

CHAPTER – II CONGREGATIONS HAVING HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN MADURAI DIOCESE

The Jesuits are the members of the religious order called the company or the Society of Jesus, which was founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola. They were soon called ‘Jesuits’. The term **Jesuit**, like Christian was at first taken in a derogative sense. But later it became evident to all that the name was very apt and appropriate. And so then members of the order as well as others began to make use of it freely.¹

The Society of Jesus was one of the major turning points in the history of Europe, mainly the Renaissance. The Society was suppressed subsequently and it was restored in 1814. By then, the world had changed dramatically. Between the suppression of the society and its restoration two democratic revolutions had occurred namely in America and in France. These two revolutions along with that of the industrial revolution gave new direction to the world. And the restored society was challenged to respond to the changed circumstances.²

The Pope approved the Society of Jesus on 16th November 1966, Pope Paul III issued a statement in appreciation of the Jesuits: **Christ chooses you, the Church sends you, and the Pope blesses you**. The Jesuits are required to take the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. In addition to these three vows, they also bind themselves by a special vow of obedience to the Sovereign Pontiff.

THE FOUNDER

Ignatius Loyola, (1491 – 1556) a Spanish noble of Basque Stock was a military officer. In 1521, the year of Martin Luther’s revolt against the Church, his leg was shattered by a cannon ball at the siege of Pamplona in a war between France and Spain. In consideration of his valour the victorious French commander

1. Fr.P.Rayanna, S.J, Manuscript, Shenbaganur Archives, Kodaikanal.

2. Leonard Fernando, S.J and Bernard’sami, **Born Again Jesuits Back in Tamilnadu**, Dindigul, 2003, p.17.

sent the wounded and helpless Ignatius in a letter to his paternal home at Loyola. Ignatius then took up religious work. In the subsequent pages, the details regarding the establishment of the Society of Jesus in India are described.

Through the influence of one Don Joao da Cruz, himself a chetty convert from Calicut, some twenty thousand Paravars in thirty villages were baptized between 1535 and 1537 and were thus brought under the protection of Portugal. There were no priests resident among them to instruct them further in the faith. The matter was therefore referred to the King of Portugal. Just at that time the members of the new Society of Jesus were signaling themselves in the service of the Church and in zeal for souls all over Europe. King John there-upon requested the Pope to send a few of these men to India to instruct these neophytes. St. Ignatius gladly accepted the offer, thus effecting a close connection between India and the Society of Jesus even before it was firmly established in Europe.

The lot for this assignment fell on Francis Xavier (1506 – 1552) who was acting as the Secretary of St. Ignatius Loyola. Acting on the instruction of Ignatius, Francis Xavier left Rome for Lisbon on 15th March 1540. Yet he was too late for that year's fleet sailing East. The following year he embarked from Lisbon for Goa.³

Jesuit's presence on the Indian Sub-Continent dates back to the arrival of Francis Xavier in Goa on 6th May 1542. As for the Tamil country was concerned, Francis Xavier and his companions had worked in the Pearl Fishery coast, Mylapore and in other parts, preached the Gospel and planted the Catholic Church. The whole of India, including the Tamil country was part of the Goa Province, having Francis Xavier as its first Provincial.⁴

The early Jesuits had mostly used their legs for their missionary journeys; and subsequently they began to use bullock-carts. In the nineteenth century, the South Indian Railway had a line between Nagapattinam and Erode passing

3. Fr.P.Rayanna, **op. cit**, n.pg.

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

through Thiruchirapalli. Six years after their arrival, probably in 1612, Fr. Garnier who succeeded Bertrand as Superior decided to embark on the new apostolate of education, the pointers were towards Nagapattinam the coastal terminus of the Railway. Here was a community of the Eurasians ready for the new education. The decision of the British Government made in 1835 to enforce English as the medium of instruction especially at the higher levels, laid the burden on the missionaries mostly non-British, of learning English as well as Tamil. English became necessary not only for running schools but for communication with the world of administration and of business.

During the first twenty five years, the death rate was so high on account of epidemics like cholera, small pox and the poor food that ways had to be found to renew the strength and give rest especially to the Europeans working all the year in parishes under trying conditions. A benefaction was obtained to establish a home of rest and holiday at Kodaikanal, namely La Province in 1863. La Province provided a month's holiday for all those engaged in teaching. It also served to bring together the old and the young in happy companionship.

The Sacred Heart College founded at Shembaganur in 1895 on the Palni Hills at a height of 6000ft. above sea level, was the pride of Madurai Mission. It housed perhaps the most cosmopolitan and international community in the whole society for practically every western nation and every region of India and Ceylon were represented there. Shembagnur provided a physical and spiritual climate conducive to serious intellectual work and deep personal prayer of which many generations of Jesuits in training have been the Benefactors. In 1980, this house was transferred to Madras under the additional name of **Sathyanilayam**. Already a decade earlier it had ceased to be the responsibility of the provincial of Madurai for it had come under the common works.⁵

5. **150 Years of Jesuit Presence in Madurai Mission**, Madurai, 1838-1988, p.9.

The Jesuit missionaries who came to India from the last quarter of the 16th century have left valuable historical records, which provide useful information about medieval Tamilnadu. The missionaries came here mingled with the people freely and made many personal observations, which they have recorded in their diaries, manuscripts, palm leaves, books etc. The above-mentioned records are presently kept in the Jesuit Archives at Shembaganur, Kodaikanal. The Jesuit documents mainly incoming and outgoing letters, diaries and descriptive notes were originally written in European languages- Italian, Portuguese and Latin. They were later translated into French and published by Rev.Fr.J.Bertrand in Paris 1848 and in 1854 respectively. They are embodied in four volumes entitled **La mission du Madure** edited by Fr. Bertrand.⁶

CONGREGATION OF ST.ANNE'S OF TRICHY

Mgr.Alexis Canoz with the help of Fr.Penzol founded St.Annes Congregation at the banks of River Cauvery. In those days Cholera was considered as a killer disease because it swallowed lives of many people irrespective of their status. As a result, many married girls lost their life partners. The traditions and customs made them widows. They were positioned at the corner of the society. To abbreviate the suffering of the widows St.Anne's Congregation was formed.

In 1844, a widow's remarriage was held at St.Mary's Cathedral Church. Fr.Tringal blessed the marriage.⁷ This mission did not stop with the celebration of a marriage of a widow.

Fr.Canoz when he became the bishop of Madurai Diocese, wrote a letter to Rev.Fr.Joseph Perdoan the procurator asking for financial assistance to start a congregation for ladies. He further proposed a plan to educate the Indian ladies.

6. 22nd Annual Report, Catholic Directory of India, Burma and Ceylon, 1922, n.pg.

7. Thelintha Neerootru, Sr.Edwidge SAT, Trichy, 1998, pp.33-35.

As head of the diocese, he himself involved in making long term plans. The Trichy Diocese was under the control of Dulus Province, which was in France. The aim of Fr.Canoz's visit to Europe was only to found a congregation for ladies especially for the widows. It couldn't be implemented immediately for an intellectual approach was needed to workout this plan. Ultimately, the Congregation of St.Anne's was founded at Tiruchirappalli.⁸

Rev. Mother Annammal, the first Superior General of the Congregation was born in 1836 at Varaganeri, Palakarai in Tiruchirapalli, Tamil Nadu, India. Despite opposition, Rev. Mother Annammal went about tending the sick and the needy, educating the illiterate. Many young widows were inspired by her service and became her followers. As the number grew, she approached the Bishop Alexis Cano S.J. to start a community for the widows. On obtaining the permission from the Bishop Rev.Mother Annammal founded the first community with nine widows on 2nd February 1858 under the patronage of St. Anne and Joachim. The first community led a simple life in a mud hut, prayed together and earned their daily bread by manually hulling the paddy. They took up the apostolic works such as teaching catechism, assisting the sick and the dying, caring for the orphans and visiting the hospitals and houses. There were three categories of members in the Congregation namely professed sisters, catechists and domestic workers.

DEVELOPMENT

From the year 1923, virgins were admitted to the congregation. After the Vatican II Council, all the new members became professed sisters. As the years rolled on, the sisters of the congregation were sent for higher education, technical training courses and theological studies. New houses were opened in India and in countries like Italy, Iran and Libya to help the poor and the needy. For the sake of administrative viability, spiritual vitality and economic self-sufficiency, the

8. **Ibid**, pp.38-40.

Congregation was divided into five provinces. Today, the Sisters devote themselves to various forms of spiritual, educational, medical, rehabilitation and social work.

In 1952, the Sisters of St. Anne, Tiruchirapalli, celebrated the Platinum Jubilee. The General Chapter, the highest authority over the congregation consists of elected delegates, and elects the Superior General and her council who along with the Secretary and the Treasurer constitute the General Team. The Superior General in consultation with the finally professed sisters in the congregation and with the consent of the councillors appoints the Provincial Team. (i) She protects the patrimony of the congregation and is responsible for governing and guiding the whole congregation.

(ii) She keeps in touch with the Holy See on matters of the congregation.

The Provincial directs the sisters to discharge the duties with simplicity and dedication. The Superiors animate the sisters to maintain a good relationship with one another in the community with a spirit of love and concern. ⁹

BROTHERS OF THE SACRED HEART OF JESUS

The Congregation of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart was founded by Fr. Caussanel, S.J in Palayamkottai Diocese in 1903. ¹⁰ As a young man of 28, full of fervor and zeal, Fr. Adrian Caussanel entered the Indian soil in 1888. Soon he discovered how this ancient land of civilization is tormented by problems of poverty, exploitation of the poor by vested interest groups and severe forms of injustices met at them. The basic human rights were denied to the weak and struggling rural communities. This situation prompted Fr. Caussanel to found the

9. [www. Stannestrichy.org](http://www.Stannestrichy.org).

10. V.M. Gnanapragasam, **A Pearl of Great Price**, 1988, p.212.

Brothers of the Sacred Heart. Fr.Caussanel was a man of great foresight and vision. Sir C.Malony, a French noble writes about Fr.Caussanel: "Somewhere in the desert there lived a dragon, which I resolved to pursue up to its den. The dragon bore the name of Adrian Caussanel and worked as a Jesuit by trade.....I had never seen so lean a man..... He lived on milk and bananas."¹¹

The Sacred Heart Brothers' work in Madurai started already when it was merely Madurai Mission. In the early years of the century (about 1926) the Brothers of the Sacred Heart helped the Jesuit Fathers in the office, depot, orphanage and sacristy of St.Xavier's High School, Palayamkottai, St.Mary's High School, Madurai. They continued such services in De Britto High School, Devakottai in 1943.

When these brothers qualified themselves to teach in schools, they launched into educational service by themselves. The R.C.Mill Cooly Line School was entrusted to the care of the Brothers of the Sacred Heart who developed the elementary school into a middle school and in 1968 into a high school. Their services in Kambay (Cumbum) Valley started with the St.Aloysius Elementary School in Rayappanpatti in 1929 which was soon upgraded into a middle school and later in 1964 into a high school.¹²

The social condition that prevailed in that region left much to be desired. The poverty was rampant. The poor were exploited by the rich. The weaker sections were marginalized. The Brothers of the Sacred Heart were deeply moved by the plight of the natives and adopted the motto "**Take the side of the poor**". The brothers advocated the fundamental rights of the victimized and the minorities. The brothers initiated the process of empowering the poor. Social service centers were started in backward areas. They struggle in solidarity with the poor towards their sustainable livelihoods. Facilitating Social Transformation is a

11. www.brothersindia.org.

12. V.M.Gnanapragasam, **op.cit**, p.212.

priority. Since a decade; such a realization is being concretely expressed in the form of social apostolate undertaken by the Brothers in various parts of the country, where the Brothers of Sacred Heart are involved.

SELECTION OF THE AREA AND PEOPLE

Where 95% of the population belong to the rural area and fall below the poverty line are chosen. Promotion of institutions engaged in the process of empowering the poor. In the four social service centres located in rural and backward localities Brothers have undertaken social service. Living in the respective centers, the Brothers spread out to villages and among the rural women, drop out youth, dalits and tribal folk and organised them in to community organizations. There are five integrated community development centres promoted and nurtured by the congregation. They are

BIRDS in Geddalahalli, Bangalore,
 JAGRUTHI in Gulbarga,
 LIFT in Triuchirapalli,
 Tribal Development Centre at Athipet and
 CAFED in Venkatapuram.

In addition, the congregation runs tribal development centres at Venkatapuram and Gulbarga. The opening of another centre at Mukkavar is in the offing. The Congregation has just completed hundred years of survive to God and humanity and celebrated its Centenary in 2003. The Congregation was canonically erected on 20th June 1952 and recognized as an Institute of Pontifical Right on 11th February 1999.

Training for Rural Health Care Managers

At Geddalahalli, steps were taken to Home Nurses who would be torchbearers of health in their respective communities and villages. Young girls after high school or Intermediate level undergo a residential training of six months in midwifery and basic health care. Many of them have already acquired jobs in local hospitals and nursing care centres. St.Michael's Health Care Centre in Singampatti also offers this course in Tamil Nadu. The young girls, who are undergoing home nurses training, are given foundational-knowledge to address on the issue of HIV/AIDS.

Mission Cooperation for Development (MCD)

The Mission Cooperation for Development is initiated as a professional central coordination organism located in the Generalate to guide, support and coordinate the development interventions of the Sacred Heart Brothers and other collaborators at the grassroots. Its functions are as follows:

- (i) Participatory Planning - Monitoring and Evaluation
- (ii) Conduct on-going reflection and research on People's Processes of Change and Empowerment
- (iii) Process Documentation and maintenance of updated Data Base
- (iv) Facilitate Capacity Building for efficiency and
- (v) Undertake impact assessment studies

It is envisaged that it would be managed self-reliantly due to its professional nature.

The Generalate of the Congregation is located in Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu and the entire region is divided into two provinces-Caussanel Province and Angelo Province. There are 250 professed religious brothers who carry forward the vision of the founder and render relevant services in the society, wherever they are placed. They go where the need is great! The life of the Sacred

Heart Brothers is significantly characterized by utmost simplicity, unconditional availability to serve the poor and always ready to give until it hurts. Their institutions and services remained 'people-friendly' to the core. The Congregation has forty one branches spread over the four southern states.

Sharing the good news of the Gospel is the primary area of the mission of the brothers. They go about forming and strengthening the laity to take responsibilities in the life of the Church. Towards this, the congregation runs four proclamation centres from where evangelization initiatives are carried on. They are:

Arutchandru Nilayam at Paramakudy, a Center for Evangelization & Formation of the Laity

Ithaya Ashram, a Centre for Inter-Religious Dialogue at Myladuthurai

Ave Maria Mission Centre at Devikulam and

Sacred Heart Animation Centre at Caussanelpuram.

Brothers promote a lay movement called "Friends of the Sacred Heart" to inculcate love for the Sacred Heart of Jesus and nurture values of compassion, service and love. ¹³

SISTERS OF THE PRESENTATION CONVENT

NANO NAGLE – THE FOUNDER

Honara, or as she has been called by generation of Irish people Nano Nagle was born in 1718¹⁴ to Garret and Ann Nagle. Nano went through the rudiments of education at Ballygriffin. In 1728, Garret Nagle and his wife had to part with their eldest child. Nano was sent to France for education. When the years of schooling over, Nano remained in Paris where her sister Ann joined her. Nano spent nearly nineteen years in Paris. ¹⁵

13. www.brothersindia.org.

14. T. J. Walsh, **Nano Nagle and the Presentation Sisters**, 1967, Cork, Ireland, p.34 .

The death of Garret Nagle in 1746 altered the family circumstances in France and in Ireland. Nano and Ann Nagle left Paris and shifted to Dublin with their widowed mother.¹⁶ Nano Nagle was brought face to face with the religious and she was very disturbed and unsettled. So she left Dublin and joined her brother David in the old home at Ballygriffin. There she visited man of homes and spoke to the inmates about salvation, duty to God and the mysteries of religion. Nano Nagle came to Cork with the intention of teaching a school. She rented a little cabin in Cove Lane about twenty five yards on the western side of the Chapel.¹⁷ On 24th December 1775, the religious life was adopted and the novitiate was begun. Nano took the name Sister St. John of God.¹⁸ Nano Nagle died in the morning of Monday 26th April 1784, aged sixty five years.¹⁹

THE PRESENTATION MISSIONS IN SOUTH INDIA

In Madras, the first Indian Presentation foundation was established in the walled town around Fort St. George; once the residence of governor and official of the East India Company. In 1844, the Sisters established an orphanage, an Indian poor school, a 'Pay' school and a boarding school for the Europeans. A call was made for more volunteers and as a result, Sister Xavier Molloy and later Sister Aloysius Neville traveled to Madras. On 16th December 1884 Mother Agnes Walton, Sister De Sales Smith, Sister Evangelist Collins, Sister Margaret O' Halloran and Sister Baptist Curtin, all trained educationists were placed in possession of Cotgrave House, Vpary, a suburb of Madras. Thus a school for gratuitous teaching of the poor and a school for the children of parents who paid a small fee was started in Vpary. In 1889, St. Anne's Middle School came in to being. In 1949, St. Anne's Middle School and St. Aloysius High School were amalgamated. At Vpary, the Presentation Sisters maintained St. Aloysius Anglo-

15. **Ibid**, pp. 36-39.

16. **Ibid**, p. 41.

17. **Ibid**, pp. 41-44.

18. **Ibid**, p.99.

19. **Ibid**, p.117.

Indian High School and a special school for Hindus and Muslims. A commodious house and property were acquired at Church Park, in the outskirts of Madras. The convent and high school of the Sacred Heart for Anglo – Indian and high caste Indian girls were built in 1909. The missionary design was completed in a series of schools at Royapuram, Egmore, Pudupet, Perambur, Royapettah and Kodaikanal. At Kodaikanal, the establishment comprises St. Joseph’s Boarding High School in 1919 for European girls including some Indians of the Parsee caste and St. Francis Xavier’s Middle School in 1919 in which the medium of instruction was Tamil.

MEDICAL MISSIONS

A revision of the constitutions in 1925 enabled the Sisters to participate in the fullness of the apostolate as visualized by Nano Nagle. The Sisters were invited by the management of the Southern Indian Railway Company to take charge of the new hospital founded at Golden Rock Colony in Trichinopoly. After a period of training, the sisters began to work in the hospital in 1928. Unfortunately, due to unexpected circumstances they had to withdraw in 1942. Mean while at Periyakulam in the Madura District, a school and medical mission were opened in 1933. But subsequently it was shifted to Theni, a place located nine miles away from Periyakulam. At Theni, the medical mission included the Holy Redeemer General and Maternity hospital and clinics for the lepers and outpatients.²⁰ A centre for people affected by AIDS called **Jeevan Jyothi** was started in 2003. It is situated at Kailasapatti located between Periyakulam and Theni.²¹ The Marian Dispensary was inaugurated in 1970, which gives medical aid to at least seven villages.²²

CONGREGATION OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

20. **Ibid**, pp. 301-306.

21. **Interview with Sr.Jayanthi**, The Headmistress, dated 24-8-2006.

22. V.M.Gnanapragasam, **op.cit**, p.231.

In European countries, men were involved in pastoral work for assisting priests. Nuns not only undertook spiritual services in their homelands but also volunteered to work in mission countries in Asia and Africa. France was on top in sending sisters abroad for missionary work. The Sisters of the Holy Cross and St. Joseph's of Lyons from France, St. Augustine's from Belgium, the Sisters of the Presentation of Our Lady from Ireland were some of the congregations involved in missionary work in India during the 19th century.

Fr. Larmey and his ardent disciple Brother Augustine Perreira were instrumental for the inception of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of Panjampatty. It is now eighty five years old with the strength of seven hundred and seventy two sisters and hundred and twenty one convents.²³

A PEARL FROM TUTICORIN

In the history of Indian Catholic Church, Tuticorin had very long back played a key- role. Eminent priests including Robert de Nobili popularly known as Thathuva Pothakar in Tamil instrumental for the formation of Madurai Mission. He learnt Tamil and initiated pastoral work in Tuticorin and nearby coastal places. Augustine Pereira was born in the traditional catholic town of Tuticorin in 1854. The seed of the spiritual zeal sown by his mother grew steadily and firmly. Though his father Ignatius had persuaded him to take up business but the acquaintance of Fr. Larmey and affection showered on Augustine made him to be his disciple. When Fr. Larmey was transferred from Tuticorin to Nagapattinam,²⁴ Augustine accompanied him and they were General Perfect and Assistant Perfect of St. Joseph's College Boarding respectively. Fr. Larmey was appointed as the Parish Priest to Panjampatty and Augustine followed him.

23. **Kilai Illangal Varalaru**, Congregation of the Immaculate Conception, Madurai, 1899-2001, p.11.

24. **Ibid**, p.13.

THE LITTLE CHILDREN OF THE MOTHER IMMACULATE

Augustine was called as Brother Augustine, since his simplicity, dedication in teaching catechism and propagating the faith impressed the people especially the youth, among themselves four girls determined to take the vow of celibacy and dedicate themselves to the service of God. Astonished by their decision, Fr. Larmey understood that it was God's will and call. He was reminded of the apostolic work of the "Beats" in his homeland, France and he thought of starting the "Beats" convents at Panjampatty. He gave Brother Augustine the responsibility of shaping up the girls, who wanted to dedicate their lives for the service of God. Brother Augustine who looked after them for ten years, named them "The Little Children of the Mother Immaculate". The House of the Immacualtes was thus founded. Visuvasam, Viyagammal, Annammal, Savariammal, the first four sisters attired in white sari, with candles in hands dedicated themselves to the service of God on 2nd February 1899, on the day of feast of the Presentation of Our Lady.²⁵

Brother Augustine who wanted to make the sisters knowledgeable, provided primary education for five or six years to them. As a result, they were able to become teachers and earn Rs. 12 per month by way of teaching. The Brother also trained them to propagate the Gospel to the villagers in simple methods and undertake charitable services. He taught them to render small medical helps.²⁶

Education of the poor villages was the need of the hour. Hence, Fr. Augustine made teachers training certificate a prerequisite for the entry into the congregation. He extended help and support to the aspiring women to enter the convent by sending them to teachers training at Trichy. Sensing the call for learning on the increase, Fr. Augustine started a school at Silukkuvarpatty also

25. **Ibid**, p.14.

26. **Ibid**, p.16.

in 1909. Three trained sisters joined the school. The convent was bifurcated. Thus, the Immaculate Conception which started from Panjampatty extended its services to Silukkuvarpatty .²⁷

St. Joseph's of Lyons, a congregation of foreign origin, was located at Kuyavarpalayam, Madurai. Fr. Augustine purchased a small portion of land from the 'Lyons' and built a house for his "Immaculate" motivations. He sent seven sisters to Madurai on 2nd July 1911 and put them under Sr.Radugandh for training. This day is considered as the day of inauguration of the Congregation of Immaculate Conception.

The Seven Dolours handed over their East Gate House at Madurai to provide accommodation for the seven sisters where they had been for forty three years to the "Immaculates". The Generalate of the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception was transferred to East Gate Madurai, on 23rd December 1923. On the 8th December 1932, all the Sisters of Immaculate Conception appeared in wonderful, bright blue attire. They sophisticated English name "The Blue Sisters came to replace the old one".²⁸

SERVICE IN EDUCATION

One of the major objectives of the Congregation of Immaculate Conception is to provide educational facilities to young women. As a result, a new guide book entitled *Educational Policies* was prepared. New buildings were also constructed for this purpose. The sisters purchased a site on the Ramnad road near the Vandiyoor Teppakulam (Tank). It is the present St. Teresa campus where a number of institutions of the **Immaculates** are situated. Rev. Fr. Planchard helped the sisters to build a chapel in the campus. St.Teresa's Teachers Training Institute, which was their traditional one, producing thousands and thousands of women teachers as well as the candidates for the Congregation of Immaculate Conception.

27. **Ibid**, p.21.

28. **Kilai Illangal Varalaru, op.cit**, pp.1,2.

In 1954, the centenary of the declaration of the Immaculate Conception as an article of faith was celebrated. On that occasion, **The Immaculate Sisters** (Amalavai Kanniar, a history of the congregation) was released. As part of the celebrations, the Nirmala Girls' High School was started on the campus of St. Teresa's. At present, it has grown up into a big higher secondary school and also stands proudly as one of the top-rank schools of Madurai city.²⁹ Thus, the Immaculate Sisters dedicated themselves to the cause of education. Mother Teresa appreciated this work. The platinum Jubilee of the Congregation of Immaculate Conception was celebrated in 1986.³⁰

MONTFORT BROTHERS OF ST.GABRIEL, INDIA

ST.MONTFORT

Monfort, a missionary saint of Western France, was born in 1673. He influenced millions of persons to commit their lives to the service of mankind. His Treatise on True Devotion to Mary became the source of spiritual formation in religious congregation and seminaries worldwide. Disciples inspired by his vision and dynamism, as Brothers, Sisters and Priests are present globally, offering to the poor and marginalized. In 1947, the Catholic Church declared him a saint and that gave a new impetus to spread his message of love and service. The followers of Montfort called as the Montfort Brothers were the first to reach the shores of British India through the French colony of Pondicherry in 1903. Today the Brothers have become the largest congregation of brothers in India, growing daily from strength to strength.³¹

29. **Ibid**, pp.4,5.

30. **Ibid**, p.62.

31. **In 1703, St.Montfort originated the congregation in France. In 1903, the Brothers came to India through Pondichery. In 1947, the congregation became an autonomous province in India. In 1975, it was divided into three provinces of South, Center and North. In 2003, it was divided into six provinces spreading from Kashmir to Kanyakumari and even spreads to the South Pacific and East Africa.**

National centenary celebration executive diary, Chennai Montfort Brothers of St. Gabriel, India, December 2003, p.1.

A GLANCE AT NUMBERS IN INDIA

1. Six hundred members
2. Organized as six provinces
3. Hundred and fifty nine institutions for general education, technical training, special schools for deaf as well as blind and social centers of liberative education and action programmes.
4. More than 1,00,000 children and youth under formation for life and training for work at any given point of time.
5. Present in nineteen states of India and reaching out to five countries as missions.

The most numerous and vibrant unit of the International Society which is present in thirty two countries, spread to all countries.

MISSIONARY SISTERS OF THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY

Sister Marie Louise the Founder

Sister Marie Louise, the foundress of the congregation was born on 8th April, 1857 and she was christened the next day at the Parish Church of St. Michael's. When she was five years old her parents sent her to the elementary school of the Grey Nuns. After the school, she along with her friend Emilia Vandemme got their first communion in the convent chapel of the Grey Nuns in 1867, on the feast day of Sacred Heart. After secondary school, Maria went for a finishing year at Ursule Academy of Tournai, in the French speaking part of Belgium. While she was a young girl, interest in missionary apostolate was emerging in Flanders. She chose to enter the community of the Canoness of St. Augustine, in whose boarding school she had gone through adolescence. On the day of her admission to the novitiate, that is on 4th May, 1879, Mary De Meester received the name Dame Marie Louise. She took to teaching and she was quite a gifted teacher.³²

32. Cecile Sandra ICM, **The Message of Life**, Haverlee-Louvain, 1979, pp.5-15.

In February 1981, Father Victor Verleure, missionary in Mulagumoodu wrote a letter to the Superior about his orphanage, his people, and the many needs of the mission he had established in 1861. She brought the news of Mulagumoodu to the sisters. Father Victor invited the community of Ieper to send two or three sisters for the running of the orphanage. The letter was read in the dining room. It touched the heart of many sisters including Sister Marie Louise. On 12th December 1892, Father Oliver, their director asked for more information from Bishop Ossi of Quilon, in whose diocese the mission of Mulagumoodu was located. The reply was dated on 12th February 1893. In it, Bishop Ossi expressed his happiness at the prospect of having sisters to serve the people of Mulagumoodu. He told them that the climate was hot and damp, but not detrimental to health. He assured them of his special protection of a very meaningful apostolate in his diocese. About Easter 1897, the Prioress of Ieper and Sister Marie Louise had an appointment with the Bishop. They pleaded him to approve the sending of Sister Louise and a companion to Mulagumoodu. The case of Sister Mary Ursule was put forward.³³

The sisters landed at Aleppy on 16th October 1897. The messenger of Bishop Ossi was waiting with a note asking them to take rest for a few days since their convent was not ready. On 20th October 1897, a fishing boat took them to Quilon. They left for Trivandrum with Mother Mary of the Incarnation. On 6th November 1897, they started of the thirty miles of bumpy road to Mulagumoodu. It was their first experience with the ox-cart. All called Sister Marie Louise as Periammal.³⁴

The number of children was steadily increasing and so were the demands on the food reserve. Sister Mary Ursule gave a bright idea of making lace. Two girls from the home, Gnanapou and Viagulum joined them as trainees. In 1898

33. **Ibid**, pp.17-22.

34. **Ibid**, pp.26-28.

there was a small group of lace makers downstairs at the convent. Lacemaking and handicrafts would help to support the large household of the mission and contribute to the development of the region.³⁵

Attention was also given to the education of the children. Six months after the sisters had arrived; they discussed the building of a school with their Bishop. The project was fully endorsed, as long as it would bring no financial hardships on the diocese or the parish. From Europe, the community of Ieper, relatives, friends and former pupils generously responded to appeals for help. By the end of 1898, a one-room primary school was erected on the premises. Bishop Ossi formally opened it on 22nd January 1899. All the classes were held in Tamil. The staff consisted of former pupils of the orphanage, whom the Headmistress, Sister Mary Ursule guided in their teaching.³⁶

When Bishop Ossi met Sister Marie Louise on 20th October 1897, he explicitly asked her to reflect on what she could do for Indian girls of the area who wished to become religious sisters. He told her then that two helpers of the orphanage had all the qualities for the dedicated life and were interested. In a letter of January 1898, Bishop Ossi made it clear that the candidates needed no specific qualifications but that they were eventually to be trained as teachers. He even asked Sister Marie Louise to set up a special fund for the training of Indian sisters. Thus, it was that appeals for local vocations were made as early as 1898.

The two girls were accepted as postulants on 15th March 1898. They were initiated to follow a mitigated Rule of Life, which was being drafted by Sister Marie Louise on the pattern of the Lay Sisters of the Augustinian Order. She herself took charge of their formation. By Christmas of the same year two more candidates joined the group. A new element of admission was introduced in August 1899, when Sister Marie Louise accepted a girl of Malabar on the recommendations of the Jesuits of Madurai. The Bishop of Quilon regularized

35. **Ibid**, p.30.

36. **Ibid**, p.31.

their status by formally approving the Rule of Life of the Indian sisters for a period of three years. This document was signed on 3rd May 1904, and handed by the bishop to Sister Marie Louise on 4th May 1904, before he officiated at the profession of vows of sisters Soosai and Augustina.³⁷

On 16th July 1904, Bertha and Françoise were received in the novitiate.³⁸ On 30th March 1905, Sister Marie Louise left for Belgium with the little boy Soosai Marian.³⁹ In August 1905, a group of eight young women began their postulancy at Roeselare. There had been many applications but the foundress had carefully selected them in view of the demands of religious life in the Mulagumoodu Mission.⁴⁰ On 3rd March 1906, she left for Mulagumoodu with the eight new recruits and the Indian boy. On 4th May 1906, Mulagumoodu was enjoying the festive ceremony of the silver jubilee of Sister Marie Louise. Earlier in 1905, Father Verelure offered his plantation of five hundred and twenty eight acres to Sister Marie Louise for the benefit of her charges. Bishop Benzigar decided to make a concession and sold it to sisters for Rs.7500. They paid the amount in installments. As on 14th June 1906, the European community consisted of six professed sisters and ten novices; the local community had four professed, six novices and eight postulants.⁴¹

Sister Marie Louise and her companion arrived Roeselare during the second half of March 1908. She met the applicants personally and visited their houses. Since there was a convenient building, part of the training was given in Belgium.⁴² This novitiate was approved by the authorities of Rome on 23rd September 1908.⁴³ On 16th November 1909, Sister Marie Louise went to Rome and had long

37. **Ibid**, pp.33-36.

38. **Ibid**, p.48.

39. **Ibid**, p.57.

40. **Ibid**, p.59.

41. **Ibid**, pp. 64-67.

42. **Ibid**, p.76.

43. **Ibid**, p.8.

discussions with Father Misonne regarding the new mission in the Phillipines and the approval of the constitutions. On 23rd November 1908, the group embarked Naples. Jesuits requested to establish a house at Srivilliputtur.⁴⁴ According to the circular sent by Sister Marie Louise as on 31st December 1910, the congregation had twenty one professed, thirty two novices and over fifty postulants; five houses and several requests for new foundations.⁴⁵ As per the request of Bishop Schelfaut of Roseau, with the help of Father De Ridder a Redemptorist priest she started new mission in West Indies.⁴⁶

In 1916, Sister Marie Louise established the house at Kodaikanal, high up in the Southern Mountain Range. It was meant as a country place for those sisters who needed to relax in a less taxing climate. Immediately the community of four sisters set out to do home nursing and to give religious instructions.⁴⁷ In July 1917, the Allies dropped the first bomb on the town of Roeselare. Several civilians including two sisters of the novitiate were injured. Part of the novitiate was damaged.

In July 1918, Sister Marie Louise was at Mariapuram where the community would soon run a school and assist the local clergy in parish work. At the same time, preliminary steps were taken for new houses to be established at Palayamkottai, Palliyadi, Trivandrum and Colachel. School education had the priority in these, as in most places.⁴⁸ On 6th December 1918, Sister Marie Louise and her companion bade farewell to all at Mulagumoodu. They travelled to Colombo, Manila and they arrived Newyork on 4th May 1919 where the religious of the Sacred Heart introduced to potential benefactors.⁴⁹

44. **Ibid**, pp.93-96.

45. **Ibid**, p.105.

46. **Ibid**, p.139.

47. **Ibid**, p.158.

48. **Ibid**, p.171.

49. **Ibid**, pp.174-176.

By the end of 1919, the novitiate had thirty nine novices and postulants. She therefore agreed to the mission in Africa. On 25th September 1920, a papal decree had placed the congregation under the jurisdiction of propaganda, and then named Sacred Congregation for the Evangelization of people. The official document was signed by Cardinal Van Rossum, it's prefect.⁵⁰ In 1922, the first General Council meeting of the congregation was organized.⁵¹ In 1923, sisters started their missionary work in China.⁵² In April 1925, Sister Mary Ursule was recalled to Belgium. She was proposed to visit all the houses in China, Phillipines, India, Manila, the States and the Carribean. In 1926, the foundress had been ill. She asked the Cardinal Protector for permission to call a general chapter.⁵³ On 14th March, 1927 a land at Heverlee was bought in which the central house was built.⁵⁴

On 1st June 1927, Bishop Wachter officially opened the chapter of the Congregation of the Missionary Canonesses of St. Augustine. The foundress participated from his sick bed. Sister Mary Augustin received the majority of the votes. Sister Mary Bernard, Sister Marguerite Marie, Sister Marie Pascal and Sister Marie Alene were her councilors. On 10th October 1928, at 4 O'clock the foundress peacefully made the final ascent to her God.⁵⁵

Sr. Cleymanns Josee is the present Superior General. All over the world, there are hundred and sixteen communities with eight hundred and sixteen professed sisters, eleven sisters in novitiate and sixteen postulants. There are twenty six communities in India with two hundred and five sisters.⁵⁶

50. **Ibid**, pp.193-195.

51. **Ibid**, p.204.

52. **Ibid**, p.210.

53. **Ibid**, pp.222-224.

54. **Ibid**, p.232.

55. **Ibid**, p.247.

56. **Directory**, Sisters of Immaculate Heart of Mary, 2007-2008, p.16.

SISTERS OF THE ORDER OF SERVANTS OF MARY

The history of Order of Servants of Mary in India goes along with the history of Madurai Diocese.⁵⁷ Robert De Nobili came over to India in 1606 and converted many people. In between 1606 and 1623, he converted fifty Brahmins, seventy Nayaks and hundred and fifty others. In 1640, he created two groups of priests one with priests of higher caste called Brahmin Sanyasis to preach the high-class people and another group of priests called Pandara Swamys to serve the low caste people. His intention is not to partition the people on the basis of caste but to convert the people of all castes.⁵⁸

In 1847, Mgr. Alexis Canoz had been appointed as the First Vicar Apostolic of Madurai. We can call this period as the Golden Period of Tamil Catholic Society. Because, many congregations were created during this period. The first and the important one such was the Servite.⁵⁹

The Bishops who had worked in Madurai Diocese realized the need of a congregation for women. This resulted in the foundation of Viyagula Matha Kanniar Sabai (Sisters of Seven Dolours) on 8th December 1854. There were six nuns belonging to the Vellalar Community and Maria Soosai Natchathiram was appointed as the head of the remaining five sisters. The Jesuit Fathers helped them all the ways.

During 1854, the nuns stayed in a house owned by Pitcai Muthu Pillai a catechist in the Cathedral Church. As the number of nuns increased, they shifted to a house near the church. After religious training, they wore the attire of nuns in 1857. In 1859, few sisters of the congregation took their first vow.

A contribution for the upkeep of the congregation was received from Miss. Desacur and the Christians of Trichy. Selvanayagam Pillai handed over this contribution on 10th June 1858. At that time, there were thirty sisters and there was

57. S. Corona Mary OSM, **Valin Vetri**, 1977, p.2.

58. **Ibid**, pp. 11-13.

59. **Idem**, p.13.

no sufficient place for them. So they bought a house for them. They started their first school in 1877. Fifty girls from children's hostel and twenty girls from outside studied in that school. Lot of students from various parts of the city attended the Sunday class.⁶⁰

In 1857, Fr.Loui San Cyr went to Europe and brought seven sisters of Parihara Matha Sabai. They landed at Trichy on 16th January 1860. They were brought here to train the Indian nuns. The French sisters and the Indian sisters had different cultures and habits. One group didn't know the culture of other groups. They lived in separate houses. The French sisters sent out many Indian sisters from the congregation. They ill-treated the remaining Indian sisters. Many fathers who were working in Madurai Diocese were the natives of France. As a result, few of them supported the French sisters. At that time, Fr.Gregory took charge of these two groups of sisters. He confined the power of French sisters on Indian sisters.

The first branch of this congregation was started at Vadakkankulam with six sisters with the help of Fr.Custanier in August 1862.⁶¹ The ladies of Tuticorin were very firm in Christianity but their knowledge was very poor. To preach them, Fr.Ravoo brought the Servite Sisters and started a community called Tuticorin Viyagula Matha Sabai. Sr.Ursulammal, Sr.Soosaiammal, Sr.Viyagulathammal and Sr.Maryanammal with a few sisters of Parigara Matha Sabai stayed in this community. These four sisters had been there till the growth of the community with the local ladies who joined the community. In 1870, they began their educational services. The Sisters of Parigara Matha Sabai imparted them religious training. In 1881, the alien sisters left Tuticorin for Europe. Then the Tuticorin Viyagula Matha Sabai functioned with the help of native sisters. In 1892, the Bishioop appointed Sr.Viyagula Mary as the Superior General and Sr.Rosammal as the Assistant Superior General of the congregation.⁶²

60. **Ibid**, p.9-32.

61. **Ibid**, pp.33-38.

62. **Ibid**, pp. 53-56.

Subsequently, the Parigara Matha Sabai and Viyagula Matha Sabai were merged into one by the Bishop and was called as the Congregation of the Servants of Mary.

In 1866, the Sisters of Parigara Matha Sabai began a new community in the island of Moris. As many of the residents were Tamilians, they called for Tamil Sisters from Viyagula Matha Sabai. Maria Soosai Natchathirammal and Maryanammal came forward to serve there. So, Bishop Mgr.Alexis Canoz appointed Thomaiaammal as Superior General and Soosaiammal and Vocational Promoter. These Indian sisters stayed together with the sisters of Parigara Matha Sabai. But unfortunately a rift surfaced between the foreign sisters and the sisters sent from India. As a result, many Indian sisters were sent home without any valid reason. The people complained Fr.Loui San Cyr regarding this matter. But he didn't like to interfere.

In between this time, not only the sisters of Viyagula Matha Sabai but also the diocese underwent troubles. The Sisters of Parigara Matha Sabai were responsible for this. Fr.Lesman was nominated to enquire this matter. He prepared the report. Based on his report, it was decided to separate these two congregations.

A house called Rose Villa near the Cathedral Church was bought. In this way, the congregation started its life as a full pledged congregation on 21st October 1876. The Vellalar sisters only stayed in Rose Villa and other sisters belonged to paraya caste stayed in the old house. They met together during festivities. In 1876, Fr.Arnold Penzole had been appointed as the Director of this congregation. He worked for the growth of this congregation. The sisters of the congregation founded the first school at Trichy in 1877. They established the second school at Irudayapuram on 7th January 1878.⁶³ In January 1881, all the sisters of Prigara Matha Sabai were drawn back after twenty one years of service in Maduarai Diocese.⁶⁴

63. **Ibid**, pp. 58-66.

64. **Ibid**, p.78.

After the departure of French sisters in 1881, a Superior General for Tuticorin Viyagula Matha Sabai was elected. In August 1884, Bishop Mgr. Alexis Canoz, Fr. Barbier and Verdier formulated a set of regulations for these sisters. Fr. Siluvai was appointed as the Director of Tuticorin Viyagula Matha Sabai. He sent the aspirants to Trichy to get education and novice training.⁶⁵

When the Jesuits created the Madurai Diocese, they started a school for boys and they wanted to have a school for the girls. So, the sisters started a school for girls. Four sisters taught in the school. All the students were Hindus. Most of them were Brahmins. In 1904, the Congregation of the Immaculate Conception of Mary was recognized as a Diocesan Congregation and the Viyagula Matha Sabai was asked to select either Madurai or Dindigul. These sisters selected Dindigul and left Madurai to the Sisters of the Conception of Immaculate Mary.⁶⁶

In 1884, these sisters established a community with a school in Palayamkottai.⁶⁷ On 4th April 1886, the sisters established a house in Manapadu and ran a school for girls there.⁶⁸ Mother Maria Louise served as the Superior General of the Congregation from 21st October 1876 to 23rd January 1892. Mother Ubahara Mary was elected as the Mother General and Maria Louise as the Secretary in the election held on 23rd January 1892. As per the request of the educational officer, they started Angelo Teacher Training Institute at Trichy in February 1895.⁶⁹

Sathankulam had two divisions of people. Parathavars lived in Peikulam and Nadars lived in Sonaperi. One young lady of Nadar Caste wanted to dedicate her life for Christianity. Following her many youth wanted to become nuns. In 1875, the Parish Priest Fr. Denis Susen permitted these young women to live together in a house and to do religious services. They lead a life like religious

65. **Ibid**, pp. 85,86.

66. **Ibid**, pp, 90,91.

67. **Ibid**, p.93.

68. **Ibid**, p.96.

69. **Ibid**, pp.107-110.

sisters. Fr.Susen sent them to Vadakkankulam to get education. Soon this organization spread over to Chokkankudieruppu and Vadakkankulam. Fr.Nicolas became the Parish Priest in 1890. He wanted to found this group as a congregation. Fr.Verdier discussed this matter of founding a congregation for Nadar caste girls in Rome. All the South Indian priests accepted it. These sisters got training in Trichy and this congregation was also called Viyagula Matha Sabai.⁷⁰ In 1644, there were two thousand two hundred and twenty Christians in Veerapandianpattanam. Twenty five students were studying in a school running there. On 15th January 1888, the second community of Tuticorin Viyagula Matha Sabai was started in Veerapandianpattanam.⁷¹ The Tuticorin Viyagula Matha Sabai established their third community at Punnaikayal on 7th January 1895.⁷²

On 10th January 1898, election was held. Mother Maria Alexia was elected as the Mother General and Maria Louis as Assistant. In 1898, they bought a farm and built a house for the sick sisters to take rest. That farm was named as Farm of Angels. Fr.Vianbes became the Director of the Congregation in 1899. He was interested in merging these congregations with the Maryin Ooliyar Sabai.(O.S.M) He wrote a letter to the Mother General San Marcello, Rome clarifying the benefits of joining that congregation. She responded immediately. So, all the sisters of the three congregations in the same name as Viyagula Matha Sabai were admitted into the Congregation of Order of Servants of Mary.⁷³

As per the request of Fr.Paethan the Parish Priest of Sarugani, these sisters started a school at Sarugani in 1900.⁷⁴ In 1902, a separate house was built in the premises of Trichy house for the Nadar caste novices. In 1904, a dispensary and rooms were built to take care of six sisters. In 1904, these sisters celebrated the

70. **Ibid**, pp.111-115.

71. **Ibid**, pp. 98-101.

72. **Ibid**, p.117.

73. **Ibid**, pp.120-125.

74. **Ibid**, p.131.

Golden Jubilee. One of the foundation stone of this congregation Sr.Maria Soosai Natchathiram died in 1905.⁷⁵ In 1902, a school for girls was started. The parish priest called for these sisters. He bought a house for Rs.4200. In the premises of this house a school was started. Sisters community was started on 23rd September 1904.⁷⁶

In Idinthakarai the community was started on 24th March 1906 with Sr.Cesili Mary as Mother and Sr.Soosai Mary and Sr.Francis Mary as helpers. This community is the fourth branch of Tuticorin Viyagula Matha Sabai. On 25th March 1906 the sisters started a school for girls.⁷⁷ The three congregations in Trichy, Tuticorin and Sathankulam came together to Trichy, the Motherhouse for retreat. After the retreat, the three congregations were merged and the Mother General of Trichy had been selected as the Mother General of the United Congregation.⁷⁸

These sisters first entered into Madurai in 1882 and opened a school in East Gate area, now occupied by the sisters of the Immaculate Conception. Later, according to the desire of the people, another school was opened near the Rosary Church. In 1900, they opened a convent and took charge of the primary school in Sarugani: later upgraded it to a middle school. In 1968, they started a dispensary, which became the Maria Mater Hospital in Arockiam Nagar three kilometer away from Sarugani. During the leadership of Mgr. Diraviam these sisters were allowed to start Alexis Canoz dispensary at Gnanaolivupuram in 1968 and in 1969 Sirumalar Higher secondary School in Nagamalai Pudukottai and later in 1972 St.Joseph's School for the Blind in Justin Nagar at the outskirts of Madurai.⁷⁹

75. **Ibid**, pp.133-135.

76. **Ibid**, p.140.

77. **Ibid**, p.143.

78. **Ibid**, pp.147,148.

79. Fr.V.M.Gnanapragasam, **op.cit**, p. 223.

SISTERS OF ST.JOSEPH'S OF LYONS

In 1906, six French sisters came from Lyons to Madurai and opened a dispensary, a home for the aged and a needlework center for poor girls. Later, they started an orphanage for the poor children and an elementary school for them at Dhanappa Mudali Street. In 1908, Sr.Patricia of this congregation took charge of the formation of the Sisters of Immaculate Conception. She continued to be their Novice Mistress till 1952. In 1910, these sisters were invited by Tamilnadu Government to serve in the Erskine Hospital (Madurai) as nurses and matrons in which capacity they worked till 1947. St.Joseph's Convent was started in 1927, with the kallar school and an orphanage, industrial school and middle school. The last was upgraded into a high school in 1953 and later into a higher secondary school. In 1959, they commenced a matriculation school. At that time, when refugees from Burma and Sri Lanka were helpless, these sisters came forward to erect hutments for fifty families, which was known as Kamarajapuram Colony. They also started projects like weaving and cottage industries and these are now continued by the parish of St.Mary's Cathedral. The Kallar School, orphanage and industrial school started in St.Joseph's convent were transferred in 1953 to Gnanaolivupuram. These sisters have in Gnanaolivupuram a Tamil High School and an elementary school for the children of the mill workers. Another house of these sisters is the Assumption House started in 1953 in Ponmeni area.(Madurai). The Novitiate which was in St.Joseph's Convent was housed in Assumption House till it was shifted to Banglore in 1972. An important institution of this congregation is Fatima College.⁸⁰

In Madurai Diocese, many congregations render their services by running educational institutions, dispensaries, orphanages, hospitals, old age homes and children's homes. Among these congregations, few congregations have higher educational institutions like Higher Secondary Schools, Teacher Training

80. **Ibid**, pp.217,218.

Institutes, Industrial and Technical Institutes, Training Colleges, Community Colleges and Arts and Science Colleges. Some of these congregations have their origin in India and the others have their origin abroad namely France and Ireland.

The next chapter discusses about the services of colleges run by Catholic Missionaries in Madurai Archdiocese.