

CHAPTER - I

HISTORY OF MADURAI DIOCESE

“Madurai Province“ derives its name from Madura Mission which stands for two Jesuit Missions, namely the Old Madura Mission and the New Madura Mission. The name Madura is very significant because since its foundation in 1606 all the European Jesuits, both of the old and new society, continued to keep the name Madura and called their mission as Madura Mission. Though the foundation of the Mission originates from Robert de Nobili, the Jesuits mentioned here under rendered meritorious services to the old Madura mission viz.¹

Fr.Francis Xavier-1542-1545;

Fr.Ganzalo Fernandez-1595-1606;

Fr.Robert de Nobili-1577-1656;

Fr.Antony Criminale-1649;

Fr.John de Britto-1686-1693;

Fr.Beschi alias Veeramamunivar-1680-1747 and

Fr. James de Rossi-1735-1774.²

One of the earliest Roman Catholic missionaries to India seems to have been Jordanus. He was sent in 1430 as the Bhisop of Columbu or Quilon. Then a host of catholic priests came and the notable among them being Francis Xavier.

Francis Xavier:

Francis Xavier of noble descent was a Spaniard born in 1506.³ Francis Xavier went to the University of Paris and took his M.A. degree at the age of 20. Soon he was appointed to teach Philosophy.⁴ There Francis Xavier developed

1. **Golden Jubilee Souvenir**, Jesuit Madurai Province, Madurai, 1952-2002, p.39.

2. Stanislaus Ponrad S.J., **Archdiocese of Madurai**, Madurai, 1983, p. 2

3.P.Rayanna, **St.Francis Xavier and His Shrine**, Imprimatur, Goa, 1989,p.73

4. S.K.Battacharya, **Christian Mission, Missionaries and Indian society**, New Delhi, 1962, p.66

acquaintance with Ignatius Loyola.⁵ In 1534, Loyola, Xavier and five others took the decision to dedicate themselves to God's services. A few years later, Loyola with the sanction of the Pope established **The Company of Jesus** or Society of Jesus on September 27, 1540⁶ and the members of which are called **Jesuits**. The motto is "To the greater glory of God".⁷

During the sixteenth century⁸ the Jesuit Missionaries came to Bengal with the Portuguese. When the power of the Portuguese declined, the Jesuits left Bengal leaving behind a considerable number of Roman Catholics.⁹ John III, the King of Portugal, sent Francis Xavier to India. Acting upon the direction of the king as well as the Pope¹⁰, Xavier set sail for India in April 1541 from Lisbon.¹¹ On 6th May 1542, Xavier arrived at Goa¹² and he was deeply grieved by the ungodly conduct of the Portuguese settlers. For the next five months, he devoted himself to the work of reformation. His days were spent in preaching in catechizing the young and in visiting hospitals. His zeal and pity won administration and marked improvement took place in the morals and conduct of the community.¹³ From Goa, Xavier went to the South to Capecomarin in 1542.¹⁴ He began by getting the creed, the Lords Prayer and the Ten Commandments translates in to the vernacular. He visited the villages and summoned large congregations attracting especially children.¹⁵ Bell in hand, he would make the children repeat those

5. P.Rayanna, **op. cit**, p.73.

6. Joseph Thekkadath, **History of Christianity in India**, Vol-II, Bangalore, 1982, p.7.

7. J.H. Carlton, Hayes, **Modern Europe upto 1870**, New Delhi, p.169.

8. P.N. Chopra, T.K. Ravindran, N. Subramanan, **History of South India**, New Delhi, 2003, p.187.

9. S.K. Battacharya, **op. cit**, p.66

10. F.R. Hemingway, **Madras District Gazetteers**, Trichinopoly, Vol.I, Madras, 1907, p.74

11. M. Ruthnaswamy, **Jesuits in India**, Trichinopoly, 1940, p.149

12. S.J. Joseph Dahlmann, **Missionary Pioneers and Indian Languages**, Trichinopoly, 1940, p.470.

13. **Madura – A Tourist Guide**, New Delhi, 1991, p.190.

14. George Schurhammer, **Francis Xavier, His Life and Times**, Vol-II, India (1541-1545), trans. M. Joseph Costllo, S.J., from original German Edition (Italy-The Jesuit Historical Institute, 1977), p.295.

15. **Madura – A Tourist Guide**, p.190.

prayers till they know them by heart. He told the children to recite those prayers to their elders. He followed this method in every one of the thirty villages, traveling bare foot from one end of the sandy land to the other over and over again.¹⁶

Xavier spent his time in these hard apostolic labours. At the same time, he found occasion to baptize another tribe of fisherman living between the Cape and Quilon. He himself reported to St. Ignatius in 1554 that in a month he had baptized more than ten thousand Mukkuvars. For three years beginning with May 1542, Xavier toiled as a missionary in South India. He then went to the Spice Islands of the Indian Archipelago for 2 ½ years. Xavier then returned to Goa and began to organize a mission to China. He met with much opposition in this endeavour and he died in 1852 in the small island of Sancian. His body was afterwards taken to Goa, where it is now preserved.

Fr. Ganzelo Fernandez:

The next Missionary to arrive at Madura was Father Fernandez. The labours of Father Fernandez between 1592 and 1606 A.D. were not crowned with any great success.¹⁷ Fernandez was useful as an intermediary in business with the Portuguese. Fernandez ran an elementary school for boys under a Hindu master. It was one of the few Jesuit schools meant chiefly for the non-catholics where non-catholics masters were employed. He also ran a dispensary but as an evangelist he had not been able to make any impression on the people of Madurai.¹⁸ He experienced great resistance from all classes. The people looked upon the Portuguese as “parangis” or barbarians who ate the flesh of cows, drank intoxicating liquors and mingled with the lowest classes.

16. **Idem.**

17. **Ibid**, p. 191.

18. C.B.Firth, **Introduction to Indian Church History**, Madras, 1968, pp.108-110.

Robert de Nobili:

In 1606, Robert de Nobili the nephew of Cardinal Marcellus II visited Madras. Robert de Nobili was born at Rome in September 1577.¹⁹ Father Robert's joined the Society of Jesus at the age of 20. He left Portugal in 1604 and reached Goa.²⁰ It was a painful and dangerous voyage. This is evident from the letter of Robert de Nobili dated 20th January 1606; **"...our journey was full of dangers and hardships and attended by some serious accidents. In spite of great dangers, finally we landed at Mozambique. At last, we reached Goa, 14 months after our departure from Lisbon. As the viceroy insisted on having in his company I had much less to suffer than my other companions"**.²¹

In January 1606, Nobili went to Cochin and from there to the Pearl Fishery Coast, where he stayed for six months.²² Nobili settled down at Madurai as an Indian Sanyasi²³ came to Madurai on 15th November 1606 along with Fr. Albert Laerzio. He began to master Tamil. He gave up his European style of living and adapted instead those of the Brahmins.²⁴ During 1607 to 1612, he laid the foundation of a genuinely Indian Church.²⁵ This led to the establishment of the Madurai Mission. In the early years its jurisdiction was too wide and it covered the

19. **Madura – A Tourist Guide**, p.190

20. S.Rajamanickam, **Robert de Nobili on Indian Customs**, Palayamkottah, 1972, p.4

21. **A letter of Robert de Nobili dated 1 September 1607, gives the following information, "when I arrived here I began to study the language and make enquiries regarding the customs of the people. I discovered that a great obstacle was our manner of dressing which shocked them. I wrote about this to father provincial and with his permission I changed my dress and food though I abstained good nourishment to eat nothing but rice and herbs, I have been so far in good health and I grow physically stronger everybody."**

Letter of Robert de Nobili to Fr.C.Aquviva, Cochin, 20th January, 1606, pp.9- 10.

22. H.R.Pate, **Madras District Gazetteers**, Tinnevely, Vol-I, Madras, 1917, p. 89 .

23. A.Sauliere, S.J., **The Life of Fr.Robert de Nobili, S.J from original and contemporary sources**, 1577- 1656, p.10.

24. H.R.Pate, **op.cit**, p.89.

25. A.Sauliere, **op.cit**, p.11.

districts of Trichinopoly, Tanjore, Madurai and Tinnevely.²⁶ During his sojourn in Madurai, Robert de Nobili lived on strict vegetarian diet. Impressed by this the Brahmin elite surrounded him. The fame of Nobili soon spread far and wide. The natives were astonished at the purity of his Tamil and captivated by his oriental learning and versatile intellect.²⁷

Nobili had a flair for Indian languages especially Tamil and Sanskrit. He is considered to be the first oriental scholar in the modern sense of the term. He kept on learning Sanskrit till his death in 1656. It is no wonder that he wrote several books, composed hymns and prayer, songs in Sanskrit. His “Information”, a Sanskrit work itself is enough to prove his depth in Sanskrit.²⁸ The Life of Our Lady was composed in Sanskrit in verse form.²⁹ Nobili’s books are Philosophical and Theological, the most important being **Gnanopadesam Kandam** or **Spiritual Teaching**, the **Attuma Nirnayam** **Disquisition on the soul**, the **Divya Madirigai** **Divine Mood Tushana Tikkaram**, **Rufutation of Blasphemy**, **Punerjenma Chepam**, **Refutation of Rebirth** and **Gnana Sanchivi**

26. Nelson, **Madura District Manual**, Vol. I, Madras, p.116.

27. Robert de Nobili said, “I will make myself an Indian in order to save the Indians, even as Jesus became a man to save a man”.

All the available Tamil works of Nobili have been edited with a help of Tamil Literature Society, Tuticorin. Fr. Bertrand published many of the letters and treatises in his “La Mission du Madure”. But it was not at all edited critically. Fr. Dahmen has published Nobili’s Latin treatise, “Responso” written in 1610 under the title ‘Pemiére Apologie’ together with a French translation. Fr. Castets published the English translation of the last four chapters of Nobili’s “Dissana Dikkaram”. Fr. Strickland has translated in to English and published the Tamil prayers composed by Nobili. These hymns are used even today. De Nobili during his stay at Madura contributed much for the Tamil, Telungu, Sanskrit literature. Most of his work deals with prayer and Catechism.

Letter of Robert de Nobili to Fr.C.Aquviva, Cochin, 20th January, 1606, pp.24, 25.

28.S.Rajamanickam, **op.cit**, 1972, p.18.

29. Vincent Cronin, **A Pearl to India**, London, 1959, p.176.

spiritual medicine.³⁰ In prison, he composed the *Attuma Nirunayam* and *Akkiana Nivaranam*(removal of ignorance).³¹

Nobili had mastery over the Yajurveda.³² He then pursued his way to Sendamangalam, a principality under the Nayaks of Madura. He was well received by the Prince. From there Nobili went to Salem. Here he was received with coldness.³³ The year 1640 saw a persecution start at Trichy and spreading to Madurai. It was occasioned by the refusal of Pariya Christian to give his daughter in marriage to a rich non-christian of the same group. At the request of the later Venkatraya Pillai the brother in law of Thirumalai Nayak had arrested Fr.Immanuel Martins with four of his neophytes. They were thrown into prison, tortured and then driven out of the town. At about the same time, Fr.Nobili and Fr.Maya were imprisoned at Madurai³⁴ on 22nd July 1640 along with his companion Separtiao de Maya by Venkatraya Pillai an official of TirumalaiNayak. However on the intervention of Tirumalai Nayak, the two sanyasis were released.³⁵ With the knowledge of French, Latin, Portuguese, Spanish and Tamil, Fr. Sauliere was able to translate the works of Nobili into English.³⁶ De Nobili retired from the Mission in 1648 due to old age and blindness. It is said that he had baptized about 100000 Tamilians.³⁷ It was thought advisable to post him to Ceylon as Superior of the Mission to that island. Due to deterioration in his health, he was transferred from there to Mylapore in Madras. Here he built himself a small cottage and spent his last days in the company of his first converts and old associates. His time was divided between literary composition, prayer and

30. *Ibid*, p.180.

31. John Castes, S.J., *Missionary Methods of De Nobili*, Trochinopoly, 1925, p.1.

32. E.R.Baierlein, *Land of the Tamilians and its Mission*, Madras, 1875, p.116.

33. Vincent Cronin, *A Pearl of India, the life of Robert de Nobili*, London, 1954, pp. 247,248.

34. Joseph Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*, Vol.II, Bangalore, 1992, pp.221, 222.

35. Vincent Cronin, *op.cit*, p.247.

36. S.Rajamanickam, *The first oriental scholar*, Tirunelvely, 1972, p.12.

37. *The Jesuit Mission in Madura*, p.51.

contemplation.³⁸ After a very brief span of rest here, he died on 16th January 1695.³⁹ He was beyond doubt the greatest of the Missionaries sent out to India by the Society of Jesus. In short, he was the real founder of the Madura Mission.⁴⁰

FATHER MARTINZ

Fr. Martinz was one of the pioneers of the Madura Mission. He served 31 years in the Madura Mission. The most important work of Fr. Martinz was **Gnana Muthumalai**. Fr. Proenza attributes the following works to him

1. Meditations to excite and nurture devotion
2. Dialogue between a Christian and a Hindu.
3. Explanation of the ineffable mystery of the Holy Trinity.
4. Contempt for the world.
5. Several lives of Saints.
6. Christian doctrine adopted from the works of Cardinal Bellarmine and Fr. Marcos George and the
7. Mirror of Examples.⁴¹

He died on 22nd August 1656 at the age 63. His loss was great blow to the Mission. Rev. Fr. I.S. Chancellor said “de Nobili had planted and Martinz watered”.⁴² Proenza mentions the benevolence of Chokkanatha the Nayak ruler of Madura in his letter of 1662 as “...graced by the justice and good administration of the young king, we could continue our work in liberty and peace” Alvarez, another Jesuit met Chokkanatha Nayak and explained the true precepts of Christianity and the mode of life, led by the Missionaries. The Nayak

38. **Madura A Tourist Guide**, p.198

39. S. Neil, **The Story of the Christian Church in India and Pakistan**, Diocesan Press, Madras, 1972, p.44

40. **Madura A Tourist Guide**, p.198

41. J. Bertrand, **La Mission Du Madura**, Vol-III, p.109

42. **The Jesuit Mission in Madura**, p.51

ruler impressed by the speech of Alvarez honoured him and promised his protection.⁴³

JOHN DE BRITTO

Jean Hector de Britto was born on 1st March 1647.⁴⁴ His father Salvador de Britto occupied a high office at the royal court of Lisbon. His mother's name was Beatric Pereira. His boyhood was spent at the court of King Alfonso VI and later in the court of king Peter II.⁴⁵ He joined the order in 1662. Ten years later he was sent out to India and was appointed as Superior of the Madura Mission. He acquitted himself so well in this capacity that the Bishopric of Cranganore in India was offered to him. But he declined the high post and chose in 1691 to serve as a simple Missionary in the Marava Country. In 1683, John de Britto was appointed as the Superior of Madura Mission.⁴⁶

The letters of Britto testifies to the fact that in 1686, he had baptized two thousand and seventy natives of the Marava country. In the same year he set out with six companions namely; Siluvai Nayakar, Kanagappan and Arulanandam, Catechists Thambiya Pillai, John's personal attendant, Suren, a neophyte and Sathianathan Chetty.⁴⁷ The Christian preachers were severely persecuted there. Kumara Pillai, the Governor- General and the first Minister of the Marava king Kilavan Sethupathy ordered the capture of Britto and it was done when he passed Mangalam along with his Catechists.⁴⁸

Maravas tortured and chained them hand and foot. They were about to be implaced on stakes. However, the Sethupathy freed with a stern warning of death sentence if they ever dared to preach Christianity in the Marava Country. Despite

43. **Ibid**, pp.52, 53.

44. Albert M. Nevett.S.J, **John de Britto and His Times**, Gujarat Sathyaprakash, Gujarat, 1980, p.2.

45. L.M.Zaleski, **The Martyres of India**, Mangalore, 1993, p.202.

46. **Madura a Tourist Guide**, p.201.

47. Diary Written by P.Rayanna, Shenbaganur Archives, **op.cit**.

48. R.Sathyanathaiyer, **History of the Nayaks of Madura**, Oxford, 1924, p.200.

the threat to his life, Britto continued his work. Britto succeeded in setting many converts to Christianity, the notable among them being a Marava prince named Tadiya Teva, the supposed heir to the Marava throne. The conversions made by Britto was resented by the Sethupathy who decided to take revenge on Britto. He ordered for the destruction of all Churches in his kingdom and the arrest of Britto and his followers.⁴⁹ On 8th January 1693, Britto was arrested with his companions and they were imprisoned in Ramnad on 11th of January. Tadiya Tevar made futile attempt to release Britto from the prison. Britto was sent to Oriyur⁵⁰ on 31st January 1693, which is located eight miles south of Tondi.

Britto's letter dated 3rd February 1693 written from the cellar describes the events, which preceded his execution. " On the 28th January I was judged and condemned to be executed in the presence of Ragunath Devan. I was separated from the Christians and conducted to his brother Oriyur Devan, to whom he sent secret order to kill me without delay. I arrived here on the 31st of January. I am expecting death with impatience; it is now precious recompense to my work and sacrifice... All the crime I am charged with is the teaching of law of true God and weaning of worshippers from their idols.

On the 4th February 1693, the order of the execution of Britto was given by Murugappa Pillai, the Chief Minister which reads as; " considering that this guru (religious leader) prevents the worship of our Gods, in the name of the king, I order you to cut off his head"⁵¹ On his charge, Britto was beheaded and his head and limbs were hung up as a warning to all Christians.

FATHER BESCHI

After the Martyrdom of Britto, the condition of the Marava Mission was precarious. But in 1707, father Joseph Beschi another celebrated

49. Nelson, **op.cit**, p. 217.

50. **Ibid**, pp.220, 221.

51. Joseph Thekkadath, **op.cit**, p.447.

Jesuit Missionary reached India to continue the works of Nobili and Britto. Father Beschi was also the most distinguished among the Jesuits for learning and intellect.⁵² Beschi was born at Castiglione delle Stoviere in the province of Venice, on the 8th of November 1680 and christened Constanzo Giuseppe Eusbio. After completing his literary studies and one year of Philosophy, he entered the novitiate of the Jesuits at Novellaria in October 1698. From September 1700 to 1701, he taught the lowest grammar class at Racenna. From 1701 to 1710 was the period of intellectual training according to the Jesuit system. In 1701-1703, he completed the course in Philosophy. From 1703-1705, he taught the middle and highest grammar classes and the Humanities. In 1706, he underwent a course of Theology and was ordained as a priest in 1709. After finishing the fourth year of Theology in 1710, he prepared himself to go abroad and work for the religion of Christ. He was then thirty years old. In May 1710, Beschi left Lisbon enroute to Goa on a Portuguese vessel. He reached Goa in October 1710.⁵³

At the time of Beschi's arrival in the Madura Mission in 1711, the political situation in the Tamil country was unsettled. At Tanjore, the Mahratta Prince Shahji persecuted the Christians and hence he was called as the "Nero of Tanjore". At Madurai, Vijaya Ranga Chokkanataha the grandson of Queen Mangammal who ascended the throne in 1706 spent his time in debauchery and histrionic amusements. In Marava country, Vijaya Ragunatha Sethupathy (1711-1725) who was in power was hostile to Christian community. Further, the Missionaries had to face the problem caused by the other native princes and the Moors.⁵⁴

52.P.Thomas, **Chriatian and Christianity in India and Pakistan**, London, 1954, p.74

53. L.Besse, **Fr.Beschi of the Society of Jesus, His Times and Writings**, Trichinopoly, 1918, pp.12-14.

54. Manuscript, Life of Father Beschi, Unpublished Material preserved in the Shembaganoor Archives p.15.

Fr. Beschi was known for his proficiency in Tamil. Beschi wrote in 1727, the book entitled **Vedavilakkam**.⁵⁵ He also wrote a commentary on the **Kural** in Tamil. His largest work was a Tamil-Latin Dictionary composed in 1726.⁵⁶ Fr. Beschi's another reputed work was the **Thembavani** which dealt with St. Joseph. The poem is divided into 36 songs contains 3615 stanzas. His other works were **Kural**, **Chinthamani**, **Ramayana** and the **Naladyar**.⁵⁷ Fr. Beschi arrived at Tinnevely in 1711 and was placed under the resident of Kamanayakkanpatti. Then he was posted at Kurukkalpatti (near Sankarankovil) where he narrowly escaped death at the hands of the inhabitants.⁵⁸

Beschi's mode of life resembled that of his illustrious predecessor John de Britto and his name was perhaps even better known in South India than that of Robert de Nobili. Among all the Jesuit Fathers, who came to India, Beschi was probably the most outstanding for learning and intellect. His knowledge of Tamil was profound. He was equally familiar with their high and low dialects.⁵⁹ Beschi did not use Sanskrit words in his Tamil works; and rather aimed at acquiring a perfectly pure and idiomatic style. His book was read with delight by all sections of the Tamils, Christians and non-Christians alike.

The Madurai Mission reached an exalted position under Fr. Beschi. The congregations spread throughout the Tamil country and the number of Christians increased to 2,00,000.⁶⁰ Thus no one can forget their contribution. One of the most illustrious figures in the history of the Indian Missions namely Joseph Constantine Beschi, "...a man of the most extraordinary mental aptitudes, one who possessed the art of entirely hinduising himself".⁶¹

55. Emmar Adaikalasamy, **op.cit**, p.316.

56. **Madura A Tourist Guide**, p.202.

57. J. Datilmann, S.J, **Indian Languages and Early Catholic Missionaries**, 1500-1800, pp.1-12.

58. H.R.Pate, **op.cit**, p.93.

59. Nelson, **op.cit**, pp.298, 299.

60. P. Thomas, **op.cit**, pp.75, 76.

61. **Madura A Tourist Guide**, p.202.

In 1759, the Society of Jesus was suppressed in Portugal for political reasons.⁶² The effects of the suppression of the society in Europe were felt in India. In 1759, Jesuit Fathers who lived in Goa were put in prison by the Portuguese. The impact was felt in Madurai too. However, the dismal of Jesuit Missionary from Madurai at the order of Portugal did not affect the growth and progress of Christian faith. The local preachers continued their work.⁶³

REVIVAL OF MADURAI MISSION

The Madurai Mission founded by pioneer Jesuits in 1592⁶⁴ was revived on 8th July 1836. Pope Gregory XVI revived Madurai Mission by a Brief. The Madurai Mission again became a distinct Vicariate. Taking mandate from the Holy See, the General of Jesuit commissioned the French Province of Lyons

Fr. Joseph Bertrand

Fr. Alexander Martin

Fr. Louis Garnier and

Fr. Louis du Ranquet

to Madurai Province. They arrived in March 1838.⁶⁵ Thus the year 1838 is to be regarded as the year of the resurrection for the Madura Mission.⁶⁶

DEVELOPMENT OF MADURAI MISSION

In 1846, the Madurai Mission was raised as a Vicariate Apostolic and Mgr. A. Canoz.S.J, the then superior of Madurai Mission was appointed as the first Vicar Apostolic of Madurai. In 1886, Madurai region became the main portion of the new Diocese of Tirichirapally in 1887 with Mgr. Canoz. S.J as the First Bishop.⁶⁷ Tanjore district and fourteen churches of Tirichinapally Diocese were

62. **Ibid**, p.201.

63. P.Thomas, **op.cit**, p.77.

64. Charles.A.S. Chleek's letter to Madurai Diocese dated 24-10-1998.

65. Stanislaus Ponnard, S.J, **Archdiocese of Madurai**, Madurai, 1983, p.2.

66. Fr.G.V.I.Sama, **Directory of the Archdiocese of Madurai**, Madurai, 1970, p.1.

67. **Catholica Sevai**, Silver Jubilee Souvenir of Madurai Archdiocese, Madurai, 1963, pp.6, 7.

attached to the Diocese of Mylapore.⁶⁸ In another development, the Tuticorin Diocese came into existence in 1923 with Mgr.Tiburtius Roche as its Bishop. He was by the way the first Indian Bishop of Latin Rite.⁶⁹

DAWN OF MADURAI DIOCESE

In its centenary year of 1938, Madurai Mission had its own Diocese. The new Madurai Diocese was enunciated on 8th of January 1938 by the Papal Bull of **Si inter fideles**.⁷⁰ Mgr.J.Peter Leonard.S.J was posted as the new Bishop of Madurai. In 1953, this Madurai Diocese was raised to the status of an Archdiocese by the Apostolic constitution **Mutat Res**.⁷¹

BRIEF HISTORY OF MADURAI DIOCESE (1938-2004)

Since its inception Madurai Archdiocese witnessed remarkable progress and changes in all aspects, mainly concerned with societal uplifts.⁷² During this period (1938-2004), it had five eminent Archbishops and one Auxiliary Bishop namely

Mgr. John Peter Leonard.S.J- 1936-1967;

Mgr.Justin Diraviam- 1967-1985;

Mgr.Casmir Gnanadickam.S.J-1985-1987;

Mgr.Marianus Arockiasamy-1987- 2003;

Mgr.P.Antony- 4th February1999- 28th December 2003 and

Mgr.Peter Fernando- April 24, 2003 onwards⁷³

In the succeeding pages, a brief note about the above mentioned Archbishops are furnished.

68.V.M.Gnanapragasam, **op.cit**, p.11.

69.**Catholica Sevai**, p.7.

70. **Madurai Maraimanila Vairavizha**, 1938-1998, n.pg.

71. Apostolic Constitution, 'Mutat Res'.

72. Volcan Henry, S.J., **Preferential Option for the Poor**, p.44.

73. Informations obtained from the Archbishop's House, Madurai, on 11-3-2004.

Mgr. JOHN PETER LEONARD.S.J

Peter Leonard was born on 29th December 1889 in the state of Luxemburg. He was admitted to the Jesuit Apostolic School in France and at the age of nineteen he joined the Jesuit Novitiate of Toulouse Province on the 7th September 1908.⁷⁴ As a scholastic Novice, Br. Peter Leonard arrived in the company of four-co-novices at Shembaganur Sacred Heart College in 1909. After his first ‘Vows’ he went through all the stages of the Jesuit formation in Shembag, then in Palayamkottai, Kurseong and Ranji. During that period, he learnt Tamil so well that he could speak and write with facility.

From 1924 to 1928, Fr. Peter Leonard taught in the Shembag Juniorate and served for four years as a professor of Philosophy in the Sacred Heart College. He was at the same time the house minister and in charge of the little parish of Shembaganur. He was appointed the parish priest of the Trichy Cathedral in 1932 and proved himself to be uncompromising in fundamental Christian principles. From 1934 to 1936, he was Rector and Professor of Theology in the Seminary of St. Pauls. In 1936, he was nominated as the Bishop of Tiruchi.⁷⁵

When the Madurai Diocese was created after the bifurcation of the Diocese of Trichi,⁷⁶ Mgr. Leonard took charge of the diocese on January 8th 1938.⁷⁷ At that time, Madurai diocese had Palayamkottai and Sivagangai.⁷⁸ India was in the midst of its freedom struggle under the leadership of Gandhiji.⁷⁹ “Foreigner, Quit India” was the slogan heard everywhere in India. Despite the trials and tribulations faced, this new Bishop worked with commitment to spread the message of universal brotherhood.⁸⁰

74. **Madurai Maraimanila Vaira Vizha**, Madurai, 1938-1998, n.pg.

75. **150 Years of Jesuit Presence in Madurai Mission**, Madurai, 1838 – 1988, p. 90.

76. **Ibid**, p. 91.

77. **The Hindu**, 03-12-1938.

78. **Madurai Maraimanila Vaira Vizha**, Madurai, 1938 – 1998, p. 30.

79. Stanislaus Ponrad, S.J, **op.cit**, p. 15.

80. **Ibid**, p. 29.

Starting from the scratch, Fr. Peter Leonard build up the spiritual and organizational setup systematically and soon made it as one of the best ecclesiastical provinces of Tamilnadu. The following could be mentioned as his chief achievements: a residence, a printing press, a diocesan magazine called **Catholica Sevai** for the spread of Catholic Social Doctrine. He also started the five-day annual retreats for Priests and his “Pastoral Letters” is still considered to be a masterpiece. As a result of his efforts, Madurai was raised to the status of an Archdiocese on 19th September, 1953.⁸¹ John Peter Leonard was appointed as Archbishop of Madurai. Trichy and Tuticorin joined with Madurai Archdiocese. In 1963, Kottar was added with Madurai Archdiocese.⁸² The “Lay Apostolate” or the “Society of Catholic Action” founded by Leonard undertook the task of social reformation.⁸³ Mgr. Leonard also attended all the sessions of Vatican II. After achieving all the foregoing success, the illustrious Bishop Leonard being seventy five years consecrated his successor namely Mgr. P.J. Diraviam.⁸⁴ Two months before his 97th birth day, Fr. Leonard passed away on 5th December 1985 in Dindigul and was buried in St. Mary’s Cathedral, Madurai.⁸⁵

Mgr. JUSTIN DIRAVIUM (1967-1985)

Mgr. Justin Diravium. J.U.D was Madurai’s first son of the soil Archbishop. He was born of a pious and illustrious family of Palakurichi, now in the diocese of Trichirapalli. He started his secular and priestly education in Trichirapally and finished it at Rome after taking the **Juris Utriusque Doctor Degree**.⁸⁶ He is popularly known as the “Shahjahan” of Madurai because of his capacity to build.⁸⁷

81. **150 Years of Jesuit Presence in Madurai Mission**, Madurai, 1838 – 1988, p. 91.

82. **Madurai Maraimanila Vaira Vizha**, *op. cit*, p. 31.

83. Fr. A. John Britto Packiaraj, **Report of Laity Commission**, 10–12-1999.

84. **150 Years of Jesuit Presence In Madurai Mission**, *op. cit*, p.91.

85. V.M. Gananapragasam, *op.cit*, p. 27.

86. Vima Amalan, **Archdiocese of Madurai Origins – Development**, Madurai, 1983, p.16.

87. **Golden Jubilee Souvenir of Archdiocese of Madurai**, Madurai, 1988, p.9.

Having the motto “The Lord is my Shepard”, Justin Diraviam became the head of the Madurai Archdiocese on 13-4-1967.⁸⁸ In his reign of eighteen years, the Madurai Archdiocese got tremendous growth.⁸⁹ He built thirty five big churches, hundred and seven chapels, twenty eight presbyteries, eighteen income generating complexes. Further, he renovated several churches and presbyteries.⁹⁰ Leprosarium, hospitals and asylums were started for the neglected and deprived.⁹¹ The youth commission was formally started in 1974 to develop the integral formation of youth leaders based on Christian values. Archbishop Justin Diraviam paid more attention to the welfare of the families as a family is the basic unit of the society.⁹² Having the motto, “To set free the oppressed”, the **Madurai Multipurpose Social Society** was registered on 4th October 1968.⁹³

Being an educationist, Mgr.Justin Diraviam was of the firm conviction that people of the rural area could be served only through education.⁹⁴ As a result of this thinking, the Archdiocese of Madurai started La Sal College with the help of De Salle Brothers, a rural college near Karumathur about fifteen miles in the western direction of Madurai.⁹⁵ It was established for the education of kallar and scheduled cast boys, most of whom would be the first generation of learning. Later on, the name of La Sal was renamed into Arul Anandar College. In 1972, the college was handed over to the Jesuits.⁹⁶ Within seventeen years of existence, the Arul Anandar College has become Autonomous. He also created an endowment in the Madurai Kamaraj University, Madurai in honour of Beschi for the cause of Christian studies in the University. In 1968, the Justin Training College for women

88. **Catholica Sevai**, Dated 1-4-1967.

89. **Golden Jubilee Souvenir of Archdiocese of Madurai**, Madurai, 1988,p.10.

90. **Ibid**, pp.9-11.

91. I.Devasahayam, **Urimaikor Kalvi**, Tamil, 1989, p.10.

92. Circular of the Madurai Archbishop dated 8-9-1974.

93. Stanislaus Ponrad, **op.cit**, p. 289.

94. Xavier Alphonse, S.J., **Report of the Education Commission** dated 10-12-1988.

95. **Jesuit Madurai Province**, p.132.

96. **College Magazine**, Arul Anandar College, Karumathur, 1976, n.pg.

was started. It was the first of its kind for women in Madurai diocese.⁹⁷ In the same year, St. Britto Higher Secondary School was opened.⁹⁸ Apart from these, many educational institutions were established. These are run by other congregations but under the religious jurisdiction of the Madurai diocese.⁹⁹ He started the communication academy named “**Sadhangai**” in 1981.¹⁰⁰ He was succeeded by Casimir Gnanathickam as the Archbishop of Madurai.

ARCHBISHOP CASIMIR GNANADICKAM

Casimir was born on 25th April 1925 at Suranam (now in the diocese of Sivagangai). After his Intermediate course at St. Joseph’s College, Trichy, he joined the novitiate at Shembaganur on 6th June 1943. After his Philosophy he was sent to Loyola, Madras to do the three-year Honours course in Chemistry. He studied his Theology at Enghien in Belgium and Chantilly in France. He was ordained on 28th July 1957. In Paris, he got a Doctorate in Chemistry. After nine years of absence from India, he returned to the province in July 1963 and became Professor of Chemistry at St. Joseph’s College, Trichy. In 1965, he was appointed as the Rector of St. Joseph’s College and in 1971 he went to the University of Kentucky for his sabbatical. He was called back to be the Principal of St. Joseph’s College, Trichy in 1972 as the college was facing problems especially with the Government. He handled them with consummate skill and tact and the verdicts of the commission constituted to look into the problems and the court were in favour of the college. In 1973, he was appointed Provincial of Madurai Province and two years later Regional Assistant for South Asia. In 1984, he was relieved and spent

97. V.M. Gnanapragasam, **op.cit**, p.44.

98. The School Visitors Record Kept by Headmaster, St. Britto Higher Secondary School, Madurai, 1968, n.pg.

99. **Golden Jubilee Souvenir**, 1938-1988, p.10.

100. Written Record in the Research Centre of Sathangai, Koodal Nagar, Madurai, n.pg.

some time in Canada for the study of Spiritual Exercises.¹⁰¹ On 16th June 1985, he was appointed as the Archbishop of Madurai.¹⁰² The Archbishop's first priorities were youth welfare, participation of laity for the general welfare of the society, formation of parish council with democratic set up and promotion of justice.¹⁰³

Casimir Gnanathickam was a rare combination of a scientist, musician, educationist, and administrator and above all lovably human and readily available to the society and the Church and capable of being at home in any assignment or task entrusted to him.¹⁰⁴ He was succeeded by Mgr.Marianus Arockiasamy as the Archbishop of Madurai.

Mgr. MARIANUS AROCKIASAMY

Mgr.Marianus Arockiasamy popularly known as 'Peoples Pastor' was installed as the Archbishop of Madurai on 28th August 1987.¹⁰⁵ He was born on 31st July 1927 at Uthamanoor Puthur in the Diocese of Kumbakonam. After his course in the minor seminary, he was sent to Rome to study Philosophy and Theology in the famous Pontificio Collegio Urbano de Propaganda Fide. He was ordained priest on 7th December 1954. In 1955, he became Secretary to the Bishop of Kumbakonam. Subsequently, he became the Bishop of Kottar diocese and Kottar enjoyed his leadership for seventeen years. He has rich fund of experience and as a daring apostle and intrepid administrator and as a result he became very popular.¹⁰⁶

During Rev.Dr.Marianus Arockiasamy tenure as the Archbishop, the Golden Jubilee Celebrations of the Madurai Diocese was held.¹⁰⁷ The Bishop utilized that occasion to construct five hundred new houses for the benefit of the

101. **Jesuit Madurai Province**, p.125.

102. **The Hindu**, 17th June 1985.

103. **Catholica Sevai**, 1985.

104. **Jesuit Madurai Province**,p.125.

105. **The Hindu**, 28th August 1987.

106.V.M.Gnanapragasam, **op.cit**, p.56.

107.Golden Jubilee Souvenir, **op.cit**, 1988, p.11.

poor. Besides this, a mass wedding of nearly fifty couples was celebrated at the cost of the Diocese.¹⁰⁸ In the field of education, the Archbishop initiated more renovating schemes to streamline the education on the basis of real Christian value.¹⁰⁹ Mgr. Marianus Arockiasamy is a gifted speaker. He united people of all religious denominations through **Thiruvarul Peravai**. He brought together the Christians through his ecumenical meetings. The ‘Minorities Forum’ started by the Bishop took care of the interest of the minorities. As the president of Bible Commission, he directed the new ecumenical Bible translation in Tamil. He was also associated with the programmes of the Department of Christian Studies in Madurai Kamaraj University. He created the Synod of Madurai Archdiocese, the first of this kind in Tamilnadu. The thrust of the synod was participation of laity in the administration of local church and the formation of self-supporting parishes.¹¹⁰

Mgr. P. ANTONY (AUXILIARY BISHOP OF MADURAI)

Mgr. P. Antony was born on 1st October 1949 at Marambady in Dindigul District. He completed his high school education at R.C. Higher Secondary School in Tiruchirappalli during 1963 and 1966. He also underwent courses in Latin and Initiation at St. Peter’s seminary in Madurai in 1968. He finished P.U.C. in 1972 at St. Joseph’s College, Tiruchirappalli. Mgr. P. Antony studied priestly studies like Philosophy, Theology at St. Paul’s seminary, Tiruchirappalli. During 1980 and 1982, he went to S.T.L. John Lateran University, Rome for higher studies. He was given ordination in 1976 and was appointed as an Assistant Parish Priest at Holy Redeemers Church in Tiruchirappalli in 1976. He served as the Secretary to the Bishop of Tirichirapalli from 1977-1978 and Secretary of the Commission for Christian life, in Tiruchirapalli from 1977 to 1980. He became the Professor of Philosophy and perfect of Philosophers at St. Paul’s Seminary in Tiruchirapalli. Fr. Antony also served as the Professor of Pastoral Theology and Director of

108. **Dinamalr** dated 28th December 1988.

109. **Catholica Sevai**, January 1989.

110. **Interview with Fr. V.M. Gnanapragasam**, dated 10-3-2004.

Pastoral programme in the same situation from 1984-1991. He was appointed as the Director of Catechetical Sisters of St. Thomas at Fathima Nagar in Tiruchirapalli in 1985 which post he held upto 1995. He became the Vicar General of the Diocese of Tiruchirapalli and also became the Dean of Studies at St. Paul's seminary in Tiruchirapalli in 1995. He served in that capacity till 1998. He contributed many articles to the Tamil monthly **Thozhan**, Tindivanam and in the Tamil Theological quarterly **Marai Aruvi**. He became the Auxiliary Bishop of Madurai on 4th February in 1999. ¹¹¹

Mgr. PETER FERNANDO

Mgr. Peter Fernando was born on 22nd March 1939 in a small village called as Idinthakarai in Tuticorin Diocese. He finished his primary education at Idinthakarai. ¹¹² He joined the St. Xavier's Higher Secondary School, Palayamkottai for his higher secondary. He studied two years at the St. Peter's Seminary, Madurai and studied Latin course for two years. He also studied three years of Philosophy at St. Paul's seminary, Tiruchirapalli. He completed his B. Sc. (Botany) at St. Joseph's College Trichinopoly. He finished B.Ed. at St. Xavier's College in Palayamkottai. Subsequently, at St. Mary's Seminary in United States of America, he qualified himself for the Masters Degree. He completed Ph.D. Psycho-Therapy at Khent State University in U.S.A. He returned to India in 1975. On his return, Peter Fernando was appointed as the Professor of National Vocational Centre at Pune. He worked there for ten years. He also served as a visiting Professor at Gnanadeepa in Pune.

Mgr. Peter Fernando served in various capacities such as Secretary to the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, the Secretary of Commission Seminary, the Puti Secretary of Tamilnadu Bishop's Council, the Rector of St. Paul's Seminary in Trichinopoly, the Vicar General of the Diocese of Tuticorin, the Co- adjugur

111. Informations received from the centre of Archbishop's house, Madurai.

112. Bio-data received from Archbishop's house, Madurai, 11-03-2004.

Bishop of Tuticorin and the Apostolic Administrator of the Diocese of Trichy before becoming the Archbishop of Madurai on 24th April 2003.

He edited and authored the following books, such as **Theologizing in India, Enculturation in Seminary Formation, Socio- Pastoral Dimension in Priestly Formation, Image of Women and Beyond the Fireline.**¹¹³

Though the missionaries from abroad came to preach Christianity, they worked for the development of vernacular languages. They laid stress on the study of the vernacular languages to preach Christianity. Apart from their missionary work, they worked for the development of education and also established congregations in order to do social and educational services. The next chapter discusses about the Congregations having higher educational institutions in Madurai Diocese.

113. Interview with Mgr. Peter Fernando, The Archbishop of Madurai, dated 11-03-2004.