CHAPTER - II

A HISTORICAL PROFILE OF BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

Modern society has achieved great progress and modern technology has produced a culture which profoundly affects society positively and negatively. In human conditions of life that is prevailing in the structure of the society either through age long heritage or the impact of capitalistic mode of thinking is a reality today. The revolutionary development of communication has reduced the universe into global village. The emergence of mega cities and the consumerism made the people more and more emotionally isolated. In this type of society, the role of the church has become more formal and spirituals. Humanism at times seems to be rare phenomena. Poverty for non European countries became a regular way of life. The structure of the society in the third world countries is shaped by the impact of poverty and the institutionalized structure imposed by the feudal Land Lords. Hence these people lost their faith in church and a good member of people did not listen to church and teachings. The loss of faith due to materialism in Europe and the loss of faith due to poverty and ignorance in the third world and the developing countries was a challenge to the church. Hence the concept of the Basic Christian Communities was
better solution to the problems of the church and the people. In fact the concept and meaning of the Basic Communities and the different types of such communities in different parts of the world is a fascinating study.

A. The concept and the meaning of Basic Christian Communities

The Basic Christian Communities are called indifferent names such as Small Christian Communities (SCC), Basic Electrical Communities (BEC) and ‘Anbiam’. Basic Christian Communities could be viewed in the light of the Catholic Church. It helped to promote church structure in the study area.\(^1\) The process of humanization and the promotion of human liberation in the social environment of the people are the inner scope of the Basic Christian Communities. The new concept of communities is actualized through fraternal living people unite in small, usually homogenous group, studying, discussing, praying and applying what they have learnt in their social and personal life. Jesus used table fellowship as a sign of intimacy and also an occasion for teaching.\(^2\) In any culture, home is a place where people have a sense of belonging of personal worth, of giving and receiving from each other and of sharing the hard and beautiful

---


2. Holy Bible Mathew, Chapter 26 words 6-13.
things in life. A home is a place where they come to know God and pray. A parish is a community of communities, a family of families. There is no cellars distinction in the community and everybody is equally responsible to the community. They are deeply involved in the world, they participate, they struggle, they labour to build the reign of God, believing that they are called the collaborations with Jesus in the salvation of the world.

J. De Santa Ana says that BCCs share life and prayer, material goods, Bible and hopes and struggles. As per Latin American experience, BCCs are simply movement or association of the church but rather a new way of living as church of being church, and acting as church. They waste a life of faith, love, liberation and justice to be the motive of all structures. Church is not praying together but to discuss on issues for social justice and of necessary of flight. Hence, the BCCs are the communion of communities.

In Tamil Nadu, the Basic Christian Communities are called Anbiam (A structure based on human love and bond). It is an organization of the

3. Peter, M., op. cit, P. 176.
4. Ibid., p. 177.
people based on love and affection who live in the same area. This structure helps a person in loneliness and in society. The whole people in the association share the happiness and sorrow of the individual. He should feel that he has an communication to help in distress. There are five ways the base communities understand and interpret the reality around them. The first is the understanding the community, their economic condition, relative illiteracy, an attitude of affirming the value of all members at both social and theological level and flexibility in reflection and action, and discover their natural right and feeling.

The second reality to the critical interpretation of subject should ensure the entry of the poor people into the church. We have to make them not the object of evangelization but the subject. People centred approach is to understand the real situation of them when they are in close harmony. Not look from outside, but from inside. The inside is the harder reality that would have been hidden out because of the lack of closeness and understanding. Inner self of the people cannot be understood at the meeting. But it can be purchased through many sitting and meeting. It is

8. A Hand of Book of Basic Christian Communities, Kottar Diocese Nagercoil, 2006, P. 10
not enough to simply understand for empathy sake. But the other party should feel that the association takes genius interest in them.¹¹

The third reality is the critical interpretation of experience. How to learn from their experience is the basic feature of meeting together. It is a source of wisdom. Experience has two meanings interaction with people and encounter. A genuine interaction helps to understand the real situation and condition in which he or she is placed. Encounter is a term used to elicit the right answers through friendly questions. The conversation is not critical or emblazing but as far as possible smooth and friendly.¹²

The fourth ingredient of the Basic Christian Communities is the critical interpretation of reality in Bible. Bible is understood as a crucial tool interpreting the word of God. They have to understand the Biblical words through their life experience. They have to find their life in the words of God. It is a mirror to understand the socio-economic reality.¹³ The Biblical words have to be understood in the historical process of space and time. The leader of the group should be a knowledge person in the interpretations of the Bible in the real tone and torture.

¹¹ Personal Interview with Fr. M. Peter, aged 66, Vicar Forane of Thirthuvapuram Vicariate, dated 21st. July 2011
¹³ Peter, M., op. cit., p. 135.
Fifth is the critical interpretation of faith. Faith is the nearness of a person who is with God and His words. It is an understanding of the words not through senses alone, but through wisdom. In the Basic Christian Community one has to believe that a new mode of life has started into Christ. Praying and singing is a part of the proceeding of the Basic Christian Communities. It is through the stage of self-actualization in experienced. The member of these communities living in accordance with the vacation to which they have been called, exercise the function that God has confided to them and thus make their community sign of the presence of the God.\textsuperscript{14}

The concept of Basic Christian Communities could not be seemed not only in the shadow of Bible but also in the dignity of human beings as a social being. Man is the product of environment.\textsuperscript{15} His life style as privation and achievements are intertwined with his immediate surrounding. Hence, Basic Christian Community concept is the realization of the self-worth. One can understand more about the functional aspect of BCCs when we study the organization structure in general.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., p. 136.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., p. 139.
B. General features of the organization structure of BCCs

In short, a Small Christian Community is a group consisting of about eight to thirty members.\textsuperscript{16} In some dioceses, there may be eight to thirty families.\textsuperscript{17} The members of the group may be from a specific area of neighborhoods. There people have a close link to form a communion of communities. They believe in, and are committed to Christ and strive to share all aspects of their life such as fails, commitment, worship, ideas, instructions, friendship, metrical possessions and good works. To this, leadership is a matter of animation, co-ordination and facilitation and their decisions are made through dialogue and consensus. They make an option with poor and live simply.\textsuperscript{18}

Some people imagine that Small Christian Communities are composed of members who like religious, live under the same roof. Not so on we have seen, there are residential groups live in their own houses, but gather to-gather in a home or some other appropriate place to form community. Right from the outset there is one fundamental point that has

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{17} A Hand of Book of Basic Christian Communmities, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{18} Maria David, A., \textit{Beyond Boundaries; Hindu - Christian Relationship and Basic Christian Communities}, ISPCK, Delhi, 2009, pp. 93 -96.
\end{flushleft}
to be made regarding the ordering of Basic Christian Communities. The organization is for people, not people for the organization. By this, we mean that if the structures employed by a group do not help the participants in their efforts to relate one another, they must be braked seriously and changed.\(^{19}\)

How to organize the BCCs is a problem sometimes. First of all, there must obviously be a person or persons interested in the idea. People know how to make the intimacy of their own. The next principle is that it has to be started from where they are. This means that local circumstances must be carefully taken in to account. The first thing required to start is information. Those who are interested need some kind of orientation about the Basic Christian Communities of the world. During the orientation proismamme, one guide lines and perceives of the BCCs can be given.\(^{20}\)

Actually, there is no needy made blueprint in need to make the people to grasp the matters in their aim experience. It should be the outcome of their life situation. It may be different to different communities.\(^{21}\) Vague intension are nature. They should have at least feels

---

19.  \textit{Ibid.}


21.  Maria David, A., \textit{op. cit.}
concrete steps to launch the group. The under lined idea of the group should be the concern for others, especially poor, downtrodden and oppressed.\textsuperscript{22}

The term group is used to refer community. There is a considerable sociological difference between the two. A group has a specific purpose where as a community has a broad interest such as worship, place, justice, environment etc. The members in a group are almost same in age whose as in community people differ image, social condition, race, sex and religious practices. A group assemblies are temporal purpose where as community tends to be under on permanent.\textsuperscript{23}

A final suggestion for starting Small Christian Communities would be to build an existing group. So that they are transferred in to communities.\textsuperscript{24} The group sharing experiences is of most importance. It has been pointed out already that the early Christian communities did not exist in isolation. They linked to-gather to form a communion of communities. Christians, either as persons or groups can not isolate themselves from one another or remain as Christian. They need the

\textsuperscript{22}  Practical experience of the investigation.

\textsuperscript{23}  Maria David, A., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 100.

\textsuperscript{24}  Personal Interview with Fr. M. Peter, aged 66, Vicar Forane of Thirithuvapuram Vicariate, dated 21st. July 2011
experience of the intimate community. Need a wider network so as not to witness and die. The small Christian communities are autonomous but not also latterly so.\textsuperscript{25}

The leader of the group and his role is quite emphatic. His role is for animation, co-ordination and facilitation. He should possess some interpersonal skills such as empathy, personal disclosure, confrontation and non-depressive exploration. All these qualities of the leader should not distract the priority that is given to the community as whole.\textsuperscript{26}

Decision making in a Small Community is done through dialogues. In the formation stage of the communities, it is very important formation involves training, education or instruction and interaction.\textsuperscript{27} The most important, dynamics in a small community is the reflection process. It is nothing but the consideration process. A sample agreed for the meeting of the community may be prayer to share meals, sharing lives and goods, and reaching out to others. The spirituality of the Small Christian Community is an integral one that combines prayer and out reach.

\textsuperscript{25} Bishop’s Circular, Kottar Diocese, dated 26 – 8 – 1986.
\textsuperscript{26} Hand Book on Anbims, Nagercoil, 2006, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{27} Personal observation of the scholar.
It is generally said that Indians are less community oriented and more individualistic in their philosophy, spirituality and social life. This is not true always. Yet there is a community consciousness based on age old joint family, the village community, the tribal solidarity, the religious community and caste system. Since the Christian are minority in India, they already belonged to well defined groups and communities. But building of BCCs is a special task to the church. Lay people, however must find their legitimate place in the church in planning, decision making and apostolic involvement. The importance of women in the church is recognized and encouraged. Spirituality should be understood as the total development of a person.

It is said BCCs are the focal points to eradicate the problems of the church. In experience in some places it ends in power struggle. But the animator of the community must be alive, active productive and bringing to life all the Christianate and the gift with which the members of the communities are endowed. The national events and feasts, common situation of disasterable from part and parcel of life of the whole community are on integral. Vatican II says ‘the joys and the hopes the grief

29. Personal Interview with S. Arulanandam, aged 63, Anbiyam Animator, Vavarai, 20th June 2012.
the anxieties of the men of this age, especially those who are poor to be addressed’.  

The church is not primarily the church in situation or building or the sacred space around it. Nor is the clergy, the church is primarily the people. Everything is for the people and of the people. Hence, Basic Christian Communities are having a new message to say to the world. Nowadays practices are becoming simply precepts. Hence, the creation of a value oriented society is the must of the day. What happened over the last fifty years in the domain of the world Church at quart among the Catholics is a fascinating chapter or renaissance. It is a revival of the Basic Christian Communities mentioned in the Bible. It was the revival of the home churches found in the Roman world before 3rd century A.D. As the New Testament in the hand book of the under privileged, the Basic Christian Communities are considered a new revolution to the people who had suffered oppression and human dignity. In a world of lawlessness and corruption, the Basic Christian Communities are an alternative for better world.

The above agreements and explanation are subset notified through a review of the Basic Christian Communities of the world. The following pages give a short account of the Basic Christian Communities of the world. One can find a verity in meaning, concept, formation, application and action. The researcher is constraint to give a detailed study on that, since the scope of the theme was on the Diocese of Kottar, and its environs, review of the Basic Christian Communities are otherwise called Anbiam of the Kottar Diocese. Today the church is facing a challenge, because of the passive role of the priests in prayer and the personal life of the people concern find the historical truth to what extent the Basic Christian Communities in Latin America and Africa become a political alternative. A look into the success story of their countries infixed very much the prime of the third world countries.

**Vatican council II**

Vatican II is hailed as an epoch making event that has brought more mental changes in life and million of the catholic church in the 20th centaury.\(^{32}\) Vatican II had brought out wider and deeper changes in the church, all over the world.\(^{33}\) As the council addressed the human issues, it

---

\(^{32}\) Vatican II is the world assembly of the Catholic Church from 1962 to 1965 held at Rome to suggest reforms in the Church.

\(^{33}\) Peter, M., *op. cit.*, p. 66.
called for a commitment of the church.\textsuperscript{34} The church began to open its window towards new lends which occur in the secular world. The Vatican document, the church in the world, deals with among many other issues, the dignity of all people, ability, social justice, common good, responses and participation in human solidarity etc. The document also proclaimed that the duty of the church in the world was to work for the enhancement of human dignity and common good.\textsuperscript{35}

Another practical outcome of the Vatican II is the liberation theology. Traditionally theology has been an academic discipline, pursued by the clergy. In the Catholic church Liberation theology in contrast arose out of the struggle of the poor for the fundamental human rights that had been denied to them.\textsuperscript{36} Theological reflections originated from and were originated to liberative action. As many liberation of theory is not justifying action but rather to critique it is the light of the faith. In other words, liberation theology is theology from the underside of history. Whose key is option for the poor.\textsuperscript{37} Thus it revolutionized theology from

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{34} Arokiasamy Xavier, M., \textit{From charity to Justice, Contributions of the Jesuits in social awakening in Tamil Nadu}, Gernony, 2012, pp. 23 -24.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Arokiasamy Xavier, M., \textit{op. cit.}, p. 24.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Kottukapally, J., \textit{Liberation Theology and Mission, Ideas from Action Series}, Indian Social Institute, New Delhi, 1986, p.2.
\end{itemize}
the preservative of the oppressed.\textsuperscript{38} Latin American theologians characterized theology is the creative application of Vatican II in the concerts of Latin America to work against the unjust structures.\textsuperscript{39} It was officially ratified by Latin American Bishop’s Conference in 1968.\textsuperscript{40} It called the Latin American church to work against the unjust structures.\textsuperscript{41} Many priests and religious people lost their life since they responded to the call from the life situations. Their theological writings and their martyrdom habits riper? cessions and vibrations in TamilNadu.\textsuperscript{42}

Soon after the Vatican II, the synod of the Bishops convened in Rome in 1971 focused on the issue of ‘Justice in the world’. The synod brought this out when it delivered ‘action on behalf of Justice and participation in the transformation for the world is a constructive dimension of the preaching of the Gospel’.\textsuperscript{43} It also encouraged the mobilization of forces at the gross-root level to create new movement for

\begin{flushleft}
39. Kottukapally, J., \textit{op. cit.}
40. It is known as Medellin Conference.
41. Kottukapally, J.,\textit{op. cit.}, p. 3.
\end{flushleft}
the development. The radical declamation of a synod has a radical importance throughout Roman Catholics in general and Tamil Nadu in particular.

Imbued with the spirit of the Vatican Council II and the synod of the Bishops, the Jesuits through to 32nd general communication in Rome in 1975 also issued the promotion of justice. It should be considered as landmark in the theological awakening of the Indian Church to concretize liberation that forces in the context of Indian situation with special reference to Tamil Nadu sociological milieu.

Formation of Social Action and BCC

Social Realities in Tamil Nadu
- Caste oppression
- Untouchability
- Emergence of peoples movement

Internal factors in Kottar Diocese
- Caste Difference
- Religious fundamentation
- Reaction

External Sources of inspiration
- Vatican II
- Liberation muggy organization of church communion

C. Basic Christian Communities in the New Testament

They have their origins in the itinerant community that trod the dusty roads of Palestine with Jesus Christ. The early Christians formed after the first Pentecost became the foundation of the theme of Basic Christian Communities.\(^{47}\) Act II in the Bible words 42 to 47 mentioned the common people who believed Christ gathered to gather as a common property. They lived and loved each other. The common bond they developed was both for spiritual and temporal purpose.\(^{48}\) Most of the people, who believed Jesus, were of one heart and soul. Neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own. But they had all things in common. They sold land and house and brought everything and laid before the pastel Peter.\(^{49}\) There are number of texts in the Bible reflecting the Joys and sorrows, sufferings and struggles of the early Christians. There are scholars who felt that Christ had left an organized church to us with a strong authority. At the same time, the fourth Gospel of John reflected a community of people attached to Jesus Chris. Irrespective of various views on the model of the early church, church as community or


\(^{48}\) Holy Bible, Act. II words from 42 – 47.

\(^{49}\) Holy Bible, Act III words 32 – 37.
people of God is strongly represented. Where authority is emphasized it is clear in tended to be dominating rather is to be understood as service.

The early Christians sat to-gather in the church and worshipped God as one group with a common bond in Jerusalem.\(^5\) Where ever they went, they proclaimed the good news to the people.\(^5\) Paul with his companion went to different places to meet the small Christian Communities.\(^5\) The early apostles also walked with the common people for their livelihood and preached to them.\(^3\) Hard life and presentation met with made them to be stronger in faith. It influenced the small Christian Communities to be stronger in their faith and conviction. It was a people centered approach. So the faithful met in homes. There were no churches as we see today. Since Christians met in homes and it was there they got the experience of the intimate group. But there was also the pre-occupation of bringing the small communities together on occasion so as to get the equally important experience of being a communion of communities. The temple in

\(^3\) Holy Bible, Act VIII words 4.
\(^3\) Holy Bible, Act XVIII words 19 – 28.
\(^3\) Holy Bible, Act XVIII words 1 – 11.
Jerusalem was an early meeting point and at Antioch. Later the Acts tell as all the people being gathered together in one place.\(^{54}\)

Of course the communitarian thrust of the church was inspired by the example of Jesus. He formed a community of disciples consisting of men and women around himself for preaching good news. One of the lessons that he must have absorbed was the efficiency of the group. It is not surprising that we find him adopting the strategy of the small community in his own minority. Sometimes there is a perception that everything went on without-hurdles. By no means, and if we think our times are difficult, theirs were still more so. The early church and Christian dealt with a host of troubles. But the way by which they jogged ahead from the very struggle and sufferings seems spontaneous. Indeed they were a source of encouragement for us in dealing with conformation and conflict today.\(^{55}\)

For three centuries from Christ to Constantine (288 to 337 A.D) the church was communication. But after the conversion of Constantine to Christianity, the church model had become hierarchical.\(^{56}\) Here we see the church adapting to survive. The survival of the fittest norm had made the

\(^{54}\) James O’ Halloran, *op. cit.*, p. 15.


church universal through not the Roman Empire. The church coated to be harassed and Christianity becomes the favored religion of the empire. It was fashionable to be a Christian and the church greatly increased in number in the fourteen centaury bishops were installed as public officials. This was the birth of the Church which became hierarchical and strongly institutional. The communitarian vision faded away. The neighborhood community or house church, ceased to exist and the four was placed on structures.

Through the vision of the church as community faded, it was never entirely lost. We found the community model in different congregation of the church has insisted this factor. Having gone through the emergence of the Christian communities and the natural death it has, for many details tell as the need for the revival of the model of the small Christian Communities. The church had a history with ups and downs. The perspectives and the vision of the church depended upon very much as the shoulders of the Popes and Bishops. The invasions of the Barbarian over Roman empire was a severe threat to the church. The western Roman Empire almost cleared to exist. Again with the arrival of institution and

57. Ibid.
59. Weech, op. cit., p. 244.
clergy, man gene the hieratical a revival. But the onslaught thy faced from the Islam and the loss of Jesus Salem to the Muslims was another severe blow.\textsuperscript{60} The crusades fought for the redemption of Jerusalem was a sad. Hence, once after another church faced severe threat. Unfortunately Rome was still firm and hierarchy. The Renaissance and Reformation movements made church to loose a good member of Christians and protestant movement gained an upperhand.\textsuperscript{61} In the midst of this peril, the church passed in to the package system. The papacy straggled hares to relieve from the temporal ordeals it faced over centuries to-gather unwitting to take lessons from the past, the church trotted through the madly path of hierarchy until Vatican II of 1962-1965.

**D. Evaluation of Basic Christian Communities in and outside India**

It was in Latin America especially in Brazil 1956, Started the movement for the Basic Christian Communities. It is true that necessity is the mother of invention. In a Christmas day at Brazil in a church there was no priest to celebrate the mass. This led some people to think about a movement of the people instead of priest centered. It was Dom Angelo Rossi, started a community catechetical movement in Brazil from which

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{60}] *Ibid*, p. 245.
\item[\textsuperscript{61}] James O’ Halloran, *op. cit.*, p. 18.
\end{itemize}
emerged small communities. This movement spread in all Latin American States. The Latin American Bishops encouraged this movement. The main pre-occupation of the communities in Latin America had been justice and peace, the option with the poor, and the option with youth. Irrespective of the political oppression by the military regime of the Latin America, the Christian Communities badly waged a crusade against them.

Small Christian Communities were found in many places in United States. There were English and Spanish speaking groups. They wanted to change the social order through their communities. In 1993, a conference of the Basic Christian Communities of North America took place. The participants at the convention exchanged experiences. They noted their origins as movement such as RENEW and RCIA. In their struggle with cultural problems, the Small Christian Communities in the United States and Synod has much to say to the next of the world. BCCs are not simply movement or association of the church, but rather a new way of living as

church. They wanted a life of faith, love, liberation and justice to be the motive of all structures. We can find a five fold shift. A shift from hierarchy to people, from formality to informality, from general to local community, from theological abstraction to living witness, from ignorance to enlightenment.  

With regard to Africa, the Basic Christian Communities began to start from 1971 onwards. In 1980, most African countries had been independent. People were very happy with this raw found freedom. But in due course people found that native rulers also expressed them. In this movement the church played a vital role. In Kenya, the Bishops supported the course of the people to face oppression. In Zambia, the Basic Christian Communities made a revolution to change a one party rule in to a multiparty rule. In South Africa, more than ten thousand Basic Christian Communities here and there. An interesting feature of the African Small Christian Communities are that they are well organized with the main stream of the church. Original inspiration for this came from the bishops not from the people. It is true to say the Basic Christian Communities were

68. Maria Joseph, op. cit., p. 11.
69. Ibid., p. 17.
aware of their political and social need and rights. They were no longer the pawns of the political cheers board. People acted as men of awareness.

In Asia, we have to trace the origin of the Basic Christian Communities on the basis of the religion, economic and cultural factors. Most of the religion originated in Asia. In Philippines, the issues were poverty, oppression, cultural alienation, serial exploitation, environmental abuse and a crying need for land reform. Religious sisters made a great contribution to organize Basic Christian Communities to bring down the oppressive Marco’s regime.\textsuperscript{70}

The story of Small Christian Communities in China is truly amazing.\textsuperscript{71} Every body thought that Maoism would have presented everything. But our churches prevailed in many places.\textsuperscript{72} In Pakistan, Silica, Australia and New Zealand and other countries in Asia the smaller communities were also found. There were sufficient movements among the people in Australia. Australian society is one of the most secularized in the world. They face evils of materialism also. It was very difficult to build Small Christian Communities there. Yet some headway was made. But

\textsuperscript{70} Joseph Prasad Pinto, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 166.
\textsuperscript{72} James O’ Halloran, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 28.
New Zealand was better. The Small Christian Communities emerged in larger extent.\textsuperscript{73}

In Europe also the Small Christian Communities survived especially in Eastern Europe. Irrespective of communist philosophy in Eastern Europe also Small Christian Communities survived. The fall of Berlin wall in 1989, was argument the growth of Small Christian Communities in Germany. In France also after Vatican II, the vision of the church has been changed. There were member of European seminary where held to spread up the formation of the Smaller Christian Communities. The Small Christian Communities go against the prevailing culture. It helped to promote non-violence and create a culture to respect environment etc.\textsuperscript{74}

\textbf{E. Basic Christian Community in India}

In India, Christianity forms only an insignificant minority of the Indian population next to Philippines, they are not evenly distributed.\textsuperscript{75} The origin of Christianity in India goes back to the days of St. Thomas.\textsuperscript{76} The Christian communities grew in the faith in Kodungallure, Quilon and

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid., pp. 32 – 33.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., p. 38.
\textsuperscript{75} Joseph Prasad Pinto, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 182.
Cape Comorin.\textsuperscript{77} From 5\textsuperscript{th} to 15\textsuperscript{th} century A.D, Christianity flourished in many places in India.\textsuperscript{78} Since then Christianity began to flourish in the Portuguese settlements. The Jesuits under the Portuguese system laid a strong formation through the principle inculturation.\textsuperscript{79}

The idea of BCCs is not something new. The church existed small communities since its inception. However with the spread of Christianity in India, the administration of the church got centralized and bureaucratized.\textsuperscript{80} It was in Mumbai, the actual concept of BCCs started. The method was explained to the people through the awareness programmes.\textsuperscript{81} In 1981, National seminar was organized in Bangalore with 104 participants. A Peril number was edited called Basic Christian Communities.\textsuperscript{82} The council of Bishops held at Nasik in 1991 adopted a programme of action throughout India.

The theology which underpins the BCC project in India was on the basis of the outcome of Vatican II. Lay people, however must find their

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., pp. 67 - 115
\textsuperscript{80} Ibid, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{81} Joseph Prasad Pinto, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 113.
\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.
legitimate place in the church, in planning, decision making and apostolic involvement. The potentiality of women was to be recognized. The vitality and enthusiasm of the youth are recognized and encouraged. Once the Basic Communities are accepted as a model, church ministries can never remain as before. Spirituality is understood as the total development of the person. The Basic Community is not a prayer group but a life centered group where prayer must be intertwined.83

**F. Basic Christian Community in Tamil Nadu**

As noted already, Christianity originated in Tamil Nadu from the days of St. Thomas in the first century A.D. The spread of Christianity in Kanyakumari, and Mylapore in the first century A.D. is a fact based on tradition.84 It was after arrival of Portuguese, the missionary work started in a large scale in Tamil Nadu.85 The conversion of the Paravars in 1583 and missionary work of St. Francis Xavier had influenced upon the inland portion of Tamil country.86 The spread of Christianity in the inland was a challenge. The Jesuits took it as a mission objective to spread Christianity in the interior. The Jesuits opened a new mission at Madurai in 1595 for

85.  Cyril Bruce Firth, *An Introduction to Indian Church History*, Madras, 1968, p. 3.
the purpose of the conversion of the inland people. But the height caste people did not accept Christianity since they thought that it was the religion of the parangis. The stigma attached to Christianity as parangi margum could not be digested by the Jesuits.

Nobile first created an impression that Christianity was not the religion of foreigners. As he was sure of the Indian ways of Gospel work, giving importance to the circumstances of the country, place, language and different mentalities and personal temperaments, he hardly entered in to the process of inculturation. As per the programmes, the Christian faith was to be planted by adopting the culture and religious tradition of the local community. It is also called ‘adoption’ since the term retired to external adjustment of accommodation to culture without integrating the inner values of contacting culture with the Christian Values. The concept of inculturation envisages that the Christian message has to be presented in its own local cultural context. Jesuit vision of Gospel work was to spread

87. Ibid., p. 70.
88. The word parangis had a strange history. It was applied to Christians, since they followed the customs of Portuguese.
89. Sundararaj, T., op. cit., p. 71.
90. Sailiere, The Life of Fr. Robert De Nobili, Shenbeganar Archives Manuscript, p. 35.
92. Sundararaj, T., op. cit., p. 70.
Christianity by any means. Hence, the indianization programme of the Jesuits was partially successful. The division of the Tamil Jesuits into Brahmin sanyasis and pandarasamys gained many souls. At the time, it did not dismantle the caste ridden society but concerned it. The Basic Christian Community system was a catered development in the 20th century.

In Tamil Nadu under the RENEW programme, the Archbishop of Madurai introduced the system of Basic Human Communities in the churches. In all dioceses the experts from other countries came and met the Bishops, priests and sisters and gave orientation on Basic Christian Community concept. On the basis in 1989, training programmes were arranged in Madurai and contacted laity.93 Orientation was given through continuous training, preparation, bulletins, hand books and brochures. As a result, the concept of Basic Christian Communities began to put in to action in 1992.94 In Tamil Nadu, there was another programme called ‘New life 2000’ comprised of ten principles such as to love, to be patiente, to proclaim good news to everybody, to make everybody to participle, to start from the house, to pray in victory, to have faith in God, to pray for holy spirit, to work together and to work for the church.95 The traditional

93.  Ibid., p. 71.
94.  Ibid., p. 71.
church is hierarchical and priest centered. But the community based church is to be democratic and people centered. The efforts of the Tamil Nadu Bishops and the priests began to breed fruits. The Tamilians usually passive in nature did not understand the true spirit of the principles of Basic Christian Communities when they were introduced. The new freedom given to the laity in organization and administration were turned by the clergy. Irrespective of the passive and their involvement were master minded by the clergy. Any acceptation of the right of the laity was blocked by the common principles which were not unknown to the laity. The BCCs are the nice concepts but rarely its spirit is understood by the takers of the programme. Perhaps this would take time to take off for the benefit of the laity. The vision of BCCs in Tamil Nadu is to form witnessing, active and sable communities based on the Word of God according to the guidance and the vision statement of Tamil Nadu Bishop’s Council, the teachings of the Universal Church.

The objectives of the BCCs are - to facilitate Bishops to have Diocesan Pastoral Priority for BCC, - to stress about BCC to Parish Priests,
Religious Communities, and those in Seminaries and formation centres. – to form animators, facilitators, coordinators to animate BCC with right focus, - to consult and corroborate with diocesan directors for encouraging Diocesan, Vicariate, Parish level co-ordinations, - to have New Ministries for the stability of witnessing communities such as BCC formators, promoters and volunteers, - to form a resource, research and documentation centre which can be an Institute for Lay Ministers and - to form a cultural team for promotion of BCC.  

The renowned church historians emphatically predicted, ‘The Church of the future will be built from below by basic communities as a result of free initiative and association’.  


Though the church provides this setup, the clergy by and large did not like the laity to enjoy the fruits of the concept of the Basic Christian Communities in many parts of India and Tamil Nadu. Its actual formation and application in the Kottar Diocese of Kanyakumari district is an interesting and inspiring phase in the history of the Basic Christian Communities of the world.

102. BCCs have become the pastoral programmes in many dioceses in India, such as Kottar, Bombay, Chennai, Lain Diocese of Trivandrum, Neyyatinkara, Thoothukudi etc. BCCs are also formed in many individual parishes under the care of the Jesuits throughout India, Personal Interview with Rev. Fr. Edwin, M. J., aged 69, Founder of Anbiam in Kottar Diocese, dated 27 March 2011.