Chapter - II

THE CATHOLIC MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN AMRAVATI REGION.
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The diocese of Amravati, created by the Decree 'Cum Petierit' dated May 8th 1955, was formally a part of the Archdiocese of Nagpur. It comprised four districts of Vidarbha, viz., Amravati, Akola, Yeotmal and Buldhana and the three districts of Marathwada viz. Aurangabad, Parbhani and Nanded.

By another Decree 'Patescit Unique' dated May 8, 1955, Pope Pius XII appointed the Rt.Rev.Joseph Rosario, msfs, the first Bishop of Amravati.

On January 23, 1978, the three districts of Marathwada were separated from Amravati Diocese to form Aurangabad Diocese.¹

The Chikalda Mission:

A small town of 35,000 people situated 50 kms North of Amravati, at the foot of the satpura mountains, ELLICHPUR was an important centre of Civil and Military administration, and for the several decades had a Goan Catholic community. A chapel and a presbytery were built in 1858 and the station was visited from Aurangabad or from Amravati. Fr.Raymond was the first
resident priest in 1892, succeeded by Fr. Bonnevie in 1893 and Fr. Souchon in 1896.

A convent was opened by the Holy Cross Sisters on February 15, 1892. 3 sisters managed a Marathi School, a dispensary and visited the town and villages, bringing relief to the sick and the poor. This convent was closed down in 1902 but reopened in 1916.

Fr. Bonnevie, ministering the local Catholics, was their chaplain. The hot climate of Ellichpur during the summer months was very trying for the Sisters who often fell ill. An English Doctor, Dr. Wartabet, who admired their devotion, suggested that they establish a holiday house on the Chikalda hills which enjoy a cooler climate. The Doctor was friend of the Deputy Commissioner of Ellichpur, Mr. Biddulph, and requested him to grant land for the Sisters in Chikalda. The answer was favourable and Mother Veronica sent an official request to Mr. Diddulph. Fr. Bonnevie took charge of the case and obtained the land for the Mission. In November 1894, Mr. Bagshaw conservator of forests, went with Fr. Bonnevie to Chikalda to delimit the land granted. He chose a large tract on the plateau near Bir Talao, a water pond, limited on the West and North by the Sambadon Road. Later on, a new Deputy Commissioner, Mr. Godwin Austine, found the grant too
extensive and gave the western part of the land to Captain Hendricks.

Fr. Bonnevie went to Chikalda in 1895 and with Mr. Bagshaw's help, built a hut about 40 feet long to take possession of the land named 'Crossland'. In July, he planted 200 coffee plants.

Fr. Bonnevie was transferred to Aurangabad in 1896 and replaced at Ellichpur by Fr. Souchon.²

Chikalda Mission - 1896-1907:

Chikalda is 96 kms distant from Amravati. From Ellichpur a winding road climbs through the mountains and forests for 46 kms. to reach the Chikalda plateau, passing from 900 feet above sea level to 2,500 feet. The difference in altitude results in a much cooler climate appreciated during the summer months. Dominating the Berar plains on the South, it is surrounded by mountains, ravines, narrow valleys and a sprawling reserved forest, the domain of Tigers, panthers, bears and a variety of game, from Sambhars to wild peacocks. Several coffee plantations surround the bungalows built by the British who come there in summer. In the forest of the Melghat range are found villages of tribals, Kurkus and Nehals.
The Kurkus:

Belonging to a tribe spread in the central part of the Satpura mountains, the Kurkus are closely related to the Mundas of Chota Nagpur, by race and language. Numbering about 200,000, they are of strong build, dark skin and heavy features. Their religion is a kind of animism with a special cult for the dead. They worship their own Gods, in addition to the locally venerated Hindu Gods, like Mahadeo. Originally shifting cultivators, they are fairly industrious cultivators, supplementing their diet with jungle fruits, fishing and hunting. They also cut and cart timber from the forest. The Kurkus are considered to be of good caste, like the Kunbis. They have at their services another tribe the Nehals, who are the outcasts of the Melghat, village servants like the Mahars of the Berar plains. Whilst the Kurkus are more independent and trustworthy and better cultivators, the Nehals are less dependable and more accustomed to nomadic life than to regular work. Education was practically unknown among these tribes.

Fr. Benistrand in 1873 had attempted the evangelisation of a Kurku village. His efforts did not succeed, but his prayers and sacrifice bore fruits thirty years later.
Arrival of the sisters - 1897:

Fr. Francis Sage came to Chikalda in 1896 and built the Crossland bungalow for Sisters, from 1st April to 6th June, all expenses being paid by the Chavanod Mother house. A few months later he was called to open the Thana residence and orphanage.

On that year 1897, a severe famine afflicted C.P. and Berar. Several Kurku families came for assistance to the Ellichpur Sisters. They were kept for some time and given religious instruction. Later sent to Chikalda they were sheltered in the big hut built by Fr. Bonnevie. Other families came, 15 in all, and during their holidays the Sisters were bust catechizing them. The Sisters began a school without much success, as the children were more at home running in the forest than confined to class rooms. They kept an orphanage for girls and gave religious instruction to girls due to get married to christian boys, a patient apostolate which slowly bore fruits.

Mariampur Village - 1898:

When the Sisters went back to Amravati, Sr. Mary and Sr. Seraphine were left in charge of the station and of the numerous famine people under instruction. Fr. Souchon, residing at Ellichpur came to Chikalda twice
a month. Through his personal influence with Mr. Bagshaw, the Forest Conservator, he obtained from the reserve Forest along the Amjheri Valley 130 acres of good land, to settle these families as cultivators. A convenient spot was selected at the heart of the valley, half way between Mennar and Katkahali, for the village of the converts. It was called Mariampur, and was occupied in June 1898.4

Mariampur Chapel - 1899:

Fr. Souchon built a chapel near the Village, at the junction of the Sembado and Amjheri roads. Mr. Bagshaw made the plan and Fr. Coppel, on a visit Chikalda, helped Fr. Souchon in tracing the foundations. Begun in 1898, it was blessed by Bishop Pelvat on June 21, 1899. Sr. Seraphine with her orphan boys and girls worked hard in bringing the building materials.

Sr. Sophie Descombès came to Chikalda in March 1898. She studied the Kurku language and mastered it within a few months.

She was able to compose a small Kurku grammar book, by end of 1898, a dictionary and to translate into Kurku the small Hindi catechism used in the Nagpur Mission.
Fr Ernest Thevenent
1874–1951
Famine of 1899-1900:

Another severe famine broke out in the whole of India in 1899 and 1900. Famine relief works and camps were started by the Government. A famine camp was established at Mariampur and entrusted to the holy cross sisters who faced hard work till August 1900, looking after more than 200 inmates. They took care of the sick, fed the hungry and gave religious instruction to those willing to learn the prayers. The total number of Christians rose above 200.

Efforts to build up the Mission - 1900:

Fr. Ernest Thevenet, who was in Amravati, replacing Fr. Dunoyer who had gone to France for a change, was sent to Chikalda in February 1900 and Fr. Souchon went to Amravati. On account of the many Kurku converts, Chikalda became the residence of the priest and Ellichpur was visited once a month. Fields, bullocks, carts and advances had been given to the Kurku and Nehal new Christians to enable them to be self-supporting. Bishop Pelvat came in May 1900 to see them at work. Bros. Alexis and John Mary came with him to supervise the field work. There was no residence for the priest at Mariampur. The Bishop had some bamboo mats placed around the back verandah of the Mariampur chapel and dwelt therewith Fr. Thevenet, Bros. Alexis and John Mary
whole month of May. During his stay, he used to write 10 letters a day, requesting help for the famine stricken. He found out that the tribals were lazy and stubborn, not accustomed to regular work, all disappearing in the forests on Mondays, their favourite day for hunting and fishing. Yet, he advised kindness towards them, as the only way to bring about a change.

At the end of May, Bishop Pelvat went back to Nagpur with Bro. Alexis and Bro. John Mary was lest as incharge of the fields. All the fields were cleared of Stones and Brambles, protected from the floods by embankments, then distributed amount 12 families. In July Bro. John Mary was replaced by Bro. James Gatti. The same year, on 23rd July, Bishop Pelvat died in Nagpur and on 16th August, Bro. John Mary died in Amravati.5

Foundation of Kamapur - 1901 :

As land was not sufficient for all, a few families were taken to Kamapur, a deserted village seven miles away, the new Christians, mostly Nehals, proved a failure as cultivators. Within a few years, the bullocks had died and the carts were broke. Among the families of real Kurkus, only three remained, the others went back to their villages and were readmitted to their caste after paying fine. The Nehals, who had no caste to lose, remained as a rule faithful to christianity.
The few families remaining at Mariampur became the Mission servants, working in the coffee plantation or in two fields kept by the fathers.

The two large fields kept to grow wheat and gram were a source of annoyance rather than income. Fr. Probst, in 1913 returned them to the forest department.

Purchase of Bungalows - 1899-1916:

In 1899, Bishop Pelvat purchased the Raven's Wood Estate of 21 acres, of which 4 acres were planted with coffee trees, with three bungalows, Raven's Wood, Mulhatam and Hayaden Cottages. He paid Rs.14,000/-. His intention was to provide a regular income for the support of the Kurku Mission and work for the new christians. Three years later, Bishop Crochet bought the bungalow 'Mon Caprice' and 14 acres for Rs.4,500/- in 1916. Craigmore and Fulview with 10 acres were acquired by Bishop Coppel. The coffee plantation was gradually extended to 25 acres. The income from the bungalows was surer and greater, but it was also a source of annoyance and trouble for the Father in charge.
Priest's residence in Mariampur - 1901:

As the bungalows on the plateau were reserved for tenants, Fr. Thevenet added three rooms to the Mariampur chapel and began residing there permanently in 1901. Bro. James Gatti assisted him in supervising the field work and coffee plantation. The poor Brother's patience was put to severe test by the lazy and independent ways of his workers. He had to summon all his spirit of faith and self sacrifice in order to bear up for years as he did.

In February 1903, Fr. Thevenet went to reside in Ellichpur where he opened a Mission among the Mahars of the region. His successors in Chikalda were Fr. John Exartier, 1903, Fr. Peter Probst, 1904, Fr. Louis Bonnevie 1905-1913, Fr. Probst 1913-1915, till July 1915 when Fr. E. Thevenet returned to Chikalda.

Fr. Bonnevie, who replaced Fr. Probst in 1905, continued to stay in Mariampur for 3 years, but as the number of christians decreased in the village, he left the place which had become very lonely and took up residence in Hayaden Cottage. From 1908, the Mariampur bungalow was abandoned and Hayaden Cottage was the presbytery till March 1922.8
The Ellichpur Mission - 1902:

The Ellichpur Mission started in a most unexpected manner. In November 1902, Carlo, a Kurku Christian, deserted his wife and sought employment in Berar. According to rumours, the fugitive was hiding in Akot, a small town, 70 miles from the mountains Fr. Ernest Thevenet, the missionary of the Kurkus resolved to trace Carlo and bring him back. He left Chikaldia in a bullock cart, and though suffering from severe bilious attack, went on towards Akot. During his halts at night fall, he visited the mahars of the villages he passed through. As a young priest, he had worked for some time among the same village servants in Ghogargaon Mission and was now naturally attracted towards them. His sympathetic manner and his venerable appearances appealed to these people who opened up their hearts to him. They complained about the treatment their children were living at school, and some villages favoured the idea, tactfully put forward by the priest, of starting Mahar schools under Mission control.

In search of pastures new, Fr. Thevenet found Akot, but not Carlo. In the 'hide and seek' game, the good missionary, betrayed by his soutan and long beard, came out second best. On his way back he visited more villages, and the same questions obtained the same answers. The hour of God seemed to have come for the
Mahars of Berar. The good Father prayed and made plans, plan worthy of his grand Uncle Fr. John Thevenet, our great builder and pioneer. On his returned to Chikalda, he sent a detailed account of his tour to Crochet and recommended the opening of a mission at Ellichpur. He also sought the advice and guidance of Fr. Jacquier. The Bishop have his consent and blessing to the venture and directed Fr. Jacquier to give all help he could.  

The veteran missionary of Ghogargaon showed himself equal to the occasion and promised every help to his former assistant. Without any delay he sent to Ellichpur Nathoo Raphael, his head catechist to tour the Berar villages and on a favourable report from him, he ordered seven of his most reliable masters to proceed at once to Fr. Thevenet's side. The Ellichpur pioneer greeted his Ghogargaon staff at the Akola Railway Station and on 10th March 1903, the spiritual drive began. The party occupied several Chikalda carts driven by Chikalda Kurkus and a long journey began across the plains of berar. Fr. Thevenet was ahead and we may well picture the late Fr. Benistrand gently smiling over the heavy clouds of dust raised by the running bullocks. From Akot onwards, masters were appointed and settled in huts which had either been rented or lent for the new schools.  

On the last day, the priest and Daniel, one of the
masters, reached Ellichpur, the centre of the new Mission.

The settling down of the spiritual undertaking was now a question of time. Some schools had to be closed through apathy of dissensions, but many villages, which had been at first neglected gave unexpected consolation. The policy was to work on large scale and non-Catholic Mahars were at times roped into fill up the gap. Pandu of Akot was one of the first to ask for Baptism, and before the close to the year, Fr. Thevenet reckoned 40 baptisms, almost as many bilious attacks, and many more trials and disappointments. He was not a man to be lost in details, but remains practical and recollected. On the advice of Fr. Jacquier and to prepare for the future, he opened a training school for catechists. The 10 to 15 boys he collected for the purpose taxed his patience to the utmost. They were not amenable to discipline, they signed for the cotton fields they had left behind and bodily ran away on several occasions.10

Besides his home troubles, the missionary soon noticed that a feeling of apathy spreading in the villages. No headway could be made and there was talk of transferring his assistant Fr. Decisier to Ghogargaon, where better results could be obtained to Crown it all, the leader among the Mahars called a meeting in a
village close to Ellichpur, to out-caste those among them who were sending their children to Catholic schools. The meeting took place on the 24th May 1905 and was attended by 3000 Mahars. The christian party argued well, but was in a great minority. Fr.Thevenet prayed with confidence to Mary help of christians, whose feast was kept on that day. A great storm burst out, followed by heavy rains, and the meeting dispersed sine die.\textsuperscript{11}

A Request for a Slide Projector :

Fr.Ernest Thevenet was a man of great zeal, searching for better means to present the faith. I began last month a series of instructions on the christian religion. But in these big meetings, it is difficult for our poor Mahars to give constant attention. Protestant preachers enlived their talks with an harmonium, playing hymns and music pieces to keep up the interest of their audience. The Franciscan Brothers at Khandwa use a magic lanten showing slides on the bible. The Audience see with their eyes what they are taught and keep attentive through the interest for a show so new to them. Thus, I thought of getting a slides projector. Bishop Bonaventure approves my project, but we would not get such a projector in India. I have recourse to you to procure for me in France a
good and sturdy slides projector which I can carry about in my village tours. (Fr.E. Thevenet to Fr. Chevallier, Ellichpur, 9.5.1905). 12

Fr. Thevenet receives an assistant - 1905:

Fr. Eugene Decisier from Savoy, who had arrived in India on 14-12-1900 and completed his theology in Nagpur Seminary, was ordained priest on July 25, 1905, appointed to Ellichpur Mission, he was a zealous helper to Fr. Thevenet who wrote to Fr. Bouvard in December 1906: "Dear Father Decisier is now bearing half the load of the Mission. With an incomparable good will and ability, he has in a short time mastered the missionary skills. He speaks Marathi and Hindi, has a good grasp of local customs and knowledge of medicine. Within a year he was able to take charge of the work. I praise the Lord for having sent me such a good and valiant confrere whose help I needed all the more since my health is not too good."13 (Fr. Thevenet to Fr. Bouvard, Chikalda 14.12.1906).

In a letter to Europe, Fr. Decisier writes: "The Ellichpur Mission forms a circle 50 kms in diameter. The town of Ellichpur where we have our head quarters is not the centre but on the outer circle. Our christians number about 400. We have thousands sympathizers, but also a majority of opponents who intimidate the would be
converts. We have to struggle to conquer prejudices. Every month, one of us makes a tour of the village, 12 to 15 days spent in checking the work of the schools, distributing medicines, listening to complains; scolding people. This life suits me perfectly. Unfortunately I am not yet able to speak marathi fluently, but this facility will come with practice.

Fr. Thevenet is for me the ideal missionary. He works too hard to last long. Just now he is in Chikalda to cure his lame left leg. I shall go to Nagpur for the Retreat. Bishop Clare and Fr. Rossillon are expected on 6th January (17-12-1906) Fr. Decisier, Ellichpur.\textsuperscript{14}

**Bold Steps Forward - 1907:**

Inspite of the hard work, during the year 1906, there was a lull in the conversions. People were hesitant to join. But in January 1907 an epidemic of plague broke out. The dire disease struck terror in the hearts of the Mahars and they flocked to the Fathers for protection. They were convinced that these men of God could preserve them from the plague. The good medicines distributed in time, especially the painting of plague buboes with pure carbolic acid, a drastic remedy but very effective, found by Fr. Decisier, saved many people from certain death and contributed in giving the Fathers that wonderful reputation.
On all sides, Mahars from new villages came to ask for schools. Then began a great movement of conversions February 1907, 27 children baptized at Lannegaon, 3 miles from Kapustalni and 17 children enrolled in the school.

-5th March at 1907 - at Pandree, 30 baptism and 20 children enrolled.

-25th March - at Borale, 19 baptisms and 14 children enrolled.

-March - Fr. Decisier baptized 23 children at lakar. 11 mahars were struck with plague and all recovered under Father's treatment.

-7th April, 19 baptisms at Anthora, and the whole village joining the catechumanate.

-16th April, 23 children baptized at Malkapur.

-21st April, 35 children baptized at Natsona.

The old villages are moving too:

The good example set by the new villages shook off the apathy of the old villages which had been stationary for two years. They yielded a good harvest of baptisms. 40 at Bandaraj, 38 at Kapustalni, 37 at Sategaon, 40 at
Chowsala, 24 at Pathrot, 16 at Beegaon, 18 at Naigaon, 27 at Umree, 17 at Kokalda, 6 at Akoli. Altogether the number of baptisms from January to April 1907 went up to 520.15.

A day in the life of the missionary:

In a letter to bishop Bonaventure, Fr. E. Thevenet describes how is spent an ordinary day during his village tours. "My Lord, I went from Ellichpur on 8th January for a tour of the villages and returned on the 23rd, 15 well filled days, I spent a full day each village. Here is my daily programme.

Early morning, I celebrate mass, with the catechist, the school children: catechism, bible history, reading and dictation in Marathi, arithmetic, all subjects are reviewed after the mass.

Then for 3 hours distribution of medicines. It's a hard but consoling task which drew the sympathy of the village people. My mobile dispensary is hardly open before sick people around it. They know by experience that father is good to the poor, his medicines are effective and free of cost. They surround me and bring pressure from all sides. Each want's to be served first. "Father, give me medicine for itch, as I am full of it". "Father, relieve me of this rheumatism that has

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been tormenting me for years". "Father, groans a distressed mother, "deliver my daughter from leprosy, as it drives away all her suitors and so on. You can imagine 50 people calling at the same time in diverse tones to draw my attention. It's rather irritating and one has to make efforts to keep patience.

I make them understand that they will all be helped in time and must take turns in proper order. From 9.00 a.m. to 12 noon, it's a dismal procession of all human miseries, people suffering from itch, scabies, fever, drowsy, sore eyes, T.B., Leprosy and even the plague at times. To each of them I give some doses of medicine, with a few words of advice and encouragement. All go away satisfied, praising God for the kindness of the Father towards the poor.16

How grateful are the people for the relief received last month. At my arrival at Bandaraj, a woman came with her son, a young man of twenty, prostrated in front of me to kiss my feet. I raised her up, asking why she acted thus. She replied: "My son was about to die with pleurisy which local doctors could not cure. You nursed him and he is now cured. you are really our Father".

How many plague stricken have been cure with my tablets of quinine and creosote. My poor Mahars were so
well preserved from the plague that a rumour went through the villages that Father could control the scourge: "you see how the Mahars who follow, Fathers were not touched by plague whilst others are dying of it." Through care for the bodies we can reach the souls. During my recent tour, I gave medicines to 700 people. As I go out every month, about 8,400 people receive medicines from me in the course of the year. The cost these medicines affects my purse. I spent more than Rs.300/- in medicines this year. At present, my 15 schools use up all my resources and I may not be able to keep my dispensary unless I receive help from charitable souls.17

Coming back to my programme, I close my dispensary at 12 noon. After lunch, I take the road to the next village whilst praying my Breviary. My bulls well rested run along gingerly and I reach the village before night fall. As soon as the children see me, they start shouting: Father alle, Father alle. (Father has come) Then people came and wish me, "Jai Christ".

We enter the school. All kneel and pray the Rosary for the mission and its benefactors. A hymn is sung, followed by night prayers. It's the end of the day for the school children.
But my work is not over. My most important task remains, talk on religion. It's 7.00 p.m. My poor Mahars have returned from their fields. It's the only time when we can meet them and speak to them. After their night meal, they gather and the conference begins. The conference, comparing the two religions, Christian and Hindi is called in Marathi 'Dharmatulla' i.e. the weighing of the religions. I show how the Christian religion could be practiced in the true sense of the term. The audience approves but people are not converted hereby, as caste obstacles come in the way, but the minds are thus opened to the Christian faith and may turn to it when the time comes. My day is now over to take a well deserved rest.”

The Plague Epidemic - 1906:

The plague is raging in our mission for the second time. 1000 people died in Akot. It is now in Akoli, where already 18 Mahars died. When it reached the village, I advised my Mahars to quit the village, as no medicine can be of use in place of infected by the epidemic. There was a division among the Mahars. Half of them well disposed towards our faith, listen to me, left their huts and went to stay away in the fields. The other half refused to move and they received a fakir who claimed that he could preserve them from the plague.
provided they paid Rs.2/- per house. One of the Mahars, Mahadu, even persuaded the others that they should not take any medicines. Within a month, 18 of them died and Mahadu lost 3 children. None of those who listened to me contracted the disease.

How many scenes of desolation we had to witness. In Akoli, a poor widow and her son 15 years old were stricken. No one to help them. My school master Michael began nursing them with great devotion, going thrice a day to give them care, food and medicines and he saved their lives.19

In another house of the same village, two widows living together fell ill. One died. Two days later, I visited the village and went with the master Michael to see them. We opened the door, a terrible stench made us hesitate to enter. One of the two was dead and the other in a painful state. We entered and brought help to the poor woman, who was cured by good care of Michael master.

Out of 15 villages, 13 were affected by the plague. In all these villages, our school masters showed an admirable zeal in nursing the sick. They were convinced that God would protect them and their families. They were not disappointed, blessed by divine Providence which protected them and my nascent mission.
of Akoli. The plague has just reached Chowsala and will touch other villages. May charitable souls helped me to bring relief to those poor plague stricken people". (Fr.Thevenet to Bishop Bonaventure. Chikalda, 10-2-1906).

Changes in Mission Personnel - 1907:

On 15th September 1907, Fr. Francis Stephen Coppel was consecrated Bishop of Nagpur. Soon after the consecration, the Bishop transferred Fr. Decisier to the Khandwa mission. He was replaced by Fr. Francis Xavier Collaco, a newly ordained priest from a well known catholic family of Nagpur.

Fr. Thevenet was sent on leave to France, to repair his health shattered by bilious attacks and incessant labours. He left on February 9th, 1908 and remained a year in France. Fr. Louis Bonnevie was called from Chikalda to assist Fr. Collaco.

On 29th March, Bishop Coppel gave confirmation to 142 catholics of Ellichpur Mission, assisted by Fr. Jacquier, Fr. Bonnevie Fr. Decisier and Fr. Collaco. They held a meeting to consider the future of the Mission. Fr. Michael Forel, the assistant at Ghogargaon was appointed in charge of Ellichpur with Fr. Collaco. He arrived after Easter 1908 and Fr. Bonnevie returned to Chikalda.20

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Holy Cross Sisters at Amravati:

The Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales had been working in India for 40 years when they asked the help of their sister congregation, the Holy Cross Sisters of Chavanod, founded by Fr. Mermier and approved as a Religious society by Bishop Rey of Annecy on November 4, 1841.

Fr. Francois Philippe, who had been 8 years Chaplain of the Sisters at Chavanod, came to India as visitor delegate of the Superior General in 1885. In several of the stations he visited, people asked for sisters. As the St. Joseph's Sisters had not enough personnel, Fr. Philippe suggested to Bishop Tissot to request help from Chavanod. Thus, the Bishop in 1885 wrote to Mother Adele Mermier, asking her to send Sisters of the Cross to his diocese.

Mother Adele asked the advice and the permission of Bishop Isoard of Annecy and of Fr. Joseph Tissot, Superior General of the MSFS and of the Holy Cross Sisters. Both of them approved this new venture into the mission field. The favourable decision was conveyed to Bishop Tissot.

Fr. Philippe writes from Nagpur on 18-9-1885: "The
Holy Cross Sisters will come to India, but the departure of the first batch is not yet fixed. I wrote back that they should not wait for me but act now".21

Bishop Tissot consulted the Fathers. It was agreed that the Sisters should come to the North where their presence would fill a greater need, but opinions differed about the place where they would open their first house. The Bishop favoured Thana, others held that they should first settle for a time in Nagpur and prepare for their apostolate. Others thought that Amravati would be the best place.

Fr. Montagnoux was all for Amravati, as we can see in a letter written to him by Fr. Domenge: "As for Holy Cross Sisters, I know that the Bishop would like them to go to Thana but that will probably not happen. We have not called them here to give them fever and kill them uselessly in the jungles. Your plan with win at the end. It has the sympathy of many of us, as it's practical, reasonable and can be successful. The Sisters will establish their Mother house in Amravati." (Fr. Domenge, Vizianagaram, 17-5-1886).22

Developments in Amravati:

In 1885, Amravati was chosen to be the headquarters of the Berar administration and the bishop
entrusted Fr. Thevenet with the task of developing the place with a view of making it the main mission Centre in Berar. On a large ground acquired earlier by the Mission. Fr. Thevenet had built in 1874 a chapel and a small bungalow. He came by mid 1885 and spent several months putting up buildings.

"I have levelled the courtyard and made a garden, raised a tower for the well, repaired the old bungalow and put up a new house with a godown. I completed the school building and set the flagstones. The chapel was repaired and whitewashed. Tomorrow, I will begin the construction of an outhouse with four rooms for the servants and a shelter for the poor. I have already debts of Rs.200/- and no money is coming in. We have been asked to open a Primary School for Anglo-Indians. The proposition made by Colonel Bullock was sanctioned by the Director of Public Instruction and must be approved by the Commissioner and the Resident. We are offered a grant of Rs.3000/- for the school building and Rs.150/- per month for two teachers. I accepted the proposal and promised, besides a priest residing in Amravati, one Brother and three Sisters. I gave my word, and if the promise is not kept, I shall be put to shame. Whatever happens, I hope the good God will bless Amravati."
It is said that I have done much, but done everything badly. It's time for me to resign my job and entrust it to someone who will do better than me.²³

Fr. Montagnoux moved to Amravati on December 30, 1885, and opened his orphanage transferred from Akola. A few months later, a letter from Bishop Tissot asked him to move again, vacating the new houses as the Holy Cross Sisters would need them. "I am afraid that the decision I am compelled to take at the last moment regarding your transfer may put you to inconvenience, but truly I can not avoid it.

I hope you will find the means to settle down somewhere with all your orphans? The Holy Cross Sisters will come to Amravati. I wrote to Fr. Superior to see where you could settle down, at least provisionally. I think that Akola would not be too bad. What do you think about it? In any case, I leave you free to choose. (Bishop Tissot to Fr. Montagnoux, Nagpur 10-9-1886).²⁴

Arrival of the Holy Cross Sisters:

In the meantime, during the first months of 1886, preparations were made in Chavanod. Volunteers were
asked for any six were selected. They left the Mother House of Chavanod on 25th August at 10.00 p.m. and went on foot to the station of Lovagny where they boarded the train to Chambery. On the train they were welcomed by Fr.Eugene Gojo and Brother Pierre Perret who were to share their journey to India. Fr.Philippe accompanied them to Marceille on 29th August, they boarded the steamer "Djemmah" of the messengeris Maritimes sailing to Colombo, which they reached on 18th September. A Coastel steamer "The Tibre" brought them to Madras two days later. Led by Fr.Gojo, the travellers entered the train for Badnera, where they arrived on 25th September morning.

Fr.Thevenet and Fr.Dunoyrt introduced the Sisters to their new life and built for them a fine convent and school. They could enter the new convent on 8th May 1889, after spending two years rather uncomfortably in the Mission's poor buildings.

The first month passed in learning language, English, Marathi and Hindi. They opened an english medium school in their campus on June 1st, 1887 with 12 students, 6 boys and 6 girls. An annual school grant of Rs.650/- was received from the Government.

Other works followed : 1888, a Creche for
RT. REV. DR. JOSEPH ROSARIO, MSFS.
BISHOP OF AMRAVATI
1955-1995
abandoned children, 1890, orphanage for only Indian girls, 1891, a dispensary and Marathi School at Nazareth, a house built by Fr. Dunoyer in the city of Amravati, 1892, a dispensary and Marathi School at Elllichpur, 45 Kms. West of Amravati.

All these activities were made possible by the arrival of the new Sisters from Savoy: 3 in 1887, 4 in 1891.

Under Sister Veronica's wise and dynamic direction, the Amravati convent became the Mother House of the Congregation in India, a warm house where a vigorous tree ready to send out shoots far and wide.25

Glimpses of Amravati Diocese:

The Diocese of Amravati was created on May 8, 1955 and Msgr. Joseph Albert Rosario was appointed as its first bishop on the same day. Joseph Albert Rosario was born at Nagpur on May 30, 1915 in a deeply Catholic Goan family. His parents Francis Xavier and Leonora Rosario originally from Verem, Goa, had come to Nagpur from Zanzibar in 1913. The children five boys and a girl all were a credit to the sound Catholic education received at home. Edwin who became a well-known doctor, Frank who was drowned in Telankerti lake whilst in school in 1925, Joseph, Vincent, Louis who was organist for
many years at the Cathedral, Lilian who married Joe Rodrigues, an officer of the Home guards who ended his career in the rank of Brigadier.

Joseph studied in the senior Cambridge Examination in SFS School, joined the apostolic school and St. Charles Seminary. He made his religious profession in the MSFS Novitiate at Visakhapatnam on June 5, 1935. He passed B.A. whilst doing regency at SFS School. Ordained priest on September 29, 1944, he was appointed teacher at SFS School.

In Father Joseph one could see a genuine discipline of St. Francis de Sales. His natural calm and gentleness were strengthened by Christian charity and a deep piety. His ready smile was the expression of a friendliness that won cooperation from all, united to a quiet spirit of perseverance and devotion to duty.

In 1947, he was officiating Principal of SFS School during the absence of Fr. Deage, a post he filled most successfully, achieving something that had eluded his predecessors, the foundation of the "the SFS Old Boys' Association".

In July 1948, he attended the B.T. Course at Jabalpur, from which he graduated with flying colours. On his return to SFS, he was prefect of studies.
In May 1951, he was Principal of St. John's High School, a post he held only for one year, as he was sent to Goa to be the Principal of SFS School, Ucassaim, replacing Bishop Eugene.

During his three years at Ucassaim, the school was at its peak performance, doing well in studies and games.

In July 1954, Fr. Joseph began preparing for his M.A. and Fr. Assisi Vaz became officiating Principal. On 13th May 1955, whilst on holidays at his sister's house at Mount Abu, Fr. Joseph received the news of his appointment as Bishop of Amravati.\(^2^6\)

**Episcopal Consecration**

On Sunday 13th November 1955, Bishop Joe Rosario received the Episcopal consecration from the Apostolic Internuncio Msgr. Lucas SVD, assisted by Archbishop Eugene D'Souza and Bishop Joseph Baud of Visakhapatnam.

Then began the spiritual leadership work of this noble and humble Bishop in Amravati region establishing a number of Catholic missionary institutions in Amravati, Akola, Yeotmal and Buldhana district. Bishop Jeo was a man of humility and prayer. He always remained very close to God asking God to bless and help him in his missionary work. It was due to his able leadership...
quality today the following Catholic institutions are standing with resident missionaries in spread of catholic faith and other developmental and social activities.27

1. Amravati : St. Francis Xavier’s Cathedral established in 1884, Amravati camp, with more than a thousand Catholics.

2. Achalpur : Sacred heart Church established in the year 1882, the present name is Parathwada with almost 500 catholics in Achalpur-Parathwada and its surrounding villages.

3. Akola : Our Lady of Mount Carmel established in the year 1881 with a large number of Catholics. At present the Whole institution is rebuilt and looking attractive.

4. Anjangaon-Surji : Catholic Church established in 1978 in Amravati district with a moderate numbers of catholics scattered in its surrounding villages with a residential Catholic missionary priest.

5. Badnera : St. John the Evangelist Church, established in the year 1904 which is a part of Municipal Corporation of city area of Amravati.

with a Catholic missionary residing to take care of the spiritual care of Catholic community there.

7. Chikalda: St. Francis de Sales Church, established in the year 1896 at Mariampur and later shift to its present complex. This institution has a large number of Catholics among the Kurku tribal caste with a more than 40 acres of coffee plantation where these Catholic tribal Kurkus are given work for their living.\textsuperscript{27}

8. Duni: This is known as Rosario Mission which was established in 1952 with a small number of adivasi catholic who earned their livelihood in working in the mission farm. A number of them are given marginal land for the purpose of cultivation and live an independent life by themselves.

9. Kapustalni: Our Lady, help of Christians established in the year 1901, has a large number of catholic community with sub-stations for the religious worship. It has a vast farm and the poor people in this area do work as labourers in the farm to earn their daily bread.

10. Kara: This is known as Kara Catholic mission opened in the very recent years which conducts social schemes for the upliftment of the weaker section and runs an educational institution for them.
11. Khimgaon: It is known as Fransalian Vidya Niketan established in the 1981. Rev. Fr. P.V. Joseph is the pioneer of the centre where inter religious meetings are organised and people belonging to various faiths share their religious thoughts in these meetings and come to know the religions of one another better.

12. Kholapur: Known as St. Peter Christ Ashram established in 1970 with Fr. John Shingare as its first Catholic residential missionary. It has a number of catholics where they come together for religious worship and prayers.²⁸

13. Malkapur: This Catholic mission station has been opened very recently and all its services are for the tribals living in that ghat area. It falls in Paralthawa Taluka of Amravati District.

14. Murtizapur: This catholic mission has been established in 1919 and the Church is named as St. Andrew’s Church. It was a military Cantonment area and initially the purpose of this institution was to take care the spiritual needs of the Catholics employed in the military camp there.

15. Nimpora: A Leprosy Relief and Rehabilitation centre opened due to the pioneering and herculean
efforts of late Rev. Fr. M. T. Thomas where a number of lepers are given treatment and thus come back to common life like others. A group of Nuns toil day and night named as Assisi Sisters of Mary Immaculate, of shertally, and serve these lepers with dedication and love.

16. Rasegaon: The Church of the Mary Immaculate with a resident priest who takes care of the Catholic community. It was established in the year 1953, very close to Parathwada.

17. Yeotmal: Known as St. Joseph's Church established in the year 1978 with Rev. Fr. Peter Pathare its first Parish Priest. He had to undergo many hardships in order to establish this Catholic institution. He toiled their for a long 18 years till he was transferred to Akola in June, 1996.
FOOTNOTES AND REFERENCES:

01. The Catholic Directory of India, published by Fr. A. Nazreth for the All India Catholic Bishop's Conference, New Delhi, p. 35.

02. Vagabonds for God, Francis Moget, p. 231.

03. Ibid. pp. 232-233.

04. Notes from the letters of History on Chikalda Mission by Fr. Ernest Thevenet, 1886.

05. Story of the Catholic Church in Central India, Francis Moget, p. 234.

06. In the days of Fr. Mermier, 1962, manuscript by Fr. Gros msfs. And Appendix No. 2.

07. Ibid.

08. The historical notes written by Fr. Moget Francis on Catholic Missions, typed manuscript, 1955-1960, pp. 41-42.


10. Ibid.


12. Ibid. p. 23.


16. Ibid.

17. Ibid. p. 281.


19. A story of the Catholic missions in central India, Francis Moget, p. 182.

20. Ibid.

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21. Ibid.
22. Ibid. p.284.
27. Notes from the letters of Chikalda mission by Fr.Ernest Thevenet.