

Contributions to Society

Synod of Diamper

The Synod of Diamper (which is known as *Udayamperoor Sunahadose in Malayalam*) which took place in 1599 under the leadership of Aleixo de Meneses, the then Archbishop of Goa is the Magna Carta of reformation in Kerala in particular and India in general. Though the Malabar Vicariate of the Roman Catholic Church had not yet been established at that time, it was the missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church from Europe who took steps to rejuvenate the St Thomas Christians of Kerala who had fallen into heresies, superstitions and un-Christian and anti-Catholic ways of living.

The Synod, having passed around 200 canons, banned the system of dowry, untouchability, superstitions, witchcraft, black magic, concubinage, polygamy, slave trade, child trafficking, suicide squad, fiefdom (*janmithwam*) etc., which were widely practiced among St. Thomas Christians conforming to the prevalent culture of the times.

The Synod of Diamper was the first of its kind addressing issues in the socio-cultural field that was to revolutionize the very foundations of the structure of culture and society. It was a clarion call for changing the hierarchical caste systems. To think and act differently from the established ways was to confront hard core orthodoxy and question the power centers. It was the first time in India these issues were addressed in pub-

lic and steps were taken banning the social and cultural evils in a systematic way.

The Synod and its reformatory punch it had left on the weird cultural and superstitious practices had far reaching effects. Social reformers of Kerala who appeared on the cultural landscape of Kerala centuries later must have been influenced by these canons emanating from the Synod of Diamper.

Hortus Malabaricus

Fr. Matheus, a Roman Catholic priest of Italian descent, stationed in Verapoly, was both a missionary and a botanist. He also had a degree in medicine. In his missionary journeys, he came across an exotic and exuberant variety of plant life in India and Persia and took interest in recording them. His handwritten work which consists of drawings of plants, their names and medical uses is called *Viridarium Orientale*. This work was presented to Henrik van Rheede, the Dutch Governor in Kerala, who had great interest in this subject. It is this book which forms the basis of the famous work *Hortus Malabaricus*.

Rheede in the preface of *Hortus Malabaricus* mentions Matheus as the beginner, founder, inspirer and *raison d'être* of this work. D. John Caesarius and Johannes Munnicks (associates of Rheede) writes in length about Matheus and his indis-

pensability (in their prefaces in this work). Hundreds of men including knowledge and expertise of the native people is made use in the formation of this book. Rheede published it in Amsterdam in 12 volumes between 1678 and 1703. Though Fr. Matheus remains the chief architect and the mastermind behind this great work, it is unfortunate that he is deliberately being sidelined.

Pallikkoppam Pallikkoodam

Pillikkoppam Pallikkoodam (1857) (a school in every church courtyard) is a landmark reform in Kerala history that brought school education accessible to all in every nook and corner irrespective of caste, creed and religion. It was the then Vicar Apostolic of Verapoly, Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli (1853-1868), who pioneered the establishment of schools in the premises of every church.

In a pastoral letter of the year 1857, Baccinelli ordered all parish priests to establish schools in the church courtyards at walk-able distances from home steads for both boys and girls. The pioneering saga of this endeavor was wrongly attributed (even today in many circles) to St. Chavara Kuriakose. However, the world is fast discovering the true reformer, Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli.

It is a fact that Kerala has become a fully literate state today through the early efforts of the Christian missionaries who set

the machinery of modern education in motion which started in 1857 with Baccinelli orders.

Society, in those days, was riven by caste system, education reserved only for men of the upper caste, practicing detestable *sati* and untouchability, blinding superstitions, no temple entry for the majority of people, where women having no role in public life, girl children being treated as burden and cattle, and many other heinous injustices had so deeply been entrenched that life as seen today and taken for granted by the present generation was unthinkable in those days!

Hence, Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli's reform of "A school in every church courtyard" was a trail blazer and was set to revolutionize the future social and political scenario in Kerala which had a pan -India impact later on with its ripples reaching the farthest corners of Indian sub continent.

In brief, *Pallikkoppam Pillikkoodam*, initiated by the great missionary and visionary, Archbishop Baccinelli, marks a breakthrough in the history and culture of Kerala. Today Kerala has become educationally and culturally advanced and stands head and shoulders above the rest of Indian states, thanks to Archbishop Baccinelli's early ground breaking educational reforms.

Pidiyari Prasthanam

Pidayari Prasthanam (a handful of rice) is a campaign that began in Catholic parishes in Kerala in 1866 for the welfare of the people. Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli, the then archbishop in the Apostolic Vicariate of Verapoly, initiated this program in Kerala. And in order to energize the charity campaign he named it after Infant Jesus, “**Unnisho Mishihayude nikshepam**” (Offering to Infant Jesus-Handful of Rice)

Bishop Baccinelli imbibed the ideas of reaching out to the poor through **Pidayari Prasthanam** (a *handful of rice* campaign) from a similar Roman Catholic program prevalent in Europe, carried out by monasteries, convents, houses for the destitute and other charitable organizations there.

In a pastoral letter issued by Bishop Baccinelli in the month of Khumbam, 1866 , he explains how a handful of rice from those who can afford to spare the same to be collected and how the proceeds from the sale of such rice collected had to be handed over to the Bishop. The rice or the amount of money received in lieu of rice was used to help the poor and also for the establishment of church institutions.

First mission hospital in Kerala

The first mission hospital in Kerala was established at Koonammavu in 1859 by a Carmelite monk, Bro. Dr. Nicholas Verouven. It was Archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli`s vision to establish a hospital for the poor people. The hospital which

was started as a dispensary in a small room was shifted to Manjummel in 1888 during the reign of archbishop Leonard Mellano. The then British resident J.C Hallinton inaugurated the hospital. The treatment there was so well appreciated that even the royal families (Travancore and Kochi), including the King of Travancore, sought treatment there. At the same time the hospital was a refuge for the poor people to get low cost and effective treatment. Bro. Dr. Nicholas had achieved the patent of certain medicines which he developed himself.

Language and literature

Christian missionaries who came to Kerala in the 16th century did not find any grammar text on Malayalam language. Hence, they pioneered to develop a grammar book on Malayalam based on the rules of European languages, especially Latin and Portuguese. It's a fact that grammar texts of several Indian languages, including Hindi, were first authored by Christian missionaries. The contribution of the missionaries to the Malayalam language and literature is immense.

It was bishop Angelo Francis (1665 – 1712), the first Vicar Apostolic of Malabar Vicariate who pioneered the first Malayalam grammar book called ‘ *Grammatica Linguae Vulgaris Malabaricae*, which has around 250 pages. The Malayalam – Portuguese grammar book called *Grammatico Malabarico Lusitana* was also penned by him. He authored six books which includes Malayalam ones.

Arnose Pathiri (Fr. John Earnest Hangsleden, (1681- 1732) a Jesuit priest of this Vicariate, who is widely known for his poem *Puthenpana*, has contributed much to the development of Malayalam language and literature. He argues that Malayalam has its roots and origin in Sanskrit. *Arthe Malvar*, is a highly acclaimed grammar book authored by him. He also compiled a Malayalam – Portuguese dictionary. *Umma Parvam, Ummade dukham, Vyakula prabantham, janovaparvam* etc. are some of his famous poems.

Paulinose Pathiri (1748-1806), is one of missionaries who contributed much to the Malayalam literature. According to the great poet Ulloor, it is Paulinose, who made known to the European world the the richness of Malayalam language and its literature. He was an English language teacher to the king of Travancore. In 1784, he compiled Gramatico-Englesa-Portuguesa for the king. *India Orientalis Cristiana* authored by him deals with the condition and missionary activities of the then church in Malabar. Bishop John Baptist a Santa Tresia, Fr. Jamaniani of Saint Octavio, Fr. Augustine of Santa Maria, Bishop Marcelinos Berardi are some of the missionaries who contributed to the grammar and literature of the Malayalam language.

First indigenous congregation for women

The first indigenous congregation for women, TOCD was founded by Venerable Mother Elishwa Vakayil at Koonammavu (a village near N. Paravur, Ernakulam) in 1866. The congregations, CTC and CMC have their origin in TOCD. Today they have become two of the major congregation of the Latin and syro Malanar church respectively, and play a significant role in the church and society.

First convent school, boarding, orphanage and women empowerment

Mother Elishwa has been a pioneer in women education and empowerment. She founded the first convent school, boarding and orphanage for women in Kerala in 1868 with the great support of then then archbishop Bernadine Baccinelli. It was first time in Kerala women were given education exclusively with boarding and orphanage facility. Her congregation imparted handicraft training to poor women to enable them to earn their own bread. Even today women folk in koonammavu and surrounding area engage in handicraft works, especially making of religious articles. Many of their products are exported outside Kerala and abroad. At a period of time when women were still more marginalized, to give them education and job training marks a turning point in Kerala history.

Printing press and the first Malayalam newspaper

It was in 1556 the first printing press in India was started by the Jesuit missionaries in Goa. *Doctrina Cristam* of St. Francis

Xavier is the first book printed. Before 1580 printing presses were started by the Jesuits in Kochi, Kollam, Kodugalloor and Sambaloor. The missionaries in the Vicariate of Verapoly contributed much in this regard.

Samshepa Vedhartham, is the first book printed in Malayalam. It was compiled by Fr. Clement Pianius in 1772. The book which was printed in Rome is considered the first printed Malayalam catechism text.

The first printing press of the vicariate of Verapoly was established at Mannanam in 1846 by archbishop Loudovico Martini. In 1869, another printing press was established by the Carmelites in Koonammavu called Amalothbhava Matha Press. In 1876, the first Malayalam newspaper from the catholic circle, “Sathyanathakahalam” was published from there under the headship of Fr.Louis Vyppissery OCD. The Press was transferred to Ernakulan in 1897 and was renamed I.S Press (Industrial School Press), where large number of secular and religious books and magazines were printed. The newspaper “Sathyanathakahalam” was renamed “Kerala Times” in 1970.

First Catholic Malayalam Bible

The first Catholic translation of the New Testament of the Bible was done by the Carmelite priests in 1905 and was printed in the I.S Press. The translation from Latin to Malayalam was carried out by Fr.Louis Vyppissery, Fr. Michael Puthenparam-

bil, and Fr. Polycarp Kadeparambil at Carmelite Monastery,
Manjumel.