



JESUITS OF OLD DAYS IN ANDHRA DESA

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An extraordinary cavalcade was issuing from the eastern gate of the lower fort of Chandragiri, not far west of Tirupati, in the morning of 15th October, 1598. Numerous soldiers, riding on horses and holding spears and lances adorned with streamers of variegated appearance, were seen first winding their way through the crooked granite gateway. After them various elephants caparisoned with rich rugs, and tinkling silvery bells under their bellies, majestically appeared. They were surrounded by an army of servants, and carrying on their backs a number of noblemen of the Vijayanagara Court, stationed then at Chandragiri. Behind them another elephant, as lofty as a mountain, towering, above all the rest, its forehead decorated with the Vaisnava mark, was the mount of a little boy aged about thirteen. He was peacefully seated on the honourable tiger skin spread upon a crimson cloth, but his eyes were staring round full of curiosity and admiration. He was dressed in a silken white vesti having a yellow salve round his torso, while two attendants behind him were agitating their chouries with intermittent regularity.

The cavalcade followed the road towards Tirupati, and having arrived at a distance of one league from Chandragiri the vanguard scout discovered two travellers wearing very unusual apparel, coming from the opposite direction. They were dressed in black gowns, their waists being girded by black sashes. A black biretta covered their heads. They carried a humble knapsack on their backs and walked briskly holding a staff in their right hands. When the scouts spotted them the cavalcade stopped, the elephants came forward and

stopped facing each other at each side of the road, allowing the taller elephant to advance through the middle of the path. And when all the huge beasts knelt down at the command of the respective mahouts the noblemen stepped down, and the little boy coming forward saluted the two strangers, offering them his naniaskarams, with more grace and civility than could be expected from his age. He was himself of noble blood and royal upbringing.

For he was a favourite nephew of Oba Raya, the father-in-law of Emperor Venkatapati Devaraya II of Vijayanagara then residing at Chandragiri, and supreme master of the Emperor's house. The graceful lad had come, on behalf of his uncle, to welcome two Jesuits who were coming from Mylapore to present their respects to the Vijayanagara Emperor. Their names were Father Simon de Sa, a Portuguese, Rector of the College of St. Thome of Mylapore, and Fr. Francesco Riclo. It was thus that the first two Jesuits to enter Andhradesa were officially received in the capital of the
Empire.



JESUITS OF OLD DAYS IN ANDHRA DESA

Emperor Venkata received the two western sannyasis most kindly and invited them to fix a permanent residence in Chandragiri, for which he gave them a plot, and the village of Elamur in the neighbourhood of Mylapore whose revenue would help them for their maintenance and cult. Accordingly in the month of August of the following year two Jesuits settled at the court, very near the Emperor's palace, which still stands in that beautiful valley, as a silent witness to the kindness of Venkata towards the Jesuits. The new corners were Fr. Manoel de Veiga and the above mentioned Fr. Ricio and these were joined by Fr. BeichiorCoutinho a few months later.

Fr. Veiga left Chandragiri in the following year to become the Provincial of Goa and was replaced by Fr. Antonio Rubino, who was to die the death of a martyr in Japan a number of years after. Fr. Ricio died in Chandragiri in 1606, the first Jesuit to die in Andhradesa. Fr. Antonio succeeded him.

Two Lay-Brothers acquired great ascendancy over the Emperor during these years. They were Bros. Alexander, Frey, an Englishman, and Bro. Bartolomeo Fontebona, an Italian. Venkata was very fond of artists at his court. These two Lay Brothers and Fontebonal in particular painted many canvasses for the Emperor. The latter's favour for the Fathers grew a great deal where he learned from a Mughal Ambassador in what high esteem the Jesuits were held by Emperor Akbar, at Agra, Fr. Alberto Laerzio, the first Superior of the Malabar Vice-Province, visited his subjects at Chandragiri in 1604, and offered some presents to Venkata, who accompanied by his guru Tata charya came down 'to the gate of his palace to see and admire them, while the parda ladies were peeping surreptitiously through the small windows of the mahal. The presents were an elephant, a hound, a painting in oils, a Bible and several other knickknacks.

Venkatapatidevaraya, who was very old and sickly for some time, finally died by the close of 1614; but the Jesuits had withdrawn from his court the previous year, after having baptized eleven or twelve adults, about whom we have no details.

Eighty eight years had to elapse till a new Jesuit entered Andhradesa in the person of Fr. Pierre Mauduit, a Frenchman, who had arrived at Pondichery some years before. He first settled in Kaneypondi, near Conjeevaram, just in the southern boundaries of Andhradesa, in the beginning of 1701. First he devoted much of his time to the study of grandham (Sanskrit) and by the end of the year, he undertook a journey of exploration through, the southern districts of Andhra accompanied by his two Brahman catechises. A hundred years before Venkata II at Chandragiri, had advised the Jesuits at his court to give up the black dress, which made them appear like Phiranguis, and put on a white robe. By that very time Fr. De Nobili had adopted the dress of the Brahmansannyasis, in Madurai. Fr. Mauduit and his successors in Andhra adopted this dress from the very beginning.



JESUITS OF OLD DAYS IN ANDHRA DESA

Thanks to one of the Letters of Fr. Mauduit we are able to follow him in this exploration tour. Having first passed through Ayenkolarn, and Arcothe reached Vellore, where his Brahman host took him to be a sannyasi of great authority. This news which spread through the town caused the Domi (governor) of the place to visit him. From Vellore he went to Pallikonda, within the boundaries of Andhradesa and thence to Gudiyattam, where he was the guest of a Komati with a large family. Then passing through Yerydurgam, he directed his steps to Peddanayakendurgam across some almost inaccessible mountains. "We spent two days, says Fr. Mauduit himself, "crossing dreadful forests and mountains, without knowing whither who were going. as we had quite lost our way, and exposed to great sufferings both from hunger and weariness. Besides tigers and other beasts which infest these mountains caused us great anxiety. In

In this extremity we started praying and had recourse to the Blessed Virgin who seemed to hear us, for shortly afterwards we struck into a way which led us to the right road, and even met a few persons who were kind enough to conduct us to the neighbouring village. After taking a little rest we at last crossed the high mountains of which we had been told such terrible things, and went through a large town without seeing a single soul in it, all the inhabitants having abandoned it, for fear of the Moors (the Muhammad ans of the Dekkan) who overran the country. At last after undergoing many fatigues we arrived at Peddanayakendurgam". The high mountains mentioned by Fr, Mauduit are the Eastern Ghats to the west of Chittoor and North Arcot Districts.

At Peddanayakendurgam he went to the fortress to offer his salutations to the Poligar, whom, he presented with some fruits and a little piece of jet. The prince was on a high seat and offered the Father a sofa, but he preferred to spread his tiger skin and sat cross-legged on the floor. After that he visited Bairepalle, Tailur, Sapur, Colalam (Kolar),Sonnakallu and finally Punganuru in Chittoor Dt., where he made a long stay. The Avildar or Governor of the place permitted him to build a Church. A Virasaiva widow and her four sons were there baptized, after a long probation, becoming the first Telugu converts to Christianity. They probably belonged to the Yelama caste. Punganuru had in the course of years to become a great Christian centre. The Jesuit letters record that 80 baptisms had been administered in that place.

In further excursions Fr. Mauduit built churches at Takkelam, 10 miles east of Arkonam, at Venkatagiri, in the present Nellore District, and at Perakur. These last two Churches were dedicated to the holy Wise Men of the East who went to Bethlehem to adore the Child Jesus newly born. While staying at the latter place with Fr. Maximilien de Couberville, both were poisoned by their enemies and died within a quarter of an hour in 1711. The church was consequently destroyed and the Christians scattered.

After the visit of Fr. Mauduit to Punganuru, a courageous young Frenchman was assigned to that post. He was Fr. Jean Baptiste De la Fontaine. He arrived at Punganuru in 1702.He soon gained



JESUITS OF OLD DAYS IN ANDHRA DESA

the good will of the young Raja of the place, of his sisters and of his mother. He made many converts among the Boyas, who were working in the military service of the Poligars. Their descendants are still at Punganuru, and at Calikiri and Narasimmayalapalem, north of Punganuru. He also baptized nine Brahman adults and many persons of other castes. This success excited the wrath of the Orthodox who blamed him for the use of wine in the celebration of the Mass. But this persecution had no lasting consequences.

Punganuru had become the centre of the Telugu Mission. In his apostolic excursions Fr. la Fontaine visited many other towns and villages, Venkatagiri, Perakur, Peddakotia and Thadamurry, 10 miles from Krishnapuram. The prince of this place received him honourably. Here he converted some people of the Togata clan, whose descendants live there to this day. Fr. la Fontaine died at Chinnaballapuram, 90 miles north-west of Punganuru, on 10th November 1718.

Iv

When Fr. la Fontaine died at Chinnaballapuram Fr. Etierme Le Gac, born in Little Brittany, inherited his spirit and tireless zeal. He had been in Chinnaballapuram since 1709. A number of families of the Sudra caste, the very caste of the Raja, had embraced Christianity in 1713. This was the cause of a great persecution some years later, when the guru of the Dasarles (Dasas or votaries of Visnu) excommunicated the new Christians and forced the Raja to expel them from the town.

The next field of operations of Fr. Le Gac was Devanapalli, 12 miles distant from Chinnaballapuram. The first converts have been baptized in 1704 and Fr. Le Gac remained there for a number of years. Also here the Duaries raised a storm against him and succeeded in dispossessing him of his church. But the Raja of Anantapur ordered the Church to be returned to Fr. Le Gac after reading a fireman of the Nawab of Arcot in favour of the Father. The fireman said:

“Sadatulla Khan, Nawab, to all Tausdars, Rajas, Qelidars, Pale acadhe and aiF— “The Roman sannyasis have churches in the Carnatic which they visit to instruct their disciples. They are penitents who profess the truth and whose probity is well known to us. We respect them and have great regard for them. Hence it is our will that they and their disciples be treated with favour everywhere and without molestation of any kind. Such is our command”.

Fr. Le Gac's last residence was Krishnapuram, 15 miles from Dharmavaram in the Hindupur Taluka of the Anantapur District. He was there from 1713 onwards. He built there a great and beautiful Church which was unfortunately destroyed by fire. It was rebuilt two years later. One



JESUITS OF OLD DAYS IN ANDHRA DESA

of the converts baptized at Krishnppuram by Fr. LeGac was one Rangappa, the first Christian parent of the Bhimashetty family of Krishnapuram whose descendants are now settled at Kondramutia.

At the end of 1720 a contagious disease claimed many victims at Krishnapuram. A young French Father named Francois Caron, who had landed in India two years before, was then helping Fr. Le Gac at Krishnapuram. He devoted himself thoroughly to alleviating the sufferings of the poor stricken people, both Christian and non-Christian, till finally he himself contracted the illness and died a martyr of charity on the 28th July 1721.

Fr. Le Gac lived many more years. The letters he wrote about his work and journeys through Andhradesa are many and contain precious data for the history of the country. He died on Good Friday 4th April, 1738; and his tomb may still be seen at Krishnapuram, between the tombs of two of his confreres, Fr. Caron, mentioned above, and Fr. Gilbert Ducros. The people say that the grave of Fr. Le Gac is the holiest. He is called Sarijivinathaswamilavaru.

A great event for the Telugu Christians occurred during the life time of Fr. Le Gac. When this missionary was at Devanapalli he instructed and baptized one Thumma Rayappa of the village of Madigubba, not far from Dharmavaram, He was the first Christian Reddy. His descendants and clansmen were to form the most numerous Christian caste among the Telugus. From the memory of their first father in the faith, the name Rayappa has become a favourite name among the Christian Reddies. Fr. Le Gac obtained from Prasanappa Naidu, Raja of Anantapur, and permission to build a Church at Madigubba, for the use of these converts. The Raja ordered that all the timber required for the building of the Church was to be furnished gratis. The Church was completed in 1722. Afterwards the Christian Reddies spread to the neighbouring village of Alumuru.

In these two villages the Christian Reddies lived peacefully for about ten years. When in the year 1733 the Reddies of Alumuru were reported to the Marathas, whose army was encamped in the neighbourhood as a very rich community. MadhuRayalu, at the head of a flying column laid siege to the town. The Reddies held out for three months; and their leader went to Anantapur seeking the protection of the Raja. The latter nevertheless did not afford the necessary help whereupon the Reddies, after discussing the case with Fr. Le Gac, decided to migrate towards the east, their former homeland. They left at dead of night in the greatest silence to evade the Maratha sentinels. They carried with them, their cattle their jewels and moneys, and other moveable property. Before departing all of them made a vow to build a church at their own cost if they escaped the vigilance of their enemies and succeeded in getting suitable land in their new home. The journey of about eighty leagues was peacefully accomplished without the least



JESUITS OF OLD DAYS IN ANDHRA DESA

molestation.

They arrived at Bukkapuram Nellore District, and the Raja of Venkatagiri gave them farm and other villages, one of them Baisatakurapadu not far from the church of Peddarikatla. They were soon happily settled in their new lands, so that the Raja of Anantapur vainly entreated them to return to the lands they had vacated. Their descendants are still occupying the same territory.

The example of the Reddies was imitated by other Christians of the Andavaru and Balarumsimas, of the Anantapur District, and by those of the territory of the Nawab of Cuddapah. They migrated to the north of the Nellore District and to the Guntur and Krishna Districts, forming the nuclei of the Christian Communities of Phirangipuram, Rentichintia, Oleru and Mutlur. Some of these settled in the latter place were Balijas. Some of the family names all these people bear, remind one of the villages they abandoned when coming to the east. Peddakota, Alumuru, Siddhavattam, Adur.

VI

When the Reddies migrated from Anantapur District they were much helped by Fr. Jean Calmette, born at Rodez, in France, whose influence there was beyond measure. He had been there in his early years and later a short stay at Venkatagiri, he returned to Anantapur. We possess many of his letters written from Ballapuram and Dharmavararn. He had also been at Pushpagiri. The letters of Fr. Calmette are all full of most interesting details concerning the ancient culture of the country, and he often quotes them in most remarkable passages from the Indian scriptures.

His reputation was especially based on his very sound scholarship, and he succeeded in building up a research school of Indian Culture, whose results have much benefit modern scholarship. Such a spirit of investigation With regard to the Ancient Culture of India was traditional among the Jesuits. Fr. Calmette in his remarkable efforts was only following in the footsteps of Fr. Roberto de Nobili, who in 1606 had established himself in Madurai. De Nobili not only learnt Sanskrit and Tamil, but also studied Telugu to perfection, the latter language, being the language of the Nayaks of Madurai, and usually spoken at court. The linguistic knowledge of De Nobili was thorough and very scholarly. He studied the ancient Sanskrit works with a real wish to know the culture of the country. One of his efforts was especially directed to get hold of a copy of the Rig-Veda which was well known by heart to the Brahmans, but which was not usually written, as this was considered against the law. Finally he succeeded in a marvelous way: one of his friends, a Brahman whose orthodoxy felt no scruples to do so, recited the Rig-veda to him while he was copying it at his dictation word by word.



JESUITS OF OLD DAYS IN ANDHRA DESA

Like de De Nobili, Calmette naturally, began his career of scholarship by the study of Sanskrit. Even in his old age he continued in his studies with unflagging enthusiasm. A few days before he died, he wrote on Christmas day of 1739: "This recurring fever takes a good deal of my time and prevents me from studying the Sanskrit language as much as I should like" Moreover he infused his enthusiasm into some of his confreres. He assures us that some of his colleagues "were not only well grounded in Sanskrit but were able to read the Veda".

Fr. Calmette was indefatigable in the search for Sanskrit manuscripts for further study. It was perhaps on this account that the tradition grew in Andhradesa that he was for some time the librarian of the Venkatagiri Raja. He never occupied that post.

"Father Calmette", says Max Muller, "was one of the first who succeeded in getting hold of actual manuscripts of the Veda" (Physical Religion, p. 431). In this he was a strict disciple of De Nobili. He himself narrates this great event thus: "From the time that missionaries first went to India, it has always been thought to be impossible to find this book (the Veda), which so much is respected by the Indians. And, indeed, we should never have succeeded, if we did not have Brahmans, who are Christian, hidden among them.

His sympathetic method of approach is marvelously described by Max Muller. When Calmette succeeds in getting hold of the Vedas and has, with the help of some; Brahmans, read and understood its sitktas, "he is not bent on extracting from the Veda passages showing the - depravity and absurdity of" the ancient Indian religion... No, the very contrary. We have extracted from it texts which serve to convince them of the great fundamental truths; the unity of God, the qualities of the true God, and a state of blessedness and condemnation are all in the Veda. But the truths which are to be found in this book are only scattered there like grains of gold in a heap of sand" (Physical Religion, pp. 43-44.)

Max Muller fully approves of the critical method followed by Fr. Calmette in his study of the Veda and adds: "I could add other passages particularly from the Brahmans and Upanishads, all confirming Fr. Calmette's idea that the Veda is the best key to the religion of India." (Ibid., p. 45)

With the Sanskrit manuscripts gathered by Fr. Calmette and his confreres they made a most valuable collection of Oriental wisdom: "It is only five or six years ago", he himself writes from Venkatagiri on the 16th September 1737, "that I was allowed to form an Oriental library for the King". As he himself indicates in this letter, the collection was finally sent to the King of France and stored in the Bibliotheque Royale of Paris. It was after all a great pity that these precious manuscripts should have been lost to our country. Nonetheless they were the cause of the philological and philosophical research undertaken by Prof. Bopp of Berlin (1844) who spent



JESUITS OF OLD DAYS IN ANDHRA DESA

much time in Paris on that account; his studies were continued by the great scholars Burnout and Max Muller, much to the glory of Sanskrit literature and of India.

Besides these scholarly activities, Fr. Calmette himself composed some Sanskrit slobs, containing some of the tenets of the Christian faith, as he himself announces in one of his letters. Besides he translated the Atmararnayam , by Fr. De Nobili from Tamil into, Sanskrit and encouraged a Brahman convert, named MangalagiriAnandai? to compose another poem entitled Vedantcirasayancim, which at times is attributed to Satyabodhaswamilavaru i.e,

Fr. Calmette himself. It is a poem in four cantos with a commentary which has been printed in Telugu characters in St. John's Press, Nellore in 1936. Fr. Calmette spread widely among the Telugu Christians another work by Fr. De Nobili entitled Satyavedasarasan graham, to which he added a Telugu commentary, Manuscript copies of this poem, containing the essentials of the true religion, were extant among the Christians of Andhradesa till very recent times.

Fr. Aelen, of Nellore, deserved well of the Telugu speaking people when he printed it in Telugu characters in the St. John's Press, in 1931.

VII

A great co-operator of Fr. Calmette in his scholarly pursuits was Fr. Jean Francois Pons, whom we found in Ballapuram in 1742, wherein he taught Telugu to Fr. Nicolas Possevin. In his excursions through the country, he also gathered many ancient manuscripts. In his letters he speaks of the literary treasures discovered in India, describes the four Vedas, the grammatical treatises, the six systems of philosophy and the astronomy of the ancient Indians. All these works were totally unknown in Europe those days, and his account did much to make the ancient wisdom of India known throughout the world. Fr. Pans died 1752-'53.

Another disciple of Fr. Calrnette was Fr. Gaston Laurent Coeurdoux, who was at Bukkapatnam in 1736 and 1737. Fr. Coeurdoux also studied Sanskrit with extraordinary enthusiasm and unusual efficiency. He also made special studies in the realm of comparative philology. One of the European scholars who appraised the true import of the communications sent home from India by Frs. Calmette and Pons was the Abbe Barthelemy, of the French Institute. He wrote to Fr. Coeurdoux in 1736 to send home aSanskrit Grammar. Fr. Cocurdoux replied four years later, sending hint a treatise entitled thus "How do you explain the fact that in Sanskrit there are a great number of words which are common with Latin and Greek, and specially with Latin ?"

VIII



JESUITS OF OLD DAYS IN ANDHRA DESA

The first member of the Kamma community who became a Christian was received into the Church by Fr. Calmette in 1733. She was a woman of the indoor Kammavnru who was possessed by the devil. She was delivered from that possession at the time of her receiving baptism. She received the name of Annamma, which became a favorite name for the women of her caste, in her memory. Her descendants live at present at Narisettipalem in the Nellore District.

At this time many Kammas were settled in Gandikotaseema. They were originally from Guntur, but they had migrated to Gandikota in the 16th century following the Nayaks during the rule of the Aravidu Emperors of Vijayanagara. Accordingly many Kammas occupied honourable positions in the employment first of the Rajas and then of the Nawabs of Cuddapah. Gandikotaseema formed a large part of the dominions of the Nawab of Cuddapah, and extended through the present Districts of Cuddapah, Kurnool and Anantapur.

Since the Jesuit Missionaries were friendly with the Nawabs whose protection they enjoyed, many of the Kamma servants of the Nawab became Christians during the last years of Fr. Calmette's life. Sometime after his death, in 1745, there was a large migration of these Christian Kammas to the Nellore and Guntur Districts. Conditions were rapidly changing in Cuddapah and they preferred to return to their ancient home. They were probably led by their missionaries.

Some of these Kamma immigrants also settled at Oleru, near Masulipatam on one of the branches of the Krishna. Their family names faithfully kept to this day, are of the villages they had occupied in the Gandikota-sima before their migration Penikalapalli, Malepadu. Yeddanapalle, Etur, Pudota Mailavaram, Kambaladine and Pothacamury.

With the Kammas who settled at Oleru, many of them of the Yeddanapalle family, there was a young Golla (shepherd), of the Gandikota plateau, near the village of Thimmanayunipetta. He was the cook of the missionary who accompanied the Kammas till Oleru. The good Golla finally became a Christian and after sometime went back to his native country to get married. Their descendants are good Christians, about a dozen Golla families, at Chinnamanayana Kota, South of Anantapur. The old cook boy of the Oleru missionary seems to have brought from there a manuscript book entitled Moksamargam or the Way to Heaven, "written on thick paper, kept by his descendants as a precious heirloom. On the last page of the book it is written: This book was written at Oleru in 1746 when Fr. Gnanaprakasam was in charge". This might possibly have been the missionary who led the Kammas from Gandikota to Oleru. He was French man named Fr. Cordey, Gnanaprakasair being his Indian name. He died in 1755.

This was not the last migration of the Christian Kammas. Those of Oleru had prospered so much and multiplied so much that they decided to settle elsewhere. The leader of their migration was



JESUITS OF OLD DAYS IN ANDHRA DESA

to be a young Italian Jesuit named Fr. Georgio Manente, who arrived at Oleru in 1768. Fr. Manente, a very modern and enterprising man, being in charge of the Kamma Christian community of Oleru, obtained lands for them in the Chingleput District, from the British Government of Madras. Accordingly he led the exodus from Oleru in 1788 and accompanied them to Kilacherry, in the Chingleput District. 400 families settled in the new lands, scattered in ten villages round Kilacherry, one of the families who migrated on this occasion was a Yeddanapallv family, some of whose descendants are two Jesuits, Fr. Lourdu, Professor of Chemistry at the Loyola College, Madras and his brother Fr. Papiiah, the first superintendent of the buildings of Andhra Loyola College, Vijayawada

IX

Towards the end of this period, in 1773 the Society of Jesus was suppressed by the Pope. No more Jesuits came to India after that date till modern times. Fr. Manente, whom we have mentioned in connection with the Kamma migration from Oleru to Kilacherry was then still alive, and though no longer a Jesuit, he continued working with his people. When he heard of the restoration of the Society of Jesus in the kingdom of the Two Sicilies in 1804, he asked permission to renew his profession, by a letter dated Madras, 27 February 1805. His request was granted by Fr. Cajetano Angiolini, the Vicar General of the whole Society, then in Russia, by letter dated Palermo 1st January 1806. Thus Fr. Manente became link between the old Jesuit Missionaries in India and the new Society. When he died in Madras in 1812 he was eagerly expecting some of his confreres from Europe to come to India to continue his work among his dear Andhras. The Jesuits who have now founded and opened Andhra Loyola College are the heirs of those heroes of old. They have received from them a glorious bequest which blazons always in the heart of all Jesuits, to work "for the greater glory of God."