CHAPTER – IV

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Entry of Christian Missions into India

Christianity, a historical religion, emerged as a result of the birth, ministry, passion, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in Palestine, on the south eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea in the first century A.D. It spread far and wide and churches were established across the globe. It made its entry into India also. India, a country with diverse cultures, was always receptive to other faiths and beliefs. Hence the foreign missionaries were accorded a warm welcome and permission was granted to them to live and propagate their religion among the natives. In India, the history of the Church may be divided into four periods viz., the Syrian period, the Roman Catholic period, the Lutheran period and the Modern period.¹

The Syrian period

The credit for introducing Christianity into India goes to St. Thomas, one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ. Obeying the last injunction of his

¹ V.S. Azariah, Introductory Lessons on India and Missions, CLS, Madras, 1910, p.71.
Master, “Go, preach the gospel² to every creature,” St. Thomas³ came down to India in the middle of the first century A.D. Thus Indian Christianity is as ancient as Christianity itself. There are ever so many traditions revolving round this apostle (messenger) though there is no historical evidence as such to prove his presence here. However, strong traditions, prevailing in the east⁴ and the west⁵ corroborate his arrival in our country. Moreover the living tradition of the community of St. Thomas Christians who are also called Syrian Christians, the existence of the churches established by him and the folk songs of St. Thomas Christians bear a strong testimony to his presence and ministry. His preaching which might have drawn a lot of hostility finally resulted in his martyrdom at Mylapore, a suburb of the Madras city, around 72 A.D.⁶

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2. Gospel means Good News. Gospel is the disclosure of Jesus Christ as God’s son and our Lord by His Resurrection from the dead. The Holy Bible - St. Paul in Romans 1:4-5.


5. As per the western tradition, following the well established trade routes St. Thomas reached India and his apostolate is supposed to have begun in the kingdom of an Indo-Parthian ruler Gondophernus and succeeded in converting him and his family. – E. R. Hambye, “St. Thomas and India”, The Clergy Monthly, 16(1952), p. 368.

6. A.M. Mundaden, History of Christianity in India, Vol. I, CHAI, Bangalore, 1989, p.29. There is yet another story that one Maya Tevan, a petty ruler of Mylapore, then a part of the Chola kingdom ordered for the murder of the apostle on account of the conversion of his own wife Dershia to Christianity by the latter. (C.M. Agur, Church History of Travancore, SPS press, Madras, 1903, p.10. But its authenticity is questionable.
The apostle was contended with the introduction of the ‘New Religion’ to the Syrian Christians and never insisted on the change of their age long customs and practices. Hence the converts remained attached to their Hindu way of living.\(^7\) This influential community even obtained a political status from the native ruler in the eighth century A.D.\(^8\) But a change of fortune took place with the rise of the Portuguese, a Catholic power of Europe, who succeeded in placing these Christians under the suzerainty of their religious head the Pope.\(^9\) However the down fall of the Portuguese to the Dutch placed them under the Patriarch of Antioch. Nevertheless a large number still clung to Roman Catholicism who came to be known as Romo-Syrian Christians. With the despatch of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionaries in 1816 the leavening of this ancient community was started through their educational institutions.\(^10\)

**Roman Catholic Period**

This period synchronised with the rise of the Portuguese as a maritime power in India in the second half of the fifteenth century. Just before the arrival of the Portuguese, Christianity was practically confined to Kerala where the

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presence of the Christians along with the co-existence of Hindus, Muslims and Jews brought about a cultural symbiosis.\textsuperscript{11} Since the advent of St. Thomas, Christians were found in the coastal regions of peninsular India without established churches and baptism. The real beginning of Christianity was marked by the advent of the Portuguese in the fifteenth century. The Portuguese, after establishing themselves in Goa which they captured from the Sultan of Bijapur in 1510, wanted to propagate their religion too. Since they had the three ‘G’ s – Gold, Glory and Gospel as their motives, they brought with them missionaries with the approval of the then Pope Alexander VI.\textsuperscript{12} Accordingly many Religious Orders such as Franciscans, Dominicans, Augustinians, Jesuits, Carmelites, Capuchins and others made their way to India and carried on the propagation of Christianity relentlessly in different parts of India.\textsuperscript{13} Nearly for two hundred years, Catholicism held sway over a large portion of South India and penetrated even in to the court of Akbar. According to the census in 1901 the Roman Catholics were 42\% of the entire native Christian community.\textsuperscript{14} Through their invaluable services towards the cause of education, till date, they exercise profound influence.

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\textsuperscript{12} C.B. Firth, \textit{An Introduction to Indian Church History}, CLS, Madras, 1961, pp.50-51.
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The Lutheran Period

In the words of Isaiah Azariah, “The story of the growth of Protestantism in South India is one of incorrigible obstinacy in the eyes of the caste Hindus and heroic perseverance in the eyes of the Christians”.\(^{15}\) The Protestant activity began with the founding of the Lutheran Missionary Centre at Tranquebar in 1706.\(^{16}\) Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg and Heinrich Pluetschau, two godly Germans of the Halle University who were the products of the pietist\(^{17}\) movement, became the spiritual envoys of the then Danish king Frederick IV who desired to preach the Gospel in the Danish possessions in India.\(^{18}\) They landed at Tranquebar on July 7, 1706, with a clear and well thought out plan to learn the local language and launch an evangelical movement. But the Danish officials due to misconception that missionary enterprise would endanger their commercial activities opposed their missionary enterprise.\(^{19}\) Despite these hurdles they carried on their missionary work and were joined by a noble group of missionaries later on. The Tranquebar Mission which was working in Tamilnadu for a little more

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17. Pietism was a revival movement in the Lutheran Church in Germany and the University of Halle became its important centre. S. Manickam, Studies in Missionary History, CLS, Madras, 1988, p.135.
19. Ibid.
than hundred years extended its work to a number of places such as Tiruchirappalli, Thanjavur, Cuddalore, Madras and in the south to Tirunelveli.\textsuperscript{20} At Tiruchirappalli and Thanjavur C.F. Schwartz and in Madras Benjamin Schultze and F.Ph. Fabricius and their colleagues did yeomen service to Christianity and Tamil language. Since these Lutheran missionaries received encouragement and financial sustenance from the royal family of Denmark this Danish-Halle Mission was called the Royal Mission.\textsuperscript{21} At the close of the eighteenth century the Christians at Tranquebar numbered around 20,000 souls.\textsuperscript{22} Unfortunately degeneration set in and the mission fell in to decay. In 1820 all its congregations except Tranquebar were handed over to the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK). However after five years, it was again transferred to the Society for the Propagation of the gospel (SPG) and the Lutherans became Anglicans.\textsuperscript{23} The Lutheran missionaries often acted as Chaplains of the British and hence their activities under the patronage of the British East India Company came to be called as “the English Mission”.\textsuperscript{24} During the whole of the eighteenth century, the Lutherans were the only Protestant missionaries in India and it was

\begin{itemize}
\item[21.] \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 31-39.
\item[22.] Richter, Julius, \textit{A History of Missions in India}, trans., Oliphant Anderson and Ferrier, London, 1908, p. 127.
\end{itemize}
called the Lutheran period. In fact the entry of Christianity into India was made through the country’s three sea ports.\textsuperscript{25} The apostle St. Thomas, is believed to have arrived in the port of Musiris (Cranganore), the Catholics followed the Portuguese in to the port of Goa and the Protestant German Mission, on the east coast. Thus right from the beginning, South India proved to be a better place for evangelism than North India.\textsuperscript{26}

**Modern Period**

It comprises two phases – Pre-mutiny phase and Post-mutiny phase. During the former period, most of the protestant missions had their beginnings while the latter period witnessed their growth and development.

In the pre-mutiny period the progress of the mission work was very slow mainly because of the suspicious and unsympathetic attitude of the British East India Company. The British, the ‘rough-riding merchant class’, had a ‘love-hate’ relationship with India. To them, bringing civilization to India was the Whiteman’s burden.\textsuperscript{27} Still as a good will gesture of a Christian concern, the company gave some concessions to the Christian missionaries such as free transportation of missionaries in their company’s ships, deliverance of their letters


to and fro free of cost and allocation of lands for the establishment of the churches, schools etc.\textsuperscript{28} But the whole situation underwent a drastic change when the company, originally traders turned into a ruling power. Thenceforth they concentrated on the consolidation of their power in India and so did not want to take up any risk in the name of their pro-Christian policy towards the people whose hatred would endanger their position in India. Hence the home authorities of the company were opposed not only to free trade but also to Christian missionaries in India because both were regarded as potential menace to their power in the country. To avoid even the appearance of interference in religious matters they not only protested against the entry of Christian missions but also helped the religious conservatism\textsuperscript{29} of the natives. Hence the British declared their neutrality on religious matters. Further restrictions on missionary activities were also enforced. Hence no new missionary was allowed to land in their territories. It was in accordance with this rule that William Carey, the first missionary from England, was refused permission to land at Madras in 1793 and so he landed at Calcutta and was there for six years under the guise of an indigo planter.\textsuperscript{30} Nevertheless that indifferent attitude of the British was compelled to change by the

\textsuperscript{28} Frank Penny, \textit{Church in Madras in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries}, Smith Elder, London, 1904, p.198.


political pressure\textsuperscript{31} and also the public desire in England which succeeded in getting additional clauses inserted in the Charter Act of 1813. It was tantamount to a declaration that missionary work in India would be patronised.\textsuperscript{32} As a result many British missions and missionaries came to India in rapid succession such as London Missionary Society, Church of Scotland Missions, Wesleyan Missionary Society etc. However the Charter Act of 1833 threw open India to all Missionary Societies irrespective of nationality and denomination. The post-Mutiny period witnessed a rapid growth of the various missions in India because the Mutiny of 1857 sounded the knell of the company’s power in India and caused the change of power from the company to the Crown. Queen Victoria’s proclamation of 1858 avowed the principle of religious liberty and this enabled the older Societies to advance in every direction. Many new missions also came into being. In 1902 altogether there were 91 Societies with 3,095 missionaries excluding wives and 25,727 Indian workers engaged in the Christian activities in India. In these figures are included 226 medical missionaries, working through 313 hospitals and dispensaries, healing the sick and preaching the Gospel.\textsuperscript{33} Despite many obstacles which the missionaries encountered, they became the torchbearers of western culture and education in to India from the sixteenth century onwards.

\textsuperscript{31} William Wilberforce, a most enlightened M.P. and also the leader of the Anti-Slave Trade Movement in England was responsible for the inclusion of a clause in the Charter Act of 1813 which allowed entry to the missionaries from the UK to carry on missionary activities in the company’s settlements in India, after securing license from the Board of Directors.


\textsuperscript{33} V.S. Azariah, \textit{Op. cit.}, p.84.
activities dominated the Indian scene for many centuries to come and played a vital role in the moulding of the destiny of our nation. But unfortunately most of the Missionary Societies were denominational in character with great fascination for mass movements.  

The mania of presenting a good statistics of increase in conversion was a very common feature among them. Towards the close of the nineteenth century when a good many Missionary Societies established themselves in South India, comity arrangements were made among themselves so as to let a Society concentrate its missionary efforts on its successful area. Moreover, the Missionary Societies drew closer to one another in an alien atmosphere to discuss common problems in the mission fields so as to arrive at solutions which subsequently led to missionary co-operation in many a ways.

**Introduction of Christianity into Madurai**

The name Madurai is said to have been derived from the word *Madhuram* meaning sweetness. According to a mythology, quoted in *Madurai Sthala Puranas*, as a sign of blessing and purification, God Shiva sprinkled from his locks drops of *amirtam* (nectar) all over the city when it was first built by the king Kulasekhara Pandya and thence forth the city came to be called Madurai. It is true that the city was unique in the sense that it was one of the oldest cities in

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South India which enjoyed a continuous political history as the capital under the Pandyas who ruled from the beginning to the 14th century of the Christian era. It was unique culturally as a seat of Tamil culture and civilization, which earned the city the epithet “Athens of South India”38. This was justified by the fact that as the seat of Tamil Academy, the Sangam, it did much for fostering Tamil language and literature. Moreover the city had sheltered generations of saints, statesmen, scholars, poets, artists, craftsmen and merchants.39 Economically it was unique since from time immemorial, it had been a centre for flourishing trade and had commercial contacts with the countries of both the east and the west.40 Among the different commodities textile products of Madurai were greatly valued besides pearls, fish and vegetables from the coastal areas. Religiously also it was unique being a flourishing centre for various religions41 such as the two prominent sects of Hinduism – Saivism and Vaishnavism, Buddhism, Jainism and Islam and was abounded with numerous monuments especially temples.

In these circumstances Christianity made its entry into the Madura country.42 In fact Christianity was first introduced in to the Madurai country by the Portuguese through the Jesuit missionaries, patronised by them. The

38.  Ibid., p. 2.
40.  K. Rajayyan, History of Madurai (1736-1801), Madurai University Historical Series, No.1, Madurai, 1974, p.18.
Portuguese in Goa were responsible for the *en masse* conversion of the Paravas of the Fishery coast.\(^{43}\) The Portuguese helped the latter to come out of the clutches of the Arab exploitation and mulctary. In return the Paravas embraced Christianity. These converts, over 20,000 in number, thenceforth came under the protectorate of the Portuguese and thereby indirectly brought under the suzerainty of the king of Portugal.\(^{44}\) To cater to their spiritual needs, John III, the king of Portugal appealed to the then Pope Alexander VI to authorise a priest from the Society of Jesus to South India.\(^{45}\) Accordingly Francis Xavier was deputed to South India.

**Francis Xavier**

Hailing from a Spanish aristocratic family, Francis Xavier came down to South India in 1548 as a spiritual and political agent of the Portuguese through *Padroado* or Patronage system. Since his mission work centred on the Paravas he was considered “the Apostle of the untouchables”.\(^{46}\) Most of his untouchable conversions were in the South Travancore State. Since the then ‘Christians’ were ignorant of any thing of Christianity due to the unintelligible Portuguese language he instructed them in the Christian faith and with the help of

\(^{43}\) Fishery Coast was the name given to the littoral of the Tirunelveli and Ramanathapuram districts by the early Jesuits, who were the members of the Society of Jesus founded by St. Ignatius Loyola, a solider turned priest. This Society was approved by Pope Paul III as an effective Counter Reformation Agency in 1540. This Society had two definite aims - Evangelisation and Education. N. Money and G.V.I. Shama, ed., *Op. cit.*, p.22.


some elite, translated a small catechism and sermon and thus organised a Christian way of life for them, which could be identified as the “Indian Mission”\footnote{Manual of the Administration of the Madras Presidency, Vol. I, Public Instruction, Part II, Madras, 1885, p.626.} and started many schools in the coastal villages. The catechists, nominated and trained by him to carry on the spiritual work, received stipends from the Portuguese Government.\footnote{C.B. Firth, Op. cit., pp. 60-61.} He had a very early death in 1552 and hence was called ‘the Saint in a hurry’,\footnote{John Morrison., Missionary Efforts at the time of Reformation, Vol. I, Fisher and Son & Co., London, 1943, pp.56-57.} though his stay in India was transient, his impact has outlived the passage of time.

It was true that the cordial relationship that existed between the Portuguese and Vijayanagar Empire in the 16\textsuperscript{th} century ensured a safe and easy passage for the Jesuit missionaries into South India. However, Fr. Antony Criminalli who was detailed for evangelisation in the fishery coast by Xavier fell in 1549 along with his catechists to tribal arrows on the east coast of Ramnad district\footnote{N. Money, and G.V.I. Shama, Op. cit., p. 25.} and became the first Jesuit martyr in India. Thus even during the time of Xavier, opposition to Christianity in the form of assassinations and destructive episodes was common. But still the Jesuits continued their mission with vigour even after the decline of their patrons, the Portuguese, and gained momentum which resulted in the founding of a Mission at Madurai.
The earliest Jesuit missionary to visit Madurai was a Portuguese, named **Fr. Goncalo Fernandez**[^51] in 1592. His congregation consisted of the paravas whose forefathers were converted by Francis Xavier and the Portuguese Christians. With the aim of securing conversion from the higher strata of society in 1592 he sought the permission of Virappa Nayakka[^52], the ruler of Madurai, in whose court he acted as the interpreter of the Portuguese Government and started a Mission at Madurai with a church, hospital, school and a mission house. But his untiring work to achieve converts from the upper classes for fourteen years bore no fruit.[^53] Because the Indians considered the Portuguese whom they called *Parangis* on par with the lower caste and this made them shun the creed itself. They considered Christianity as a religion meant for knaves or fools. With the arrival of Robert de Nobili to Madurai, the status of Christianity in India rose to sublime heights.

**Robert De Nobili**

Nobili is considered as the real founder of the Catholic Madura Mission.[^54] He was the first Jesuit to work under the Archbishop of Cranganore.[^55]

An Italian Jesuit of aristocratic parentage, Nobili reached Madurai which was the centre of Tamil culture, along with Fernandez in 1606. Madurai was then under the

[^53]: R. Sathianathaiair, *History of the Nayaks of Madura*, University of Madras, Madras, 1924, p. 68.
Nayak ruler Muthu Krishnappa whose reign saw the beginnings of Nobili’s endeavours for the cause of Christianity. Within six months, he acquired proficiency in the Classical and Literary Tamil and even held discussions with the elite who called on him. His main aim was to raise the status of Christianity in the eyes of the natives by converting the leaders of Hinduism (Brahmins) and thereby the whole of the Hindu society in India. He considered Madurai as a place where the hope of spreading the faith was so inviting. He disassociated himself from Fernandez who was a Parangi in the eyes of the Indians and declared himself a ‘Roman Brahmin’, regulated his diet and dress and also renounced the world and its carnal pleasures. By the adoption of the life of the missionary to that of the people (the Brahmins), the appropriation of harmless (Hindu) customs and ceremonies for Christian use and the thorough study of vernaculars and Sanskrit, the language of the sacred books of Hinduism, he attempted to indigenise Christianity. His adaptation method, coupled with his altered life style, earned him respect from the local Hindus and resulted in conversions of some high caste Hindus. Nevertheless he was so careful as not to offend them in any way. Hence to appease them, he instituted two kinds of priests. One was Sanyasi, a high caste priest, to cater to the spiritual needs of the high caste and the other was

Pandaraswami, priest for lower caste. This differentiation was condemned by many as too much concessions to caste feeling. However his efforts bore fruits in the form of 200 converts from several castes within two years and within five years he baptised 108 Brahmins. Thus he opened the portals of the church to prince, pauper, Brahmin and low caste. Encouraged by the first fruits of his labour, Nobili built a new church in 1610. Nevertheless his adaptation method led to opposition even from his co-workers and ecclesiastical authorities and nearly landed him into the jaws of the Inquisition. However Pope Gregory XV took decisions in favour of his methods in 1623. As far as Madurai was concerned, this controversy resulted in a loss of prestige to Nobili. He was convinced that this ancient seat of Hinduism was not congenial for conversion. His assistant Antonio Vico also felt that one would never encounter obstacles anywhere as great as in Madurai despite the fact that Tirumala Nayak of Madurai was sympathetic towards the missionaries. Since his experiment met with failure in Madurai, Nobili turned his attention towards the north. In 1623 he set out on a long journey through the Salem district and the Trichinopoly where the converts were mainly of low castes.

63. The alleged charge from Fernandez was that Nobili’s religion was ‘a monstrous combination of Paganism and Christianity.’ R. Sathianathaiar, *Op. cit.*, p.79.
Persecutions, hardship, insults and even imprisonment were experienced by him. After an arduous service of 42 years he retired to Mylapore, nearly blind and died in obscurity.

**John De Britto**

The most outstanding follower of De Nobili, a greater intellectual and zealot than Nobili himself, was John De Britto, the son of the Viceroy of Brazil. He came to India in 1673 and joined the Madura Mission in the following year. He started his work in Kuttur in Thanjavur kingdom then shifted it to the Marava country (Ramnad) which was a tributary to the Madurai Nayak kingdom. To begin with conversion took place only among the low caste Hindus but gradually it spread among the Maravas and made its head way in to the palace and armed forces. Britto was for group conversions in rural castes and intent on its realisation. This rapid growth of Christianity resulted in his deportation by the then ruler of Ramnad—Raghu Natha Thevar alias Kizhavan Sethupathi.

After a lapse of two years, Britto came back to Ramnad and succeeded in converting nearly 4000 Maravas including one Tadia Thevar, a prince of Maravan and a supposed heir to the throne of Ramnad. In accordance with the Christian doctrine, he divorced his all wives except the first one. This landed Britto in trouble since the youngest wife of Tadia Thevar happened to be

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the niece of Kizhavan Sethupathi who was awaiting an opportunity to do away with the missionary. Because he believed that the safety of his crown and the interest of his kingdom necessitated a stern step. Despite representations from Tadia Thevar, Rani Mangammal of Madurai, and others on February 4, 1693, Britto was beheaded outside a village of Oriyur. However before his tragic end he had converted more than 12,000 Maravas. Thus he became the second martyr in the Tamil country. Nelson truly remarks “the murder of John de Britto so far from injuring the cause of Christianity appears to have advanced it very considerably” However Christianity enjoyed much freedom in Madurai where Rani Mangammal followed an enlightened religious policy.

**Joseph Constantine Beschi**

The outstanding Jesuit of the 18th century was Beschi, a gifted linguist and a successful missionary who followed the footsteps of De Nobili in his adaptation and accommodation policies but in a showy way. While Robert de Nobili Indianised the apostolate, Beschi Tamilised it. Though he served at Kamanayakanpatti and Kattar in Tiruneveli, Madurai, the Marava country and

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71. “In his personal life Beschi was an ascetic, but for impressing the people he adopted a showy way. He travelled in ivory Palanquin, surrounded by a number of disciples. A silk umbrella, the insignia of royalty was carried before the Palanquin. He reclined on superb couches and his attendants fanned him with the fly whisk of peacock feathers.” N. Money, “The Society of Jesus in the Tamil Area,” ed., Op. cit., p.27.
Trichy, his principal mission station was Yella Kurichi, on the north bank of the Kollidam river where he had built a church. He too had his over share of hardship and danger in the early years of his service when the rulers were often hostile. However he was able to win the confidence of Chanda Sahib, the ruler of Trichinopoly, who appointed Beschi his Dewan and assigned to him four villages in Trichinopoly district, fetching an annual revenue of 12,000 rupees. His contribution to Tamil Literature was unparalleled and earned him the title Veera Mamunivar (the great valiant hermit). In fact the Madurai Mission reached its zenith of glory during his time following his relentless missionary work. But after his death in 1742 the Madura Mission began to decline.

**End of the Madura Mission**

The adaptation method, disliked by many, resulted in the expulsion of the Jesuits from Portugal and its colonies. Owing to various representations from Christian kings to the Pope, the Society of Jesus itself was suppressed in 1773 by Pope Clement XIV and thus the Madura Mission came to an end. Hence much of its previous work was undone and the converts relapsed into Hinduism. With the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, Madurai lost its prominence as a flourishing Christian centre. On the whole Catholicism was at its lowest ebb between 1800 and 1830 a period that was characterised by law-suits, ignorance.

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and corruption.\textsuperscript{75} From the languished Catholic community many were won over to Protestantism.\textsuperscript{76} While some relapsed to Hinduism some were forcibly converted to Islam by Tipu Sultan.\textsuperscript{77}

At this juncture a change took place in the political scene in the form of the fall of the Portuguese which synchronised with the rise of the British power in India. As Portugal was not disposed to help the missions in India with men or money, Rome decided to make the Indian missions independent of Portugal. Through a Bull of Pius VI issued in 1778 Madura Mission was brought into the fold of the French Foreign Mission of Paris established at Pondicherry in 1776/7.\textsuperscript{78} The bull was resented to by the Portuguese who claimed Padroado\textsuperscript{79} rights over all the Indian missions. Because of this the notorious jurisdiction struggle started between the Portuguese Goan Priests and the Fathers of the Foreign Mission of Paris. This proved to be a stumbling block for the spread of Christianity.\textsuperscript{80}

However the Society of Jesus was restored by Pope Gregory XVI in

\textsuperscript{79} ‘Padroado’ is Portuguese for Patronage which was tantamount to the monopoly of the Madurai Mission under the Portuguese king. Accordingly appointment of Bishops, stipends to missionaries, maintenance of the churches etc. became the privilege of the Portuguese.
1814 as the result of many representations from the Catholics of Ramnad, Tirunelveli and the Fishery Coast to Pope, clamouring for missionaries.\textsuperscript{81} In the meantime in 1811 the new seminary at Pondicherry started to produce Indian priests and in addition to this after the Napoleonic wars, large number of priests came from France too in 1815.\textsuperscript{82} When the missions were reorganised in 1836 the territories in the southern most part of the Old Madura Mission were entrusted to the French Jesuits of Toulouse in 1838.\textsuperscript{83} Thus the Madura Mission was re-established in 1838 which could be identified as the New Madura Mission.

**The establishment of the American Madura Mission (AMM)**

The most important and far reaching mission in the province of Madurai was that of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Mission (ABCFM) founded in 1810.\textsuperscript{84} The ABCFM despatched its first set of missionaries who landed at Calcutta in 1812 and carried on evangelical work through the establishment of churches, educational and technical institutions, hospitals etc. in South India.\textsuperscript{85} However the political rivalry and the bitter experiences of the War

\textsuperscript{81} R. Hull Earnest, *Loc. cit.*


of 1812 made the British expel even the American missionaries from their settlements in India. Hence the American missionaries had to retire to the non-British settlements in India. With the renewal of the British East India Company’s charter in 1813, the British Government made it mandatory on the part of the company to recognise the duty of introducing ‘useful knowledge and religious and moral improvement’ among the Indians for which purpose a sum of Rs. One lakh per annum was set aside. Thus the British missionary activity in India began with the approval of the British Government. However permission was denied to the American missionaries. Charles Grant, an enlightened M.P. and a religious enthusiast was instrumental in securing the official sanction of the British Parliament for the American missionaries to settle down at Bombay by 1815. In response to the political pressure and public opinion, through the Charter Act of 1833, India was thrown open to all missionary activities irrespective of nationality and denomination. Hence the ABCFM again sent its missionaries to India.

The beginning of the AMM in Madurai must be traced to the Island of Ceylon lying off the south east coast of India where the missionaries of the American Board started the Jaffna Mission in 1816. Following their success there,

87. Hugald Grafe, pp. 189 - 190.
they wanted to extend their missionary activities to South India also.\textsuperscript{90} Hence in 1834 they deputed one of the American missionaries from Jaffna - Levi Spaulding to visit India so as to find out whether there was any opening to begin their Mission in India.\textsuperscript{91}

Accordingly Spaulding toured areas such as Ramnad, Palayamkottai, Nagercoil and Madurai and found out that the Church Missionary Society (CMS) was already at work in and around Palayamkottai, the London Missionary Society (LMS) had occupied the Nagercoil field, Ramnad was far off to the extreme end of Madurai district while the Madurai ‘country’ was a large field of ‘virgin’ soil, all unoccupied. Consequently Madurai was chosen as the most appropriate place for their new Mission.\textsuperscript{92}

In the meantime the business world of America was caught up into the jaws of economic depression which had a telling effect on the American Mission too.\textsuperscript{93} Since many candidates could not be sponsored the Board resolved that the Mission in Ceylon be instructed to depute two of its own members to Madurai for commencing the Mission.\textsuperscript{94}

With this understanding Mr. Woodward, an American missionary, met Lord William Bentinck, the then Governor General of India and Sir Frederick

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\textsuperscript{90} J.S. Chandler, \textit{Seventy Five Years in the Madura Mission}, Lawrence Asylum Press, Madras, n.d., p.36. \\
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid. \\
\textsuperscript{92} Sixty-Sixth Annual Report of the AMM, 1901, p.92. \\
\textsuperscript{93} J.S. Chandler, \textit{Loc. cit.} \\
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., p.38.
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Adams, the then Governor of Madras at Nilgris. On securing an official permission from the Madras Government with difficulty on June 5, 1834, William Todd and his wife Lucy Brownell Todd and Henry R. Hoisington along with three Jaffna Tamil helpers arrived in Madurai on the 31st of July 1834 and founded the AMM. Since the pioneers of this Mission were put up in Jaffna for over 18 years where Tamil was the common language they had already acquired the language and so straight away they started preaching in vernacular. In addition to the Madura Mission, the missionaries started the Madras Mission in 1837 and Arcot Mission in 1851, but both were turned over to the SPCK and Dutch Reformed Church respectively. Hence the ABCFM in South India concentrated only in the Madurai district. Moreover the SPG which had been pursuing missionary activities in Madurai, after a comity arrangement in 1857, withdrew from Madurai and confined its work to the Ramnad Zamindary and hence the AMM was to have the remainder. The Deputation which visited the Mission in 1855 remarked…. “God has given us this fine Madura district to cultivate with the general consent of Protestant Christendom that we have it all to ourselves.”

Thus the AMM which had a humble beginning since then covered the entire province with a network of stations. The pioneer missionaries were soon

95. *ABCFM Report for the year 1834*, Boston, 1835, p.16.
joined by reinforcements from the home land now and then and finally the number rose to 200 who did zealous service in the educational, medical and social fields.

**The establishment of the New Madurai Mission**

*Henceforth referred to as (CMM)*

With the restoration in 1814 the Society of Jesus arose once again like phoenix from its ashes. When the missions were re-organised, the territories to the south of the Cauvery and Fishery coast were assigned to the ‘New’ Catholic Madurai Mission (CMM). Hence it had jurisdiction over part of the districts of Tanjore, Trichiropoly, Madurai, Tirunelveli, Rammad and the kingdom of Pudukkottai. 99 For administrative purposes, this CMM was divided into three districts – the North, Central and South with Trichirappalli, Madurai and Palayamkottai as their respective headquarters. 100

Father General John Roothan, the Head of the Restored Society, entrusted the responsibility of the re-establishment of the Mission in the Madurai Province to four missionaries. 101 They were Fr. Louis Du Ranquet, Fr. Alexander Martin, Fr. Joseph Bertrand (leader of the team) and Fr. Louis Garnier De Falton, all from France. The prime concern of these missionaries was the revival and

continuance of the work left undone by the ‘Old’ Madura Mission and also of the up bringing of an indigenous clergy. No sooner had they landed in Madurai than they realised the gravity of the situation and the magnitude of their uphill task. Though they were determined to stick on to the policy of adaptation of Nobili they had to put up a stiff fight against the challenging situation.

The exclusive and peculiar *padroado* problem threatened the very existence of the CMM. Moreover the Protestant Missions which had encroached upon their missionary fields during the lacuna between the suppression and the subsequent restoration of the Society of Jesus had to be overcome. The persecution which had engulfed the Catholic churches in Trichirappalli and Tirunelveli made them consider Protestantism as ‘Cave Adullam’. 102 It is on the record that nearly 500 members each of the churches turned to be Protestants. 103 In the northern region of the CMM with its headquarters at Trichy, Fr. Garnier achieved tremendous success 104 which led even to an unsuccessful attempt on his life by his enemies. In the central region which included the Marava Country (Ramnad and Sivaganga) with Madurai as headquarters, Frs. Martin, Ranquet and Bertrand took over their old churches in the city in quick succession but were eventually evicted from there by the Goanese priests. Fr. Bertrand, driven from Madurai, stationed at

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102. ‘Cave Adullam’ – David to escape the wrath of Saul, the king of Israel, took refuge in Cave Adullam where he was joined by the oppressed and suppressed. Thenceforth it has become an epithet of a sheltering place of the distressed. (The Holy Bible: I Samuel, 22: 1&2)


Calladithidal in the Marava country and took possession of some 50 churches there but subsequently had to return to the Goan party.\textsuperscript{105} The then collector of Madurai, Mr. Blackburn, played an active role in the eviction of the Jesuits.\textsuperscript{106} Though they had to retire to some obscure villages they soon moved in to their respective missionary centres. In 1842, Fr. Bertrand bought a land near the present palace of Tirumala Nayak and raised an impressive modern church there.\textsuperscript{107}

The toils and hardships endured by the missionaries cost their lives prematurely. Of the four, three died of disease and Fr. Bertrand suffered due to food poison and left for France for good. During the first decade of the CMM, (1837-1847) 21 priests died out of 64 and most of them were below the age of 35. These heavy losses in man power necessitated the acceleration of raising up of an indigenous clergy.\textsuperscript{108} This was the ultimate goal and it was achieved in a progressive manner.

The year 1847 was conspicuous for two important events.

(i) The Madura Mission was made a Vicariate Apostolic.

(ii) The opening of the first Noviciate at Trichirappalli with six Indians.

Thus a bold step towards Indianisation of the Mission was taken. In

\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p.90.
\textsuperscript{108} “A Hundred Years Ago,” \textit{Caritas}, November 1942, p.201.
1887 the Vicariate Apostolic of Madurai became the Diocese of Trichi as suffragan to the Metropolitan See of Bombay. In 1938 the Diocese was again divided into two – Trichirappalli Diocese and Madura Diocese. In 1952 the Madura Mission became an Independent Jesuit province under the Indian Assistancy. In 1953 Madura became the Archdiocese. Out of the Archdiocese of Madura two more Dioceses were carved out – Diocese of Palayamkottai in 1973 and of Sivaganga in 1987. In due course Nobili’s adaptation method was done away with and in the name of modernization Christianity was presented to the Indians in its western garb i.e., use of western costumes, Biblical names and the adoption of the customs of the Westerners were also encouraged among the converts. As agents of social change the two important dimensions – social services and social concern were given importance by the Jesuits. Thus while the old Madura Mission was much concerned about evangelisation, the CMM concentrated more in various other fields.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHURCH OF SWEDEN MISSION (CSM)/ TAMIL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH (TELC)

109. Assistancies are territorial groups into which the Society of Jesus is divided for administrative purposes. Provinces, Vice-provinces and Missions are the sub-divisions of an Assistancy.

110. Extracts from the Diary of Fr. Jean A., Caritas, March 1942, pp. 50-51.
The Danish-Halle Mission which flourished in Tranquebar extended its mission work to other places also such as Thanjavur, Trichirappalli, Cuddalore, Madras and in the south to Tirunelveli.\textsuperscript{111} From Trichirappalli were sent native preachers, though occasionally, to the province of Madurai whose labour bore fruit in the form of a small Christian community found scattered from the capital to Ramnad.\textsuperscript{112} Towards the close of the eighteenth century degeneration engulfed the Tranquebar Mission.

Tranquebar Mission which was considered as the “Mother of the Missions” from whom the missionaries of other Societies used to acquire their first knowledge of Tamil and Tamil Christianity, was given a helping hand by many a Missionary Societies.\textsuperscript{113} But still the position of the Danish Mission was not stable. Hence all churches except Tranquebar were handed over to the SPCK in 1820 including Madurai. As stated earlier on the inability of the Society to provide them with the needed aid these Christian communities were transferred to the SPG. Thus the Lutherans became Anglicans.

After the collapse of the Tranquebar Mission, the Dresden (Leipzig) Evangelical Lutheran Mission (LELM) of Germany which was the product of the

\textsuperscript{113} Hugald Grafe, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 34.
pietistic - orthodox revival in Germany\textsuperscript{114} sent its missionaries to Tranquebar. This Leipzig Mission started its work in India in 1841 and took over the congregation at Tranquebar. It alone had the Lutheran character then and thus claimed to be the legitimate heir of the Tranquebar Mission. Starting from Tranquebar work spread over Tamil Nadu from Madras in the north down to Virudhunagar in the south along the Coromandel coast and in to the interior district of Coimbatore and the native state of Pudukottai and Mysore.\textsuperscript{115}

In the mean time Sweden which had already been in the service of the Tranquebar Mission right from 1740\textsuperscript{116} became interested in the affairs of the Tranquebar Mission. Consequent to the great missionary awakening taking place in England during the close of the 18\textsuperscript{th} century and the beginning of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century many Mission Societies were formed in Sweden including the Lund’s Mission Society in 1845.\textsuperscript{117} This Society which got merged in to the Church of Sweden Mission Board eventually extended its co-operation to the LELM in 1852.

In 1869 a new epoch in the history of the Swedish Mission started

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\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., p.47.
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with the joining of C.J. Sandegren in the Mission.\footnote{Ibid., p.128, Rev. C.J. Sandegran had married Theodora Kremmer, a daughter of one of the prominent German missionaries at Madurai. So his family was 50% German and 50% Swedish.} He exercised profound influence on both the Missions. In Madurai he built a new church, a mission bungalow at Ponnagaram and a school for girls on the outskirts of the town. Reinforcements in the form of men and money came mainly from Sweden.

Owing to the initiative taken by Sandegren the collegium of the LELM consented to hand over three stations to the church of Sweden\footnote{C.H. Swavely, ed., \textit{The Lutheran Enterprise in India}, F.E.L.C., Madras, 1952, pp.122-142.} such as Madurai, Pattukkottai and Anaikkadu in 1901 under the official name ‘Swedish Diocese of the LELM’. From Madurai the evangelical activity extended up to Virudhunagar in the south and even stretched up to Ceylon. With its growth the collegium of the LELM recognised the independence of the Swedish Mission with a new name ‘Church of Sweden Mission in India’.\footnote{Ibid.} Nevertheless both the Missions had agreed to co-operate for the building up of the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Church (TELC). But before the ratification of the new agreement the First World War broke out. The unexpected political situation made the LELM hand over its work and property with full authority and ownership to the Church of Sweden.\footnote{G.O.No.369, Public, dated Feb. 28, 1916; G. O. No. 1147, Public, dated June 14, 1916; G. O. No. 1465, Public, dated August 10, 1916.} The atmosphere was not very congenial to the Swedes since due to their former bond with LELM of Germany they too were suspected pro-Germans.
and put to much hardship. This crisis, coupled with their genuine desire to establish an Indian Lutheran Church in the Tamil Country, resulted in the formation of the TELC.  

The congregations that were built up hitherto were united in the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Synod, which at its historic session held at Thanjavur on January 14, 1919 declared itself a self-governing body with full authority over its work and functions. With a very few missionaries, the entire missionary activity was manned by the Indian leaders. To regulate relationship of the church and the mission, episcopacy was introduced. Accordingly Bishop of Tranquebar was appointed the Head of the hierarchy.

**Madurai, in the eyes of the Foreign Missionaries**

The past glory and uniqueness of the Madurai country, which the missionaries had heard much about, had already become a forgotten story. The ground reality was diametrically opposite.

In Madurai, as elsewhere in India, there was an almost intolerable poverty. Empty stomach was the greatest obstacle to progress. Pickett’s view about India’s poverty was very much true in the case of Madurai also. “Neither

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Government nor caste, neither religion nor custom rules the daily life of the rural masses in this sub-continent more surely than poverty does“.

As stated earlier Madurai, being a rain shadow region, rainfall is scanty and irregular and is about only 30 inches a year. The life-line river of Madurai- the Vaigai is not a perennial one but is a rain fed river system. In those days, vast areas of this region were covered with thick jungles and thorny shrubs. Lying entirely within the tropics, the temperature is fairly high for the major part of the year. The scattered and diminutive land holdings rendered the application of improved technology impossible. Natural calamities such as recurrent droughts, famine and epidemics shook the very foundations of the social fabric.

No outside help or governmental welfare measure was available. People died, children were sold, some migrated and the surviving masses fed on wild fruits, herbs and roots. As has been well said, “an Indian farmer is born in debt, lives in debt, and dies in debt”, the Madurai farmers also remained under debt from generation to generation. Illiteracy was colossal. Though the Tamils were not indifferent to education, it was characterised by exclusiveness. A Brahmin received religious education whereas a Kshatriya was trained in martial arts and the Vaishyas and Vellalas were given vocational education in their respective trades. The Sudras were excluded from higher

education, though relaxed at times. In villages, there were *pial* (verandah) schools or elementary schools run by individuals in the vestibules of temples or under the shade of trees or in sheds or in their houses. The curriculum included reading, writing and the composition of letters, elementary arithmetic and accounting. Oral instruction which trained the memory of the students played an important part. To begin with, writing was performed on sand with finger then on dried and seasoned Palmyra leaves with the aid of pointed stylus. The temples and *mutts* encouraged advanced learning. *Gurukula* was a residential college which flourished in different parts of the country and even *Salais* provided education and boarding to students where besides Vedas, Grammar, Logic, Astronomy, Astrology, Medicine etc. were also taught.

Despite all these, degeneration set in which in due course resulted in widespread illiteracy. Even the British who carried culture and civilization with them cared a jot for the promotion of learning until 1813. Female education was thoroughly neglected for fear that an educated woman would bring in disaster and disgrace to the family. The worst part of it was the parents themselves believed that if their daughters were sent to school, they were sure to turn prostitutes since

130. Ibid., p. 98.
the then general notion was – education was meant only for the courtesans and
dancing girls.\textsuperscript{134}

In the absence of learning and enlightenment society was immersed
in ignorance, conservatism and superstition.\textsuperscript{135} Even absurd stories and rumours
circulated far and wide. The attitude of the villagers towards inoculation has been
recorded by the American missionaries. They believed that through inoculation,
the British were trying to secure some 3,00,000 human lives so as to prolong the
life of Queen Victoria who was growing feeble with age. They even mistook the
Governmental measures of reconstruction of the famine stricken areas as efforts
with vested interest – “The fatter the body, the fitter the sacrifice”.\textsuperscript{136} The
ignorance of the people in medical sciences and the exorcism of the devil baffled
them which could be understood from the words of Chandler, an American
missionary. He gives an account of the prescription by the Indian physician –
“Tiger’s claws, Turtle’s shell, shark’s teeth, Hedge hog’s quills, breast bone of the
cock, silver – all to be ground up together and mixed in honey” was one that was
warranted to cure anything.\textsuperscript{137} In case of illness many tried to get cured through
recourse to the gods.

To the early missionaries another problem of an extreme intricate

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\textsuperscript{134} The Missionary Herald, Boston, 1840, p. 145.
\textsuperscript{136} Annual Report of the AMM, for 1898, p. 7.
\end{flushright}
nature was the caste system. It was more than a crossword puzzle for them and beyond their power of comprehension. “Sad! Sad! Is the strength of this viperous grasp” was the lamentation of Chandler.\textsuperscript{138} According to Neill, the caste system had divided up the country itself into infinity of water tight compartments thereby postponing national unity and hindering national efficiency.\textsuperscript{139}

In fact caste, ‘the Achilles heel of Hinduism’,\textsuperscript{140} posed a serious threat to the intrusion of Christianity. Though the British had brought with them a casteless culture and a literature full of thoughts on individual liberty, they never seemed to have taken any step to discard it.\textsuperscript{141} Unfortunately even the early missionaries – the Jesuits, the Danish, and the German, chose to make caste a ‘friend’ rather than a ‘foe’ so as to facilitate conversions.\textsuperscript{142} Hence the missionaries, irrespective of their denominations, could neither agree upon the nature nor the way of tackling it unanimously. In the words of a Jesuit priest, “in India four demons stalked over the land – Disease, Darkness, Drink and Debt, in other words, Infirmities, Ignorance, Intemperance and Indebtedness.”\textsuperscript{143} So also in Madurai, besides poverty, illiteracy and ignorance, many social evils such as

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\item\textsuperscript{138} Ibid., p. 139.
\item\textsuperscript{140} Duncan, B. Forrester, \textit{Caste and Christianity: Attitudes and Policies on Caste of Anglo-Saxon Protestant Missions in India}, Centre of South Asian Studies, University of London, 1980, p. 270.
\item\textsuperscript{142} M.A. Sherring, \textit{Op. cit.}, p. 57.
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female infanticide, child marriage, liquor and narcotics, gambling, temple prostitution, extravagance, city demoralisation, rural backwardness etc. were prevalent.

Hence the missionaries had a clear cut vision of their mission. Though evangelism was their principal aim they felt constrained by the love of Jesus Christ to alleviate human suffering and misery by providing better facilities of life as their prime concern. Consequently they charted out an agenda of social reforms for the benefit of the natives of Madurai.