

Christianity in the Princely State of Mysore (1800-1947)

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Abstract: *Christianity in India was perhaps introduced by St. Thomas the Apostle. Several studies are undertaken by different persons in this regard. Christianity in Mysore was initiated by Dominicans, but Fr. Leonardo Cinnami is the founder of Mysore Mission in 1648. Jesuits were succeeded by MEP missionaries beginning from Abbe Dubois who reached Srirangapatana on 13-12-1799. He and other Christian missionaries of MEP society, worked selflessly not only to spread Christianity but also introducing changes. In this article we get the glimpse of their manifold activities.*

Keywords: Christianity, Missionary, Mysore Mission, MEP

1. Introduction

Christianity was introduced perhaps by St. Thomas the Apostle into south of India, on the Malabar Coast, in the first century. He is believed to have landed at Cranganore in Kerala in 52 AD. His first converts were found in Cranganore, Palayur and Quilon. Then he converted on the east coast of India before he travelled to China. On his return, he stayed in Madras. Here people disliked the new religion preached by St. Thomas and killed him in 72 AD. In 1523, Portuguese settlers built a church over his grave and called it **San Thome**; it has become center of pilgrimage not only to Christians but also to the people of other faith.

St. Thomas's visit to India can be clarified by the following evidences. The oldest document that refers to St. Thomas is Acta Thomae, written at Edessa in 2-4 CE by a Syrian scholar. According to the description, St. Thomas reached the Parthian King Gondophores, later he travelled to South India. Besides, in popular folk songs and ballads like "Margamkalipattu, Ramban Pattu (Ballad of Thomas) Mission, death and burial of the Apostle are preserved from ancient times and transmitted from generation to generation. Marco Polo also has recorded that he visited the tomb of St. Thomas in Mylapore. The coming of the Apostle was impossible if India had not accessible to the Greco – Roman world at that time. Documents of historical evidence reveals that the travel between India and Ancient Roman Empire through sea route was rather common even before the birth of Jesus Christ. The City of Cranganore on the Malabar Coast was one of the principle port and trading center for exporting spices to Greco - Roman Empire. Roman coins unearthed in large number in different parts of South India confirm the contact. In short Thomas could have reached south India in first century AD.

The Close connection between Mysore with western Malabar Coast provides grounds for supposing that Christian influence may have been extended to this country in the early part of the century. However, According to Msgr. Laouenan, the first systematic attempt to convert Mysore to Christianity was made by the Dominicans about 1325 A.D. Their leader was Fr. Jourdain Severao, Who sailed towards Quilon in India, where another ship would take them to China. But on reaching Salsette their ship was stopped at

Thana. He carried on his missionary work before other Dominicans joined him later. They travelled to Mysore and baptized the natives; they were followed by the Franciscans. Politically, The expansion of Christianity began with the arrival of St. Francis Xavier in 1542 and Fr. Robert de Nobili in Madura.

In a new attempt to introduce Christianity into Mysore, Fr. Leonardo Cinnami, who is considered as the founder of Mysore mission, speaks about Christians and a beautiful Church of Srirangapatana in his letter. This is a clear indication that others preceded the Jesuits. Fr. Leonardo Cinnami evangelized the region which is included in the present Kingdom of Mysore. Father Cinnami made Srirangapatana the head quarter of Canarese mission. As missionaries they belonged to the province of Goa and were under the authority of the Archbishop of Cranganore. After the disappearance of the Capuchin Fathers from Mysore mission, Jesuits of Madura Mission came to Mysore via Coimbatore. In the middle of the 17th century, missionaries of Madura had mission- stations in Coimbatore which belonged then to the Kingdom of Mysore, and Satyamangalam. From there, some of these missionaries crossing hills and forests came to Kollegala side and founded mission stations.

In the western part of Mysore Kingdom, Settihalli is first mentioned by its name in the Jesuit records in 1727. Settihalli was looked after by the missionary of Magge. In 1744 Settihalli or Magge was one of the Canara residences existing then, the other being Anekal, Arubale, Srirangapatana and Gadenahalli. Gadenahalli had its first Christian converts in 1760 and the first church was built in 1768.

In 1777 Carnatic Mission with headquarters at Pondicherry was entrusted to the Society of the Foreign Missions of Paris (MEP). Mysore including both Canarese and Telugu Christians became part of that mission. John Anthony Dubois (Jean Antoine Dubois), Missionary of Foreign Mission Society of Paris came to Pondicherry in 1792. On the fall of Tippu Sultan he was invited by the Catholic congregation of Srirangapatana and he came on 13-12-1799. He was received well by the Colonel Wellesley. Soon after coming to Mysore, he understood the absolute necessity of

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adapting to the dress, life style of the local people, studied their customs- manners and refused to oppose their prejudices.

J.A.Dubois was the founder of the church at Mysore and of the Christian agricultural community at Settihalli near Hassan, and laboured in the Mysore for twenty two years. He wrote a well-known work on "The Customs, Manners and Ceremonies of the People of India. During 1803-1804, he taught the practice of vaccination against small pox. In 18 months he had got vaccinated 25432 people including the bride of Maharaja Krishnaraj Wodeyar III. He built churches at Ganjam (1800), Chapel at Blackpalli (Shivaji Nagar) in 1803, Settihalli (1810) it was renovated in 1860. He left India in 1823 after his exceptional service in Mysore, that was rewarded by the government on his return. He was succeed by other MEP missionaries, who worked zealously in mission, built beautiful churches introduced printing press and contributed greatly to Kannada literature.

In 1837 Etienne Louis Charbonnaux reached Srirangapatana. He built chapel at Fraserpet and a church at Shimoga; He built church at Mysore with liberal financial help given by Raja of Mysore in 1845. Mysore remained a part of the Carnatic Mission till 1844. In 1850 Mysore Mission was separated from Pondicherry as a separate Vicariate Apostolic including Coorg, Wynad, Hosur taluk and Kollegala, with headquarters at Bangalore and was governed by Msgr. Charbonnaux who was named its first Vicars Apostolic assisted by European Priests, all members of the Society of Foreign Missions, and Indian Clergy. Msgr. Charbonnaux having found no proper books in Kannada quickly founded a printing press for the benefit of schools. He was a prolific writer; he wrote many books in Kannada. They are, grammar: Kannada – Latin (Vyakarna: Kannada - Latin) Dictionarium: Latino – Canarensis (Latin– Kannada Dictionary) Gnana Darpana (the spiritual Mirror) Patitara Marga (the way of the Heretics) other. He brought sisters to establish St. Martha's Hospital, Bangalore. As a missionary and writer his contributions Princely State of Mysore is praise worthy.

Jean Marie A. Bouteloup, a French Missionary of MEP Society, destined to work in Mysore Mission. He was relentless worker, having good command over Kannada, English and Latin; he published several books in a short time. He sent to the Universal exhibition of Paris in 1867 his books. To name them, Dictionary: Kannada-Latin (Dictionarium Canarensis Latinum), England Shimeya Charitre, Geography (Bhoogola Shastra), Mathematics Book (Ganitada Pustaka), Elementa Prodiæ Canaresnsis and many other.

In 1845 Mysore with Bangalore was separated from Pondicherry and was called Mysore Mission, Bangalore was the head quarter. In 1852, Mysore, Coorg, and Wainad, were formed into a Vicariate Apostolic, with head –quarters at Bangalore. In 1887 the hierarchy was proclaimed in India, and the countries above mentioned, with the addition of the taluqs of Hosur (Salem district) and Kollegala (Coimbatore District) were erected into a Bishopric, under the title of the Diocese of Mysore, the head –quarters remaining at Bangalore as before. Eleven Districts were added to Mysore

country. In 1904 Bangalore was separated from Mysore diocese. Besides Missionaries, religious men and women also were contributed their might to social welfare. They are; the religious communities of the men are the Brothers of the Immaculate Conception and Brothers of St. Gabriel, both engaged themselves in educational work at Bangalore.

The religious communities of women of Christianity (Sisters/Nuns) also worked in the princely state of Mysore in different field are; The Sisters of the Good Shepherd with Convents (Residence of Nuns) in Bangalore and Mysore and started St. Martha's Hospital, Bangalore, and the Magdalene's. The Sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes worked in Bowring Hospital, Champion Reefs and Mercara. The little sisters of the Poor worked in home for the aged in Bangalore. Besides, sisters also worked in the boarding, orphanages and health centers (Dispensaries) at Settihalli near Hassan.

The activities of Missionaries launched in the Indian soil and their efforts set a new direction in the sphere of Indian life, thought and Culture. They were not only concerned of spreading Christianity but also they worked for the welfare of people. Agricultural farm with villages populated chiefly by famine orphans have been established at Siluvepura, Nelamangala Taluk and Mariapura, Kankanhalli taluk. Large number of schools, both for boys and girls were built. St. Joseph's College at Bangalore taught up to BA class. Nuns of the order of Good Shepherd of Angers started school for girls both in Bangalore and Mysore. Magdalene asylum and orphanages were built for both boys and girls in Bangalore and other places. Over 1500 orphans both boys and girls are supported by the mission. The largest mission orphanage is St. Patrick's Orphanage, Bangalore, with over 100 inmates. Connected with the mission is St. Martha's Hospital an institution on a large scale with eye Infirmary attached to it; Nuns worked as nurses in the civil hospitals both in Bangalore and Mysore, thereby providing health and medical facilities to the people of Mysore Kingdom.

The Roman Catholic Diocese of Mysore has splendid buildings, more especially in Bangalore. Among them St. Patrick's Cathedral, Convent of the Good Shepherd, St. Joseph's College, and St. Martha's Hospital in the city proper. The members of mission have always been on the friendliest terms with the Mysore Royal Family. The first Vicar Apostolic Dr. Charbonnaux was an intimate friend of His Highness Krishnaraja Wodeyar III, and Rev. Father A M Tabard was decorated by His Highness Sri Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV in the order of **Ganda Bherunda** with the title of **Rajasabhabhushana** as an acknowledgement of services rendered to the state in founding the Mythic society.

Jean Yves Marie Coadou was appointed as the Vicar Apostolic of Mysore mission in 1886, with residence in Bangalore. He was responsible for the installation of St. Joseph of Tarbes Sisters in Bowring Hospital, laying foundation to St. Martha's Hospital by Good Shepherd Sisters and reconstruction of St. Joseph's College to render education. He also opened an Agricultural orphanage at Mariapura (Thattukuppe) or Farming colony. He was succeeded by Eugene Louis Kleiner. He was an architect and built churches at Shimoga and a large church in gothic

style at Blackpalli (Shivaji Nagar), with the first Gothic Vault in South India and was consecrated in 1886. Bishop Basal established first Aged Home in Bangalore. He Built Louis Boarding and rendered service to Kannada literature by printing and publishing for the first time the books **Keertane Pustaka** (Book of Psalms) and **Jnanopadeshada Pustaka** (Catechism Book) in Kannada. Bishop Maurice B Departures was appointed the Bishop of Mysore 1922-1942. He welcomed Priests; the Jesuits, Redemptorists and Franciscans, sisters (nuns) and Brothers of the different congregation, to work in the Diocese of Mysore. He then, handed over St. Joseph's College and Louis boarding to Jesuits. St. Patrick Orphanage was given to Franciscans. 'Dootha Patrike' (Magzine named 'Dootha') that was started in 1924 with the generous support of Bishop Despatures. In 1940 Rt. Rev. Msgr. Rene Feuga was appointed the first Bishop of the newly formed Diocese of Mysore, comprising the districts of Mysore, Mandya, Coorg, Shimoga, Hassan, Chickmagaluru and Nilgiris and a part of Coimbatore District. He functioned as Bishop of Mysore till 1947, the date up to which article is concerned. Later in 1955 Ooty became separate with Nilgiris and parts of Coimbatore District, in 1963 Diocese of Chickmagaluru was bifurcated with districts of Hassan, Chickmagaluru and Shimoga, from the existing Diocese. At Present Diocese of Mysore comprises the four Civil Districts of Mysore, Mandya, Kodagu and Chamarajanagar.

2. Conclusion

In this article Christianity in the princely state of Mysore (1800-1947) the author tries to find the growth of Christianity in Mysore with special emphasis to MEP fathers who filled the vacuum created by the sudden suppression of their predecessors. In this article the author tries to trace Christianity in Mysore from Fr. Abbe Dubois to Bishop Rene Feuga in the Mysore Mission which gradually yet steadily became diocese of Mysore. We can observe that the missionaries worked hard, travelled untraded path, faced great trials, learnt language, customs, manners and dress code, and adapted all that is possible that is so different from their country. Their heroic zeal and unshakable confidence and selfless spirit is an inspiration to everyone to imbibe. Their every initiative is the fruit of their ardent desire towards the welfare of the people. Every Missionary was a compliment to the Bishops, that they could realise their desire of spreading the Christianity in the Princely state of Mysore. The fruit of their hard labour vibrates even today to the breadth and width of the land they travelled and in the area of education, health care, architecture and care for the aged, orphan, destitute.

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