CHAPTER TWO

JESUIT LETTERS

In general letters have played an important role in history. In the absence of transport and telecommunication, letters were sent for declaring war or concluding treaties. Before the usage of paper and the invention of the press, the Tamil rulers followed a system of sending messengers with olai (palm leaf scripts) to the neighbouring kingdoms. There are references in the Bible to persons carrying letters and messages from one place to the other. Saul (St. Paul) who wanted to destroy the early Church went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogue at Damascus.¹ Later he himself wrote fourteen Epistles (Letters) to different newly established churches.²

According to John Correia Afonso, letters constitute a unique literary type. They are written conversation between one person and another. When they are described or narrated, they assume the nature of chronicles and records. This material is really valuable when it includes the contemporary activities and life patterns of the people. As historical sources, letters must also be considered as testimonial evidence.³

This chapter deals with the Jesuit Letters in general. It is necessary to have a broader perspective of the letters of the Jesuit missionaries before delving into any particular letter. The origin, nature and the development of the Jesuit Letters are discussed in the first part of the chapter. Secondly, the salient

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³ John Correia Afonso, Jesuit Letters and Indian History 1542 - 1773, Bombay, 1969, p. 73.
features of the letters are examined. Thirdly, a special focus has been assigned to the letters of Francis Xavier who was a great inspirer to the missionaries to write the Annual Letters to the Father General of the Society of the Jesus. Finally, the merits, shortcomings and the impact of the letters have been brought out.

Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus was a born leader. He had combined in himself the experiences as a soldier at the battle of Pamplona in 1521 and an intellect in the Paris University. He had an ardent desire to spread the good news of the kingdom of God far and wide in the world by his fellow missionaries of the Society. He read the signs of the times. He lived and grew during the critical period of the Reformation when the Catholic Church was going through a period of crisis and transition. Martin Luther and his followers had attacked the Church but the Counter Reformation movement by the Catholics against Protestantism brought a renewal in the Catholic Church at different levels. The Society of Jesus played a vital role in the Church by sending missionaries to the East to spread Catholicism and they were supported by the Portuguese authorities.

The Portuguese ships carried not only traders but also the zealous Jesuits to India. Ignatius of Loyola instructed his men in Rome and the missionaries in other countries to send annual reports of their missionary activities to him. The Jesuits who were known for holy obedience strictly adhered to the advice of their master. As a result, volumes of letters reached the headquarters of the Society of Jesus which today are a valuable source material to write the history.

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4 Father General is the head of the entire Society of Jesus who is elected either after the death of the present General or at the time of his resignation him. St. Ignatius of Loyola was the first Father General. Arturo Sosa, of Venezuela is the present Father General. (The Jesuit Year Book 2017)
of the Jesuits as well as secular history. The annual reports became the Annual Letters of the Jesuits. This practice continued even after Ignatius of Loyola and his successive Father Generals who received the Annual Letters from their fellow men working in different parts of the world.

**Aims and Objectives of Ignatius of Loyola**

Ignatius of Loyola realised that the preservation and growth of the Society are very essential. To achieve this he wanted to secure union among the members of the Society and close contact between his men and the superiors. He prescribed that the Father General must receive reports from the provincials\(^5\) and rectors\(^6\) under him periodically. Since the Jesuit missionaries were working at far away places, Ignatius found that epistolary correspondence would cement the unity of the young Society and its administration.

Fr. Peter Joannes de Polanco, the Secretary of Ignatius of Loyola in his letters to the members of the Society speaks about the objectives of writing letters to Father General on 27 July 1547. The two objectives of the Jesuit Letters are: edification of the members of the Society and their guidance. As the Jesuits had been working all over the world, the Society wanted to draw inspiration from them. Not only the Jesuits, the founder desired the non-Jesuits and the lay personnel to be inspired by the letters of the missionaries. The Father General intended to know the nature of the mission stations, residences of the Jesuits, their daily activities, their dealings with the local and Major Superiors, and the ecclesiastical and

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\(^5\) Provincial is the head of the Province.

\(^6\) Rectors are the superiors of the big communities of the Jesuits.
civil authorities. He expressed his intention to collect information with regard to the matters mentioned above and desired to issue instructions to guide the missionaries.

The Jesuit missionaries upheld the wishes of their founder and sent Annual Letters to Rome. The letters were not free from errors though the members of the Society exhibited holy obedience to their Father General and two objectives were systematically accomplished. The letters were of great inspiring to all those who read. A strong union was established between the authorities and the subjects. The Major Superiors\(^7\) could guide the missionaries according to the situation that prevailed in the places where the missionaries worked.

**Origin of the Letters**

In the beginning of the Society of Jesus, the members were kept informed about domestic occurrences and matters of importance by a hebdomadarius\(^8\) residing with the Father General at Rome. This office was exercised by each of the members in turn. Francis Xavier was the one who held this position for a long period. It was a full time job for any man, since each Jesuit wanted to have all the news about the rest.\(^9\)

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\(^7\) Major Superiors are the provincials of the provinces. They are the heads of the provinces.

\(^8\) Hebdomadarius in French refers to the weekly letter writer.

\(^9\) Afonso, *op.cit.*, p. 2.
Ignatius of Loyola had given instructions to the members of the Society that general information should be written with thought and care in a main letter which might be shown to anyone. Information of a more private nature should be set down in a separate sheet which was known as a hijuela.\textsuperscript{10}

Polanco sent a circular letter to the Society in which he brought forward twenty reasons for diligent correspondence. These reasons may be roughly grouped into three classes. They are the following:

i) Close contact through letters between its members would promote union and it would foster good governance of the Society.

ii) The Society would gain some external advantages; its good name would be upheld and vocation would be promoted among the readers of the letters in the outside world.

iii) All members of the Society would be strongly rooted in their vocation. They would grow in humility and diligence when they learn about the labour of others. It would be easier for them to seek counsel for their men.\textsuperscript{11}

The members of the Society of Jesus were advised to follow the rules for writing letters as made out by Polanco. He further insisted upon three things. They were i) what was to be written, ii) how was it to be written and iii) with what diligent was it to be written and despatched. In 1571 the Society made a decision, and according to that every provincial would sent a report of the missionary activities of the province.\textsuperscript{12}

\* Hijuela in Spanish means a separate or private note attached to the letter.
\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Monumenta Ignatiana, Series Prima, Epistolae et Instructions}, Tomus Primus, Madrid, 1903, pp. 536 - 537.
\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Monumenta Ignatiana}, Tomus Primus, pp. 537-539.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 547.
Even today the Society follows the practice of collecting the reports of various activities from each province. Once a year they issue the book called The Jesuits. The reader can have a comprehensive knowledge of the various activities of the Jesuits all over the world.\textsuperscript{13}

**Nature and Development of Jesuit Letters**

The Jesuits were instructed by their Father General that accuracy and fidelity have to be followed while furnishing information about their mission. Objectivity and reliability were very much insisted upon. The letters should be exact and the readers also could be exacting. The Jesuits were asked to reduce undue length of the letters. Only authentic information were to be sent to Rome. A comparatively high standard of reporting was demanded from the Jesuit correspondence.

Three types of letters were sent by the Jesuit missionaries from their respective mission stations:

i) Letters written to the Father General.

ii) Letters written to the members of the Society in general.

iii) Letters written to the public at large. The first type of the letters were clearly informative by their nature and facility. The second one was modest in character. The final one was more deliberate.\textsuperscript{14}

The Jesuits were the first missionaries who established contacts between the civilization of Europe and the ancient cultures of the East. Some of their accounts written to their personal friends were published with the title Relations. These are buried in private and public archives. At present the materials are available to the historians because of the efforts taken by the


\textsuperscript{14} Afonso, *op.cit.*, pp. 8 - 9.
Jesuit Institute of History in Rome. The epistolary correspondence undertaken for purely domestic reasons had far reaching consequences for this has furnished abundant materials for the writing of history.\textsuperscript{15}

**Origin and Development of the Jesuit Letters from India**

The dreams and plans of Ignatius of Loyola were executed by Francis Xavier the first missionary in the East. Francis Xavier firmly believed that only through the medium of letters the Jesuits could meet one another in this life. Even before leaving for India, he wrote letters to Ignatius of Loyola from Bologna on 31 March 1540. Francis Xavier promised in the letters that he would write letters frequently and in the manner indicated by the Father General. A part of the letter is given below:

“As I think it is only through the medium of letters that we shall see one another again in this life in the next it will be face to face with many embraces it remains for us during mutual glimpses by frequent writing. This is what you tell me to do and I shall do it, as well as to your instructions about the hijuelas”.\textsuperscript{16}

The wishes of Francis Xavier was conveyed in a letter written by Fr. Gaspar Barzaeus to India and Europe. He wrote “My dear brothers and fathers write length; each one individually as Father Master Xavier commanded each one of us who are scattered in these regions.”\textsuperscript{17} Again Francis Xavier exhorted his fellow men to write Annual Letters before he left India in 1552.\textsuperscript{18}

\textsuperscript{15} Afonso, op.cit., pp. 8 - 9.
As a result, a large number of letters arrived at the Society’s headquarters in Rome from 1553 onwards. The first Annual Letter was written by Fr. Manu Ludovici Frois shortly from Goa on 1 December 1552.\(^{19}\) Soon he became an expert chronicler and his numerous and compendious writings were among the best ever produced in the East. There was a steady improvement in the style and content of the Indian letters and they form rich material for the historiographer to write authentic history.

Towards the end of 1547 through Polanco, Ignatius of Loyola charged those in India to send detailed information which would be of greater help for the administration of the Society and the greater edification of all. They were to relate whatever was worthy of being known and speak about such things as the climate, diet, customs and character of the natives and of the peoples of India.\(^{20}\) These instructions are found in the letter written from Rome by Polanco to Nicolão Lancilotto who was in Goa on 22 November 1547.

Ignatius of Loyola intended to know the cosmography of the regions where his men labored and how long the days of summer and of winter were.\(^{21}\) The missionaries also sent to Europe the information about the flora and fauna, ethnography, religion, customs, traditions and history of the lands where they worked. These details are found in the letter of Fr. Frois to the Jesuits in Portugal.\(^{22}\)

Ignatius of Loyola was concerned about the loss of letters due to the countless perils on the high seas. In 1553 he wrote to the superiors in India and


\(^{21}\) *Monumenta Ignatiana, Quintus*, 1907, pp. 329 - 330.

Brazil, asking them to see to it that their subjects did not grow careless about sending the detailed information that was required at Rome.\textsuperscript{23}

Ignatius of Loyola wrote to Gaspar Berze on 24 February 1554 saying that the letters from the Jesuit missionaries are like a mine of information to the readers in Europe. So he wanted his companions to send letters in two parts. The first part should contain letters regarding the missionary activities meant for the Jesuit authorities so that they would guide their fellow men. The second part would be meant for the public.

Some Jesuits had exaggerated certain events that took place in the mission stations. These defects were corrected by Fr. Alessandro Valignano who visited the mission stations as well as the houses of the Jesuits. He strongly criticised the writers of the private letters because they were printed even before the official publication of the Annual Letters in 1583.\textsuperscript{24}

\textbf{Contribution of Fr. Alessandro Valignano}

In 1573, Valignano wrote to the Father General, Everardo Mercuriano on 13 December requesting him to instruct the superiors in India and Japan to send letters written with simplicity, truthfulness and a full knowledge of the facts avoiding exaggeration. Moreover he pointed out several causes for the misinformation conveyed in the letters received from Japan and India. They are given below:

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\textsuperscript{23} D.I., Vol II, (1550 - 1553), 1950, p. 313. \\
\textsuperscript{24} Afonso, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 6.
\end{flushright}
1. Some missionaries are deceived by external appearances of the people,

2. These external appearances are considered as reality by the readers,

3. Not all the conversions made were due to a real conversion of the people, and

4. The Jesuits were fond of generalizing and gave national significance to a particular case.²⁵

The noble task of printing the Indian letters was entrusted to Valignano. He found out that the names of persons, places and things had been wrongly given in the letters. The translation often changed the original meaning and sometimes the exaggerated things provided completely an opposite meaning of the event. Some of the published accounts were written by inexperienced newcomers.²⁶

Valignano took efforts to improve the situation. The official letters were improved. The Father Generals issued instructions to the superiors in India. As a result, the superiors took care to avoid indiscretions in their letters and a good Latin style was demanded for the official letters.

Salient Features of the Letters and Reports Sent from India

The missionaries were expected to furnish accurate reports not only about the members of the Society but also about the countries and people among whom they worked. The attitude of the rulers of the land in religious questions had also to be recorded since it could do much to promote or hinder the work of the missionaries. The geographical condition and the native religious beliefs and practices were to be carefully included in the letters.

²⁶ Schurhammer, Historical Research into the Life of Francis Xavier in the Sixteenth Century St. Xavier’s College Magazine, Bombay, 1923, pp. 42 - 43.
Francis Xavier carefully followed the instructions and became a forerunner in sending letters. Other missionaries also followed suit and exhibited great enthusiasm in their mission as well as in sending reports on the same. Though there are many shortcomings in the letters yet they form valuable source materials even today to know about the history of the sixteenth century.

The writing of the Jesuits portray the three dimensions of sincerity, piety and culture. The physical and psychological circumstances were taken into account while writing the letters. The letters form a marvellous monument of the vitality and were inspired by the Society to which the writers owed allegiance.

It is quite interesting to find that the Jesuit Letters do not begin with the political affairs of the state or the mission stations. The missionaries were worried about the work of the Society and its members. Secondly they gave importance to two things: one, geography because they had to undertake their mission journey and two, they learnt Indian religious beliefs and practices while involved in their missions. These details are well portrayed in their letters.

The second volume of Documenta Indica furnishes a variety of informations like geography, voyages, hardships, conversions and religious practices and social customs in places like Cochin, Sri Lanka, Maldives and South India.27

The Annual Letters based on the local reports had been edited after much consideration. The local reports were carefully adhered to and

reproduced in the chief letters of the mission or province. These first hand reports were textually reproduced in the Annual Letter itself.  

Some historians may lament this policy of silence or matters which interest him greatly, but again the missionaries were not writing for him and it is not difficult about official lapses they might easily add to their existing difficulties in India, while their leaders in Europe would neither profit by these revelations nor be able to help them.

The Indian letters proceeded from the prudence and discretion which Ignatius enjoined on his subjects. In the letters meant for publication the missionaries were to omit details to which exception might be taken by their fellow Jesuits or by the ecclesiastical and civil authorities. In some letters the personal names have been omitted. Two references have been cited in ‘The Aravidu Dynasty of Vijayanagara’ by Fr. Henry Heras. Venkata III sent an army to defeat Lingama Nayak the rebel chief. Fr. B. Coutinho’s letter narrates the victory of Venkata II but not the name of the general of the army. After the conquest of Deccan, Akbar sent an embassy to the Emperor of Vijayanagar in 1600. The letters of Fr. Coutinho which give this information do not give the name of the ambassador, but only states that he is a prudent and experienced man. It shows that in some cases the Jesuits were prudent and they must have thought that it would mean little for the distant readers. In their direct correspondence with high civil and ecclesiastical circles the missionaries could at times be very blunt and severe indeed as the letters of Francis Xavier amply testify.

Both private and official letters despatched from India to Europe were very lengthy. Most people rarely made time for anything more than a hurried note and long letters are looked upon as curiosities of a remote past. However, the extensive length of the Jesuit Letters is not difficult to account for.

Since the Indian fleet left Cochin and Goa for Lisbon once a year, the missionaries as well as the officials also sent their letters annually. Correspondents could only post their letters between times and at long intervals. They had to convey much about the past events, future problems and help and advice to seek. It took nearly four years to receive the reply to a letter with the provision that in this calculation there may be some slight difference, more or less, depending on the state of the sea and winds.31

In Europe the letters were awaited with eager curiosity not only by Jesuits but also by other persons, both lay and ecclesiastical who were interested in the progress of the faith in the distant lands. It was praiseworthy curiosity which the missionaries were not loath to satisfy by writing at length. A letter speaks about the fishermen of Cape Comorin, their food, drinks, dress and the pearl called aljofar.32

Fr. Lancilotto wrote to Ignatius of Loyola that he would limit his account to Quilon and the Fishery Coast since “all the fathers in these parts had an order from the latter to write to him every year, it would not be necessary for me to write anything about the others or about other parts and provinces as he did in past years.33

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Seed pearls were known as aljofars. They were very small and bright.
The Jesuit Letters were primarily focused on the edification of the members of the Society. The Society was edified by the missionary zeal of the Jesuits missionaries. It acquired a comprehensive knowledge about the rulers and the people of India. The second objective was to receive guidance from the authorities which was also accomplished. The letters written by the Father Generals were of great consolation and guidance to their fellow men. Monumenta Ignatiana, a collection of letters of Ignatius of Loyola to the missionaries bears witness to this.

The origin, development and features of the letters have been narrated. Ignatius of Loyola had been instructing from the beginning about the authenticity of writing letters. As a result, the three dimensions namely sincerity, piety and culture run through out the letters. The letters also witness to prudence and discretion which the Father General insisted upon while writing letters by the missionaries. The local reports on which the Annual Letters were based were drawn after much consideration. The salient features of the letters speak for their authenticity.

Polanco instructed the missionaries through his guidelines on what to write and how to write. The constant motivation extended by Valignano enabled the missionaries to be precise and exact in writing letters.

**Letters of Francis Xavier**

The Jesuit missionaries had been dispatching letters and reports from sixteenth century onwards from India and other countries to Rome and Lisbon. Among them the letters of Francis Xavier deserve a special concern and treatment. More than anyone else, the letters of this great visionary and missionary inspired a good number of young men who opted for the service of
humanity. It is good to know the special features of the letters of Francis Xavier to comprehend the entire Jesuit Letters. There is a saying that he used to write letters to Ignatius of Loyola kneeling down. The day Francis Xavier was about to board the ship to India, he was presented a crucifix by Ignatius of Loyola commanding “go and set the world on fire”. Francis Xavier gladly accepted the proposal with great joy saying “Puessus Héme aquií” (Good enough; I am ready). The two friends bade good bye never to see each other again in life.

Francis Xavier Wonderfully accomplished his zealous mission which is revealed through all his letters. His letters speak not only about his missionary activities but also the day to day problems of the people.

**Structure, Style and Pattern of the Letters**

Francis Xavier was a man of passionate action. He never wrote any book. But his letters and the few instructions which he wrote to various people in the concrete situation manifest the mission of his life, his convictions and his deep spirituality.

Francis Xavier wrote numerous letters but many of them are lost or extinct. From those which are found, after a careful examination and study, today there are more than a hundred letters and other documents or instructions attributed to Francis Xavier. To these a fragment written on both sides by Francis Xavier to King John III and identified and published by Schurhammer is added.

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The letters are 109 and there are 29 instructions and documents. Some of the letters are long with a lot of details about his journeys, the work of evangelization, the situation of the people, the place etc; others are short. 36

These letters were written from Rome, Goa, the Pearl Fishery Coast (Thoothukudi, Ponnaikayal, Alanthalai, Manappadu), Travancore, Mylapore, Mannar and Jaffnapattanam. Three letters have been sent from Amboyana, Malacca, and Cochin. 37

The letters were always personal, meant for an individual or individuals. Some are long with a lot of details and meant for the larger readers interested in the works of the Society. Many of the letters were written by Francis Xavier in his own hand. Most of them were written in Spanish and those written to the King of Portugal and to his companion in Portugal and the Indies are in Portuguese. Many of his letters contain words, phrases and sentences in Latin as was the style of the time. Though his native language was Basque, he had learnt many other languages like Spanish, Latin, France, Italian, Portuguese and to some extent Tamil and Japanese. Therefore in his letters one can often find a mixture of words of different languages. 38

Francis Xavier being a man on the move and always in haste often his thoughts are not expressed in a logical order; the sentences are at times long and redundant. This was also perhaps because most of his letters were dictated. As he advised his companions he taught and preached in the language as is spoken by the common people in order to be better understood. 39

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38 Hilario Fernandes, *op. cit.*, p 40 - 43.
39 Ibid.
Francis Xavier was most natural and spontaneous in his writing without much thought for finding the most apt words but conveying the ideas which he wanted to convey. He was aware of his limitation as he mentions in his letter, “Since I arrived in Cochin at time when the ships were about to leave and was interrupted by the visits of many friends, this letter has been hastily written, the things are not in order and the accounts are defective. Accept my good intentions.” Commenting on the style of Francis Xavier’s letters, Alexander Brou writes:

They are always warm with the love of God and of souls, always tender and expressive. Xavier never uses a literary phrase. Admirers of a beautiful language and learned composition will not find here anything but sentences that are frequently entangled barely correct, written in haste by the pen of a man whose entire time was spent in the service of his neighbour. Latin phrases and Portuguese words, the first that cause to his pen are mixed into his Spanish text. But it is all alive and almost breathless. We can imagine him dictating or writing his letter in the midst of constant interruptions and then taking up again as best as he could the thread of his thoughts.

Generally the letters of Francis Xavier begin with the sign of the cross and at times the name of Jesus abbreviated as ‘Ihus’ or ‘Ihs’, especially on the letters written to the companions of the Society or other priests. Secondly, the letters begin with greetings, “la gratia y amor de Christo nuestro Senor sea en nuestra ayuda y fabor” for the letters in Spanish or “A gracia de Nosso Senhor Jesu Christo seya sempre emnossa ajuda e favor; Amem” for the letters in Portuguese, or “Gratia et pax Domini nostri Jesu Christi sit semper nobiscum”

41 Hilario, op.cit., p.34.
for the letters in Latin. All these greetings mean more or less, “May the grace of Christ our Lord always help and assist us. Amen”.43

All the paragraphs of the letters are numbered and each paragraph normally contains one idea or theme or information. The ending of the letters have various forms. For instance some letters end with “Your least brother and son”, when writing to his companions in Europe; or “Your child in Christ,” when writing to Ignatius of Loyola and “Your dearest brother in Christ”, when writing to Fr. Simon Rodrigues.44

Francis Xavier’s first letter to Ignatius of Loyola from Thoothukudi was written in the spring of 1543. The beginning and end of the letter is a great testimony to the great affection Francis Xavier had towards his Father General. The letter commences in this way:

“May the grace and charity of Christ our Lord always help and favour us Amen. I wrote you a long letter from Goa about our voyage from Portugal to India. Now because such is your wish, my best and sweetest Father, I will give you a little account of my expedition to Cape Comorin.”45

The same letter ends with following conclusion:

“As for myself, trusting in the infinite goodness of God and in your sacrifices and prayers as in those of all the Society, I hope that we shall see


* Simon Rodrigues was one of the six companies of Ignatius of Loyola when he founded the Society of Jesus. He was appointed as the Provincial of Portugal by Ignatius of Loyola.

44 *Epistolae S. Francis Xaverii, Tomus I. (1535-1548)*, 1944, pp. 50-51.

* Another name for Kanyakumari is Cape Comorin. Francis Xavier has mentioned Cape Comorin instead of Kanyakumari in his letters.

one another again, if not in this life, at least in that blessed life which is to come, whose joys far surpass all that we could have here.”

Your child in Christ

Francisco

Just like a child, the great missionary wrote his letter to Ignatius of Loyola. Love and affinity run through all the letters which are great inspiration for those who undertake missionary work in very remote villages amidst great dangers.

**Unique Features of the Letters of Francis Xavier**

In order to bring out the unique features of the letters of Francis Xavier, the author of the thesis analyses the letters written by him from the Fishery Coast. It is appropriate to understand the nature of the letters of Francis Xavier written to his Father General, his companions, to the king of Portugal and the other officials from the Fishery Coast.

The letters of Francis Xavier reveal that the understanding of mission by Francis Xavier was broader even in the sixteenth century and this had an impact on the socio, economic, political and cultural lives of the people of that time. His letters related to the Fishery Coast witness to the fact that he was carried away by liberative tendency in all his dealing with native rulers and their people. The spiritual and secular activities had been undertaken enthusiastically and strongly by Francis Xavier.

The letters of Francis Xavier portray that he was a man of zeal in his missionary activities. The mass conversion of the Paravas in 1536 was not immediately followed by any of the organised missionary work in the

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Fishery Coast. Only after the arrival of Francis Xavier in 1542, a true Christians life was promoted among them. He baptized hundreds of people every day. He visited all the Christian villages on foot and instructed the converts in faith. He sought the help of a few individuals who helped him to translate Latin prayers and religious texts into Tamil.  

The letters of Francis Xavier throw light on the building up of Christianity in the extreme south of the Tamil country five centuries ago. Francis Xavier memorised the important prayers and with a bell in his hand went around the streets of each village and called upon the women, men, labourers, slaves and children to come out of their houses and gathered them in one place and taught them prayers. He was very careful in preventing the new Christians from going back to their age old religious beliefs and customs. Thus Francis Xavier implanted the faith, imparted instructions and insisted upon perseverance in their new life in Christianity. He imbibed the same zeal and spirit in his companions. He intended that each village in the Fishery Coast to have a resident priest and that was achieved by the end of the sixteenth century.

The letters also reveal that Francis Xavier was a systematic evangelist. The evangelization work in the Fishery Coast was diligently planned, organised and carried out by him and his successors. On Sunday evenings, the men gathered around the priest and had their doubts regarding their faith clarified. On Friday, all the Christians meditated on the Passions of Christ. The women discussed practical issues on Saturdays. Children were taught the doctrines on Wednesdays; young girls were instructed about chastity and

modesty in dress and behaviour.\textsuperscript{49} Later these small groups were latter developed into sodalities and confraternities.\textsuperscript{50}

The letters describe Francis Xavier as a visionary. He knew the scarcity of missionaries to continue the work. He introduced lay collaboration in his endeavours. He spotted a few pious and bright Catholics in each village and entrusted to them the catechetical apostolate. A small circle consisting of three persons was formed effectively and fruitfully. The ‘trio’- the ubadesiyar\textsuperscript{51} the kanakkapillai\textsuperscript{52} and the padre\textsuperscript{53} became a nucleus and played an influential role in shaping the fisherfolk community into a cultured society.

Even among the ‘trio’, the role of the kanakkapillai was an incomparable one which continues to function in almost all the parishes\textsuperscript{54} even today. Francis Xavier himself appointed the kanakkapillais and they were expected to be clean and pure in heart. He had to monitor the presence and activities of black magicians in the Christian villages. It was his duty to supervise whether catechism was taught regularly. He had to make a survey of the people of those who had not received baptism and made confession. He had to visit sick people also. He had to present a report to the parish priest of the happening in the parish in his absence.

Some of the letters witness that Francis Xavier was the lover of human dignity. He desired that women should be treated with dignity. He was against the practice of sati and other superstitious beliefs. Widows were to eschew sati

\textsuperscript{49} Joseph Costelloe, M., (ed.),\textit{op.cit.}, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{50} Confraternity is a society or an association, especially a devotional or charitable society for the laity started by the Jesuits.
\textsuperscript{51} Sacristian was known as ubadesiysar.
\textsuperscript{52} Catechist was called as kanakkapillai.
\textsuperscript{53} Parish priest was called as padre.
\textsuperscript{54} Parish is the last unit of the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church. Parish has been established in each Catholic village. Parish priest is the head of the parish.
and not to shave their heads at the death their husbands. Francis Xavier proscribed the consumption of úrak.\(^{55}\) He offered one fanam\(^{56}\) for each drunkard woman captured and instructed and she was to be confined for three days. The merinho\(^{57}\) was asked to proclaim this order in all the villages.\(^{58}\) Francis Xavier was sympathetic towards the slaves. He instructed the slave masters to treat the slaves humanely. The slaves were asked to come to the church on Sundays after their masters had departed and they were also taught catechism on Sundays. He advised his companions to spend a considerable portion of their time with the slaves.\(^{59}\) Francis Xavier in one of his letters condemns the Portuguese who held female slaves in Punnaikayal.

Francis Xavier had shown the seeds of inculturation even before De Nobili and the people have adopted and modified the culture that the Portuguese or the missionaries imposed on them depending on their life patterns Francis Xavier was astonished at the number of Brahmins who were serving at the temple in Tiruchendur. He made several attempts to have dialogue with them. He explained to them the fundamental principles of Christianity. He carefully noticed their chanting ‘om cirii Narayana nama’ and has mentioned it in a letter.\(^{60}\) The saint had known how to integrate events which took place in around him instead of despising them.

Francis Xavier not only carried out the spiritual activities like administering baptism and imparting catechism but also carefully studied the

\(^{55}\) Úrak was a country liquor available in the Fishery Coast.

\(^{56}\) Fanam, a very small gold coin worth around 25 reis was used in the Fishery Coast and Southern Travancore.

\(^{57}\) A warden or police officer in a Portuguese colony.

\(^{58}\) Joseph Costelloe, M., (ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, 1993, pp. 75 -76.


changes which were taking place in the Vijayanagar ruler, the Nayaks and the Poligars. His letters say that the Fishery Coast was under the control of three rulers and often they threatened the Paravas who had fled to a nearby island out in the sea and were dying from hunger. Francis Xavier asked the village leaders of Kombuthurai, Punninkayal and Thoothukudi to raise an amount from the champanotes to help the refugees. On his way to Kanyakumari, Francis Xavier also persuaded the looting army to withdraw from their attack on the coastal villages. The ruler of Travancore expected help from Francis Xavier and the Portuguese. But the holy missionary answered them he would offer prayers and he must have fulfilled his promise. The Vijayanagar army retreated from Kottar after ravaging the coast.

While narrating the most pitiful situation in the Fishery Coast during this invasion, Francis Xavier said that, some had nothing to eat; others, because of their age, had not been able to come, others were dead. Others were husbands and wives, who gave birth on the way; and there were other most pitiful sights. Francis Xavier ordered all the poor people to come and settle at Manappadu. He also wished the rich people of Manappadu to help the affected Paravas of Kanyakumari.

This political situation witnessed by Francis Xavier form the primary source material which is helpful to know about the history of Fishery Coast in the sixteenth century. The historians are indebted to the letters of Francis Xavier in this regard.

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62 Small boats used for navigating rivers are known as champanas. Champanotes are the owners of the champanas.
63 Kottar an interior place is situated near Nagercoil.
64 Joseph Costelloe, M., op.cit., pp. 94 - 95.
There are ample evidences in the letters of Francis Xavier to prove that he raised his voice quite often against the Portuguese officials whenever they illtreated the natives. He lamented that the captain João Fernandes Correa inflicted several harsh treatment on the fisherfolk. In one of his letters Francis Xavier expressed his anger over Cosme de Paiva, the captain who was selling horses to Vettum Perumal. The latter claimed jurisdiction over Thoothukudi and had harassed the Paravas for their conversions and for not remitting taxes due to him. De Paiva was warned by Francis Xavier and at his request the former was imprisoned wrote a letter to the king of Portugal on 20 January 1545 from Cochin in which he explained about the persecution of the newly converted Christians at Mannar.

Francis Xavier was aware of the economic condition of the fisherfolk, particularly the annual pearl fishing of the same people. His letters speak about two kinds of pearls, season of pearl fishing and chank fishing, the areas where these marine species were available and the rent the Paravas had to pay to different authorities and administrators.

In one of his letters Francis Xavier made an appeal to the king of Portugal to exempt the fisherfolk from paying any taxes in the absence of pearl fishery. The fisher men had to give a stipulated amount of money for the foot wear of the queen of Portugal and at each pearl fishing season certain big pearls were reserved for this. Francis Xavier brought this to the notice of the king and stopped sending foot wear money. Francis Xavier wrote to the queen

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65 M. Joseph Costelloe, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
that the prayers of the poor Paravas would be the best sort of slippers for her to mount up to paradise in.68

Impact of the Letters

Francis Xavier carried out the wishes of his master Ignatius of Loyola sincerely. The letters of the former established a strong bond between the missionaries of the Fishery Coast and Rome. His letters were eagerly read in Europe and they made great impact on the rulers, the ruled and the Jesuits. It was the time of the Counter Reformation Movement launched by the Catholic Church and the Council of Trent was in session in 1545. Keeping in mind the ecclesiastical changes and the impact of Protestantism, Francis Xavier wrote his letters with greater missionary zeal.

The Catholic Church in Europe and the Catholic countries read the letters with reverence and enthusiasm. The following passages describe how the letters were read and how jubilant the whole Europe was.

The positive reaction was made on three open letters written by Francis Xavier dated 27 January 1545 from Cochin. One of them in Portuguese was addressed to Simon Rodrigues the other two in Spanish one meant for Ignatius of Loyola and other for the brethren in Rome. The content of the letters is about the protection of the Paravas from the Vadugars, the baptism of 600 Caraiyars69 and the conversions of 10,000 Mukkuvars.70 Also

69 Caraiyars – A community of fishermen once considered inferior to the Paravas. They inhabited the specific settlements like Singithurai, Kombuthurai and the north end of the Fishery Coast.
70 Mukkuvars – A fisher community who inhabited the southern stretch of the Fishery Coast.
there is a mention about the massacre of 600 new Christians in Mannar by the king of Jaffna.\footnote{Rayana, P., \textit{Saint Francis Xavier and His Shrine}, Fifth Edition, Old Goa, 2010, p. 117.}

Being an open letter, it was shown to the king. The king ordered the news to be proclaimed from every pulpit\footnote{A small platform in a church that is like a box and is high above the ground, where a priest, etc. stands to speak to the faithful.} in the realm. He directed his treasury to increase the aid to the 100 scholastics and the Jesuit scholars in Coimbra and to send twelve of them to India the following year. The letter reached Coimbra on October 19. The enthusiasm of the scholastics knew no bounds. The letter was at once translated in Latin and copies in both the languages were put into circulation among friends and well-wishers of the Jesuits.\footnote{Rayana, P., \textit{op.cit.}, p. 118.}

Peter Faber received the original copies of the translation at Madrid with no less enthusiasm and wanted to go to the aid of his friends. Prince Philip desired to read the letter but turned out to be an implacable enemy of the Jesuits in Spain. On November 19, Faber forwarded the original letters to Rome and copies of the letter to Bobadilla in Cologne.

The letter reached Rome at the end of 1545 and it was translated into Italian and a copy was sent to the scholastics in Paris on 17 January 1546. Dr.Diogo Gouvea gave the imprimatur to the French translations of this letter. Louvain received its copy on 24 March 1546. Laynes received a copy at the Council of Trent. One of the presidents of the Council Cardinal Cervini, the future Pope Marcellous II had its reading during his meals. King John III
forwarded the letter to the Pope on 19 February 1546. His ambassador in Rome printed the letters in a booklet form and distributed them.\(^{74}\)

The reaction of Ignatius of Loyola to this letter is found in the letter written by him on 24 March 1546.

“oh what docile sons has the Mother Church found for Christ and how strong in persecutions, so as to rejoice to find herself robed again in purple on her white tunic by her sponge; For after baptism more than 600 bravely laid down their lives for Christ. In this way Christ in His love begun to coupon safe for the injury done to her by those who defected to Martin Luther or Philip Millington and for all those who weigh her down by their lives. In the same charity, He grant that, being ashamed of themselves and amending their ways, they may again be incorporated into her.\(^{75}\)

Francis Xavier’s letters took Europe by storm. They created a desire for the “Italian letters” in all literary circles, both vernacular and Latin. To satisfy this demand, individuals as well as printing presses began to print single letters or a collection of them in all languages—Latin, French, Italian, Spanish, German, English, Dutch, Polish and Japanese, others made summaries or extracts of the letters. The market was overflowing for centuries with various editions, reprints, extracts, etc. But hardly any of them was very reliable. More than the incorrupt body, the work of Francis Xavier’s spirit and his writings suffered corruption or mutilation on a massive scale through centuries in all countries of Europe.\(^{76}\)

The letters of Francis Xavier speak volumes about the history of the Fishery Coast. The life of the Paravas in the sixteenth century has been portrayed marvellously in the letters. The letters speak about the Missiology

\(^{74}\) Rayana, P., *op.cit.* p.118.

\(^{75}\) Rayana, P., *op.cit.* p. 118.

of the Church, the formation of Christian faith and the methods of teaching of catechism which is followed even today. The political history of Vijayanagar Empire, the Nayakdoms, the Poligars and their contemporary rulers upto Travancore centred around Pearl fisheries has been brought only by the letters of Francis Xavier. The social history of the Paravas with their socio, economic and cultural problems have been found a place in the letters. A kaleidoscope nature of the letters of Francis Xavier is a testimony to his multi-dimensional personality. These letters are a living monument to the zeal of Francis Xavier for generation after generation.

**Geographical Areas Covered by the Jesuit Letters**

The Annual Letters of the Jesuit Missionaries furnish detailed information about the establishment mission stations in India and abroad. Francis Xavier arrived Goa in 1542 and he visited a number of countries. He died on 3 December 1552 in the island of Shangchuan near China. The Portuguese king had selected Francis Xavier for work in India but he (Francis Xavier) broke free from the narrow confines of Portuguese dominions and went to people who were not reliant on foreign proclaim or subservient to anyone. He sowed the seeds of Christianity in diverse regions beyond India. In the space of eleven years he covered some 80,000 kilo meters, most of it by sea; and throughout these long and arduous journeys he maintained contact with his Jesuit companions working in India, and with Ignatius of Loyola, his religious mentor and Superior in Rome.\(^7\)

The Indian Province of the Society erected in 1549 extended as a matter of fact from the Cape of Good Hope to the Moluccas and even beyond

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them to Japan. The Jesuits penetrated into Burma and had established the mission in Sri Lanka also.\(^{78}\)

António Franco and Camara Manual published Catologues providing the list of departures for the missions from 1541 to 1724 and 1541 to 1613 respectively. Antonio da Silva Rego’s Documentação para a história das Missões do Padroado Português do Oriente has a list of letters received from the East.

In 1580 the first Jesuit Mission was received at Fatehpur by Akbar, the Great Mughal Emperor. It was followed by two missions to his court. Two Jesuit priests in Bengal drew Akbar’s favourable attention towards Christianity. These Jesuits had arrived in Bengal in 1576 but it was only in 1598 that a regular mission was established. Hugli was the field of their earliest endeavours then the Jesuits pushed on to Chandecan and Siripur in the north and to Chittagong in the east; later on they even established a residence at Patna.\(^{79}\)

In the seventeenth century there was a struggle between the Great Mughal, other Indian rulers, the Portuguese, the Dutch and the English. Bengal was the centre of trade. They all plundered it. Its harbours were destroyed. The Jesuit letters written from Bengal give an elaborate account of this. A full account of this also has been given by Fr. Cabral in a letter to the Provincial of Malabar written in 1634.\(^{80}\)

The letters of Fathers Nicholas Pimenta, Belchior Coutinho, Francesco Ricio and Fride Veiga furnish information about the relationship

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\(^{78}\) *Dj, Vol, I*, pp. 507-510.


between Venkata II and the Jesuits. Oba Raya the father in law of Venkata was the mediator between the emperor and the missionaries. Both had high respect and regard for one another. The Jesuits were able to establish their missions at Santhome and Chandragiri and they were financially helped by the emperor. There is a reference that the emperor himself visited the Jesuit house at Chandragiri. The life of the Jesuits at the court of Venkata II and their letters that witnessed the contemporary activities of the emperor are valuable information to study the history of the Aravidu Dynasty.  

The Old Madura Mission was founded in 1605. Fernandes prepared the ground and it was well established by De Nobili. It included the missions of the Pearl Fishery Coast, Travancore, Cochin, Madurai, Sri Lanka, Bengal and Pegu, Malacca and the Moluccas. The Fishery Coast witnessed the service of the Jesuit missionaries for two centuries. The fruitful and multifaceted work of De Nobili, John de Britto and Beschi in and around Madurai have been brought out to the common people by the works of Joseph Bertrand, Leon Besse, Jean Castets and Houpert. These authors do not furnish a critical edition of the original sources, but they have provided enough material from the missionary letters regarding the Nayaks of Madurai, Senji and Tanjore.

Fencio explored the land of the Todas and brought back information which was published three centuries later by W.H.R. Rivers in his famous work on that tribe. Fencio also penetrated into the ‘kingdom of the salt,’ across the Ghats from Calicut. Information about the Zamorin, the roving

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84 Kingdom of salt refers to Kerala.
Kunhale, and political conditions in Calicut, are to be found in the Annual Letters and other Jesuit reports.

The first Annual Letter from Madurai seems to have been written in 1640. The last Annual Letter of the Mission that is recorded in the Archives is of 1757. There are some gaps between these two dates, however as not all the Annual Letters have been preserved.

The mission of Mysore was begun by Fr. Leonardo Cinnami towards the middle of the seventeenth century. Dharmapuri, Marandaha, Sambali, Quellamangala and Srirangappanam were under this mission. The Carnatic Mission of the French Jesuits is well represented in the collection of Letters Edifiantes.

Fr. Gonçalo Martins lead the Bijapur Mission in a later period. The viceroy of Portuguese India sent him to Shivaji’s court to secure the ratification of the Maratha – Portuguese Treaty of 1667. Thus a link between the Jesuit activity in the Muslims and in the Maratha areas was established. The Jesuits witnessed the rise of the Maratha power in western India and the ravages of the wars between the young nation and its neighbours in the Konkan and in southern India. Their records are valuable and they give a complete picture of Maratha rule in the region of Salsette.

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85 Kunhale or kunjali refers to the Marakkarr chieftain of the Malabar Coast.
91 Afonso, *op.cit.*, p. 54.
Fr. Ferroli gives an account of the “Dutch Exploits in India and Ceylon, as related by Contemporary Jesuit Letters, 1602-1633.” His works help the study of the rise of the Dutch, the second colonial power in India.  

**Publication of the Letters**

The Jesuits made attempts to compile the letters into book form. In 1545 a French translation of the famous letters of Francis Xavier written from Cochin on 15 January 1544 was printed in Paris. A second edition was promptly called for in France while a German edition was published in 1545. The printed letters were sent to booksellers to be disposed of at a nominal price, while measures were also taken to secure wide publicity for this new type of literature.

As the letters from India increased in number with the arrival of new members of the Society of Jesus on its shores, it was found more convenient to bind several letters together in book form and the first collection of this was *Avisi Particolari delle Indie di Portogallo*. It appeared in Rome in 1552 and an edition followed in Spanish. Seven years later great progress had been made and a four volume set of Jesuit Letters, the *Diversi Avisi Particolari dell Indie de Portogallo* was printed at Venice. In 1563, a Latin edition appeared at Dillingen and thus the Indian letters came to reach an even wider public in northern and central Europe.

In 1583 the official Annual Letters compiled at Rome from the reports of the various provinces and missions were printed and became public for the first time under the title: *Annuae Litterae Societatis Jesu anni MD- LXXXI ad*  

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93 Afonso, *op.cit.*, pp 33 - 34.  
Patres et Fratres eiusdem Societatis. The suppression of the Society was a terrible blow to the literary activities also. The letters were published again at Lyons in 1819 and at Paris and Toulouse in 1829 and 1832 respectively.  

Jesuit letters were translated into Spanish, Italian, Polish and English. Indian students would be much benefitted by the English translation of the letters. The letters of Jesuit Missionaries to worked in the Coromandel Coast are considered as travellers’ narratives. John Lockman’s *Travels of the Jesuits into Various Parts of the World*, published in two volumes in London in 1743 is considered more valuable.  

After the restoration of the Society in 1814 Jesuits resumed their spirit and it paved the way for a new era in their missionary literature. In 1894, the *Monumenta Historica Societatis Jesu*, a periodical publication of historical documents relating to the Society was launched at Madrid. It was transferred to Rome and began to assume an international importance in 1929. A special Jesuit Institute of History was set up in Rome in the 1930’s and the trained Jesuit specialists run the new periodical entitled Archivum Historicum Societatis Jesu. They also publish the volumes of the Monumenta and other historical works.  

Every Indian Scholar may judge for himself of the high historical standard of the publications of the Jesuit Institute of History by inspecting the volumes relating to India which have been edited in recent years by its members. They are the work of Schurhammer and Joseph Wicki, who have brought to their work a German thoroughness coupled with a deep love for their subject. 

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Portuguese historian António da Silva Rego has edited the Documentação para a História das Missões do Padroado Português do Oriente. Of these twelve volumes on India, the last ten contain documents relating to the Society. These are available at the Government Archives of Goa at Panaji and at the Xavier Centre for Historical Research at Porvorim, Goa.

The works of Schurhammar like *Francis Xavier – His Life, His Times, Vols I - III* are immensely helpful for the history scholars. Volume II throws lights on the missionary activities of Francis Xavier and the life style of the people of the Fishery Coast. Joseph Wicki in his Documenta Indica in eighteen volumes speaks about the mission journey of the Jesuits. Among them, the first five volumes are very useful to know the early mission history of the Jesuits in the Fishery Coast. All the eighteen volumes of Documenta Indica are in the Portuguese language. If they are translated into English, history students will be able to contribute more towards the Indian history by exploring the primary sources.

**Availability of the Letters**

Rome, Lisbon and Goa are the three important administrative centres of the mission of the Order of Society of Jesus where official letters of the Jesuits have been deposited. In 1544 only four years after the official establishment of the Society, Ignatius of Loyola and his companions moved into the house in adjoining the church of S. Maria della Strada, in what is today the Pizza del Gesú. This house in Rome was to be the official residence of the Father General and the administrative centre of the Society till its suppression in
Only in 1564 was a regular archive inaugurated with registers of the letters sent and received. Among 137 letters and other writings of Francis Xavier whose text has been preserved, only 33½ are extent in the original, the majority of them in Lisbon. The man who did the most however to organise the Jesuits archives and to preserve was Polanco. At the time of the suppression, the central archives of the Society were still located in the residence of the Gesù where they had been inaugurated. They were returned to the Jesuits at the time of the restoration of their Order in 1814 in a rather complete state.

The greater part of their content is now preserved in the Archivum Romanum Societas Jesu - a treasure-house of information about the East. The last Annual Letter of the Province of Goa that is preserved in these archives is actually for the years 1750-1753. The last one of the Province of Malabar is of 1745 and is signed “Iosephus Khrening,” this being a missionary who left Europe for Malabar in 1737, and died about the year 1789. Other evidence, however, seems to establish the fact that the Annual Letters were continued till 1759 the year of the expulsion of the Jesuits from Portuguese territory.

During the persecution of the Jesuits by Marquis of Pombal the much valued copies of the letters from the East, the Cartas da India of the College of Coimbra, and hundreds of packets of documents belonging to the same institution were confiscated and transferred to other places; the codex Cartas da India is now preserved in Lisbon, in the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The National Library of Lisbon, the National Archives of

the Torre do Tombo, the Ajuda Library, and the Public Library of Evora also have the contents of the letters from India.\textsuperscript{103}

In recent years, fortunately, a mass of these documents have been published by the Centro de Estudos Históricos Ultramarinos in Lisbon. The most important of these publications from the point of view of the present study is the Documentação para a História do Padroado Português do Oriente, edited by Antonio da Silva Rego, who is also responsible for two important serial publications.

After Pombal had ruined the missions of the Society of Jesus in India and seized its goods, he ordered in the King’s name that the state and ecclesiastical archives of the Portuguese territories in India should be sent to Lisbon by ship. This was in 1774. The carrying out of this instruction was entrusted to a certain Luis Xavier of whom the Portuguese Governor wrote in 1799 that he had proceeded in a most faithless manner and had caused great damage. In any case over 12,000 state documents in 62 folio volumes: (Livros das Monções do Reino) arrived in Portugal and are now in the Archives of the Torre do Tombo. But the records of the religious orders seem to have disappeared without leaving a trace.\textsuperscript{104} The manuscripts of Monções do Reino are available in the Government Archives of Goa.

At present no original Jesuit Letters from the Society’s archives seem to exist in the Historical Archives of Goa where the old documents once lying in various government departments were collected. Personal investigations and a perusal of the most recent studies on the Goa archives reveal just one, unpublished Jesuit codex, the Copiador das cartas dos Padres Jesuitas aos

\textsuperscript{103} DI Vol I, p. 65.
\textsuperscript{104} DI Vol I, p. 134.
seus provinciais (1744-1758), which contains only a few letters and is not in a very good condition. Dr. Pissurlencar who was responsible for the reorganization of the Goa Archives, an eminent authority on Indo-Portuguese and Maratha history has already utilized the documents relating to the Jesuits which he found in Goa. He has also compiled some of the Portuguese letters related with trade and his work Assentos do Conselho do in two volumes are greatly useful to the scholars of maritime history.

It was only in 1924, when Messrs. Magrs Brothers published a detailed catalogue of a part of the Aveiro collection autograph letters relating to the Catholic Missions India and the Far East, that the research students were made aware of the existence of the historical treasure-trove. The documents cover the years 1663-1771, and some of them contain material for Indian historiography.

Francis Xavier was aware of the ecclesiastical changes that were taking place due to the Reformation Movement while he wrote letters to Rome. The letters of Francis Xavier give a comprehensive view about the history of the Fishery Coast during the Portuguese era i.e. from 1500-1658. There are similar references found in Schurhammer’s work on Francis Xavier – His Life, His Times, Volumes I –III. The Letters of Francis Xavier reveal that the understanding of the mission by the Jesuits was not confined only to the religious activities; it involved socio, economic, political and cultural issues. The struggles of the people became the focus of his mission and he found people oriented solution to their problems with the help of intellectuals, rich,

105 Afonso, op.cit., p. 136.
106 Decla, S. op.cit.,
officials and the rulers. Many young men volunteered themselves to serve as missionaries in the East. The letters of Francis Xavier are unique and they have made great impact on the readers.

The Jesuit authorities printed the letters with the noble intention of providing wider publicity. The letters were translated into several languages, Schurhammer, Joseph Wicki and Antonio da Silva Rego have exhibited their sincere efforts in editing these letters. Their works are in Portuguese and if they are translated into English historians will be able to contribute more towards Indian history. Hosten has made an impact by bringing to light many letters of the Jesuits in relation to the Mughals. His work is available in English. More efforts must be undertaken to tap such available sources in order to contribute effectively in writing a comprehensive history.

The letters of the Jesuits speak also about the geographical areas covered by the missionaries in India and abroad. Francis Xavier visited a number of countries and his letters describe the difficulties in establishing particular missions and the fruits of such endeavour. The missionaries had obtained permission from the great rulers before erecting new mission stations. The Jesuit mission among the Todas has been explored by Fencio. The Jesuits have established their mission stations not only in the important centres but also in remote areas. The Jesuit letters speak about their mission among the Todas. This information regarding the establishment of various missions had enabled the Jesuits to write their mission history. Secular historians also are greatly benefitted by referring these informations.

The places of the availability of the letters have been mentioned. Many historians are not aware of the availability of the primary source materials.
Due to linguistic problems these materials remain unexplored by the historians. So an appropriate future course of action could be devised by scholars of history and the authorities of the archives.

**Analysis on the Jesuit Letters**

The Jesuit Letters have merits and a few short comings. They have made great impact on Indian historiography. Both secular and non-secular historians have attributed credits to the letters of the Jesuits.

**Merits of the Letter**

It is true that Letters of the Jesuits are known for their near accuracy. The missionaries had developed the habit of recording events daily and immediately after its occurrence. The Jesuits enjoyed special privilege of staying at the courts of Mughal emperors. Their observations and attendance enabled them to produce correct and intimate information about rulers like Akbar and Jahangir. Neither Abul Fazal, the author of the Ain-i-Akbari nor Badaoni the two principal authorities on Akbar’s military administering make any mention of commanders of 12,000 or 14,000. Such information are found in the Letters of the Jesuits. The missionaries enjoyed honourable positions at the courts at Jaipur and Vijayanagar rulers also. Unlike the rulers in the north, the rulers in the South had established relation with the people. So the accounts regarding the day to day life of the people, their behaviour, customs and practices seem to be more reliable.\(^{109}\)

Jesuits were often used as intermediaries between European empire builders and native sovereigns and were respected and trusted by both parties. Thus, for example, Fathers Simon de Sa and Countinho accompanied the

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ambassadors of Venkata II to the Portuguese Viceroy; Gonçalo Martins was an envoy to the courts of Bijapur and Fr. Bednurand to Shivaji and Fr. Damian Vieira was sent as a legate to Aurangzeb. The role played by the missionaries in building up commercial relations between the Portuguese empire and the Indian rulers is vital. The information the missionaries furnish regarding this are authentic.

Though the Portuguese empire expected the missionaries to be the agents to promote their prospects, neither Francis Xavier nor any other Jesuit was silent when things went wrong. They have criticised the local European officials whenever the former found appropriate time. The Indian rulers, their economic and religious policies have been criticized in the writings of the Jesuits. Francis Xavier has condemned Cosme de Paiva vehemently in his letter. He has even condemned his own companion Antonio Gomez. The Jesuits Letters speak that the missionaries were honest in presenting the events at the administrative level. The unjust events, and rulers have been criticised by them whether they were Europeans or Indians.

The linguistic proficiency of the Jesuits add authenticity to the letters. Some of them were genuine in learning the local language. As they became more at home in India, some of their members studied Indian books and Indian philosophy, not merely with the idea of refuting it but with the desire of profiting by it. De Nobili and Beschi were known not only for acquainting themselves with the language but also they have authored a number of books on Tamil grammar and dictionary. They also encouraged their companions to realise the importance of learning the vernaculars.

110 Fr. Anonio Gomaz was the Rector of St. Paul’s College, Goa.
The Letters of the Jesuits not only throw light on the evangelical mission of the Society of Jesus, but they also provide interesting information about the time, the space, the flora and fauna and the life of the people. Even the weather condition is reported in the letters. Several volumes of Documenta Indica bear witness to this. The existence of peacock and cobras too have been mentioned. The letters of Francis Xavier furnish information on chanks (conch shells) different kinds of pearls like aljofar, fanams and urâk. All these minute details speak about the interesting life of the fisherfolk on the Fishery Coast.

Through their letters the Jesuits describe about the various administrative systems of great as well as small powers in India. Accounts of the powerful Mughal Emperor in northern India, the Vijayanagar Empire in the middle, other rulers in India and their struggles with the Europeans powers are resourceful material for the historians.

The letters brings to our notice some of the historical figures like Akbar, Jahangir and Arungazeb, Krishna Deva Raya, Venkata II, Rani Mangammal and Unni Kerala Varma. The struggles between the rulers of the Vijayanagar Empire, the Nayaks of Madurai and their army men Poligars and Vadugars on one side and the rulers who supported Portuguese and the fisherfolk on the other hand are narrated in detail. The pearls were source of all conflicts between the Muslims and the Paravas. This resulted in the mass conversion of the Paravas to regain the lost hold on pearl fisheries. These details are also found in the letters.

The graphic description of the perils of the voyage to India, found in some Jesuit Letters is corroborated by other Europeans writers like F. Pyrard.
de Laval and Pietro Della Dalle. The descriptions which the missionaries give of native custom and can also be compared with other contemporary accounts; and excellent studies can be made of Jesuits sources as confronted with other Portuguese and Indian evidences.

**Shortcomings in the Letters**

The Jesuits Letters have the other side of shortcomings and criticisms also. In some cases they were carried away by prejudices while narrating the wars between the rival princes. Another remark, was that a few letters have been written without verifying veracity. This was due to the misinterpretation on the part of one who wrote the letter. But history has witnessed that the authors are carried away by their personal interests to please the reading public.

The Jesuit Letters have made a great impact on writing of the history of the Society of Jesus as well as in writing secular history. Theses defects are found in the unofficial letters. L. F. Rushbrook Williams is of the opinion that these unofficial letters are liable to suffer from the following weaknesses:

The traveller fails to understand much of what he sees; he has to rely far too much on gossip, and at times he becomes the victim of deliberate deception; his account is at times written long after the occurrence, probably in old age, when the memory had grown dim.

Many Jesuits have failed to appreciate the nobler elements of Indian culture and civilization. They have viewed the Indian culture from a purely religious stand point and saw in it an obstacle to their missionary work.\(^{112}\)

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There were many missionaries who had depended on the topazes\(^\text{113}\) in the Fishery Coast. Even the topazes had made errors and Fr. Henriques has mentioned about this in his letter written from Cochin on 12 January 1551 to Simon Rodrigues.

The letter is given below:

“Since till now the instruction in the mysteries of the Faith was being given through interpreters, the people could not understand things well, because the interpreters could not explain such ideas. And since to be able to do good among these people it is necessary to understand their language, the four of us who are at present here namely, Father Paul, Brother Balthasar, Brother Ambrose, who was received into the Society here in India, and I strive to learn to read and write in malavar\(^\text{114}\) with good grammar which is indeed a labourious task. But the Lord God has given us much assistance, especially in that a malavar grammar is ready, which the brothers study. With it one learns within a short time to speak correctly, putting things in their correct place, such as the conjugations and declensions, and all the tenses.”\(^\text{115}\) Among us we have made a rule never to read and speak spontaneously in Portuguese but in malavar; and there is a penalty for the one who speak Portuguese, except when we speak with the Portuguese, and also when we speak among ourselves of the things of God, encouraging one another to serve him. The Christians are greatly consoled to see us speaking their language, both because of the spiritual doctrine which we can give to their souls, which before could not be done well through interpreters, and because the interpreters, ours as well as those of the captains, received presents and committed other abuses; and now because they are understood and known to us they are more careful about what they do. We hope in God our Lord that we shall not only speak the language, but that after some days we shall order that writing among us is to be done not in Portuguese but in malavar.”\(^\text{116}\)

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\(^{113}\) Topaz was a translator during Portuguese time.

\(^{114}\) Malava refers to Tamil language.

\(^{115}\) DI, Vol. II., op.cit., p.159.

\(^{116}\) DI, Vol. II., op.cit.,
From the beginning, Valignano was insisting upon supplying correct information from mission stations. He was of the opinion that the reports were sometimes made from hearsay, without sufficient information. He was referring to the unofficial letters, which did reveal an excessive credulity and a lack of discrimination.\textsuperscript{117}

The missionary letter-writers were guilty of faults of omission rather than of commission and the exclusion of incidents that did not help edification and yet does not invalidate the value of this magnificent contributions of the Jesuit Letters to history.

The letters prove that a few missionaries were unable to pronounce the names of the places and persons. Francis Xavier could not spell names of some of the villages in the Fishery Coast, Alanuta (Alanathalai), Manapar (Manapadu), Punicale (Punnaikayal), Tutucorin (Thoothukudi), Bembar (Vembar) and so on. It is sad even today some noted historians use the same spelling of Francis Xavier to refer to Manapadu as Manapar. In one of the widely read magazines namely JIVAN (Indian Jesuits’ Views and News) Manapar has been referred as Manipur.\textsuperscript{118}

The political divisions mentioned in the letters from India were not always clear, since it was often difficult to distinguish between a petty raja and a great land owner, an independent sovereign and a nominal ruler and the terms “realm” and “region” mentioned in the Jesuit Letters do not always have the connection which the spaces historians use nowadays.

These shortcomings are very few when they are compared with the merits of the letters. One cannot expect a complete knowledge about the Indian

\textsuperscript{117} DL., Vol., I op.cit., p. 466.
\textsuperscript{118} JIVAN – Jesuits views and News, Sahitya Prakash, Gujarat.
rulers including the Tamil kingdom from the European missionaries. Except a few Jesuits, most of them have relied on the topazes. One must remember that it was not the missionary’s main task to convey historical intelligence, nor did they wrote for the sake of historical science as such. The historical information they gave was meant to provide a background for the better understandings of their missionary activities: it had a pragmatic purpose.

**Impact of the Letters of the Jesuits**

The most important aspect of the entire scenario is that how the letters were received in Europe and the impact of these letters on the individual, Jesuit community and the non-Jesuits, both secular and religious. The entire Catholic world was awakened to read the letters of the missionaries, the reason being the Protestant Reformation Movement which was sweeping the European countries under its fold through the new preaching of Martin Luther. The Counter Reformation Movement was much enhanced because of the Jesuits Letters which carried the good news of conversions of thousands of people in the Fishery Coast situated in the extreme south of Tamil country.

Before making an analysis of letters of the Jesuits it is appropriate to remember two quotes of Sri Ram Sharma and Vincent Smith in this regard. Sharma says “The strange rather than the ordinary usually attracted them.” Smith says that the frequent neglect to use Jesuit authority was responsible for the loss of realism in some parts of that history. One of the chief merits of his Akbar, the great Mogul, is that it is enriched by the information gleaned from the Jesuit records as far as they were available to the author. The Jesuits

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119 Sri Ram Sharma, *A Bibliography of Mughal India (1526 – 1707 A.D.)*, Bombay, New Delhi, p. 136

in this land as foreigners belonging to a western civilization entirely different from that of the Orient were thus well qualified to be good observers.

The Jesuits Letters were sent to Europe not only for the information of higher superiors but also for the enlightenment and edification of the members of the Society of Jesus and of its friends. These letters were written from some remote Fishery Coast but were read in the universities, royal courts and in the middle class houses. These were products of the apostolic spirit of the Counter Reformation. They stirred the hearts of many in Europe. It was not the Catholic world alone which took an interest in the Jesuit Letters: since truth and courage are the common heritage of mankind, all men could seek information and inspiration in the missionaries’ reports.

In the beginning the Jesuits were not aware of using their letters critically for writing history. Recently they have utilised the same in writing the history of the Provinces or the Assistancies of the Society. Of these histories, the best known are those of Astrain of Spain, Rodrigues on Portugal, Leite on Brazil, Duhr on Germany, and TacchiVenturi on Italy. The secular as well as ecclesiastical historians would be much benefitted in the future. It is important to note that religion and politics were inextricably mixed in the Renaissance Europe of sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{121}

The non-Jesuit historians have made little use of the Indian Letters because they are unaware of the existence and publication of the letters. The Jesuit documents have been utilized to some extent by German historians. Among others, E. Gothein and G. Loseche, non-Catholics both, discovered in them valuable materials. The great Ludwis Von Pastor thought it worthwhile

\textsuperscript{121} Affonso, \textit{op.cit.}, p.103.
to study the Jesuit Letters and had recourse to them in the preparation of his magnum opus, the History of the Popes.\textsuperscript{122}

Indian scholars have paid little consideration to the Jesuit Letters. Some have made use of the histories based on them. The letters have been written in Portuguese, Spanish and Latin. The Jesuit letters have not been translated into English. There is bias among the Indian historians towards the foreign sources. In recent years publicity has been given to the Jesuit accounts by the European writers of Indian history. The Jesuit documents are not available in English translations. There is a bias against foreign sources that has blinded some to the fact that the historian must not fear to accept the truth about the past, from whomsoever it may come to him. In recent years publicity has been given to the Jesuit accounts by European writers of Indian history. The study and publication of the letters in learned reviews have made them better known in historical circles.

According to K.A Nilakanta Sastri, “today no historian of India worthy of the name can ignore the existence of Jesuit documents bearing especially on the history of the northern, western and southern portions of the country, between the years 1542 and 1773. Of course after he has made an impartial study of the Jesuit Letters, he may still pronounce against them, and may do so quite sincerely.”\textsuperscript{123}

An authentic historian might raise a genuine question about the contribution of the contemporary Jesuit missionaries or secular writers in this sphere. John Correia Afonso would say that the non-Jesuit missionaries were

\textsuperscript{122} \textit{Ibid.}

\textsuperscript{123} Nilakanta Sastri, K.A., \textit{Sources of Indian History with special Reference to South India}, Bombay, 1964, pp 91 - 95.
not organised and the secular writers did not exhibit real interest in recording
the events. He further says that the Jesuit missionaries were persons of talent
and culture. They were not just casual travellers. These men spent their lives in
the regions to which they had been posted.

The Jesuit Letters have both merits and shortcomings. The letters are
known for accuracy, authenticity and comprehensiveness. Both secular and
religious activities are covered in the letters. The linguistic efficiency of the
missionaries helped them in this matter. Also some of the Jesuits were of good
chroniclers and recorded the day to day occurrences perfectly.

These are shortcomings also in the letters. Sometimes the missionaries
have been carried away by prejudices. The unofficial letters fall under this
category. The letters have been written after a long gap of the events. In some
instances Indian culture has not been understood correctly. The translators
have misinterpreted the matters. Certain names have not been pronounced
properly.

Yet with all these shortcomings, the letters have made great impact on
religious and non religious spheres. The letters of the Jesuits gave hope to the
Catholic Church when it was languishing due to the spread of Reformation
Movement. The number of the members of the Society increased. Many
Jesuits came forward to serve as missionaries in the East. The exemplary life
of Francis Xavier portrayed in the letters aroused the missionary zeal of the
missionaries. Antonio Criminali became a martyr at Vedalai and John de Britto
was executed at Oriyur. Even today every Jesuit is expected to live upto the
charism of Ignatius of Loyola and the other pioneers of the foundation of the
Society of Jesus. The members of the Society derive their inspiration from the Annual Letters of the missionaries.

The Secular historians also have expressed their views on the letters. They have great appreciation towards these missionaries for their keen observation and for providing minute details of the incidents. K.A. Nilakanta Sastri’s remark speaks about the significance of the Jesuit Letters to the writing of Indian history.

**Conclusion**

The second chapter has brought the origin, nature and the development of the Jesuit Letters. Though there are a few shortcomings, the impact they make on the Indian historiography is great. These letters break the monotony of history. The missionaries have looked upon the social, economic and political events from people’s view points. To make history more interesting and authentic the historians could explore these letters so that more comprehensive history will be produced.

The Jesuit missionaries were persons of talent and culture. They were not just casual travellers. These men spent their lives in the regions to which they had been posted. Also some of the missionaries were chroniclers who spent several years in the royal courts of the Mughals and Vijayanagar emperors. These letters were received in Europe by the lay and ecclesiastical persons with much curiosity.
The letters of Francis Xavier from the villages on the Fishery Coast are valuable sources which throw light on the life of the fisherfolk of the same coast. The political and economic struggle of the inhabitants is revealed in the letters. The inhuman treatment of women in the society has been portrayed. Francis Xavier carried out his evangelical work very systematically. The methods of teaching catechism and Christian faith formation are still relevant today. The letters of Francis Xavier highlight these above activities.