

## CHAPTER - III

### ARRIVAL OF THE JESUITS IN MARAVA COUNTRY

According to the oral tradition popular among the Tamil Christians also backed up by Christian missionary organizations, the earliest Tamil converts to Christianity can be traced to the 1<sup>st</sup> century when the Apostle St Thomas visited South India. St Thomas established a settlement of Christians baptized by him at Mylapore (the Portuguese Meliapore) in modern Chennai which led to the place being known as Santhome. St Thomas Mount in Chennai, the place where St Thomas, one of the disciples of Jesus Christ, was believed to have been martyred, is an important pilgrimage site for Indian Christians. Although Christianity came to Tamil Nadu from the time of St Thomas, the Apostle, the revival of Christianity dates back to St Francis Xavier. Because of the perseverance and hard work of the missionaries, many Tamilians have become Christians, who are the second largest number after the Christians in Kerala.

The Jesuits played a vital role in bringing Christianity into the Tamil Country. St Ignatius of Loyola started the Society of Jesus with six members on 27<sup>th</sup> September 1540 with the approval of the Pope Paul III.<sup>1</sup> St Francis Xavier was one of them. The members of this Society are commonly known as Jesuits. At the request of the Portuguese king, St Ignatius sent St Francis Xavier to India. He came to Goa in 1542 and at once devoted himself to the reformation of the nominal Christians whom he found there. After changing the face of Goa he came down to the South along the coast of Travancore and Cape Comorin.<sup>2</sup> St Francis Xavier, followed his own method and helped the Paravas of the Fishery Coast in spite of the political turmoil that prevailed there. Francis Xavier converted about 20,000 Paravas, besides the Kadeyars and Mucuffers.<sup>3</sup> He and his companions worked in many parts of India such as Mylapore, Kuzhithurai,

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Lippert, *The Jesuits-A Self-Portrait*, New York, 1956, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Strickland, *Catholic Mission in Southern India to 1865*, London, 1865, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> J. Castets, *The Madura Mission*, St Joseph's Industrial School Press, Trichinopoly, 1924, p. 13.

Tiruchenthur, Nagapattinam, the Coromandal Coast, and the Fishery Coast, Sri Lanka, China and Japan. So he is the great apostle of the Indies. Till 1601, the Society of Jesus had only one Province in India, based at Goa. It was only in 1601 that a separate Province for the South was established, called the Malabar Province, of which Cochin served as the headquarter.<sup>4</sup> Roman Catholicism was introduced by the Portuguese through the Jesuit missionaries in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Fr Robert de Nobili came to Madurai and started the Madurai Mission in 1606. He learned Tamil very well. He was a scholar in Sanskrit and Telugu also. On the whole he has written more than 52 books in theology and philosophy. Some of his books are Athuma Nivaranam, Agnana Nivaranam, Life of Our Lady, Life of Christ and Thattuva Kannadi etc. He is rightly called by people as “Thattuva Pothakar”. Before his missionary activities, people had a wrong notion that Christianity was a religion of low caste people only. The Portuguese Missionaries who came before Nobili without knowing the social distinction or customs moved very freely with the low castes, especially with Adi Dravidas who were considered untouchables. These Adi Dravidas were forbidden to live with other people as they were the servants for the caste people. Since the Portuguese had contacts with them they were also considered vile, base and loathsome. The Portuguese entered the church with shoes, which was not liked by the Indians. The Portuguese were beef-eaters which was repugnant to them. Because of these reasons the missionaries were considered “*Paranghis*”, which was a most abominable word in those days. But Fr Nobili changed this idea. He gave the correct guidance that Christianity belongs to everyone in the world irrespective of his caste, colour, political and economic situation. He wore *Sanyasi* robes. He was a pure vegetarian. As a result, encouraged by this kind of adaptation 87 Brahmins and many

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<sup>4</sup> D.Ferrol, *The Jesuits in Malabar*, Bangalore Press, Bangalore, 1939, p. 51.

more Nayakars converted themselves to Christianity in 1607 –11.<sup>5</sup> Fr Antony de Provenca and others continued his evangelization work in Madurai Mission after Fr Nobili.<sup>6</sup>

### **Fr Antony de Provenca (1626-66)**

Marava Country was a forest area with a scanty rainfall. Often it was affected by the natural calamities. In this circumstance, Fr Antony de Provenca was allotted to the Marava country to preach the Gospel to the Marava people by the Madurai Mission.<sup>7</sup> He was born of Noble parents at Remella in Portugal in 1626. He went to study at the Euora University. He joined the Society of Jesus in 1644. He came to Goa in 1647. He served the mission in various capacities to everybody's satisfaction. He was respected and loved by all. He joined in Madurai Mission in 1653. He was also a member of the Pandaraswamy group. So he was called Pandaraswamy. He entered the Marava country in 1663 during the period of Raghunatha Sethupathi. He became its superior in Madurai Mission in 1665. His ambition was to preach the gospel to the poorest among the poor. Raghunatha Sethupathi allowed Fr Provenca to do so freely in his kingdom.<sup>8</sup> They were ready to accept the Gospel, because the Good News offered them peace of mind and some relief to their economic sufferings. Soon there were some 250 Christians there. Remarkable among these converts were two brothers Mudiappan and Arulappan. Arulapan cured the Sethupathi of a dangerous tumor and a certain army captain also.

The political arrest which followed badly affected the Christian community of Maravas so he went outside. He worked in Tiruchirappalli, Shengippiati and Thottiam etc. He died in Thottiam in 1666.<sup>9</sup> No missionary had gone to the Marava country for about 18 years because of the terrible persecution of Society of Jesus in 1669. After

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<sup>5</sup> Fr Xavier Mampra S.J, *St John de Britto Missionary and Martyr in India*, Ananda Publication, 2012, Oriyur, p. 88.

<sup>6</sup> *Annual Letter of Fr Antony de Provenca to the General*, dt. 15.8.1666, Cangupatti.

<sup>7</sup> C.K. Swamy, *Oriyur Olivilakku*, Dindugal, 1983, p. 91.

<sup>8</sup> M. Arumaraj, *Seventeenth century Tamilagam as gleaned from Jesuit letters*, Trichy, 2002, p. 318.

<sup>9</sup> Moumas, *La Mission de. Madure Besse S.J.* English translation, Vol. II, p. 2.

Fr Provenca there was nobody who had lived and preached Christianity in Marava land till Fr John de Britto. During this time the spiritual needs were met by the fathers working in Mullaipadi, Avur and Kandalur, who had baptized groups of the Kallars and Nadars who lived in the region of Pudukkottai, Devakottai and Thiruppur. In the absence of the Jesuits the zealous catechists continued the missionary work in the country till 1686.<sup>10</sup>

### **Fr John de Britto (1647 – 93)**

In 1682 Fr Britto was appointed Superior of the Madurai Mission. The year 1686 brought a crisis in the affairs of the mission. The Brahmins believed that no missionary was at large in the Marava country. They were furious to learn that Fr Britto was in the province, making converts and strengthening the faith of the Christians.<sup>11</sup>

Fr Britto's first acquaintance with the people of Marava was in 1679. Groups of Marava Christians came to Karayampatti and to receive the sacraments from him. He was waiting for a chance to cross the border of Marava. After a long waiting on May 5<sup>th</sup> 1686, he crossed the frontier at a place called Panagudi (near Sivagangai).<sup>12</sup> Now Kallar people are living there.<sup>13</sup> He entered the Marava during the period of Kilavan Sethupathi to preach the gospel to the Marava people. He had trained six catechists.

These catechists would go into the villages instruct people in the rudiments of the Christian religion. He prepared them for baptism. He heard thousands of confessions. He baptized 4000 catechumens in Vallamudugarpatti, certain part of Nanakudi region,<sup>14</sup> now Kallars, Dalits are still to be found there in Nanakudi (Near Devakottai).<sup>15</sup> This was

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<sup>10</sup> C.K. Swamy, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

<sup>11</sup> Edward Francis, *Man with a Mission, The life of St. John de Britto*, Dindugal, 1993, p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> P. Vettivayal Valavan, *Anand Gangai Thuthoo*, Malar 5, Oct. 2011, Pastor Centre, Sivagangai, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with *Fr Marivalan*, Parish Priest of Oryiur and dt.12.3.2010.

<sup>14</sup> P. Vettivayal Valavan, *Anand Gangai Thuthoo*, Malar 5, Dec. 2011, Pastor centre, Sivagangai, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Interview with *Fr. Moollel*, Librarian of Oryiur Church, dt. 12.3.2010

the modus operandi of Arulanandar with the help of these catechists his work was very fast and people came from far and wide to listen to his teaching.

Encouraged by this immediate success he now pushed on to Vellankulam. There he met with further success. In 1686 within a period of two months and a half, he received into the Christian fold as many as 2070 people. Soon the Christians flourished in Marava.<sup>16</sup> Andavoorani is one of the ancient parishes of the Marava. Fr Britto administered sacraments and converted a good number of people.<sup>17</sup> Now Dalits, Udayars, Yadhavars and Christians lived there.<sup>18</sup>

Pandaraswamy movement's growth was rapid in what the missionaries called the kingdom of Marava, a large area which extends South East from Madurai through the district of Ramanathapuram. This is an area of small towns and villages with no large centre. But the record of baptisms is impressive. By far the larger numbers of the Christians were from the poorest sections of society, but there were some from higher castes including Kallars and Maravars the often lawless descendants of the soldiers of the Palaiyakkarar the marauding chieftains of earlier days. Fr Britto showed himself a completely devoted missionary. The records of the next ten years, in so far as one has them, are full of stories of his heroic wanderings, his disregard of danger, the multitude of conversions brought about by his ministry and the many marvels attributed to his holiness and his prayers. Much of the work was carried out in the Marava area, newly opened to the work of the mission. Where the dangers were great there were also the opportunities for successful evangelisation. He baptized over, 2000 persons and administered the sacraments to nearly all the Marava Christians.<sup>19</sup> Kumara Pillai heard about this and was not at all pleased. So Arulanandar and his disciples were arrested by

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<sup>16</sup> Albert M. Nevett, *John De Britto and His Times*, Sahitya Prakash Anand Publication, Gujarat, 1960, p. 228.

<sup>17</sup> *Archdiocese of Madurai Origin and Development*, Nobili Pastoral Centre, Madurai, 1983, p. 136.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Fr Marivalan, Parish Priest of Oriyur, 12.3.2010.

<sup>19</sup> John Correia – Afonso, *The Jesuits in India (1542-1773)*, Bombay, 1997, p.201.

Kumara Pillai, the minister of Kilavan Sethupathi in Mangalam. On the way Kumara Pillai gave inhuman torture to Fr Britto and his disciples. Finally the prisoners were taken to Kalaiyarkovil. They were shut up in a small temple. Kumara Pillai got everything ready for the execution but an urgent letter came from the Sethupathi asking Kumara Pillai to postpone all engagements, and proceed to the capital at once. In Four days they were taken to Ramanathapuram and the Kilavan Sethupathi enquired of him about his teaching in the court. Finally he and his disciples were released. And he went to Lisbon in 1687.<sup>20</sup>

#### **Fr Louis de Mellow (1687 – 1691)**

Fr Louis de Mellow succeeded Fr Britto in 1687. He worked in Kandalur. When Fr Louis de Mellow was working there, everything in the country was in disorder and war. He worked among the Christian community in Marava country. So he was arrested by the Kilavan Sethupathi's soldiers and put into jail for 15 days. Fr Rogerd' Abrew Superior got Fr Louis de Mellow released with the help of Mangammal, the ruler of Madurai. He went away and died in Avur in 4<sup>th</sup> February 1691.<sup>21</sup>

#### **Fr John de Britto's re-entry into Marava country**

After the death of Fr De Mellow, Fr Britto again came back to Marava in 1691 at Muniur. When the Christians heard that a priest had come to their village they were overjoyed and flocked to him for instructions and to receive the sacraments. In 1692 the conversions of Marava and Agamudaiyars also increased. Though severe persecutions Jesuits continued works without publicity. This news reached the ears of Sethupathi and his new Minister Murugappillai. Tadiya Thevar was the poligar of a Siruvalli. He was suffering from a deadly disease. Siluvai Nakkarr the catechist sent by Fr Britto cured the disease of Tadiya Thevar. So he wanted to meet the Sanyasi himself, and receive baptism. But he had five wives. According to the Christian principle one man may have

<sup>20</sup> P. Vettivayal Valavan, *Anand Gangai Thuthoo*, Malar 5, Jan. 2011, Pastor Centre, Sivagangai, P.20

<sup>21</sup> Fr Xavier Mampra SJ, *St John de Britto Missionary and Martyr in India*, Ananda Publication, 2012, Oriyur, p. 88.

only one wife. So Tadiya Thevar dismissed all except the first wife. Kathali, who happened to be one of the other wives of Tadiya Thevar complained very bitterly to her uncle Kilavan Sethupathi. He took this matter into his hand and wanted to put an end to all this matter.<sup>22</sup>

Accordingly Fr Britto was beheaded at Oriyur in 4<sup>th</sup> February 1693. The local tradition claims that St Britto passed through the village of Karmilangudi in his last journey to Oriyur from Ramanathapuram. The village of Karmilangudi was converted to the faith very soon after the Saint's martyrdom.<sup>23</sup> Now Dalits and Dothi Christians are still to be found there.<sup>24</sup> There was a meeting with one of the descendents (S. Kaliyammal, W/o Subramani, belonging to Pallar caste) of Perumal who had the responsibility of beheading St John De Britto on 4<sup>th</sup> February 1693. Accordingly Fr Britto was beheaded at Oriyur in 4<sup>th</sup> February 1693. Rani Devi, who like the wife of pilate interceded on behalf of the Saint, died two years after the death of John. She felt remorse for the cruelty of her husband Udayathevar, wanted as a sign of reparation, the ashes of her body to be strewn along the path to be tread by the pilgrims to the shrine of Britto.<sup>25</sup> Perumal was partially blind and was not happy to ill-treat Fr Britto. But Fr Britto encouraged him saying that it was only his duty to do so it is report that blood from Arulanandar is neck fell on his eye and he was given his eyesight and so every Wednesday he used to come to the spot of Fr Britto's martyrdom, to pray and thank Fr Britto. Thus it was a Hindu who actually started the devotion to Fr Britto at Oriyur.<sup>26</sup> The Christians of Oriyur begin only from 1693 when St Britto was Martyred there but soon after the martyrdom it became a sacred spot pilgrims started to flock there and pray to the holy martyr. Now Dalit Christians are to be found there.<sup>27</sup> When the Marava lost its

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<sup>22</sup> P. Vettivayal Valavan, *Anand Gangai Thuthoo*, Malar 5, Feb. 2011, Pastor Centre, Sivagangai, p. 26.

<sup>23</sup> *Archdiocese of Madurai Origin and Development*, op.cit, p.138.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Mr *Santiago*, Catechist of Oriyur Church, Oriyur, Ramanathapuram, dt.12.3.2014.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Mr *A. Arokiyam*, villager, Oriyur, Ramanathapuram, dt.12.02.2014.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with *S. Kaliyammal*, villager Oriyur, Ramanathapuram, dt.12.02.2014.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with *R. Mary*, villager Oriyur, dt.14.02.2014.

beloved missionary his place was taken by Fr Laynez who visited Oriyur. He baptized 400 catechumens in 1704. After him the missionaries in charge of the Marava region could not move about the country as persecution was raging everywhere. Only the catechists went round preaching the gospel. Though persecutions went on till 1730. In 1730 a bright dawn for Christianity commenced in the Marava country. Kattaya Tevar ascended the throne in 1729. He granted permission to put up a thatched shed at Oriyur. He even endowed it with a free gift of twenty acres of land that has remained free of taxation down to this day. Before 1736 a mud chapel roofed with palm leaves was in existence in memory of the martyr but it was dedicated to the blessed Virgin as the holy missionary was not yet declared a blessed. In 1736 the mud chapel gave a place to an octagonal brick structure built with the permission of the then Sethupathi, Kattaya Tevar. At the time of Fr Rossi some 40 ft to the north east of the spot of the martyrdom there was a tomb like structure. The blood of martyrs is the seed of Christianity. Pilgrims came in crowds and conversions increased. The “Red Sand” at that spot believed to have turned red by drinking the blood of the saint, became the instrument of numerous miracles. So arose the need of putting up a chapel there. Fr Rossi built a church, in a present structure, with its Portuguese style in 1770. For the same reason that the martyr was not yet declared “Blessed” the missionary dedicated it to St Francis Xavier. That title was changed however in 1882 when Fr Britto was beautified and it became the chapel of Bl. John de Britto. Around that year the mud chapel was transformed into a fine brick construction. It is in good condition even now. Later there was built another church in 1947, after Fr Britto was declared a saint.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Edward Francis, *The History of the St Britto*, Vaigarai Pathippagam, Dinduga, 2010, Pp. 44-46.

### **Fr Francis Laynez (1693 – 1704)**

After the death of Fr Britto, Fr Francis Laynez came into Marava, in 1693 during the period of Kilavan Sethupathi. He was born in 1656 Oct 31. He came to India in 1681. He joined Madurai Mission in 1683. He worked in Kattur and Marava. He baptized more than 400 catechumens. He was made Superior in 1691. The conversions increased in Marava country. In 1694 he baptized 9000 catechumens in Marava.

In 1700 he baptized 500 gentiles in Arantangi with the permission of the prince of Arantangi.<sup>29</sup> Now Vellalars, Kallars, Chetteeyars, Dalits, and other castes are still to be found there.<sup>30</sup> In 1701 there were 4725 Christians in Marava. He baptized 300 to 400 catechumens in a single day. He converted many thousands to Christianity in Marava. He confirmed 23,000 Catholics. Many of whom were from the Marava. So he was arrested in 1704 by the Kilavan Setupathi. But by the intervention of the Raja of Tanjore, the missionary and his companions were released. In 1704 he was sent to Rome. He was ordained Bishop of Mylapore in Lisbon in 1708. He returned to India in 1710. He visited Bandal, Kolkata Takka and Chittagong. He worked in Bengal for 5 years. And he died in Bandal near Hugli in 1715.

### **Fr Xavier Maria Borghese (1704 – 1708)**

Fr Borghese came into Marava during the period of Kilavan Sethupathi in 1704. He baptized 2340 persons in Marava. He was transferred to Vadakkankulam on account of ill health. He died in 1708.<sup>31</sup>

### **Fr Peter Martin (1708 – 11)**

Fr Peter Martin came into Marava during the period of Kilavan Sethupathi in 1708. In 1708 Fr Peter Martin arrived with his catechist Sathiyanaatha Pillai at Sarugani. He converted 20 Maravars there. In 1708 he baptized 300 persons in Marava. In 1709 he

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<sup>29</sup> Fr Xavier Mampira, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Fr Arokiyaswamy, Superior of Oriyur Church, Oriyur, Ramanathapuram, dt. 12.3.2010.

<sup>31</sup> Moumas, *La mission de Madure*, Besse S.J. English Translation, Vol. II, p. 18.

baptized 4000 persons in Marava alone. During his period Vijayan Sethupathi succeeded Kilavan Sethupathi in 1710. From the beginning he was favourable to Christians. But he turned against Christianity because of the conversion of his brother-in-law Tiruvaluanathan and his soldiers. Fr Martin built a church at Arantangi with permission of the prince of Arantangi. He stayed at Sarugani and around the areas converted nearly 20 Maravas and Ambalakkaras around Ponnalikkottai. Vijayan Sethupathi first seemed to be favourable to the Christians so he allowed Peter Martin to construct a brick church at Ponnalikkottai. But when the Christians of Ambalakkaras refused to drag the 'Ther' at the temple of Thiruvenampattu, urged by the infuriated Brahmins, he ordered the newly built church to be destroyed and started torturing Fr Peter Martin and his catechists. In spite of the severe persecution the Christians were on the increase. So Vijayan Sethupathi imprisoned Fr Peter Martin and his catechists in the jail of Kalaiyarkovil. After 2 months he released and banished him in 1711. But his health impaired. He became dizzy and began to vomit so he was sent to Vadugarpatti a less laborious station.<sup>32</sup> He was replaced by Fr Cappelli in 1712.

#### **Fr Augustine Cappelli (1712 – 1715)**

Fr Cappelli entered into Marava during the period of Vijayan Sethupathi in 1712. He had joined Madurai Mission in 1711. He worked and built a church in the name of St Francis Xavier in Kalukar Kadai in 1711. He baptized 608 persons in Uttamapuram. Vijayan Sethupathi ordered the Christians who refused to worship of Hindu Gods to have their nose, ears and fingers cut away. He wanted to meet Sethupathi and convinced him to stop the persecution but his Superior prevented him. So he went outside of the Marava land. The health of Fr Cappelli deteriorated. So Fr Joseph Vieyara was sent to look after the health of Fr Cappelli. Although Fr Cappelli improved in health he was persuaded to take native medicine. But the medicine man put poison into the medicine as desired by his local enemy. His health turned for the worse, and he soon died, in 1715.

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<sup>32</sup> Fr Xavier Mampra, *op.cit*, p. 91.

After him the missionaries, in charge of the Marava region could not move about the country as persecution was raging everywhere. Only the catechists went round preaching the gospel. Those persecutions went on till 1730.<sup>33</sup>

### **St Fr James de Rossi (1736 – 1774)**

Fr James de Rossi was born in Italy in 1701. He entered the Noviciate in 1721. He came to India eager to serve in the Madurai Mission. 1734 he came from Goa to Cochin. Then he went to Ambalakadu and prepared himself studying Tamil, in order to work in Marava country.

### **Rossi's works in Marava land**

From Ambalakadu he went to Thoppur to meet the Superior of the Jesuits and to obtain permission to work in Marava land. From there he went to Marava land through Thoothukkudi and Manapadu in 1736. In this time the Christians were in trouble due to persecutions, accusations and attacks. In the vast area of the Marava land, Fr Rossi was the only active missionary.

In 1736 Fr Rossi came to Sarugani and continued the evangelization work during the period of Kattaya Thevar. He was also known as “Sinna Savariyar” (Little Francis Xavier) as his zeal was similar to that of St Francis Xavier for the people of Marava land. He took up residence in Sarugani, in a hut for himself.<sup>34</sup> Now Vellalar, Chetteeyar, Nadar, and Dailt Christians are still to be found there,<sup>35</sup> in the midst of rivers, wild animals, and thick forests. The people responded by coming to him in these difficult circumstances for their spiritual needs and took part in the festivals. The converts of Fr Britto also joined these groups.

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<sup>33</sup> J. S. Yaghoo, *Vaergale Vizhutaki*, Palayamkottai, Vaigarai Pathippagam, Dindigul, 2006, p. 48

<sup>34</sup> S. Savarimuthu, *Rev. Fr James de Rossi, 1701-1774*, St Joseph's Industrial Press, Trichinopoly, 2001, pp. 20-23.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with P. Joseph, villager Muppaiyur, Ramanathapuram, 12.03.2012.

Kattaya Thevar was favourable to Christianity because Fr Bertoldi had predicted a few years back that he would ascend the throne of Ramanathapuram. So Kattaya Tevar received Fr Bertoldi with a great honour. At this time there were 25,000 Catholics in Marava. The situation of the Christians began to improve. He baptised 876 adults and 2032 children.

The days of Kattaya Thevar were indeed a glorious chapter in the annals of the Marava Christians. Fr Rossi founded strong Christian centres at Suranam and Sarugani. Pallars were converted to Christianity in Suranam. The place developed with a good Christian population during the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. According to a local legend four Pallar brothers had brought a miraculous cult of a banyan tree to the village. Thus, the cult of St James, the Greater developed focusing on a sacred banyan tree. The Jesuit missionary resided at Sarugani and took care of the Idaiyar converts. He ministered to the three principalities of Ramanathapuram, Sivaganga and Arantangi. He was the founder of the Sarugani village started on a land got from the Raja of Sivagangai Sasivarna Udaya Thevar and built there the most of the beautiful church in the whole of Marava. He did 650 miracles in the name Fr Francis Xavier, Fr John de Britto, Our Lady of Immaculate Conception etc.

In 1736 Kattaya Thevar died, his son who was a minor took up the rule and was controlled by his ministers. At this time the ministers practiced severe persecution against Christians. They wanted to drive him out of Marava land. So the minister gave a lot of inhuman tortures to Fr Rossi. Fr Rossi's church and presbytery were destroyed by the minister. So he traveled through thick forests and across dangerous rivers to preach to the people and give the sacraments to them. He spread the devotion to Mother Mary among his followers. He built a church in honour of Our Lady of Sorrows in 1736 at Sarugani. There lived Chetteeyars, Vellalars, Ahamudaiyars. In 1739 this church was destroyed by Brahmins. But the commander of the Sethupathi's army was sympathetic to

Fr Rossi and advised him to leave Marava land. Fr Rossi was unwilling to do so but at the advice of the people, he finally agreed to get out of the Marava land. Although the Christians had many things to suffer in the absence of Fr Rossi, they persevered in their Christian faith. At this point the ministers got frightened that some harm might fall on them due to the strong faith of the Christians. They now allowed Fr Rossi to come back in 1737. The regent mother of the king even apologized to Fr Rossi for the persecutions.<sup>36</sup> In 1745 at Karumilangudi a village of Pallars he stayed for 8 days; he heard 1203 confessions gave baptism to 64 adults, 101 children. Then again the approach of the enemy obliged him to flee. Andichioorani is one of the Udayar communities that settled in the kingdom of Sivaganga in the 18<sup>th</sup> century at the time of Sinna Maruthu. Fr Rossi was then evangelizing the Maravas and ministering to the Udayar Christians newly come from the Tanjore region.<sup>37</sup>

In 1745 he baptized 630 adults and 1356 children. In 1746 he baptized 773 adults and 204 children. In 1747 he baptized 557 adults and 1732 children; in 1748 he baptized 260 adults and 653 children. In 1749 he baptized 443 adults and 1024 children. He converted not only low caste people, but also the high caste and the royal princes. He converted Udaya Devan the princes of Marava. He died in 1774 in Sarugani.<sup>38</sup> Maruthu brother's kings of Sivaganga held Fr Rossi in great respect and veneration. At the death Fr Rossi these kings sent five cart loads of sandal woods and three cart loads of ghee for the funeral. Although they knew the Christians do not cremate dead bodies. In spite of that, they sent these gifts to show the great respect for the father. Fr Rossi's tomb, erected into a chapel like monument, became a place of pilgrimage, to which Christians and non-Christians like flock to venerate their father in the faith and pray for favours. He was the last missionary in the Old Madurai Mission.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> J.S. Yaghoo, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>38</sup> *The Annual Letter of Fr Rossi in 1746, 1747, 1749* at Archives, Shebaganoor, Kodaikanal.

<sup>39</sup> S. Savarimuthu, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

Even after the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773, there was increasing number of Christians in Marava. The zealous catechists were fully involved in the mission work. In 1780 there were 35,000 Catholics in Marava.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Moumas, *La mission de. Madure*, Besse S.J. English Translation, Vol. II, p. 33.