values and began to forget the nagem ways of worship. Since they were not allowed to enter into the temples, they used to erect small huts in mud and pot idols of kali and other mother Goddess and worshiped. Mostly church places of worship

\(^{56}\) Personal Interview with Mr. Maria Sebastian, aged 50, Thirithuvapuram, dated 9 April 2002.

\(^{57}\) Narchison, J. R., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 143.

\(^{58}\) Ferroli, D., \textit{Jesuits in Malabar}, Vol. II. Bangalore, 1951, p. 58.
had been demolished by them. The conversion brought a new out look to them.

It is important to note that in the interior there are catholic rites as the Syro – Malankara and the Syro- Malabar. The Diocese of Kottar is having well established churches and parishes. There are social work activities like Kottar Social Service Society [KSSS] and Kuzhithurai Integral Development Social Service [KIDSS].\textsuperscript{59} Besides the Vicariates have credit societies to aid the people. However, in the last five years the Kerala dioceses established Thuckalay and Marthandam. They constructed the churches, parishes and mission stations. The recently constructed people, simple and poor and they change from one rite to the other allured by the material benefits offered to them.\textsuperscript{60} It created one receiving mentality among the people. By and large, over the years, the mentality of the interior people had changed. Their hard work in interest in education, slowly transformed them into number of doctors, engineers, professors and entrepreneurs from this agricultural case. Hence, Christianity brought a sense of autonomy and relief from the Nair land lords and caste hierarchy. In the interior of the diocese there are few villages where fishermen have

\begin{paracol}{2}
\begin{columns}[t]
\begin{column}{.5\textwidth}
59. \textit{Ibid.}, p. 60.
\end{column}
\begin{column}{.5\textwidth}
\end{column}
\end{columns}
\end{paracol}
settled down since many generations. These places are Kottar, Aloor, Manalikarai, Puthenkadai, Ambalakadai, Puthukadai, Marthandam, Kaliyakkavilai, Attoor, Unnamalakadai and few other places. They are surrounded by people of other castes and creeds. Though they have certain traits of coastal life, in due course they have developed different professions. However, a good percentage of them are engaged in marketing fish from the coast.\textsuperscript{61} Today the fishing market has been so advanced. So that fishers are coming to the market centres in lorries. The whole sale merchant in the market as well as to the interior is as.\textsuperscript{62} Their life is mostly centred around subsistence level. They have their own local rules and regulations.

The church had a role to regulate the economic life of the people. Overcrowding of market by many sellers will create surplus of fish. Accordingly they may get loss. To avoid that, some kind of regulations were setup to reduce the number of persons selling fish in the local markets. The right to sell fish has to be obtained every week by paying some fee which was the main source of income for the parish. This system is known as ‘vatti’. The church in its scheme was expected to protect the

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{61} Personal Interview with Dr. T. Sunderaraj, aged 63, Former Prof. and Head (Rtd.), Department of History, St. Joseph’s College (Autonomous), Trichirapalli dated 21st. June, 2012.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{62} Narchison, J. R., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 144.
\end{flushleft}
system of vatti from outside danger arising from within the fishermen community or from without when one enters by force into the market with a fish load with out obtaining the right for it on where people of another caste want to complete in the same market. The vatti system has been de-linked from the church. The church administration mainly depended upon great source of income. Though the parish council of the local churches is vested with powers for administration, the trump card is with the parish priest. Hence, total autonomy is not possible as the diocesan administration is focused on the Bishop at the diocese level, the Vicar Forane at vicariate level and parish priest at church level. Generally, a present committed priest can still steer the administrative wheel in the right direction.

The Nanjil Nadu Vellalas who are said to have come from Madurai in the first century A.D. are mostly Hindus and they owned fertile lands of the district. The catholic flock among them as minority who live in three parishes of Ramanachen Puthoor, Rajavoor and Ramapuram. Once upon a time they possessed considerable land of their own like their counter part

63. Personal Interview with Kaliyakkavilai Unit (Fishermen community) dated 10 March 2012.
64. Personal observation.
Hindus. But they lost their lands in due and reduced to poverty. Some left to other places in search of work. Being a very small minority, they feel isolated and insecure in the midst of other caste of overwhelming numbers who have great political and economic advantages.\textsuperscript{67} They follow the marriage customs of the other caste. Being a small group, they used to select the partners from their caste in the earlier days. They are deep in devotion. In spite of their poverty, they used to contribute as much as possible to the church. Sociologically a small group either religiously or economically is driven either to poverty or richness. The catholic Christian Vellalers once commanded a good position economically and socially driven to dependence due to their limited numbers. The Catholic vellals at the same time in other places of Tamil Nadu occupied good positions in life. Most of the Jesuit Fathers of Madurai Mission belonged to the Catholic vellalas. A good number of lay people are also working as professors, teachers and business men. Unfortunately as a microscopic minority, the Catholic Vellalas of Kottar Diocese have become improvised.\textsuperscript{68}

There is only one parish, Asaripallam where Catholics belonging to the Chettiar caste live. Their traditional profession is to extract oil from

\textsuperscript{67} Personal observation.
nuts and sell it. As an enterprising community they have been progressing fast and today a number of people among them are educated. They are in all walks of life. Though they are from a minority group, they live together in Asaripallam. Some of them are agriculturists and a few of them are still following the traditional business. The marriages are taking place within the group in Asaripallam itself. They keep on the family bond and cultural link. They contribute liberally to the church. We find striking difference between them and the Vellalas. Though in a hierarchy of caste system, the Vellalas claim they are superior. Unfortunately, the Vellala Catholics are deprived of their economic base; where as the Chettis of Asaripallam related their economic and social base. An insular community surrounded by other dominant caste group, tillable to relation their caste and religious identity.⁶⁹

There is another catholic community belonged to the Kerala Mudhalies who live more in the parishes of Palliyady, Amsi and Ritapuram. Some of them in other interior places are called Christian Barbers. Many of these people had been converted to Christianity in course of the Christianization of the district. The Mudhalies took up the profession of weaving; now days find a downward trend. Many of the

⁶⁹. Personal Interview with Fr. M. Soosai, aged 64, Bishop’s House, Nagercoil, dated 12 June 2012.
people these castes were taken to other professions. They are now from a hand existence to marching forward economically by hard work. They follow the marriage customs of the other catholics of the district. They select their marriage partner from the bar bar community from other interior places of the diocese. Some time there is conversion of the partner on either side. Mostly these conversions sustained. Some of the people from this caste select the priestly and monastic life. As priests and sisters, they play a very subsequent role in the administration of the diocese, since the celestials administration is dominated by the dominant communities. Many of the interior catholics from their flock are falling to the net of the Syrian Catholics.

The are other communities who pursue catholic religion are the Goldsmith, Dhobeys and Harijans. A handful of catholics are Asari caste that depends upon their traditional occupation of carpentry. As changes take place, they are also subjected to change in occupation and social life. Some of them make gold jewels. Many of them were through duty job, due to the arrival of jewellaries with modern making and technique of business. Therefore, the Goldsmith switches other calculation another type of work, in the caste hierarchy they claim superiority and Hindu counter parts to the

71. Personal observation of the school.
Brahmin ways. Once they lived in hand to mouth existence. Now a day we find a general prosperity among them. Their voice in the educational system is very marginal. Priests and sisters are drawn from this community.72

The Dhobeys from another bulk population of the catholic community spread all over the diocese. They are available in all the big villages to do the work of washing. Both men and women of this community wash clothes of the whole village civil society. This is the only community where women lead the creative humanitarian work and cultural process. According to Hindu concept of life, they occupy a very low status.73 Washing of clothes as a social process does not receive any social recognition that does not bring them any new lease of life. Though they live small in number, their marriage customs are like other catholics of the interior. Marriages mostly remain within the community. As they found in different regions of the diocese, the marriage partner may be from different regions. Now they give more importance to education. They occupy the various professions away from their traditional business. They share faith and contribute their might to the greatness of the church.

The Harijans Christians are called Dalits. Caste Hindu who is the top rings of the caste ladder considers them on the bottom rings as untouchables. Untouchability practiced among the parayas and pulayas. The Christian terminology for them is the Dalit. There is good number of theories about their origin. It is sure that they were subjected to the lowest level by political fortunes. A good number of them were converted to Protestantism and Salvation Army. A few of them are sustained in catholic religion. They were attracted to Christian religion to escape from caste slavery. But their conversion seldom brought a sense of relief. In Kottar Diocese, few centres exclusively belonged to them. Churches fully managed them also. A parish in Kottar Diocese Kotoorkonam all the Catholics is Dalit Christians. There is a Dalit commission exclusively working for the liberation of the Dalit Catholics. The Dalit also spread in few numbers in different centres of the diocese. Previously they were working in the fields of caste Hindu. Now they were interest in education. Therefore, a good number of them are employed in foreign countries also.

74. Personal Interview with Sundararaj, T., aged 63, Former Prof. & Head, Department of History, St. Joseph’s College (Autonomous), Trichirapalli, dated 12 March 2012.
Still the concentration of the diocese is needed for the development of the Dalits.75

C. Adoption of local culture and conversion

The coming of the Portuguese to India in 1498 was a landmark in the history of the Church and that of India. Under the Portuguese protectorate spiritual colonialism triumphed on the coastal regions of Tamilagam. In fact political security drove the coastal people of the south to the arms of the cross. Devoid of such a situation, the interior inland regions remained closed to the spiritual expansion of western Christianity. A few attempts at the end of the 16th century failed to evoke positive response due to high culture.76 Having perceived that the missionary efforts were not fruitful, the Jesuit missionaries of the 17th century devised a new strategy by which the Christian faith was to be planted by adopting the culture and religious traditions of the local community. Till 197777 the term used to refer this transmutation was ‘adaptation’. Since the term referred to external adjustment of accommodation to culture without integrating the inner values of ‘contacting culture’ with the Christian

75. Ebaniser, V., op. cit., p. 36.
76. In 1595 Fr. Goncalo Fernandez was sent to Madurai to open the inland for Gospel work. He could not convert the high caste people.
77. The synod of Bishops in 1977 after the II Vatican Council decided for inculturation of the faith.
values now coined in its place. The reciprocal process of cultural transmutation is better expressed by the ecclesiastic term inculturation than by the term adaptation or enculturation or cultural assimilation of the social scientists. The concept of inculturation envisages that the Christian message has to be presented in its own local cultural context.\textsuperscript{78} The Christian experience showed that it would assimilate universal values of culture in its framework and thereby facilitated the acceptance of the message of Christ by other cultural and religious people.\textsuperscript{79} The Jesuit of the Malabar province opened a new mission at Madurai in 1595 for the purpose of the conversion of the inland people.\textsuperscript{80} The Portuguese ways of life and the status attached to the Christians of the coast were looked upon as foreign things, incompatible with the social customs of the high caste people.\textsuperscript{81} The high caste people of Tamil Nadu used the word parangi\textsuperscript{82} to refer the Christians and it evidently expressed the manner of living, their character, religion and culture of the spiritual colonialism of the Portuguese.\textsuperscript{83} The stigma attached to Christianity as parangi margam could

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{78} Peter Fernando, (ed). Inculturation in Seminary Formation, Indore, 1980, p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{79} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{80} Malabar Province was the spiritual jurisdiction of the Jesuits in the south.
\item \textsuperscript{81} Letter of Fr. De. Nobili to Fr. Fabius de Fabius, dated 8th. October 1609.
\item \textsuperscript{82} The word parangi had a strange history. For more details, refer chapter 7 of this work.
\item \textsuperscript{83} Letter of De Nobili to General, Madurai, dated 8th. September 1610.
\end{itemize}
not be digested by Fr. De Nobili (1577 – 1656) who was sent to Madurai in 1606 to open the door of the inland for missionary work. Having understood the causes of the work in conversion of the high caste people, Nobili worked out a programme to suit the customs and culture of the local community. Religion, caste and the functional distinctions associated with it were the major impediments against Christian conversion. Since the high caste assumed that Christianity was meant for the socially inferior people, they had an aversion to the new faith.\textsuperscript{84}

The early missionaries shared the contemporary view that one would not be eternally saved unless one accepted Christ. In 1813, many missionary societies, such as The Church Missionary Society (CMS), the London Missionary Society (LMS), etc. opened new missions in Madras, Calcutta, Bombay and Travancore.\textsuperscript{85} The Syrian Christian tradition was presence in the central and northern parts of Travancore. They were well-placed in the social hierarchy when the Portuguese set their foot on the coast.\textsuperscript{86} They promoted conversions to Christianity culminating in the reception of Baptism. At the same time, westernization in Travancore coast

\textsuperscript{84} Dahen, P., (ed.), \textit{The Archbishop of Armagh}, Vol. IV, 1935, Roman Archives

\textsuperscript{85} Joseph Prasad Pinto, \textit{Incultureation through Basic Communities}, Bangalore, 1985, p. 82.

and interior took place gradually as the British established their rule and law over the whole Indian sub-continent and peace was established. The superior scientific discoveries and the technological achievements of Europe won the admiration of many Indians with a strong urge to imitate the European. Many wealthy Indians took pride in educating their children in the west. As the contact with the Western culture grew with the system of education and the mass media, many, especially the wealthier folk in the cities, adopted the Western pattern of living. The Christian missionaries unconsciously fostered this trend toward westernization. Meanwhile the church in India continued to be completely Western in appearance, by adopting Latin in the liturgy, Latin ways of thought and legalistic tendencies in its philosophy and administration.\(^8_{7}\)

The missionaries gave importance to the circumstances of the country, place, language, different mentalities and personal temperaments. They boldly entered the process of inculturation. They understood that the folk religion is closely related to the folk people’s custom, beliefs and lifestyle. In Kanyakumari, the revivalist force also belonging to the right wing

\(^{87}\) Joseph Prasad Pinto, *op. cit.*, p. 84.
fundamentalist assumed the role of enculturalists, due to the influence of caste system.\textsuperscript{88}

The missionaries bore certain titles as Guru, Sannyasi and Aiyer as Brahmin counterparts. The explanation they gave to the objections raised against such titles shows that they were an acute students of indology. Guru is one who makes clearly his explanation and sannyasi meant one who renounced everything in life.\textsuperscript{89} Aiyer means master of the house. The systematic observation of Brahminical customs almost debarred them from others. The kavi or saffron coloured dress was the symbol of chastity the people of spiritual path.\textsuperscript{90} To them kavi was not an external garb to attract the high caste to their fold, but a dress exclusively used by the people who renounced the worldly pleasures in Indian environment. So the missionaries of this type willingly gave up their old ways of life and integrated themselves with the new situation.\textsuperscript{91} Brahmin sannyasi was the name given to these types of missionaries who accepted, followed and allowed the use of thread, tuft or kudumi, sandal paste and other bodily

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{88} Sundararaj, T., Hindu Revivalism and Cultural Change in Tamil Nadu with Special Reference to Kanyakumari District, in \textit{Indian Historical Studies}, Vol. VI, Tiruchirapalli, 2010, p. 13.


\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\end{footnotesize}
ablutions even after the conversion because such things were the part of the social customs of the people. The thread indicated a social and political rank. The kings and Brahmins and other high class wore thread and kudumi of different quality as an indication of their profession and caste. Similarly bodily ablutions were performed not for religious purpose but for cleanliness. So there was no superstition involved in taking bath before going to the church. The theological idea behind keeping water in a little tank near the entrance of the Catholic Church has this social significance.

The Roman custom was that the man who slept with his wife should not enter the church without taking bath. The same tradition was adopted to the converts in Tamil Nadu as the system was also in vogue in this part. The Roman washed their hands before meals and even the disciples of Christ have done the same before the last supper. The converts did not take bath to honor any idol but merely to observe a general practice. Tradition demanded them to do such ablutions at the time of religious ceremonies. Brahmans usually pray while they take bath. The christian converts also performed the same custom called Vandanam through the

---

92. Letter of Archbishop of Cranganore Fr. Francis Roz to the General, 1618.
93. Ibid., pp. 41 – 43.
94. Ibid., pp. 71 – 72.
95. Ibid., p. 74.
adoration of Christ. Sandal paste as source of ornamentation is purely a social custom. As clothes adorn the body, so sandal paste adorns the forehead, since bare forehead was considered humiliating.

The Christian terminologies used in Tamil country were either from Latin or Portuguese in Tamil script. Some of the words used had been translated from such languages in Tamil and were defective in meaning. So the missionaries had given a proper vehicle for ritual communication as though those terms apparently seemed like the ritual terms of the Hindu counterparts. They coined terms like Suthan – son, Moksha – heaven, Survesvaran – God, Pujai – Holy Mass, Prasadham and Kovil.

They got into the root of the meaning of such words and found that they were conveying more secular meaning. Though there was initial opposition to such words in due course they became the integral part of the Tamil and Christian terminology. The missionaries also composed hymns similar to the Bajanas of Hindus.

The missionaries walked bare footed and with head uncovered. They slept on barren ground. The kind of food they have taken was akin to that

---

96. Apologia, Madurai, 1610, Chapter II
97. Ibid., Chapter III.
98. Ibid., Chapter II.
of the Hindu hermits such as boiled rice and herbs and they took only a meal a day.\textsuperscript{100} They embraced such a sort of life spontaneously so as to make the Gospel suit the local culture. The Brahman Sannyasis had to follow a very trying and irksome rule of life. They were obliged to take bath every morning in a public tank and take a similar bath before their meals.\textsuperscript{101} In the 17\textsuperscript{th} century, the cultural assimilation of a new complexity emerged in the Christian pockets. At the same time, the desire for self identity as a Christian community was also evident. Hence, the missionaries reinterpreted the traditional cultural values to suit the convenience of the converted. This process had an everlasting impact upon the attitude of the church and the people. The Hindu self-understanding and world view was reflected in the lay-out, architecture and sculpture of the temples as well as the cult rituals performed there.\textsuperscript{102} Most of the churches built in the 17\textsuperscript{th} Century were in thatched roof and the interior decoration reflected the same world views of the Hindu temples except the erotic scenes. The missionaries gave Tamil names to converts which literaly corresponded to the western names.\textsuperscript{103}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{100} Letter of the Fr. Frances Layns of Madurai Mission to General, dated 4th February 1691.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{101} Letter of Fr. Tachard to General, Pondicherry, dated 4th February 1703.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{102} Peter Fernando, (ed.), \textit{op. cit.}, p.39.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{103} Sundararaj, T., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 39.
\end{flushleft}
The missionaries saw that Hinduism was more ritualistic and ceremonial. Some of its practices were diffused to Christianity. The Thali or marriage badge has the same form as the Thali used by the Hindus except the cross in the centre. The missionaries were allowed to celebrate the Pongal festival under the foot of a cross. As a result of the Christian approach to conversion, the caste system, an alien item to Gospel, was admitted into the fold of the church. The missionaries knew well that the Indian society, fortified by its custom and ceremonies remained static. Hence, they accepted the situation and compromised with it. The missionaries and their methods had to be formulated to the needs of social groups. Hence, feasts and rituals similar to that seeds of Christianity were sown in Tamilagam under the process of inculturation. The religious propagation and social services of the missionaries led to the disappearance of many social evils in this region. The missionary education opened the window of the west to the Tamilians.

Christian missionary work corresponds with the period and spirit of western expansion in Travancore. Through the agency of education the west made felt its cultural and spiritual values in Travancore. The Travancore elite was significantly attracted to western education.

105. Ibid.
Paradoxically, however, they themselves became the leaders of the national awakening. They sought to understand Jesus Christ and Christianity and integrate them with local cultural spiritual heritage.\textsuperscript{106} Their rituals followed by a community are based on the beliefs and the culture or its members. The missionaries gave explanations to the socio-religious customs of the people, though such items were traditionally followed by the people without understanding the significance of them.

Such reforms and adaptation had started in the Kottar Diocese along with the Vatican Council II that was held in 1962.\textsuperscript{107} The diocese adopted the liturgical reform for the conversion of the people. It was the Villavancode taluk which spearheaded the liturgical movement in the diocese. The parish priests took up programmes towards forming the people, involving them actively and helping them relate the celebration to life. The movement soon spread all over the district. The years 1968 – 1975 can be rightly called era of adaptation seminars in the history of Kottar. During this period, a number of training programmes for all sections of people were conducted at the diocesan, vicariate and parish

\textsuperscript{106} Joseph Prasad Pinto, \textit{op. cit.} p. 88.

\textsuperscript{107} Vatican II, Sacrosanctum Concilium. 4 December 1963, New York, 1975, including liturgical changes, bible study, ecumenical and interfaith relations, church work and secular world.
levels. A special issue of the diocesan magazine ‘Then Oli’ 108 was brought out to explain to the people the various aspects of the new rites. 109

On the whole, the adaptation and reforms were received by the people. Besides, in certain areas in interior where the people have received Christian faith more recently, some fruitful experiments in services could be conducted. For, the people were more receptive and were less accustomed to the traditional Christian ways of worship. It is remarkable that in the parish of Parakunnu, 110 from the early fifties occasionally mass was celebrated facing the people an innovation which indeed was ahead of the Council and yet already then well received by the people. This shows to what extent people were disposed in some areas of the diocese to receive the liturgical reforms. 111 It created awareness in the minds of people and laid the foundation for the socio-religious movements like Basic Christian Communities in this region of Kottar Diocese.

108. Then Oli is a monthly diocesan news bulletin and publication which was very popular in the district.
110. Parakunnu village first received adaptation by the Belgium priest Fr. Fr. James Thember in 1968.
111. Felix Wilfred, op. cit., p. 147.
In several parts of the diocese, missionary work has been pursued by the Franciscan Missionary Brothers. They are the pioneers who plunged themselves into full time missionary work in remote and uncared areas. In connection with the spirit of their congregation, they have carried out their activities with mission as their most important concern still. The villages Midalakadu, Chemparuthivilai, Vattavilai, Melpuram, Melpalai, Kolvel, Eachakodu and Ettamadai bear witness to the activities of those brothers. In the attitude of cordiality and friendliness, they visit houses importing Christian instruction and teach the people to pray.\(^{112}\) In interior, people started to adopt Christian culture and it led to the establishment communities.

In 1969, new steps were taken to intensify missionary activity.\(^{113}\) The diocese appealed to the congregations to set apart some religious sisters exclusively for the work. The sisters, trained catechists and lay people were given periodical training for their work. Once in two months they met together. They were given chances to share their missionary experiences besides doctrinal and practical instruction.\(^{114}\) To conscientize

\(^{112}\) Lawrence, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 162

\(^{113}\) First all India Seminar was conducted for new missionary work with the direction of Fr. D. S. Amalorpavadas in Bangalore.

\(^{114}\) Personal Interview with Br. V. M. Selvamony, aged 54, diocesan catechist, dated 12 November 2011.
the people of their responsibility for the work of evangelization, occasionally seminars were conducted. One such important seminar took place on November 6 and 7, 1973 in which 91 people participated. The seminar focussed its attention on the following points: [1] The local Church’s responsibility concerning evangelization. [2] Formation for the work of evangelization. [3] Resources for evangelization [4] Methods to be followed.\textsuperscript{115} In Kottar Diocese, cultural renewal or adaptation or new way of evangelization were held in 1879, 1980, 1982, 1986, 1988, 1992, 1994, 1997, 2000, 2002 and 2004.\textsuperscript{116} Various attempts are being made to establish mission work in the surroundings and help people live amicably. Evidently, missionary work today needs modern means of communication and contact. Efforts are therefore being made to establish a well equipped media centre and a mobile team of workers with suitable means of conveyance to reach out to the various parts of Kanyakumari District.

\textsuperscript{115} Felix Wilfred, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 158.

\textsuperscript{116} Paul Richard Joseph, R., \textit{From the Root of Venadu} (Tamil), Kuzhithurai, 2007, pp 78 - 90.