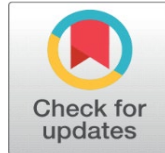
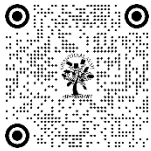


A HISTORICAL STUDY ON LATIN ROMAN CATHOLIC COMMUNITY OF KANYAKUMARI REGION

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the historical development and socio-cultural contributions of the Latin Roman Catholic community in the Kanyakumari region, situated at the southern tip of India. The Latin Catholic presence in this region traces back to the Portuguese colonial period, with the establishment of churches, schools, and social institutions that significantly shaped the local landscape. The study delves into the community's origins, highlighting the influence of colonial missionaries and their efforts in converting and integrating the local population into the global Catholic network. The article further examines the challenges faced by the community, including the impact of British colonial rule, the post-independence socio-political shifts, and the evolving religious practices within the context of a predominantly Hindu region. Through archival research, oral histories, and the analysis of church records, the study aims to uncover the unique identity of the Latin Roman Catholics of Kanyakumari, focusing on their religious, educational, and economic transformations. This research also investigates the community's role in fostering inter-religious dialogues and its ongoing relevance in the modern socio-political fabric of the region. Ultimately, the paper offers a comprehensive understanding of the Latin Roman Catholic community's contributions to the religious and cultural diversity of Kanyakumari.

Keywords: Latin Roman Catholic, Kanyakumari, Kottar Diocese, Missionaries, Catholic Community

1. INTRODUCTION

Kanyakumari is a popular district having all wealth and beauty. It has ponds, rivers, paddyfields, forests, seas, mountains, hills and this region is called "God's region". The land is also called "Tiru Adi De.sam"; (a land at God's feet) Srivarddhanapuri or Srivazhumkadu, means seat of prosperity and a land of treasuresⁱ. The foreign travellers, Christian missionaries and tourists call this place as "Lands end", where the Indian ocean, Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal make a confluence.ⁱⁱ This land is an abode of different religions and for the people of other countries and other regions, the land is wonderful and its people are wonderfulⁱⁱⁱ. Christianity is a part of this region and it is noted that every village in Kanyakumari district has a Roman catholic church along with the public and other institutions like post office, rest house (stone ambalam) and a small temple. It denotes that the catholic religion was much old in this region^{iv}. The Roman catholic faith or the Papal ciiristian faith was the first to be introduced in this region when the Portuguese came to this

country and spread Christianity. The catholic Christian community is scattered all over this region^v and for centuries together the Roman catholic missionaries revolutionized the life of the people.

The Latin Romancatholic Missionaries arrived at Malabar much earlier than the Portuguese and the objectives of them were the propagation of Gospel and present Latin rite Romancatholicism before the Travancore Christians, who had been converted by St. Thomas and Pampered by Thomas of Cana.^{vi} In the thirteenth century Pope innocent IV wanted to promote the expansion of the church beyond the border of Christendom. He founded the first society of mission for the East, known as society of Pilgrim for Christ or Societies peregrinatum prochristo. It consisted of the Franciscans and Dominicans.^{vii} The religious were organaised into orders and congregations. They evolved in various forms in the church from the early centuries. St. Dominic (1170 – 1221) and St. Francis of Assisi (1182 – 1226) found their congregations in Europe. The Franciscans a congregation founded by Francis of Assisi and legally approved in 1209 were the first missionaries who came to India. In Goa and Travancore they did considerable work and looked after the spiritual needs of the early converts. John of Monte Carvino was a latin missionary visited India in the early days. He was a Franciscan friar, who visited quilon in 1291 A.D.^{viii} a little earlier than Marcopolo on his way to China.^{ix} He stayed in Malabar for a year and baptized a number of people into the Latin Catholic rites.^x Marcopolo the venation travellers visit to quilon in 1293, referred the Chinese connection to quilon, an early trade centre of South Travancore. According to Marcopolo, the Jews were already at quilon and he speaks of Nestorian Christian in Malabar. At that time the king of Quilon had diplomatic and commercial ties with the Chinese emperor, Kublaikhan who was responsible for sending the venation traveller to quilon. The Missionaries who came with Marcopolo did their apostolic work in China and Quilon. Jordanus a Dominican friar visited quilon in the years between 1321 and 1324. He made his way by the traderoutes to India. In his book “Mirabilia Descripta”, he described himself as orlundum de Severaco of Indias major Episcopes columbensen ie., hailing as severae Bishop of quilon in the greet Indies. Persecutions were always on their track in Travancore. In 1326, Andrew of Perusia a Latin Missionary speaks of a massacre in South India, that the Latin Missionaries Nicolas of Banterra and Andrutius of Assisi were killed. In 1324 A.D. five Dominican Friars were disposed for mission work in Canara, Mysore, Malabar and Travancore. Jordanus was one of the five Dominicon friars responded to the appeal of Pope and was dispersed to Travancore. The service of the Dominican friars increased the conversion and in 1328 the number of converts in the East reached ten thousand. John de Marignolli a Franciscan and papal legate who visited quilon in 1348 testifies the existence of Latin Catholic Church at quilon dedicated to St. Geroge. This Church had connection with Rome and practiced Latin form of worship.^{xi} He stayed at Quilon for sixteen months. Quilon was a center of Latin Romancatholic mission in India and a very busy port. Where the whole of Pepper trade was concentrated.^{xii} Before leaving India Marignolli erected a pillar at Capecomarin. He said that in India he erected a stone as a land work and memorial in the corner of the world. It was a marble pillar with a stone cross upon it, intended to last till the worlds end. It had the popes armed his own thumb engraved upon it with inscription both in Indian and Latin characters. These holy monuments were consecrated and blessed in the presence of an infinite multitude of people. He was carrying it on the shoulders of the chiefs and later this monument was attributed to St. Thomas by the local people. Baldeaus another missionary, reports that he visited the place and saw the pillar in 1622. Father Jordanus left for Rome to place before the sovereign Pontiff John XXII, the affairs of the Indian Mission. He convinced the Pope, the need of establishing, a regular ecclesiastical government in India with a bishop as it head. The 197th, Pope John XXII (1316 – 1334) unhesitatingly offered the office to Friar Jordenus who was highly responsible for the Catholic church in India. In 1328, the Diocese of Quilon was erected and Johncatalandi of severoc was appointed the first Bishop Friar Jordenus was episcopally ordained Bishop of Quilon by Pope John XXII at Avignon. This was raised the status of a Diocese of the latin rites.^{xiii} Bishop Jordenus went to Toulouse in 1328 A.D. He convened General order enlisted a large number of friars for his mission and returned to India. He found several houses of his order in this country and converted many people to the Catholic faith and the Christian activities, reached its Zenith when Pope by his bull constituted quilon as an Episcopal see.^{xiv}

2. SOUTH TRAVANCORE UNDER COCHIN AND FUNCHAL, 1515 – 1557

Cochin was the centre of Christianity from 1498. It has and age old tradition as many churches were erected in the coastal area of South Travancore, These churches were mainly huts, bearing the symbol of cross. Under the Portuguese Jurisdiction or Padroado or Goanose Jurisdiction the churches of Travancore were built chiefly through the instrumentality of Portuguese power at Valiatoray (1538), Kottar (1543), Puthura (1556), Mampally (1568) and Manakudy (1571).^{xv}

In 1515, Pope Leo X established Arch Bishopric of Funchal and all foreign missions founded by Portuguese in the East made subordinate in the Arch Diocese of Funchal in the Island of Maderia. Funchal continued to be the Arch Diocese from 1515 – 1557. Goa the centre of Portuguese dominations in India had been raised into a bishopric. The whole of Asia resided in the diocese of Goa and its bishop was a suffragan of the bishop of Funchal in Maderia. In 1557, Pope Paul IV made Goa an Arch Diocese. In 1558, he made Cochin a diocese, as auxiliary to Goa, there was usually a Vicer General – a Church official ranked next the Bishop residing at Cochin exercising, Spiritual administration both in Malabar and the fishery coast in the name of Bishop of Goa. The fisherfolk and the poor sections felt significant presence on that day, as it was ecclesiastical institution of the disadvantaged castes and communities. The Missionaries of Jesuit society took up the task of nurturing the new Christians in true faith.^{xvi}

Pedro Sebastiao Gonslaves the Vicer General of Cochin in 1532 speaks about a big fight between the Parava fishermen community and the Muslims. More killings had taken place in the attack held in Thoothukudi and in the areas of South upto Kanyakumari. The Muslims decided to blockade the Paravas both by sea and land with the intention of uprooting the entire race.^{xvii} At this point of time John Decruz an Indian horse dealer came from Calicut who was at Kanyakumari. He heard of the plight of the local population of Kanyakumari. He visited the people and spoke to them of the Portuguese and the Protection they could offer. They were impressed by the information she gave and decided to send fifteen leaders of their community, called pattamkattis to Cochi.^{xviii} They asked for baptism and for priests to take care of them and for the Portuguese military protection. This request was willingly granted in principle. The Portuguese captain of Cochin, Perovaz, a Pious and God fearing man wanted the whole caste to be ready to accept Christianity. At Cochin the Paravas met Michelvaz Cauthino, the Vicer General of Goa who came there on official visit.^{xix}

The Portuguese King had power of appointing Vicer General for the spiritual and ecclesiastical supervision in India. Michaelvaz was the vicer General of the Bishop for South India and his Jurisdiction extended over by the king of Portugal to establish stern discipline and to make a steady growth by attending all religious duties. He was appointed Vicer General for the area of the present diocese of Thoothukudi and Kottar in Kanyakumari district.^{xx} He came to India in 1530 with other Portuguese Priests. He held this office from 1536 to till his death in 1547. His service in erstwhile South Travancore is highly recorded by many church historians. Vicer General Michael Vaz Cautinho was neither a priest nor a cleric. He was pious catholic and he had doctorate degree in Canon Law.^{xxi}

Based on the request of Perovaz, seventy Pattamkattis from the coast came forward to be baptized. They all reached Cochi and the Vicer General Michael Vaz who took charge in 1536 baptized these Paravas in the Church of Mother God, the future, Cathedral of Cochin.^{xxii} In a ceremony these converts adopted Portuguese Surnames. They gladly accepted the Portuguese names such as Decruz, Miranda, Kulos, Decosta, Fernandez, Souza, Micade, Morais, Rebairo, Amaldo, Gonslaves, Vaz, Rodrigues, Rozerio, Pedro, Pero, Pereira, Riche, Barbosa, etc.,^{xxiii} Many of the Paravas choose the name of John Decruz as their family name out of respect for the man who had been acting as their guide and it became a tradition among the Parava chieftains to hold the Portuguese names as a mark of distinction and honour and these surnames their descendants use even today.^{xxiv} Immediately after the conversion in February, 1536, captain Perovaz, sent a strong fleet in the fisher coast with newly baptized Parava chiefs under the delegation of John Decruz, Michael viz Cauthino, the vicer General of Goa and Pedro Gonslaves the vicer General of Cochin and other three clerics to baptize the rest of the Paravas. In 1536, the Franciscan Friar Lawrence D. Goes sent the first news of this new Christians to King John II of Portugal and the king sent an ambassador to Rome to inform the Pope about the matter of the Parava Christians. It was the initiate step and then many missionaries reached Travancore from the European countries. The heyday of Latin Roman Catholic Christianity in South Travancore was certainly during the time of Francis Xavier. Mass conversion in the Southern coast of Travancore were held largely during the visit of this unique personality who was profoundly concerned with the spiritual needs of the Indian Christians and made more contributions to the spread of Catholic faith in South India especially in Travancore region. He was gifted with talents and he succeeded in winning the love and confidence of all the converts of this area. The nation is proud of having a great reformer of the Catholic reformation movement.^{xxv}

The influence of the European customs, manners and practices is witnessed in almost all spheres in the society and mainly the Portuguese, the Spanish and the French customs over run the catholic society of India^{xxvi}. Next to Hinduism, Christianity has large number of followers in this region. There has been a tremendous rise in the catholic population in the last few decades in Kanyakumari district. In 1901, it was just 3, 60,000. It shot up to 9,97,000 in 1961 and it was 12,72,549 in 1971 and it had a handsome figure of 23,42,812 in 2005. This means the catholic population of the district has reached a milestone in this place^{xxvii}. Also in 1931, there was a total of sixteen lakh Christian population in India and

among this, one fourth lived in Kanyakumari alone^{xxviii}. At present, the Christians form atleast thirty five percentage of the total population and the Roman catholics are atleast twenty percentage. The other Christians belong to the Church of South India, Salvation Army, Indian Evangelical Lutheran Church (IELC), Syrian Christians of Malankara and Malabar rites form the other fifteen percentage. The Christian people of all denominations have a good understanding and a friendly approach towards the mahammadan and hindu brethrens^{xxix}.

3. KANYAKUMARI REGION UNDER QUILON

With the establishment of hierarchy in India by Pope Leo XIII, Quilon became a separate diocese on 1st, September, 1886. It's first bishop was Ferdinand Ossi, O. C. P. The whole territory of present Kanyakumari District came under quilon. The spark of the missionary fire Penetrated in the in land villages of Travancore. Bishop Ferdinand Ossi strengthened the Ramanthurai and Kottar Missionary units. New and strong catholic centers emerged at Karankadu, Manguly, Mulagumoodu, Mathiravillai, Allanchi, Mullanginavillai and Vengadu villages. On Ninth, March, 1902 Bishop Aloysius MariaBenzigar, the Ceedjutor Bishop of Quilon proclaimed seven religious districts in the Kanyakumari region named. Kottar, Capecomarin, Karankadu, Colachel, Mulugumoodu, Ramanthurai, and Vencodu. Among these Vencodu had eighteen church as and 4695 Catholics. Mulagumoodu had nineteenth churches and 9000 Catholics Colachel had seven churches and 7012 Catholics Capecomarin had seven churches and 4774 Catholics Ramanthurai had six churches and 9002 catholics. Kottar had fifteen churches and 11924 Catholics. Karankodu and fourteen churches and 10924 Catholics. Bishop Benzigar in 1906 added that the total population of Catholic Christian of this area was more than 63300. By that time mass religious conversions had taken place at Vilavancode taluk of Vencode religious district.^{xxx}

4. KOTTAR DIOCESE

The Roman Catholics of the Kanyakumari District diocese of Kottar live today in 154 parishes, spread all over the district under four vicariate centres in Kottar, Colachel, Mulagumoodu and Tiruthuvapuram. In the early days, in south Travancore, the non-caste hindus like ezavas, mukkuvas, pallas, paravas constituted the avarnas. They were generally regarded as untouchables and considered as polluting communities. Their condition was generally miserable. These communities had poverty and ignorance. They were subjected to exploitation and humiliation. It drove these low class communities to embrace Christian faith^{xxxi}. The Christian castes who embraced Christianity were the bharathas, mukkuvas, nadars, cheramar, (pulayas) sambavar (parayas), catholic arasas, kuravas, aiyyanavar, vannar, ezhavas, pallans, chekkarayar, vetas, muthalis, kavathis, marakkan, vallayan and so on. In the coastal regions from Cape Comorin to Thengapattinam, the people as a whole were Latin Roman catholics. They belonged to the fisher men communities of paravas and mukkuvas. In the interior regions of the district, the catholics are surrounded by hindus, muslims and the Christians of other denominations.^{xxxii} On account of the natural growth in population and as a result of many years of missionary work from the time of early conversions from fourteenth century to the twenty first century, there has been remarkable growth in the number of catholics throughout the district.^{xxxiii}

The villages of Kanyakumari are closer to one another and it is very difficult to find out, where one village ends and the other begins, because houses are constructed continuously, but the churches which are established in the middle of the village stand as an identification to note the villages^{xxxiv} and there is a grotto in each Christian village in its beginning to denote that catholics are resided in that place, and the locality is Christian. In every christain village, the streets are named after the saints and martyrs. The educational institutions such as schools, colleges, technical institutes, shopping centres, business establishments, hospitals, auditoriums, stadiums etc. are named after christian titles^{xxxv}. In Travancore, the roads and streets were developed by the colonial powers with an aim to meet their commercial, administrative, religious needs and to provide greater mobility to their military forces. In RomanCatholic, Kanyakumari diocese of Kottar, many villages and streets are named after Christian saints such as Saveriyarpuram (St.Francis Xavier), Fathimapuram, Sahayapuram, Lourdhupuram (St.Mary), Mariapuram (St.Mary), Thatheyupuram (St.Jude), Yacobupuram (St.Jacob) Siluvaipuram (Holy Cross), Anthoniyarpuram (St. Antony) Thomayarpuram (St. Thomas), Rayapuram (St. Peter), Meignanapuram (City of Christian Wisdom) etc.^{xxxvi}

The Christian Missions developed seaports and fishing harbours in the district. Manakudi, Rajakkamangalam, Colachel, Pattanam, Cape Comorin were the early ports of this region which were developed by the Portuguese and used by the other European powers in south Travancore^{xxxvii}. The ancient towns of Travancore like CapeComorin, Colachel, Kottar, Thengapattinam, Thiruvancode, Padmanabhapuram^{xxxviii} were the famous Christian centres in which much

religious, commercial and political activities were undertaken successfully by the missionaries^{xxxix}. The catholic society of Kottar is basically rural and traditional. The people are depending by and large on cultivation of land and on fishing in the sea for their sustenance. Part of the population is also employed in cottage industries such as carpentry, weaving, husking the cashew nuts, making match boxes and making earthen vessels. A good number of people have ill defined jobs. The catholics are found in every kind of profession and they share the same lot with the majority of the people in the district. The catholic missionaries were bound to protect against the corruption and oppression of the administrative authorities and they wished to seek a better political position for the Christians.^{xl}

5. CONCLUSION

The Latin Roman Catholic community of the Kanyakumari region has played a pivotal role in shaping the region's religious, social, and cultural fabric. Emerging from the colonial period, this community has navigated through a complex history of missionary influence, socio-political changes, and cultural integration. The establishment of churches, educational institutions, and charitable organizations by the Latin Catholics contributed significantly to the region's development, particularly in terms of literacy, healthcare, and social welfare. Despite facing challenges, including colonial exploitation, cultural assimilation pressures, and post-independence societal shifts, the community has maintained its distinct religious identity while engaging in a broader, more inclusive social dialogue. Through its involvement in various interfaith activities and its contribution to the multi-religious landscape of Kanyakumari, the Latin Catholic community has demonstrated resilience and adaptability, ensuring its place within the diverse socio-cultural milieu of the region. The Latin Roman Catholic community's journey is a testament to its perseverance, its ability to preserve religious traditions while fostering community development, and its ongoing contributions to the social cohesion of Kanyakumari. The historical study of this community not only highlights its rich heritage but also underscores its continued relevance in contemporary society, offering valuable insights into the intersection of religion, culture, and history in southern India.

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