

**RELIGION AND SOCIETY:
INDIGENISATION OF ROMAN CATHOLICISM
IN SOUTH INDIA**

By

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*Thesis Submitted for the award of the Degree of T-245
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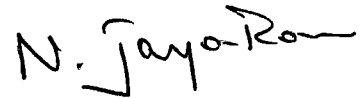
I, Lalitha Thomas M.A., hereby declare that this thesis entitled 'Religion and Society: Indigenisation of Roman Catholicism in South India' is the outcome of my own study undertaken under the guidance of Prof. N. Jayaram, Head of the Department of Sociology, Goa University. It has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or certificate of this or any other university. I have duly acknowledged all the sources used by me in the preparation of this thesis.



Lalitha Thomas M.A.

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled 'Religion and Society: Indigenisation of Roman Catholicism in South India' is the record of the original work done by Lalitha Thomas M.A. under my guidance. The results of the research presented in this thesis have not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma or certificate of this or any other university.



Dr. N. Jayaram
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PREFACE

While doing my Master's Degree course in Sociology at Christ College, Bangalore between 1991 and 1993, I once had a discussion with Prof. N. Jayaram who had come to give some guest lectures. It was he who created in me the interest for sociological research on the Catholic community. He suggested that being a Catholic nun, I could give an 'insider's' view of the community. Subsequently, a unique feature of the Catholic community in South India drew my attention, and that was the high degree of integration that the Catholic community enjoys with the Hindu community. Exploring the ways in which the Catholic community negotiated with its new religion from its native cultural traditions absorbed my mind for a long time. It took seven long years before I could formulate a research project on the subject. Since I hail from Tamil Nadu and am familiar with its culture, the choice of the field was natural.

Doing research in this field was both exciting and challenging. It was exciting because I relived my own childhood religious experiences, most of which had remained embedded in my own subconscious. My childhood days were spent amidst well-established Catholic and Hindu communities living in contiguous villages. My worldview was shaped by these vibrant Catholic and Hindu communities and I was fully immersed in the socio-religious ceremonies of these communities. These experiences began to unfold as I started collecting data illuminating the same in such a way that I could immediately grasp their sociological significance. Simultaneously, it turned out to be a path fraught with danger. Understanding the data from the terrain of one's own subconscious could lead one into an irredeemable subjectivity. To that extent, doing

research on this subject was quite challenging. I could claim in all modesty that my formal training in methodology was a boon and the input from my guide who is a non-Christian provided the balance. To retain the religio-cultural flavour filling the social intercourse between the Catholics and the Hindu communities, I have liberally used Tamil words and phrases. To retain the phonetic integrity of these words and phrases in English I have followed the system of Tamil transliteration followed by Mozi Trust, Chennai (1999).

Doing research is a journey. The track on which I have travelled, has criss-crossed many individuals, communities and institutions. I feel overwhelmed, when I recall the role they have played. Most important among them is my supervisor, Dr. N. Jayaram. He has been a never failing guide. He sharpened my thoughts, challenged me when I erred, encouraged me when I failed, and rejoiced when I climbed certain heights. He personally attended to every detail of the thesis at every stage and spent long hours going through all my chapters. I place on record my deepest gratitude for all that he has been to me in the completion of this thesis.

I am very grateful to Dr. Lazar, from the Department of Social Dynamics, St. Joseph's college, Tiruchirappalli who was ever ready to help me at every stage of my thesis. He guided me in the selection of the field site, listened with perception to my experience in the field, and offered insightful comments and suggestions that helped in conceptualising and writing the thesis.

I must record my debt to the Catholics and the Hindus who accepted me in their midst, and offered me hospitality during my stay with them. They paid close attention to all my queries and were earnest in their responses. They were prompt in inviting me on specific occasions to all the significant rituals taking place in the villages, Ashrams and

pilgrim centres. They personally accompanied me and explained to me the significance of each ritual. Almost all of them were interested in my research. Some even requested that I write my thesis in Tamil so that they could read it. Some others wanted to see the thesis after its completion in whatever language in which I choose to write.

I thank the University Grants Commission for granting me two years leave under the Faculty Improvement Programme and the Principal of Jyoti Nivas College, Bangalore for allowing me to avail this leave.

My gratitude goes to all the faculty members in the Department of Sociology, Goa University. I thank them for their availability when approached for discussion and for their encouragement.

I gratefully acknowledge the librarian and staff of Dharmaram Library, Institute for Social and Economic Change (ISEC), Jyoti Nivas College, and United Theological College, Bangalore; International Institute of Tamil Studies, Sacred Heart Seminary, Sathyanilyam and Madras Institute of Developmental studies, Chennai; Vidya Jyoti, and Delhi School of Economics, Delhi; Goa University Library, and Racol Seminary, Goa; Jesuits Archives, Kodaikanal (Tamil Nadu); Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai; Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune and St. Paul's Seminary, Tiruchirappalli.

I thank Professor Usha Gopinath, Department of English Literature, Jyoti Nivas College, Bangalore for editing the text.

I place on record my sincere gratitude to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Tarbes for their constant support and encouragement. The superior and Brothers at Clive's Tiruchirappalli, for providing hospitality during the course of my data collection and for the hospitality extended by Pillar Fathers during my stay at Goa.

Last but not least I thank my father Mr. Manickam. Despite being an aged person, he travelled miles together with me to the interior villages during the fieldwork and put up with all inconveniences. He considered all these as unexpected opportunities in an unusual task, to express his love for his daughter. My heart swells with gratitude to him. My other family members and friends too provided me with much needed emotional support during the period of data collection, and I am grateful to all of them.

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NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In this thesis we have followed the system of transliteration developed by the Mozi Trust, Chennai (1999). The Tamil words are given in lower case all through, since the capital letters denote a particular Tamil letter in this system of transliteration. However, months and proper nouns are spelt conventionally using the upper case for the first letter.

Given below are the Tamil alphabets with their equivalent English letters.

அ	ஆ	இ	ஈ	உ	ஊ	எ	ஏ	ஐ	ஒ	ஔ	ஔள
a	aa	i	ii	u	uu	e	ee	ai	o	oo	au

க	ங	ச	ஞ	ட	ண்	த்	ந்	ப்	ம்	ய்	ர்
k	M	c	ñ	T	N	t	n	p	m	y	r

ல்	வ்	ழ்	ள்	ற்	ன்	ஜ்	ஷ்	ஸ்	ஹ்	க்ஷ
l	v	z	L	R	n	j	sh	s	h	ks

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Religion is a universal social phenomenon. There is no society known which has not practised religion in some form or other. Sociologists and anthropologists have accordingly recognised the importance of religion as a universal feature of human society: Max Müller accepted that a belief in divinity was universal among humankind; Edward Tylor implied that magic, science and religion are present in all human societies; and Bronislaw Malinowski held that religion is both universal and necessary (quoted in Morris 1990:93, 105 and 149). Thus, there has been a high degree of consensus among social scientists on the universality of religion.

Considering the ubiquity and salience of religion, sociologists have evinced a good deal of interest in understanding the reciprocal relationship between society and religion. As Berger (1969:51) has observed, the sociology of religion has shown in numerous instances the intimate relationship between religion and social solidarity. Since, according to him, every human society engages in 'world building,' he proposes that religion creates and maintains a social world that allows people to survive in their environment. From the functionalist point of view, religion is seen as establishing and reaffirming social solidarity, and in turn as being strengthened by it. Thus, for example, Durkheim (1995) analysed how religion creates a sacred reality that helps to organise and find meaning even in the mundane experience of everyday life. Scharf (1973:23) sees religion as a social fact powerfully reinforcing a given social structure. Summarising the ideas of historian Fustel de Coulanges, Evans-Pritchard says that religious ideas are the

causes of social changes and the primary factor in social phenomena, and that the reverse is also true (Morris 1990:112). Max Weber (1971) and Yinger (1971) go beyond the reciprocity and describe the way the reciprocity expresses itself. According to them, religion itself goes through a process of adaptation and modification depending on the existing needs of the society or to the changing situation of the society (Max Weber 1971 and Wickers 1979:201)

The relationship between society and religion is mediated by culture and it is culture that provides the foundation for religion. The religious symbols are constructed or derived from the larger cultural resources of the community. Even to grasp the meaning of religious symbols one needs to understand the cultural universe from which these symbols emerge. Thus, religion as a social institution has been regarded as a 'central and fundamentally important' (O'dea 1969:133) and an 'immanent' (Dawson 1948:46) aspect of culture. Geertz (1973:90) goes to the extent of defining religion as 'a cultural system.' For him, 'Religion is (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in (people) by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic' (ibid.). Therefore, he suggests that symbols seem so critical for religious institutions that religious meanings are stored in symbols, such as a cross, a crescent, etc.

Religion originates in a given cultural context, and takes root, develops and lives in that cultural context. It is this fact of religion being mediated by culture that makes a particular religion what it is. While religion as a social phenomenon is universal, how religion is experienced and practised by the adherents in a given society makes it

particular. Specific expressions in beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols make religion typical to a particular area, environment and its socio-economic context. Since religious ideas, values and experiences develop from the total cultural matrix of a society, religious beliefs, customs and rituals can be understood only in relation to that cultural matrix. Thus, we can speak of Hinduism in India, which is very different from Hinduism as practised in Sri Lanka or Trinidad. The same is true of Buddhism in Asia, Islam in the Middle East and Christianity in the West.

This difference is noticeable not only between countries but also within a country and even within a region. The regional cultures do play an important role in shaping the way religion is practised by the people of that region. Nevertheless, we can also speak of the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, and Islamic cultures. There are certain commonalities in the doctrines and basic beliefs of a religion that are more or less static and are maintained, in spite of the differences noticed among these religions and their capacity to adapt to a particular culture. This gives a religion a unity that could be recognised anywhere in the world. Thus, one can speak of Christianity without making any reference to any country or people, and so is the case with all other religions of the world. Religion is particular to a culture and at the same time it has a universal character.

Interaction among Religions

Societies do not live in isolation. As Kramer (1960:26) observes,

The occurrence and importance of cultural contact in the course of history have been far greater than we often know or imagine. Cultural anthropology ... (has) shown the great significance of migrations and reception of foreign material and spiritual, cultural element even in prehistoric times, taking place on a grand scale between all the five continents.

In congruence with the physical movement and the spread of people and cultures across the world down the centuries, religions have moved from their places of origin. They have encountered other religions and interacted with them in multiple ways.

Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are classic examples of religions that have moved far and wide from their places of origin and interacted intensely with other religions. Buddhism originated in the middle of the fifth century BC in North India and spread to other regions like Sri Lanka, Myanmar (Burma), Thailand, China, Tibet, Korea, Japan, Vietnam, Mongolia, Nepal and Bhutan. Christianity, since its birth after the death of Christ, spread initially in the Greco-Roman world. Its second wave of expansion was in Europe and with colonisation in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries it spread to the colonies. Islam began in Mecca about 610 AD, and after the initial expansion in the Middle East, North Africa and Western Europe, it spread to Central Asia, the Indian Peninsula, Eastern Europe, and Africa South of Sahara, Malaysia and Indonesia (Beaver et al. 1992:314-33, 228-42). The spread of these religions resulted in the emergence of definite locations for each religion vis-à-vis the local cultures and religions. Thus, while Islam acquired a specific location vis-à-vis the religions in India after the Mogul conquests, Christianity came to hold a definite position during the European colonisation of India.

With the possibility of this cultural exchange in view, we can distinguish between the indigenous and implanted religions. An *indigenous religion* is one which has originated within a given socio-cultural context and has developed within it over a prolonged period of time. It is also called the *native religion*. The innumerable tribal

religions are typical illustrations of such indigenous religions. An *implanted religion* is one which, having had its origin outside a given socio-cultural context, takes root there under certain socio-historical conditions. It is also called *alien religion*. The incoming religion has to encounter both the existing culture and religion. During this encounter, the interacting religions adopt a process of give and take or one of them dominates the other by imposing its own religious symbols and meanings.

Historically, the incoming or 'alien' religions have become a part of the host society under various circumstances. Trade, commerce and military conflicts and conquests, proselytisation through welfare and other activities are the most common circumstances under which interaction among religions have taken place.

The encounters and interactions between the native and the new religions have resulted in a process of religio-cultural adaptation. There has been an interplay of multiple factors in shaping the forms and content of the interacting religions. In the ultimate analysis these religions, both 'native' and 'alien,' appear to have inevitably borrowed some elements from the other religions and have incorporated them in their own. Under certain conditions they have even discarded some elements of their own religion.

The interaction can further be explained in the ways in which some religions like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam interacted with local cultures and religions in regions of the world. In the process of conversion to Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam people have been relating to the religio-cultural symbols of the new religion as well as to those of their earlier religion in different ways: The first possibility is the complete negation of the old religious symbols and the adoption of the new religious symbols. The second possibility is the partial negation and partial affirmation of the old religious symbols and the

adoption of the new religious symbols. Finally, the third possibility is the full affirmation and retention of the old religious symbols, which in reality is not possible and conversion itself would be meaningless.

However, the extent of negation and affirmation depends on the social background of the converts. Studies have shown that whenever there is a mass conversion there is a tendency to retain some of the earlier religious symbols and religio-cultural practices. This is so because the converts belong to a homogeneous background and that they find it easier to partially retain their earlier moorings (Hrangkhuma 1998). Thus, the second possibility in relating with symbols appears to be realistic and observed reality.

For example, Buddhism in China has undergone inner transformation due to the impact of the Chinese political economy and culture. The monks made concessions to various beliefs of the lay people (Max Weber 1967: 257-71). As Kramer (1960:160 and 167) observes, in China Buddhism has retained its well established 'ancestral worship or the treasury of magical lore,' and in Japan it has assimilated to the extent that 'the common people do not distinguish between Buddhist divine beings and Shinto gods.' Houtart and Lemerciner (1985:187) also point out that Buddhism in Sri Lanka had no difficulty in achieving the necessary synthesis. Accordingly, though Buddhism originated in India, it came to be known in China as the Chinese Buddhism and elsewhere as the Japanese Buddhism, the Thai Buddhism and the Sinhalese Buddhism. Similarly, with reference to Islam in Africa, King (1971:100) has observed that it 'was more akin to its native inclinations and that many African customs can sail into the future under the lee of Islamic customs which are really remnants from the pre-Islamic days of Arabs.'

Considering the history of Christianity, Yinger (1971:484) has noted that Catholicism has proved marvellously adaptable to changing circumstances:

Christianity was strongly influenced by the setting in which it developed. Historical research has shown that many of the elements of Christianity that were long thought by its adherents to be unique were common ideas, practices and myths in the ancient world. Some of its doctrines and practices were added, as it developed from a small Jewish cult into a dominant religion (ibid. 482).

From the beginning Christianity has sought to establish its relevance with the existing culture in which it became a part. Wach (1971:272) points to the process of adaptation that Christianity underwent when he says, 'The first phase of early Christian society was determined by the social, economic, and cultural conditions of the late Roman Empire, to which the new Christian community had to adopt.'

Christianity has continued to change, and has continued to absorb new elements. Heyndrick (1991:161) observes that the faith-healing and exorcism in Chinese Christianity is directly related to the Chinese folk religion. While referring to the Japanese Christians, Crollius (1986a:137) finds that, for the Japanese, ancestral worship is a very important part of life and it has found its expression in prayers for the dead that the Church has officially recognised the same.

Though the observed reality is the second possibility in relating with symbols, there are cases of full affirmation of the new religion. For instance Harber (1995:14) found that the low-caste converts to Christianity 'frequently resisted orientalising efforts to promote indigenisation and instead embraced opportunities for westernisation. [They] often preferred western ways to *prima facie* indigenous ones; frequently the latter

signified to them aspects of caste or regional oppression that they wished to avoid rather than embrace.'

Interaction among religions in India. India is as multi-religious country. According to the 1991 Census, the religious composition of India's population is as follows: Hindus 82.41 percent, Muslims 11.67 percent, Christians 2.32 percent, Sikhs 1.99 percent, Buddhists 0.77 percent, Jains 0.41 percent and others 0.40 percent. Hinduism, the religion of the vast majority of the people of India, is considered to be as old as the Indian civilisation itself, with its existence traced back to more than 3,000 years. Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism emerged as reactions to the orthodoxy of Brahmanical Hinduism. In addition to these indigenous religions, India is host to several implanted religions like Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Zoroastrianism. Though originating outside the country these religions have been so integral a part of the Indian society for centuries that they have become and are regarded as 'Indian' religions.

A dominant view is that the plurality of religions constitutes a single cultural stream and that concepts of 'alien' and 'native' do not apply in the case of religions within India. However, one comes across scholars who apply these concepts to explain the inter-religious interactions. Radhakrishnan (1992:308), for instance, makes the following observation about Hinduism's adaptation to native cults:

Behind the façade of Vedic orthodoxy and its tendency to abstract symbolism, an extensive and deep rooted system of popular beliefs and cults and a decided tendency to anthropomorphic presentation prevailed. The Vedic religion, however, absorbed, embodied, preserved the types and rituals of older cults. Instead of destroying them, it adapted them to its own requirements. It took so much from the social life of the Dravidians and other native inhabitants of India that it is very

difficult to disentangle the original Aryan elements from others. The interpenetration has been so complex, subtle, continuous, with the result that there has grown up a distinct Hindu civilisation which is neither Aryan nor Dravidian nor aboriginal.

In the way the Vedic religion adopted itself to the religions of the native inhabitants of India, the implanted religions such as Islam and Christianity too went through a process of adaptation. Commenting on the adaptation of Islam in India, Ahmad (1987) notes that there has been injection of caste into the theoretically egalitarian ethos of Islam. He also observes that Muslim marriages are conducted according to local customs (1976:157). He finds parallels between Muslim worship and household rituals with that of local Hindu devotional practices. In brief, he highlights the uniqueness of Islam in India (1981:7).

Thus, Indian culture is deeply rooted in the pluralistic ethos of age-old history providing creative expressions, value-sustenance and belief patterns to thousands of communities that constitute the contemporary Indian society. The interaction between alien and native religions presents an important area of sociological study of religion in India. The instant study analyses the nature and implications of such an interaction with reference to Roman Catholicism¹ in South India.

Catholicism in India

Christianity as a religion has its origin in the preaching of the disciples of Jesus Christ. In the beginning, the disciples carried the message of Christ in the Hebrew and Greek regions. Gradually it took root in the Roman Empire. What began as a charismatic movement of people embracing a new way of life on receiving baptism in the name of

Jesus became an organised state religion in the Roman Empire under Constantine (AD 306-337). Latter Christianity entered into synthesis with the Greco-Roman, or with what was popularly known as the Meditarian culture. Subsequently it spread to various parts of Europe and got more and more organised in terms of doctrines, rituals and practices. And, with the European nations establishing their colonies in Africa, America and Asia, Christianity also spread in those continents (Pelikan 1987:348 and 349).

Christianity² was introduced into India through two main movements historically separated by some fourteen hundred years.³ The first movement was soon after the death of Jesus. It was the East Syrian Christian movement of traders and merchants, who made converts and established settlements of Christians on the southwest coast in what is now the State of Kerala. Thus, Christianity in India is as old as Christianity itself (Mundadan 1984).

Tracing the history of Christianity in India, Church historian Mundadan (1984:21-64) claims that St. Thomas, one of the twelve close disciples of Jesus, brought Christianity to Kerala in the first century AD. Fuller (1976:54) notes that while this legend has various versions, it is by no means impossible that St. Thomas did come to Kerala. Irrespective of the historical veracity of St. Thomas legend, it is important to note that unlike elsewhere in India Christianity existed in Kerala much before the European conquest and colonisation with which Christianity is normally associated (Visvanathan 1999). In other words, in India Christianity has a long history extending to about 2,000 years.

During the pre-colonial period Christianity remained confined largely to the Malabar region (K. J. John 1981:349). The second movement came from Western Europe

in the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the Portuguese, in their voyage of discovery, took control of the trade centres and established colonies. During the sixteenth century and the first half of the seventeenth century, when colonialism spread roots in the western coastal regions, one sees notable expansion of the Church.⁴ The Church established Christian communities along the western and eastern coasts and other parts of India (Thekkedath 1982:3). The real thrust of the influence of Christianity came to this region along with European imperialism during the nineteenth century (M. D. David 1985).

This period is viewed as a period of inflexibility and in particular the age of European colonial expansion deeply affected missionary activities. In the views of many missionaries and ecclesiastical authorities, Catholicism was so integrated into European culture that no distinction could be made between them. Thus, conversion meant accepting the European cultural expression of faith. The priests brought by the Portuguese introduced a form of Catholicism which though had accommodated itself to Greco-Roman culture did not seek to adapt itself to Indian culture. In 1622, efforts were made by some members of the Church to condemn the ecclesiastical and European ethnocentrism and encourage indigenisation of Catholicism (Arbuckle 1986:513 and 514). A notable person in this regard was the Italian Jesuit missionary, Robert de Nobili, who, in the first half of the seventeenth century, adopted the life-style of a *sannyasi* (see Chap. 2).

Thus, the Church took a different turn with the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries in the fifteenth century. While the St. Thomas Christians had not given up their native practices, the Portuguese priests persuaded, and even coerced the native converts to give up their traditional practices. Christianity was introduced from the West,

with a Western understanding and interpretation and Western cultural forms. A similar observation has been made with reference to the introduction of Christianity in Africa (see Abogurrin 1988:235).

Accounting for the implantation of the European form of Christianity, Amalorpavadass (1978:29) writes,

Church being a part of society, knowingly or unknowingly transmitted along with the Gospel the cultures of the countries from which missionaries came forth. The natural and simple fact that the missionaries were westerners implied also that they were products and expressions of the west. Christianity came to be associated by them with western culture and western cultural expressions were identified as the Christian culture.

One of the important features of Christianity in India is its uneven geographic spread and the qualitative diversity found in Catholicism. These different groups were born of very different traditions. The process of conversion to Catholicism in the Portuguese colonial territories, such as Goa for instance, was markedly different from that among the Assamese tribes. Similarly, the implantation of a group of immigrants from abroad, such as the Syrians in Kerala, and the conversion of the fisherfolk of the Tamil Nadu coast, were the result of very contrasting social mechanisms. These differences resulted in the formation of diverse socio-religious groups within the same Church (Houtart and Lemerciner 1981:2).

It is important to note that the Catholicism that came to India in the colonial period was a fully evolved religion compared to the Christianity that was brought by St. Thomas in the first century AD. It had already developed its own identity, as regards beliefs, rituals, and symbols, on the one hand and doctrine and theology, on the other. It

had also established a structure of authority that meticulously supervised the functioning of the Church all over the world. Nevertheless, this fully evolved religion has gradually gone through a process of give and take in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Thus, as Amaladass (1988:75) observes, from the beginning Christianity had to encounter native religions and culture; and, in India, the religion with which Christianity had to interact followed varied religio-cultural practices broadly known as Hinduism.

There are two aspects involved in the interaction between Christianity and the native converts to Christianity in India. One, in the initial stage, Christianity remained a 'non-Indian' or 'foreign' religion. The other, the first Indian converts to Christianity, either Hindus or tribals, obviously had nothing of the Christian symbols in their worship. Given their traditional religious background, the converts tried to retain certain symbols and practices related to their old religion, while at the same time accepting certain symbols, beliefs, rituals and practices of the new religion. The dynamics of this religious interaction reflected a tendency to combine elements from both religions and cultures. The converts accepted the forms of worship and rites, which were predominantly Latin, while they continued to practice their traditional religious beliefs and practices. As a consequence what was once 'foreign' gradually became 'indigenous.' To understand how exactly this has happened we ask: What are the native religio-cultural practices that still persist among the Catholics? What meanings do the Catholics attribute to these practices? In other words, how have they reconciled with these practices along with the religion they follow? Has the Catholic Church accepted and legitimised these practices? And, has Catholicism become fully or partially integrated with the native culture? These and related questions are sought to be examined in this study.

cultures. Focusing on the socio-religious rituals practised in Christianity they claim that there has been a high degree of adaptation with native religious and cultural traditions. Estborn (1959), for instance, observes that the ceremonies and customs followed by Christians in Tamil Nadu are almost identical to that of the Hindus.

There are studies which go further to explore the adaptation of Christianity. They point to a multi-directional process. Sahay (1976:22), in his study on the Christianisation of the Uraon tribe in Central India, identifies five types of cultural processes: Oscillation, Scrutinisation, Combination, Indigenisation and Retroversion. We shall later consider the definitions of these processes.

Some studies claim that the process of adaptation was not comprehensive in the sense that it did not touch all aspects of the lives of the converts. According to Godwin (1972), conversion to Christianity and contact with the Portuguese have not greatly changed the socio-economic life of the community. The adaptation remained confined to the sphere of religion.

It is often assumed that the converts were passively adapted to the new way of life through conversion to Christianity. In this the role of the foreign missionaries is emphasised. Pruett's (1974) study of the Baptist Mission in Nagaland claims that, around 1930, there was a strong movement in Nagaland and Manipur to enforce a westernised culture. Pruett, however, notes that the general thrust was towards an authentic Ao Christianity. He suggests that the converts did not receive the new faith passively, and they played a definite role in evolving a new variant of Christianity. Bayly (1992:454) shares this perspective when she says, 'New doctrines, texts and cult personalities were

introduced by a variety of Indian, West Asian and Churchmen, but over times these were taken over and transformed by the recipients.'

Houtart and Lemerciner (1982) draw our attention to indigenisation in areas other than culture and to aspects other than religious rituals and symbols. They refer to the changes in the structure of the Catholic Church and note that after India became independent from the British colonial rule, the authority structure of the Church got indigenised, meaning that the Indian clergy replaced the European clergy at all levels of authority within the Church.

Roche's (1984) study reveals that indigenisation was not confined to any particular community. He studied indigenisation among the fisherfolk in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu and observed, 'Parava [fisherfolk] Catholicism was Latin Catholicism [read as Roman Catholicism] by adaptation but Tamilised Catholicism in practice' (ibid. 48). Devdutt (1984:55) makes a similar observation with regard to the Catholics in Kerala.

Unable or unwilling to be uprooted from their cultural moorings, the converts seem to adopt a strategy of filling their original religious symbols with parallels from the new religion. Bayly (1992) explains how the warrior Christian saints filled the place vacated by the warrior kings and heroes whose valour was celebrated in their native culture. In this manner we understand some aspects of the relationship of the Christian communities with the political powers and the religious world of the time. While discussing the Christian fisher women of Tamil Nadu village, Ram (1992) notes very close resemblance between the veneration of Virgin Mary and the worship of the goddess in popular Hinduism. This Diehl (1969:159) calls substitution, which is the outcome of

the meeting of religions. He points out that the meeting of religions may mean a complete change of context in the sense that a person takes over a set of concepts and traditions entirely different from that of his old religion or that he may substitute them while the functions remain essentially the same.

Yet another way in which Christianity took shape was to superimpose the Christian meaning to cultural elements that persisted with the converts. Sinha (1989) points out how a tribal festival like Nava Khani (harvest festival) was allowed to continue after conversion and how the Christian liturgy was made an integral part of that festival.

Allowing both explicitly Christian practices and the traditional practices in the same ritual is said to be another mode in which adaptation took place in India. In order to explain this, Visvanathan (1999) makes a distinction between the 'domestic' and the 'canonical' rituals. Canonical rituals are rituals those that are performed in the Church. Those rituals which though are not officially accepted as an integral part of Christian rituals and yet performed in the domestic sphere are domestic rituals. She observes that Christians comfortably maintain the distance between these types of rituals and perform them with equal respect.

Though converted to a religion different from the rest of the community, there still persists the need to identify oneself beyond religious identification. Thus, caste identity has remained a part of Christians in India. This social reality is revealed in studies of caste and Christianity in rural Andhra Pradesh (Reddy 1987), Kerala (Fuller 1976) and Tamil Nadu (Mosse 1986).

Often adaptation could be a reversible process. What was once accepted as part of Christian rituals could at some point of time be abandoned fully or partially. Mosse

(1986:375) explains how caste and associated practices during Hindu religious festivals became part of the Christian celebrations. According to Hindu tradition, those who occupied the authority structure were given importance in accordance with their position. This practice was known as *kooyil mariyaatai*. The Christians who had followed the same for decades abolished all caste privileges in 1983.

In the process of conversion the earlier identity of the convert has to encounter a new identity. Whatever may be his or her inclination to adapt to the new identity, the convert is forced to relate with both identities all the time. In the process one becomes dominant. More's (1998) study on Hindu-Christian interaction in Pondichery between 1700 and 1900 highlights the dominance of Christian identity over their past Hindu identity.

In dealing with these two identities, the converts tend to be selective as in the case of the Catholics in two Goan villages studied by Robinson (1998). She observes that the converts avoided practices which are explicitly Hindu in orientation like the festivals of Ganesh Chaturthi, Divali, etc., whereas they continued to follow the rituals associated with agricultural seasons and the feasts of the Churches were incorporated to synchronise with them.

There are communities in which one finds not deliberate selectivity but simple combination of both Christian and Hindu practices. For example, 'tie a cross round their necks and on the same thread put a Hindu charm or talisman' (Luke and Carman 1968:165).

Many accounts of South Indian Christians view the non-Christian elements in their beliefs and practices as 'hangovers' from the Hindu culture. Studying the persistence

of Hindu practices among Lutheran Christians, Diehl (1965:39-41 and 45-52) for example, concludes that these practices are 'hangovers,' deviations from the Christian norms, the presence of which is explained in terms of social obligations and pressure from the dominant Hindu groups. In contrast, Mosse (1986:1 and 2) considers the way in which these constitute part of a structured whole comprised of both Hindu and Christian elements. Using ethnographic and historical data, he explores how Christianity 'has become embedded in the indigenous social and religious order.'

Studies of non-Hindu communities generally focus on the commonalities they share with the orthodox Hindus rather than on the ways in which they are different (Parry 1974:118). Agreeing with Parry, Caplan (1980:214) argues that though 'religious minorities are not independent of their environment, and...they do not constitute autonomous societies, it does not necessarily follow that the distinctive religious beliefs of these minorities are thereby unable to exert a crucial or even dominant influence on their adherents.' He, therefore, recommends that the study of non-Hindu communities should look at what is distinctive about the religious beliefs and practices and not what they share in common with Hinduism. Responding to these studies Robinson (1998:17) holds that a balance could be achieved only if the two form part of a single perspective. Her study postulates that there is unlikely to be a community born through conversion which radically and completely overthrows its earlier moorings, and observes that the new is perceived through and integrated with the old.

One of the first studies on the lived Christianity of a small community in India is that by Diehl (1965) who found that the lived religion of the Lutherans in a Tamil village embraced practices from Hinduism. In his study of Christianisation of the Uraon of

Central India, Sahay (1976, see also 1986) has enumerated the cultural process through which Christianity absorbs elements of tribal religion into the lived religion of tribal converts. Neither of these studies is concerned only with Catholicism; while Diehl deals with the Protestantism, Sahay deals with both Catholicism and Protestantism.

Much light has been thrown on indigenisation of Christianity by the above mentioned studies. Each of these studies has explained the changes and continuities in the practice of Christianity with regard to some individual aspects. However, they do not cover all aspects of the life of Catholics. An integral approach is essential to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the process of indigenisation of Catholicism. Accordingly, this study covers aspects that are significant from the point of the Catholics (Laity) and the Church (the Clergy). It examines the role of the clergy and the laity in the process of indigenisation of Catholicism in South India.

Indigenisation: A Conceptual Clarification

To understand the interaction among religions scholars have used such concepts as adaptation, acculturation, syncretism and indigenisation. *Adaptation* is a process by which a group or an individual adjusts its/her or his behaviour to suit the social environment (Scott 1999:5). *Acculturation*, 'is the process of change toward greater cultural similarity brought about by contact between two or more groups' (Yinger 1997:69). It encompasses not only the external cultural traits, such as dress and language, but also the internal ones, such as beliefs and values. *Syncretism*, is the term

Used to denote any mixture of two or more religions, as for instance, in Hellenistic syncretism, where elements from several religions are merged and influence each other mutually. It might also be used to refer to cases when elements from one religion are accepted into another without basically changing

the character of the receiving religion (because of the relatively small quantity of adopted elements) (Ringgren (1969:7).

Amalorpavadass (1978:47), a theologian, views *indigenisation* not as mere going back to the traditional culture and religions. Rather it involves addressing itself to both traditional and modern cultures in so far as the values, elements and aspects of the traditional culture continue to be in vogue today and permeate the modern form of one's national culture.

As already mentioned, in his study on the interaction between Christianity and the Uraons in Central India, Sahay (1976:22) delineates five types of cultural process:

- *Oscillation* is the 'nominal affiliation with Christianity and partial understanding of it. The simultaneous observance by the converts beliefs and practices having Christian and native elements, which normally tend to be contradictory.'
- *Scrutinization* is 'a process that leads to the elimination of certain Sarna (religion of the Uraons) elements on the one hand and to the retention of others on the other, on proper scrutiny.'
- *Combination* is 'the mixing up or combination of the retained Sarna elements with newly introduced Christian elements.'
- *Indigenisation* refers to the

Persistence of indigenous cultural values and beliefs. This, within the framework of a particular Sarna belief or practice, refers to the replacement of Sarna elements by Christian ones, the two generally being contradictory to each other. This process is similar to cultural combination, with the only difference being that here we note the partial replacement of a Sarna belief or practice by functionally similar Christian elements fulfilling indigenous needs. Such a specialised type of

replacement by or combination of Christian elements does not seem to disturb the framework of the indigenous beliefs or practice in question; rather the new elements get integrated in it and are thus indigenised.

- *Retroversion* is 're-evaluation of indigenous cultural beliefs and practices.'

The Church in India has shown a favourable attitude towards indigenisation, especially after the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). Many Indian Christian thinkers were encouraged by the outcome of this Council and have shown interest in developing an indigenous theology, forms of worship, and art and architecture, and have initiated inter-religious dialogue. In the process of making the Church Indigenous they use the term 'inculturation.' *Inculturation* refers to the process by which a particular Church expresses its faith and life in and through the local culture (Geffre 1995:24). This concept has been used mostly by the theologians and the meanings carried by this concept are theological in orientation.

While some of these concepts have been referred to in this study, the main concept around which it revolves is indigenisation. *Indigenisation* essentially denotes the interaction between two communities which are culturally alien to each other. Though they are alien to each other one pre-exists the other in a given socio-cultural space. The pre-existing community is viewed as native while that which begins its interaction at a later point of time is viewed as alien.

Following this, we define indigenisation of Catholicism as a process by which the Catholic community has absorbed, totally or partially, some elements of the native religion and acquired an identity which is different from its counterparts elsewhere in the world where Christianity is practised, for example, in Africa, China, Japan, etc. In this

study we look at indigenisation of Catholicism as a process whereby the Catholics in India incorporate Indian cultural symbols in their worship, lifecycle rituals and popular beliefs and practices.

Indigenisation is basically a cultural process in the sense that the interaction between the two religions is characterised by exchange of cultural symbols in form and/or content. The exchange takes place through different modes such as partial selection, partial retention, total absorption, total retention, etc. These modes explain the level of indigenisation that Catholicism has gone through.

Indigenisation is fundamentally a collective process. So much so it is almost impossible to locate the source that prompts changes in the cultural sphere. Nevertheless, the exchange is conducted by individuals and groups. Identifying and understanding the role of individuals and groups is crucial for any sociological inquiry into the process of indigenisation.

Every religion has its own structure of authority having its own specific character. At the same time, the vast majority of the people on whom such authority is exercised assert their own right to conceive their own deities, modes of worship, and norms and customs. While considering the process of indigenisation and the role of individuals and groups, this distinction needs to be maintained to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon.

Briefed by these conceptual clarifications, the present study proceeds to understand the process of indigenisation among the Catholics in Tamil Nadu and some parts of South India.

Scope and Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to understand the process of indigenisation of Catholicism in South India. Specifically, the study has sought to examine the incorporation of the native religio-cultural symbols in the rituals practised by the Catholics on the one hand, and to analyse the reinterpretation of the Catholic rituals and symbols by the native converts to Catholicism, on the other. Thus, we spell out:

- The study examines the socio-historical factors responsible for initiating the indigenisation process in Tamil Nadu.
- The study analyses the extent of indigenisation in the religious and social spheres. It investigates the specific aspects of indigenisation in spheres such as worship and celebrations; rites of passage; agrarian activity; everyday concerns of life; art, music, drama, and architecture; rituals carried out in the pilgrim centres; and the Catholic ashrams.
- The study classifies the rituals into two categories: (1) Church prescribed rituals (2) Native rituals, in order to understand why and how indigenisation takes place.
- The study identifies the crucial actors in the indigenisation of Catholicism.
- The study examines the modes adopted by the Catholics in the process of indigenising Catholicism. It delves into the methods adopted by them in legitimising the native practices and dealing with the tension arising as a result of indigenisation of Catholicism.
- Finally, it discusses the emerging trends in the indigenisation of Catholicism.

This study is guided by a few lead questions:

- In the first place, what are the native cultural symbols that have been retained by the converts? The study seeks to locate the cultural/religious symbols of Hindus found in the Catholic community.
- In the second place, what are the modes adopted by the Catholics and the Church in this process of indigenising Catholicism?
- Finally, the human agency of indigenisation is considered. The Catholic Church in India, as elsewhere in the world, has its well-established and highly organised structure of authority. There is a well-guarded gap between the vast majority of lay people or laity and the small section of the clergy who exercise religious authority over the laity. How did these segments within the Catholic Church involve themselves in the process of indigenisation in South India?

The study has adopted a descriptive framework for understanding how the process of indigenisation has taken place in the religio-cultural milieu of the Tamil Catholics. In this venture Geertz's (1973:14) concept of 'thick description' seems to be a useful tool. To Geertz, an adequate understanding of a culture of a community is possible only through a minute description of the details of the cultural expressions. Using this approach, we record in as many as details possible of the important aspects of the lives of the Catholics in rural Tamil Nadu. We then derive the sociological meanings of these practices to understand the dynamics of indigenisation.

The Locale of the Study

With its history of nearly 2000 years, Catholicism has taken roots and grown in different parts of India. However, for certain historical reasons, the Catholics are concentrated in certain parts of India such as the states of Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, the

Chota Nagpur region, and the North Eastern states. The present study is largely confined to the state of Tamil Nadu as it meets satisfactorily the requirement of a field suitable for the study.

First of all, the Catholics constitute a sizeable percentage (5.69) of the total population of Tamil Nadu (*Catholic Directory* 2000), a size that is neither too small nor too large. Neither of these conditions would have been suitable for our study: When it is small, the community could be completely isolated by a reactionary non-Christian majority. When it is too large, it may subdue the non-Christians and resist any indigenisation. Hence, a middle ground on this count is suitable to pursue the study of indigenisation where a process of give and take could normally be expected to take place.

Second, it was in this region that the first ever experiment in indigenisation was undertaken nearly 400 years ago by the Italian missionary Robert de Nobili. On account of such experiments, the Catholics in this state remain well integrated with the people of the region, providing ample scope for a study on indigenisation.

Third, this study concentrates on the rural areas of Tamil Nadu, where the traditional religious practices are still found in existence. Thus, the community in the rural area provides a better vantage point to understand the process of indigenisation. Though the Catholics living in urban areas have not given up their religion, they seem to abandon many of their traditional practices as a result of education, urbanisation, etc.

Four, caste is central to all social processes in India. The caste system being well entrenched in Tamil Nadu seems to have played a significant role in mediating the establishment of Catholicism in that state. The Tamil Catholics too maintain caste distinctions, though not to the same extent as the Hindus.

Finally, the familiarity of the research scholar with the language and culture of the Tamils is yet another reason why Tamil Nadu was chosen as the field for the study. Since, this study deals with cultural symbols, rituals, etc., familiarity with the field, its people and their language is an asset in the understanding of a socio-cultural process such as indigenisation.

A preliminary visit to the probable field sites in the month of June 2000 made it possible to ascertain their suitability for fieldwork and to establish contact with the local Catholics. The final selection of the field sites was done in consultation with the locally knowledgeable persons (the priests, laity and social scientists). Table 1.1 shows the field sites from where the primary data were collected by the researcher, and Table 1.2 lists the other places visited by the researcher in connection with the study. The location of these sites is shown in Map 1.1.

Table 1. Field Work Sites

Area	District	No. of Catholic Households	Caste Under Focus
Tiruchirappalli (T)	Tiruchirappalli	6	Brahmins
Rajakambeeram (V)	Sivagangai	170	Vellalars
Idaikattur (V)	Sivagangai	46	
Vatakku Andavoorani (V)	Ramnad	93	Udayars
Thekku Andavoorani (V)	Ramnad	63	
Sengudi (V)	Ramnad	100	
Thedakottai (V)	Sivagangai	65	
Keelauchani (V)	Sivagangai	130	Nadars
Valghiramanickam (V)	Sivagangai	110	Parayars
Savariyar Pattanam (V)	Sivagangai	26	

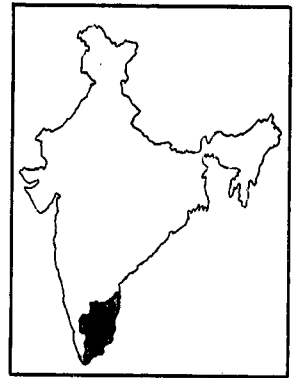
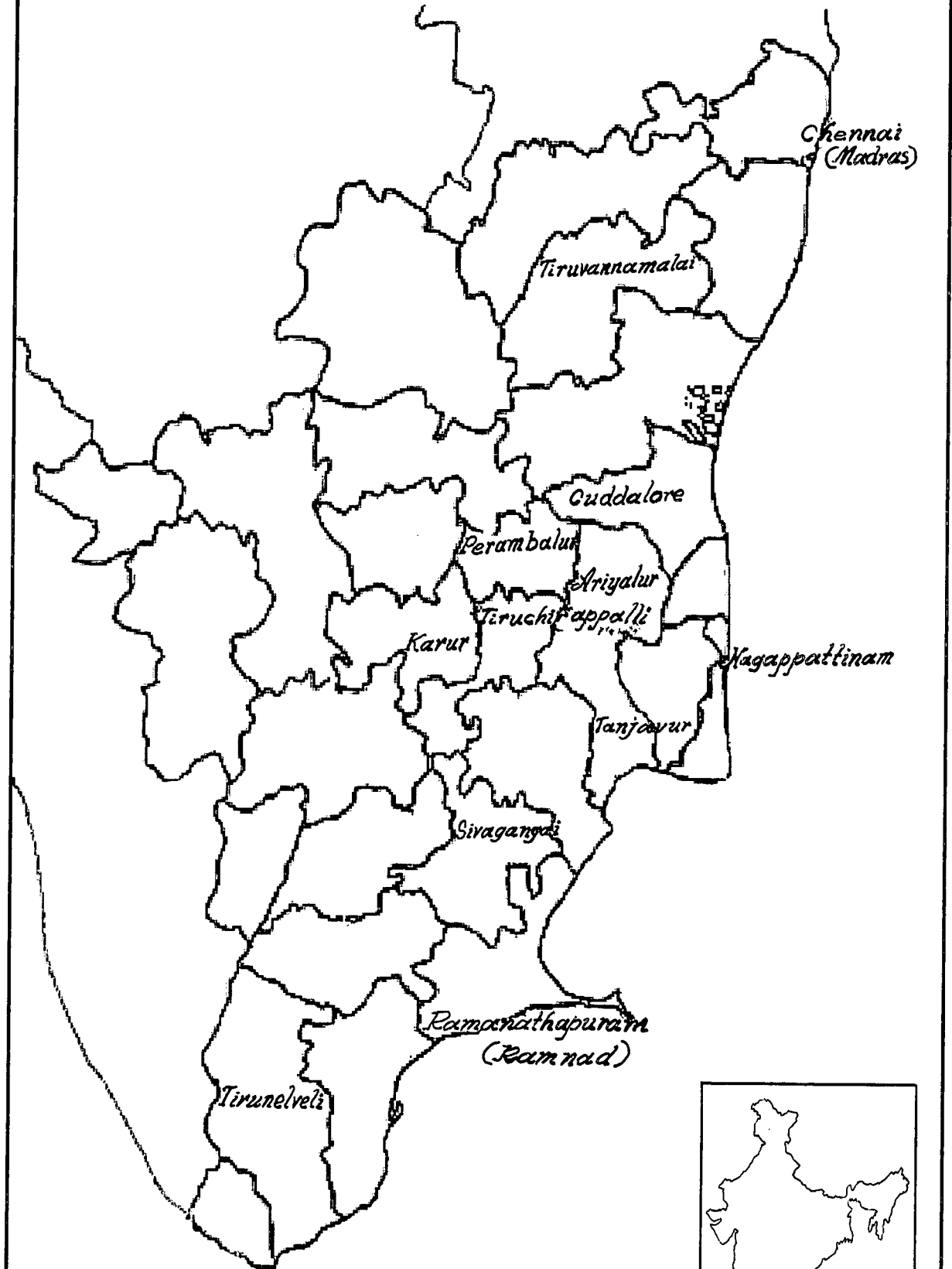
Note: T= Town, V= Village

Table 1.2 Other Places Visited by the Researcher:

Focus	Institution/Site	Place and District
Ashrams		
Catholic	Saccidananda Ashram	Thannirpalli, Karur
	Anjali Ashram	Mysore, Karnataka
Hindu	Ramana Shri Ashram	Tiruvannamalai
Monastery		
Catholic	Benedictine Monastery	Bangalore, Karnataka
Hindu	Shri Mat Andavar Ashram	Tiruchirappalli
Pilgrim centres		
Catholic Shrines	Adaikalamatha	Elakuruchi, Ariyalur
	Periyannayaki Maata	Konankuppam, Cuddalore
	St. Anthony	Muthupattinam, Ramnad
	St. John de Britto	Oriyur, Ramnad
	Our Lady of Health	Vailankanni, Nagappattinam
	St. Sebastian	Valayampatti, Sivagangai
Hindu Temples	Kali	Kollankudi, Sivagangai
	Mariamman	Thiruvettriur, Ramnad
	Mariamman	Karai, Sivagangai
	Sri Ranganathar	Srirangam, Tiruchirappalli
Muslim	Nellaiappar	Tirunelveli
	Nagore Andavar	Nagore, Nagappattinam
Architecture		
	NBCLC Chapel	Bangalore (Karnataka)
	Arul Perum Jyothi Church	Kayavayal, Sivagangai
Drama		
	Kokkurani (V)	Ramnad
	Idaikattur (V)	Sivagangai

Note: V= Village

MAP 1.1 TAMIL NADU



The Catholic Community in Tamil Nadu

As a religio-cultural community, the Catholics of Tamil Nadu have acquired their own socio-cultural space. A brief description of this may be helpful to understand the process of indigenisation that has been taking place among them.

In many villages of Tamil Nadu the Catholics co-exist with the Hindus, though there are villages which are predominantly inhabited by the Catholics. The most basic unit of the Catholic community is called *paMku* (parish). A *paMku* consists of certain number of villages where Catholics live. There is no uniform policy regarding how many villages a *paMku* can hold. Normally a *paMku* will have a minimum of ten villages. Each *paMku* will have one or two *paMku gurus* (parish priests) who are based in one of these villages. The *paMku guru* is expected to visit periodically all the villages under the *paMku* and to perform the Church-prescribed rituals there.

The next higher administrative unit is *maraiivaTTaaram* (The Vicariate) and the one who officiates it is called *maraiivaTTaara guru* (Vicar General). The *maraiivaTTaara guru* has a limited role of animating the *paMku gurus* (parish priests) and sorting out problems of the *paMkus* coming under his jurisdiction. The highest administrative unit is the *maraimaavaTTam* (The Diocese). The *Aayar* (Bishop) is the head of the *maraimaavaTTam* and is solely responsible for all the affairs within the *maraimaavaTTam*.

The *paMku kooyil* (parish church) and the *paMku guru* (parish priest) together give the religious identity to the Catholics in the *paMku*. All Catholics scattered in villages in a radius of ten km acquire their identity as 'Catholics' only by their association with the *paMku* and the *paMku guru*. In villages where they constitute a minority, their

association with the *paMku/paMku guru* is significant for the way they are viewed by the Hindus. At the same time, it is to be noted that the totality of their identity is not determined by the *paMku/paMku guru*. Much of their life is lived in association with the Hindus in the village and they partake in different aspects of the village including the religious practices and there seems to exist a composite culture shared by both the Catholics and the Hindus.

In the composite culture shared by the Catholics, caste remains an integral part. Though Catholicism does not officially recognise caste, every Catholic has a caste identity. Vellalar, Udayar, Nadar, Konar, Pallar and Parayar are some of the numerically dominant castes in Tamil Nadu, and Catholics are drawn from these castes in a notable way. The Catholics belonging to other castes such as Brahmins, Mudaliar, Asari, etc. are very small in number. There is another caste known as Kallar, which is pre-ponderous in number, and there are a few Catholics from this caste.

The Vellalars, who are landowners and who do agriculture with hired labour, and the Udayars, who are peasants owning land and who cultivate mostly with domestic labour supplemented by hired labour, are the dominant castes. Nadars are the toddy tapers and they provide agriculture labour to the landowners to supplement their income. Konars are cattle breeders and the number of Catholics from their community is small. The Pallars and Parayars are the two segments of the 'untouchable' caste. The Pallars are said to be occupying a position higher than that of the Parayars. They are largely landless labours besides doing all menial jobs such as disposing carcasses, cleaning common place, etc. The converted Brahmins are engaged in various occupations and their earlier ritual position in the Hindu caste hierarchy is not significant as far as Catholicism is

concerned. Our study revolves around the five castes, namely, Catholic Brahmins, Vellalars, Udayars, Nadars and the Parayars.

It must be noted that in some villages where the Catholics of a particular caste live, Hindus belonging to the same caste also live. For instance, Andavoorani has both the Catholic Udayars and the Hindu Udayars. Similarly, Valghiramanickam has both the Catholic Parayars and the Hindu Parayars. The juxtaposition of the Hindu Udayars and the Catholic Udayars has far-reaching implications for the process of indigenisation.

Research Methods

The data on which this thesis is based were gathered during August 2000 - June 2001 and in February and March 2002. Initially the researcher spent ten days in both Vatakku and Thekku Andavoorani, Keelauchani, Rajakambeeram, and Valghiramanickam, and three days in Tiruchirappalli to gather information on the Catholic calendrical festivals, the life cycle rituals, beliefs and practices related to occupation, auspiciousness, evil, and religious practices carried out in the locally popular shrines. Based on the information so gathered, she prepared a calendar of events as they would be taking place in the respective villages. Accordingly, she visited the places as and when the events took place. The Catholics kept her informed of other events, e.g., marriages, etc, to take place in their villages. In some cases the researcher found it difficult to gather data. For instance, death was a sensitive subject. Not only, the researcher had to 'wait' for its occurrence, but also her presence at a funeral was often mistaken: the people thought that she was there to express her condolences!

The researcher had to keep in mind her dual role - one as a social researcher and another a nun of the Catholic Church. The Catholics of the village viewed her primarily

as a nun rather than as a researcher. This was explicit as they readily engaged with her regarding their everyday concerns of life (the Catholics expect a religious person to listen to them, speak words of comfort and pray for them). Thus, often the researcher had to wait patiently to get into discussion with them on the rituals and meanings attributed to them.

Since she was viewed as a nun of the catholic Church the researcher was not sure to what extent the Catholics would disclose their practices related to superstition, consulting non-Christian religious personnel and visiting shrines of other religions, as these practices are considered by the Church to be unchristian. This was the case with a few and some of them virtually avoided her while there were a number of them willing to discuss these matters and at the same time wanted her opinion on these issues once they knew that she was eliciting all this information as a researcher.

The researcher had to play two roles: one as a researcher interested in information and the other as a nun who cared for the welfare of the people. The latter role seemed more realistic since her religious identity is relatively more permanent than her role as a researcher. However, with her frequent visits her purpose became clear to the people and they co-operated in giving the needed information. On the whole the researcher was well received by the Catholics and the Hindus and had enriching experience in collecting data.

Our research design being basically descriptive and warranting a qualitative analysis, we needed a variety of qualitative data. Hence, a combination of methods was resorted to for collecting data. The primary method used was observation based on an 'observation chart' (see Appendix 1.1). Since rituals are essentially a part of a community's cultural repertoire, they are embedded in the collective behaviour of its

members. As such, their meanings often elude the verbal articulation by individual participants. The researcher was present at all the rituals recorded in the thesis and she observed their proceedings closely. In some cases the researcher adopted limited participation and marginally took part in the celebrations. In a few cases she adopted total participant-observation method. For example, she walked with the pilgrims a distance of about 210 km to Vailankanni. Similarly, she stayed for ten days in Saccidananda Ashram near Tiruchirappalli. In all these detailed field notes were recorded, the rituals were photographed and pictures of the places and diagrams related to certain beliefs were collected.

Notes from observation often needed to be clarified, understood and interpreted. Thus, after observing each ritual, the researcher held informal interviews with some of the participants present in the ritual. This not only amplified the meaning of observational data, but also helped to prevent the infiltration of her personal perceptions into their interpretation.

The Catholic Church provides one of the most organised theological trainings which the clergy are obliged to undergo. Some of these training centres have been proactive in initiating the process of indigenisation, especially after the Second Vatican Council. The priests and nuns trained in these centres have attempted in their respective place of work many experiments on indigenisation in worship, art and architecture, music, etc. Based on the reputation that they have gained in their respective fields, some theologians, priests, artists and musicians were selected for formal interviews to ascertain their views on indigenisation. Since some of these individuals were scattered, the

researcher decided to elicit their views through a mailed questionnaire. The interview guide and the questionnaire used are given in Appendix 1.1.

Indigenisation has been one of the most extensively discussed and debated subjects in the Church. Such discussions and debates are documented and stored in many libraries and archives of the Church. Thus, the secondary data, mainly in the form of Church documents and studies on Catholicism, were collected from the Dharmaram Library, Bangalore; Jnana Deepa Vidyapeeth, Pune; Jesuits Archives, Kodaikanal; Aikya Alayam, Sacred Heart Seminary and Sathanilyam, Chennai; St. Paul's Library, Tiruchirappalli; United Theological College, Bangalore; and Vidya Jyoti, Delhi. The researcher also benefited from her visit to the following libraries: Delhi School of Economics, Delhi; Goa University Library, Goa; Institute for Social and Economic Change, and Jyoti Nivas College, Bangalore; International Institute of Tamil Studies and Madras Institute of Developmental studies, Chennai, and Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai.

The data collected from these different sources form the basis of the findings presented in this thesis

Organisation of the Thesis

This thesis is divided into ten chapters, including the instant one introducing the study.

Chapter 2 presents an historical overview of indigenisation of Catholicism in Tamil Nadu in order to set a background for the present study. Contrary to the popular belief that indigenisation is a recent phenomenon, it is shown that it is as old as Christianity itself in India and that it has been central to Catholicism in Tamil Nadu for

nearly four centuries. The process of indigenisation has been dynamic in that it has passed through many stages expressing itself in different forms. It has always remained an issue of intense debate not only within India, but also in Europe from where the Catholicism travelled to India.

Worship is central to any religion: It is directed towards the sacred Being; it takes place in a sacred place and at a sacred time; and it is officiated by a sacred person. It is worship which gives a religion its identity. Accordingly, Chapter 3 deals with worship and celebrations as the primary aspect of Catholicism in which indigenisation has occurred. While the first part of this chapter focuses on worship in church *per se*, the second part analyses the rituals that are part of the calendrical celebrations of the Church and the annual church feast. This chapter establishes how the indigenous religious elements have gained grounds even in the sacred sphere of the church.

The rites of passage constitute the second most important arena for religious expression. They are concerned with the self and its need to cope up with the crises associated with different stages of life. The performance of the rituals associated with the rites of passage presents a complex situation: While some of these are performed exclusively in the sacred domain, namely, the church (e.g., baptism and first holy communion), some are performed exclusively in the domestic sphere (e.g., puberty ritual), and some are performed both in the sacred and domestic spheres (e.g., marriage and death rituals). In some of these rituals the priest is given central place (e.g., baptism, first holy communion and marriage), while in others the community elders play a crucial role (e.g., puberty ritual). Because of this complexity in the way the rituals are performed, the process of indigenisation also has acquired a complex character. Chapter 4 presents these

Endnotes

1. For the sake of brevity, unless otherwise specified, the terms Catholic, Catholics, Catholicism are used instead of Roman Catholic, Roman Catholics, and Roman Catholicism.
2. Christianity has two main streams, namely, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism. The Roman Catholics acknowledge the primacy of the Pope, the Bishop of Rome. The Protestants do not recognise the authority of the Pope. There are many other differences between these two Churches in their doctrines and rituals. Protestantism was born out of a sixteenth century religious movement known as the 'Reformation.' Besides these two main streams, numerous Churches have emerged subsequently. While Protestantism, as also some other Christian Churches have taken root in India at different points of time, the Catholics constitute the single largest (comprising 1.8 percent of her total population) and the oldest of all Christian denominations in the country.
3. For a detailed history of Christianity in India, see the six-volume project on the subject, of which three volumes - Mundadan (1984), Thekkedath (1982), and Hambey (1997) - Part 2 of the 4th volume, Grafe (1990) and Part 5 of the 5th volume, Downs (1992) have been published.
4. In this thesis, 'Church' spelt with capital 'C' refers to the formal authority of the Roman Catholic Church, and 'church' spelt with lower case 'c' denotes a place of Christian worship.

CHAPTER II

ROMAN CATHOLICISM IN TAMIL NADU: AN HISTORICAL SKETCH OF INDIGENISATION

This chapter presents a brief history of the Catholic Church in Tamil Nadu. Its main objective is to analyse the methods adopted by the missionaries in introducing Christianity in the Tamil region and the role of the Church in indigenising Catholicism there. It is not intended here to reconstruct the Church history according to a set chronological framework; rather the focus is on those key actors who played a critical role in initiating and sustaining or resisting indigenisation, and their strategies for establishing Catholicism. This brief history, it is hoped, will provide the setting against which our analysis of the various aspects of indigenisation will become clear.

*PADROADO*¹ (1498-1542)

When the Portuguese colonised Goa and the coastal regions of the present day Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the Portuguese clergy accompanied the soldiers and the administrators primarily to provide them with spiritual care. Subsequently, they developed an interest in converting the natives to Christianity. The soldiers, administrators and priests were under the direct care and control of the King of Portugal. The Pope only exercised moral control over the priests. There was a close link between the military-cum-administrative powers and the clergy. Hence, the process of conversion gave a privileged position to Christianity vis-à-vis the native religion. The churches were built in the Portuguese style, the interior of the church was also modelled along the Portuguese lines,

and the liturgical language was Latin. The converts were forced to adopt many of the Portuguese socio-cultural practices.

The conversion of the natives to Catholicism gained momentum in Tamil Nadu with the arrival in 1543 of Francis Xavier, a priest belonging to the Jesuit order. Xavier made a mark in the history of Catholicism by travelling far and wide and baptising thousands of natives. The main thrust of the missionary movements during this period was on making gains in terms of number.

The coastal regions of Tamil Nadu were inhabited by the Paravas, Mukkuvar and other low ranking fisherfolk and labouring people. Their original homeland ran along the Gulf of Mannar, from southern Ramnad to the extreme tip of the Coromandel Coast, known as the 'Fishery Coast' in Portuguese literature. It comprised of twenty-two villages, chief among them being Kayalpatnam, Tuticorin (now called Thoothukudi), Vaipar and Vempar. The Paravas or Bharatars of the pearl fishery coast are one of South India's maritime communities. The primary occupations of the Paravas were regular fishing and pearl fishing, the latter being an organised industry in Tuticorin and the neighbouring coastal region of Tamil Nadu. The Paravas' conversion to Christianity took place in the course of a savage maritime war fought between 1527 and 1539 by the Portuguese and the South Indian Muslim rulers who were allied with the Zamorin of Calicut. The Paravas sought the protection of the Portuguese, as the Arab Muslims were exploiting them, and in return they, as a caste, embraced Christianity in 1538. Thus, the Portuguese involvement on the fishery coast had a profound effect on the history of the Paravas (see Firth 1998 and Roche 1984).

After their conversion, for about six years, till the arrival of Xavier, the Paravas remained without any religious instruction. During those years they were left free to carry on their religious practices. Only with the arrival of the Portuguese missionaries from 1545 they were given Christian faith formation.

Xavier, who had patronised this community, did not attempt to acquire any systematic grasp of the Hindu theology. With the help of the natives who had an understanding of Portuguese, he got the prayers translated into Tamil. He appointed catechists (religious instructors) in every place to instruct the Catholic Paravas. The missionaries who came after him followed his footsteps in dealing with the converts (Firth 1998:58).

Apart from the translation of prayers into Tamil, there was hardly any effort at adapting Western Christianity to the culture and outlook of the converts. The receiving of baptism often meant the abandonment of much of one's cultural ties with the past. This was particularly so in the territories directly governed by the Portuguese. For example, the new converts were even given Portuguese names and surnames such as Lorenzo Fernado, Felix Wilfred, etc. Generally missionaries at that time were inclined to see idolatrous practices and superstition even in social customs which were quite harmless, and hence they sought to suppress them (Thekkedath 1982:485). There were, no doubt, exceptions to this line of thinking, as Robert de Nobili who, for example, differentiated between idolatry and mere customs of the region, and who realised that becoming a Christian need not involve the adoption of a new cultural identity.

Placed at the lower rung of the caste hierarchy, for the Paravas, conversion meant identifying themselves with the ruling class. While they built their new identity around the

Christian symbols, they retained the native cultural practices. Bayly (1992:323-47) observes that much of the trappings and organisation of the Parava festival were taken from the *utsavams* (temple feasts) of the great Sri Subrahmanyasami temple at Tiruchentur, twenty-four miles from Tuticorin. This temple has long been cited as a reference point in the creation of the Paravas' ceremonial cult tradition. It was this fusion of the Christian motifs and native traditions, which gave the Paravas a coherent caste identity and enhanced their social status (see *ibid.*).

For the Hindus, the 'new' religion which the Paravas embraced was *parangi maarkam* (religion of the Portuguese). *Parangi* is the Tamil version of 'Feringhi,' which referred to the Portuguese (and the Europeans, generally), and it became coterminous with the Christian faith (Firth 1998:111). *Parangi*, however, was not a complimentary term, since it referred to people who were defiled by their eating of beef and drinking of wine (Rajamanickam 1987:303). Since, the *parangis* were considered as polluting as the Paryans and Pallans (the untouchables of Tamil Nadu), from the very beginning Christianity was identified with an inferior, polluting group and came to be known as *parangi maarkam* (Cronin 1959:43 and 45).

It is necessary to clarify here that while conversion in the coastal area was connected with the Portuguese, the spread of Christianity in the hinterland of Tamil Nadu did not result purely from a campaign of the Portuguese-directed missionary proselytising. Bayly (1992:380-84) observes that the initial spread of Christianity in this region was transmitted through indigenous network of trade and pilgrimage by the Catholics of the coastal region. Catholicism that had filtered inland from the coast was largely syncretic

and cult oriented. The first Jesuit missionaries who penetrated into the hinterland already found churches there.

THE JESUIT MISSION

In Madurai, an ancient centre of Tamil culture and language, Fr. Concalo Fernandez, belonging to the same order as Francis Xavier, took on religious leadership. He catered primarily to the Portuguese Catholics and the converted Paravas settled or visiting Madurai for business. Fernandez accepted the identification of the Portuguese with *parangi*, and of *parangi* with Christianity. Being ignorant of Tamil, Fernandez (as other Portuguese priests did) asked any candidate for baptism whether he wished to enter the *parangikulam* (community of *parangis*), instead of 'do you want to be a Christian?' Not surprisingly, he was unable to make a single conversion in his ten years of work. His inability to convert has been attributed to his reluctance to compromise on the Christian teaching of equality; some have attributed this to his European superiority complex (Neill 1984:280). It is against this background that Robert de Nobili (here after de Nobili), a Italian Jesuit missionary, entered Madura Mission in 1606. The Mission gradually extended itself over nearly the whole of Tamil Nadu except the coastal strip (Thekkedath 1982:211). In this period de Nobili sought to disassociate Christianity from the colonial trading powers and present a soteriological message of the Gospel in indigenous cultural form.

De Nobili's approach to the dissemination of Catholicism was based on two principles: firstly, following the traditional principle 'convert the king subjects will follow.' Secondly, in order to convert the Brahmins one has to understand their beliefs,

customs, sacred literature and even adapt their life-style. This second method was revolutionary since de Nobili's attempt to understand the indigenous customs and rituals led to a change in the attitude of contempt towards the natives earlier held by the missionaries (Deliege 1990:53). De Nobili took a different approach from that of the Portuguese missionaries, who he found 'not only endeavoured to Christianise the Indians, but they tried to Lusitanise them' (Rev. D. Ferroli, quoted in D'Souza 1975:122).

De Nobili tried to acquaint himself with the language, culture and religion of this region. As Rajamanickam (1967:83-86) puts it, 'adaptation becomes indispensable when the Gospel is preached in places where the social customs are entirely different and de Nobili understood this too well.' Thus, de Nobili and his missionaries disassociated themselves from the low-caste Parava converts, their Portuguese missionaries and the colonial trading power, all of which had consigned Christianity to an inferior status. Rather, his mission was to set about indigenising Christianity. Since he viewed religion as a matter of spiritual reality, beliefs and worship, he presented the soteriological message of the Gospel in an Indian social and cultural form (Mosse 1986:36).

Sensing the resistance of the natives to the all-polluting *parangi maarkam*, de Nobili adopted the life style akin to the local priestly class. He made an intensive study of the Tamil and Sanskrit sacred scriptures and composed a series of learned Tamil treatise and devotional poems. His aim in these works was to reach an accommodation between the Hindu and Christian scriptural traditions. He realised that the teacher of spiritual values in India is the *sannyaasi*.² Accordingly, he chose the life style of an Indian *sannyaasi* (renouncer). In addition to the priestly vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, he maintained absolute abstinence from meat, fish, eggs, wine, etc., and had

one meal at 4 p.m. cooked by a Brahmin cook. He gave up using chairs and cots, wearing hat, and travelling on horseback. He adopted the dress of the local *sannyasi*, the *kaavi* (ochre-coloured garb), in place of the black cassock and exchanged his leather shoes for wooden sandals. More important, de Nobili wore the sacred thread across his shoulders with a cross fastened to it. He anointed his forehead with sandal paste, and went about carrying a water-gourd in his left hand and a bamboo stick with seven knots in his right (see Picture 2.1) (Rajamanickam 1967:84).

In brief, says Zupanov (1999), de Nobili enthusiastically renounced polluting substances (meat and alcohol) and polluting persons (low-caste people) in order to penetrate among those whom he considered his equals. His converts addressed him as *aiyar* (guru) and named him 'Tattuva Bodhakar' (the Teacher of Reality) approving of his ways and teaching. De Nobili continued to be known under this name for the rest of his life (Cronin 1959:71 and 127). Thus, the strategy adopted by de Nobili was to integrate the Gospel values with the local culture.

De Nobili's methods were quite in line with the religious revival in the southern parts of India in the early seventeenth century, when many *gurus* (religious teachers) were going around. He too was accepted and looked upon as one such *guru* by the upper-caste people. When a few Brahmins were convinced of his teachings, they came forward to be baptised. In turn, de Nobili allowed them to keep some symbols of affiliation to their caste by claiming that they were not religious but social customs. He believed that some of the native customs could be integrated into the Catholic rites. He Christianised the religious customs of the converts: the sacred thread blessed by a Catholic priest, from which a cross or a medal was hung; sandal paste blessed by the priest applied on the forehead; *kuTumi*

(tuft of hair) for men; and bath as a symbol of inner purification (Hambey 1997:212). He substituted the Church ceremonies with local rites, and Christian prayers with the Hindu *mantrams* (chants). For example, in conducting a marriage, he substituted the ring of the Christian tradition with the *taali*, the marriage badge worn by the Hindu women. To the *taali* a cross was attached (Neill 1984:289). He encouraged the celebration of the *poMkal* (harvest) festival by the Catholics and allowed them to cook rice and boil milk at the foot of the cross which was planted for that purpose. He is said to have built a church in indigenous style and called it *kooyil* (a place of worship among the Hindus) (Rajamanickam 1967:86).

De Nobili translated the names of European saints and rechristened them with Tamil names: Fidelis became Visuvasam (faith or the faithful one); Deus Dedit, Sivadarma (follower of Jesus); Honoratus, Arasaarappan (devotee of the Lord); Constadius, Dairyam (courage); Peter, Malaiyappan (the rock); Hilary, Muthudyan (the pearl); Joachim, Devaram (a collection of devotional songs in honour of Lord); Lazarus, Devasagayam (God my help); Elizabeth, Devannamal (mother of God), etc. His most notable achievement was the creation of a new Christian vocabulary for the region's converts in which all the key words and phrases were drawn from the existing terminology of 'high' scriptural Hinduism. He Christianised certain words and infused into them a new meaning: for example, *puucal* (the Mass), *veda pustakam* (prayer book), *mantram* (prayer), and *prasaatam* (denoting grace, the gift from god) (Rajamanickam 1967:86).

In sharp contrast with most of the earlier Portuguese missionaries, de Nobili attempted to present the gospel in a form less alien to the Hindus among whom he worked; he sought to evolve an indigenous Christian theology. Analysing de Nobili's

treatise on Christ as the divine guru, Clooney (1988) notes that de Nobili rejected the *avataara* theory of the Vaishnavites and adopted the position of the Siddhantins which views Siva as a *guru*. According to the Saivite School (Saiva Siddhanta),

Siva stands outside his creation of which he is only a *causa efficiens*. Incarnation would make him subject to Karma and Samsara, over which he is ruler. But in order to help his devotees to reach his final goal, the complete union with Siva, he occasionally assumes a human shape and appears in disguise, as a religious preceptor, as a Guru, often with the name *Satguru*, 'the true Guru.' ... Nobili thus in his choice of the image of the guru carried with it the threads of the whole fabric from which it was excised (ibid. 33 and 34).

De Nobili considered the caste system as a form of social categorisation parallel to the distinctions of class and rank in Europe. He was of the opinion that the religion which he taught, did not require a person to renounce caste. He, thus, allowed the Christians to follow their caste customs (Firth 1998:114). He even set himself as a Brahmin *sannyasi* separating from the lower castes.

De Nobili and his companions sought to deal with the problem of ministering the lower castes and the untouchables by creating a separate set of missionaries on the line of *pandaarams* (non-Brahmin renouncers), and these missionaries were called as the *pandaaracaami*.³ Thus, there emerged two sets of missionary priests: one modelled after the Brahmin *sannyasi*, to minister to the Brahmins; and the other, the *pandaaracaami*, ministering to the lower castes. These two sets of missionaries rarely mixed or stayed together. The life style of the *pandaaracaamis* was also different from that of the Brahmin priests. The former was not conversant with Sanskrit and were meat eaters (Cronin 1959: 251).

In 1744 this distinction even became official when Pope Benedict XIV recognised the creation of 'pariah missionaries.' Separate churches were built and the whole structure of the Catholic Church was shaped on this model. The Catholics carried forward their caste divisions from Hinduism, and the untouchables too remained as such within the Catholic Church (Deliege 1990:53). Ultimately, with the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1759, the system of two sets of missionaries catering to the religious needs of the upper-caste and lower-caste converts was abandoned.

Many accusations were levelled against de Nobili for compromising and syncretising the Christian faith. Fernandez opposed de Nobili's move to Indianise (Brahminise) Christianity. He pleaded for retaining the 'originality' of Christianity (as brought from the West) and accused de Nobili of compromising with the caste system which upholds inequality among Catholics, calling it anti-Christian (see Firth 1998: 114-16).

Cardinal Eugene Tesserant records that 'the Portuguese intervened and de Nobili was arrested and tried by the Goa Inquisition on a charge of heresy' (quoted in D'Souza 1975:123). However, 'a timely brief from the Pope which required that his case should be investigated by a round table conference which would include fellow Archbishops and other theologians, saved Fr. de Nobili from the clutches of inquisition' (Vincent Cronin, quoted in D'Souza 1975:123). Supporters began to converge on either side of the controversy and the matter was referred to the Vatican.

De Nobili argued that there was no harm in the wearing of the Brahminical sacred thread and smearing of sandal paste on the forehead, and that the practices related to caste were social customs and mores of the people. He defended the method adopted by him as

similar to the method followed by the followers of Christianity in the West. He showed how several pagan customs of the Greco-Roman world had found an honourable place in the Christian religion. He interpreted the caste system by drawing parallels with the European estate system (Fernandes 1981:18).

The papal decision in favour of de Nobili and his method was declared in the year 1623:

We grant ...to the Brahmins and other gentiles who have been and will be converted to the faith the permission to wear the thread and grow the *kudumi* as distinctive signs of their social status, ... we allow them to use the sandal paste as an ornament, ... provided however, that to remove all superstitions and all alleged of scandal, they observe the following regulations and conditions... (quoted in Anchukandam 1996:104).

Thus, the Vatican upheld the approach of de Nobili saying that the indigenous life-style adopted by de Nobili did not amount to Hinduising Christianity.

Nearly a century passed without anybody seriously questioning the papal decision in favour of de Nobili and his method. It looked as if they were beyond controversy, but suddenly they became the targets of ever-increasing bitter criticisms (see Ferroli 1951:377-487). The resulting controversy over the acceptability or otherwise of de Nobili's methods is known as the 'Malabar rites controversy'⁴ (Hambey 1997:212).

Despite the controversies which de Nobili provoked, his work had a lasting impact on the idiom of Christian discourse in South India (Bayly 1992:390). It was de Nobili who found a way beyond the limitations of *parangikulam* Christianity. His methods were followed by a small group of Jesuit missionaries who had a positive approach to the local culture and thus some of them entered into the world of Indian religion, learning Sanskrit,

the then language through which philosophy, theology and science were discussed and taught. Thereafter the de Nobilian method became the official method of the Jesuits in South India (Rajamanickam 1972:46).

Deliege (1990:53) is of the view that it was probably the use of the de Nobilian methods which succeeded in converting many high caste people such as the Vellalars, Udayars and Maravars. Wilfred (1993:11) accords de Nobili a place above the other missionaries in the venture of adapting Christianity to the native culture by saying 'no history of theology in India worth its name can be written without reference to de Nobili. He was the pioneer in the history of Christianity in India who initiated "Indianising." He was the pioneer in the study of Sanskrit and the founder of modern Tamil literature.' Sauliere (1956:16) says:

If the Christians of South India have not been torn away from their own people, if they still live the same social life as their Hindu brethren, following the same customs, wearing the same dress, sharing their joys and sorrows, their hopes and aspirations; if, in a word, no one can with justice point at them the finger of scorn and question their loyalty to the land of their birth, it is largely due to Fr. Robert de Nobili.

Matteo Ricci, another Jesuit, also followed similar methods in China, where he sought to adapt Christianity, save in essentials, to Chinese values and traditional practices (Cronin 1984).

Another significant person, who shared with de Nobili the indigenising attitude, was John de Britto (here after de Britto), a Portuguese missionary. De Britto disassociated himself from the coastal power of the Portuguese and the Dutch and entered Maravanadu (Ramnad), which was beyond the sphere of colonial political influence. He was the most

prominent figure of the Madura Mission and a *pandaaracaami*. Prior to his arrival the other European missionaries only carried out 'exploration and skirmishes' (Ponnad 1983:134). His work was mainly confined to the rural areas of interior Tamil Nadu, especially the villages under our study. He took the Tamil name Arulanandar (*Arul* – grace and *anand* - joy).

De Britto led a simple life and walked barefoot. He did not want to make any compromise with regard to the basic tenets of Christianity. This is proved in the case of the conversion of the Marava prince Tadiya Devar. This prince had five wives and had to give up four of his wives in the wake of his conversion to Christianity. The youngest wife was the niece of Sethupati who brought all troubles that cost de Britto his life. He was beheaded in the year 1693, when he converted a local chieftain in Ramnad (see Nevett 1980). He was canonised in the year 1947 and he is portrayed as a 'deified hero tutelary.' This missionary saint-martyr is still the focus of an active devotional cult in the Tamil hinterland (Bayly 1992:399). His shrine is located in Oriyur, a village in Ramnad District. The stories of his heroic wanderings, his disregard of danger, his miraculous powers to heal and to exorcise, and his martyrdom are popularly presented in the village dramas. His shrine is well known for animal sacrifice (see Chap. 8). Even to this day it is believed that the famous centres of Christianity in the Tamil hinterland are due to the labour and blood of de Britto.

The next remarkable person was Fr. Joseph Constantine Beschi (here after Beschi), a Italian missionary, who came to the regions of Tamil Nadu in the year 1711. Michael (1996:57) points out that de Nobili Indianised the apostolate, while Beschi Tamilicised it. His notable contribution was in the area of Tamil literature. He followed the footsteps of

de Nobili in his approach to the native Christians and in his life style. He chose the Tamil name Veeramamunivar (the Valiant Sage).

The first church that Beschi built at Konankuppam was dedicated to Mary and was called in Tamil *Periyanaayaki* (after *Paarvati*, the consort of Siva, in the Hindu pantheon, who is also known as *Periyanaayaki*). The statue of Mary installed there resembles a Tamil woman dressed in sari, wearing ear rings and finger rings. He built another church at Elakkurichi and placed Mary as its patron. He Tamilicised Mary with a purely Tamil name, that is, Adaiakalamatha (Mother of Refuge). The decorations of this church resemble those of a Hindu temple. He followed the Hindu customs of pilgrimage and celebrating the feast of the patron in these churches. He incorporated the practice of making *poMkal* during the village feast of the Hindus with that of the patron's feast of the Catholics (Gnanaprakasam 1988:171).

In his poetry, Beschi uses Hindu religious terminology to present the Christian religious themes. For example, in his 'Thempavani' (Life of Christ), Christ is described as *Mekavaakanaatan*, meaning one who has the cloud as his vehicle. This is in keeping with the Hindu religious lore where of every god has a vehicle (*vaakanam*). Jesus is said to hold the spear, which echoes the idea of Murugan holding a spear. To refer to Christ as the one who rules the world with his wheel reminds one of Visnu with his *cakra* (wheel). Mary is given attributes like *teeva ambikaiye* and *ariya amala iisvariye*, which elevate her above the ordinary mortals (ibid. 176-79).

What is to be noted is that the missionaries adopted an accommodative approach towards the practices of the Brahmins and non-Brahmin castes. The accommodation, however, was not unlimited. While they welcomed those practices that were in

consonance with the Christian beliefs; those that did not resonate with the Christian beliefs were resisted. For instance, while they welcomed practices such as *poMkal* (harvest festival) celebration, car processions during the annual village patron's festival, etc., they resisted practices such as seeking the help of sorcerers. Thus, Catholicism during this period was marked by a good deal of accommodation. In some cases, missionaries actively reformulated the native practices such as *koottu* (a folk art form) to popularise the life and teachings of Jesus and the saints. Simultaneously one witnesses a concerted effort to de-Hinduise the natives by describing the Hindu deities as idols, meaning that they are not authentic powers of the almighty. This process continued in the Catholic Church for nearly three and a half centuries.

There were certain measures of adaptation and accommodation that went against the vital spirit of Christianity. The deep-rooted caste system was one of the formidable challenges that the earlier missionaries encountered in Tamil Nadu. They had no instant solution to this problem that contravened the basic tenets of Catholicism. The retention of caste diluted the Christian idea of universal brotherhood. The missionaries who endeavoured for the assimilation and understanding of Hinduism found it difficult to break down the formidable barrier of the caste system. Those who had converted from the higher caste continued to retain their claim to superior status and did not mix with the low-caste Christians. Thus, caste distinction and discrimination, which were an integral part of the Hindu social system, extended their tentacles to the Indian Catholic Church, too (Houpert 1937:41).

CATHOLIC ASHRAMS

In the twentieth century a more indigenised form of Christianity was observed. This came through the establishment of Catholic *ashrams* modelled after the *ashram* life-style of the Hindus. Attracted by the values of Indian *sannyasa*, some Catholic priests adopted the *sannyasic* life-style. The pioneers were Fr. Jules Monchanin and Fr. Henri Le Saux, followed by Fr. Bede Griffiths. Monchanin attempted a deep and total adaptation of the contemplative life of the Hindu *sannyasin* and dedicated himself to the quest of the absolute. Thus, he opened the way to the deepest form of spiritual union between Christianity and Hinduism (J.C. Weber 1977:8 and 9). Le Saux visited several Hindu ashrams and lived in them. Ramana Maharsi, the sage of Arunachala in Tamil Nadu, had a great influence on Le Saux. Arunachala was really his spiritual birth place because it was during his life in the caves of Arunachala that he awakened to the mystery of non-duality within the 'cave of his own heart' (Vattakuzhy 1983:378).

The pioneers' sought to translate the Benedictine monasticism into a *sannyasic* form in India, to find synthesis between them. They realised that

The goal of monastic life in the East and the West is essentially by the same. Saint Benedict requires of a monk that he should "truly seek God," and it is this search for God, or Quest of the Absolute...which remains always and everywhere the characteristic mark of the monk (Griffiths 1980:433).

While adopting indigenous *ashram* life-style, the *ashramites* combined contemplative spirituality and social action that is in line with Gandhian ashram (see Chap. 9).

THE SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL

The Second Vatican Council,⁵ which took place during 1962-65, is regarded as a landmark in the history of the Catholic Church. As regards the indigenisation of Catholicism in India, and elsewhere, the Church began playing a more positive role after this Council. Reviewing the history of the Catholic Church in India, one finds that there have been efforts to introduce an indigenous character to the religious beliefs and practices of the Catholic Church much before this Council. Indigenisation, in fact, is an inevitable process in the evolution of a religious community and Roman Catholicism is no exception. What this Council did was to officially recognise such a process.

Among the many things deliberated during the Second Vatican Council the issue of inculturation (localising the Church in terms of rituals, leadership, language, etc.) assumed great significance, especially for Churches in Africa, Asia, and South America. Latin ceased to be the liturgical language, modes of worship went through change, and the Christian theology began to integrate local theological and philosophical traditions. This phase of the history of Catholicism can be characterised as a period of integration in India. It sought to reduce the distance between Christianity and Hinduism: From the logic of 'instrumentality' (indigenous methods to convert people), Catholicism switched over to the logic of 'complementarity' (bridging the gap between Christianity and the native religions). Thus, Catholicism in South India, which had moved from a position of domination in the first phase (*Padroado*) to one of integration via accommodation in the second phase (Jesuit mission), began to enhance its own vision and deepen its experience in the third phase (Second Vatican Council).

CONTEXTUALISING THEOLOGY

In 1980s, world-wide Catholicism passed through yet another stage. With increasing evidence that religion was a part of the liberation struggles in the Third World, Catholicism became an instrument of popular resistance and a source of inspiration to sustained struggle (Pieris 1988:100). Some priests engaged with indigenisation were influenced by the 'liberation theology' originating from Latin America. Foregrounding the exploited masses, in the line of Marxian analysis of society, leading theologians in Latin America infused class orientation in theology and worship (Agera 1989:97). In the institutionalised Church, too, the Church came to be projected as the sign of liberation.

Influenced by 'liberation theology,' several Indian theologians too began stressing the need for contextualising theology and worship in India. They placed Dalit (the most oppressed group of people) as the focal point of their theological praxis. The emphasis here is on an anti-caste 'social gospel,' solidarity with the poor, and participation in their struggles for liberation (see Antony Raj 1992, Mark 1994 and Joe Britto 1997). This approach of a section of the clergy fundamentally departs from both the de Nobilian adaptation method and the *ashram*-oriented theology. It is beyond the scope of this study to go into the theological implications of the various strategies for indigenising Church in India.

Conclusion

Brief as it may be, from the foregoing historical sketch of Catholicism in Tamil Nadu, it is clear that indigenisation has been central to Catholicism for nearly four centuries. It has always remained an issue that gave rise to intense debate not only within India but also outside. The process of indigenisation has been dynamic in that it has passed through many stages expressing it in different forms. The dynamism observed in indigenisation can be attributed to the many models adopted by the missionaries down the centuries. The model adopted by Robert de Nobili and some other missionaries of his time was different from that used by the missionaries working in Goa. These models gave expression to different forms of indigenisation depending upon by the socio-political contexts surrounding them.

In the earlier phase of its history Christianity approached the Hindu religion from a position of 'domination' and tried to preserve its own 'pristine' form. Later, when Christianity spread to different parts of Tamil Nadu, it adopted a position of 'accommodation' in order to expand its missionary activities. It permitted a process of Christianisation of Hindu religious symbols and rituals. During the last fifty years or so, it has embarked on a process of 'acculturation' where by it has adopted not only the Hindu forms but also the Hindu meanings of these forms.

In the following chapters we shall examine the socio-religious practices of the Tamil Catholics and the meaning contained in them. We shall also analyse the methods adopted by the Catholics in negotiating their native practices. While doing so, our objective is not to arrive at a theological statement on the nature of contemporary Catholicism, but only to present an analysis of Catholicism as a lived-in religion among its Tamil adherents in South India.

Endnotes

1. Under the *Padroado* system, the Pope entrusted the King of Portugal with ecclesiastical affairs. The King decided the religious order that should take care of the Christians under his territory and granted maintenance for the same. The missionaries were restricted in their dealings with the native Christians (Houtart and Lemerciner 1981:106).
2. In Sanskrit, the word *sannyasi* refers to 'one who resigns or abandons all,' that is, a renouncer. In Tamil poetry the *sannyasi* is portrayed as one who has no desire for gold (*ponnaacai*), land (*mannaacai*) and women (*pennaacai*). Traditionally, it was the fourth and last stage of life recommended for the Brahmins. However, there were other men aspiring for the same ideal but practised it differently. They lived in monasteries praying, studying and training disciples. Their mode of life was open to men of all castes (Cronin 1959:46).
3. In the traditional Hindu order, the Brahmin priests did not serve the lower castes. The latter, therefore, had their own priests drawn from their respective castes or any upper caste other than the Brahmins, especially from the Vellala caste. While the Brahmin priests were addressed as *caami*, these non-Brahmin priests were addressed as *pandaaracaami*. The Christian missionaries, set to serve the lower castes, combined both these terms and called themselves *pandaaracaamikal*.
4. In the eighteenth century the term 'Malabar' was used by the Portuguese to refer to the people and the languages of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. During the controversy with regard to de Nobili's methods this term was used almost exclusively to refer to the Tamil people and their culture (Hambey 1997:212). The controversy is known in the Church history as The Malabar Rites Controversy, although geographically Madurai, the actual centre of the controversy, is far removed from Malabar. This is understandable in the light of the fact that the entire region was under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Angamally-Cranganore, situated in the Malabar Province of the Jesuits. This controversy would in subsequent years result in a protracted struggle between the Jesuits and the Capuchins, with understandably negative consequence for the Catholic Church's missionary efforts in South India (see Ferrolli 1951:418-87).

5. The term 'Council' is technically used in theology and canon law to refer to an occasional meeting of ecclesiastical persons having juridical power to make joint decisions of a doctrinal or disciplinary character that bind the constituencies represented. The standard Catholic enumeration recognises twenty-one ecumenical councils from Nicaea I (325) to the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). The Second Vatican Council was the twenty-first ecumenical council in the history of the Church. Important functionaries of the Church, namely, the bishops, cardinals, theologians from world over met in Rome with the Pope presiding over the gathering (Dulles 1994:235).



Picture 2.1

Robert de Nobili as a *Sannyasi* (Source: Cronin 1959).

CHAPTER III

RITUALS: WORSHIP AND CELEBRATIONS

Following the Durkheimian tradition, sociologists have emphasised the communitarian aspect of religious experience. The community plays a significant role in legitimising and particularising the religion it follows. This process of being particularised offers an unique vista for a sociological study of indigenisation. The particularising of religion is an ongoing process, involving mutual reactions of the clergy and the people. Nowhere is this as explicit as in worship and associated celebrations. Accordingly, in this chapter we shall focus on worship as the primary facet of indigenisation of Catholicism. As a community-oriented religion, Catholicism gives prime importance to worship in community.

According to Wach (1971:29), 'collective expression is vital to any religion.' The Church has developed a pattern of liturgy, which stresses the community coming together for the purpose of worship and religious exercise. 'Congregation' would be a more suitable designation for this type of religious expression.

Central to the Catholic worship is a community in celebration called 'the Mass.' The Church expects the believers to take part in this community celebration at least once a week. Thus, Sunday is designated by the Church as the day of obligation, a day on which the Catholics are obliged to participate in the Mass.

While considering worship, we need to make a distinction between official and non-official forms of worships. By official we mean those practices that are sanctioned by

the Holy See – Pope, the established Church. The forms of worship which the people follow on their own without the clergy are non-official. In this chapter, we deal only with the official religious practices of the Catholic Church. In the first section our main focus is on the Mass, a ritual which is celebrated daily and which has a central place in all the calendrical festivals.¹ Though the Mass is the constant feature of all liturgical feasts, it is accompanied by varied rituals. Taking into account all the rituals accompanying the Mass celebrated on various occasions, we consider the question: to what extent these rituals are indigenised?

I

WORSHIP

The Evolution of the Mass and the Associated Rituals

The Mass and the rituals associated with it have evolved in the course of the history of Christianity. It is claimed that the Mass originated from the ‘Last Supper’ that Jesus Christ had with his disciples before his crucifixion. However, up to the fourth century, there was neither a definite text nor a fixed ritual liturgical tradition. It was only between the fourth and eighth centuries that Christian texts were composed, but still no uniform ritual was established (Amaladoss [nd]). In the ninth century, Emperor Charlemagne imposed the ‘Roman liturgy’² on the territory of the Roman Empire. It was only from the sixteenth century that liturgy came to be centralised and became a uniform form of worship for all the Catholics (Collins 1994:596-97).

The ‘Roman Rite’ consists of three parts: (1) the introductory rite, (2) the liturgy of the Word, and (3) the liturgy of the Eucharist. The *introductory rite* begins with the

priest inviting the people for the celebration, followed by a purificatory rite. The *liturgy of the Word* consists of the readings from the Bible. And in the *liturgy of the Eucharist* is enacted Jesus' offering Himself to humanity: The partaking of the sacred Bread and Wine, which symbolises the Flesh and Blood of Jesus respectively, enables the Catholics to establish communion with the sacred. Thus, the Mass, in its original form, follows a set of specific rituals and is performed in a sequence.

Once the liturgy became centralised it ceased to be an expression of the local traditions of the people, and their religious experience became rootless. Thus, Catholics in different parts of the world felt the need for a liturgy that reflected the culture of their region (Saldanha 1996:57). This need was addressed by the Second Vatican Council, which declared that '...the Church has no wish to impose a rigid uniformity in matters which do not involve the faith or the good of the whole community. Rather she respects and fosters the spiritual adornments and gifts of the various races and nations' (Flannery 1992:32). Thus was born the idea of an indigenous liturgy.

In India, indigenisation of liturgy was initiated by the Bangalore based National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Centre (hereafter NBCLC), an organ of the Catholic Church. The 'Indian Rite' (as different from the 'Roman Rite') worked out by the NBCLC was approved in the year 1969. It incorporated indigenous socio-religious symbols and practices (Leeuwen 1990:71). In what follows let us briefly sketch the salient features of the Indian Rite.

As a mark of reverence to the divine, before entering the *kooyil* (church) Catholics leave their footwear outside. In the *kooyil*, as a religious expression of worship to the divine, in place of kneeling down they make *Anjali Hasta*, a bow of the head with joined

hands on the forehead. The celebration of the Mass begins with welcoming of the people with *cantanam* (sandal paste) and sprinkling of *panniir* (rose water). The priest wears a cotton saffron-coloured shawl as the liturgical dress (instead of the Roman liturgical dress known as vestments). The people receive the priest with *pushpaaratti* (*aaratti* with flowers), and the priest reciprocates this. The candle is replaced by *kuttuviLakku* (brass oil lamp) placed at the *piiTTa* (low altar). The Mass is celebrated on a *piiTTa* (in place of the high altar) with the priest squatting on the floor (instead of remaining standing). Similarly, the laity too, remain seated on the floor (instead of kneeling, standing and sitting - the different postures assumed during Roman Rite). *Bhajans* (repetitive rhythmic singing of short verses) and vernacular hymns are sung as part of the ritual.

Once the priest and the people enter the place of worship, the priest blesses the water, kept in a brass vessel, takes a sip (as a mark of purifying himself), and then sprinkles the 'holy water' on people using a mango leaf as a sign of purification. While doing so, the priest recites the Sanskrit *sloka* 'om shuddhaya namaha' (praise to the most holy). Preliminary to the second part of the ritual of reading portions from the scripture, the Bible is venerated by offering floral and incense *aaratti* to it.

The last part of the liturgy, known as the breaking of the Bread, enacts Jesus' sacrifice. Symbolising the eight directions of the universe, the priest places eight flowers on the altar one by one with the Sanskrit chant *om shri yesu bhagavate namaha* (Jesus the lord). People offer triple *aaratti* - of flowers, incense and camphor (fire) - during the consecration of the Bread and Wine. The wheat wafer, known as 'host,' is consecrated and partaking of it symbolises communion with Jesus. During the Mass people receive the flame from the light and bring their palms towards the eyes or forehead in reverence.

All the prayers are in Sanskrit, and they are chanted by the priest and responded to by the people. These, in brief, constitute the Indian Rite Mass (see Appendix 3.1).

Response to Indigenisation

The indigenisation of the Mass in the form of the Indian Rite was initially confined to the NBCLC in Bangalore. As this process became more public, it evoked different kinds of responses from various sections of the Catholics. The NBCLC (Leeuwen 1990:93), which has documented the responses of the people who had participated in the Indian Rite Mass, observed that the people respond favourably when the symbols and their meanings are explained to them. However, people feel that the Indian Rite is too long compared to the Roman Rite, and they are not prepared for its contemplative character with long periods of silence.

Objecting to the Indian Rite some lay Catholics and priests had led the 'Save the Faith Movement.' Active from the 1960s through the 1980s, its journal *Laity* carried resistance to the Indian Rite. The use of the word *Om* was opposed as it stood for 'Krishna, a Hindu god' [*sic*]; *anjali hasta*, in place of kneeling down, was regarded as insufficient as a mark of respect for the divine; and *diipa aaratanai* was looked down as a form of fire worship, which is not in keeping with Catholicism. In brief, the Indian Rite Mass was viewed as sacrilegious as it obliterated the Christian symbols embedded in the celebration of the Mass, the very institution set up by the founder of Christianity.

The resistance to indigenisation of liturgy was also defended in terms of the conversion to Christianity. Conversion meant a *new* set of religious symbols, whereas the Indian Rite used the very same religious symbols of the Hindus. Being familiar with the

Hindu religious symbols, the Catholics could not view them as Christian symbols. Hence, the need for symbols which are unique to Christianity.

It is true that the 'Save the Faith Movement' was an urban phenomenon, and those who were in its forefront were educated people. However, the process of indigenisation of the Mass in rural areas and among the uneducated peasant communities presents a different scenario, as revealed in the villages where our study was carried out.

Worship in Rural Tamil Nadu

From the 1970s the medium of worship in the villages is Tamil and *puuca* (the Mass) is also celebrated in Tamil. Initially the villagers were reported to be unhappy with the switch over from Latin to Tamil. However, gradually Tamil has come to be accepted as the medium of worship, though the older people still favour the Latin funeral songs, as they feel that it adds to the solemnity of the occasion.

While retaining the Roman Rite largely, in rural areas of Tamil Nadu, the priests have introduced a few native Hindu symbols and have sought to blend the Roman and the Indian rites. For example, *aaratti* is done on special occasions like the patron's feast to welcome the priest for the liturgical celebration and as veneration to the divine during the worship. Similarly, *kuttuviLakku*, instead of candle, is used on special occasions. Conventionally, the priest places the sacred Bread in the mouths of the laity; but it is now received by some faithful in the hands. This is in keeping with the local custom that the *pracaatam* is received in the hands and not placed in the mouth. However, the people are free to receive the sacred Bread with their hands or to get it placed in their mouth. Thus, the native elements have been introduced only when a consensus prevails between the priests and the people.

Even as the orthodox among Catholics may resist change in the ritual of the Mass, there are several native religious expressions, before and after the Mass, carried on in the sphere of the church. For instance, before the Mass the elderly may be seen making the *castaMkapranaam* (prostrating) to show their reverence to god, which is a typical native religious expression in worship. Similarly, after participating in the Mass many a Catholic seeks the blessings of the saints and Maata (Mother Mary) by touching their statues three times and passing the hand over the forehead. This is a familiar religious expression observed among the Hindus before their deities. This practice seems to satisfy the need felt by the laity to experience the divine in a more tangible form. Since idol worship has no formal place in Christianity the provision of devotions to Mary and the saints, even by touching their statues, has a great appeal to the Catholics, especially in rural areas.

The deference for men, a characteristic of Tamilian patriarchal society is carried to the place of worship, too. The Tamil women do not address or refer to their husbands by name as a mark of respect. As a consequence of this socio-cultural code, during the Mass, as also at other times of prayer, some women remain silent when they have to utter the word 'faith.' As the Tamil translation of the word 'faith' is 'Visvaasam' and since some men in the village bear the name Visvaasam, the women whose husbands are called Visvaasam do not proclaim their faith! (see Caritas 1961:151).

The Church does not observe the purity-pollution dichotomy of the Hindus. The dead body is taken into the church and women after childbirth and during menstruation enter the church, receive the Mass and touch the statues of the saints and Maata. Nevertheless, though not as their Hindu counterparts, the Catholics have retained some

form of the notion of pollution in the place of worship. Thus, for the Catholics, bath is a precondition to participate in the Mass. The elderly informants in the villages said that though they were engaged in agriculture and allied activities during the week, they would set apart Saturday evening to bathe in order to take part in the Mass on Sunday morning.

It was reported during the fieldwork that until about two decades ago the native practice of untouchability was observed in the church premises. The lower-caste occupied the left wing of the church and the veranda of the church. However, this is no more prevalent in the village churches visited by the researcher. This change was initiated by the church personnel and has been supported by the educated people in the villages.

While the Mass constitutes the mainstay of the Catholic worship, and the Catholics in the villages view it as the highest form of prayer conferring on them religious merits and redeeming them from their sins - '*tinamum puucaikku poonavan, niccayam motcatukku pooavaan*' (one who attends daily Mass will go to heaven), goes the Tamil saying, and the Mass does not exhaust their religious experience. A series of calendrical festivals and associated rituals mark the high points in the faith-life of the Catholics. Among these calendrical festivals Christmas is the foremost, and it is followed by the New Year celebrations. The period of Lent and Easter and the All Souls Day are the other important festivals in the Catholic calendar. In addition to these calendrical festivals, villages with large concentration of Catholic population celebrate an annual titular feast of the local church. It is in these calendrical festivals and titular feasts that the Catholics have retained or adopted a number of their native practices. In the following two sections we shall discuss the calendrical festivals and titular feasts respectively in the villages covered by the fieldwork.

II

CALENDRIAL FESTIVALS

caami piRantanaal (Christmas)

Christmas, called *caami piRantanaal* (literally, the day on which the Lord was born) in Tamil, is the most important calendrical festival for the Catholics. It celebrates the birth of Jesus, around whom the religion of Christianity is centred. Right from its origin, Christmas has had a native orientation: It was, in fact, adapted from the pagan feast of 'Sol Invictus' or the 'Unconquerable Sun,' an important cult in the Roman Empire (Warner 1976 and Lukose 1981:197). The real celebration begins on the 24th of December; but this is preceded by the twenty-one day 'Advent' season (waiting for the Lord), during which the Church prepares the people for the great celebration.

From the point of view of indigenisation the celebration of Christmas can be analysed at three levels: home, church and society. In the *domestic* sphere, people colour paint the walls of their houses, purchase new clothes, distribute home-made native sweets to their relatives and friends. Some hang a paper-work star outside their house.

In the *church*, the youth and children prepare the *paalan kuTil* (crib or manger) - an imitation of the setting in which Jesus was born. In Andavoorani the *paalan kuTil* depicted the prevalent social problems. People participate in the midnight Mass when the birth of Jesus is enacted. Saying aloud 'the Saviour of the world is born,' the priest places the child Jesus in the crib. At this time the church bell is rung, the *tappu*³ (a round-shaped drum) (see Photo 3.1) is played and crackers are burst.

On this occasion people bring *jaggery* (unrefined sugar) to the church. The *jaggery* is placed at the altar, and is blessed by the priest after the Mass and distributed to all those gathered. By incorporating *tappu* and the distribution of *jaggery*, the Tamil Catholics have given a native flavour to Christmas. In the village of Thanichaorani, the Christmas celebration is known as *carkarai tirunaaL* (*jaggery* feast). This is in accordance with the native practice of naming celebrations by reference to the ritual items of the celebration or the day or the month in which it is celebrated: For example, *tiippaavaLi* is the celebration of light, and Tai *poMkal* is the ritual cooking of *poMkal* in the month of Tai. Thus, like the Hindus, the Catholics also name the Christian rituals after objects and terms they are familiar with in their native culture.

Of course, there are regional variations in the celebration of Christmas in Tamil Nadu, especially as regards its peripheral symbols. For instance, Sivasubrahmanian (1988:79-86) records that, in Nellai District, on the Christmas day, the Catholics bring baskets of sprouted grain called *muLaippaari* to the church and place it before the crib. These baskets, made out of palmyra leaves, are prepared eight days before the Christmas by filling it with manure and sowing different grains in its bed. Women and children carry these baskets to the church and stand outside waiting for the announcement of the birth of Jesus. Once this is announced through the singing of a hymn called 'Gloria,' they walk into the church as a group and place these sprout-baskets in front of the crib. When the crib is dismantled, eight days after the Christmas, the sprouts are thrown into the wells and scattered in the fields with the hope of a good harvest. In another place, in the same district, women and children perform *kummi* (a group folk dance with the clapping of hands) before the crib where the *muLaippaari* are placed. Sivasubrahmanian's (1988)

study reveals that the placing of sprouts is basically a Hindu practice, which the Catholics have adopted as part of their Christmas celebration.

Dumont (1986:429) refers to *muLaippaari* among the Hindus as 'Adonis Garden.' In Karai, a Hindu village in Sivagangai District, the Kallars, a non-Christian caste, carry out this ritual as a vow made by women and children. They germinate seven or nine kinds of grain and grow them in a dark room for a week, during which period women even abstain from sexual relationship. The baskets of sprouted grains are brought to the temple on the feast of the village deity, the women dance the *kummi* around it, and later empty the baskets into the temple pond. Through this ritual they seek the assistance of the Hindu goddess 'Amman' to protect them from smallpox and to bless them with prosperity, particularly in agriculture.

The Hindus carry out this ritual during those months when the respective goddesses were believed to have been born (Sivasubrahmanian 1988:66). While retaining the indigenous practice of germinating the grains, the Catholics have related it to the birth of Jesus. The songs called *kummi paaTTu* are retained, but the invocations to the Hindu deities have been replaced by those to the Catholic divinities (ibid. 1988:84). For instance, the Hindu invocation '*muunaa naaL muntumuLai, amma pattirakaalimuLai*' (the sprouts are to goddess Pathirakali) is replaced by '*muunRanaattu munTum muLai namma tiviya paalanmuaLi*' (the sprouts are offered to baby Jesus).

The native practices at the peripheral level can also be noticed in the Christmas decorations. On the Christmas day, in the pilgrim centre of Vailankanni, plantain trees with their fruits and mango leaves adorn the entrance of the church. This is in keeping with the decoration of temples during the Hindu festivals. Thus, the prominent native

cultural elements have been retained or adopted for the celebration of Christmas among the Catholics in rural Tamil Nadu.

varuTappiRappu (New Year Celebration)

The New Year celebration is also referred as *putu varuTappiRappu viza* or *eTTaantirunaal* (literally, feast on the eighth day). On the night of 31st December at 11 p.m. the Mass is celebrated to mark the beginning of the New Year. People bring with them *kaapparici* (rice mixed with treacle and distributed at the birth of a child), and place it at the altar. After the Mass, this rice is blessed by the priest and is distributed to all those present in the church. The rice so distributed is taken home and mixed with rice and shared among friends and relatives.

Literally, *kaappu* means protection and *arici* means rice; thus, *kaapparici* refers to rice that is protected from pollution. The Hindus have a similar practice in the month of Maarkazi (December-January). They make porridge out of the new rice and offer it at the family altar and then consume. *kaapparici* is the new rice from the harvest that is first offered to the deity and then consumed. Similarly, the Catholics offer the new rice in the church.

tapacukaalam (The Season of Lent)

The season of Lent denotes a period of forty days when the Catholics are expected to realise their sins and make reparation for the same. During this period some Catholics abstain from physical pleasures like the consumption of meat and alcohol. As an expression of penance devout Catholics even wear a special kind of indigenous dress called *kaavi*. Some combine the Lenten ritual with *tiruyaattirai* (a pilgrimage on foot) to Vailankanni (see Chap. 8).

As prescribed by the Church, the Lenten rituals begin on the *vipuuti tirunaaL* (Ash Wednesday), the day on which the priest applies *vipuuti* (ash) on the forehead of the people during the Mass. Three decades ago, the Catholic women were proscribed from wearing flowers in their hair and *kuMkumam* (red spot) on their forehead during the Lenten season, and the priests were particular about it. Some Catholics recalled that during one Lenten season a priest had refused to give communion to a lady who had gone to the church with *kuMkumam* on her forehead. Today, this is not very strictly followed, and most women wear the *kuMkumam*, though they give up wearing flowers in their hair. For Tamil women *kuMkumam* is an auspicious sign, which is only proscribed for widows. The priests have also come to understand the native symbolism and accordingly respect such practices of the people.

***punita vaaram* (The Holy Week)**

Starting with Palm Sunday, the week is called *punita vaaram*. Palm Sunday, Holy Thursday, and Good Friday are the three most important days of the Lenten season. On *kuruttu naayiRu* (Palm Sunday) the priest blesses the palms, which then people carry in procession singing 'Hosanna to the King' and enter the church. After the Mass, the palms are carried home and made into crosses. These crosses are placed in various parts of the house: at the main entrance of the house, under the pillow of the sick, in the cowsheds, etc.

According to our informants, the palm crosses thus placed in the house reinforce their identity as Christians and ward off evil influences. They believe that *ciluvaiei kanTaal peeykal kiTTa anTaatu* (the devil runs at the sight of the cross). The cross is a typical Christian sign that is used by the Catholics to deal with *peey* (the devil). The belief

in *peey* is an element of the native belief-system that is common to both Catholics and Hindus, which the Hindus seek to ward off with the sacred ash.

The main ritual on *punita viyaazan* (Holy Thursday) is that of *paataMkazuvra caTaMku* (the priest washing the feet of the laity), which recalls Jesus washing the feet of his twelve disciples. In some villages the Catholics make a vow to wash the feet of twelve people. Carried out during the *tapacu kaalam*, this ritual engaged in by the male folk only, begins with a prayer by the *kooyilpiLLai* (catechist). As each person's feet is washed, the water is collected, and the person who has fulfilled the vow drinks a handful of this water. The rest of the water is thrown in a place not stepped-in by people. Sometimes this water is used to bathe the sick with the belief that their illness will be cured. The influence of the native practice of bathing the sick with the water used to wash the idols of gods and goddess is clear (see E.Q. Martin 1988:255). The Catholics symbolically associate the 'twelve people' with the disciples of Jesus and hence the water used to wash their feet is treated as sacred.

After the ritual, the *kooyilpiLLai* and the poor are served food. Before partaking in the meal, the *kooyilpiLLai* prays for the dead persons of the house. The meal on this day is vegetarian, and the number of vegetable cooked is twelve, signifying yet again the twelve disciples of Jesus. As a penance some Catholics eat morsels of food given by the poor from their leaves.

Offerings at the church are a universal practice. But what is offered is specific to the place. Thus, the Catholics in the villages visited offer betel leaves and areca nuts, tamarind, salt, chilly, cereals and vegetable, that is, the produce of their gardens.

punita veLLi (Good Friday) is the day on which the Catholics remember the passion and death of Jesus on the cross. Praying ‘the way of the cross’ is one of the central rituals of this day, and in some churches the laity relive the passion of Jesus in the official fourteen stations. Indigenous practices observed during this ritual include *Maata puzampal* (Lamentation of the Mother of Jesus at the death of her son); *parivaTTam* (head-dress worn in mourning) a ritual offering of a piece of new cloth (white shroud) for the body of Jesus (this is same as the *kooTi pooTutal* [a cloth used as a mourning head-dress] when a person dies);⁴ and *tuumpa pavani* (funeral car procession), the silent procession of the ‘body’ of Jesus through the streets of the village, terminating in the church where the body is laid to rest and the church doors are closed (see Photo 3.2). The flowers used for decorating the *tuumpa* are distributed to the people, and are preserved by them for use at the time of sowing, or to keep under the pillow of the sick, etc. It may be noted that the decoration of the *tuumpa* is similar to the *paaTai* (funeral bier) of the Hindus and the *aacanti* (funeral cart/career) of the Catholics.⁵

Maata puzampal (Mother Mary’s lamentation for her son Jesus) is sung in Tamil to the tune of a funeral song called *oppaari* (see Appendix 3.2). Such songs lament the death of a person by making numerous references to his/her personal appearance and excellent qualities. Though the Bible does not refer to the weeping of Mary, this element of local culture of the Tamils has been incorporated by the Catholics into the Good Friday ritual.

Generally women sing the *oppaari* at the time of the death of a person. However, when the Tamil Catholics relive the death of Jesus, instead of women it is the men folk who sing the *oppaari*. This is because women have been traditionally excluded from

important positions in official religion. In fact, some twenty years ago they were not even allowed to read the Bible in the church. This may have been due to the survival of the Brahmanical notion of menstrual pollution. Only from the late 1970s have women been taking active part in the church activities.

On these days, the Catholics observe a few more native practices, which are similar to the rituals carried out during any death in the family: On Good Friday, as a mark of sorrow, they consume a bitter herb called *akatti kiirai* (*sesbania grandiflora*) and the associated ritual is called *tanTu tazai* (stems and shoots). On the following day they take oil bath and eat dry fish preparations as a sign of the end of the mourning period. Thus, while reliving the death of Jesus the Tamil Catholics perform death rituals similar to those of ordinary mortals. In this process the 'alien' religion becomes indigenised and help the people enter the realm of the sacred. While the sacred is the domain of the religious functionaries (priests), people seek entry into this domain without altering the ritual structure but adding native flavour to the Christian rituals. Thus, people are able to actively participate in the religious rituals.

The centrality of *uyirtta tirunaaL* (Feast of the Resurrection) or Easter Sunday is the Eater Mass celebrated in the late and early hours of the day (11 p.m. on Saturday to 2 a.m. on Sunday) in keeping with the tradition that Jesus rose from the death at midnight. During the Mass, the resurrection of Jesus is dramatised with crackers, smoke, loud noise, and the playing of the *tappu*. At the beginning of the Mass, fire and water are blessed, and the laity take them home. It is believed that the holy water wards off evil from the house and persons when sprinkled. The blessed fire is used to light the oven, a symbolic way of restarting life after forty days of penance. There are no significant native practices

attached to the Easter Sunday ritual. This may be because the idea of resurrection does not have a native parallel to which the local Catholics can relate.

The religious ceremonies of the Holy Week described above, particularly those on the Good Friday, throw up another dimension in the process of indigenisation and, that is, the interaction between elements of an 'alien' religion and those of the culture of the converts. The sorrow overtaking the Tamil Catholics while recalling the death of Jesus is expressed through cultural elements such as *oppaari* is a typical illustration of this. Here indigenisation has taken place by transferring a local custom into the religious sphere after conversion. This is entirely a self-generated process of indigenising religion.

***kallaRai tirunaaL* (All Souls Day)**

This falls on the 2nd of November and is dedicated to all the dead by the Church. The rite of All Souls Day was incorporated into the calendrical feast of the Church from the tenth century (Turner 1969:171). That the dead need the prayers of the living is the essential message of the day. This is because of the Catholic belief that the dead do not enter heaven directly, but go through an intermediary state called the *uttarikkira aatmaakkaL stalam* (purgatory) waiting for final judgement. Prayers by the living cleanse the souls of the dead, bringing them into closer communion with god. Catholics not only pray but also ask other intermediaries like the saints and Maata 'to intercede for those under going liminal ordeal in purgatory' (ibid.).

Following the native lore of the Hindus, some Catholics believe that failure to pray for the dead in the family would provoke the dead to disturb the living. Thus, misfortune and sickness in the family are often attributed to such failures. Dreams of the dead are considered as reminders to pray for them and/or as signs of impending

misfortune. The Catholics also believe that even as the dead need the prayers of the living, the dead can also assist the living in the material world (Turner and Turner 1978). This is one of the reasons why the Catholics offer the Mass before any auspicious occasion (e.g., marriage) or after a beneficial event (e.g., getting a job).

On the All Souls Day, the Catholics clean the cemeteries and decorate the graves of their family members with flowers. They place lighted candles and *agarpattis* (incense sticks) on the graves. The priest prays for the dead stressing on the Christian belief that they are not dead but are risen with Jesus. The blessing of the cemetery by the priest is very significant from the point of view of the people, since the notion of the fear of the dead still lingers in the minds of the people. It is symbolic of the dead person's spirit bound within the grave and the harmful effects being neutralised by the sprinkling of the holy water.

It is this which makes a Christian *kallaRai* differ from the Hindu *cuTukaaTu* (burning ghat). The Hindus do not frequent the *cuTukaaTu*, since the place is considered to be polluting. The *cuTukaaTu* is generally situated outside the boundaries of the dwelling quarters of the village. On the contrary, the Catholic cemetery lies within the vicinity of the village, and in some places within the church compound itself. Among the Catholics the cemetery is viewed as an interim place and is devoid of the notion of pollution.

There is another reason for people, not only Hindus, not frequenting the *cuTukaaTu*: it is believed that often the dead linger at this place, becoming *peey* (devil) and possessing the living. While the Church does not subscribe to the notion of the dead person haunting the world (Turner and Turner 1978:204), the Catholics continue to share

this belief about *cuTukaaTu* with the Hindus. However, since the cemetery is blessed by the priest, *peey* cannot reside there.

Offering food in the name of the dead is a native practice, and is distinct from praying for the dead. Through acts of charity, the local Catholics believe, the liminal ordeal of the soul in purgatory could be minimised. In Andavoorani the Catholics bring paddy to the cemetery for distribution among the needy; a share is also given to the *kooyilpiLLai*. Many Catholic families conduct regular cults to the dead: To obtain the blessings of the dead, candles are lighted and incense is burnt at the cemetery before any important planned event. In a few cases the worship of the cemetery has become regularised as a weekly or biweekly routine. We came across a family that burned incense and offered flowers to the photos of the dead. Besides the individual families honouring the dead, the dead are also occasionally collectively approached, as for instance when the monsoon is delayed (see Mosse 1986:423).

The rituals the Catholics follow on the All Souls Day show the way they have fused their Christian ideas of death with the native practices. The remembrance of the dead ancestors has now become a part of the prescribed prayers of the Church. Thus, the manner in which the Catholics observe the rituals on this day is one of combination, moulding and reinterpreting the Catholic rituals with that of their native beliefs and rituals (cf. Robinson 1998:135).

To sum up, the calendrical feasts of the Catholics have definite rituals and procedures set by the Church. From the foregoing description of the celebrations we observe that the Catholics while retaining the given structure and rituals of the Christian celebration have added native rituals, beliefs and practices. They have done so by

retaining the core Christian symbols and have added on peripheral symbols, which are basically native and not Christian in origin. These native symbols receive Christian attributes as they are incorporated into the Christian celebration. Furthermore, the native symbols which are peripheral do not affect the perception or effectiveness of the ritual which is being performed. This again explains the reason for the people's resistance to changes in the Mass.

III

***uur tiruvizaa* (VILLAGE FEAST)**

As noted earlier, besides these calendrical festivals, villages with large concentration of Catholic population also celebrate as a calendrical event the patron's feast of the Christian divinity to whom the local church is dedicated. However, unlike other calendrical festivals, the Church has not prescribed the manner in which this, feast is to be celebrated. Since this is a sphere in which people play an active role, it inevitably draws from the native practices related to the Hindu temple feast. As it will become clear, in the manner of its celebration, the patron's feast resembles the celebrations in the temples in the surrounding Hindu villages. More importantly, for the Catholics, as for the Hindus, the *uur tiruvizaa* is the most important celebration. Every member of the village feels obliged to be present. Even those members who reside outside the village claim their belongingness to the village by their presence during the feast and by paying the *kooyil vari* (church tax). Given its prime of place in Catholic life in rural areas, we shall now discuss the celebration of the *uur tiruvizaa* in the fieldwork villages.

The church in every village is dedicated to a Christian divinity which is regarded as the patron or guardian of the village. Villagers celebrate the annual feast of their church, which they call *uur tiruvizaa*. The celebration of the patron's feast is both an *uur tiruvizaa* (feast of the village) and a *kooyil tiruvizaa* (feast of the church). As such, the *uur tiruvizaa* is held in honour of the patron and guardian, and they are an expression of the gratitude of people for the favours already received and also a prayer seeking continued assistance of the patron through the following year. Since the Hindus have been holding annual village celebrations in honour of their village deities, the Catholics counterpart of such a festival provides an interesting setting for identifying the influence of native practices. As an illustration, an account of the celebration in the village of Andavoorani is presented here.

***uur tiruvizaa* in Andavoorani**

The church in Andavoorani is dedicated to St. Michael, one of the four angels referred to in the Christian fables, the other three being Gabriel, Raphael and Lucifer. Angered by Lucifer's claim for equality with God, St. Michael is said to have killed Lucifer who subsequently became the leader of the devils. Thus, St. Michael has come to represent both loyalty to God and valour to counter the evil. He is the *kraama teyvam* (the village deity) or *uur kaavalar* (the village guardian) of Andavoorani.

As a backdrop for understanding the salient features of Andavoorani's annual festival dedicated to St. Michael, we need to highlight the special characteristics of the social structure of this village. The Catholic community of Andavoorani belongs to the Udayar caste. The Udayars have a council for managing matters of community interest, including the settlement of disputes. The Catholic community is divided into four

segments called *karai*⁶ and each *karai* has a head called *karaikaarar* either nominated or elected by the respective *karai*. The term of office of the *karaikaararkal* is one year, terminating with the celebration of *uur tiruvizaa*. In consultation with the priest the *karaikaararkal* take the initiative to prepare for the celebration of *uur tiruvizaa*. The significant contribution of the *karai* is the celebration of *uur tiruvizaa*, the mega event in the village.⁷

The patron's feast lasts for ten days: The ritual of *koTiyeeRRam* (flag hoisting) is followed by nine days of novena to the patron and preparation for the *uur tiruvizaa*, culminating in the *capparappavani* (the car procession).

Flag hoisting has an important place in Hindu temple festivals, and so is it with Catholic celebrations. It is a sign and an announcement to all in the village and its neighbourhood that the celebration of the feast is on. Once the flag is hoisted, the Catholics do not leave their village, and if they have to go out for any reason, they are obliged to return for the *capparappavani*. This is called *koTitaTai* (the impediment of the flag), meaning prohibition on travel during a temple festival. The Catholics believe that staying away from the feast is a mark of disrespect to the patron saint, which deprives them of the saint's blessings.⁸

With flag hoisting, the life style of the Catholics is significantly altered: They maintain a chaste life during the period of the feast, and give importance to spiritual life by taking part in the daily Mass and prayer. Reinche looks at such rituals related to the flag as something that brings about a transformation in the lives of the people (quoted in Mosse 1986:297).

The patron's feast has precedence over all other social celebrations. Thus, during the feast days marriages are not celebrated in the village. This is similar to the Hindu custom in this area of not conducting marriages in the months of AaTi (July-August), PurTaasi (September-October), Maarkazi (December-January) and Pankuni (March-April), months set apart to celebrate the feast of their deities (Somalai 1975:123).

The death of a person during the patron's feast disturbs the joyful event that is in progress. Such a death is considered to be untimely - *ittanai naaLum iluttukkiTTu kiTantuviTTu ippa caavalama* (having lingered so long should one breathe her/his last now), goes the local saying – and not a peaceful one. It is viewed as an inauspicious sign not only for the family concerned but also for the village. In such a case the burial takes place on the same day, and the funerary rites are carried out quietly, devoid of any music or outburst of mourning. It was also observed that the spontaneous and explicit expression of sorrow, which is normally invoked by the receipt of an obituary of a relative from another village, is conspicuous by its absence in the village that celebrating the feast.

Unlike their Hindu counterparts, the Catholics do not regard attending a funeral as polluting. This is because the Catholics can approach the divine irrespective of their physical condition of purity, whereas the Hindus refrain, as they fear the wrath of their deity. Thus, participation in a funeral is not an impediment to a Catholic's participation in the patron's feast.

The beliefs and practices associated with flag hoisting reveals that the patron's feast is very much localised. The elders of the church, along with the *kooyilpiLLai* tie mango leaves on the upper portion of the flag mast and place a cross on the top. The ringing of the church bell accompanied by playing of *tappu* mark the commencement of

the important event. The *kooyilpiLLai* reads a prayer to the saint, after which the flag mast is raised to the accompaniment of the ringing of the church bell, playing of *tappu*, women utter *kulavai* (chorus of shrill sounds made by women by wagging the tongue, uttered on festive and auspicious occasions) and bursting of crackers. All this creates an atmosphere of excitement and reverence among those gathered. The people raise their hands in reverence to the patron saint, who is symbolised in the flag mast.

The male folk gather before the church to formally invite everybody through the *veRRilai parimaarutal* (the distribution of betel leaves). The Vannaan (washerman) spreads the cloth for the people to sit. The male folk sit according to their social position, and those belonging to the 'untouchable' castes sit on bare ground. One of the *karaikaarar* initiates *veRRilai parimaarutal* (see Photo 3.3). Sandal paste followed by betel leaves are presented to the *karaikaararkal*, *kooyilpiLLai* of other villages, representatives from other villages, *kooyilpiLLai* of the village, and the 'untouchable' castes in that order. *mutalmariyaatai* (the prime-honour) is accorded to the four *karaikaararkal* of the village and then to the *kooyilpiLLai*, who as a religious functionary has an important role in the celebration of the feast. The order of ritual invitation follows the social position of each caste group, thus making the caste hierarchy of the village explicit.

Following *veRRilai parimaarutal*, the village elders invite the priest to hoist the flag. They garland the priest and bring him to the church in a procession to the accompaniment of *tappu*. After the priest has blessed the flag, the *kooyilpiLLai* carries it around the village streets followed by two rows of seven boys each carrying colourful flags and ringing bells (*taTTu mani*). This announces the patron's visit to streets -

uLLirukkum kaTavuL veLiyil vantu ullaar (patron from the church is present in the street). This is said to remind the villagers of the days when the king's arrival was similarly announced.

It is generally the prerogative of the priest to hoist the flag and in his absence a nominee of the village elders hoists the flag. In the latter case, the *kooyilpiLLai* gets the flag blessed by the priest. This is rare, as the parish priest makes it a point to be present.

For nine days from the day of flag hoisting, every evening, led by Parayar *tappu* children carry colourful *iTaikkam* (flags) around the village, announcing the feast day celebration. Once the children return to the church the *kooyilpiLLai* recites the prayer to the patron and the rosary to Our Lady, which are followed by the Mass. The first six days are considered to be the days of preparation for the festival, which climaxes in *capparappavani* (the car procession). The elders of the village bring the priest in procession to inaugurate the *capparappavani*.⁹ On the last three days the *capparam* (see Photo 3.4) are carried on the streets. The statues of the saint and other tutelaries are decorated with *paTTu* (silk clothes), garlands and are carried around the streets. The route through which the saint is taken in procession is referred by Bayly (1992:334) as the 'deity's symbolic kingdom.'

Capparappavani (see Photo 3.4) stops at the four corners of the village and the villagers offer prayers. People place a lighted lamp in front of their houses and kneel down in veneration as the saint passes the street. People from houses located outside the route of *capparappavani* bring their lamps to a street on the route. People shower flowers, salt, and *pori* (puffed rice) on and offer garlands to the patron saint for the various favours

received. The Catholics take home as *pracaatam* the flowers from the garland of the saint, salt and pepper placed at his feet (see also Bayly 1992:344).

The Catholics believe that the saint goes around the village every night, guarding the people from malevolent forces. Not only is the saint said to protect their property from theft¹⁰ and destruction, he is claimed to have ensured that their village is not afflicted by any famine. During the *capparappavani* the saint is believed to take stock of his people, claim his suzerainty over the territory and its people for which he is the guardian. For the Catholics it is an experience of having come under into direct contact with the saint and his protection.

The ten-day feast is an occasion for the villagers to fulfil their vows. Thus, one can observe within the vicinity of the church complex people sacrificing goats and cocks, cooking food, and offering *kooTTai* (paddy), goat, and hen. *neertikkaTan* (a vow made to god) expresses the reciprocal relationship between the believers and the saint: The vows are a kind of transaction between the saint and the people. This is expressed through the offering of various gifts to the saint for the favours received (see Appadurai 1981: 33 and 34).

During the feast days special Masses are offered to the saint seeking his protection from *pilli cuuNiyam and ceivinai kooLaaRu* (sorcery and black magic). Though belief in sorcery and black magic is alien to the Church theology, the Church offers the Mass respecting peoples belief. From the Church's point of view what is important is the need to pray to a Christian saint, and the belief in black magic is secondary.

On the last day of the feast it is customary to have a cultural show in the evening: a play depicting the life of a saint or an orchestra rendering popular film songs or even

screening some films. As a matter of policy the Church does not endorse the screening of films during the festival, as the films generally deal with 'profane realities' and have no place during a festival which is sacred in orientation.¹¹

The patron's feast concludes with the lowering of the flag and the flag mast. The flag is lowered with a thanks-giving prayer to the patron and then taken ceremoniously into the church. Before the flag is lowered people go around the flag mast praying for their intentions. The flag mast is brought down on the third or fifth day after the flag is lowered.

Sacredness is attached to all the objects that represent the patron saint or are in contact with him. For example, the flag mast, the flag, the *capparam*, and the mango leaves tied to the flag mast are regarded as sacred. The villagers take these mango leaves and keep in the house as protection against evil influences, mix them with seeds to be sown for obtaining a good yield, or place them under the pillow of a sick person for speedy recovery. In a similar manner the people venerate the flag mast and the rope that supports the flag mast. The very same flag mast that lies idle through the rest of the year becomes a sacred object of veneration during the feast. Attributing extraordinary power to the flag mast, people take it as their privilege to have had an opportunity of touching it.

uur tiruvizaa is not only a religious celebration of the Catholics, but also a community festival for the entire village and the neighbouring villages, too. Traditionally, the various castes had designated roles to play: In Andavoorani, the Parayars play the *tappu* and carry the gas-lights during *capparappavani*, the Vannaan spreads the cloth to seat people for *veRRilai parimaaRutal*, and the Cakiliyar (the 'untouchable' caste person) cleans the streets through which the *capparam* is carried. However, over the decades there

has been a decline in this tradition and the people are no more obliged to perform their caste-related duties, though the elderly still continue with caste-based occupations as a way of earning their livelihood. Interestingly, the Hindu Parayars play the *tappu* at the patron's feast as an offering to St. Michael, whom they perceive to be powerful and helpful (cf. Basu 1999:90). The Parayars at Andavoorani recalled the sickness and poverty which their families had to suffer earlier when they had refused to play for the feast.

It is important to note that women do not play a formal role in the organisation of *uur tiruvizaa*: Women do not take part in *veRRilai parimaaRutal*, and the *capparam* is carried only by the male folk. Persistence of the Hindu idea that woman could be polluting during certain periods and the prevalence of strong patriarchal norms and sentiments seem to explain this.

So far what we have described is the way the patron's feast is celebrated in Andavoorani. There are some other native rituals related to *uur tiruvizaa* that are performed in other Catholic villages. *maNTakappaTi* (bearing the expenses of the feast-day celebrations) is a time-honoured tradition in the Catholic villages. There are three types of *maNTakappaTi*: the village, the caste, and the individual/family *maNTakappaTi*. In the village *maNTakappaTi*, the Catholic community in the village as a whole shares the expenses of the celebration. This practice prevails in Andavoorani, and it does not give scope for comparison and competition among families, thereby emphasising the fact that the patron's feast is an *uur tiruvizaa*.

In multi-caste villages, as for instance in Oriyur parish, the practice of *maNTakappaTi* follows caste hierarchy. In his study of social organisation and religion in

rural Ramnad, Mosse (1986) also observes that the patron's feast is celebrated on the basis of caste-based *maNTakappaTi*. Besides endorsing caste hierarchy in a Catholic ritual, this practice had led to unseemly competition between castes. Accordingly, caste specific *maNTakappaTi* was proscribed by The All India Catholic Bishop's Conference held at Tiruchirappalli in 1981, and the Bishops of Tamil Nadu unanimously resolved that the patron's feast should not be celebrated on the basis of caste. Though the Church conveyed its stance to all the parishes, it took over ten years to stop the caste-based *manTakappaTi* in Oriyur.

Under the individual *maNTakappaTi*, some families in the village bear the expenses of each day's celebration. This practice prevails in Sengudi. After *veRRilai parimaaRutal*, individuals who wish to meet a day's expenses give their names, and if there is more than one person per day, the expenses are shared. Besides the expenses incurred on the flowers for the Mass, offertory gifts (like fruits, rice, chicken, eggs, etc.), decoration of *capparam*, and the crackers, on each day after the Mass the concerned family hosts a dinner to the priest and people (one member from each family). The invitation to dinner may be summarily extended at the time of *veRRilai parimaaRutal* or the women of the host family go round the village to extend personal invitations. The relatives of the family help in the cooking and serving of food and beverages. After the dinner, betel leaves and areca nuts are served. Then the family members and the invitees from the village invite the priest to bless the *capparam* (car procession). The priest blesses the *capparam*, and one of the male members of the *maNTakappaTikaarar* garlands the patron's statue. The *capparam* is then carried around the village streets.

It must be noted that the organisation and celebration of *uur tiruvizaa* is not necessarily harmonious and peaceful. During the ten days of the feast, tensions may arise between the villagers and the priest. In Andavoorani one issue occasioning such a tension has to do with the timing of *capparappavani*: The villagers prefer to start *capparappavani* late at night and go on till the morning, as the Hindus do. But the priest insists that they start it around 9 p.m. and end by 11 p.m. so that the religious spirit of the feast is not lost. The priest's apprehension is that if *capparappavani* starts late at night, some people may consume alcohol and their behaviour may affect the *capparappavani*. Even if people do not take alcohol, keeping awake the whole night adversely affects their participation in the next day's Mass. Nevertheless, in Andavoorani on 29th September 2000 *capparappavani* started around 11 p.m. and ended around 3 a.m., and the priest had to ignore it.

Similarly, tensions can occur during flag hoisting. About forty years' ago, irrespective of his religion, the *uur amplaar* (the village head) hoisted the flag and received *mutalmariyaatai* (honour). Now it is generally agreed that the priest, as the religious head, hoists the flag. However, in Kokkurani, a Catholic village, this is a contentious issue. Kokkurani consists of Parayar Catholics and their *amplaar*, who belongs to a non-Christian Kallar caste, is from the neighbouring Hindu village. The *amplaar* insists that it is his prerogative to hoist the flag, but the priest refuses to acknowledge this claim. Though the Catholic Parayars are not in favour of the *amplaar* hoisting the flag, they are unable to voice their opinion, as they belong to the 'untouchable' caste and depend on the *amplaar*. During the feast in 2000, as the priest

blessed the flag, the *amplaar* without any invitation forced himself into hoisting the flag. Amidst such tension the hoisting went on (see Mosse 1994b).

Any difference of opinion between the villagers and the priest during the year is reflected in the celebration of *uur tiruvizaa*. In Sengudi, a Catholic village, due to differences of opinion between him and the people, the priest was absent from the church. With their *uur tiruvizaa* fast approaching, the villagers requested the Bishop to depute a priest to hoist the flag. None of the three priests deputed by the Bishop, however, turned up at the appointed time on the flag hoisting day. Hence, the village elders requested the *kooyilpiLLai* to bless the flag and hoist it. This implied that the presence of the priest is not obligatory for the celebration of *uur tiruvizaa*.

If the people could hoist the flag on their own, why then did they request the Bishop to depute a priest for the purpose? According to the informants, only the priest can perform *religious* functions like the celebration of the Mass and the absolution of sins. The *kooyilpiLLai* cannot take the place of a priest; his role being limited to the use of holy water that has been blessed by the priest. Hence, in the absence of a priest the feast would lose its religious significance. While the people may act independently in some rare cases like the above, the Catholics in general recognise the priest as the religious functionary and *uur tiruvizaa* as a religious event.

There are variations in the celebration of the patron's feast among the different Catholic caste groups: The practice of *veRRilai parimaaRutal* is peculiar to the Udayars. The Udayars, a land owning caste, constitute a significant section of the Catholic population in the villages, and they have retained this native practice to assert their dominant status within the larger community. Differences are also noticed in the number

of *capparams* carried: The Parayars and the Brahmins carry one *capparam*, the Nadar and the Vellalars three and the Udayars five. This difference is said to be reflective of the size of the community and their relative economic conditions.

***uur tiruvizaa*: In Comparative Perspective**

In describing the celebration of the Catholic *uur tiruvizaa* above we have alluded to similar practices among the Hindus. Based on the description of the patron's feast at Andavoorani, we may now highlight the indigenous elements in the Catholic *uur tiruvizaa*. At the on set, it is necessary to clarify the theological difference between the Catholic *saints* and the Hindu *gods*: Whereas the Catholic saints derive their power from superior Christian divinities, and specifically from Jesus, the Hindu gods function independently. The saints are persons who have led an exemplary life while on earth and are believed to be closer to god. The saints are in a favourable position to intercede for the people who go to them seeking favours and blessings. Yet, in certain respects the Catholic saints and the Hindu gods perform similar functions, as for instance in their role as the guardian of the village.

capprappavani may have originally served the purpose of providing an opportunity to lower castes, who were prevented from entering the temples, to view the divine face-to-face when the idols were brought in procession on the streets (Somalai 1975:118-28). The Catholics continued the same practice in their place of worship: The conversion to Catholicism did not bring change in the caste-related practices. Though not approved by the Church, for a long time the 'untouchable' caste Catholics were not allowed inside the church, and even when they were later allowed to enter the church, they were seated separately from the higher caste Catholics. Thus, the patron's feast was

an occasion for all Catholics, irrespective of their caste, to have a view of the patron saint, their protector and guardian. Of course, today all can enter the church and the original function sub-served by *capparappavani* may not be all that meaningful.

Flag hoisting is a significant event for both the Catholics and the Hindus - *koTiyRRam illamal oru tiruvizaava?* (can there be a feast without flag hoisting?), so goes the native saying. Along with flag hoisting, the Hindus also have the ritual of *kaappu kaTTutal* (tying an amulet with yellow string on the flag mast as a token of vow or as a pledge of its fulfilment) carried out by the temple *puucaari* (priest). While the Catholics have retained flag hoisting and tying mango leaves to the flag mast, they have given up the ritual of *kaappu kaTTutal*, as it may not have received the approval of the Catholic priests.

The colour of the flag is white, with the cross in the centre marked in red. This combination is significant from the point of view of indigenisation: The temple flag is of the same colour and combination (white and red). *teer* (the temple car) of the Hindu deity is painted red, the colour which is said to symbolise the increased power and activity of the deity, especially during the feast days. This red is always against the background of white, a symbol of stability and purity (Beck 1969:565). While retaining the colour combination of the flag, the Catholics have replaced the vehicle of the Hindu deity with that of the Christian symbol of the cross.

The *capparam* of the Catholics is in the shape of their church *koopuram*. However, the base of the *capparam* resembles the Hindu *teer*. In designing the *capparam* the Catholics have obviously replaced the temple structure model by the church model. Unlike the Catholic *capparam*, 'in Tamil Hindu temple rites,' as Bayly (1992:344)

observes, 'the *teer* is at once a war-chariot, a mobile palace and a representation of god's temple.'

Dedication of the church to a Christian divinity is a universal practice among the Catholics, which appears to be in consonance with the practice of the Hindus. The Catholics regard these divinities as their patrons or guardians. By tradition, every village in Tamil Nadu has a deity placed on the village boundary to guard the village against intruders. Ayyanar is one of the popular deities guarding the villages, especially in the southern districts. Though the Catholics do not place their deity on the boundary like the Hindus, the role given to their saint is same as for the Hindu deity. The common belief in the divinities as the guardians of the village has aided the Catholics to replicate the Hindu temple rites in the celebration of the patron's feast. This replication was facilitated by the familiarity of the Catholics with the Hindu rites, as also by the approval of the Church authorities to ensure adherents to the faith. Discussing the feasts of the Paravas, a Catholic community in Tamil Nadu, Bayly (1992:343) draws similar conclusions.

The most notable difference is in the ritual calendar - the Hindus celebrate their *uur tiruvizaa* during the months of AaTi, PurTaaci, Maarkazi and PaMkuni, when the climate is temperate and the farmers are relatively free from their agricultural activities. Thus, the non-Christian calendar is in keeping with the agricultural and seasonal patterns. The Christian calendar, however, has not taken into consideration the agricultural and seasonal practices of the Catholics in Tamil Nadu. Rather, it has been fixed in consonance with the seasons of the West and is meant for Catholics all over the world. Though the Catholic calendar is not particularised, the feasts of the Catholics are particularised by the people.

From the foregoing analysis it is clear that the overall mood and ethos in the celebration of *uur tiruvizaa* is more or less the same among the Catholics and the Hindus. The distribution of rights/duties runs along the same line in both the communities, and caste plays a dominant role. The secular authorities play a significant role in the decision making process. Among the Catholics, the role of the priest as an 'outsider' to the village is measured: As long as the priest recognises the local authority structure, he could have a place of eminence as the religious head.

Thus, we observe that an 'alien' religion can not easily subdue the native social structure and culture. Indigenisation is an inevitable process for any religion implanted in a new land and people. The nine days of preparation that marks the Hindu festival and found among the Catholics has its parallel in the concept of 'Novena' in the Catholic Church. Novena refers to nine days of collective prayer towards a Christian divinity during which individual seek a favour or favours from the saint. The feast need not necessarily follow the novena. While Catholics retain the structure of the village feast and the nine days of preparation they incorporate Christian novena along with it.

In our discussion of *uur tiruvizaa* the focus was on *tiruvizaa* in honour of the guardian and it did not go into the saint *per se*. It may not be out of place to note that the villagers believe that the saint's power extends beyond their village. Michael, the Archangel of Andavoorani, has become locally famous for *cattiam caital* (swearing in god's name). People use the church as the court and the saint as the judge before whom they make a promise of proving their innocence, thereby semi-institutionalising the saint's power. This is a serious matter, as the people believe that the punishment for false promises is instantaneous. This is carried out in the following manner: In the event of a theft or cheating on property-related matters, the contending parties reach the church to

settle the issue. It is the affected party who normally calls the other to swear before the saint. He lights the candle and places it on the altar of the church. The other party must swear that what he claims is true by blowing off the candle. Such a practice is found in Hindu temples, (e.g., Kali temple at Kollangudi in Sivagangai District) where the camphor instead of candle is lit and the flame put out. Thus, the Catholics while continuing with the native practice of *cattiam caital*, have only replaced the objects of religious symbolism, e.g., candle in place of camphor.

Summary and Conclusion

The rituals in worship and celebrations, when viewed from the point of view of indigenisation, reveal three types of ritual space. One in which the core liturgical element of Catholicism, namely, the Mass is celebrated and in which the official Church exercises a good deal of control. The second space consists of rituals, which are part of the main elements of Catholicism and yet yield ground for inclusion of indigenous practices. The third space contains mainly the indigenous celebrations and rituals which have been Christianised with typical Christian elements.

The celebration of the Mass is central to the Catholic worship and its basic structure is explained in terms of what is popularly known as the 'Roman Rite.' Its structure has three elements namely the penitential, the Word of God and breaking of the sacred Bread. The official Church has always been watchful in preserving this rite as it is thought to be the most sacred ritual. However, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, attempts have been made to indigenise this worship by adopting some Hindu rituals and symbols. At the same time, these attempts did not break the basic structure of the Roman Rite. Such attempts were confined to a few centres run by some members of

clergy and did not become widespread practice in the Catholic community. Nevertheless, such attempts had enduring influence and some changes in worship initiated through such attempts reached far and wide in various churches. These attempts also faced mild opposition from some quarters and eventually lost their force.

In the celebration of the calendrical feasts, one observes high density of Catholic rituals. At the same time, sizeable number of indigenous practices has found place in them. It is difficult to establish whether the people or the clergy introduced these practices, as such these practices have been in existence for centuries. It is probable that the people initiated them and the clergy conceded legitimacy considering that many of these practices acquired Christian meaning after they were included. These indigenous practices did not violate the structure or meaning of the rituals accompanying the various calendrical feasts.

The village annual feast is fundamentally an indigenous practice, both structurally and also in its meaning. Almost every element of this indigenous structure has been subjected to a wide range of processes before being integrated as part of the Christian ritual. Some elements that bore the core of Hindu religious elements, such as the deities, have been abandoned. Some elements that are explicitly Christian, like the cross on the top of the *capparam*, have been added afresh. Some elements that did not bear any typical Hindu symbol were retained by superimposing Christian meaning on them. When some elements could not be included are dropped, parallel elements from Christianity were invented and added. The annual feast being fundamentally an indigenous practice, the

people exercise more control over it and the clergy has been constrained to adopt a cautious path in according legitimacy to it or imposing its control over it.

Endnotes

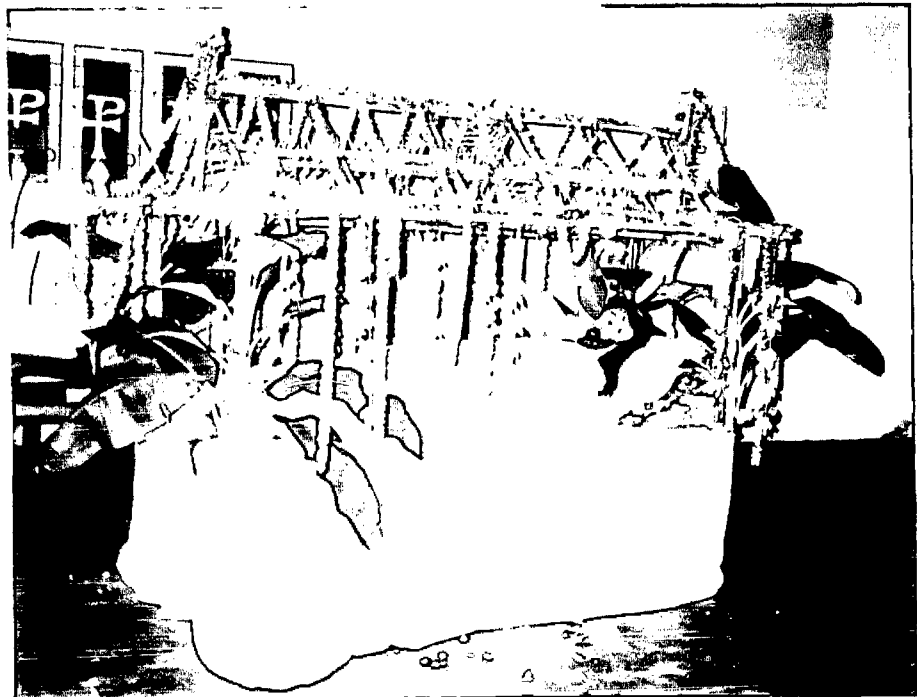
1. The calendar of the Church, which is built around the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, replaced the indigenous one with its own feasts and celebrations. The Catholics have a calendar demarcating four different liturgical seasons during the year: The Advent, Lenten, Easter and ordinary. Each of these seasons has a set of rituals and feasts.
2. 'Roman liturgy' refers to a set pattern of celebrating the Mass which is different from other patterns, as for instance, the 'Syrian liturgy' which is practised mostly in Syria and adjoining regions.
3. *tappu* is a round-shaped native drum played on important occasions, both joyous (e.g., feasts) and sorrowful (e.g., death). The difference is shown in the rhythm of playing. The *tappu* is beaten with sticks by both hands and the beats are produced in unison with fellow drummers.
4. In Rajakambeeram on the 13th of April 2001, people offered 407 *parivaTTam*, and there were non-Christians among them. *parivaTTam* has now become another ritual where in people (not necessarily Catholic) make a vow to offer new cloth for the various favours received.
5. The imitation of Christ in the Philippines, as observed by Cannell (1995:380-83), reveals that the Good Friday rituals are influenced by the Philipino culture. The Philippinos treat the body of Jesus exactly as they would the dead body of a mortal being and follow similar rituals. The statue of Jesus 'is dressed as an honoured corpse, with a binding-cloth tying up his jaw. A sigh and a shout from the waiting crowd goes up as his body is placed inside a special decorated and glass-sided funeral bier' (ibid. 382).
6. These four *karais* are: (1) *maanaakarai* (the landowners of the village) (2) *kuunaakarai* (the descendants of *kunaanTi* the lineage head (3) *naanaakarai* (the

descendants of *naTuviliar viiTu*), and (4) *muunaakarai* (the descendants of *muttukuttian viiTu*).

7. The entire Catholic community meets the expense of the *uur tiruvizaa*: During the year 2000, from each of the ninety-three Catholic households (in the village was collected), Rs 250, 5 kg rice, salt and tamarind, to meet the expense of *uur tiruvizaa*. The *karaikaarar* collects the *kooyil vari* (the church tax).
8. In the pilgrim centre of Vailankanni, during the feast days, the flag is hoisted everyday so that people who come to the shrine can leave the same day without violating *koTitaTai*.
9. The researcher observed that on the ninth day the celebration was grand. On this day along with *tappu*, *meeLam* was also played. There were twenty priests to hear confession and celebrate the Mass. A special sermon was prepared for the occasion, new hymns were sung and a special adoration conducted by a priest. Relatives and friends who had made a vow come to participate in the celebration, fulfilled their vow. At 11 p.m. the elders went with *meeLam* and *tappu* to bring the priest to bless the statue and the *capparam*. The statues of Our Lady, St. Joseph, St. Savariar, St. John de Britto, St. Michael and St. Sebastian were brought from the church and were placed on the *capparam*. On the first *capparam* St. Sebastian and St. Michael were carried. The priest blessed each of the *capparam*, followed by a prayer by the *kooyilpiLLai*, after which the procession started. St. Michael is considered as the guardian of all the Catholic villages and his statue leads the *capparappavani* in all villages.
10. By way of an illustration the villagers narrated an event which took place a few years' ago: Thieves who had robbed the people of their belongings could not cross the village boundary and had to abandon their loot at the village boundary.
11. As rain had been forecast, no cultural programme was held during the annual festival covered by the researcher.



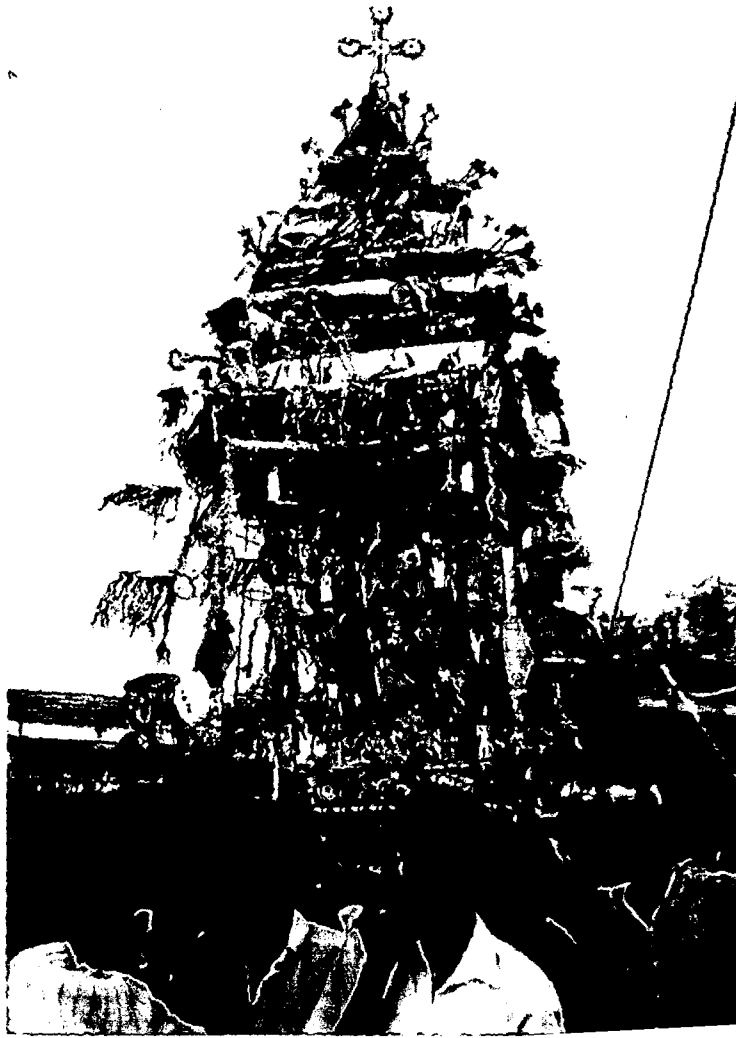
3.1 The Parayars Playing *tappu*



3.2 *tuumpa* (Statue of Jesus in Indigenous Coffin)



3.3 Invitation to the Annual church Feast



3.4

capparappavani (Car Procession)

CHAPTER IV

RITUALS: RITES OF PASSAGE

In the preceding chapter we saw how religious rituals centred on worship and celebrations among the Tamil Catholics carry in them indigenous socio-religious practices. In this chapter we shall focus on the life-cycle rituals or *rites de passage* (van Gennep 1960) that mark the passage of the Tamil Catholics from one defined stage of life to another.

A series of life-cycle rituals is practised by the Catholics in the villages under study. They are Baptism, First Holy Communion, tonsuring, ear piercing, puberty, marriage and death rituals. Some of these, such as baptism, first holy communion and marriage are prescribed by the Church, and they are referred to as *sacraments*.¹ The funeral rite is considered by the Church as *sacramental*.² The remaining rituals are not prescribed by the Church, but are followed by the Catholics as a matter of tradition. Nevertheless, these rituals are given a religious overtone by drawing in Christian symbols during their performance.

Thus, we may classify the life-cycle rituals into two categories: (1) Rituals prescribed by the Church, and (2) Rituals *not* prescribed by the Church. The Church-prescribed rituals generally take place in the precincts of the church, and the presence of the priest is obligatory during their performance. The rituals that are not prescribed by the Church generally take place in the domestic sphere, and they are performed with or without the assistance of the priest or the catechist. In what follows we shall examine how the Tamil Catholics have given native meanings to 'alien' religious rituals and 'alien'

religious overtones to their traditional socio-cultural rituals. We shall begin with the initiation ceremony of the Catholics by which every individual born into a community or seeks entry into it is formally enrolled and given the identity of being a Catholic.

BAPTISM

The word for baptism in Tamil is *naanastaanam*. This Sanskrit root consists of two parts, namely, *naana* (wisdom) and *snaanam* (bath), literally meaning 'bathing in wisdom/knowledge.' It is a rite of passage or the passover, the passing over from a 'human condition to a divine condition' (van Gennepe 1960:94). Given the Catholic belief that every individual is born with 'the original sin' ('*jaNmappaavam*'), baptism is intended to help the individual pass from a state of sin to a state of life with Jesus. The ceremony of baptism signifies not only that the child's original sin is removed, but also that he/she is given a spiritual birth. These meanings are symbolically expressed: Light signifies spiritual birth; the washing of the child's head with water, the freedom from the original sin; and covering the child with a piece of white cloth, its becoming a child of god. Thus, baptism is a purificatory rite.

As an initiation and naming ceremony, baptism incorporates the individual into the religious community. While thrice pouring the holy water on the child's head, the priest prays 'I baptise you in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.' Thereby the child is believed to become the child of god and a Catholic (van Gennepe 1960:62, 63 and 79). A baptised individual is entitled to receive the Holy Communion, to be married in the church and to have the Church burial. Thus, the identification with the 'collective' (Durkheim 1995) is inscribed on the child's body.

The Catholics in the villages generally view baptism as a protective rite and a powerful spiritual aid. Through baptism, the child is believed to come under the powerful protection of god. Since baptism is believed to negate the evil forces and their harmful effects over the child, the period between the birth of child and its baptism is considered to be crucial. Thus, sickness and delay in baptism are inter-linked. Before baptism the elders tell the child '*nii innum kaTavuL piLLai aakavillai*' (you have not yet become the child of god), and when the child is ill they tell '*ataan unakku viaati*' (that is the reason you are becoming ill). Incidentally, it is only after baptism that the child is addressed by name because god should bless the name.

At the time of baptism, the child is accompanied by the *naanatakappan* (godfather), if the child is a boy, or the *naanataai* (godmother), if the child is a girl. The *naanapeRRoor* (godparents) are responsible for the spiritual life of their *naanapiLLai* (godchild); that is, they are to see that the child grows in the knowledge of god as taught by the Church.

Among the Tamil Catholics anybody in the religious community can be the *naanapeRRoor* for the child and the choice is based mainly on the child's spiritual interest (cf. Stirrat 1975:594). As such relatives do not enjoy any preference in this regard. However, if a relative is chosen as the *naanapaeRRoor*, baptism intensifies the already existing kin ties. Ordinarily, nobody refuses the request to be *naanapeRRoor*, as it is regarded as a privilege to be linked to the family through this ritual kinship. Such ritual kinship, it may be noted, carries few of the obligations and responsibilities of true kinship (Bloch and Guggenheim 1981:378). The *naanapeRRoor* offer gifts at the time of *naanastaanam*, First Holy Communion and marriage of the *naanapiLLai*. It is expected

that the *naanapiLLai* keeps in touch with the *naanapeRRoor* and vice versa, and the *naanapeRRoor* is informed of important events in the life of the *naanapiLLai*.

While the baptismal ceremony is an essential rite among Catholics all over the world, it has certain native features as it is practised by the Tamil Catholics. The first child gets the name of the father's father if it is male, and that of the father's mother's if it is a female. The second child, if a female, gets the father's mother's name, and if a male, the mother's father's name. 'Lineal continuity is thus ensured by the process of naming' (Visvanathan 1999:127) and the paternal lineage is given precedence over the maternal lineage.

Based on the baptismal register maintained by the Church in the villages under our study, we can classify the proper names into four categories: (1) The names that are indigenous in syntax, e.g., Aloysius Mani, Alphonse Dhiraviam, Josephine Mallika, etc. (2) The western Christian names that have been Tamilised, e.g., Antony as Anthonymuthu or Anthonysami, Ignatius as Ingnasimuthu, John as Arulappan, John de Britto as Arulanadam/u, Joseph as Susai (for men 'Muthu' and 'Cami' and for women 'Ammal' are added at the end, e.g. Susaiammal). (3) Names coined to reflect certain spiritual qualities, such as Ganaprakasam (Light of Wisdom), Sengol (Sceptre), Visvasam (Faith), Alankaram (Mother of Dolorous), Adaikalam (Bon Succour), etc. These three categories of names have been in vogue since the seventeenth century. (4) In the recent past fully Indian names, such as Anitha, Sharmila, Rajesh, Kumar, etc., are also in vogue.³ Thus, there is a positive approach on the part of the Church towards accepting purely indigenous names.

Furthermore, the Brahmin converts to Catholicism have retained the ritual of *toTTil poTatal* whereby the new-born is ceremoniously placed in the cradle. This ritual is held at home after the child is baptised in the church. The cradle is decorated with flowers and toys, and all the women gathered rock the cradle singing a lullaby (*taalaaTTu paaTatal*) for the child.

A typically native behaviour is observed at the time of baptism: The Catholic women do not refer to or address their husbands by name. When both the husband and son are named Savarimuthu, the son is called by some other name at home.

TONSURING AND EAR-PIERCING

Tonsuring and piercing the ear with a stud are purely native practices which have received a religious overtone by being performed in the church precincts. Tonsuring the first hair of the child is offered in a church of the parent's choice. Often this ritual is performed as a thanksgiving ceremony, while at the same imploring the divine blessings on the child.

The ritual of boring a hole in the lower part of the ear lobes and fixing a small golden ornament is performed on a new-born child or when the child is two or three years old. This ritual takes place in the church compound or in a pilgrim centre or in the house depending on the family's convenience. But the preference is to have it done in the church so as to seek the blessings and protection of god.

The *maamaa's* (mother's brother) role is obligatory with regard to the ritual of ear piercing of the first child. Since the woman customarily goes to her parents' house for the first delivery, her brother shares in the responsibility of his parents. If the *maamaa* is not

able to perform this ritual for whatever reason, the child is then placed on the lap of maternal grandparents or on the lap of either the father or the mother of the child. The ritual is performed facing an auspicious direction. This practice, which has survived the conversion to Christianity by their forefathers, is also found among the Hindus (Udayar, Vellalar, Nadar and Parayar) of the place.

Similar to Hindus, we found the belief in *kula teyvam* (family deity) prevalent among the Catholics. Among the Catholics one particular saint is venerated as the guardian of the family. Generally, the family performs all the life-cycle rituals in the church devoted to this saint.

***putunanmai* (FIRST HOLY COMMUNION)**

putunanmai is another important sacrament in the life of a Catholic. Holy Communion refers to the Body and Blood of Christ in the form of Bread and Wine, which is the central element in the celebration of the Mass. Through *putunanmai* the individual is privileged to participate in the 'sacred meal.' On the day of *putunanmai* the children are dressed in white and the girls wear a white veil covering their head. After the ceremony is over in the church the *naanapeRRoor* and relatives and friends garland the child as a mark of honour. The garlanding the First Holy Communicant is a native ritual incorporated at this rite.

PUBERTY RITUAL

While the foregoing rituals exude certain religio-philosophical meaning, there are other rituals which are essentially social in nature. In Tamil society, e.g., puberty ritual is

an occasion to reaffirm the filial bond of the woman, whose daughter has attained puberty, with her natal family. Her brothers are expected to be present on this occasion as an affirmation of their responsibility to carry out certain duties in the interest of their sister and her daughter. This filial bond is mediated by certain material exchange, the totality of which is known as *maaman ciiru* (gifts from the mother's brother). As part of their cultural universe, Catholics even after conversion carry on these rituals. Though these rituals are essentially social, they are not totally devoid of religious orientation and therefore can be considered a terrain of indigenisation for Catholics in Tamil Nadu.

Puberty ritual is a rite of passage from childhood to womanhood, which is widely observed in South India. The ceremony is linked to the celebration of the event on one hand and to the impurity associated with menstruation on the other (Dumont 1986:269). Mosse (1986:152-53) has described this ritual among the Hindus in Tamil Nadu and we focus on its prevalence among the Catholics.

The central features of this ceremony are the ritual baths for the girl and the *maaman ciiru*⁴ (gift offered by the *maaman*). The ritual baths connected to this rite are of two kinds: One takes place on the day the girl attains puberty, and it is called *kaNTataniir uRRutal* (bath on seeing) or *taniir uRRutal* (pouring water). This is more a family affair and the presence of *maaman* and his wife is not required. The second ritual bath is carried out on the seventh or ninth day of attaining puberty and it is called *caTaMku* (ritual). This ritual is also known as *poo punita niiraaTTu viza* (a holy bath for the flower). Puberty here is metaphorically referred to as the stage of flowering. The word *punita* means pure/holy, emphasising that at puberty the girl is recognised as pure. This ritual is *tiiTTu kazittal* (a purificatory rite) in nature. Since the presence of the *maaman* is obligatory at

this ritual, the day of its celebration is decided in consultation with the *maaman*. This ritual is more or less elaborate and public, and it advertises the marriageability of the girl.

A list of the *maaman ciiru* is given below - a pot, a mug, a towel, a stool, *nalleNNai* (sesame oil) and *ciikaikaai* (soap nut powder), soap, turmeric and a sari. The *nalleNNai* and *ciikaikaai*, which are used at this ritual, are not brought by the *maaman*. They are considered inauspicious items, due to their association with the bath of the corpse. The ritual items used after the bath are flowers, *kuMkumam*, a comb, a mirror, powder, ribbons, bangles and a garland. The food items are raw rice, rice, coconut, fruits, cereals of different kinds, sweets, sugar, betel leaves, areca nut, fruits, and coconuts. The number of trays carrying the items mentioned above should be in odd number. It is not only the ritual items that are important, but also the way they are handled by different persons. A description of the procedure is given below.

Once the *maaman ciiru* arrives at the house of the girl, the girl is taken by her *attai* (*maaman*'s wife) and a few other women (in odd number) for the ceremonial oil bath. The girl is thought to be in a 'heated' and impure condition when she matures (Beck 1969:562). Therefore, *nalleNNai* and *ciikaikaai*, which are considered to be cooling substances, are applied on her head.

After the ceremonial bath, clad in her new sari, the girl is asked to step over a branch of a creeper called *moTakkattaaan* (*cardiospermum*), which marks her purification. The girl then appears before the guests, the *maaman* garlands her and blesses her by drawing the sign of the cross on her forehead and *ciiru* brought by him is placed before the girl. The *maaman* shares the cost of the rite and in some cases bears the entire cost, for he has a claim on the girl as a bride for his son (Dumont 1986:271).

During the time of menstruation the girl is deemed to be in a delicate condition and as being vulnerable to the evil eye (*kaNNu, tirusTi*). The *attai* takes the *aalaatti* for the girl to cast out the evil eye. The people gathered bless the girl by drawing the sign of the cross on her forehead and give her gifts.

Among the Vellalar Catholics, at the end of the seclusion period, the girl brings a lighted lamp and places it at the altar of the church. The light symbolises the offering of herself. She seeks god's protection in general and particularly from evil. The native ritual is Christianised, as this ritual culminates in the sphere of the church.

As to the idea of pollution among the Catholics, we find that some thirty years ago, the Vannaan (washerman) washed the dress worn by the girl at her first menstruation. Since the first menstrual blood pollutes the dress, the Vannaan gave the girl a sari to wear till the day she is given the ritual bath. The role of the Vannaan in this ritual was in keeping with the idea of *kanni tiiTTu*. However, the Vannaan does not like doing this any more.

These Catholics also believe that blood attracts dangerous spirits known as *peey* (the devil) in local language (see Pfaffenberger 1982:201) and that the girl at her first menstruation is vulnerable to possession by evil spirits. In order to protect the girl from *peey* they place objects such as a broom, wooden pounding rod, an iron piece or old chappals at the entrance to the room where the girl is confined. The researcher came across a woman who gave a piece of iron to her school-going daughter who had attained puberty so that she could carry along the 'protective device' to school rather than stay away from it.

The entire ritual resembles that of the Hindus of the region. However, the Catholics have given up the purificatory rite performed by the Hindu *puucaari* (temple priest) as the idea of purification has gone through a change. The *aalaatti*, which is more elaborate among the Hindus, is simplified by the Catholics. The practice of passing around the girl a measure of paddy with betel leaf by the *attai* has been given up. The non-Christians present at the Catholic puberty ritual recognised the rituals to be native, though modified: either the Christian symbols are brought in or the ritual is given a meaning that is compatible with the Catholic religious beliefs.

The Catholic priest is conspicuous by his absence at the ritual. This is understandable from the Church's point of view, as there is hardly any religious element associated with this predominantly social ritual. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that a prayer has been formulated by the Church for this occasion (see Arpanapookal, a prayer diary prepared by the Church in 1998).

The rites of passage beginning with baptism to puberty are celebrated on a relatively small scale, while marriage and death are elaborate rituals, since they are viewed as the principal thresholds or stages of a person's life (Robinson 1998:159). Accordingly, these rites expectedly yield greater scope for indigenisation of Catholicism.

***kalyaaNam* (MARRIAGE)**

For Catholics marriage is a sacrament. As a sacrament it is considered a permanent union and not a contract which can be dissolved at the will of the persons concerned. Early Christians conducted marriage according to local customs and as a family celebration, and the priest was no more than a qualified witness on the occasion.

From the eleventh or twelfth century the priests began performing the rites of consent (Schmidt 1974:239, 266 and 267). It was only in the sixteenth century, at the Council of Trent, that official status was given to marriage as a sacrament and a Church ceremony became essential for the validity of marriage. The delay may partly be due to the reluctance on the part of the Church to regard a relationship with sexual overtones as being holy (Warner 1976 and Thomas 1994:628).

As early as 1963, a Catholic priest named Lourdes (1979:71-96) observed that the Tamil people have the highest grade of marriage spirituality of their own, such that their marriage must be defined as 'naturally Christian.' In accordance with the Canon Law of the Church which holds 'that wherever it is the practice to employ other laudable customs and ceremonies at weddings, it is fitting to maintain them' (quoted in Lourdes 1979:72), the Tamil Catholics have retained their marriage rituals followed in the domestic circle and replaced marriage in the temple or that officiated by the Hindu *pucaari* with that of a Church marriage. Similar observations have been made about marriage among the Catholics in Goa (Robinson 1998), Kerala (Joseph, Mariamma 1994 and Visvanathan 1999), and Shillong (Susngi 1995).

Based on the observation of several marriages and the wide-ranging discussions with the informants during the field study we shall now analyse the rituals of marriage among the Tamil Catholics. Following Visvanathan (1999:102), we may broadly classify these rituals into two categories: canonical rituals (as per the prescription of the Church) and domestic rituals (which are carried out by the people though not prescribed by the Church).

Season and Time

The Tamil Catholics arrange marriage according to the Tamil calendar which regards some months as auspicious and others as inauspicious. The months of Cittirai (April-May), Vaikaasi (May-June), AaNi (June-July), and AavaNi (August-September) are the preferred months for celebrating marriages. It is during these months *mallikai* (jasmine), a white flower which has special significance in an auspicious occasion like *kalyaaNam*, is available in abundance (Sasivalli 1985:15).

The months of Aipasi (October-November) and Kaartikai (November-December) are also auspicious, though not as auspicious as the previous set of months. *kalyaaNam* during these months is considered *avacara kalyaaNam* (marriage in a hurry). AaTi (July-August) and PurTaaci (September-October) are inauspicious months and, like the Hindus, the Catholics generally avoid marriages during these months. It is believed that the AaTi *kalyaaNam aaTTivaikum* (those who get married in AaTi undergo suffering of all kinds). Apart from these months, Catholics avoid marriages during the season of Lent (a period meant for penance and prayer for atonement of one's sins) as required by the Church and during the feast of their patron saint.

Within the auspicious months, like their Hindu counterparts, the Catholics go by the concepts of *naLLa naaL* (auspicious day), *naLLa neram* (auspicious hour) and *raaku kaalam* (inauspicious hour). The specific duration keeps fluctuating according to the day of the week and the details are available in the Tamil calendar. However, the early hours of the day, e.g., up to 6 a.m., are considered auspicious.

Some Catholics do match the *jaatakam* (horoscope) of the potential bride and bridegroom in order to ascertain the mutual compatibility of the partners. The researcher

came across a family that refused to give its girl in marriage to her *muRai maapiLLai* (mother's brother's son) because according to her *jaatakam* she had no privilege to live with her mother-in-law. So, she was given in marriage to a boy whose mother was already dead.

Caste, Kinship and Marriage

The Tamil Catholics generally observe caste endogamy. Marriage within one's caste and religious community is treated as proper. However, change is visible and an educated groom of lower caste is better accepted than an uneducated groom of one's own caste.

Caste endogamy among the Tamil Catholics is facilitated by the norm of preferential mating. The 'preferred spouse' for the Tamil Catholics is the cross cousin of the right relative, that is, the *muRaipayen* (right boy) and *muRaipen* (right girl) (Busby 1997:22). Thus, preferred spouses for the boy are his mother's brother's daughter and father's sister's daughter. Furthermore, uncle-niece marriages are also permitted. In all this, the consent of the *maaman* is important, as he has the right to marry the girl (if of marriageable age) or marry her to his son.⁵ Only when he permits the marriage outside his family the marriage proceedings are carried out. It is part of the kinship pattern of Catholics that marriage takes place between bilateral kinship (Karve 1968). However, among the Nadar Catholics the male ego cannot marry his sister's daughter as they follow the system of matrilineal *kiLai*, according which the male and his sister's daughter belong to the same exogamous group.

Catholics also follow the rules of consanguinity laid down by the Church to regulate the relationship between those who are related by blood. The rules of

consanguinity prevent the closure of marriage circles and their restrictions within particular kin groups (Robinson 1998:150). The Church also makes it possible for the dispensations of the same rule and this may be with respect to the customs followed by the Catholics in different regions. Thus, the Catholics in Tamil Nadu continue to practice marriage alliance with their cross cousins and nieces by paying a penalty to the Church. The parish priest allows marriage with the cross cousins while only the Bishop can allow marriage with the uncle. This is allowed in the absence of a male heir. We came across one such marriage in Thedakottai a village.

Once the partners are selected the ritual of *niccayataarttam* (confirmation of the marriage) or *paricampooTutal* (betrothal) is held, where a gift from the groom's father to the bride's father is given as a sort of pledge and an initial guarantee that the girl is theirs. This ritual takes place within the domestic circle of the girl. The boy's party comes with gifts - flowers, fruits, sweets, garlands, *veRRilai paakku* (betel leaves and areca nut), coconuts, *paricappuTavai*⁶ (the engagement sari), *kuMkumam*, turmeric, etc. The entire ceremony is identical with that of the Hindus with the notable Catholic element of the elders blessing the girl by drawing the sign of the cross on her forehead.

The ceremony of *niccayataarttam*, is also referred as *oolai elututal* (writing on palm leaf). Each party writes on a sheet of paper the names of the person to be married, of the parents and grandparents (of two generations), tracing the descent from the paternal side. Turmeric paste (the symbol of auspiciousness) is applied on the four corners of the sheet. This sheet is placed on a tray of betel leaves and is ritually exchanged between the parties. This is called *taTTu maattutal* (exchange of trays).

In addition to the above, the Vellalars observe a ritual known as *maTinirapputal* (filling the sari *pallow*), which is absent among other Catholic caste groups. The sister of the boy or one of the *cumaMKali* performs this ritual. The sister brings in her sari *pallow* a coconut, *veRRilai paakku* and fruits which she transfers into the sari *pallow* of the girl. In van Gennep's (1960) words this is a 'ritual of incorporation' of the girl into the boy's family.

Another ritual associated with the engagement, and unique to the Catholics, is the practice of announcing the marriage banns in the church. This formal announcement after the Sunday Mass for three consecutive Sundays signifies that marriages are a concern of the larger community which endorses the validity of the proposed marriage. The girl and the boy now learn the prayers and basic rules of a Catholic marriage through the priest/*kooyilpiLLai* (catechist). They then obtain a formal letter from the priest certifying that they are fit to be married in the church.

Invitation to Marriage

Today printed cards have become the most popular mode of invitation to the marriage, and the order for the printing of the invitation is placed on an auspicious day and time. The top of the wedding card carries the sign of the cross and a verse from the Bible. Like the Hindus do, the Catholics too apply turmeric paste on the four corners of the invitations before distributing them to the guests. Besides, as in earlier times, close relatives are invited with *veRRilai paakku*. The maternal uncle, who is first among the relatives to be invited, is even presented a gift of money.

The day before the marriage, at an auspicious time, the *pantal* (a temporary enclosure to make room for guests) is put up. On either side of the entrance to the *pantal*

plantain trees with their bunch of fresh yield is tied to the polls as a sign of fertility and prosperity. Decorations of palm leaves are hung all around the *pantal*. It is removed only on an odd day from the day it is put up.

***peN azaittal* (Inviting the Bride)**

This is an exclusively Catholic ritual as the place of *kalyaaNam* has changed with the adherence to Catholicism. Since the Catholics follow the rules of marriage laid down by the Church, the principle of patrilocality is assumed at the marriage itself and the marriage takes place in a church in the groom's village. It is in this context that the ritual of *peN azaittal* becomes significant to the Catholics: The groom's party arrives the day prior to the *kalyaaNam* to invite the bride and her relatives. After being blessed by her parents and elders the bride leaves her natal house and is kept for the night in the house of a relative of the groom; and the bride enters the groom's house as a rightful wife only after the *taali* is tied in the church. Thus, the Tamil Catholics have combined the Church's norm of patriarchy by having the marriage ritual in the church of the groom and according to the local custom of matriarchy the bride enters the groom's house only after the *taali* is tied.

After the bride reaches the groom's village, both are taken to meet the priest along with cash and fruits. This meeting is called *caami cantippu*, and as a preparation for the marriage ceremony, they make their confession to the priest.

The Wedding

On the morning of the *kalyaaNam*, the *kuuRaipuTavai* (the wedding sari) is brought ceremoniously to the place where the bride stays. The preferred colour for the *kuuRaipuTavai* is red or shades of red or *maampazakalar* (the colour of mango); these

colours are associated with auspiciousness, fertility, procreation and motherhood. White is not generally preferred, as it is regarded as an 'infertile colour' associated with widowhood and asceticism (see Daniel 1987:190).

kooyil kalyaaNam (church wedding): Among the Catholics marriage is recognised as valid only when it takes place in the church and in the presence of a Catholic priest (Warner 1976). Led by the *meeLam*, the bride and her relatives are brought in procession to the church. Similarly, the groom and his relatives also reach the church. The bride comes in a silk sari and with a white veil over her head (earlier the head used to be covered with her sari *pallow*) while the groom comes in a suit (earlier he used to wear a silk *veesTi*, shirt and a pleated silk towel over the shoulder). These changes are a result of modernisation and thus there is a combination of indigenous and Western practices.

At the entrance to the church the priest receives the couple and they are led to the altar. From the stand point of the Church, the most important element of marriage is the declaration of consent. Marriage is viewed by the Church primarily as a relationship between consenting adults, rather than between families or whole groups of kin. During the celebration of the Mass the priest asks for the consent of the couple, and the couple join their right hands and declare their consent. The ritual of tying the *taali*, instead of exchanging the rings, follows the formal consent (see also Visvanathan 1999:108).

The tying of the *taali*, a typical native marriage badge for the bride, is the most important ritual from the point of view of the people.⁷ *taali* is passed around and the elders bless it. Then the priest blesses the *taali* and hands it over to the groom who, assisted by his sister, ties it around the neck of the bride. At the time the church bell is rung and the *meeLam* (the native musical instrument) is played. After the *taali* is tied, the

priest blesses two garlands and hands them over to the couple and they garland each other. Once the church ceremony is over the couple takes the blessing of the elders by *vizuntu kumpiTTu* (touching of the feet, especially of their parents).

Rituals in the Domestic Sphere. The following custom is retained by the Catholics of Tirunelveli. Once the *kooyil kalyaaNam* is over, the bride and bridegroom are taken in a procession to their respective houses. Later in the day the groom is taken in procession to the bride's house. A custom called *vaasarpaTimariyal* (blocking the entrance to the house) is followed. The *muRai maapiLLai* (man who has the right to marry her under the preferred cross-cousin marriage) stands at the entrance of the house of the bride and does not allow the groom to enter since he has the right to marry her. Following a mock fight the groom pays a price or a gift to the 'contender' and then the groom is allowed into the house of the bride (see Sivasubrahmanian 1969:291-296). Bayly (1992:336) refers to this as

A kind of ghostly fictive marriage system running parallel to the conventional pattern of Christian marriage alliance which they have adopted in recognition of Church teaching on consanguinity and permissible liaisons. Though such marriages were banned under the Catholic consanguinity regulations, ... Catholics still made prestations to their hypothetical *muRai* marriage patterns.

The married couple is received at the entrance of the house with *aalaatti* which can either be simple (turmeric water, lime and betel) or elaborate (tray of lamps, flowers, etc.) (see Photo 4.1). It is always offered by female folk and especially by the *cumaMkali*.

Among the Vellalars the toe ring ritual (see Photo 4.2) is carried out after the *aalaatti* is conducted. On a raised wooden plank (earlier a grinding stone, which signifies stability, solidity and strength), a plantain leaf (signifying new life and continuity) is

placed. On it salt is spread (human beings are to preserve life like salt that preserves things). On the salt the girl places her right foot, then the left. Milk (a sign of purity) is poured on her toes. Finally, the groom's sister puts the toe rings on the bride's toes and tightens them with the help of a coconut. The coconut is broken on the street, to ward off the evil eye. Toe rings, like the *taali*, are the symbol of marriage. Traditionally, when the Tamil women walked with their heads lowered, the *taali* could not be seen, but their toe rings were visible. Today, the wearing of the 'toe ring' has become a fashion, and is worn, irrespective of their marital status (Kaliaperumal 1980:73-75).

The couple enters the house ceremoniously placing each one's right foot first as the woman sing:

*manamakaLe marumakaLe vaa vaa, un valatukaalai eTutuvaittu vaa vaa;
kunamirukkum kulamakaLe vaa vaa...*

(Bride and daughter-in-law, put your right foot and enter; the daughter of our lineage, you who posses excellent qualities put your right foot and enter).

From the ethnographic account provided by Hertz (quoted in Das 1994:157) we gather that 'the importance of the right over the left expresses symbolically the dualism of the sacred and the profane, where, in most cases, the right is associated with the sacred and auspicious and superior.'

The day after the *kalyaaNam* is the *peN viiTTu viruntu* (feast at the girl's house). The *maaman* brings the *ciiru* (gift) for the girl (see Photos 4.3 and 4.4). One of the important items in the gifts brought is the *kuttuviLakku* (a brass lamp). It is a symbolic object representing the bride as the light of the groom's house. The presentation of gifts by the relatives and friends follows.

The guests who come for the *kalyaaNam*, after taking part in the *kalyaaNa caappaaTu* (marriage meal), gift the family with money. This is known as *moipanam*. The amount gifted is always an odd number, e.g., 101 or 501, etc. This is recorded by a member of the family, called the *moiezututal*, since the compliments need to be returned on a suitable occasion. The collection is carried out in the bride's house among the bride's relatives and in the groom's house among the groom's relatives. In practice this amounts to a partial compensation to the family which has given the feast. Thus, all those present at the *kalyaaNam* share the expense. Here we see the principle of reciprocity working (Dumont 1986:257).

***taali/maaMkalyam* (The Marriage Badge)**

Since the *taali* is the most significant ritual object of the *kalyaaNam - taali kaTTu kalyaaNam* (marriage is tying the *taali*), so goes the Tamil saying – we shall examine at some length this central symbol of Tamil marriage.

The use of the *taali* is common in Tamil marriages irrespective of the religion and caste to which one belongs, though its size and shape may vary according to the caste and social standing of the marrying families. In olden times, the names of the bride and the groom used to be written on an *oolai* and this used to be tied around the girl's neck. This *taali* is called a *panai oolai taali* (palm leaf *taali*) (Lokidhasan 1988:166). However, no one is certain as to how this custom began (Rasamanickanar 1957:108-10).

The *taali* has been associated with religious beliefs from earlier times: the *taali* of the Hindus bear an image of the Lingam, of Ganesh, or of Laksmi (Srinivas quoted in Dumont 1986:251). Among the Tamil Catholics we find that these religious symbols of the Hindus are replaced by the Christian religious symbol of the cross. Each Catholic

caste has a distinct shape of *taali*. The Parayars have a plain cross, the Nadars have a plain cross but different from the Parayars, while the Udayars and Vellalars have a more decorative cross. While scanning through the various designs of *taali* at the *aacaari*'s shop we discovered that the designs were the same for both the Catholics and Hindus, with the difference that the Catholics have the cross on the *taali* (see Picture 4.1). Caste difference in the shape of the *taali*, is however gradually disappearing.

There are two types of *taali*: One is called the *ottai taali* (single *taali*) and the other the *coTipu taali* (double *taali*). The Udayars generally wear the double *taali* and so they have no custom of *taali perukki poTutal* (increasing the *taali*), since it has everything a *taali* needs. The others who wear the single *taali* have the practice of *taali perukki poTutal*, that is, addition of a gold coin, beads and gold stud. Not all Catholics follow this ritual and those who do carry it out during an auspicious month, day and time. Neither the *aacaari* nor the people could explain the variations in the designs of the *taali*.

The Tamil Catholics attach great significance to the *taali*: The *taali* is not exposed because they fear that an evil eye may affect the woman's marital life. Loosing the *taali* is considered as an inauspicious sign and a sign of danger to her marital life.

It is clear from the foregoing that the Tamil Catholics are conscious of the way 'proper' marriage rituals are to be carried out, as defined by Tamil society (Bayly 1992:336). Beginning with the choice of a partner - the *muRai maapiLLai* - to the *kalyaaNam* proper, they follow the existing socio-cultural practices. Their rituals are culturally determined; they may or may not carry a religious overtone. The cultural element of the ritual makes it possible for the incorporation by the community irrespective of its religious adherence.

Nevertheless, the Tamil Catholics hold that the marriage is recognised and valid only when it is blessed in the church. Accordingly, notwithstanding its pre-eminently indigenous character, the important ritual in marriage, namely, the tying of *taali*, takes place in the church. The Church, in turn, has incorporated the *taali* instead of the ring, the exchange of garlands, and native music as part of the marriage ritual. The typical Christian rituals observed are the reading of the marriage banns in the church and securing the consent of the couple in the presence of the divine and the people.

An auspicious event like marriage is celebrated throughout the first year of the couple's married life. The bride's family in particular finds various occasions to invite them over and offer them gifts. For instance, the couple is invited by the bride's family for their *tala* (first) Christmas celebration, just as the Hindus do for *tippaavali*, and is offered a new set of clothes. However, it is noteworthy that the Catholics have given up the custom of *poMkal ciiru* (gift at the harvest feast); the reason may be that the educated have moved from the village.

The marriage prestations come to an end with the birth of the first child. We shall now discuss the practices related to pregnancy and child-birth. While these do not fall under the rites of passage, they are an integral part of the socio-cultural life of the people, and are considered by van Gennep (1960:49) as rites of protection.

PREGNANCY AND CHILDBIRTH

Traditionally, pregnancy and childbirth are regarded as the states of transition which are vulnerable to the influence of evil. Hence, to protect the expectant mother, in the first place, and the mother and the new born, certain protective practices exist in the

native culture. Though these rituals are not endorsed by the Church, the Catholics follow them. Ritually, a woman in her fifth month of pregnancy is brought to her mother's house, and this is known as *maruntu kuTikka azaittal* (to consume medicine). The woman is taken to the church where she offers lighted candles and partakes of holy water given by the *kooyilpiLLai*. The ritual is also intended to protect the mother and the child in her womb from all possible evil effects.

On the thirtieth day of childbirth the mother and the child are given a special bath. The entire house is cleaned and holy water brought from the church is sprinkled all over the house. This is a kind of purificatory rite followed by the Catholics; the basic idea is to ward off malevolent forces. While the practice related to childbirth is still followed, the underlying idea of pollution is neutralised with the Catholic faith. To ward off evil, Catholics tie a black thread around the wrist of the new born child and a holy medal with Christian symbolism fastened to a black cord is put around its neck. A black spot is also placed on the cheek of the child.

Marriage Rituals: A summary

Overall, one observes that the major part of the marriage rituals among the Tamil Catholics are non-religious and that they occur in the domestic sphere. One could then ask as to what is the relevance of discussing these rituals in a study on the indigenisation of Catholicism. Underlying this question is the assumption that religion and culture are two distinct realms, and that indigenisation belongs to the realm of religion, rather than that of culture. Our empirical data, however, show that there exists a symbiotic relationship between these two realms, and that the human agents shift between these two with ease and integrate them into an organised whole. The basically socio-cultural rituals connected

with betrothal, for instance, get a Catholic religious overtone when the bride is blessed by the elders with the sign of the cross.

There is another reason why cultural practices of a religious community could be considered as an integral part of indigenisation. At the time of their original conversion to Catholicism the converts had the option, at least theoretically, to abandon totally their past culture as they sought to abandon their past religion. But, as our data suggest that they have not done so and that they have retained those socio-cultural practices that do not have any explicit symbols of Hinduism.

However, retention of an element, which the indigenous culture regards as irreplaceable marker, is not without any tension. This is particularly so when the converting religion, that is, Catholicism, has its own marker which it regards as essential. For example, typically in a Catholic marriage (as in the West), the exchange of rings constitutes the central symbol of the bond between a man and his wife. The Tamil Catholics, whether in rural or urban areas, of high caste or low caste, of upper class or lower class, regard the wearing of the *taali* as more sacred than exchanging rings. The tension arising out of this resistance is neutralised by the compromise of carving a cross on the *taali* and the *taali* being blessed by the elders and the priest. Thus, a new cultural element, which is essentially indigenous in form and symbolism, enters Catholicism as it is practised in Tamil Nadu.

Parallelism is another mode of indigenisation. This is evident in the way the marriage invitation cards are printed. While the Hindus inscribe the symbol of *Om* or *U* (Ganesh symbol) along with a picture of Hindu deity, the Catholics inscribe Jesus, Mary, Joseph (*Yeesu Mari Susaitunai*) or Hail Mary (*Mariye vaazka*) along with the impression

of the cross or the picture of the Holy Family. Of course, retention and reproduction are the easiest options. For instance, just like the Hindus, the Tamil Catholics too mark the four corners of the invitation cards with turmeric paste. Also, as the Hindus do, close kin are personally invited and the cards are given along with betel leafs and a token amount of cash.

THE ANOINTING OF THE SICK

The fear of death and the anxiety about life after death has preoccupied the minds of people throughout history. This has led to the evolution of beliefs and practices to address such fears and anxieties. According to the Church, the ritual that ensures a peaceful death is the giving of *avasttai* (extreme unction): This consists of anointing the person by the priest and absolving her/him of all the sins. Most Catholics look upon this as a necessary ritual before death. It is generally performed when a person is sick and also when he/she is on the deathbed. Such a person is believed to go to heaven. Conversely, it is also believed that failure to administer this ritual will make the spirit of the dead person to linger on.

The children and the close relatives of the person on the deathbed pour milk and holy water into her/his mouth. As the person breaths her/his last, the people assembled call out to Jesus, Mary and their favourite saints, with the belief that they may enable the person to die in peace and reach *mooccam* (heaven). The fact that a dying person recites the names of the divine is regarded as a sign that the person is prepared to die and certain to reach *mooccam*. Children consider it a blessing to be present at the last stage, and the

blessings of the dying person are auspicious for the living as they are her/his last wish which are believed to be immediately answered by god.

***caavuccaTaMku* (DEATH RITUALS)**

For every community the fact of death is critical, and hence rituals to deal with it are ubiquitous (Mead 1973:89 and 90). While death is the termination of life for the individual concerned, it is a transitional period for the survivors: They enter it through the rites of separation and emerge from it through the rites of integration into society (van Gennep 1960:147).

From Church records we gather that Catholics everywhere have retained their native rituals related to death, though, their attitudes to death have changed as a result of their adherence to Catholicism (Rutherford 1980:5-15). An Indian theologian has made an attempt to study the death rituals of the Hindu Brahmins, and has suggested an 'Indian Christian Funeral Rite' (see Pereira 1980). In this section we shall describe the funeral rites of the Udayars as observed during the field study. Of all caste groups, the Udayars have the most elaborate death rituals. However, we also note the differences in the rituals followed by the Catholic Brahmins, Vellalars, Nadars and Paryars, which were also observed during the field study (see Table 4.1).

The day and the time of death are attached significance by the people. At the funeral of a lady the researcher heard that the woman was lucky as she had passed away on a Wednesday, which is considered an auspicious day: *poNNu kiTaitaalum putan ki'Taikaatu* (you may find a bride but not a death on Wednesday) was the saying.

Similarly, the Tamil Catholics believe that a person dying on Good Friday will enter the heaven the same day.

Death on a Saturday is considered inauspicious. It is also important to note that Saturday is dedicated by the Church to Mary, and the Catholics make a special visit to Mary's shrine on this day, but their native beliefs about death on a Saturday have not changed. The popular saying is: *cani ponam tunai teeTum* (the one dying on a Saturday looks for company), that is, it portends three consecutive deaths in the same village. To safeguard against this, the Catholics, like the Hindus, tie a hen to the *aacanti* (a Catholic funeral cart/career) to be sacrificed before burial. In spite of the strong objection by the Church, the practice continues.

When a person dies, the men folk take charge of *keetam colliviTutal* (informing the relatives of the death), and the Parayan is sent to inform the relatives about the death. At the house of the deceased a *pantal* devoid of decoration is put up and the *urumi* (a percussion instrument whose sound suits the mood of mourning) is played. The church bell is rung by the *kooyilpiLLai* (catechist) slowly one stroke at a time.

The body is given a ritual bath and turmeric paste is applied on the eyes. If the deceased is a woman, *kuMkumam* is placed on the forehead. At the head of the body some people place *nirainaazi* (a measure of paddy and a betel leaf, which is to be given to the Vannaan) and water in a *cempu* (mini pot). Both the hands of the deceased are folded across the chest and the fingers are interlocked. A rosary is wound around the wrist. The priest and/or the *kooyilpiLLai* prays for the eternal rest of the soul and sprinkles holy water on the body.

The women folk sit in a circle around the corpse with their hands on the shoulders of those sitting on either side, and they sing standard verses describing the character of the deceased and the loss to the loved ones. This ritual is called *oppaarivaittal*.

The men folk stand outside the house bare bodied above the waist. When other mourners arrive, they stretch out their hands with palms open. This is referred to as *keetam koTuttal* (the relatives of the deceased accepting the expression of sorrow). The visiting mourners place their hands on the open palms. This is called *keetam keTTal* (expressing one's sorrow to the relatives of the deceased). In the presence of the dead body the mourners show respect by removing their shoulder towel. As the body is taken away people fold their hands as done in prayer.

The gifts (a garland and paddy) from the affines arrive. The paddy is used before or at the final *caTaMku* (ritual), and it is not saved. This is followed by *kooTi konTu varutal* (bringing new cloth for the deceased). There are two kinds of *kooTi*: *pirantta iTattu kooTi* (in case the deceased is a woman) and *pukuntta iTattu kooTi* (in case the deceased is a man). Both the *kooTi* come from the woman's natal home in procession with the Parayar *tappu*. When the *kooTi* reaches the house, it is a sign for the last ritual bath to be given.

The rite of separation, of the dead from the living, begins with the ritual of *niir maalaieTuttal* (ceremony of bringing water for bathing a corpse before burial). The *niirmaalai* is a significant event for the family and relatives, as also for the entire village. This is the only time the relatives come in close contact with the corpse and that affinal and filial relationships are expressed through this ritual.

The important ritual specialists are the Ampataien (barber) and Vannaan (washerman) and they perform the purificatory rite for the corpse. Water is brought from the village pond or well,⁸ by the chief mourner, sons, daughters, daughters-in-law and grand children of the deceased. The Parayars lead the procession with their *tappu*. The chief mourner dips himself thrice in the pond, and others may do likewise or sprinkle a handful of water on themselves. The basic idea of a bath is to purify oneself and, by implication, the water carried by such person is pure. The Ampataien ties a white thread around the pot of the chief mourner in a criss-cross manner; a similar decoration is done by the Brahmin priest at the time of the Hindu purificatory rite. Flowers are rolled around the pot and a few petals are floated in the pot (see Photo 4.5). The Ampataien garlands the chief mourner who carries the pot of water under the white cloth provided by the Vannaan (see Photo 4.6).

For the final ritual bath, if the deceased is a married man, his wife applies the *nalleNNai* on his head and then the *ciikaikaai*. For an unmarried person this is done by the parents. While applying the oil and soapnut powder the left hand is used. After the bath the eyes of the corpse are covered with turmeric paste. The mouth is closed using a bandage, and the Ampataien ties the two thumbs and the two big toes together. The body is dressed with the *kooTi* and garlanded, and a coin is placed on the forehead. *KuMkumam* is also used for women.

There are certain socio-cultural codes: if the deceased is a woman whose husband is alive, her body is dressed as if she is a bride in all her marriage finery, and the *kuMkumam* on her forehead is symbolic of her marital status and fertility. Whereas a widow's body is unadorned by jewellery and no *kuMkumam* is placed on her forehead.

The traditional colour of the sari is *arakku* (red), a royal colour. Thus, Tamil women in general, not excepting the Catholics, wish to die before their husband. The man under any status is dressed in white.

***caavuppucai* (Mass for the Dead)**

The body is laid in the *aacanti* and carried to the church. The death ritual in the church is the last farewell with which the Catholic community honours one of its members before the body is buried.

The body is kept in the church facing the entrance. Two candles are kept burning at the head of the body along with some incense sticks and a cross. The priest celebrates the Mass in a violet vestment, a ritual dress for the funeral Mass. After the Mass the priest comes down from the altar and the final prayers for the dead are offered. The body is incensed and holy water is sprinkled on it, and it is then carried to the cemetery in the *aacanti*, in procession, while the church bell is rung.

Only the male folk proceed to the cemetery. The chief mourner carries a cross under the white cloth provided by the Vannaan. Another person carries a *tii caTTi* (a pot of fire) for the purpose of incensing at the cemetery. Flowers are sprinkled on the way and coins are scattered. The body is carried facing the village, and at the end of the village the body is turned facing the cemetery. This is a symbolic act: Facing the village symbolises that he/she has been part of the village; facing the cemetery symbolises that he/she is now part of the dead. In the absence of the priest, the *kooyilpiLLai* carries out the ritual, except for the Mass.

Rituals at the *kallaRai* (cemetery)

At the cemetery the priest offers prayers and sprinkles holy water on the grave and on the body. The chief mourner is tonsured. The body is laid in the grave and the Ampataien removes the chief mourner's garland and places it on the body along with a handful of mud and a few strands of hair which have been removed from the chief mourner. The chief mourner draws the sign of the cross on the forehead of the deceased and expresses his grief. Then all those gathered throw a handful of mud into the grave. Once the grave is covered the chief mourner places the cross which he has brought on the grave, garlands the cross, and places lighted candles and burning *agarpattis*. As van Gennepe (1960:163) observes, the burial is the real act of incorporation of the dead into the world of the dead.

Rituals in the House after the Burial

The women folk clean the house, take bath and keep a lighted candle or kerosene lamp at the place the deceased was laid. The male folk bathe in the village pond before returning home. At the entrance to the house they wash their feet and the chief mourner is received with *aalaatti* by *kozuntya* (the wife of the woman's brother). The male folk kneel down at the place the person was laid out and the *kooyilpiLLai* prays. After this ritual a meal that is brought from the relatives and neighbours houses is served to all. After the meal the date of the final funeral rite is decided.

The final funeral ritual is elaborate and is referred to as *kallaRaiccaTaMku* (ceremony at the cemetery). Only after this rite one can take part in *nallakaariam* (auspicious occasions). It has four parts: (1) *ciluvaikampuvaittal* (planting of the cross), (2) *taalivaaMkutal* (removal of the marriage badge) when a woman loses her husband, (3) the ceremonial oil bath followed by a non-vegetarian meal, and

(4) *urumaa/leencukaTTatal* (tying of the turban). Once more on this day there is great mourning and weeping. They sing the mourning song called *oppaari*.

The ritual of *ciluvaikampuvaittal* begins in the house. The cross is brought the previous day or on the same day of the ritual (since the people believe that the cross is a sign of suffering and should not be kept too long in the house). In the house the priest or the *kooyilpiLLai* offers prayer and blesses the cross. Later in a procession the chief mourner carries the cross to the church and places it at the altar. The Mass is offered for the family and for the eternal rest of the person who died. After the Mass the cross is carried by the chief mourner to the cemetery and, after the priest or the *kooyilpiLLai* prays and sprinkles holy water on the grave, the chief mourner plants it on the grave and garlands it. Lighted candle and *agarpattis* are placed in front of the cross on the grave.

In case a man dies leaving his wife, the ritual of *taalivaaMkutal* is observed on the day of the *ciluvaikampuvaittal*. When the men folk return from the cemetery the sisters of the woman bring water from the village pond and give a ritual bath to the woman. The husband's sister or an elderly woman or widow removes the *taali* from the woman as she stands facing the cemetery. The *taali* is dropped into a pot of milk. Milk is the sign of purity and symbolises woman's fidelity to her husband.⁹ From then on she cannot take an active part on auspicious occasions. She wears neither flowers nor *kuMkumam*, which are associated with the marital status, and generally withdraws herself from all social activity.

The final ritual in the rite of separation of the living from the dead is the ceremonial oil bath. The chief mourner is given oil bath along with two other members. The women folk and the *kooyilpiLLai* also have oil bath and share in the meal along with the chief mourner. One of the items served at this meal is *paakaikaai* (bittergourd) or *akatti kiirai* (*sesbania grandiflora*, bitter vegetable) to signify the end of the inauspicious occasion. From the point of view of the separation from the dead oil is significant. It is a

sign that the living have no more relationship with the departed. Thus, the Catholics ordinarily do not have oil baths when a member of the family is setting out on a journey.

urumakaTTatal is a ritual incorporating the mourners into society and it enables them to resume their normal life once again. The *camppanta kuTikaararkal* (persons related to the deceased through marriage) and the *paMkaali* (the patrilineage, those who have right to the property), each bring a *veesTi* (or, now, some dress material), a towel and some cash, which are offered to the chief mourner. After everybody has presented the *veesTi*, one of the elders' present requests the chief mourner to *talappa kaTTuppa* (tie the turban). The chief mourner takes one of the *veesTi* received and ties it around his head and all the men gathered also wear the turbans.¹⁰

These rituals reveal the nature of kinship relations and their obligations. Presentations are a duty incumbent on agnatic groups which are affinally related to the mourners. Thus, every individual household (kith and kin) makes its presentations at these rituals (Burkhart 1976:52). The most important funeral presents, are food grains and clothes. These presents are put down in writing in order to reciprocate in the future in case of a death in the donors' family (see Dumont 1986:278).

On the fortieth day of the death a Mass is offered for the departed soul, as the Catholics believe that the dead need the prayers of the living. Some keep the light burning at the place where the person was laid out until the final funeral rite. Some keep it for forty days, while some place a jug of water along with the light (Visvanathan 1999:141). This is a typical Hindu practice, following the belief that the dead person revisits the house till the final ceremony is performed.

The mourning period lasts for a year. During this period people may call on the bereaved family to express their sympathy. Moreover, during this period the family does not celebrate Christmas, New Year, *poMkal* and the feast of the patron saint of the village.

Death Rituals in a Comparative Perspective

Table 4.1 shows the differences in the death rituals followed by the Catholic Brahmins, Vellalars, Nadars, and Parayars. Overall, there are only a few variations in the structure of death rituals among the Catholic castes (Vellalar, Udayar, Nadar and Parayar). The Ampataien and Vannaan do not assist at the Nadar and the Parayar death rituals. The Nadars are a low caste and hence are not entitled to be served by the Vannaan and Ampataien. The Parayars are untouchables and cannot command the service of the ritual specialists.

There are certain cultural codes with regard to carrying out the death rituals. The mourner is always a male. In principle he is the deceased man's or woman's elder son, even if he is a child. If there is no son, he can be the deceased woman's husband or a grandson of the man. Thus, whatever the sex of the deceased, it is always a small local agnatic group which is in full mourning (Dumont 1986:274). Only the male folk have the right to perform the final death rituals such as the carrying of the cross, burying the body, etc.

Table 4.1 Death Rituals followed by the Catholic Castes

Rituals	Inter-caste Variations
Third day ritual	<p>The Brahmins, Vellalars, and Parayars plant a permanent cross on the grave. Milk is poured on the grave.</p> <p>The Vellalars place food items on the grave for the dead. They follow a definite ritual meal called <i>taNTu tazai</i> (stems and leaves).¹¹</p>
<i>taali vaaMkutal</i>	<p>Among the Parayars after the bath the woman is made to stand at the entrance of the house. Her husband's brother puts the sari on her head and he removes the <i>taali</i>.</p> <p>For the Brahmins it is a family affair. The person herself removes the <i>taali</i> and puts it in the milk in the presence of the members of her family.</p> <p>The Vellalars and Nadars carry out the ritual of <i>taalivaaMkutal</i> after the final ritual bath for the deceased. The woman is made to sit at the foot of the deceased. A pot of water is poured over her and the <i>taali</i> is removed. If the woman had her <i>taali</i> on the thread, the thread is tied to the toe of the deceased. The Nadars do not put the <i>taali</i> in milk as Vellalars do.</p>
<i>Aalaatti</i>	This is not carried out by Brahmins, Vellalars, Nadars and Parayars.
<i>leencu kaTTutal</i>	<p>The Vellalars have a vegetarian meal on this day.</p> <p>The Nadars perform the ritual of <i>leencukaTTutal</i> before the planting of the cross. The chief mourner holds the cross and three people offer the <i>veesTi</i>. They are his <i>maaman</i>, his wife's brothers and his father's sisters. Two people hold one of the <i>veesTi</i>, the chief mourner carries the cross under the <i>veesTi</i> and plants it on the grave.</p> <p>The Parayars carry out this ritual on the day of the burial, and the <i>veesTi</i> is brought only by the <i>maaman</i>.</p>

Regarding mourning, the women utter lamentation while the dead person is placed in the *aacanti*. As long as the body is in the house weeping is permitted. But when the body leaves the house weeping is not permitted and the women folk gather around the bereaved relatives to console them. Expressions of grief are regarded as bondage for the

departed soul: 'Grief and passion are seen as sensory limitations of man in the temporal world which could bind the departed soul to the world of the living' (Kaushik 1976:285). A woman who had lost her husband was chastened by a relative saying '*alukaatei avara nimatiya pooka viTu*' (stop crying and allow your husband to go in peace). Female folk do not accompany the dead body to the cemetery, though they visit the cemetery at other times, especially on the All Souls Day. Though the Christian cemetery is perceived differently from the Hindu *cuTukaaTu*, the Hindu beliefs related to death seem to persist.

In many respects the Catholic funeral rituals resemble those of the Hindus of the place and they correspond generally to rituals elsewhere in the region:

(a) The Catholics share the same *repertoire of symbolic materials* such as turmeric, oil, *ciikaikaai* and milk (Good quoted in Mosse 1996:463). The ritual substances used at the funeral rite are considered to have a cooling effect and at the same time purify the dead and the mourner (Srinivas 1965:84).

(b) The Catholics hold the *same idea* that the evil forces can affect both the dead and the mourners. To protect themselves against this they place the rosary and holy medals on the body and keep candles, cross and holy pictures around it. The church bell and the sound of the *tappu* keep the evil spirit away. The body is not left alone and people keep watch and pray (cf. Diehl 1965:117). The limbs of the dead are tied with threads. This gives a magical protection against the evil spirit, says Beck (quoted in Mosse 1986:270). Similarly, the circumambulation of the body while carrying it to the cemetery defines a sacred space, and creates a protective boundary against harmful forces.

aalaatti is waved both at auspicious and inauspicious occasions. At death it is a sign that the person is not alone and that there are others who will take part in his suffering. This is symbolically done as the chief mourner returns from the cemetery.

Again, *aalaatti* is also meant to protect the chief mourner from malevolent forces as he has been in close proximity with the dead and been at the cemetery. This puts him in a vulnerable state of being affected by malevolent forces. Thus, *aalaatti* at the entrance to the house is meant to ward off the evil force from the individual and from entering the house.

(c) The Catholics share with the Hindus the *same ritual functionaries* like the Ampataien and the Vannaan. The ritual roles of the Ampataien and the Vannaan reveals that each caste has a definite role to perform even among the Catholics.

The major differences between the Catholics and the Hindus as regards the death rituals are:

(a) Among the Catholics the Ampataien assists in the rituals only on the burial day. While among the Hindus the *puucaari* officiates at the final death rituals, it is the *kooyilpiLLai* who says the prayers in the case of Catholics. According to Mosse (1986:140), the *kooyilpiLLai* replicates the role of the Brahmin in officiating at the final rite on the sixteenth day or third or fifth day funeral rite. However, the rituals performed by the Catholic religious functionaries have no resemblance to those of the Hindu ritual specialists.

(b) Among the Catholics, in the death ceremony, the Church enters the domestic sphere. Through the extreme unction the priest prepares the person to meet god and after her/his death the priest offers prayers for the soul and blesses the body. These are unique to Catholics and in this sense there are no similarities with the practices of the local Hindus. Among the Hindus the concept of pollution is associated with death, while it does not exist among the Catholics. The *aacanti* is kept in the church when not in use, and unlike among the Hindus, the objects that are used for a funeral are not considered

polluting. The dead body is taken to the church. The Catholic priest comes in close contact with the dead.

(c) The final death ritual has a Christian connotation and it has a Christian term *kallaRaiccaTaMku*. The Hindus refer to it as *karumaati* (accomplishing final duty). The content of the ritual is the same for both the Catholics and the Hindus in that the chief mourner is duty bound to carry out this ritual. But its form is Christianised: The important ritual item here is the cross, which is blessed by the priest and is planted on the grave. By incorporating the Christian symbol the native ritual becomes unique to the Catholics.

The Catholics have made a selection of the native death rituals. They have given up the *kuTamuTaittal* (though the Catholic Konars have retained this);¹² in its place the chief mourner carries the cross. They have also omitted *ciiteevivaaMkutat*: the touching of the body at three points by a measure of paddy and *vaiikkarici* (feeding the dead for the last time).

However, they have retained the belief that the dead visit the house during their liminal stage, and hence they place a pot of water in the house where the person was laid out for the last time. This belief is not endorsed by the Church. This could perhaps be explained by the concept of the archetypes: Almost all the traditional societies have an archetype of ancestral worship. It holds the possibility of the dead to have life of their own and of being able to communicate with the living (Sempore 1991:81 and Hoebel 1958:549). Though it did not deny the life after death, having its Judaic roots, Christianity rested on another type of archetype that upholds the impossibility of such a communication. Living in a traditional society, the Catholics in Tamil Nadu are still under the influence of the archetype of ancestral worship. The beliefs preached by Christianity are not able to replace the archetype of the Tamil Catholics. Hence they carry on with

such practices. The Church does not react negatively, as these practices are confined to the domestic sphere.

The practice of offering food in the name of the dead is still observed on different occasions, if not at the death ritual. Some give a meal to the *kooyilpiLLai* throughout the year on the day a person died. This is called *kizamaiccooRu*. In some villages the *kooyilpiLLai* eats in such houses every day of the year. He prays for the dead person before having the meal.

Catholic death rituals have been incorporated into the traditional ritual configuration of the community. Catholics have made simple substitutions like a candle in place of camphor and the drawing of the sign of the cross on the forehead of the deceased instead of drawing lines with the sacred ash. The Hindus plant a creeper on this day. They pour milk and place food at the grave. The Catholics have replaced the creeper with a cross. The entire ritual assumes a different connotation. The Catholics have also made certain additions from the standpoint of their religious adherence, e.g., the rosary, the holy water, the church bell and the Christian prayer. Thus, in Tamil Nadu the Catholics have evolved their distinct set of rituals by adding Christian symbols to the underlying native ritual structure.

Conclusion

In the life-cycle rituals we find there are two principle actors. They are the religious functionaries (the priest and the *kooyilpiLLai*) and the people involved. They mediate between two sets of rituals: Those prescribed by the Church (the Christian rituals) and the native rituals (not prescribed by the Church) retained by the people. These actors have their defined sphere for carrying out these rituals. In the religious sphere the

priest plays a dominant role in carrying out the rituals that are prescribed by the Church. For example, in baptism and first holy communion, the Church prescribes and directs the rituals. These rituals are significant only from the religious point of view. Though in form and content they are dominantly Christian, native rituals are incorporated into them. The key actor here is the priest and the Church determines his role. Probably this may be the reason why there is minimum of indigenisation in these essentially religious rites of passage.

In the domestic or the non-religious sphere people are the key actors. The rituals here are part of the wider culture in which they live and they are not particular to any religion. The rituals in the domestic sphere have little to do with the doctrinal Catholicism. Their meaning is located in the cultural universe of kinship and domestic relationships and the associated socio-cultural codes.

The domestic rituals of Catholics are in close consonance with those of the Hindus. A parallel can be observed between the ritual items, the procedure or the structure of the ritual, and the actors who carry out the rituals. At the level of meaning, explanation, reasons and significance some of the rituals are coloured by Christian principles and philosophy. Even here the levels of meaning understood by the Catholics are not totally different from those of the Hindus. Thus, while incorporating distinctively Catholic elements and symbols, the life-cycle rituals of the Catholics have a structure similar to those of the Hindus.

There are rites like the Catholic marriage and death that have both Church-prescribed rites and native rituals. The Church-prescribed rites are carried out in the

church with minimum incorporated native rituals, e.g., the tying of *taali* in marriage and blessing the cross in the ritual of *culuvaikampuvaittal*.

The native rituals are of two kinds: Those which are performed in the sacred sphere and the others performed in the domestic sphere. One of the native rituals which is associated with the sacred sphere is tonsuring. The Hindus also carry out this ritual in the temple. These native rituals are taken to the sphere of the church. The Catholic priests have no objection to it as long as the people conduct it outside the church. The Catholics have always carried out the native rituals confined to the domestic sphere in the domestic sphere itself. However, they have been selective, as has been pointed out earlier. So, the need to take them to the church or the question of legitimisation by the Church does not arise.

From our interviews with the people, we observe that for the Catholics the rites prescribed by the Church are essential to legitimising and sanctifying life-cycle events. But, in socio-cultural terms, they are not sufficient. The people link the Church-prescribed rituals with appropriate native rituals for the rite to be considered complete.

Thus, the analysis of the Catholic life-cycle ritual practices shows that in the lived-Christianity of Tamil Catholics the rites of the Church have come to be adapted to indigenous socio-cultural patterns. In other words, the two domains are not completely disengaged, but rather are framed by the particular socio-cultural contexts within which they are located.

Endnotes

1. Sacrament means a sacred action, object or means. It is some external action or sign performed in the name of Jesus, and is reminiscent of Jesus' actions capable of producing inward grace. For example, the Eucharistic sacrament employs bread and wine 'symbolically and analogically rather than conventionally and arbitrarily' (Turner 1974:1). The Catholic Church observes seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist Reconciliation, Anointing, Matrimony and Priesthood.
2. Sacramental are sacred signs which bear a resemblance to the sacraments in so far as they signify the effects, especially of a spiritual kind, which are obtained through the Church. Various occasions of life are made holy by them, e.g., blessings (house, person, etc.). Thus, the Catholic funeral can take place without the celebration of the Mass, and the catechist can officiate at the funeral rite.
3. Stirrat (1975:593) reports that in Sri Lanka, too, Sinhalese names have begun to gain favour among the Catholics.
4. It is the expectation of the South Indian *maaman* (the maternal uncle) to provide protection and comfort to his sister and her children, especially in the absence of his sister's husband. In terms of importance he comes even before the husband and the father, whenever his sister's children's future is at stake. His relationship goes beyond any potential marriage connection, that is to say, even when neither his son nor he marries the daughter of his sister. Normally the expenditure, which a man incurs on his sister's children, are offset by the fact that he has been his father's heir, while his sister has been excluded from the inheritance. According to Dumont (1986:289), there are two ways in which property is transmitted from one generation to the next. On the one hand, a son's inheritance expresses the principle of patriliny; on the other, gifts to the daughter or to the sister, to her husband, and to her children express the principle of alliance.
5. We came across a case where the *maaman* refused to be present at the engagement of his niece. He was sore that his proposal for his son to marry his niece was turned down by the latter's father. Though the elders of the village and other relatives persuaded him to attend the ceremony, he remained passive throughout.

6. The word used for the engagement-sari, *paricappoTavai*, is symbolic of the advance given before the purchase of an object. It marks a tacit agreement between the parties and a guarantee to the boy's party that the girl is theirs. By accepting the sari the engagement is confirmed and is symbolically expressed by the girl appearing before all gathered clad in that sari.
7. As early as 1890, a book written by a Catholic refers to the ritual of *taali* tying in the domestic sphere with the recitation of prayer by the *kooyilpiLLai* (Lourdes 1979). Thus, as part of the *kooyil kalyaaNam*, the ritual of *taali*-tying must have been a latter incorporation.
8. Since people believe that an inauspicious occasion as death is not welcome, they avoid taking water from the house.
9. The researcher was told that about ten years ago the ritual was observed quite differently. The woman was taken to the village pond with her head covered, where, after she was made to take three dips in the pond, the *taali* and all other ornaments on her were removed. She was then taken to the church and the *kooyilpiLLai* said a prayer and sprinkled holy water on her. Today, this ritual takes place in the house and only the *taali* is removed.
10. While leaving the house, people who have come for this ceremony tell the residents 'I am going' (*poorein*). While on auspicious occasions they would say, 'I am going and coming back' (*pooi viTTu varein*).
11. The Vellalars cook *akatti kiirai* (a green leafy vegetable, which is slightly bitter) and plantain stem. In the evening *payaru aviccu caapiTatal* (boiledgram, mixed with soaked raw rice) is eaten by all the relatives. These items of food are associated with death and they are not served to newly married couples.
12. The Catholic Konars follow the ritual of *koLLi kuTamutaittal* (breaking the pot with water). The significant actors in this ritual are the daughter-in-law, the daughter and the son. Each of them has a definite location to perform this ritual: The daughter-in-law performs this ritual in the house (She is the woman of the house). The daughter (claiming her right as the girl of the family, but belonging to another family, and thus has no more right to the property) does it outside the house. The son (with a right to

the property) performs it at the cemetery. The person carries a new mud pot with water on the left shoulder. The Vannaan makes a hole in the pot each time the person goes around the corpse thrice. The near relatives sprinkle the corpse with the water flowing through the hole. The significance of this ritual is that of sending the dead by honouring them with a ritual bath, as is normally done for a deity (observed in the village of Kokkurani).



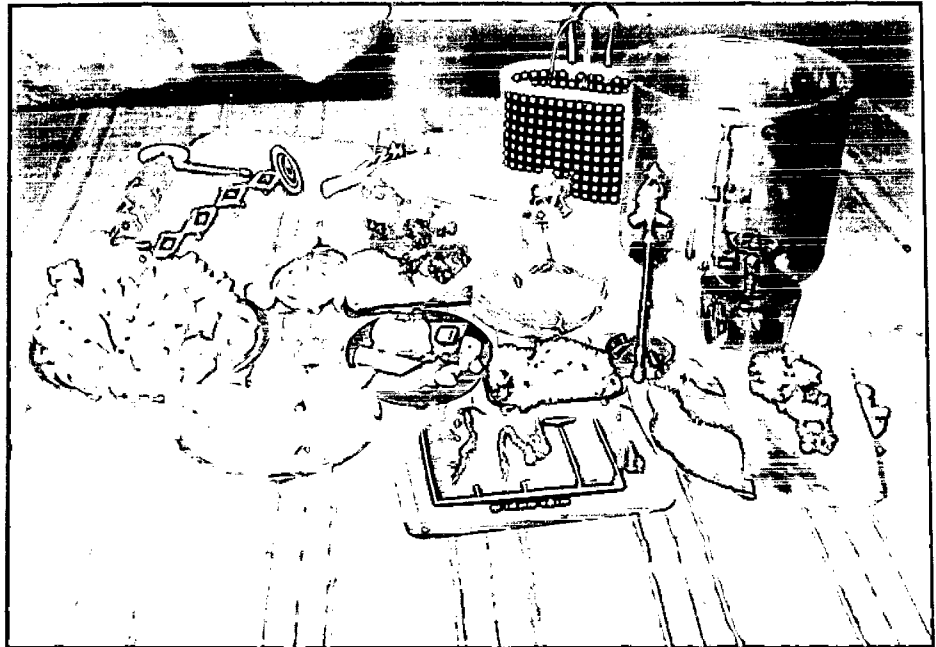
4.1 Receiving the Newly Married with *aaratti*



4.2 Putting the Toe Ring



4.3 The Arrival of *maaman ciiru* - 1



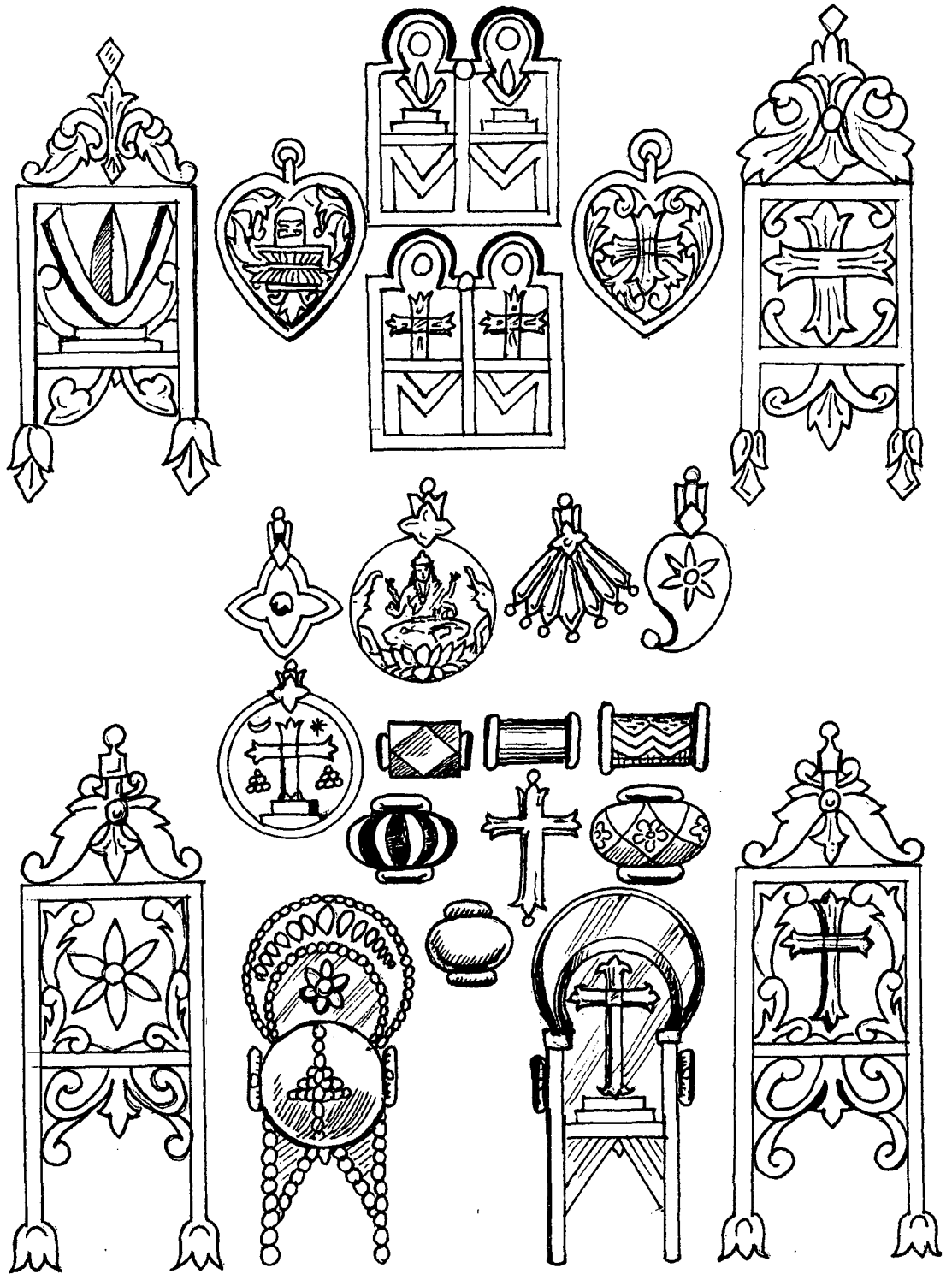
4.4 Display of *maaman ciiru* - 2



4.5 Ampataien Decorating the Pot



4.6 The Chief Mourner Carrying Water



4.1 The Designs of taali

CHAPTER V

RELIGION AND THE AGRARIAN SOCIAL LIFE

The focus of the preceding two chapters was predominantly on the communitarian nature of religion, where we have dealt with worship as religious expression and the location of the individual in the community through life-cycle rituals. In order to survive every community has to engage in some economic activities, and these activities tend to have a religious dimension. Thus, a study of indigenisation of religious experience has to consider how the economic activities of a community are influenced by its religion. Accordingly, this chapter focuses on the aspects of indigenisation of Catholicism as manifested in the economic sphere of the community. •

Agriculture is the main activity of the area under our study. Even non-agricultural activities are geared towards agriculture. Traditionally, with regard to agriculture and allied activities the villagers have observed a series of rituals and festivals that have had some religious significance. While the Church has neither prescribed definite rituals related to this sphere nor endorsed the practices which the people have traditionally followed, it has evolved a set of prayers to go with the native rituals. Our interest here is in the way the Catholics carry out these rituals and the extent to which Catholicism exerts influence on the existing collective beliefs and practices.

The rituals related to agriculture follow a fixed sequential order, namely, ploughing, sowing, seeking rain, controlling pests, and harvesting. The harvest festival marks the culmination of agricultural activity. Our analysis, however, is not confined to

rituals associated with agricultural activities, but it also considers the rituals concerned with crafts and house construction. These later rituals may or may not be connected with agriculture. But, to the extent that these crafts and craftsmen contribute to the economic and social life of the community, the rituals associated with them become significant for us.

AGRICULTURE AND RITUALS

nalleer kaTTutal (Ritual Ploughing)

The Tamil New Year begins with the month of Cittirai, corresponding roughly to the period 14th April to 14th May. The first day of Cittirai is considered to be auspicious for commencing agricultural operations. On this day the villagers observe the ritual of *nalleer kaTTutal*¹ (inaugural of ploughing), though the actual ploughing is resumed only with the onset of the south-west monsoon in the months of Vaikaaci (May-June) and AaNi (June-July).

On the first of Cittirai agricultural implements are cleaned and the oxen are bathed and decorated with sandal paste and *kuMkumam*. The villagers assemble in the churchyard with their plough and oxen, and the elders invite the priest to initiate the ritual with a Christian blessing, which is carried out in the field. Led by the *tappu* all march from the church to the field. Before the procession starts the women folk touch the plough and pass the hand over their forehead. The plough and the oxen are integral to their livelihood and as such they become objects of reverence.

Once they reach the field the male folk start the ploughing in the field that belongs to the church. As they go round ploughing, on the third round the priest blesses the men,

the plough, the oxen and the field. The Parayars play the *tappu* and the women *kulavaivaitaarkal* (sounds made at important transition points to drive away the evil spirits). After the ritual of community ploughing the men go to their respective fields and plough. Finally, they all gather in the church for another round of prayer led by the priest/*kooyilpiLLai*.

Processing the Seeds

In the months of Vaikaaci and AaNi the fields are levelled, weeded and ploughed. On the eighteenth day of AaTi (July-August), which is regarded as auspicious, seeds are set apart for sowing. On this day the ritual of *naaLvitai eTuttal* (taking seeds on a day) is observed. The month of AaTi is said to be auspicious for agricultural activity as it is a rainy month and the reservoirs are full. It is believed that the seed kept aside in the month of AaTi will have multiple yields (*AaTi perukku*); *AaTi paTTam teTi vitai* (the month of AaTi is the right month to sow), goes the popular saying.

The ritual of *naaLvitai eTuttal* is as follows: on this day people take a basket of paddy to the church, where it is blessed by the priest after the Mass. The villagers take a handful of the blessed paddy and add it with the seeds to be sown. The rest of the paddy is left in the church as a *kaaNikkai* (offering). However, the actual timing of sowing, like that of ploughing, depends on the rainfall.

The Catholics carefully observe auspicious directions while engaging in activities considered significant. *cuulam*, a concept relating to inauspicious directions, is an important element in the native culture. They do not face the direction of *cuulam* while engaging in critical activities such as ploughing, sowing, harvesting, etc. *cuulam* is set each day and it is given in the Tamil calendar (see Chap. 6).

Seeking Rain

The area under our study is drought prone and people depend on the monsoon for their agricultural activity. Since the monsoon itself is a period of fluctuation and uncertainty, the villagers have evolved certain rituals as part of their culturally defined coping strategy. The ritual of seeking rain is, thus, carried out precisely to invoke the divine to give them rain in due time.

The ritual object of rain is basically rice. *mazaiccooRu kaccutal* (cooking rice for rain) is the most prevalent ritual today, and we came across its observance in four villages. The villagers collect rice from every house except those of the 'untouchables.' The rice so collected is cooked and served to all after it has been blessed by the priest or *kooyilpiLLai*. In Keelauchani, a Catholic village, people make sweet rice called *poMkal*. The *poMkal* is prepared in front of the church and offered in the church during the Mass. After blessed by the priest, it is served to all gathered. In this ritual the cooked rice is viewed as *caami cooRu* (Lord's rice) and partaking of it is also viewed as a blessing. The ritual cooking of *poMkal* is a symbol of prosperity and thus by this very act they anticipate prosperity which is ensured through rain.

mazaiccooRu vaaMkutal: In addition to *poMkal vaittal*, the young girls go round in the night collecting cooked rice from all the houses. With the rice so collected, they gather in front of the church and pray and sing (*mazai paaTTu*) to Maata (the mother of Jesus) for rain. After the prayer they make small balls of this rice and eat it without adding salt or curry as a symbolic act of penance.

The *mazaiccooRu kaaccutal* or *vaaMkutal* is a community activity. However, the 'untouchable' castes are excluded from these rituals. As V. Britto (1992) observes, it is

ironical that though the low castes are the main workers on the land they are denied the right to be part of this ritual pertaining to agriculture. This is by far the most glaring departure among the Catholics from the egalitarian teachings of the Bible and the Church.

The people firmly believe that the dead ancestors can be a positive influence.² The Catholics approach them collectively requesting them to pray for the community and for its welfare: In the years gone by the women and the young girls collected rice from each household in the village and cooked the same as a collective exercise. The cooked food was eaten adjacent to the cemetery. They then fell on the grave of their relatives and cried. Today, most of the villages have given up this practice, and the young are unwilling to participate in such rituals which involve overt expressions of mourning and weeping.

Violations of moral codes, such as women failing to be chaste, are believed by both the Hindus and the Catholics to have an adverse impact on the collective life of the community (Kritinasamy 1981:222). For instance, when the monsoon fails, the elderly often say *namma poNTu piLLaikal ellaam ozuMka iRuntaal namakku kasTTam illai* (if our women and young girls are disciplined, we don't face misfortune).

It is also widely believed that rains fail if *koTumpaavi* (a sinful person) enters the village. The villagers make an effigy of a fictitious person called *koTumpaavi* and drag it on the streets, while the elderly women and/or young boys beat their chest and cry aloud. This ritual is known as *kuuttaan* or *koTumpaavi kaTTi azutal*, during which (*mazaikkaaka azutal*, crying for rain) they keep reciting '*koTumpaavi caava, eMkal kastaMkal tiira*' (let the evil person die and that we are freed from our suffering). Finally, the effigy is set afire near the village pond (see Pfaffenberger 1982:151).

Besides these native rituals the Catholics also observe some Christian rituals to seek to undo their sins, which they think cause the failure of rains. For example, they do penance. A Catholic priest, records a similar belief:

There has been no good rain for the last seven weeks. The dry crops suffer much and people are downcast. In their distress, they have arranged to fast next Friday to appease the anger of god caused by their sins, and to beg for rain and asked for a Mass for the same intention (Caritas 1927:5).

Collective Lamentation for Rain: Young girls draw *koolam* (rankoli), an auspicious sign, at three places in the village to symbolise the land that is prepared for cultivation. They then go to every house, say the 'Our Father and the Hail Mary' (Christian prayers addressed to god and Mary) and collect cooked rice. They sit around the *koolam* they have drawn and *mazaikaka azutaarkal* (cry for rain). The songs sung are '*vaanattai nampiyallo, koolattai poTTuvaitein*' (believing in the sky, we have prepared our land for cultivation) and '*koolam kalayalaie oru koLLa mazai peialaie*' (the *koolam* has not lost its original form, because the sky has not showered rain). After this ritual of crying around the *koolam* they gather in front of the church and sing a hymn to Maata and then they disperse (cf. V. Britto 1992).

It was observed that it is mostly young girls and women who perform the ritual of rain. Women in the indigenous culture stand as symbol of fertility and prosperity. Women are themselves a source of sacred power in Tamil thought; they are deemed to be filled with a supernatural potency that, under the right conditions, can bring health and prosperity to a family (Pfaffenberger 1980:209). Chastity is the right condition and it arises from virginity, and for a married woman, from faithfulness. Thus, chaste (*kaRppu*)

women are considered to have power (*caktti*) that can influence the gods. No wonder, they take an active part in the ritual of rain.

Though the ritual of rain varies from village to village, the commonality among the Catholics is the song and prayer addressed to Maata. The Catholics have transferred the association of the Hindu goddess with water, fertility and prosperity to Maata. Thus, the Tamil song to Maata expresses the Catholics dependence on Maata:

variyoor ciriyoor varumai niiMka mancu vaiamma, mazai poziya caiyamma; mazai taravenTum taaye eMkal, vaRumai teirvaye amma (have a heart for the poor and the needy and pour down rain; give us rain, and free us from poverty).

The Church, recognising this, has incorporated in its worship a special prayer and a hymn to Maata. The elderly persons in Oriyur narrated the concern of a Jesuit priest. Twenty years ago, seeing the sufferings of people without rain, a Catholic priest decided to conduct prayer. On the fourth day as they were praying the rosary there was a heavy shower. Since then, in addition to the native ritual of seeking rain, the Catholics have a Christian ritual.

Generally, the ritual of seeking rain goes on for three days, and it may continue for seven days in case the rain fails. As the researcher was in Keelauchani to observe the ritual of rain, it rained a day before the ritual was scheduled. However, the ritual was carried out as per the schedule as it was a vow made to the divine. It was carried out more as a thanksgiving, rather than as a request. The entire ritual of seeking rain shows the continuity with the native rituals and the incorporation of Christian elements and symbols in their support. Another example of this type of ritual concerns pest control.

Controlling the Pests

Catholic farmers who have to contend with pests believe that the holy water is a powerful deterrent to these destructive elements. Thus, sprinkling holy water in the field is one of the immediate steps taken against pests. Catholic priests have also encouraged the farmers to seek recourse to the divine in dealing with pests. About twenty years ago, a French missionary working in the erstwhile Ramnad District was known for controlling pests. People approached him in large numbers seeking his help. He used to write a prayer on a palm leaf in Latin *Scio Cui Credidi* meaning ' I know (in) whom I have believed or faith.' He instructed the people to plant a cross in the field along with the palm leaf with the above words inscribed on it. This is practised even today as a preventive measure.

Apart from observing the rituals believed to enhance agricultural output, the Catholics also seek the aid of persons believed to be the medium of the divine. In Maviduthikottai, like the Hindus the Catholics too consult the Hindu *puucaari* (priest) during the feast of the Hindu deity about their agricultural prospects. During the feast, the *puucaari* possessed by a Hindu deity is taken in procession on the streets to the accompaniment of drums and both the Hindus and the Catholics seek to know from the goddess the prospects of rain and the yield from the field. Interestingly, the Church does not openly object to such consultation with the Hindu *puucaari*. The Catholics consult the *puucaari* on general matters concerning the entire community and they neither visit the temple for this purpose nor worship the *puucaari* or the goddess.

Harvest

Harvest marks the climax of agricultural activity. While harvesting the Catholic farmers do not start from the direction of *cuulam* (inauspicious), but from *canimuulai* (the

auspicious north-east quarter of a field) and end on *polimuulai* (the auspicious boundary) of the field. They believe that it is through *canimuulai* that an easy entry could be made for good as well as for evil. As one informant said there is no difficulty in deciding on the *canimuulai*, as the crops always bend in the direction opposite to *canimuulai* which becomes ideal to start the harvesting. For the common people the ideal is perceived in terms of the right course of action, which in turn becomes a ritual.

Before storing the grains in the granary, in keeping with the tradition of offering the first fruit to the divine and as an expression of gratitude, a basket of paddy is offered to the church. After offering it in the church, a handful of paddy sprinkled with holy water is brought home to be put in the granary where the paddy is stored. Thus, people seek the protection of the divine in safeguarding the paddy from insects.

The period between sowing and harvesting is about four months. This period is not seen as the festive time. The end of the harvest signifies the start of the festive season among the Catholics, as among the Hindus. After the harvest season most marriages are performed and the month of Tai (January-February) is considered to be auspicious. As the saying goes, '*Tai piRantaal vazi piRakkum*' (ways are opened with the beginning of the month of Tai). The most important festival in the month of Tai is the harvest festival and the feast of *Vanattucinnappar* (St. Anthony of the desert). St. Anthony is the patron and protector of the forest and the cattle. Next to *urr tiruvizaa*, *poMkal* is another native festival organised by the people and this brings together the Catholic community in celebration. Since it is a native festival in which the people play an active role it is loaded with indigenous elements.

***poMkal* (THE HARVEST FESTIVAL)**

In their description of the festival of *poMkal* Dumont (1986) and Good (1983) have emphasised the transformation of the rice and that which marks the cosmic, calendrical and agricultural changes. As a harvest festival *poMkal* marks the end of agricultural activity and it is a time to thank god for the bountiful yields and pray for the prosperity of the cattle. It is also a festival denoting the change in the season, that is, the onset of summer. It is celebrated on the first day of the month of Tai when the sun enters Capricorn and takes a northward course. Thus, *poMkal* is a celebration that is related to both agriculture and a cosmological event.

On this day *poMkal* is prepared as an offering. Definitionally, it consists of the ritual cooking of the new rice obtained from the grains harvested in the year. The act of cooking *poMkal* represents the cosmic rite of passage, recapitulating the entire rice growing cycle cumulating in the boiling over of the pot. The harvest festival enacts and helps to terminate the main events of the agricultural year (Good 1983:236 and 237). Not surprisingly, this is a festival which is widely celebrated by the Tamils, including those living in the urban areas. In what follows we shall describe the celebration of this festival by the Catholics.

Since the seventeenth century the Catholics in Tamil Nadu have been celebrating the festival of *poMkal*. Recognising the cultural significance of this harvest festival, the Church had combined it with the feast of *Vanattucinnappar* and called it *Anthoniari poMkal* in Tamil. This feast falls on the 17th of January, a day dedicated by the Church to St. Anthony, three days after the Hindus celebrate *poMkal* (on the 14th of January).

However, in some Catholic villages (e.g., in Sengudi) it is celebrated on the 14th of January itself.

In 1972, the Church made a study of the *poMkal* celebration and it came to the conclusion that it is a cultural festival and could be celebrated by any, irrespective of caste or creed (Villavarayar 1972:1-16). However, while incorporating this native feast into Catholicism the practice of sun worship is given up, as sun is viewed not as a god but as a created element. Since the 1990s the Church has recognised *poMkal* as a Christian celebration and observes it on the 14th of January as per the Tamil Hindu calendar.

The Ritual Cooking of *poMkal*

The following description of *poMkal* celebration is based on the observations at Andavoorani, a Catholic village. The ringing of the church bell and the beating of the *tappu* mark the commencement of the *poMkal* celebration. The women come in procession to the church with their decorated pots, rice, and other ingredients needed to make *poMkal*. On entering the church they kneel down to pray before they start their ritual cooking of *poMkal* (see Photo 5.1).

The *poMkal* pot is a special pot and a key ritual object of the day. Some twenty years ago people used new mud pots, but now they use mud, steel or brass pots. The pot is decorated with *koolam* made out of rice flour. Sandal paste and *kuMkumam* are applied on the sides of the pot and the turmeric plant with its cluster of tubers is tied around the neck of the pot. All these mark the auspicious occasion in progress.

When all the people are gathered in the church compound the elders of the village (*karaikararkal*) invite the priest with sandal paste and *kuMkumam* and request him to

inaugurate the ritual cooking of *poMkal*. The priest lights the oven following which the others light their ovens.

The oven faces east, the direction of the sun, and it is a symbolic action of thanking the sun. Though Catholics do not worship the sun, the direction of making the *poMkal* is retained, recognising the role of the sun in agricultural operations. The direction east is also believed to possess many beneficial forces (Beck 1976:214).

The oven is lighted and women draw the sign of the cross over the pot before water and rice are put into it. This is a practice prevalent among the Catholics in their daily cooking, too. It is said to be a sign of acknowledgement of the fact that it is god who feeds them. The very act of cooking needs to be blessed by the divine and the food needs to be protected from malevolent forces. A similar practice is also observed among some Hindus who apply ash on the sides of the pot.

Water and a little milk is poured into the pot and to hasten the boiling a pinch of salt is added. The time when the water in the pot boils over is considered auspicious and people cry out aloud *poMkalo poMkal* (loud exclamation of joy on the occasion of boiling milk for *poMkal*). Some women *kulavaivaitaarkal*, some kneel down, while others stand with their folded hands as a mark of reverence to the pot which symbolises god's blessings on the household. The overflowing of the pot is a visible sign and an assurance of a favourable year for the family members (see Photo 5.2). One hears people exclaiming 'this year our pot boiled over not just once but thrice. I thank god for such assurance of his blessings.'

Once the water boils over, raw rice is put into the pot. Two kinds of *poMkal* are prepared: One, which is sweet, is called *carkarai poMkal*, and the other, which is plain, is called *vettu poMkal*.

The cooked *poMkal* pot is taken to the church, where at the entrance the priest receives the people and asks '*poMkal poMkucaa?*' (did your *poMkal* pot boil over?), to which the people respond '*nalla poMkucu caami*' (yes, it did boil over) - (This is the customary way of greeting any one during the season of *poMkal*). The pots are placed at the altar and the Mass is celebrated in thanksgiving for the good harvest. After the Mass the priest blesses the *poMkal*, which is then distributed among the people.

Though cooking is done by individual families, the cooked rice becomes a collective resource and the village elders take charge of its distribution. While every household takes a small portion of the cooked rice, much of it is distributed among those who serve the village in different capacities like the *kooyilpiLLai*, the drum players, the Vannaan, and also to the destitute in the village, the widows, etc.

Besides the collective celebration of *PoMkal* each family does another round of cooking in their respective homes. The researcher observed the ritual cooking by a family: After her bath, the lady of the house cleaned the house and the courtyard, sprinkled water and drew the *koolam*. On the *koolam* she placed the oven facing the east and on it the decorated pot. After the cooking of *poMkal* the ashes from the fire are spread on the road. This is meant to remove *kaN tirusTi* (evil eye) and other harmful influences of the old year. This also expresses the idea of renewal and abundance.³ As *poMkal* is an auspicious event it is not celebrated during a mourning year.

Since the preparation of *poMkal* is considered to be an auspicious activity it is done by *cumaMkali* who are considered to be auspicious. The women who prepare the *poMkal* purify themselves by bathing before starting this ritual.

Raw rice is used because boiled rice can easily get contaminated in the process of boiling. Some twenty years ago, paddy was pounded at home and not cleaned in the electric rice mill in order to protect the rice from getting contaminated through coming into contact with electrical instruments (cf. Good 1983:227).

In the discussion of colour and heat in South Indian rituals Beck (1976:558) points out that the whole process of cooking of *poMkal* involves heating and subsequent eating of auspicious white substance. The colour white is thought of as cooling and pure and the ritual items used at *poMkal*, e.g., the raw rice and milk, are primarily white.

In one of the Catholic villages *poMkal* was celebrated but the traditional music - *tappu* was given up. The Hindus believe that smallpox is a visitation of *Amman* (Hindu goddess). When any person suffers from smallpox, the music - *tappu* is given up as it disturbs the Amman. The Hindus do not hold any celebration during those days. But the Catholics, though do not give up the celebration altogether, in keeping with the native belief, give up the music. Although the Catholics do not worship the Hindu deity, there is a recognition which manifests in their fear.

The Mass on the day of *poMkal* celebration is very much appreciated by the Catholics. Responding to the importance given to the Mass on *poMkal* day, a priest records way back in 1950's that the same people are not keen on attending the Mass on other days and especially Sunday a day of obligation (Caritas 1941:64). Thus, it appears that from the people's point of view the Mass as a Christian ritual assumes significance

when it is combined with a native ritual like *poMkal*, which has much wider significance for the people.

Though *poMkal* is recognised by the Church, it is observed that not in all the villages is the priest present or the Mass celebrated. In some villages the ritual is carried out with the help of the *kooyilpiLLai*. In some villages people deem it sufficient if the *kooyilpiLLai* initiates the ritual of cooking *poMkal* and blesses the cattle with a Christian prayer. Since the celebration has been observed from time immemorial even before the people got converted to Christianity, the presence of the priest is not regarded as mandatory. What is important from the point of view of the Catholics is that the celebration is carried out with a Christian prayer.

As a preparation for the celebration of *poMkal* the Hindus paint their houses with bold red and white stripes in the same way that the temple walls are painted. The Catholics have given up this colour combination, which is apparently associated with the Hindu temples. As a matter of fact most of them paint their houses in preparation for Christmas or their *uur tiruvizaa*.

The next important ritual in connection with agricultural activity is the *maaTTu poMkal* (cattle *poMkal*), the ceremonial boiling of rice performed on the second day of the month of Tai in order to ensure the prosperity of cattle. It is also a time to honour the cattle recognising in gratitude the contribution of the cattle in the agricultural operations. The cattle are washed and are decorated with colours with the designs of the cross standing out prominently. Around the necks of the cattle the people tie a piece of sugarcane, an edible root (*panaMkizaMku*, the palmyra shoot) and a towel or *veesTi*.

On hearing the church bell and *tappu* people bring their cattle to the church compound. One of the elders ties a towel on *kooyil maaTu* (literally the cattle that belongs to the church, also meaning the bulls used by the priest). This is a symbolic act of honouring the cattle: while the village elder honours the *kooyil maaTu* the entire herd is honoured in the presence of the divine. The priest prays for the well being of the cattle and blesses them by sprinkling holy water. Then, the cattle are taken to a central place in the village and are turned loose. The young boys run behind to take control of them and take possession of the things that are tied around their neck. This act is considered to be heroic.

The Tamil Catholics keep cattle for milk, for dung, for draught ploughing and for pulling carts. Since the cattle are the cornerstone of agrarian productivity, the villagers desire the health and prosperity for their cattle as much they desire it for themselves. The Catholics observe the ritual of *tirusTi kaziccu poTutal* (casting off the evil eye) for the cattle, which is done at home in private: Some light camphor in front of the cattle, some perform *aalaatti* with turmeric water, while others make the cattle cross over the green weed *muTakattaaan* (cardiospermum).

When the cattle fail to increase or when they are sick the Catholics make a vow to god requesting the divine to increase the numbers and improve their health. One such vow is known as *vittu vilakkaraiaam caital* (sell the diseased person or cattle in the presence of the divine and buy them back at a price). This practice is not confined to this day, though the researcher observed one such incident in Andavoorani on this day, and it took place in front of the church, after the blessing of the cattle:

A woman came forward with her cow and said '*naan en maaTTai vittu vilakkaraiaam caikinRein*' (I am selling my cow) for Rs. 100. A member of the gathering

responded aloud ‘Adaikala Maata sannitikku munnaal 2001 vatu varuTatil inta kanRai rupai noottukku vaMkupavar unTa?’ (in the year 2001, in the presence of Adaikala Maata who is willing to buy the cow for hundred rupees?). Among the persons gathered one came forward to buy, saying ‘unTu’ (I am ready to buy). The same question is asked thrice and the third time the last sentence is slightly altered thus ‘aRuta kiriamaaka vaMkuvar unTa’ (finality, as in a sale). The woman paid the amount and took back her cow. The money paid goes to the church.

manju viraTTu (bull race) is a typical Tamil festival celebrated during *poMkal*, both by the Catholics and the Hindus. *manju* is the decoration on the horns of the bull. This cultural event has assumed certain religious overtones in the way the Catholics celebrate it. Before the race begins the bulls are decorated and brought before the church to be blessed by the priest. The bulls are released one by one; the young men follow the charging bulls, some holding their tails. Some fail in the course of chasing the bulls while a few succeed in getting on the shoulders of the bull and ultimately bringing them under their control. Some bulls are so furious that they turn and attack the pursuer, often hurting him grievously. It is a dangerous race and yet there are people who are ready for such an event since great prestige is attached to the men who are able to control the bull. The bull has a towel tied between the horns and this is the reward to one who controls the bull.

Apart from *poMkal* there are other indigenous festivals celebrated by the Catholic Brahmins in Tiruchirappalli town. They are: (a) *kaarttikai viLakku*, a festival of lights, which is observed on this feast day by placing lighted oil lamps outside the house for three days. (b) *koluvaipatu*, arrangements of dolls in the house for nine days, when the neighbours come and sing devotional hymns (Christian and Sanskrit) and distribute

sweets. Whereas the Hindus place the idols of their gods and goddesses along with the dolls, the Catholics place the statue of Mary and Jesus. (c) *varalakshmi nonpu*: on this day the Catholics cook *kolukaTTai* (steamed rice cakes). These are typical Hindu Brahmin festivals and thus naturally only the Catholic Brahmins have retained their celebration.

The Catholics in general celebrate *tiippavaLi* (the Feast of Lights); they make native sweets and burst crackers. These festivals are significant from the point view of cultural celebration, and carry no religious significance for them.

Aayuda poojai is another indigenous feast followed by some Catholics and mostly in the towns. This falls in the month of October. On this day they clean their houses and apply sandal paste and *kuMkumam* on all the tools, books, and other instruments and gadgets. The Christian statues and pictures in the family altar are garlanded and incense is burned. Some take their vehicle to the church to be blessed by the priest. Those who own factories, shops and business centres get them blessed by the priest. Enquiring about the significance of the *Aayuda poojai*, we found that the Catholics view it as a time of invoking god to bless the instruments used by them. The tools and desks are not conceived as divinities. Applying sandal paste and *kuMkumam* on auspicious occasions only means coming into the sphere of benign and effective power.

Thus, the Catholic villages have their own calendar of feasts with elaborate rituals which provides them scope for incorporating many native Hindu practices while giving up their specifically Hindu contents.

INDIGENISATION AND THE CRAFTSMEN

In India, traditionally, different caste groups have been engaged in specific trades and occupations. The Catholics who belong to different occupational castes have been observing rituals specific to their occupation and, to that extent, indigenisation among them is quite pronounced. The Catholic *aacaaris* (goldsmiths) observe the ritual of wearing the sacred thread, as they claim to hold a unique place in society from the point of view of their creation (Brouwer 1988:448). The *taali*, the marriage badge, is designed solely by them and to that extent the rest of the Catholic community depends on them for their essential craft items.

On an auspicious day and time in the month of AavaNi (August-September), the Catholic goldsmiths perform the ritual of wearing the sacred thread before the family altar. As a preparation, they bathe, fast and apply saffron and sandal paste to the white thread. The candles and *agarpatti* are burned. They recite the 'I Believe' (the creed of the Church), one 'Our Father' and ten 'Hail Mary' and wear the sacred thread. The thread is worn for a day and is then removed. A similar ceremony is carried out for the boy after the Church wedding.⁴ The whole ritual is Christianised by being performed with a prayer before the Christian divinity.

The Catholic Parayars observe a native ritual while making bricks. On nine bricks two halves of a coconut and flowers are placed, while camphor is burned on a betel leaf. Before performing this ritual they light candles and pray in the church. Thus, though they follow the native ritual without any alteration, they first invoke the blessing of the Christian divinity.

***viiTu* (HOUSE)**

The construction of the house is viewed as an important occasion in the life of an individual. People take all available measures to ensure the successful completion of the house for a prosperous stay. Every house has its own seat of strength and on it the house is built; if not, the misfortune may fall upon the inmates of the house (Daniel 1987). Thus, the site, direction of the house, and the month, the day and the time on which the foundation is to be laid, are all carefully chosen on the instruction of a person well-versed in *manaikaTTu caastaram* (house-construction astrology). While most Catholics may not consult the astrologer while carrying out the life-cycle rituals, the astrological dimensions are given the greatest weight while building the house.

The foundation is laid on an auspicious day. The ritual begins in the northeast direction by making a square where the new structure will eventually stand. Around the square five bricks are placed. The first two bricks are placed horizontally and on it two bricks vertically and on it one brick horizontally. In the centre of the brick a branch of the margosa tree is placed after removing its bark, and it is decorated with flowers and *kuMkumam*. A member of the household pours a little milk and applies sandal paste and *kuMkumam* to the brick. After this ritual is completed the construction begins.

Most Catholics pay the *aacaari* (the carpenter) and permit him to carry on traditional rituals associated with the laying of the foundation. The Catholics bury a Christian medal (a metal piece on which the figure of a saint is engraved) in the foundation pit. A handful of *kooyilmaNnu* (sand collected from the churchyard) which is considered to be sacred, is also put at the site while building the house. In this ritual the

Catholics manage the conflict arising from the Hindu *aacaari* invoking the Hindu deity by placing the Christian medal. On their part, the Catholics only invoke their divinity while carrying out the native ritual, as Catholicism does not have a designed set of rituals for this purpose.

When the ceiling is done a light is kept burning all night. This is believed to keep the *peey* (devil, demon) away, as a house which is left in darkness becomes an easy entry for the *peey*. Furthermore, a pumpkin or an effigy of a person is hung on the house in order to ward off the evil eye.

It is ensured that the number of steps leading to the house is an odd one. The first step is referred to as *laapam* (gain), the next as *nasTam* (loss), and last step ends in *laapam* (gain). This is believed to bring wealth to the house.

Once the house is built and ready to be occupied Catholics follow another set of rituals. This is performed on an auspicious day and time. People perceive the house not as a mere dwelling place but a place that will influence the wellbeing of the residents. The house, like its inhabitants, shares the auspicious and inauspicious occasions.

On the night previous to the house-warming ceremony some Catholics get the *aacaari* to sacrifice a cock and sprinkle its blood on all four corners and at the entrance of the house.⁵ The purpose of this ritual is to ward off the evil. Since the wood that is used in the construction of the house is from the forest and the evil spirits reside in the trees of the forest, this ritual is performed to keep away these evil spirits from the house (Sivasubrahmanian 1988:164).

Some Catholics observe the ritual of bringing the cow into the house, as it is believed to be a symbol of prosperity and fertility. The urination of the cow inside the

newly built house is considered to be an auspicious sign. However, unlike the Hindus the Catholics do not worship the cow.

To mark the auspicious occasion the Catholics decorate the place with *maavilaittooranam* (mango leaves hanging over the door). On the day of the house-warming ceremony a pot of water, salt, and turmeric are first taken into and placed in the centre of the new house. On a new oven the milk is boiled and the sweet *poMkal* is cooked in the central part of the house. The priest blesses the house, sprinkles holy water all over the house, and prays for the wellbeing of the inhabitants. After the sanctification by the priest the milk and *poMkal* is served to all those present.

Since the house has great influence on the persons who reside in it, the Catholics share with the Hindus certain beliefs related to the house. The house itself is perceived as a person, and what is good for the house is regarded as good for the inhabitants and vice versa (Daniel 1987). For example, the coconut tree is planted as it signifies strength and vitality, but the drumstick tree is not planted facing the house as it is weak and breaks easily.

People often associate their fortune and misfortune with the house in which they live saying '*inta viiTtukku vantaneeram*' (all because of the day we set foot in this house). Thus, some houses are considered as *raaci* (fortunate or lucky) and others are not. Some of them even go to the extent of changing the house or altering the house in the wake of misfortune. Problems believed to be due to the house are called *manaikkaTTu kooLaaRu*.

We came across a case wherein the inhabitants of a house in Sengudi village had a serious debate on the *raaci* of their house in the wake of the sudden demise of their only son in an accident. This 'ill luck' was attributed to something being wrong with the house.

But, the man of the house refused to accept this and said that they had been living in the house for the past twenty years and that a number of auspicious events had taken place in the same house. Finally the house as the cause of death was ruled out on the ground that the house that is auspicious for the first several years with its first inhabitants would remain essentially auspicious (cf. Daniel 1987:146).

In Valghiramanickam village the Catholics reported that a house that faced the church did not experience the blessing of the deity: '*caami paarvaila irukkakuuTaatu*' (never dwell under the direct sight of the deity). The house should not also be located in the path of the church of the village. They pointed to a house that stood on the path of the church and said that the persons dwelling in that house had not progressed economically.

The construction of the house and the related rituals reveal that there is an interesting blending of the Catholic and the Hindu ideas. In her study of the Christians of Kerala, Visvanathan (1999:6) too finds that the merging of the Hindu and the Christian customs to be most evident in the construction of a house.

The rituals carried out by the Catholics are not a mere remnant of their past. Rather they are woven into the very fabric of their socio-religious world, and are modified and substituted with Christian symbols. Thus, there is both discontinuity to the extent that the object of worship is the Christian divinity and continuity with the retention of native rituals. This is further explored with the beliefs and rituals related to auspiciousness and evil in the next chapter.

The native rituals related to agricultural activity invariably take place in the sphere of the church. The prevalent practice in any village is that the temple becomes the meeting ground for community activities. Likewise the church becomes the meeting place for

community activities of the Catholics. Churches replacing temples as the focus of the socio-religious life of the community, the Catholics have reconstructed their socio-cultural system around the 'new' place of worship.

The foregoing description reveals that conversion to an 'alien' religion has not resulted in complete replacement of the native rituals, beliefs and practices. Instead every agricultural activity and allied activities are accompanied by a Christian prayer, sanctification with the holy water and the tolling of the church bell. These Christian signs and symbols have become an integral part of their native ritual procedure.

Conclusion

All the rituals described seem to suggest they are primarily cultural in the sense that both the Hindus and the Catholics observe them. Whatever differences highlighted are marginal to the overall ritual performances. We need to account why they are common to both the communities and why is it that there are marginal differences.

The unity in the rituals can be accounted in terms of the context in which these rituals are performed. This context is constructed by occupational needs. The Tamil Catholics under our study are largely rural and their occupation is agriculture and/or related arts and crafts. These occupations are studded with many rituals, which are religious in character. When Christianity took roots in India it did not alter the occupational pattern of the people drastically. Since occupations and rituals associated with them are marginal to the core of the religious practices, Christianity did not present an entirely different set of rituals for the Catholics to follow. Continuing with an old occupation and following a new religion, the Catholics faced a religious vacuum when

they sought for religious symbols and rituals to cope with the vagaries of nature. The natural option was to continue with the traditional practices.

In doing so, they could not adopt them in totality. Wherever these traditional rituals are tied to Hindu deities they replaced them with parallels from Christianity. For instance, Mary replaces Mariamma of the Hindus in the rituals of rain. However, there were some rituals which are not tied to any explicit religious symbols, such as those practices avoiding certain days, months and directions for sowing, harvesting, etc., and such rituals were adopted in totality.

When one considers the response of the Church to all these ritual practices, one observes a specific pattern. Initially, the Church considered these types of rituals as cultural and private to the Catholics as they were not practised in the sacred sphere of the church. The Catholics felt the need to relate some of these rituals to their newly acquired faith and began to Christianise some of these rituals. Subsequently they sought and got the services of the *kooyilpiLLai* for some of the rituals.

In the recent times, especially after the Second Vatican Council when the Church decided to integrate with the local culture of the believers, the Church has devised a new set of rituals for the occupational context of the Catholics. Thus, we find the *poMkal* celebration having become an integral part of the Catholic faith and practices with supporting Christian theology.

It is important to note that indigenisation is not limited to certain rituals and completed at one point of time. What emerges from the present study is that there is a 'process,' an unending dynamism, an urge and a need that enable the Church to integrate people and their beliefs and practices amidst differences.

Of course, these existential conditions are not without their predicaments. There are many such moments in the life and practices of Catholics. Let us consider the rituals performed by the Catholics at the time of house construction. When the foundation is laid, the builder has his set of rituals. Catholics too have a ritual, which is probably of a recent origin: The priest says a prayer and sprinkles holy water on the foundation pit. As Catholics, they would like to have the Christian ritual and at the same time they are not alien to the beliefs surrounding the rituals performed by the Hindu builder. They choose to have both the rituals performed and the Church does not object.

When they choose to have both the rituals, it is only to be expected that the Catholic privilege their faith, for which the Hindu builder does not have any objection. Thus, faiths seek to establish an equilibrium: While the Catholics grant a space for the Hindu rituals, the Hindus accept an adjustment in time sequence. This is not always and entirely a cultural process. It also depends on the status of person in the village: The owner of the house being the key person, his faith is granted the place of pre-eminence.

Finding the Christian parallels for traditional rituals was the effort of the Catholics in the initial stage. Now, inspired by new theologies and strengthened by the openness of the Church expressed through the Second Vatican Council, the clergy play a more active role in performing that role. More and more traditional practices performed in the domestic and social sphere are being brought into religious sphere.

Endnotes

1. *nalleer kaTTutal* is a 'mock' ploughing. All those having a pair of oxen and ploughs gather in a common place, which may or may not be cultivable land, and plough the ground superficially. Those not having these instruments of production also join the gathering as an integral part of the peasant community.
2. One woman reported that her dead mother-in-law appears in her dream before the time of sowing and instructs her on what kind of seeds to be sown and where.
3. According to the lady, 'The year before had been a trying year; we faced lot of difficulties. I wish that all our difficulties are trampled upon as the people walk on the ash and we hope for a year of blessing.'
4. The number of threads worn varies with the man's marital status. For example, an unmarried man wears three threads rolled together, called half pair; the married man wears six threads, called one pair; a man with children wears nine threads, called one and half pairs; and the man with grand children wears twelve threads, called two pairs. The father ties the thread for the son. For married men the father-in-law ties the thread the first year and then on they tie it for themselves.
5. Eliade (1959:54-56) presents a detailed cosmogonic myth related to building construction and blood sacrifice. 'If a "construction" is to endure (be it house, temple, tool, etc.), it must be animated, that is, it must receive life and soul.' Thus, blood sacrifice is perceived as life giving force and an important ritual connected to house-building.



5.1 Prayer in the church before the Ritual of *poMkal*



5.1 Thanking God as the *poMkal* Pot Boils Over

CHAPTER VI

RELIGION AND THE QUOTIDIAN LIFE

In the foregoing chapters our discussion was centred on organised and standardised forms of religious rituals and celebrations which are observed periodically. Religious experience and expression, however, are not confined to such periodical observations. In their every day life individuals confront contingencies which are not timed and which need to be addressed and responded to. They not only have to face different kinds of uncertainties, but also have to make meaning of what is experienced. In order to cope with such uncertainties and contingencies, every community evolves a worldview as part of its culture. This worldview, which is significantly influenced by religion, provides a set of beliefs and practices to deal with dichotomies of auspiciousness/inauspiciousness, good and evil, etc.

While Catholicism draws a distinction between good and evil it does not have an elaborate set of norms specifying the auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of time, direction, etc. Nevertheless, in practice, the Catholics in South India have drawn a good deal of beliefs and practices from the native culture and have adopted them in their quotidian life. This sphere provides another facet in the study of indigenisation of Catholicism, and we shall discuss the same in this chapter.

I

AUSPICIOUSNESS/ INAUSPICIOUSNESS

The Tamil Catholics believe that every ritual has an underlying principle of how and when it has to be carried out in order to derive its beneficial results. They also believe that things happen at the time chosen by god: 'To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven ... a time to plant ...' (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2, *Good News Bible*). In making sense of the beliefs held by the Catholics we group them into auspicious time, auspicious direction, auspicious ritual items, and auspicious persons.

Auspicious Time

Time is a matter of everyday concern for people and the belief in the auspiciousness or otherwise of time creates heterogeneity of time. Thus, some months of the year, certain days of the week, and specific time during the day are considered auspicious or inauspicious, while others are regarded as neutral.

The year begins on the first of the Tamil month Cittirai (April-May), a month that is considered auspicious to begin agricultural activity. The months of Cittirai, Vaikaaci (May-June), AaNi (June-July), AavaNi (August-September), Aipaci (October-November), Kaarttikai (November-December) and Tai (January-February) are the auspicious months for marriage rites and house construction. The month of AaTi is auspicious for sowing, but not for marriage ceremony. Thus, the auspiciousness of the months varies for different occasions.

The character of a particular month is marked off by lunar days. The cycle of lunar days comprises a fortnight, and every month contains two fortnights with some

overlapping. The first part of the lunar cycle is referred to as the *paurNami* (full moon) and the second part as the *ammaavaacai* (new moon). *vaLarpiRaikaalam* (season of growth) is thought to be auspicious and enterprises begun during this season are believed to meet with success. *teeipiRaikaalam* (season of decrease) is thought to be inauspicious.

Like the months of the year, the days of the week are also qualified. Each week has its cycle of seven days, some of which possess an overall auspicious quality, some are deemed as inauspicious and others remain neutral: Tuesdays and Saturdays are considered to be inauspicious and no important event is carried out on these days. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays are regarded as auspicious, which means that one can start a new enterprise or set out on a journey on these days. Tuesday is the most feared day, as the activities beginning on this day are believed to meet with difficulties. As such, it is described as *cevvaai veruvaai* (Tuesday empty mouth).

The best time during the day stretches from dawn to noon and evening to dusk. During these times people go about their work as there is little danger of attack by hostile or mystical forces. With few exceptions, even now the Catholics celebrate marriage when the day dawns and the wedding Mass held between 6 a.m. and 7 a.m. Certain times during the day are considered auspicious and the notion of auspiciousness gets particularised in the observation of time. Time assumes a sacred character as people set out to perform the rituals within that specified time of the day. To illustrate this, a reference may be made to an incident of altering the set pattern of the Mass in order that the *taali*-tying ritual could take place during the auspicious time. It was a Wednesday and the marriage Mass was fixed for 9 a.m. as the auspicious time was between 8.45 a.m. and 9.45 a.m. Since the Mass could not begin at 9.00 a.m., fearing that the *taali*-tying ritual will fall outside the

auspicious time, the priest was requested to perform this ritual right at the beginning of the Mass. The priest mentioned that while the notion of auspicious time is unknown to Christianity, the Catholics continue to believe in it. As a religious functionary and as a well wisher of the people, the priest would rather consent to their wish than hold on to the belief of the Church that all time is ordained by god and that one section of time is no more auspicious than another. Moreover, the priest also said that he did not want to be blamed if the marriage turned out to be a failure, as it would be attributed to the disregard for the principle of auspiciousness.

Auspicious Direction

Direction is given pre-eminence while constructing a house, while performing agricultural activities, and while conducting the life-cycle rituals. It is believed that the East is associated with the rising sun and that beneficial forces emanate from this direction. Thus, the entrances to the church and the house face the East. The direction West is considered to be inauspicious and the participants do not face this direction while performing auspicious rituals. The sun sets in the West and thus the direction signifies the diminishing of life. For the Hindus, in the South the god of death resides. The cemetery in the villages of our study lie in the South, and the Catholics refer to South as the place where the dead rest and say '*unnai konTu tekkei vaikka*' (keep you in the South). The direction North is neutral and it is not qualified.

The character of the direction of each day is solely judged by its standing in the weekly cycle and not by the static point of the four directions mentioned above. The Catholics in the village Andavoorani gave the following list of *cuulam* (inauspicious directions avoided while performing important events) according to the day of the week:

Monday and Saturday	<i>kizakkey cuulam</i> (East)
Tuesday and Wednesday	<i>vaTakkey cuulam</i> (North)
Thursday	<i>tekkey cuulam</i> (South)
Friday and Saturday	<i>meRkkey cuulam</i> (West)

While directions, months and days are static, there are variable sources of cosmic influences. The planets are said to influence the auspicious time for the individual. This is more personalised in nature and is advised by an astrologer.

Auspicious Numbers

The Catholics attach great importance to odd numbers while carrying out both auspicious and inauspicious rituals. An odd number signifies incompleteness, and it is this incompleteness which makes the odd number auspicious. According to the Catholics, the incompleteness of the ritual gives scope for making it complete. Life is viewed as ongoing, and in a way the observance of odd numbers is to ensure that life continues. So, when offering a gift of cash it is given in odd numbers, thus signifying that there is more to come. For similar reasons ritual items and persons performing the rituals are also in odd numbers.

In her narration of beliefs and practices of people, Gandhi (1980:187) notes that odd numbers are believed to bring in positive effects and even numbers negative effects. According to her, the Greek thought of even numbers as breakable and therefore weak and feminine. In contrast, they thought of odd numbers as unbreakable and therefore strong and masculine.

The Catholics associate the number 'three' with the Holy Trinity. The number 'seven' is also associated with fullness and perfection. Apart from these two numbers the Catholics do not find any other number association in the Bible. To the Tamil Catholics the significance of odd number is drawn from the existing native beliefs and practices rather than from the Bible. Odd numbers have ritual value and number three is especially sacred, observes Srinivas (1994).

Auspicious Ritual Items

Flowers play a significant role in South Indian rituals. They figure both at auspicious and inauspicious rituals and carry different meanings. Flowers are an indispensable item of worship and a way of expressing joy as well as respect; thus, they are used to honour both the divine and the human. They are offered to the divine, and are used in the rituals of puberty, marriage, and house warming. The women deck themselves with flowers and this signifies their status: Since they are a mark of a *cumaMkali*, widows do not wear flowers. Flowers are the only item generally offered to the dead.

The Hindus use only certain flowers in their worship. Each deity has a flower particularly suited to her/his worship. However, such associations do not exist among the Catholics. They generally use jasmine and rose in worship, though other flowers are not proscribed. Flowers have become preponderant in the individual offerings to the divine.

Paddy, the unhusked rice, is the most sacred member of the plant world. It is a sign of *ciiteevi* (a positive force behind worldly prosperity). The Hindus use it in the life-cycle rituals, while Catholics place a measure of paddy at the side of the dead body. According to them it denotes the positive influences of the dead persons and their fertile life in the world.

veRRilai paakku is distributed at the beginning and end of the marriage ritual. It is considered to be auspicious and is believed to induce auspicious (good) feelings.

There is a close link between the ritual items and their colours. Colours are symbolic, conveying specific meaning in specific contexts. The colours white, red, green, yellow and black are associated with certain properties. A combination of these colours is used in South Indian rituals. White is associated with purity, stability and cooling effect, e.g., milk. The over flowing of *poMkal*, a white substance, is considered as a sign of prosperity. It is cooked and distributed in marriage, house construction and house-warming ceremonies. *poMkal* is one of the items of votive offering to the divine. The Catholics offer it in the shrines as a thanksgiving for favours received. Milk, a white substance, is also considered pure and becomes a fitting offering to god.

Red, the colour of blood, stands for vitality and fertility and it is associated with femininity. Vermilion symbolises auspiciousness and joy. *kuMkumam* (vermilion) is the red spot the women wear on their forehead and only women whose husbands are alive can wear it. Since *kuMkumam* is an auspicious item it is considered an ideal item to use as an offering when inviting guests for such celebrations as house-warming ceremony, puberty ritual, etc. For the Hindus, vermilion is associated with goddess Durga, while the Catholics have not retained such an association or transferred it to any Christian divinity, they continue to use it as an auspicious item.

Yellow is the colour of turmeric, which is considered to be cooling, a sign of prosperity and fertility. It is an edible root and one of the most important spices used by South Indians in their cooking. It is considered to be pure, antiseptic and good for the body. Turmeric paste is used by women in their daily bath. It is an item that widows can

not use. Turmeric plays a prominent place in the rituals, including life-cycle rituals. It can even replace *taali* as the marriage emblem. We came across a woman wearing a piece of turmeric in place of *taali*, as she had offered her *taali* in the shrine of Vailankanni. Turmeric is also used to cast off evil spirits. *aalaatti* that is waved to honour individuals and to avert the evil eye consists of turmeric water, calcium and betel leaves. Turmeric paste is applied on the eyes of the dead body to prevent it from being possessed by the evil spirit.

Green signifies a cooling effect and denotes fertility. The plantain tree itself is auspicious and is used in life-cycle rituals. At the entrance of the *kalyaaNamanTapam* (marriage hall) it is specifically planted to wish prosperity to the newly wedded couple.

Black stands for repelling evil, and that is why while binding the evil black and red cords are used. Red signifies the battle with the demon and consequently the blood of the demon. The hair of the possessed is cut in the exorcism ritual to signify the demon in the hair (see also Beck 1969:558-59). Black is generally used in casting off evil, for example, the black spot put on the cheek of the child. A piece of charcoal is taken when carrying animal flesh. This is because the demon is attracted to the smell of blood and the person becomes vulnerable to the attack of the demon.

Oil and soap-nut powder, which are used in the ritual bath of the dead, are regarded as inauspicious items. Since they are associated with death, these items are not exchanged between people. Women never carry them from their natal home to the house where they are given in marriage. While setting out on an important journey, seeing a person coming with an empty pot is considered inauspicious. We observed that on the day

of *naaLvitaieTuttal* no person went to fetch water during the morning hours, as the sight of an empty pot is a sign of penury.

Auspicious Person

A *cumaMkali* (married woman with children and husband) is the appropriate person to carry out every auspicious ritual, for example, *aalaatti* in the marriage rite, assisting at the puberty ritual, etc. Traditionally the state of a *cumaMkali* is considered as the ideal for a woman and is desired by women in general. Widowhood is considered inauspicious, as it stands for renunciation of life.

The dead body becomes auspicious under certain circumstances. For example, when a person is on an important journey and meets the people carrying a dead body it is considered auspicious. It is an assurance that the journey will result in success. The dead body anticipates the success, since the dead person has successfully relieved himself from the suffering of this world. The principle of polarity works in this belief, such as those who mourn now will laugh later.

The Vannaan (washerman) is considered to be auspicious when he is met carrying washed clothes, but he is viewed as inauspicious when he is met carrying dirty clothes. The Ampataien (barber) is always considered an inauspicious person, since he is associated with tonsuring which denotes mourning, sorrow, penance, etc. With the onset of an important occasion one would avoid the sight of the Ampataien. The Ampataien too avoids people for the fear of being cursed.

The Catholics maintain a remarkable ambivalence about auspiciousness and inauspiciousness: On the one hand, they hold that everything happens as ordained by god – ‘*kaTavuL cittapaTiee naTakkum*’ (according to the will of god), as they would say. On

the other hand, they continue with the native beliefs and do all that they can to enhance success, wealth and happiness and try to avoid whatever misfortune is in store for them. Apparently there is a disjunction between their professed faith and actual observances in every life, and they handle this disjunction by invoking the Christian divinity and saying the Christian prayers.

II

SICKNESS

The Catholics do make use of the indigenous methods to deal with sickness. We may consider here smallpox as a case in point and the way the Catholics treat this sickness. In Tamil Nadu the Hindus consider smallpox as a visitation of the goddess Mariamma rather than as a disease. When a person suffers with *ammai* (smallpox) he/she is accorded the same respect that is given to the goddess. Although the Catholics do not worship the goddess Mariamma they too believe that this sickness has some association with the goddess. Some of them consult the Hindu *puucaari* who is a specialist in matters concerning *ammai* and he normally gives *vipuuti* (the sacred ash) to be smeared on the person and prescribes a treatment with margosa paste and turmeric.

Since the Church does not associate smallpox with any Christian divinity, the Church instituted sacrament of anointing the sick is not done in the case of smallpox. This sacrament is exclusively used in the last stage of a person's life rather than at other times of illness. People can not associate smallpox with any kind of sickness that could be dealt with by the Catholic priest. Hence, the native belief that the goddess has visited the person still lingers in the minds of the Catholics and they consult a native specialist.

There are cases of Catholics playing a role similar to that of the Hindu *puucaari*. The researcher met a Catholic lady who guides people in times of crisis such as serious illness; she uses holy water in place of *vipuuti*.

III

EVIL

Every religion provides an understanding of evil (see Parkin 1985). Suffering is seen in Hinduism as due to one's *karma* and the sins of the past. Catholicism sees good and evil as being fundamentally and radically opposed. Every good emanates from god and the saints, while evil is attributed to the devil who is viewed as being antithetical to Jesus and the forces of good. This section focuses on the phenomenon of evil as experienced and interpreted by the Tamil Catholics.

The Catholics view wellbeing of life as emanating from the goodness of god. They consider the blessings of god as the result of one's prayers and good deeds done to others. On the other hand, the Catholics share with the non-Christians the belief that misfortunes are the result of one's sins or evil actions caused by others (sorcery) or evil in the form of *peey* (devil).

To be freed from the consequences of one's sin the Catholics make confession to a Catholic priest and seek forgiveness and mercy of god through the mediation of priest. In addition some go on *tiruyaattirai* (pilgrimage) as a mark of penance, while others fast and pray. These are specifically Christian acts in dealing with suffering as a result of sin.

Misfortunes which are considered to be the workings of the evil spirits and sorcery necessitate consultation with Catholic and/or non-Christian religious specialists (see

Caplan 1985). There is general disapproval among the Catholics about consulting the non-Christian specialists, and the researcher's queries about it always met with plain denial: 'We are Christians, and we don't believe in it.' Yet, in moments of crisis such as persisting illness Catholics do consult the non-Christian soothsayers, though only discretely; but they are viewed by the Church as deviants rather than as contributors to the indigenisation of Catholicism. The Church considers consulting non-Christian specialists as a sin, and such sinners are asked to confess their sin to a Catholic priest and seek atonement for the same. There are a few cases where it was believed that because they consulted a non-Christian specialist the Christian divinity has inflicted them with continuous suffering.

The religious beliefs and practices of the Tamil Catholics have to do with dangers that fill day and night. Not only ghosts and malevolent spirits but also fellow human beings consciously or unconsciously become the medium for the functioning of evil forces. The community adopts the well-articulated native rituals in dealing with such sources of misfortunes.

***kaNNu* (The Evil Eye)**

The evil eye is referred to as *kaNNu* in Tamil and the Muslims refer to it as *najar* (Pocock 1994:52). It is understood as the envious glance, a result of jealousy and the feeling of one's deprivation, which can affect the other who has a privileged position. It is believed to cause illness, loss of appetite, stomach-upset, etc. It has no link with religious practitioners and warding it off is carried out by people themselves. It is not discussed publicly, as it is believed that the secrecy of the ritual enhances its efficacy.

The *kaNNu* and its ill effects can be turned away by performing appropriate rituals. The indigenous methods employed to ward off *kaNNu* are known as *tirusTi kazittal* (casting off evil eye). *tirusTi Kazittal* consists of collecting a little sand at crossroads in the village along with fragments of palm leaves removed from three houses roofs. Together with three or five chillies and a little bit of salt this collection is waved round the person's head and the person is asked to spit on it thrice. The whole thing is then thrown in the fire. If the smell of the chilly escapes in the air and the sound of the salt crackling is heard then the person is believed to have been affected by evil eye.

Camphor is also used in *tirusTi kazittal*. It is burnt in front of the house after waving it three times in front of the person. Women generally perform this ritual and they seem to have authority in this ritual (see Pocock 1994:54). It is generally performed at dusk on Tuesdays and Fridays, since on these days the evil is believed to be most active. However, it may be carried out on any day if it is deemed necessary. In chapter five we have referred to the way people seek to avert *kaNNu* by distracting *kaNNu* by hanging a pumpkin on a new house and a black spot on the cheek of the child, etc.

When the causes of the problems are unknown the Catholics, like their Hindu counterparts, approach the divine for aid. There are six culturally defined causes for one's problems. The actual source of the problem is ascertained by *tiruvuLacciiTTu or ciiTTu pooTTu paarttal* (picking lots to find the divine will) in the church by the Catholics while the Hindus follow the same before their deity. As per the set procedure, people write down on pieces of paper the different sources/causes for their problems. A child is asked to pick up one piece of paper. This is repeated thrice and the problem appearing more than once is identified as the cause of the present suffering. Accordingly, measures are

initiated to counter the sources of this problem. Enumerated below are the possible causes of misfortune and the means to deal with them:

(1) *ceivinai kooLaaRu* (sorcery): The Catholics employ different courses of action to deal with sorcery. Some of our informants sought the intervention of the divine and possible revelations of the wrong doer by staying in the shrine of St. Michael for a week. In another case the affected persons went on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Our Lady of Vailankanni to negate the evil power. Some of them consulted a Catholic priest by name Santhanasamy (discussed later in this chapter).

(2) *morappaTTu kooLaaRu* (result of calling on the divine to punish one's enemy): Addressing St. Michael, the Tamil Catholics say '*aanTavare unakku kaNNu illayaa? caamiye niyee keeLu*' (don't you have eyes St. Michael? Lord you ask). Such a calling is believed to affect the wrong doer negatively. The divine is called when there is a dispute among individuals, family members and relatives due to jealousy or during division of property. The affected individuals request the person who called the divine to settle the dispute in the church. In the church the *kooyilpiLLai* prays on behalf of the parties in dispute and gives them the holy water (among the Hindus the *puucaari* gives sacred ash).¹ The divine that was beseeched to punish is now requested to bring peace.

(3) *peey kooLaaRu* (results of demonic possession): This is discussed under exorcism.

(4) *manaikkaTTu kooLaaRu* refers to the belief that the house is the cause of the person's present suffering. In Andavoorani, a Catholic altered his front door in order to avert the misfortune caused by his house.

(5) *teivak kooLaaRu* is a misfortune resulting from the failure to fulfil the vow made to god. By fulfilling the vow one frees herself/himself from *teivak kooLaaRu*. A woman had made a vow that she would sacrifice a goat in the shrine of St. John de Britto for the wellbeing of her son. There was some delay in fulfilling the vow and meanwhile her son died in an accident. She believed that *kiTaaikku patilaa eMka kiTaya eTutukiTTaar* (instead of the goat the saint has taken our goat, meaning son). She nevertheless offered the goat requesting the saint to protect the rest of her children. Though the Christian theology does not portray god as being cruel or punishing, the Tamil Catholics view vow as a serious matter, as the failure to fulfil the same angers god and invites misfortune.

(6) *enta kooLaaRum illai* (none of the above mentioned causes): This leaves the Catholics in peace and they seek medical treatment in case of illness, etc.

Similar to the above is *eeTu poTTu paarttal*: The *kooyilpiLLai* brings palm leaves on which Bible verses are written and the persons concerned are asked to pick up one. He then explains the words, which may explain the problem and possibly the cause of the suffering. Alternatively, some Catholics stay at the shrine - *vaarattukkuiruttal* - requesting the saint to reveal to them the cause of their problem. The Church neither objects to nor encourages these practices.

On the other hand, the Church is strongly opposed to some native practices, such as the performance of the following symbolic actions by the Catholics appealing to the saint to take revenge on the evil doer: (a) *paTi kaTTuratu or kaacu veTTipoTutal*: Cutting a coin into two pieces and dropping them in the box for donations. (b) *oolai veTTi vaittal*: Cutting the tender shoot of the palmyra tree and keeping it in the church. (c) Burning a

handful of red chillies after placing it before the statue of St. Michael and beseeching him to punish the evil doer. These native practices instil fear in persons and portray god as the punishing judge.

Sacred Words

It is believed that religious icons prevent the evil from entering the house. Similarly certain words are thought to have power when recited. When tormented by evil, for example, the Catholics invoke and address prayers to St. Anthony. The prayers and the icons used in the name of St. Anthony are known as St. Anthony's *yantra* (see Picture 6.1).

We came across a prayer book entitled *punita Anthoniar ceivinai akaRRum japaMkal* (Prayers to St. Anthony to Remove the Effects of Black Magic) which explains the procedure to be followed in enthroning St. Anthony's statue and saying prayers before it. The author of this prayer book, a Catholic himself, notes that some words used in the prayer are alien to the Christian theology, yet only with those words can the evil be removed. The author's great-grandfather who had combined his knowledge of *cittarkal* with the use of some Christian prayers composed these prayers about 100 years ago. *cittarkal* refers to a set of mendicants who developed their own philosophy (Bhattacharya 1999:263).

The St. Anthony's *yantra* and prayers are said to be powerful in dealing with the problems of black magic and demonic influences. As shown in Picture 6.1, the figures of three saints and Mary occupy the four corners of the cross. At the centre of the cross is the figure of the Sacred Heart of Jesus. There are six *cakkaram* around the cross and within each of these circles are written jumbled alphabets. These resemble the Hindu *yantras*,

but an obvious variation is that the symbol of *trisuul* (Shiva's trident) has been replaced by the cross.

The direction plays a very important role in the power of a particular *yantra*: 'In any *mandala* the directions are extremely important, for they guard and frame the sacred universe at its borders. There may be four directional guardians; or eight, counting the intermediate directions; or ten, including a guardian above and below' (Eck 1994:147). In St. Anthony's *yantra*, too, there are four corners, eight directions, as well as the sky, the earth and the valleys. The prayer seeks protection from evil spirits coming from all directions. Each direction is entrusted to a Christian divinity to whom a prayer is addressed: East to St. Anthony, South to St. James, West to St. Michael, and North to Mary. And the direction in between are entrusted to the cross of Jesus.² The prayer is said with the intention of binding the evil with the help of saints, Mary and the Holy Trinity.

The positioning of the Christian divinities in the *yantra* is based on the Hindu belief that a divine guardian or regent protects each direction: Indra, the Vedic war god, protects the East. The Catholics have replaced Indra with St. Anthony, who is associated with waging war against the demons. Varuna, who rules the waters and is the guardian of the moral order in Vedic times, protects the West. This direction is entrusted by the Catholics to St. Michael, who is also portrayed as the destroyer of evil and the protector of justice on earth. Yama, the Hindu god of death, guards the South; for Catholics, St. James guards this direction. Kuvera, the wealthiest is in the North for Hindus; Mary takes this direction for the Catholics (see Eck 1994:148). Thus, in St. Anthony's *yantra*, while replacing the Hindu deities, their attributes have been transferred to the counterpart Christian divinities.

The jumbled alphabets in the cross are the mantras addressed to Jesus, the saints and Mary. There are also prayers addressed to the saints, to Mary and to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which combine Christian and non-Christian sacred words. In all there are nine *mantaraMkal* (prayers) and these are written on the reverse of the *yantra* (see Picture 6.2; for English translation, see Appendix 6.1). Since it is believed that the power is not in the person but in the *words*, anybody can recite the prayer and control the power of the evil. Similar prayers are found among the Sri Lankan Catholics, too (Stirrat 1992:141).

A closer examination of St. Anthony's *yantra* reveals that it is a combination of *yantra* and *mantra*, which is based on the principle of *mantric* tradition of the ancient Vedic times. *yantras* are diagrams of geometrical patterns engraved or drawn on paper, metal, wood, stone or other substances. In worship, the *yantra* is an abstract image of the deity, it is a substitute of the iconographic image of the deity. The *yantra* becomes alive when the sacred words are uttered invoking the deity. In that sense the *yantra* is a dynamic symbol of the deity's power (Khanna 1987).

mantra, as different from a prayer, is a sacred formula or a mystical verse addressed to a deity to acquire power. It consists of powerful words, syllables, and names of gods, interjections and exhortations. Sometimes a short sentence stating the case or the wish more plainly is inserted along with words that have no intelligible meaning (see Appendix 6.2). St. Anthony's *yantra* consists of letters which when uttered produces a definite sequence of sounds. The central idea is that when the sacred letters are uttered in a prescribed manner it produces cosmic vibrations and energy that can be directed to serve specific purposes of good or evil.

Sacred Knowledge and Persons

People believe that some persons are bestowed with extraordinary power to deal with the evil. One such sacred person who has gained popularity among the Tamil Catholics is a Catholic priest by name Santhanasamy. Since the Church does not recognise individual holy men having power to handle the evil or the native methods in dealing with black magic, this priest has been excommunicated from the Church. This, however, has not affected his clients and they continue to consult him. He is often referred to by some Catholic priests as the *mantiracaamy* (magic priest) who removes evil spells of all kinds (*pilli cuuniam, ceivinai kooLaaRu*) by means of Christian prayer following the indigenous principles of acquiring power to avert evil.³

According to villagers, priest Santhanasamy has the power not only to diagnose the source of trouble or disease, but also to cure it. He is a 'doctor' as well as a priest and a repository of traditional and sacred knowledge. From those among our informants who have consulted him we gather that he is regarded with respect as a person of prayer and a person capable of helping the people in trouble. They said '*caamiyaruTaya utaviyai naaTi vantaal nammala japam ceiya vaikiraar*' (when we come seeking his help, he makes us pray). When the Catholics consult the Hindu *caamiji* they do it with a strong sense of ambivalence, since the Church shuns such beliefs and practices. However, the Church does not provide effective assistance with personal crisis believed to be the result of supernatural influences.

In Rajakambeeram, Kollankudi and Thanjavur we came across a few Hindu and Catholic men and women who are believed to possess powers to deal with the evil. In the native idiom possession by the benevolent spirit is referred to as the *caamiaaTi* (divine-

dancers), and Dumont and Pocock (1959a:58) refer to them as god-dancers. They occasionally enter into a stage of trance, dancing in their own style and speaking in a language attributed with certain divinity by the people around them. The Hindu divine-dancers can be men or women, of high or low caste. While they are in a trance, they scream, and with a commanding voice give orders to their clients. The people around them see a divine spirit in them and these spirits are perceived as deities such as Mariamma, Kali, they all worship. The people consult them for their present problems and seek remedies.

From our field we came across a Catholic woman from Thanjavur, known to be the medium of Mary, who has gained popularity among the Catholics. People come to her throughout the week to consult her as she is seized by Mary. When possessed she becomes thirsty and weak. She asks for water and sits down quietly. Soon we can expect 'Mary to speak through her.' She speaks in whisper to a select few, whom she calls out by their name or by the colour of their dress or by the direction of the place from where they have come. She has an assistant who ushers in the individuals whom she beckons.

The difference between a Hindu medium and a Catholic medium is in their external manifestations. The Catholic woman is calm, weak and communicating to individuals. Among the Catholics, the consultation takes place in the privacy of people's home and not in the church. It does not have official sanction. The Catholics go to her as she encourages people to pray the 'rosary' (a prayer the Church has sanctioned). People are familiar with the possession by the divine and this has been modified according to the Catholic tradition of Mary being the gentle mother.

Spirit Possession and Exorcism

Ghosts, demons or evil spirits are other forms of evil encountered by the Catholics, and such malevolent forces are referred as *peey-picaacu* (spirit of the dead, devil). The *peey*⁴ harms the individuals either by frightening them or by taking possession of them. According to the Catholics, the effect of *kaattu* (evil breeze) is termed *payanta kooLaaRu* (problem caused by fright). The indications are suffering from a sudden fever or gazing. When afflicted by *kaattu* people consult either the *kooyilpiLLai* or the Hindu *puucaari* to perform the ritual of *mantirittal*. The *kooyilpiLLai* prays and gives holy water to drink, while the *puucaari* gives sacred ash to eat and to be placed under the pillow.

We came across a Catholic girl who was affected by *kaattu*. One night as she was returning from a neighbouring town riding on the pillion of her father's bicycle she experienced sudden fear. The 'cause' of her fear was a huge white figure criss-crossing the road and then disappearing. On reaching home she developed fever. Since on inquiry the parents 'found' that she was affected by *kaattu*, the same night a Hindu *puucaari* was called to nullify its evil effect.

The Tamil Catholics also share beliefs in 'spirit possession' prevalent in the Tamil culture. The existence of spirits with the power to influence human beings by attacking and taking control of a person's body is an unquestioned aspect of everyday reality for the Catholics and non-Christians alike. The Catholic shrines address themselves to this problem and in turn the Tamil Catholics have combined the existing native ritual with the Christian method to deal with such difficulties. The ritual of exorcism is performed when the *peey* takes possession of the individual. In what follows we shall describe the nature of exorcism as it is practised among the Catholics⁵ in the area of our fieldwork.

Exorcism is 'the act of driving or warding off demons or evil spirits from persons, places, or things that are believed to be, possessed' (Gratsch 1966:748). According to Catholicism, the demons are the angels who disobeyed god and were cast into hell, where they establish their reign. In the Bible we read that Jesus chases demons from persons (Mathew 12: 2-30, *Good News Bible*). Following this tradition the early Christians continued to exorcise demons in the name of Jesus by making the sign of the cross. The Church too authorises persons to perform exorcism.

In ecclesiastical language an exorcist is a cleric who has the power to perform exorcism as part of his religious functions (McCafferty 1966:750). During their earthly life, 'Holy persons' like St. Benedict, St. Anthony and St. Sebastian had been authorised by the Church to exorcise. The churches dedicated to them continue to attract individuals who are possessed by the demon, as the respective saints are believed to exercise their power over the demon.

In the middle of the twentieth century a Jesuit priest by name Levell (referred to in Chap.5 in connection with pesticides) was well known for exorcism in Ramnad District. He used to command the Satan to leave the possessed person by placing a cross on the person and reciting a Latin prayer. Today the priests rarely perform exorcism, as they believe that the true cases of exorcism are rare and most of the cases are psychological or physical. One priests even refers to *peey aaTTam* (devil dancer) as *talai aaTTam* (dance of the head) (Caritas 1938:31). However, the Catholics continue to be afflicted with *peey* and seek the aid of the persons and places endowed with the power to deal with such matters.

Shrines and Exorcism: Exorcism is often associated with shrines especially those dedicated to St. Anthony at Muthupattinam (Ramnad District), St. Sebastian at Valayampatti, and Our Lady of Health at Valghiramanickam (Sivagangai District). The researcher came across a number of cases in these shrines. From the account given by the *kooyilpiLLai* of these shrines and the Catholics in the villages of our study we present the *peey* and *peeyiTittal* (the act of possession) and *peey viraTTutal* (chasing the devil) as perceived by the Tamil Catholics.

As believed by the Catholics there are of two kinds of beings which possess and are harmful to people. They are the maleficent spirits of the dissatisfied dead and the inferior Hindu deities. The Catholics hold that all the dead do not become *peey*, but only those who meet with unnatural or untimely deaths. Those persons who die before their time are certain to desire continued life and the same applies to persons who have attachment to worldly pleasures. It is precisely due to beliefs such as these that Catholics value having a good death. A good death is the one where the person leaves the world willingly and desires to join god rather than remain on this earth. Some of them say that when a proper funeral rite is not accorded to the dead they become *peey*. They haunt particular places or trees especially when it is dark (see Chap. 3 and 4, and Caplan 1985:113).

Apart from the human dead becoming *peey*, Catholics recognise the existence of Hindu deities like Muni, Matan, Karupan and Alakar. They do not worship them, but consider them as dangerous bloodthirsty beings capable of inflicting harm (see Deliege 1999:255). Hindu women believe that going past a temple in a state of impurity angers the Hindu deity. Catholic women share this belief and thus they avoid passing by these

shrines especially during their menstruation for fear of being possessed by them. The elderly Catholics warn the young saying '*anta caami nammala onnum caiakkuTaatu, naama tuura irukkaiyil anta pakkam pooka kuuTaatu*' (these deities should not harm us and you should avoid that direction during menstruation).

In states of bodily impurity (*tiiTTu*), e.g., during menstruation and childbirth, women are vulnerable to demonic attack. Sinfulness and sexual desires especially in young unmarried women, when they are overcome with the desire to get married render them liable to be possessed. *kooyilpiLLai* referred to a young woman who had been possessed for four years in succession, whose parents he had advised to get her married off, as he felt that it was her unfulfilled desires which made her vulnerable.

Several persons in the villages affirmed that fear is the main cause of demonic possession: '*aranTavanukku irunTatellaam peey*' (every dark spot is a devil for the one who is frightened), goes the popular saying. According to our informants, women are by nature weak and can be easily frightened. In fact, women outnumber men in spirit possession. Mosse (1986:470), while pointing out to weakness as the essential precondition in possession, also adds beautification as another cause which increases vulnerability to attack. Thus, the Catholics say that when women go out alone or with a group with their hair left loose or flowers in their hair, with turmeric applied on the face, etc., attract *peey*.

All the same, the Catholics also hold on to the belief that no good Catholic is ever harmed by *peey*. One who is steadfast in faith and prays regularly need not fear the *peey* – '*kaTavuLmeel pakti uLLavarkaLiTam peey kiTTa varaatu*' (those have faith in god will not be afflicted by the *peey*). Only persons of weak faith become easy prey to the *peey*.

The possession usually occurs outside the boundaries of the village, as the divinities of the village guard it (see Caplan 1989:55). The *peey* can not reside inside the village but frequents places like the forest, *cuTukaaTu* (the Hindu cemetery), and lonely groves. This is because, as Pfaffenberger (1980:208) notes, 'the village is considered to be a part of the inside or inner world and is well-ordered and resplendent with fertility, equilibrium, happiness and progress. The "outside world" on the other hand is one torn between wilderness, chaos, ignorance and evil.' The wilderness is primordially the repository of evil beings which seek to destroy human happiness.

People become vulnerable to the *peey*'s attack at definite times during the course of the day - mid afternoon, dusk and midnight, when the individual's defences are supposed to be weak. At these times people try to avoid places where the *peey* resides.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that the Catholics share with the Hindus beliefs about the nature of *peey*, its place of residence and conditions under which it is likely to possess a person. While both have some general belief in spirit possession, the Catholics differ on certain grounds. As Deliege (1999:252-53) observes, the 'Catholics tend to ignore the link which may exist between morality and spirit possession. To them spirit possession is not the consequence of some moral misbehaviour but is rather the unfortunate outcome of their relative neglect of the rules for ritual purity, a neglect which particularly annoys Hindu deities.' Our informants are also of the same view.

The ritual of exorcism: We shall now narrate a case of exorcism at the church dedicated to St. Sebastian, well-known for exorcism, in Valayampatti, a small Catholic village in Sivagangai District.

The exorcism starts with the pilgrimage to the shrine, where the possessed stay for a week or even some months. This practice of staying in the church is known as *vaaratukkuiruttal*. During the stay, the individuals cook, eat and sleep within the church enclosure. The stay at the shrine can be best viewed as a 'war of attrition' in which the demons are exposed to the holy and sacred (Stirrat 1977:140-41).

Those staying at the shrine are given specific instructions by the *kooyilpiLLai*. They lead an ascetic life fasting, praying and doing penance such as kneeling for hours and praying. They rise early in the morning, bathe and in their wet clothes, circumambulate the shrine and the flag mast three times with hands folded in prayer. It is at this time that some run in a frenzied state towards the flag mast, screaming and crying aloud and the possession is confirmed. They join in special prayers conducted by the *kooyilpiLLai*. At these prayers a lighted candle is placed on their palms (see Photo 6.1). The melting wax from the burning candles, according to the *kooyilpiLLai*, activates the spirit, which then becomes restless and reveals its identity. Those who are not possessed do the same as a mark of penance. This ritual in general is understood as an ascetic practice intended to purify oneself in preparation for the exorcising of the *peey*.

In addition, the persons are asked to look at the statue of St. Sebastian as they pray. The authenticity of possession is established when the person is brought in contact with the sacred. The prevalent belief is that the *peey* within the person shows up when it comes in contact with the sacred space and objects such as the cross, the saint's statue, etc. The statue is the key focus of the saint's power. Thus, the *peey* can not encounter the saint, which results in restlessness. It was also reported that when they look at the saint's

statue they experience a burning sensation and scream *eriyuteey*; some plead for relief from the burning sensation.

After the prayer all of them drink the holy water and some of them eat the leaves of *manjanatty maram* (Morinda tree) which is believed to have curative value as it is growing in the church compound. These rituals make the *peey* uncomfortable. All locally popular shrines have such trees with sacred curative significance - Valghiramanickam (a tamarind tree), Andavoorani, (a margosa tree), and in Muthupattinam (a mango tree). Similar beliefs are held by the Hindus, e.g., the margosa tree in Thiruvettriur temple is believed to possess curative value.

Both among the Hindus and the Catholics, Tuesdays and Fridays are important as far as the practice of exorcism is concerned. On these days the spirits are supposed to be aggressive. Special prayers are conducted during which St. Sebastian is believed to drive away the spirit. The following is an episode of exorcism witnessed by the researcher herself.

A young woman said that she had been a hard-working person until all of a sudden she lost interest in her work and family. Her husband said that she sat idle all day long and did not respond to his requests. She was possessed and said 'one day at about 3 p.m. while returning home from the field carrying firewood, I heard a voice. I turned around and found no one and at that moment fear gripped me.' She was alone, there was a mysterious voice and she experienced extreme emotion, especially fear. All such occurrences are typical of the first signs of possession.⁶

This woman was staying at the shrine for three weeks. In the second week she revealed to the *kooyilpiLLai* some of the names of the *peey*. During the third week of her stay, all *peeykal* (plural form of *peey*) decided to leave the person.

On a Friday (13 October 2001) morning the woman in her wet clothes ran towards the flag mast and rolled on the ground there. She then returned to the church, stood outside and prayed. Later she went into the church and knelt down to pray. Incense was lighted in front of her while she held burning candles in her palms. She started swinging her head and announced aloud *naan poreen* (I will go). The *kooyilpiLLai* asked her to go to the entrance of the church, there the ritual of *peey viraTTatal* (chasing the devil) began (see Photo 6.2 and 6.3).

The *kooyilpiLLai* asked her to give the names of the *peey* and she pronounced nine names, which were cross-checked with the names given on Tuesday and they tallied. Some of them were those who had committed suicide in the village and others were the Hindu deities such as *muNi*.⁷ It is important to note that though the possessed person is a Catholic, some of the spirits are from the Hindu pantheon. Not surprisingly, the Catholics, like the Hindus, fear the minor Hindu deities and consequently come under their attack. Belief in the Christian divinity has not rid the Catholics fear of the minor Hindu deities as they belong to the same cultural universe as that of the Hindus.

In the process of *peey ooTTatal* or *viraTTatal* (chasing the *peey*), as a sign of the *peey*'s departure a few strands of hair are given by the possessed, which the exorcist cuts and burns in a place not trampled upon by people. Keeping with this belief the woman took out a few strands of her hair and the *kooyilpiLLai* knotted them each time she pronounced a name. After all the names were given the woman made the sign of the cross

on the door step of the church three times saying ‘*mukkaalamum cattiyam naan ini varamaaTeen*’ (I promise that for all ages I will not return again). While making this promise St. Sebastian is called as a witness saying ‘*Sabastiyaare niiye caaTci.*’ After burning the hair the person was brought back to the entrance of the church and three pots of water were poured on her. With this the ritual of exorcism was complete. The person later returned to the church and offered candles as a thanksgiving for being delivered from the torment of the *peeykal*.

The *kooyilpiLLai*’s role in exorcism is more as a Church functionary and he does not claim any special power, though the Catholics do attribute such power to him. Generally the *kooyilpiLLai* and individuals who have no fear of *peey* conduct exorcism. Children and young girls are discouraged from witnessing exorcism rites. It is believed that persons who are easily frightened are vulnerable to the onslaught of the *peey* and they could be possessed.

Though the Catholics and the Hindus share the same ritual procedure in exorcism, the Catholics have replaced some rites and given up other rites and in that category fall the following: In the Hindu exorcism the possessed rushes from the village beyond the settlement carrying a huge stone. The stone is dropped under a tamarind tree or a palmyra tree. Once the possessed drops the stone the exorcist cuts a few strands of hair and the same is nailed to the tree. Thus, the *peey* in this case is chased from ‘inside’ the dwelling place to the ‘outside’ the dwelling quarters of the people. The nailing of the hair to the tree is a sign of controlling the activity of the *peey* with the help of the deity. It is perhaps the possessed rushing from the village beyond the settlement which is transferred to the frantic run from the church to the flag mast. The flag mast in Tamil is *koTimaram* (flag

tree); the *koTimaram* replicates the tree and eventually the forest that lies outside the settlement of the living quarters. *koTimaram* also lies outside the sacred space of the church, in a way denoting the transition from 'inside' to 'outside.'

The Hindu exorcist beats the drum while the possessed swings his/her head in a trance. He smears the sacred ash on the person demanding the evil spirit to leave the person. In some cases a goddess possesses the Hindu exorcist and he enters into a dialogue with the *peey* on the basis of the power vested in him by the possessing deity (Basu 1999:98). As a final rite the Hindu *puucaari* offers to the *peey* the demanded items, e.g., chicken, cooked rice, egg, fish, etc.

The Catholics have given up the beating of the drum, as it is not used in the worship of the Christians. They use holy water instead of sacred ash. The items demanded by the *peey* are not offered as the saint overpowers the *peey*, and it finally consents to leave without any of its demands being fulfilled. The *kooyilpiLLai* or for that matter any other Catholic exorcist is not possessed by the Christian pantheon. The exorcism is purely the work of the saint and the consequence of the ascetic life lived by the individual during the stay in the church.

The differences in the ritual of exorcism between the Catholics and the Hindus no doubt make the former unique; but the way it is practised by the Tamil Catholics certainly carries the stamp of their culture. Thus, the persistence of native beliefs and rituals in exorcism is a high point in the process of indigenisation of Catholicism.

Sacred Objects

To protect oneself from evil the Catholics wear *punita Anthonyiar taayattu* (St. Anthony's talisman), cross, holy medal, rosary, scapulars, etc. The *Anthonyiar*

taayattu is an imitation of the Hindu *taayattu*, with the difference that a Christian prayer, instead of a Hindu *mantra*, is written on a piece of paper concealed in it. Similarly, like the Hindus, as a precautionary measure against the entry of demons, the Catholics place a broom or a pair of slippers or a pounding stick at the entrance to the house. Iron is also used as a charm, since it is believed that it makes the *peey* burst into flames and disappear. In Sengudi village an iron piece was nailed to the doorframe to avert the evil.

Sacred persons and sacred knowledge together and inseparably provide the setting for a meaningful performance of the rituals that we have discussed. Certainly the access to certain kinds of sacred knowledge by Fr. Santhanasamy, the Catholic exorcists and the Catholic woman who is the medium of Maata, sets them off from ordinary Catholics. They are *sacred persons*, as they are able to deal with the people's notion of evil. They legitimise their role by combining their Christian beliefs and practices with the existing native ones. Thus, the Catholics consulting them find a legitimate way of dealing with their beliefs related to evil.

With the exception of a few, the majority of the Catholic priests ignore the native religious beliefs and practices which the people find quite powerful. The *kooyilpiLLai* carries out exorcism since that has been the practice for centuries. While the priest does not explicitly approve of this practice, neither does he oppose it. Thus, based on the 'need' of the people and combined with the existing native rituals, Catholicism acquires a different dimension from the avowed Church beliefs.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter was an attempt to look into the complex world of rituals that helps sustain the everyday life of the Catholics which is filled with moments of crisis in the physical, social and psychological realms. Considering the practices associated with the concept of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness and the influence of evil and evil spirits, this chapter sought to understand the process of indigenisation among the Catholics in Tamil Nadu.

We have observed that there is a high degree of resemblance between the practices followed by the Catholics and their Hindu counterparts. How is this to be explained? Catholicism, though known for its elaborate theological teachings, has left some important grounds such as auspiciousness in terms of time and direction, and the influence of evil eye not covered to a great extent. At the level of pastoral 'monitoring' the Church did not employ adequate mechanism to 'control' the converts as they developed their own methods of coping with life-crises. In the absence of well-articulated official practices coupled with considerable freedom available to them, the Catholics had no difficulty from the beginning to replicate almost in totality the practices of the Hindus. The whole set of practices associated with auspiciousness and inauspiciousness highlight the process of replication in indigenisation.

Previous studies have often recognised the process of superimposition in indigenisation (Sahay 1981). How does this superimposition take place and what is the agency involved in it? It is often the Church that is considered to be the agency of such transmutation. The present study reveals that in the absence of the involvement of the Church, a set of exorcists and soothsayers emerge on the scene, who combine the existing

native methods with that of Christian prayers. The woman considered as being the medium of Mary is a case in point. Similarly, in villages where exorcism is practised, the exorcists have emerged on their own in imitation of the practice of exorcism among the Hindus.

Though the realm of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness and the casting of evil eye are grounds not covered by the Church, and though they give rise to a set of persons acting as an agency, they (soothsayers, exorcists) find themselves facing a limit to their freedom. The question facing them is how to draw upon the meaning system governing such Hindu practices and present it as Christian. They have achieved this by transferring the form and content of certain Hindu practices and placed them within the Christian paradigm. The *yantra* of St. Anthony is a clear example of how ingeniously the unofficial agents of indigenisation overcome the limits set by the forms and meanings of two different religions. Similarly, the positioning of the possessed Catholic with reference to the notion of 'inside' and 'outside' is not that of the Hindu practices. In the latter, the 'inside' and 'outside' is defined in terms of the boundaries of the village, whereas in the case of the Catholics, it is defined in terms of the church, entrance to the church and the flag mast outside the church.

There is yet another process of indigenisation that has eluded the attention of the scholars so far, namely, indigenisation under the cover of secrecy. When there are no Catholic soothsayers or exorcists, or when they are not found to be effective, the Catholics seek the assistance of the Hindu specialists. They resort to typical Hindu practices like cutting the coins to wish evil on their foes. The Catholics are not willing to make this open; they feel embarrassed if fellow Catholics come to know.

It may be argued that since such practices are carried out secretly, they cannot be considered a legitimate process of indigenisation. This kind of perspective is borne of certain moral considerations. For sociologists, the *social* character of an action is more privileged than the *moral* character of the action. As long as the factuality of the practice can be established, it could be considered one of the processes of indigenisation.

Though the notions of auspiciousness, evil eye, and possession are comparatively marginal to the theological teachings, what needs to be pointed out is the differential disposition of the Church to the adherence of the believers. The disposition of the Church to exorcism is one of acceptance as there are many references to possessions in the Bible and in the traditions of the Church in the medieval period. There have been many well-known cases of exorcism permitted officially by the Church.

With regard to practices associated with the notions of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, the disposition of the Church reflects certain ambivalence. These practices are perceived to be superstitious and therefore they are tolerated hoping that when the believers are educated such practices will disappear.

The practices relating to casting or containing evil evoke total disapproval from the Church as they are directed against persons and are destructive in intention. Since the Church does not condone such practices, they are practised secretly. The Church is not willing to consider the supposed possibility of an individual using the faculty of control over evil forces for protection of persons. The excommunication of Fr. Santhanasamy reflects this disposition.

In brief, the quotidian life of the Catholics constitutes a fertile terrain of specific forms of indigenisation.

Endnotes

1. Two cases of *morapaTTu kooLaaRu* were observed, one in a Hindu Kali temple and the other in the church in Oriyur. In making up with the enemy the Catholics give to each other the holy water from the church to be consumed, while the Hindus give sacred ash.
2. Among the Hindus, Agni, the Vedic fire god is in charge of Southeast; Nirriti, goddess of death and decay, guards the Southwest; Vaayu, the wind god, is in the Northwest; and in the Northeast is Iishaana. In the St. Anthony's *yantra*, the holy cross is entrusted with all these directions.
3. Fr. Santhanasamy uses the five elements of the universe - fire, earth, sky, water and ether - to affect persons positively by following the ceremonies prescribed in the book of *maantirikam* and by prayers addressed to Christian divinity. These five elements are known as *panja puutaMkal*, *puutaMkal* refers to the power and strength of each element. He recites the prescribed *mantras* on full moon and new moon days, days which are believed to be endowed with special powers.
4. The term *peey* is derived from the Sanskrit word *preta*, meaning the 'departed.' It refers to the spirits of human beings who, from the moment of death until they are in communion with god, remain in a limbo, neither with members of the living nor that of the dead (Blackburn, Reiniche, quoted in Nabokov 1997:299).
5. There are a few studies of exorcism among the Catholics: Documenting the ritual of exorcism among the Sri Lankan Catholics, Stirrat (1977) analyses 'the demonic possession from the point of view of its existence as a collective representation.' Discussing the rituals of possession among the Catholics in Kanyakumari District, Ram (1992:93-105) has observed that demonic possession enables women to reinterpret 'dominant' symbolic constructs of the female body and sexuality and 'challenge the daily discipline of living within the confines of respectable femininity.' Describing the Catholic exorcism cults in Ramnad District, Mosse (1986:478-87 and see also Ackerman 1981:92) examines the continuity and discontinuity in relation to malevolent possession and exorcism between the Hindus and the Catholics. He presents the Catholic saint as representing the forces of absolute good at war with

undifferentiated evil in the indigenous cultural belief system.

6. The *peey* may or may not manifest itself to the victim. According to our informants, the victim is suddenly frightened by a sound, senses that some body is calling and fails to see the person, sees an animal or figure of unnatural proportions, or a dark object, and these are considered as *peey*. A common belief in the villages is that some of the dead persons become snakes. Thus, in one of exorcism observed by the researcher in Marithiammal *kallaRai*, the possessed person revealed that 'I came in the form of a snake, and took possession of her.'
7. The nine names given by the woman are (1) Tankarasu (died consuming poison), (2) Aaraayi (died hanging), (3) Paapaal (died of attack by Muni (Demon), (4) Kaliaamma (died by spirit possession), (5) Amurtam (died of mental illness), (6) VaTakaaTu Muni, (7) Citalakuntu Muni, (8) Pottukaattu Muni, and (9) Raakumaratu Muni.



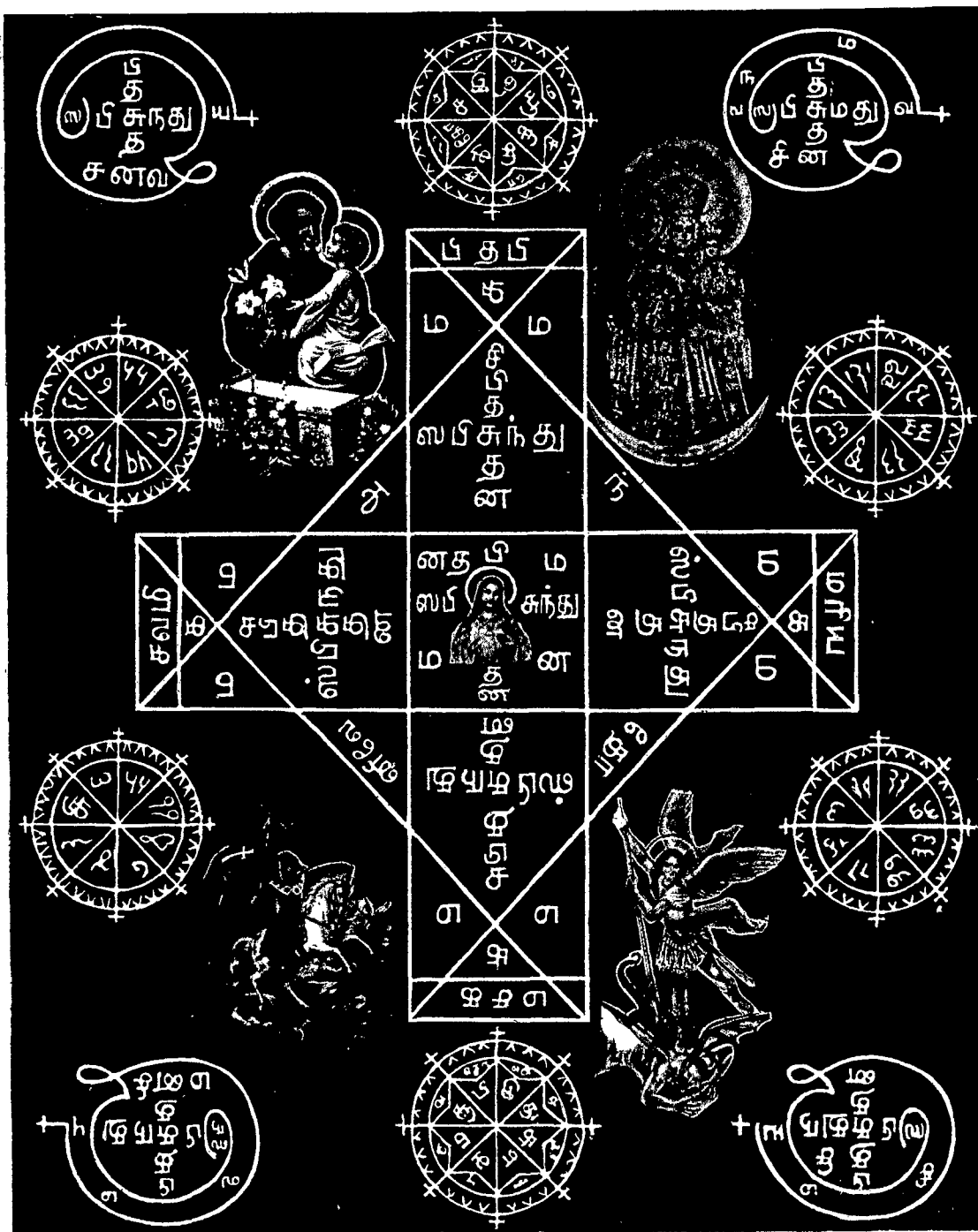
6.1 Praying with Lighted Candles on the Palm



6.2 The Ritual of *peey viraTTtutal*



6.3 The Possessed Swinging Her Head



6.1 St. Anthony's Yantra



<p>என் ஆண்டவருடைய பரிசுத்த சிலுவையே எனக்கு நேரிடும் எந்த ஆபத்து அபாய துர்மணங்களிலே விழித்த காந்து</p>	<p>அர்ச். அந்தோனியாரே! கிழக்கு திசையிலிருந்து என்மீதில் எதிர்த்து வரும் சகல சத்துரு பூதபேய்களையும் தூஜுன் அப்பிலிஷா கைகுஸ்த்தீன் அந்தோனி தூலிபோஸ்கே சுவன்கர்க் கிஸ்தூ ஜீசஸ் கிறைஸ்த் தூலிபோஸ் பாசல் விஜின்மேர் தூ லூக்கஸ் கை குஸ் டாக்டாக்கடாக் மிதோ என் ஆண்டவருடைய பரிசுத்த சிலுவை சத்துருவாகிய நீங்கள் அகன்று போகக் கடவீர் யூதர் கோத்திரத்தின் சிங்கமும் தாவிதின் சந்ததியுமான ஏசு கிறிஸ்து ஜெயங்கொண்டார் அல்லே லூயா</p>	<p>என் ஆண்டவருடைய பரிசுத்த சிலுவையே எனக்கு நேரிடும் சகல துன்ப பாவ கிரகதோஷங்களில் விழித்த காந்து</p>
<p>அர்ச். பரிசுத்த ஆரோக்கியமாதாவே! வடக்கு திசையிலிருந்து என்மீதில் எதிர்த்துவரும் சத்துரு, பேய், பில்லி குன்யம், ஏவல், குட்டி, சகல பூதங் களையெல்லாம் உமது திரு வலது பாதத்தினால் அதன் தலையை நசுக்கி நரக பாதாளத்தில் அனுப்பி பிதா வினால் வரம் பெற்ற என ஆண்டவனே எங்களுக்கு நேரிடும் எந்த ஆபத்து, அபாயதுன்பம் சஞ்சலத் தில் நின்று உமது திருக்கரத்தேந் திய குழந்தை சேகநாதரை மன்றடி எங்களே ஆசி புரிந்தருளும் ஆமென் அல்லேலூயா.</p>	<p>என் ஆண்டவருடைய பரிசுத்த திரு இருதயமே! நாலு மூலை எட்டு திக்கு பதினாறு கோணம் ஆகாயம் பூமி தாழ்வாரங்களே நின்று என்மீது எ திர்த்து பூத பேய்க வரும் சத்து னையும் நீக்கி ரு பேய் பில் உம்முடை லி குன்யம் ய அடைக்க ஏவல்குட்டி ல மென்கிற இருதய நிழலில் வைத்துக் காப்பாற்றி இரட்சித்தருளும், ஆமென்சேசு. அல் லேலூயா.</p>	<p>அர்ச். சந்தியமாயாதாவே! திசையிலிருந்து என்மீதில் எதிர்த்துவரும் சத்துரு, பேய், பில்லி, குன்யம், ஏவல், குட்டி, சகல பூதங் களையெல்லாம் உமது திரு வலது பாதத்தினால் அதன் தலையை நசுக்கி நரக பாதாளத்தில் அனுப்பி பிதா வினால் வரம் பெற்ற என ஆண்டவனே எங்களுக்கு நேரிடும் எந்த ஆபத்து, அபாயதுன்பம் சஞ்சலத் தில் நின்று உமது திருக்கரத்தேந் திய குழந்தை சேகநாதரை மன்றடி எங்களே ஆசி புரிந்தருளும் ஆமென் அல்லேலூயா.</p>
<p>என் ஆண்டவருடைய பரிசுத்த சிலுவையே எனக்கு நேரிடும் சகல துன்ப பாவ கிரகதோஷங்களில் விழித்த காந்து</p>	<p>அர்ச். அந்தோனியாரே! கிழக்கு திசையிலிருந்து என்மீதில் எதிர்த்து வரும் சகல சத்துரு பூதபேய்களையும் தூஜுன் அப்பிலிஷா கைகுஸ்த்தீன் அந்தோனி தூலிபோஸ்கே சுவன்கர்க் கிஸ்தூ ஜீசஸ் கிறைஸ்த் தூலிபோஸ் பாசல் விஜின்மேர் தூ லூக்கஸ் கை குஸ் டாக்டாக்கடாக் மிதோ என் ஆண்டவருடைய பரிசுத்த சிலுவை சத்துருவாகிய நீங்கள் அகன்று போகக் கடவீர் யூதர் கோத்திரத்தின் சிங்கமும் தாவிதின் சந்ததியுமான ஏசு கிறிஸ்து ஜெயங்கொண்டார் அல்லே லூயா</p>	<p>என் ஆண்டவருடைய பரிசுத்த சிலுவையே எனக்கு நேரிடும் சகல துன்ப பாவ கிரகதோஷங்களில் விழித்த காந்து</p>

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6.2 Prayer in Tamil to the Saints, Jesus and Mary

CHAPTER VII

RELIGION AND THE EXPRESSIVE DOMAIN

Historically art has been an integral part of religion. On the one hand, people have found in art an effective means of communicating their religious beliefs and consciousness. On the other hand, the artistic expressions of a people can be viewed as the conveyors of the religious beliefs and practices of their community. The towers of the temples and churches, the sculptures in those towers, music played in the places of worship have a particularising tendency since the cultural resources of the community shape the artistic expressions.

Accordingly, one aspect of the indigenisation of Catholicism is in the realm of art, which we call the 'expressive domain.' This expressive domain is more appealing and acceptable to people and they seem to retain their identity as being part of a culture. In this chapter an attempt is made to understand the interaction between the art and architecture of Hinduism and Christianity. We focus here specifically on music, drama, art and architecture. As we shall see, music and drama are areas in which the Catholics have shown considerable interest in and appreciation for the indigenous forms, which they have adapted to their religion. However, the attempts at indigenisation in the sphere of art and architecture, initiated by a few laymen and Church personnel, have not become popular among the Catholics, especially in the rural areas.

MUSIC

In the beginning, for a long time the Catholics worshipped and sang in Latin, which was the Church-prescribed language of worship. The hymns sung at worship were as in Europe, and the music used was largely Gregorian (Michael Raj 1955:599). Indigenisation in the field of music among the Tamil Catholics came through the initiatives of a few pioneers who gave direction to the composition of music in worship. The breakthrough to replace European canticles by Tamil songs came through the Jesuits. Santiago (1848-1926), a Catholic priest, was a pioneer in composing '*teva tottira kiirtanaikal*' (In Honour of St. Joseph), poems that could be sung during the services. He also composed a hymn to Jesus '*cecuvin matura tiru irutayame*' (Sacred Sweet Heart of Jesus) (Caritas 1926:9-16).

In the first stage, the Latin songs were transliterated, and the worshipers could sing such songs as '*Tantum Erhum*' and '*Liberame Domine*' even though they did not understand their meaning. Even today some elderly people recall nostalgically the satisfaction they had while singing these songs in Latin.

In the second stage (1950s), Tamil words set to Latin melodies came to be sung in worship. With this a certain uniformity was maintained in all the churches. But the devotees remained alienated to the cultural tradition, as the music was still alien to them (Amaladass 1988:235). It was during this period that the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) was held. This Council directed the Church to adopt an interactive approach in societies/cultures where it has taken roots. Though the Gregorian chant continued to be recognised as the official music of the Church, keeping in tune with the culture and

artistic traditions of the place other forms of music came to be allowed (Flannery 1992:48 and 49). This gave impetus to the development and use of native music in worship. Nevertheless, at this stage, while the songs such as '*cuurian caaya kaariruL mella, cuuzntiTa yaavum ceerntiTum veeLai*' and '*tantaaney tutipoome,*' etc., were in Tamil, the music was neither purely Indian nor purely Gregorian.

In the third stage (1970s) conscious efforts were made to drop all Gregorian tunes and to promote Sanskritised Tamil lyrics. The musical composition of such songs as '*irukaram kuuppi, iRai unnai tozutaal*' and '*uLLat taamaRai italilee,*' was in orthodox Carnatic tradition.

Since people found it difficult to sing pure Carnatic pieces, as they demanded a trained voice, in the fourth stage (1980s) efforts were made to simplify the songs so that they could be sung by all at worship. Songs such as '*tamizaalun pukal paaTi teevaanaan tinam vaaza varuvaaye tirunaayakaa*' and '*imaioru polutum enaipiriyaaatu...nii iruntaaL,*' addressed God in the intimate second person singular 'you' – '*nii*' '*un,*' were composed in the tradition of Tamil Hindu Bhakti poets (Grafe 1990:256). In some songs the words used by the Hindus to address Murukan are used to address Jesus, for example, '*tirukumaraa en yecuvey tirukumaraa.*' Thus, a kind of fusion began taking place in the church singing. Later, songs with light music like '*talaivaa unai vanaMka en talaimael karam kuvipaen*' '*yecu alaikkenRaar aavalaai tan karattai niiTi anpaai azaikinRaar,*' etc., became popular among the people.

Finally came the introduction of folk songs, filmy tunes, repetitive type of songs and *bhajans*. Simple lyrics with catchy tunes have now become popular for worship, more so at pilgrim centres and in the homes of people. We hear songs such as '*Maatave*

caranam, Amma Mariye caranam' (a song to Maata) set to the tunes of songs sung for Aiyappa, e.g., *caamiye caranam, caranam Aiyappa*. *Bhajans* are songs with refrains, with a leader leading this type of singing and the congregation repeating the same. *Subrabatham* is another popular form sung in the Hindu temples especially in the Tamil month of Maarkazi (December-January). It consists of a series of couplets, each couplet sung in the same sing-song tune. In recent years the Church has released audio cassettes of Christian *Subrabhadam* sung in the same way as its Hindu counterpart, e.g., 'Annayin *Subrabhadam*' (on Mother Mary) and '*pooloka raksaka yesu teva putra, poo swarkka palaka yesu putra, sri yesu tevamaparaney tapa subrabhadam*' (on Jesus).

The Catholics, by and large, expect devotional songs to be sung at worship. However, they play songs set to film tunes and devotional hymns of other religions in their homes and during celebrations. Thus, the choice of music may be appropriate to the place and occasion. People do not seem to be passive any longer and they even criticise the type of singing in the worship.

It is noteworthy that the choice of music differs with age group: The elderly are not in favour of film tunes for worship and they are critical of the younger generation which shows a strong inclination to this. On the other hand, the young prefer lively music and since they play an active role in the church singing, songs with film and folk music have gained popularity.

paaskaa

The elite of the Church support and offer guidance to stage dramas on the life of Christ and the saints. Plays depicting the lives of saints, stories from the Bible and the Passion of Jesus are staged on festive days. Through these dramas the great tradition of Christianity is transmitted by adopting the little tradition of local culture. Among the dramas, the Passion play, or the *paaskaa* as it is popularly called in Tamil, staged during the Easter week holds a prominent place in South India.

The word *paaskaa* is derived from the biblical word Passover denoting the ritual that the Israelites followed on the day before their deliverance from the King of Egypt. In commemoration of their deliverance the Jews have since celebrated Passover in the first month of every year. Jesus followed the same on the night before his arrest by the Romans.

From the seventeenth century *paaskaa* has been enacted in Tamil Nadu. Enacted for two nights, the second night's episode was known as the resurrection *paaskaa* (Caritas 1936:58), as the central theme was the resurrection of Jesus after his death. Because of the large assembly of people and the magnificence of the show, earlier people referred to *paaskaa* as *ottalookapaaskaa* (great assembly, magnificence).

As an all-night cultural show, *paaskaa* was an imitation of *kuuttu* (dramatic performance), a native genre of drama in Tamil culture. It presents the distinctive soteriological message of the gospel in Indian cultural form. In Tamil Nadu, Avoor, Idaikattur, Karankadu, Kokkurani, Kottar, Metupatti, Mylapur, Nagappattinam,

Panjampatti, Purathakudi, Rayapanpatti, Sarukani, Salem, Suranam, Thanjavur, Thuthukudi and Vailankanni, have a tradition of enacting *paaskaa*.

A Jesuit priest named Venantius Bouchet introduced this form of play between 1697-1702 in Avoor (Michael Raj 1955:598). In the beginning it did not have any human performers; statues were used as actors. In 1912, people started to act in *paaskaa*, but the character of Jesus continued to be represented by a statue, as people were hesitant to enact the role considered sacred. It is only since the 1960s that the role of Jesus is also enacted by human beings. However, the sacredness of the role is retained the person who plays the role of Jesus leads an ascetic way of life for forty days. Interestingly, though *paaskaa* is a Catholic religious play, it used to draw actors from outside the religious community.¹

The following discussion is based on a *paaskaa* which the researcher witnessed at Kokkurani, a small Catholic village in Ramnad District. The church at Kokkurani is dedicated to St. Sebastian, the saint known for his miracles in matters of health, and his shrine attracts a large number of people. Until the liberation of Goa in 1961, this church was under the Portuguese and Goan priests were its religious functionaries.

Kokkurani is a Christian area and the Catholics from the surrounding villages come to this church to take part in its Easter celebrations. They would stay back in the church compound overnight, and the *paaskaa* is presented to them both as entertainment and as a form of religious instruction. It was also an attempt made by the early missionaries to bring home the life of Christ in the form of drama which carried the imprint of the local performing art form called *kuuttu*.

During the course of fieldwork it was gathered that Kokkurani was not an independent parish till 1970 and that it came under the parish in the neighbouring

Kallatathadal village. Nevertheless, it was chosen for the performance of *paaskaa*, as it was centrally located vis-à-vis the surrounding Catholic villages and it was home to the shrine of St. Sebastian. The actors came from different villages and most of them belonged to the Udayar caste. It was almost as if it was the feast of the Udayars because of the preponderance of Udayars in the neighbouring villages. As the major landowners of the place they sponsored almost the entire show.

However, the situation changed once Kokkurani became an independent parish with a resident priest. The Kokkurani Catholics demanded that the actors should be drawn from the local parish. Moreover, since they were Parayars, considered to be an ‘untouchable’ caste, they desired a significant place in *paaskaa*, which they had been denied all these years. Thus, from the year 1970 the actors have been drawn from within the parish. But the people, especially the elderly, pointed out that the quality of the show had deteriorated as prominent actors have withdrawn from the show.

paaskaa is performed in an open-air theatre. The audience, numbering five to six thousand, is drawn from the surrounding villages and it consists of both Catholics and non-Christians. They are all seated on the floor in front of the stage. The show lasts for two nights – on the Easter Sunday and the following Monday: It starts with ‘creation’ and ends with resurrection and ascension of Jesus; thus highlighting the various scenes from the Bible. The episode in which the angel Michael strikes Lucifer with a sword, which is symbolic of the destruction of evil, is significantly meaningful to the audience. Here we may recall that dealing with evil is a matter of major concern to the Catholics, and their great devotion to Saint Michael derives from his role as the destroyer of evil (see Chap. 6).

The local cultural ethos determines the significance attached to particular scenes in the *paaskaa*. For example, there is no mention of Mary lamenting for her son in the Bible (see Chap. 3), but in the Maata *puzampal* scene the Catholics have allowed their imagination to recreate the feeling of a mother at the violent death of her son. In the Tamil cultural set-up the death of a son is lamented more by a mother than anybody else and the people do not seek biblical authenticity to understand mother's sorrow.²

The costumes are more or less an imitation of the dress of Jesus' time. However, the ornaments worn by the High Priest and Pilate are imitations of the native royal ornaments. The dress of John the Baptist, who according to the Bible was clothed in animal skins, is the same as that of Shiva (the Hindu god), that is, the Tiger skin. Thus, wherever the people could easily find a parallel dress in their native culture they have adopted it. The actors are all men, who play the roles of both men and women.

The mood of the show is well balanced: there is both singing and dialogue. The actors themselves sing and so the choice of the actors depends on the talent for singing, too. The songs are set to Carnatic (classical) music, folk music and film tunes. The familiarity with the tunes creates enthusiasm in the audience. The dialogue between Caiphus and Pilate is presented in the form of a 'Darbar.' The conversations involving Jesus, his disciples, and the Jewish and the Roman authorities are authentic versions from the Bible. But the scriptwriter takes liberty with regard to the conversation among the soldiers, and the Jewish and the Roman authorities. This gives considerable scope for an indigenous mode of dialogue.

As noted earlier, *paaskaa* is an adaptation of the native performing folk-art form called *kuuttu* which is enacted in almost all the villages of Tamil Nadu during the annual

village feast. In the Catholic *paaskaa* the Hindu mythological themes have been replaced by a Christian theme. Though the theme is Christian and the costume is Jewish, the mode and the time of its performance give *paaskaa* the ambience and touch of *kuuttu*. There is a kind of cultural fusion, yet each has its own identity: *paaskaa* remains a high point in the process of indigenisation where Hinduism and Christianity merge beautifully without losing their identity.

ART

The earlier attempts at indigenisation of Christian icons came through the presentation of Mary. Devotion to Mary has occupied a pre-eminent place in Catholicism down the ages. Depicting Mary as an Indian woman was attempted by an Italian missionary called Joseph Constantine Beschi in the year 1715. Beschi drew a picture of Mary and the child Jesus in her arms as a typical Tamil woman clad in sari and had it made into a statue in Manila. Once the statue reached India he adorned it with earrings and named the statue Periyannayagi Ammal (The great Lady or The Great Princess), a typical Tamil name.³ A similar statue is also seen in Elakuruchi (see Photo 7.1). In almost all shrines Mary is draped in a sari. This has great appeal among the Tamil Catholics and they make sari as a votive offering in her honour.

In the twentieth century an innovation was attempted in the design of Mary in Nellur, Chenkelpet District. Mark, a Jesuit priest and social worker, designed Mary as a revolutionary Tamil woman: Dressed in a sari Mary is shown holding a torch in her right hand and a globe in the left. He named her Dalit Maata (see Photo 7.2). The Bishop of Madras objected to the name and suggested that she be called Vitutalai Maata (Our Lady

of Victory). The reason behind his objection was that the official sanction of it would create a kind of competition within the church with each caste claiming their Maata. Initially, the elderly were not in favour of such a depiction of Mary and they even objected to it saying that such a figure does not inspire veneration. While in the course of time the village has come to accept the portrait of Mary, it has not gained popularity among the neighbouring villages.

During the field study it was gathered that the Catholics have a definite idea of a Mother figure in Christianity. As the mother of Jesus, Mary is graceful, benevolent, understanding and people can not picture her as Dalit Maata who is ferocious, revengeful, and fearful being. This is what they object to. As regards Mary being draped in the sari, people seem to view it as a sign of their close link with Mary: 'as a votive offering to Mary, we can only think of a sari, for that is the dress of a woman in our culture.' Also, as they say, '*puTavayai kaTTuvatinaal Maata maaruvatuillai*' (Mary does not lose her status because of sari). In other words, the sari is viewed as a peripheral symbol whereas the statue itself (physical appearance of Mary) is the essential symbol which cannot be altered.

As a result of the revival of the Indian spirit in the early twentieth century, a number of Christian artists tried to discover their cultural identity in art (Elavathingal 1990:221). Angelo da Fonseca, a Goan pioneer in Christian art, regarded Indian culture as the birthright of Indian Christians and ventured through his art to integrate Indian culture with Christian faith: Defending his depiction of Mary in *sari* and Jesus in *kurta*, he argued that Christian faith has established a family relationship with god and people which is brought out through art which portrays earthly resemblance.

Further motivation came from the Second Vatican Council: 'New art forms adapted to our times and in keeping with the characteristics of different nations and regions should be acknowledged by the Church' (Flannery 1992:868). With this efforts at indigenisation of Christian art led to the depiction of Jesus and Mary as Indians. As Sahi (1986:74) notes, to present Jesus and Mary as having Indian features is to appropriate them for India and view them as one of us.

In what follows let us discuss the work of two Bangalore-based contemporary Christian artists, namely Sr. Claire, a Catholic nun and Shri Jyoti Sahi, a layman. Sr. Claire, who hails from Andhra Pradesh, is an internationally acclaimed pioneer in Indian-Christian painting. She has had a unique religious and cultural background, being the sole Christian member in a Hindu family. Her art becomes meaningful against her background of Hindu origin and Christian faith. She has attempted to synthesise the East and the West in depicting Jesus and Mary.

Sr. Claire has presented a large number of paintings of Jesus and Mary in Indian cultural settings. In one of her paintings, she portrays Jesus as a *yogi*, wearing saffron tunic and seated in a *padmasanam* (Indian posture of meditation). In her painting of Last Supper (see Photo 7.3), the Bread and Wine are placed on a banana leaf. The disciples taking part in this sacred meal are seated on the ground and they are depicted as typical Indian ascetics clad in saffron outfit. The background is filled with native lights and decorations.

In depicting Mary's earthly life with Jesus, Sr. Claire has painted Mary as a sari-clad Indian woman. According to her, in her earthly life Mary is part of history, and adaptation at this level is limited to the extent that it does not distort the authenticity of

that history. However, while depicting Mary's status in the heavenly world, she merges the Hindu goddess image with that of Mary. Here, as a devotional figure Mary transcends history and hence historical specificity is not emphasised. For example, the Church acknowledges Mary as the seat of wisdom, and Sr. Claire presents Mary as the personification of wisdom in a typical indigenous style (see Photo 7.4): Seated on a lotus, Mary's left hand is in *varamudra*, keeping the left palm with fingers joined and pointing to the ground. Mary's right hand is in *abhayamudra*, holding the right hand lifted to the shoulder with the palm turned towards the people. All the elements are represented in the painting: earth, water, air, sun (wisdom radiating like the sun) and ether (*akasa*). In the Indian tradition the lotus represents the 'womb of creation;' Mary seated on the lotus is symbolic of her bringing forth Jesus to the humankind. The lotus is also an epithet of the goddess Lakshmi who is the Hindu goddess of wealth; Jesus is the wealth that Mary brought to the world. The lotus flower grows on a long stalk and stands above the water while its roots remain in the muddy earth; Mary chosen among women stands above all women because of her purity.

Shri Jyoti Sahi, a well known artist in India today, is associated with the National Biblical Catechical and Liturgical Centre (NBCLC), an organisation which pioneered the indigenisation of Catholicism in India. He is a founding member and a Governing Council executive of the Asian Christian and Indian Christian Art Associations.

According to Shri Sahi (1986:6), an artist must constantly remain with the people, and consciously long to give expression to their deepest aspirations. He claims that the symbols he uses are universal and not specific to any particular religion. He goes on to add that his work has drawn not only from dominant traditions like that of the Saivites but

blissful awareness of reality in meditation and contemplation, and (2) The church at Kayavayal village in Sivagangai District of Tamil Nadu dedicated to Arulperum Jyoti (the Great Light, i.e., Jesus). Both these indigenous churches are the outcome of the need to relate religious experience with indigenous cultural symbols.⁴

The Saccidananda Chapel

The chapel at the NBCLC was built with the impetus given by the Second Vatican Council. It was thought that in the spirit of indigenisation the celebration of a typical Indian liturgy would be authentic if the place of worship is also in the Indian style. Situated in the metropolitan city of Bangalore, this structure, thus, was also conceived of as a model of indigenisation for the Catholics in India.

The overall theological vision and synthesis of an indigenous church came from the late Fr. Amalorpavadass, who was the founder and Director of the NBCLC. He was technically assisted by artist Shri Jyoti Sahi. Based on their knowledge of indigenous architecture they ventured to create a typically indigenous church synchronising Christian theology. Sahi's (1998:184) approach to indigenisation is based on his understanding that

The holy and symbolic cannot be reduced to intellectual or religious property rights. The Hindu does not possess the Tirumurti, or the letter OM, any more than the Hindu possesses Sanskrit, or the Christian Latin or Greek. It is important to stress that the insights which are basic to the temple or mosque are as relevant to Christian images of God as were the forms of Greece and Rome which contributed so much to what we are now calling Christian culture.

The structure of the Chapel combines the Dravidian and the Aryan temple plans. Drawing inspiration from the Bible, where it reads 'the plan of the city is perfectly

square' (Revelation: 21:16, *Good News Bible*), the ground plan of the church is square. However, the architecture has adapted the design of the Aryan fire altar. The structure of the Chapel is based on the form of the *veeti*, an ancient sacrificial altar, which is supposed to represent a bird in flight with outstretched wings. In one of these wings is situated the Indian-type altar at which the priest sits cross-legged on the ground to celebrate the Mass. The *vimaana* (head) of the structure is located directly opposite the entrance and provides the setting for the tabernacle in the form of a symbolic pillar which represents the axis of the universe (Sahi 1998:118).

On the top of the Chapel is the *koopuram* or *vimaana* (see Photo 7.6). There are seven layers representing the cosmic tree or cosmic mountain. This symbolises the relationship between the divine and human which is depicted through the *vimaana*. On the top of the seven layers is the lotus-shaped *kalacam* (sacred vessel). The lower layer of the lotus petals is opened downward signifying the earth and the upper layer is turned upward pointing to the heaven. In the centre of the lotus is a closed vessel signifying that it contains the nectar of life.

Inside the Chapel is the tabernacle, placed in the centre of the cosmic tree. The heart shape of the tabernacle symbolises the Upanishadic experience of god dwelling 'in the cave of man's heart.' A *kuttuviLakku* is kept burning as a sign of the presence of god. On the tabernacle are Jesus depicted as a *sannyaasi* and Magdalene depicted as a typical Indian woman clad in sari (Amalorpavadass 1982:15-20 and 39).

A tank is built on either side of the entrance to the Chapel. Keeping in tune with the Hindu practice of taking a dip in the river or washing feet in the tank before entering

the temple for worship, these tanks are meant to serve the purpose of purification by washing of the legs, hands and face before entering the Chapel.

The Arulperum Jyoti church

The church at Kayavayal village was built only recently (in the year 2001). It was designed by Fr. Arockiasamy a Catholic priest, who has a doctorate in Indian architecture. According to him, the temples have been the means through which religion was imparted to the people. The temples have a narrative function and on the walls of the temple one can see mythological scenes depicted. Similarly, this church is designed keeping in view the narrative function, with its compound walls depicting biblical stories. He has closely followed the indigenous theology of the temple and has applied it in building the church giving a Christian interpretation. Our description of this church is based on the information gathered through our interview with Fr. Arockiasamy.

The very construction of the temple indicates the path to self-realisation. The South Indian temple creates a sense of dynamism, of movement away from the profane towards the sacred (Shulman 1980:18). There lies the sacred force contained within the sanctum sanctorum, a dark room where there is a small oil lamp burning perpetually. Around the sanctum sanctorum is a closed passage on all four sides. Outside this is a wider passage with covered roof. Beyond the walls there is a still broader passage without roof. The entrance to the temple leads to this open passage. Thus, there are three passages leading to the sanctum sanctorum. The temples are of two types: one is *kiTanta koolam* (lying posture) and the other *ninRa koolam* (standing posture). The church at Kayavayal is in the standing posture and it has followed the Dravidian style of art.

The *tooraNavaayil* (the arch) is the structure at the entrance (see Photo 7.7). In a Hindu temple this depicts the character of the deity to whom the temple is dedicated. However, at this church the *tooraNavaayil* has been left plain for the present. The compound wall separates the church (the sacred) from the mundane (the profane) life of the people. As the devotee enters the *tooraNavaayil* he/she is immediately cut-off from the profane world and is enveloped in the world of the sacred. The compound wall is so high that one can not see the world outside. On the inner side of the compound wall is depicted scenes from the Bible in a sequential order. The devotee goes around viewing the scenes as a preparation to have the *dharshan* (encounter with god).

At the entrance to the church is the statue of Mary depicted as a typical Indian woman in sari, holding the Bible (see Photo 7.8). She is the *vaahana* (vehicle), the channel of divine communion. This is akin to Nandhi (bull), the *vaahana* of Shiva, placed at the entrance to a Shiva temple. As the Hindus do in their temple, the Catholic devotees circle the statue of Mary seeking her aid to enter into communion with god.

The devotees then make the third round going around the church from left to right. The reverence to the divine is expressed by keeping the divine on the right side; thus, the divine becomes 'all' and the devotee becomes 'nothing' before the divine. Behind Mary stands the *koTimaram* (flag mast); and just as the Hindus prostrate before the *koTimaram* in their temple the Catholics too are encouraged to do the same.

At the main entrance to the church on either side the statues of St. Peter (one of the twelve apostles of Jesus) and St. Paul (a great missionary in the early Church) are placed. This is the replication of *dwarapalakas* (the doorkeepers) placed at the entrance to

the Hindu temple. They are in the posture of *vishmaya mudra* (god is a mystery) and *susi mudra* (one god and god is inside) respectively. There are seven steps leading to the sanctuary, signifying the seven sacraments administered by the Catholic Church. The main church is an *arta manTapam* (open hall) which has twelve pillars portraying the life of Jesus. In the *garpagiraha* (sanctuary) is the figure of cosmic Christ seated on a lotus in *arta padmasanam* (meditation posture) with his hands in *dhyana mutra* (in meditation) (see Photo 7.9). There are two lotuses: one inverted and the other open, symbolising respectively the evil and the good. The tabernacle, the sacred container having the sanctified Bread, is placed in the hands of Jesus implying that he offers life.

On the outer wall of the sanctuary are depicted a few significant scenes from the Bible. These portrayals, called the *devakostram*, include the Baptism of Jesus, Jesus receiving the Holy Spirit, and Jesus healing. On the *koopuram* (dome) are the four *vahana* - angel, lion, calf and eagle. They represent the four gospel writers Mathew, Mark, Luke and John, the vehicles through whom the message of Christ is spread.

According to Fr. Arockiasamy, the icons in the church are typically Christian, and have been retained since they are historical figures and history can not be distorted. Indigenisation of the icons is observed only with the figures of Jesus and Mary, since they are depicted not in their earthly life but in their heavenly life. From the reports of the few visitors to this church it was gathered that though it looks like a Hindu temple, one soon realises that its icons are Christian.

In the indigenous architecture of the churches that we have described there are two processes at work: One is that the indigenous symbols are given a Christian interpretation,

e.g., *tooraNavaayil* and *koTimaram*. The other is that the Christian symbols receive an indigenous explanation, e.g., Mary, the apostles, etc. Both the churches manifest an artistic and architectural synthesis of the Hindu and the Christian spirituality and theology.

In every society the image which people have of the divine influences the way their places of worship are built. Thus, every culture has its own distinct art forms reflected in its places of worship. The art *per se* is not religious in nature, but it may be used by the designer to interpret the religious and philosophic trends of the time. Nevertheless, in the course of time people come to associate a particular art form with a particular religion. For many centuries the Catholics have been familiar with only one form of architecture, namely, that which was imported from the West, and they find it difficult to accept innovations, which the Church interprets, as indigenisation. Hence, we may conclude that assimilation of the indigenous architecture in church will be a difficult and long drawn out process.

Summary and Conclusion

Picking up four main forms in the 'expressive domain' of religion, namely, music, drama, art, and architecture, we have traced the evolution of these forms in the Catholic Church from the point of view of indigenisation. We have shown how these forms, which were explicitly European in the initial stage, were consciously reformulated. This is not to deny that while implanting Christianity in India, nearly 400 years ago, the missionaries had shown no tendency to appropriate and integrate certain native elements in these expressive forms. Robert de Nobili can be cited as an example (see Chap. 2). These minimal efforts have been growing in strength especially after the Second Vatican Council.

From purely Gregorian chants, music has now reached the mode of Aiyappa *bhajans*. In the realm of drama, adopting the *kuuttu* model *paaskaa* has developed. In art, the fair complexioned Jesus and Mary in their Jewish attire have been transposed to brown complexioned Indians robed in dhoti and sari. In architecture, the gothic structure of churches gave way for Dravidian style temple-like structures.

Two streams of indigenisation can be delineated in the 'expressive domain': while in the realms of art and architecture indigenisation draws its elements mainly from the great tradition, in the realm of drama the elements are drawn from the little tradition. In music, both these elements are interwoven.

The adaptation of the great and little traditions could be explained in terms of the main actors involved in effecting the indigenisation and among whom such practices were adopted. In the realm of art and architecture, and to some extent in music, the actors were the clergy. By training they have come to acquire a certain degree of expertise to present

their faith in an intelligible relation to the great tradition. In this they remained somewhat insulated from the little tradition. In the realm of drama and the recent form of devotional music, on the other hand, the main actors were the laity, whose theological perceptions were at ease with the elements of the little tradition.

Our interviews with those who introduced indigenisation in art and architecture revealed that they infused Christian meaning into the Hindu symbols such as lotus, oil lamp, dancing posture, etc., which they incorporated. While doing so they adopted a unique approach. For instance, Shri Jyoti Sahi remarked that he did not view them as Hindu symbols at all. Rather, he saw them as universal symbols, not belonging to any particular religion. Defining the identity of religion in terms of particular symbols and meanings, according to him, would limit the depth of indigenisation.

Endnotes

1. There are references in Caritas (1936:58) to non-Christian actors taking part in the *paaskaa* play. In 1936, a Hindu actor played the role of Pilate. Today, the non-Christians play the role of background singers.
2. Similarly, the Filipino Catholics' esteem and respect for women, especially mothers, is reflected in the scene of Mary meeting Jesus after he is resurrected which is depicted on Easter Sunday, a scene which does not figure in the Bible (Chupungco 1992:106-7).
3. These details are contained in the Church handouts of Konankuppam, Cuddalore District.
4. In recent years several churches have been built using the prevalent tribal architecture. One example of such a church is in Gujarat, among the Zankhva tribe (Sahi 1998:164).

7.1
Mary Adorned with
Ear and Finger Rings



7.2 Mary Portrayed as the Dalit Maata



7.3 The Last Supper



7.4 Mary, the Seat of Wisdom



7.5 Dancing Jesus



7.6 The Chapel at NBCLC



7.7 The Arulperumjyoti church

CHAPTER VIII

SHRINES AND RITUALS: THE PILGRIMAGE

In the preceding chapters we presented the interface of the domestic and public spheres in the way the Catholic rituals were conducted and indigenised. The analysis hitherto has been confined to a limited space, namely, clusters of villages. Moving beyond the narrow confines of a village, in this chapter we shall discuss sacred places to which people visit away from their own familiar surroundings to fulfil vows and perform a number of rituals to cope with the contingency of their everyday life. Such sacred places, which are often associated with some miracles, are known as pilgrim centres and people who visit them are called pilgrims (Turner 1987:167).

There are two types of shrines related to pilgrimage in Catholicism: one dedicated to the relics of the saints and the other to Mary. Shrines dedicated to Mary are places sanctified by the apparitions of Mary which are believed to have taken place in the past. The principal ones, in terms of the number of pilgrims visiting them, are the shrines of Our Lady of Lourdes in France and Our Lady of Fatima in Portugal (Sigal 1987:331). Our focus in this chapter is on the shrine that is dedicated to Mary (Maata) at Vailankanni, popularly known as the 'Lourdes of South India' due to the apparitions connected with the place (Sahay 1985:141).

THE SHRINE AT VAILANKANNI

Vailankanni is a panchayat, with a population of 5,000, situated a few miles south of Nagappattinam along the Coromandel coast of Tamil Nadu. It is home to the church of Our Lady of Health, a church that was founded on the basis of visions and miracles in the seventeenth century. Since then it has gradually acquired fame throughout India and, through the people of Indian origin, abroad, too.

According to a legend current among the people, Maata is said to have appeared to a lame boy who used to sell buttermilk on the roadside under a Banyan tree to help himself and support his widowed mother. One day, as he was seated, a woman of peerless beauty, holding a still more beautiful child in her arms, is said to have appeared before him and asked him for a cup of buttermilk to quench the thirst of her child, which he readily gave. She cured him of his lameness and asked him to inform a Catholic man living in Nagappattinam of this happening. When told, the Catholic man had no difficulty in believing the boy, having himself had a similar vision the previous night. Both reached Vailankanni and were favoured with the same apparition, and Maata asked for a church to be built in her honour. A thatched chapel was built with the co-operation of the people and a statue of Maata with the Infant Jesus in her arms was installed. In view of the miraculous cure of the lame boy and the subsequent cures that were reported to have taken place there, Maata came to be known as Our Lady of Good Health (Arockiamata).

Another local legend has it, that a little shepherd boy was carrying milk from Vailankanni for his master, a Hindu Vellala living in Nagappattinam, and on his way

near the village tank he stopped to quench his thirst. He then relaxed under a Banyan tree near the tank and soon fell asleep to be awakened by a bright vision of a beautiful lady holding a child in her arms. Both wore a celestial halo around their heads. The lady asked the boy for milk, which he gave, and soon the vision disappeared. The boy reported this to his master and asked to be forgiven, as the quantity of milk was less. To his great surprise, the master found the pot of milk was full as ever. The boy and his master immediately returned to the spot and they were favoured with the same vision. The tank is now called 'Our Lady's Tank' and its water is used as holy water.

These two legends are significant from the point of view of indigenisation, as they contain a rich mixture of Hindu and Christian motifs. Mary's apparition is related to the overflowing of milk, which is a familiar motif in Tamil temple history. We came across a similar narrative about the Nellaiappar temple at Tirunelveli: A man used to pass through the forest carrying milk for the king and invariably he would trip on a tree stump and spill the milk. On reporting the matter to the king some men were sent to clear the stump and while doing so blood gushed from the tree stump. It is said that the king and the people prostrated at the spot and built a temple there. When comparing this myth with the legend of Our Lady of Vailankanni we observe certain similarities in the manner in which Mary appeared to the boy in the forest and the gushing of blood that is related to the Hindu god.

There are a few other points that link Maata with the Hindu temple myth. The shrine at Vailankanni is associated with forest. Originally the church at Vailankanni was situated in a remote uninhabited *kaaTu* (forest). According to Mosse (1986:446), Mary, like the goddess who resides outside the village, cannot tolerate the pounding of the *ural*

(mortar) and *ulakkai cattam* (pounding and grinding sound), activities associated with village people and which carry ‘an explicit metaphor for sexual intercourse.’ The forest stands for renunciation both in Hinduism and Christianity. Even today we see in the shrine of Maata the image of a tree (see Photo 8.1). The tree, a recurring image in Tamil temple history, represents ‘the vital link between the shrine and the transcendent worlds below and above,’ and equally between ‘the chaos of the wilderness’ and its opposite, the order of settled village life over which Maata extends her protection. Since tree also represents the Tamil idea of localisation and fixity of the divine power into material objects (Shulman 1980:44-47), Maata’s power appears to be localised beside the tree where she appeared.

The location of the church near the sea has close association with the Hindu temples that are situated near ponds, rivers and seas. Water is a symbol of life and purity. Catholics relate Maata to life and purity. Every pilgrim to Vailankanni bathes in the sea, which cleanses one in preparation for entering the sacred space. This has been an age-old observation among the Hindus.

The Catholics consider Maata as *caktti* (power) which is again symbolised in the overflowing of milk in the apparition narration (Mosse 1986:446). The people narrate the power of Maata giving the example of the numerous miracles effected by her. Thus, the oral version of Maata at Vailankanni has the Hindu motifs inter-linked with its legend.

The first chapel built on the present site of the magnificent church of Vailankanni is also ascribed by local tradition to the direct benevolent intervention of the Blessed Virgin Mary. It is said that sailors of a Portuguese ship bound for Sri Lanka from Macao prayed to Mary to save them from a storm in which they were caught and they vowed to

build a church in her honour wherever they landed. They were miraculously saved and on their landing were led by Mary to a near by thatched-roof chapel mentioned earlier. They built a church on the spot that Mary pointed to them. To their great wonder they saw that the statue from the chapel was transferred to the new church. On their subsequent visits, the sailors donated many objects to the church, among which are the rare porcelain plates now preserved in the new Basilica. The feast of Our Lady's Nativity coincides with the day on which the miracle at sea is believed to have taken place, that is, the 8th of September (Santos 1993: 4-9).

In Vailankanni there are two important sacred spots: (1) The church in which the miraculous statue of Maata is enthroned. This is situated facing the sea. It is here that the individual votive offerings of the people are received. (2) The shrine located near a pond where Maata is said to have appeared, and is called Maata *kuLam* (Our Lady's Tank). This is situated behind the main church about a kilometre away. This spot was originally a *kaaTu* (forest). The Holy Way that leads the pilgrims from the main church to Maata *kuLam* has thirty stations, which portray the birth, life, and death of Jesus and Mary. On this Holy Way people say the 'rosary' and the 'Way of the Cross.' Some walk bare foot at twelve noon on a hot summer day, while others go on their knees on this Holy Way to the shrine. Around Our Lady's Tank is a concrete platform in the shape of a lotus and behind it stands the original chapel to Our Lady. The people fulfil their vows and carry out the ritual of penance at these places. The church and the icons in Vailankanni have a European style, but this seems to be of secondary importance to people, who mainly believe in their efficacy (Newman 1993:8).

Vailankanni draws thousands of devotees, many of whom come on *tiruyaattirai* (sacred pilgrimage on foot). Pilgrimage on foot is considered to be the highest form of *tapas* (austerity), and it is believed to be meritorious. There are three seasons during the year which attract a large number of people on *tiruyaattirai*: (1) during the *kooyil tiruvizaa* (feast of Our Lady of Vailankanni), which falls in the month of September, (2) during the Lenten season (a period set apart by the Church for fasting and penance in memory of the passion and death of Jesus), and (3) the month of May (a month dedicated by the Church in honour of Mary).

During her fieldwork, the researcher had the opportunity of observing and interviewing the devotees on *tiruyaattirai* during the feast days and the Lenten season. The pilgrims revealed that they undertake pilgrimage for more than one reason. Many go to fulfil a vow or as an expression of thanksgiving for favours received. Some go in the hope of experiencing miracles in their own lives, and still others to obtain inner peace. For most it is a form of penance and purification, and a prayer for abundance of life in the world.

In the first part we enumerate the rituals carried out during the course of the pilgrimage, and in the second part we shall enumerate the individual vows. While doing so, we propose to view the impact of cultural influences on the practices of Roman Catholic pilgrims in Tamil Nadu.

tiruyaattirai TO VAILANKANNI

tiruyaattirai being the most prominent aspect of popular religiosity in which many indigenous elements are found, the researcher adopted a participant observer approach to gather accurate and detailed information on pilgrimage. In April-May 2001 she joined a group of 320 people who went on a *tiruyaattirai* (journey on foot) to Vailankanni from Devakottai in Sivagangai District.

The *tiruyaattirai* by this particular group was initiated by Thiru Sellam (a Catholic), a bus conductor. As a conductor he had opportunities of being on the route to Palani, a pilgrimage centre of the Hindus in Tamil Nadu. Seeing the Hindu pilgrims going to Palani, he was inspired to start one to Vailankanni. He went on *tiruyaattirai* along with two of his friends in the year 1980. After undertaking this journey for three consecutive years, he invited others to join in and started with seventeen pilgrims in the year 1983. The year the researcher joined the group, the number had swelled to 320 including both Catholics and Hindus.

Our *tiruyaattirai* is named *Annai Vailankanni Maata tiruttala punita tiruyaattirai* (Pilgrimage to the Holy Shrine of Our Lady of Vailankanni). Thiru Sellam was *talaivar* (the leader) of this group. The *talaivar* is not a full time spiritual master, but a person with leadership qualities, experience of pilgrimage, and spiritual maturity. Incidentally, our *talaivar* also has the power to exorcise persons under demonic possession. The *talaivar* not only provides leadership on the actual journey to the shrine but also helps people spiritually. While the Catholics address the leader as *talaivar*, the Hindus address

him as *caami*¹ (Lord) as they do to any person on the pilgrimage, and the young fondly use the term *appa* (father).

Rituals in *tiruyaattirai*

Turner (1987:167) views pilgrimage as a 'social process' involving a series of actions which he calls the 'sequence of social drama.' With reference to *tiruyaattirai* to Vailankanni we can identify five sequential stages, with specific rituals marking each stage. The preparatory stage begins from the day the pilgrim wears the dress and the *maalai* ('rosary') around her/his neck. This ritual, known as the *maalaipoTatal* (wearing the 'rosary' beads), is held nineteen or forty-one or three days before the actual journey depending on the convenience of the pilgrim. The pilgrim sets herself/himself apart from others by wearing a dress having an unusual colour,² though the most common colour is black, blue, green, and *kaavi*. We wore a dark blue, which, according to Beck (1969:571), is a colour associated with black and black is an important colour in repelling evil influence. Our informants connected the colour with the protection of Maata on the journey. Similarly, the 'rosary' beads are worn as a protective charm.

The *maalaipoTatal* ritual takes place in the church: After the Mass the priest blesses the 'rosary' held out by the prospective pilgrims, which then is placed around their neck by the *talaivar*.³ This is akin to the *kurucaami* putting the *maalai* for the Aiyappan pilgrims, which is also carried out in a temple.

Preparation for the pilgrimage involves the observance of certain vows of austerity from the day the individual wears the *maalai*. These include (a) *uLLa cuttam* (clean at heart): the avoidance of sexual relationship and losing of one's temper, and saying the 'rosary' and attending the Mass. (b) *uNavil cuttam* (eating food that is pure): the

avoidance of non-vegetarian food and intoxicating beverages. (c) *uTaLil cuttam*: keeping the body clean with a daily bath. Apart from these, some go bare foot, sleep on the floor, and fast on Tuesday and/or Friday or give up one meal a day. In brief, the pilgrims lead a life of a *sannyaasi* (an ascetic) for the days they wear the *maalai*. All this is akin to the self-discipline expected of Aiyappan pilgrims.

If there is a death in the family, the pilgrim calls off her/his *tiruyaattirai* by removing the *maalai*. Unlike their Hindu counterparts, the Catholics do not view death as pollution, but as a *taTaMkal* (hindrance). *taTaMkal* is interpreted in two ways: either the individual has not taken the preparation seriously or the time has not yet come for the fulfilment of the intention for which the *tiruyaattirai* is undertaken.

The Journey to Vailankanni:

After the *maalaipoTatal* ritual at 4 p.m. on the 18th of April we started our *tiruyaattirai* on the 2nd of May. After the priest blessed us in the church we set out. The family members, relatives and friends blessed us by drawing the sign of the cross on our foreheads. In turn, some of the family members took the blessings of the pilgrims in the belief that such blessings brought them grace (*tiruyaattirai pooravaMkaliTam ciluvai vaMkuvatu naLLatu*).

In five days during which we traversed the rough roads for 210 km the body was submitted to hard and voluntary discipline in terms of food and wayside relaxation. The rhythm of our daily journey was set out collectively, with prayers said by the leader and repeated by us in the mornings and evenings.

The *tiruyaattirai* on the whole is viewed as a form of penance. The often heard verses were '*naaMkal paavikal eMkal paavattirkku itu oru vazi*' (we have sinned and so

we suffer and the suffering could be averted through penance) and '*uTalai varutti keeTTaal Maata kanTippaa koTuppaarkaL*' (through our physical pain we want Maata to work a miracle).

Holy Stopovers: On the way to Vailankanni, the pilgrims visit a few sacred sites - a church, memorial or grave. The sacred site that we visited is a gravesite of a Catholic girl known as Marithiammal *kallaRai*. The local tradition has it that this is the grave of a young girl who died of smallpox while returning from pilgrimage to Vailankanni many years ago. As Burton (quoted in Turner 1979:121) says, 'Those who die on a pilgrimage become martyrs...the ghost departs to instant beatitude,' and this young girl came to be regarded as a holy person. Since the girl was a *kanni* (a virgin), the place is perceived to be all the more powerful.

Another factor that adds to the sanctity of the site is that the girl died of smallpox. The Hindus view smallpox as the visitation of the goddess Mariamma herself. The person dying of small pox is considered to be on par with the goddess. Though the Catholics do not refer to Mariamma, they regard this affliction as enhancing the sacred quality of the person; one hears people saying '*ammaapaattu cettu poccaam*' (died at the sight of mother). To die of smallpox is to die a holy death, is what they believe.

Women in their menses do not enter this site, lest they incur the wrath of the *kanni*. This is as if the Catholics identify the source of the negative aspect of female power as residing in sexuality (Mosse 1986:446). Proscription of women in their menstruation entering the shrine is a uniquely native norm which is alien to Catholicism. The Church does not restrict entry of persons on the basis of bodily pollution, and this belief and the related practices are in contravention of the official teachings of the Church. Since

traditional Hinduism considers woman impure during the menstrual period (Sekar 1992:42), we see the influence of Hindu beliefs on the practices related to this gravesite.

The significance of this sacred site became apparent when we reached it on the fifth morning of our journey. Two women who had shown signs of possession earlier ran towards the grave and began to dance the *peeyaTTam* (devil dance). The *talaivar* performed the rites of exorcism (see Chap. 6).

All the pilgrims took the ritual bath in the pond nearby and entered the site in wet clothes. The *talaivar* blessed the pilgrims at the grave by applying *kuMkumam* on their foreheads and gave them flowers and ash from the grave (see Photo 8.2). Thus, the entire ritual at this shrine runs parallel to the practices observed in the Hindu temples.

The second holy stop-over was Neermulai *kebi*, a Christian grotto where the Crucifix is placed on an artificially built mountain. The proximity of the site to Vailankanni (about 20 km) has bestowed it with importance. Here the pilgrims offer candles as a thanksgiving in anticipation of reaching Vailankanni. Most of them believe that from here the *tiruyaattirai* gets easier.

Purificatory Bath: The belief in bodily purity is very much explicit in the behaviour of the pilgrims. Since Maata 'resides' in Vailankanni, not just in the church built in her honour, bathing at the entrance to Vailankanni becomes a precondition for entering the sacred sphere. In our wet clothes we proceeded to the shrine saying the 'rosary.' As we entered the shrine holy water was sprinkled on us by the *talaivar* and all knelt before the image of Our Lady as the *talaivar* prayed on behalf of the group. On coming out of the church each pilgrim was blessed by the *talaivar* and the *maalai* was

removed. Once the *maalai* is removed the pilgrims are no more bound to the group and are left free to carry out their individual vows.

As part of the individual vow every pilgrim makes it a point to bathe in the sea and pray in the shrine (see Photo 8.3). In addition, the pilgrims carry out numerous votive offerings as thanksgiving for the favours received or pray for a favour (A detailed list of these rituals is given in Appendix 8.1).

The return journey is psychologically different: Once the promised vows are fulfilled the pilgrims become tourists (Turner and Turner 1978:22), and our group was no exception.

The re-incorporation of the pilgrim into the community is simple. The family members receive the pilgrims with reverence, for they are now considered holy. The younger pilgrims take the blessings of the elderly by kneeling down and the elders bless them with the sign of the cross on the forehead. The elderly pilgrims bless the younger members of their family.

The pilgrims to Vailankanni generally carry back such sacred objects as holy oil, holy water, 'rosary' beads, holy medals, *pori kaTali* (puffed rice and grams), candle, and flowers which have touched the feet of Maata. As in the Hindu tradition (see Sekar 1992:87), the Catholics also consider it auspicious to receive such sacred objects from one who has completed the *tiruyaattirai*.

The entire ritual observed by the members of the *tiruyaattirai* is charted out by the *talaivar*. The *talaivar* has drawn the ritual of *tiruyaattirai* from those observed in the pilgrimages to Palani and Sabarimalai and has merged them with the Christian practices. The *tiruyaattirai* is one situation where the Catholics have autonomy to express their

culturally-rooted religiosity, and this is precisely the reason that the entire pilgrimage is coloured by the rituals of the Hindu pilgrimage. The role of the Church is limited to celebrating the Mass, absolving sins and blessing the people on *tiruyaattirai*.

Certain parallels can be drawn between the *tiruyaattirai* of the Catholics and that of the Hindus. This is particularly so with regard to such ascetic practices as fasting, walking bare foot, and wearing black, blue, green or *kaavi*. Thus, apparently there is unity at the level of external or material aspects. But the adaptation of the Hindu practices by the Catholics is partial. For instance, the predominant colour chosen by the Catholics is blue, a colour associated with Mary. Similarly, while the Hindus wear '*rutraaksa maalai*,' the Catholics wear a string of beads known as 'rosary.' At the level of meaning, however, there is a pre-existing unity in the beliefs of both the Catholics and the Hindus. Both feel the need to wear special garments at the time of penance and purification. This is an important aspect of indigenisation.

***neertikkaTan* (VOWS AND VOTIVE OFFERINGS)**

Often the explicit purpose of visiting a shrine is to make a request. The shrine offers one the advantage of being in the presence of the divine. There is also a beneficial atmosphere (sacred space) which will aid the prayer of the devotee. It is believed that the benefits of the visit to a shrine are further enhanced when the devotee has observed the rules of appropriate conduct, that is, observing all the rituals enjoined on pilgrims.

The visit to the shrine to make a request often precedes the making of vows. It is implied that on fulfilment of the vow the devotee takes appropriate offerings to the

divine. The diverse rituals practised by the people at the shrine are more or less individual devotions combined with vows.

The Tamil term *neertikkaTan* means both 'vow made to the deity and offering in fulfilment of a vow' (Tamil Lexicon). It is formed from two roots, namely, *neer*, meaning that which is appropriate and straight, and *kaTan*, meaning a debt which is cleared when the vow is fulfilled. At times of crisis persons promise to do something appropriate to the divine: Examples include offering a coconut sprout or a cradle to the divine when a hitherto barren woman is blessed with a child, and vowing to stay for a week or more at the shrine (*vaarattukkuiruttal*) by a person suffering from a disease.

The difference between a request and the fulfilment of a vow is not always clear. Offerings in the shrine are in the form of silver or wax replicas of a cradle or parts of the body. They are offered to Maata as reminders by some or as thanksgiving by others. The more general offerings at the shrine denote both the request and thanksgiving and consist of candles and flower garlands. Close to the Maata *kuLam* scores of the replicas of cradles are hung and saffron thread tied on the trees as reminders to Maata for the help expected; the cradle denoting the need of the devotee for a child and the saffron thread denoting the need for a bride/bridegroom.

Thus, *neertikkaTan* brings out the *reciprocal* relationship between the individuals and the divine. The devotee not only makes the vow but also offers something appropriate for the favour received. The divine accepts the votive offerings of the devotees, and in return confers grace (*aruL*) and blessing (*aacirvaatam*) on the devotee. The *aruL* and *aacirvaatam* may be received by the devotee through the various objects in

contact with Maata such as the oil from the lamp burning near the altar, salt and pepper on the altar, and flowers adorning her become the medium of *aruL* and *aacirvaatam*.

While, generally, *neerttikkaTan* is an individual choice, the type of *neerttikkaTan* and its use are learned from one's culture and is often particular to a region. Thus, for instance, in the shrine of St. Thomas, in Dindigul District, persons affected by boils and pimples offer a broom to the saint as a request and thanksgiving. This practice is peculiar to this region and it is not observed in other Catholic shrines. A list of *neerttikkaTan* and the manner in which they are carried out in the shrines by the Tamil Catholics is provided in Appendix 8.1.

Animal Sacrifice⁴

Blood sacrifice is common among the Catholics and the Hindus of this region. Though a typical native practice, the way Catholics carry it out differs markedly from the practice of the Hindus. Among the Tamil Catholics sacrificial offering to the saint is known as *caamikku kiTaaiveTTutal*. After saying prayers in the church, holy water is sprinkled on the goat three times. If the goat shakes its body and head it is taken as a sign that the saint has accepted the sacrifice (*namma veenTutalai eeRRukonTaar*). If not, it is considered that the saint is not pleased with the offering of the devotee (see Photo 8.4). When they get the sign of approval, the goat is killed. A portion of the meat offered to the priest as part of the ritual. After the cooking is over the priest is requested to celebrate the Mass and to bless the food. Some times a elderly person brings holy water from the church and sprinkles it on the food or requests the *kooyilpiLLai* to do so. The food is first served to the poor and then the relatives are invited for the votive offering.⁵

Among the Hindus the animal is sacrificed in front of the deity and the blood of the animal is poured into the mouth of the deity or the *puucaari* drinks it while he is in a trance.⁶ The cooked meat is offered to the deity (*paTaiel*). The Catholics do not sacrifice the animal inside the church but in the church compound. The Saint notionally receives the life of the animal. A share of the meat is given to the priest. It is important to note that the saint is disassociated from the act of killing, as unlike the Hindu deity, the saint is not viewed as the one who needs to be appeased with the blood sacrifice.

According to Shulman (1980:91), the common factor in animal sacrifice among the Catholics and the Hindus is the notion of exchange. The devotees bring to the sacred sphere an offering that is returned to her/him in a new form through the ritual. The one who sacrifices is ultimately identified with her/his gift; in other words, the person sacrifices herself/himself in order to win the reward of the saint/deity. The reward here refers to more life in the form of health and material increase. From the point of the view of divine, the saint offers himself in order to bring blessings on the devotees. This is the underlying theme in the Tamil myths. 'The deity offers up his own life in order to be reborn from the sacrifice' (ibid. 92). Thus, the one offering sacrifice identifies oneself with the sacrificial act of the divine.

In this context it is interesting to note that, unlike in the Hindu temples, in the Vailankanni shrine the coconuts brought to the church are not broken. Though coconut is an important object of ritual offering among both the Hindus and the Catholics, the form of offering the same to the deity/saint differs. The Catholics burn a wick in the coconut.

The response of the Church to religious practices of the lay Catholics has been ambivalent. In some cases, e.g., *toTTil kaTTutal*, the Church ignores the practices all

together. In other cases, e.g., receiving the offerings brought by the people in the shrine, it co-opts them with its official practices. From our observations at Vailankanni it is clear that the Church has used the popular religious practices as a means to sustain the people's faith in Jesus. Moreover, the Church receives the offerings inside the church.

In still other cases, e.g., animal sacrifice, tonsuring, etc., the Church has allowed, if not incorporated, their performance by providing a place outside the church. The Catholic priests now view the rituals carried out by the individuals at the pilgrim centres as a continuity of the existing cultural practices.

From the interviews conducted among the Catholics it was revealed that the native rituals help them express their needs and devotions. At the same time the institutionalised forms of prayers become a spontaneous way of praying while carrying out the native rituals. For example, on *tiruyaattirai* the pilgrim says the 'rosary' and on reaching the church the pilgrim takes part in the Mass. As the pilgrims put it, '*kaTavuLiTam enteevaikalai collimuTitapiraku, jabam collukayil parolakatil iRukinTRa yeMkal tantaye and aruL nirainta mariye, evaikal taanae enakku teRintta jabaMkal*' (we are familiar with institutionalised forms of prayers and when we stand before Maata with the coconut sprout or any offering the spontaneous prayer that we say are 'Our Father and Hail Mary'). Thus, at the pilgrim centre, the Catholics express a set of Christian religious ideas while at the same time continuing with their native cultural practices. The sacred sphere the church is the place where the *neertikkaTan* is carried out by the Catholics, though the Church herself does not prescribe them. This underlies the fusion of two modes of worship, namely, the official (Church) and non-official (indigenous) in the sphere of the church at Vailankanni and other Catholic pilgrim centres.

Summary and Conclusion

Pilgrimage, and the rituals accompanying it, throw up a number of interesting strands of indigenisation. It is striking that in the evolution of the Catholic pilgrim centre, such as for example Vailankanni, the course of actions and rituals are similar with the Hindus.

The origin of the pilgrim centre is a myth or a set of myths. The locale of such myths is in the proximity of a water body like a lake, river, or sea. The course of the pilgrimage begins with a period of preparation during which the pilgrims abstain from items of pleasure and observe practices disciplining the body and mind. Considering the type of rituals observed during and at the end of the pilgrimage, one finds a good deal of resemblance between the Hindus and the Catholics.

It must be emphasised, however, that the striking similarities are only at the surface level. A closer look at our data reveals different dynamics of indigenisation. In the choice of myths and the locale of pilgrim centres the Catholics place themselves very close to the Hindus. In the course of the pilgrimage, they walk along a parallel line in the sense that they follow the same ritual proceedings of the *tiruyaattirai*. In all this the Catholics have christianised the *maalaipoTatal* by wearing the 'rosary', praying with the 'rosary,' invoking the name of Jesus and Mary, having the ceremony in the church. Finally, carrying out the *neertikaTan* in the church.

We should note that a popular pilgrim centre like Vailankanni draws not only Catholics, but also a large number of Hindus. It is possible that initially only the Hindus 'transport' the practices followed in Hindu pilgrim centres, such as the offering cradle, tying of saffron thread, etc., which are familiar practices found in the Hindu shrines. A

Catholic, who is familiar with the meaning of these symbols and associated practices, follows the same when he or she is faced with similar needs thus endowing them a Christian character.

The gradual process of mixing and integration of native elements can be explained in terms of the types of pilgrims who visit the shrine. Almost from its origin a shrine attracts people of different faiths. Though the shrine of Vailankanni is explicitly Christian in its origin, the pilgrims belong to different faiths and come with their own specific religious expressions. Gradually, the boundaries that mark the different forms of worship (as in *neertikaTan*, for instance) get blurred and the pilgrims acquire certain degree of ease in accepting and adopting different forms of worship.

Catholicism, though well organised with regard to its worship and other life-cycle rituals, seems to yield to this process of mixing and integration specifically in the pilgrim centres. Monitoring and regulation would mean censuring the people who visit the shrine, which would be incompatible with the universality the Church attaches to the faith in Jesus.

The origin and development of a pilgrim centre is usually the result of individual initiative. The Church may acquire control over the shrine only at a later point of time. By that time the centre would have acquired a character of its own which is invariably native in orientation. That is how locale of the pilgrim centre and the myths that provide sanctity to the locale are often native in character. The choice of seashore and the myth of apparition of Our Lady to the shepherd boy, as in the case of Vailankanni, bear close proximity to the native pilgrim centres at the ideational level. Thus, the absence of the Church in the origin and initial development of the shrine could be yet another reason for

the felicity of mixing and integration of the native elements. Thus, the pilgrim centres, pilgrimages and votive practices present themselves as a terrain in which indigenisation of Catholicism takes place intensely.

Endnotes

1. The Hindus going on pilgrimage to Sabarimalai and Palani are addressed as *caami*. In the course of time these individuals form a group and one among them functions as a leader addressed by others as *kurucaami* (the chief). Among the Aiyappan pilgrims only a person who has gone on a pilgrimage to Sabarimalai at least three times can be a *kurucaami* (one who initiates the pilgrim). However, this is not the only criterion. The person has to be recognised by others as a *kurucaami* (Sekar 1992). From this account we find a parallel between the *talaivar* and the *kurucaami*. Though the Catholics do not address the pilgrim as *caami*, they exhibit the same respect for the persons on *tiruyaattirai*.
2. Leach (1976:58) has argued that colours make 'convenient makers' of role reversal in religious ritual when they are employed to indicate the differences between religious roles and secular ones. According to the pilgrims, the colour sets them apart from others and it is also a sign of austerity.
3. The year the researcher joined the *tiruyaattirai* the ritual of *maalaipoTutal* was carried out on the 18th of April 2001. The Hindus who join the *tiruyaattirai* follow certain rituals to deal with their adherence to two religious traditions. Prior to the *maalaipoTutal* in the church they visit the shrine of their *kulateivam* (family deity) and make offerings. Once they wear the *maalai* (rosary) they do not visit the temple or participate in any of the *pooja* (worship) till the *tiruyaattirai* is completed. They further explained their action saying 'we neither want to incur the wrath of our god nor that of the Christian god whom we approach in need.'
4. The shrine of St. John de Britto (Arulanandar) in Oriyur in Ramnad District is popularly known for animal sacrifice. St. Britto was beheaded at Oriyur in 1693. The

shedding of his blood is believed to have sanctified the place and localised his power there. The animal sacrifice narrated here was observed in this shrine.

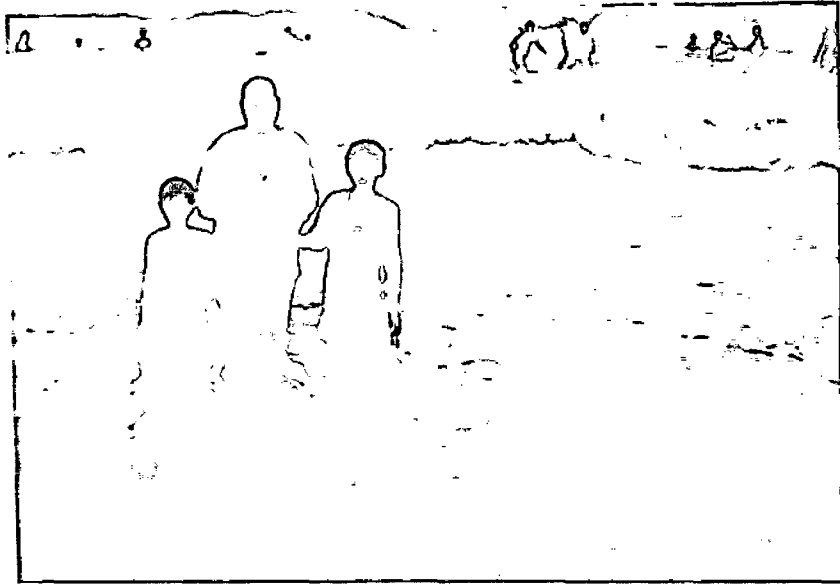
5. For most people this has become not only the fulfilment of a vow but also a time for the reunion of families. Whenever a family makes a vow to offer a goat or cock they inform the relatives to take part in the offering and share the *caami caappaaTu* (sacred meal). If an invitee fails to turn up without a satisfactory reason it is taken as an offence. In the same way, if someone closely related is not invited, it is also taken as an offence.
6. The animal sacrifice among the Hindus was observed in Karai a village in Sivagangai District.



8.1 Maata Appears to a Milk Boy



8.2 Blessing the Pilgrim at
Maritiammal *kallaRai*



8.3 Bathing in the Sea



8.4 Animal Sacrifice

CHAPTER IX

THE CATHOLIC ASHRAM: AN INDIGENISED MONASTERY

In the preceding chapters we have discussed the dynamics of indigenisation in various domains of the lives of the Tamil Catholics. The common thread that ran through was that the people themselves have been the main authors and primary agents of the indigenisation of Catholicism. This is significant considering that it is usually the clergy that plays a dominant role, especially in religious matters, in the Catholic Church. In this chapter we shall consider one of the most visible expressions of indigenisation, namely, the Catholic *ashrams* which have come into existence almost as an exclusive creation of the clergy. This fact of indigenisation, it is important to note, significantly differs from the initiatives of the laity.

The idea of monastic life is very much a part of the Catholic Church and has existed for centuries. In its effort to identify itself with the local culture, Catholicism has incorporated the tradition of *ashram* in India in its monastic life. Attempts at relating the Christian faith with the tradition of *sannyasa* and *ashram* were first made by the Protestants in the 1940s and then gradually by the Catholics (Wilfred 1993:43). The Second Vatican Council (1962-65) provided the legitimisation and ideological framework for indigenisation, which in turn has led to the emergence of a number of Catholic *ashrams*.¹

Ashram is a place specifically designed to help a *sannyasi* seek single-mindedly the bliss of inner freedom. Known as *sannyasa* in Hinduism, the concrete expression of

this renunciation is found in the *ashramic* life. To analyse the extent to which the Catholic monastery is indigenised in India, the researcher undertook a participant observation study of the Saccidananda Ashram at Thannirpalli in Karur District of Tamil Nadu. This Ashram was chosen as it is situated in Tamil Nadu, the geographical area chosen for our study, and this Ashram was started before the Second Vatican Council. The observational data are supplemented by interviews with the inmates of the Ashram, some Catholics of the village and a few Christian leaders.

Monasticism in India and its Adoption by Catholicism

There is evidence of the existence of ascetics in India from the beginning of the first millennium BC. The practice of *tapas*, which included silence, fasting and asceticism in general, was already established. Though the tradition of the individual ascetic mendicants had become deeply rooted in Indian culture, there was no organised centre of such ascetics. Monastic life in the sense of a community of monks renouncing the world and living in poverty and chastity began with Jainism and Buddhism in the sixth century BC. The early Jain and Buddhist monks, like the Hindu ascetics, originally lived as wandering monks, begging for their food, and it was the necessity of remaining in the same place during the monsoon season which compelled them to build monasteries (Griffiths 1980:432). The first monastic organisation of the Hindu ascetics dates from the eighth or the ninth century AD, and these were established by Sankaracharya in the four quarters of India (Ghurye 1995:5 and 6). Thus, though asceticism began as an individual practice it has developed into a religio-social institution, and a large number of ascetics now live in monastic centres or *ashrams* (ibid. 1995:220 and 270).

Ashram life has been considered from ancient times in India to be a very effective means of attaining union with God. In a setting that is simple, peaceful, austere and welcoming, it makes it possible for persons to experience the divine. *Ashram* is a place where a *sannyasi*, one who has renounced the world, lives. The *sannyasi* wears *kaavi* (ochre-coloured garb) which is symbolic of this renunciation.

Life in *ashram* is generally one of self-control and discipline: The daily routine includes a set of religious observances of physical purity, mastering and reading of sacred texts for mental elevation, communal prayers for group ecstasy, and preaching for the religious benefit of the lay people. The ascetics are vegetarian and they take two meals a day. The main source of income of the monasteries consists of the offerings of lay devotees and the land donated by the devotees. The visitors may take part in the *pooja* performed there.

Since Christianity also recognises asceticism as a legitimate mode of life, it has not been difficult for Catholicism to adapt itself to the indigenous *ashrams*. In what follows we shall discuss the Catholic *ashram* in Thannirpalli that has remodelled the Christian monastic life drawing extensively from the Hindu concept of *ashram*.

For the first time in the history of the Catholic Church in India two priests were permitted by the Bishop of Tiruchirappalli (Rt. Rev. Dr. Mendonca) to adopt the lifestyle of a *sannyasi* to lead their religious lives (Monchanin and Le Saux 1964:90). These two pioneers, Fr. Jules Monchanin and Fr. Henri Le Saux, visited a number of Hindu *ashrams* in order to gain experience of the life there. Among the *ashrams* visited the one which influenced them most was the Sri Ramana Ashram at Tiruvannamalai in Tamil Nadu (Stuart 1995:29).² They found that this Ashram to be the Indian equivalent of

contemplative life in the Christian tradition. They were impressed by the intense and sustained quest for the divine there and the emphasis laid on *sadhanas* or specifically Hindu spiritual exercises. They noticed the similarity between the Christian monasticism and the Hindu *sannyasa*, and between the lifestyle in the Hindu *ashrams* and that of the Christian monasteries. Thus, they founded a Christian *ashram* to absorb the spirit of the Hindu tradition and in doing so they strove to live a monastic life in the setting of a Hindu *ashram* (Stuart 1995:38).

Sannyasa, as these pioneers understood, was not the fourth *asarama* (a stage of life) which follows those of *brahmacharya* (student), *grihastha* (householder) and *vanaprastha* (retirement to forest); rather, it is *atyasrama*, that is, beyond (*ati*) every stage of life. It belongs to no category whatever and cannot be undertaken along with anything else. Thus, this stage of life is in keeping with the Christian monasticism, wherein the person has only one desire and that for God alone (Abhishiktananda 1975:4 and 5).

Sannyasa, as a way of life, has many features of asceticism which are common to all religions. These include fasting, or at least reducing the intake of food; abstention from meat and alcohol; life-long celibacy and total abstention from sensual gratification; vow of silence; sleeping on bare ground; going bare foot; minimal clothing; and absolute indifference towards the world. The emphasis on complete renunciation in *sannyasa* has a close parallel in the Catholic monastic life.

In accordance with the Indian tradition, these two priests took Indian (Hindu) names for themselves: Fr. Jules Monchanin's became Parama Arubi Aananda (Bliss of the Supreme Formless One, the Spirit), and Fr. Henri Le Saux became Abhisiktesvarananda (Bliss of the Anointed One, the Lord) and later shortened it to

Abhishiktananda. Initially their lifestyle and the rule by which they were guided were hardly different from a Western Benedictine monastery, lived out in huts on the banks of river Kavery. But, gradually, they adopted the *kaavi* dress, the ochre colour garb of a *sannyaasi* (Ralston 1987:92).

Saccidananda Ashram (Ashram of the Holy Trinity)

The Saccidananda Ashram was founded in the year 1950 on the feast day of St. Benedict on the banks of the river Kavery. They gave the name Shantivanam (Grove of Peace) to the whole campus and dedicated the Ashram and the chapel to the Holy Trinity and called it Saccidananda (*sat-* being, *cit-*consciousness, *ananda-*bliss) Ashram, after the name for the god-head in Hinduism. By choosing this name they showed that it was their intention to identify themselves with the Hindu quest for god as *saccidananda*, and to relate this quest with their own experience of god in the mystery of the Christian Trinity. The commonly used name for this Ashram, however, is Shantivanam.

The location of the Ashram, on the banks of the river Kavery, is significant. Kavery is regarded as a holy river, and it is even described as the Ganga of South India. Thus, the 'holy location' is intentional, that is, to make the Christian *ashram* resemble the Hindu *ashram* in its setting.

The Sanskrit word *aasarama* is derived from the root *sram*, which means exertion; that is, a stage of intense exertion in the duties of life. This term *aasarama* is used to refer to (a) the hermitage or forest dwelling-place of a person who spends his time in meditation and austerities or (b) the stages in the life of a twice-born Hindu, characterised by appropriate spiritual exertion (Chenchiah, Chakkarai and Sudarianam 1941). In the context of the Ashram, the word *ashrama* is used to refer to the hermitage of a seer. The *risis*

(seers), while in *tapas* (austerities, penance), are believed to have received the Vedas from the gods. In their forest hermitage the *rishis* composed the Upanishads. Sitting at the feet of the *rishis* the disciples listened to their teaching and shared their experience of the Brahman (Parrinder 1971:236). The Catholic *ashrams* have drawn from the Upanishadic tradition and Vedanta philosophy (especially *advaita* or non-dualism) for their spiritual search and ideology (Abhishiktananda 1969 and Griffiths 1982). The Saccidananda Ashram adopted the *ashram* life characterised by meditation, asceticism and strenuous spiritual endeavour.

The founders sought this Ashram to be a genuinely Indian Benedictine *ashram* following the principles of St. Benedict as the basis for life there. However, this Ashram differs from a Benedictine monastery³ on the following grounds: (a) The Benedictine monastery prescribes regular hours of liturgy - the monks meet seven times a day to pray together – and lays emphasis on the Mass and community prayer. In the Ashram emphasis is laid on the Mass and the study of Vedanta, the observance of the Hindu methods of prayer and meditation by the practice of yoga. Sanskrit chants are extensively used in the Ashram prayer and worship. (b) As prescribed by St. Benedict, the monastery is a ‘closed’ institution, but following the Hindu *ashram*, the Saccidananda Ashram is essentially an open community. (c) In the course of time the Benedictine monastic life has become institutionalised, but in the Ashram there is much liberty and less organised life (Griffiths [nd.]: 48-50). (d) The head of a Benedictine monastery is the Abbot, whereas in the Ashram it is the *guru*, who is not elected but ‘recognised’ as a spiritual guide by people. (e) The Benedictine monks live in a community, and very few of the Benedictine monasteries allow along with community life the life of a hermit. The Ashram leaves the members free to live either in the community or as a hermit. (f) The *sannyasi* in the

Ashram chooses a typical Indian (Hindu) name, whereas as this is not the practice in the Benedictine monastery. Thus, the founders of the Ashram have consciously indigenised the monastic life based on the *ashram* tradition in Hinduism.

Parama Arubi Ananda (Fr. Monchanin) died in 1957, before the Ashram had been fully established. Abhishiktananda (Fr. Le Saux), after continuing alone for some time, eventually settled as a hermit in the Himalayas, where he died in 1973. After the latter's departure the Ashram was taken over by a group of monks from Kurisumala in Kerala, who have continued the combined traditions of Christian monasticism and Hindu *sannyasa* (Griffths [nd.]: 46). Fr. Bede Griffths, a monk from Kurisumala, who took the name Swami Dayananda, was the last *guru* and spiritual guide of Shantivanam. It was during his time that the Ashram became a centre of spiritual pilgrimage.

In the Upanishadic tradition the *guru* is a spiritual guide – the one who dispels darkness and enables the seeker to become conscious that the world is a transitory place and *moksa* (liberation) is what needs to be sought. Great importance was attached to the *guru* in the ancient tradition, because of the belief in the necessity of a spiritual guide to attain knowledge of the Brahman and liberation. In the Christian *ashram* Jesus is seen as the *sat guru* (the true *guru*) (Abhishiktananda 1974a:202). Traditional *ashrams* in India are led by *gurus*, and a *guru* is recognised by others as a person of deep spiritual experience. In the Christian *ashram* the human person is only a representative of Christ, who is the true head of the *ashram*.

The conceptualisation of *ashram*, *guru*, and *guru*-disciple relationship, in both the Hindu and the Christian writings appears to lay great emphasis on charismatic authority in which the power to command is legitimised by the extraordinary qualities of grace

believed to rest in a person. In addition to this, we observe with Max Weber (1958) that, charismatic authority is socially constructed in recognition, acceptance and legitimisation by followers of the extraordinary qualities of a leader. Thus, the *guru* is not appointed but *recognised* by people as a *guru*. Following this tradition, the *guru* is not appointed in the Ashram. The last *guru* of this place was the late Swami Dayananda (Fr. Griffiths), and after his death the Ashram is without a *guru*.

It is important to note that the Ashram is not completely autonomous. Since the Catholic *ashrams* have all been founded by priests or religious congregations, they are all in varying degrees under the authority of the local Bishop, and in many cases under the authority of the head of a particular religious institution. In 1980, Shantivanam was affiliated to the Benedictine Monastery of Camaldoli in Italy. With this, the *sadhaka* (seeker or the aspirant) and *Brahmachari* (the one who has committed oneself to the search of god) of the Ashram, when they become permanent members as *sannyasi*, make their profession as monks affiliated to this Monastery in Italy.

Membership of the Ashram

Those who seek permanent membership of the Ashram go through three stages of formation: The first stage is that of *sadhaka*, the initial stage of seeking. The second stage is that of *Brahmachari*, the stage in which the initiate need not remain permanently in the Ashram. The third stage is that of *sannyasi*, the stage in which the initiate makes the final and total dedication. On attaining *sannyasa*, the person is given *kaavi* (ochre-coloured garb), which is a symbol of renunciation. Following this indigenous formative method, Swami Dayananda (Fr. Griffiths) had given *dhiksa* (initiation to *sannyasa*) to three of his disciples. Among them two are ordained as priests. The researcher interviewed one of

them, namely, Fr. Christopher, who is presently the administrator of the Ashram. In the words of Christopher, 'I was initiated on the bank of the river Kavery. Swamy Dayananda baptised me with the water from the sacred river Kavery and pronounced the sacred name into my ears, he then gave me the *kaavi* dress to wear.' *Dhiksa* establishes formally the *guru-sisya* (master-disciple) relationship. Initiation takes the form of communication of a *mantra* (sacred name or formula) and it may be also by touch, sight or thought (Ralston 1987:49). In the Christian monastery definite formation programmes are charted out for a certain number of years. This has been reformulated according to the traditions of the Indian *ashram*.

The Ashram's community is small: Today the Ashram has six permanent members and all of them are male. However, the *ashram* is open to men and women, single or married, as visitors and even as part of the community.

The Lifestyle in the Ashram

An atmosphere of peace prevails the Ashram. Silence is observed as a matter of course. The monks follow the Upanishadic precept that 'practise of silence is really the disciplined life of a student of sacred knowledge, for only by leading such a life does one find the *Atman* and meditate' (Vandana 1980:47).

The basic lifestyle is simple and is in keeping with the indigenous lifestyle of the Hindu *ashrams*. The living quarters of the *sannyasis* consist of individual huts with thatched roofs (see Photo 9.1). For the visitors there is a long low guest building, a hall serving as the dining room, a library and a church built in Dravidian style of architecture. Most of the buildings have thatched roofs and cement flooring. The Ashram is situated

amidst flower gardens, cultivated fields, and papaya, mango, and coconut groves. The setting indeed recalls the descriptions of ancient Hindu *ashrams*.

In external customs the Ashram follows traditional Hindu patterns: The monks wear *kaavi* instead of the Catholic habit common in all Catholic monasteries, go barefoot, and sit on the floor for prayer and meals. The food at the Ashram is vegetarian, and the meal is taken seated on the floor. Before and after every meal a Sanskrit prayer is said: Grace before meals: ‘*Om sahana vavatu, sahanau bhunaktu, saha viryam karavavahi, tejasvina vadhitamastu, ma vidvishavahai, om shanti, shanti, shanti*’ (let us agree together, let us eat together, let us behave honourably, let our knowledge be resplendent and let us not be divided - from Vedas). Grace after meals: ‘*aham vaishvanaro bhutva, praninam dehamashritah, pranapanasamyuktah, pacamyannam chaturvidham*’ (becoming fire of life in the bodies of living creatures and mingling with the upward and downward breath, digest four kinds of food - Gita 14 and 15).

Hospitality is the mark of a monastery, and in the Ashram it is in tune with the Indian tradition. The Ashram is open to all irrespective of caste or creed and hospitality is shown to all visitors. It offers spiritual guidance to all those who seek such guidance. The guests are allowed to take part in prayer, meditation, yoga and work. However, there are conditions to be met by persons wishing to stay in the Ashram. Silence is to be observed in the premises, and smoking and liquor consumption are prohibited.

The common *saadhanaa* (way of life) in the Ashram is prayer, study of sacred scriptures, and manual work. One does one’s own personal work and workers are employed only for common work, maintenance of the Ashram and cultivation of its land. The Ashram is also involved in social service and developmental work in Thannirpalli

village. It runs a home for the aged and a training centre for young girls. It may be pointed out here that though all three *maargaas* - *jnaana* (knowledge of god, growing in wisdom and intellectual discrimination), *bhakti* (devotion) and *karma* (doing one's duty) - are followed in the Ashram, the emphasis is definitely on *jnaana margaa*.

Indigenisation in Prayer

Sandhyaa (twilight)⁴ is conceived as the sacred time of the day, a time meant for ritual offering made to the divine: sunrise, midday and sunset are set apart for silent meditation, the time consecrated for worship by the Hindu and the Christian traditions alike. In the morning, after silent meditation, the Mass is celebrated; at midday and in the evening, prayer is held in common. On these occasions devotion is enriched with Sanskrit and Tamil texts and songs. Every prayer starts with the sacred syllable *Om*.⁵ 'This word first appears in the Upanishads as a mystic monosyllable and is regarded as the object of the most profound religious meditation. In the Manduukya Upanishad it is said that this syllable is all that has been, that which is and is to be; that all is *Om*, only *Om*' (Gispert-Sauch 1982:547). This word is taken to denote Christ, who is referred to as the Word by John, one of the disciples of Jesus.⁶ Every Sanskrit chant starts with *Om* and the *sannyaaasis* intone the word *Om* three times followed by the Sanskrit chant. For example, the morning prayer begins with '*Om Bhur Bhuva Svaha*,' etc. (see Appendix 9.1).

Litanies to Jesus - '*Om Bhuta Krute namaha*' (Salutation to the Creator) - and to Mary - '*Om Shri Matre namaha, Shri Maharajnyai*' (Holy Mother, Holy Queen) - are recited in Sanskrit (see Appendix 9.1). The basic prayer and the Bible readings remain in English. The readings from non-Christian Scriptures, for example, from Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita, and Thiruvacakam and Thevaram (Tamil Saivite spiritual writings), are

also included in the prayer. Thus, the communal prayer in the Ashram is less formal than in the monastery, where the community meets seven times a day to pray the Psalms of the Catholic Church.

During the evening prayer a Sanskrit hymn to the Trinity – ‘*Vande Saccidanandam*’ (Worship to the Trinity) - is sung. This hymn (see Appendix 9.2) was written by Brahmabandhab Upaadhyaaya, born of a Bengali Brahmin family and converted to Christianity in 1887. He saw Christianity as a western religion hidden under a series of unfamiliar terms and structures. He found that in the Hindu conception of *Saccidananda*, the mystery of the Trinity could be unfolded. His hymn begins with the verse of worship to the Trinity as *Saccidananda* and goes on to describe the three-fold unity, of the Father, the Son and the Spirit (see Boyd 1989:63-85).

As in the Hindu temples, people entering the place of worship in the Ashram leave their foot wear outside. All follow the indigenous style with regard to posture for prayer - cross-legged, prostrate, seated on a low stool or a wooden plank. At the end of the prayer the *sannyasi* makes a *casTaaMka nmaskaaram* (prostrating oneself on the ground).

Indigenous religious materials and symbols are used during the communal prayer: *cantanam* (sandal paste) is used during the morning prayer; it is applied on the forehead and hands as a sign of consecrating oneself to god at the beginning of the day. *kuMkumam* (vermilion) is used during the midday prayer; it is placed on the forehead. *vibhuti* (ash) is used during the evening prayer.

The day begins and ends with *aaratti* (waving of light). *aaratti* is derived from ‘rati’ which means delight, joy or devotion (Vandana 1980:45). *aaratti* with burning camphor is waved before the Blessed Sacrament and the light is brought to each one

present for the prayer. Each person passes her/his palms over the flame and places it on the eyes (see Photo 9.2).

The Mass in the Ashram

The Ashram follows the Roman liturgy in the celebration of the Mass. However, some symbols from the Indian Rite Mass (detailed in Chap. 3) are incorporated. The Mass is celebrated on a low stone altar (see Photo 9.3). During the offertory the priest sits in front of the stone altar and makes an offering of the four elements - water, earth, air, and fire. The priest sprinkles water around the altar and then on the people as a sign of purification, and then takes a sip of water in order to purify himself. Next, the priest places *chappatti* (Indian wheat bread, instead of the usual wheat wafer) and Wine on a brass plate. He also places on this plate eight flowers reciting Sanskrit *slokaas* referring to the eight directions of the space.

In the ritual offering of flower the priest uses the five fingers of the right hand to pick up the flowers gently, then turns the fingers with the flower upwards and softly offers the flower at the Lord's feet. The five fingers represent five senses (Parthasarathy 1994:102). Offering flowers to the eight directions of the universe is a symbolic act, denoting that the Mass is celebrated in the centre of the universe. The priest makes the *aaratti* with incense (representing the air) and with camphor (representing the fire). The symbols and gestures used in the Mass are drawn from the Hindu customs.

As in the Hindu temples, indigenous ways of adorning the place of worship are followed on Tuesdays and Fridays. On these days cow-dung water is sprinkled in front of the Chapel and *koolam* is drawn. On other days plain water is sprinkled and *koolam* is drawn.

Indigenisation of Place of Worship

The place of worship is built in the Dravidian style of South Indian temples. Parama Arubi Ananda (Fr. Monchanin), one of the founders of the Saccidananda Ashram, saw a Shiva temple at Magadipettu in Pondicherry, and it became the model for the chapel in Shantivanam (Stuart 1995:47). He constructed only the *garbhagirha* (sanctum sanctorum explained below), and later Swami Dayananda (Fr. Griffiths) completed the building using the local village craftsmen.

At the entrance is the *koopuram* or *tooraNavaayil* on which is shown an image of the Holy Trinity in the form of a *tirumuurti* (three-headed figure), which according to Hindu tradition represents the three aspects of the godhead: as creator, preserver and destroyer of the universe (see Photo 9.4). Interpreting this as a symbol of the Christian Trinity, the figure (the father depicted as an elderly man, the Son as a young man and the Holy Spirit as a woman expressing the feminine side of god) is shown emerging from a cross, implying that the mystery of the Trinity is revealed through the cross of Christ.

Between the *koopuram* and the *manTapam* (outer court of the temple) there is a cross (cosmic cross) enclosed in a circle on a raised platform. In this symbol, Christianity and Hinduism are symbolically joined by Buddhism: the cross of Christianity is enclosed by the circle representing the wheel of the law (*dharma*) of both the Hindu and the Buddhist traditions. At the centre of the cross is the word *Om*, denoting Jesus, the Word.

In the *manTapam* or outer court of the temple, where the congregation assembles, there is a similar cross having the words '*saccidanandaya namaha*' in Sanskrit meaning worship to *saccidananda*. Over the doors leading to the inner sanctuary or *muulastanam* there is an inscription in Sanskrit taken from the Mahanarayan Upanishads: '*Param arth*

stvam evaikonanyosti jagata pate’ which means ‘you are alone the Supreme Being: there is no other Lord of the world.’ Below it are the words inscribed in Greek letters ‘*Kurios Christos*,’ the Lord Christ. The same is written in Tamil ‘*ulirukum ulkuvaan, uliruntey ulkuvaan.*’

The *garbhagiraha* (sanctum sanctorum), found in all the Hindu temples, is replicated here. The form of the church is transformed by the Hindu concept of an inner sanctum sanctorum, which is like the womb of the sacred space. In the physical structure of the church this is the inner sanctuary with a stone altar. There in a tabernacle is preserved, the Blessed Sacrament, the sign of the presence of Christ.

At the base of the *vimaanaa/koopuram* (see Photos 9.5 and 9.6) are the figures of the beasts of the Apocalypse, the lion, the ox, the man and the eagle (Revelation 4:7, *Good News Bible*), which represent the whole creation redeemed by Christ. Above them are four figures of saints, representing the redeemed humanity, and above them are four figures of Christ in different postures seated on *simhaasana* (royal throne) surrounded by four angels. *Simhaasana*, a feature familiar to Hindu iconography, is used here as the seat of Jesus to denote his role as the King.

The figures in each direction present the different postures of Christian divinity: In the east, Christ is depicted as King in the royal posture. Beneath him, Mary is depicted as Queen of Heaven, an Indian woman seated on a lotus. In the north, Christ is depicted as a priest in the *abhaya mudra*, taking away fear and conferring grace. Beneath him is placed St. Peter holding the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven. In the south, Christ is depicted as a prophet or teacher in the posture of a *guru*. Beneath him is placed St. Paul, as the teacher of the nations. Finally, in the west, Christ is depicted in a contemplative *dhyana*

(meditation) posture. Beneath him is placed St. Benedict, the Father of monks and founder of contemplative life in the west.

Above the figures of Christ and the saints is the Throne of God, represented by *koopuram* (the dome) covered with peacock feathers.⁷ At the top of the *koopuram* is the lotus, symbol of purity, supporting the *kalasa* (an ancient symbol of the four elements earth, water, air, and fire), pointing upwards to the *akaasa* (the infinite space) in which god dwells 'in inaccessible light.' Thus, at the entrance to the temple the mind is directed to the mystery of the godhead as three persons adored by angels. The underlying idea is the basis for the syncretising religious traditions.

Outside the chapel is an altar on which Mary is placed dressed in a sari (see Photo 9.7), replacing the grotto in the Christian churches.

Influenced by Sri Aurobindo, Swami Dayananda (Fr. Griffiths) incorporated yoga as part of the Ashram life (Sahi 1998:108). A circular hall is built for yoga and meditation. At the centre of this hall is placed the figure of Jesus seated in *padmasanam* (meditation posture) on a lotus, facing the four points of the compass. In this posture Jesus is viewed as the axis around whom all time and space revolves (see Photo 9.8). In the campus of the *ashram* the statue of Jesus is depicted as a *sannyasi*, dressed in *kaavi* (see Photo 9.9) and Mary is also depicted in Indian style (see Photo 9.10).

The Ashram as Viewed by the People

From the interviews with the Catholics of Thannirpalli village we gather that the Catholics have come to accept the lifestyle of the priests in this Ashram. They are highly appreciative of the simple lifestyle. Some of them come to the Ashram to spend some time

in prayer. Though the Ashram is quite a distance away from the village its personnel have established a friendly relationship with the villagers.

According to the theologians and priests, who have knowledge of the Ashram, the Ashram has emerged as an institution akin to the Christian monastic life and it is a model for religious life in India. However, it has not been a popular movement in the Catholic Church. As *ashrams* are meant for persons who are drawn towards silence and prayer not many show interest in it. Moreover, the *ashram* life demands greater discipline and only persons drawn to contemplative life can conform to it.

For the founders indigenisation meant the expression of the Christian religious experience in theology, spirituality, liturgy and symbols which are drawn from the indigenous culture. In their quest they drew from the tradition of ancient Hinduism to evolve a Catholic *ashram*. As such, the Ashram has made contributions to the indigenisation of architecture of the place of worship and the dwelling quarters of the religious, as also to the indigenisation of worship and the development of an indigenous theology. Many theologians whom the researcher interviewed agreed that the Ashram has been an ideal setting for the development of indigenous theology (see Abhishiktananda 1969, 1974, 1975 and Griffiths 1966, 1982).

Notwithstanding the foregoing, the theologian Amaladoss avers

I think the *ashrams* had their day and they are all on the decline. None of the *gurus* has left any serious disciple. I do not see the Ashram either as the ideal of indigenisation or as an instrument of indigenisation. I think persons who want to lead a contemplative life in monasteries try to live in some kind of an *ashram* setting. I do not look to them as means of indigenisation because the real authentic indigenisation should come from the people where the people feel free to respond

to the gospel in and through their culture. Eventually the theologians try to be the voice of the people, in line with the teachings of the Church.

Amaladoss seems to distinguish between the people (laity) and leaders (clergy) as though they have irreconcilable differences on indigenisation. But, as this study has suggested, as far as indigenisation goes, both have significant, if different, roles to play.

Summary and Conclusion

Both in Hinduism and Christianity there is a long tradition of institutionalised contemplative life. While in Hinduism it is called *ashram*, in Christianity it is known as monastery. Even before the Second Vatican Council, a few Christian monks began to reorganise their monastic life on the pattern of Hindu *ashrams*. Taking the Saccidananda Ashram in Tamil Nadu as one such initiative, this chapter has sought to establish *ashram* as one of the highpoints in the process of indigenisation. We tried to elucidate this by highlighting the salient features of the Ashram in terms of the structure of the Ashram, the living quarters of the monks, the lifestyle of the inmates (dress and food habits) the indigenous elements in prayer and worship conducted in the Ashram, and the indigenisation of the place and methods of worship.

We observe that there is religious syncretism in the Christian *ashram*. The two religious traditions, the Catholic and the Hindu, have merged together to form one. The Catholic priests have incorporated the idea of Christian monastic life with that of Hindu *sannyasa*. This involves living a life based on the principles of St. Benedict and the study of Hindu doctrine and methods of prayer and meditation. They have adopted the Hindu *ashram* way of life by wearing *kaavi veesTi*, eating vegetarian food, living in huts, going

bare foot, using Vedic chants in prayer and adopting Indian elements at worship. The head of the Catholic *ashram* is called the *guru* and the *guru* is not appointed but recognised as such by the people. Since the common ground for the meeting of two religious traditions is the need for contemplative life, they reinforce each other. No wonder, Abhishiktananda saw monasticism, whether Christian or Hindu, as one basic vocation.

Diehl (1969:151) points out that in the Christian *ashram* the exchanges of religious elements from one religious context to another are made quite intentionally on an assumption that they are inter-changeable. Such a substitution of Hindu *ashram* life in place of Christian monastic life has come quite naturally to some Christian clergy who are eager to adopt Indian customs in their religious endeavour.

Endnotes

1. A directory prepared by O'Toole (1983) lists thirty-nine Christian *ashrams*. It is, however, difficult to determine the exact number of *ashrams* existent today, as *ashram* has become another name for prayer houses in many religious congregations.
2. As part of her fieldwork the researcher visited this Ashram.
3. For an understanding of the Benedictine monastery, the researcher visited the Benedictine Monastery in Bangalore, Karnataka. This monastery derives its name from its founder, namely, St. Benedict, who has laid down a set of principles to be followed in all Benedictine Monasteries.
4. Dawn and dusk are important *sandhyaa*, but midday is also considered as *sandhyaa*, since at this time the sun changes its ascending course up to the heavens and descend once more to the horizon (Sahi 1998:129).
5. The sacred syllable *Om* is extremely simple. It is formed of three elements, A and U, which combine to make the sound O, and M, which prolongs the O in a nasal resonance. It is thus composed of three letters in a single sound. The Upanishads not

only saw in this syllable an expression of Brahman but also identified *Om* with Brahman (Panikkar 1994:769).

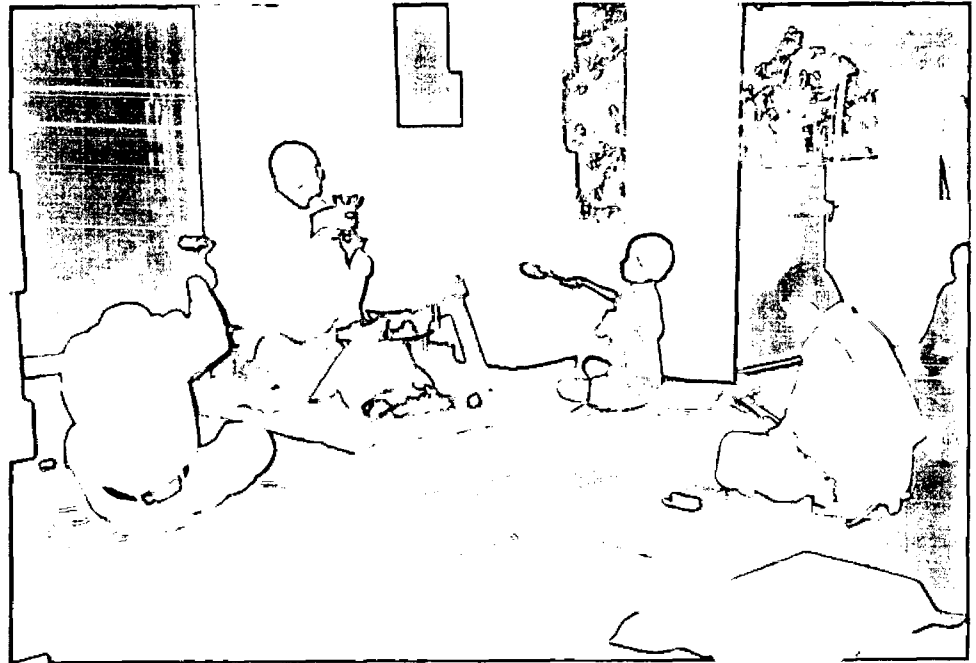
6. 'Before the world was created, the Word already existed; he was with God, and he was the same as God... The Word was the source of life, and this life brought light to mankind' (John 1:1-5, *Good News Bible*).
7. 'In early Christian iconography the peacock was a symbol of the resurrection. Its flesh was thought to be incorruptible, and it was often imbued with the same properties as the phoenix which rises miraculously unconsumed from the flames' (Bayly 1992:263).



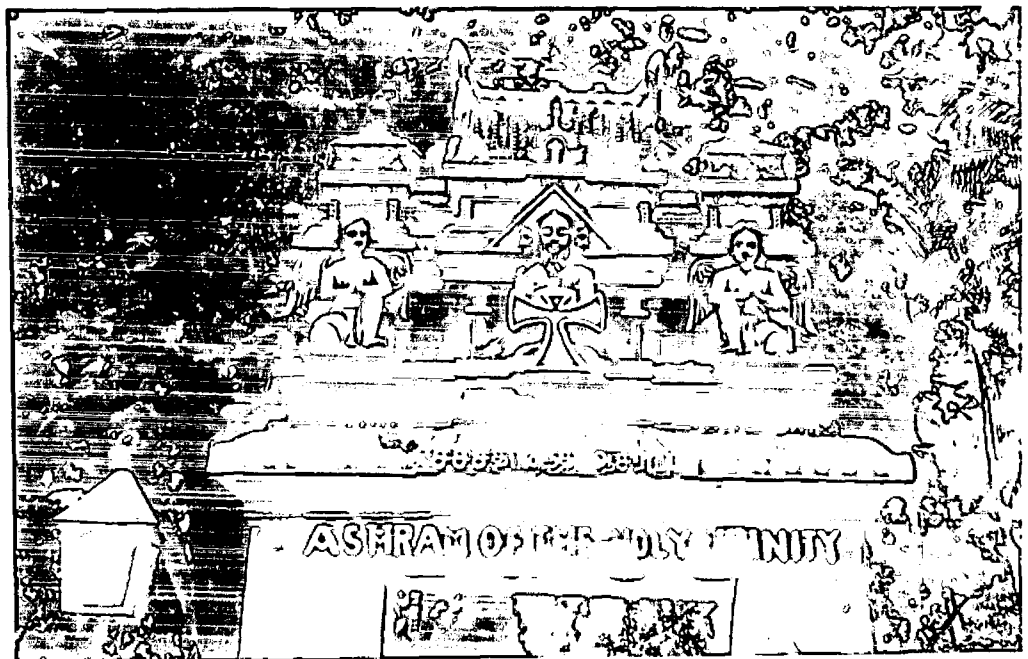
9.1 Individual Hut of a *Sannyasi*



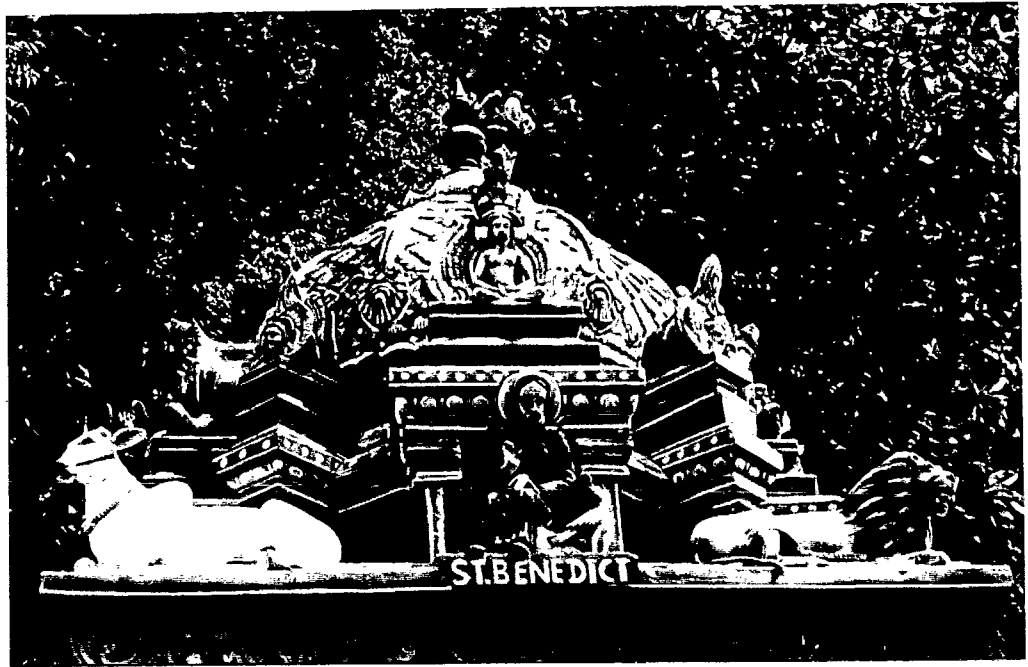
9.2 Receiving the Flame in Saccidananda Chapel



9.3 The Mass Celebrated on a Low Altar



9.4 Entrance of Saccidananda Chapel



9.5 The *koopuram*



9.6 Mary Seated on the Lotus on the *koopuram*



9.7

Mary in an Indigenous Grotto



9.8 Yoga Hall

9.9 Jesus in *kaavi*



9.10 Mary as an Indian Woman
Seated on Lotus.

CHAPTER X

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Understanding indigenisation of Catholicism in South India was the broad objective of this thesis. To realise this objective and to answer the lead questions raised in the study we collected data from the field sites in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere in South India. These data have been presented in the preceding thematic chapters. We shall, in this chapter, put together logically the main findings of the study by way of conclusion.

First and foremost, sketching the history of indigenisation in Tamil Nadu, we highlighted the fact that in the course of 400 years of Christianity in Tamil Nadu, Catholicism has interacted with the native religion and has undergone a process of indigenisation, making it a unique phenomenon. While several of its aspects have changed, Catholicism has come to adopt several aspects of Hinduism, and in this process several persons have played a significant role. The study has shown that indigenisation is not a recent phenomenon as it is generally believed to be. It has been an incessant process going on since the time Christianity was founded in India.

For analytical convenience, we can divide the history of indigenisation into three phases: (1) the early period of colonialism, (2) the latter period of colonialism, and (3) the post-colonial era. Each of these phases had its own character. In the early period of colonialism, Christianity approached the local culture from an Euro-centric attitude and encouraged (and often coerced) the native converts to abandon their traditional socio-religious practices. In the later period of colonialism, with a view to overcome the hesitation of the natives to convert to Christianity due to the fear of losing their native

customs, Christianity 'tolerated' some of the local traditions to co-exist with Christian practices. Around the middle of the twentieth century, that is, in the post-colonial era, almost all the colonies attained freedom, and Europe had to reckon with the assertion of different nationalities, their cultures and religions. Hence, a spirit of religious pluralism began to take roots in Christianity and the churches in the former colonies, including India, were encouraged to incarnate the Christian faith in their respective cultures. Intense debate and resistance marked all these three phases of Christian history and these go on even today. The important point that emerges from the history of indigenisation in Tamil Nadu is that the early missionaries created a favourable environment that led the natives to retain most of their socio-cultural practices.

Moving from the history of indigenisation of Christianity in Tamil Nadu to the converts' lived in experience of religion of Catholicism, we identify two reciprocal life domains: the religious and the socio-cultural. In order to understand the nature and extent of indigenisation we traversed the various aspects of the religio-cultural life of the Catholics in rural Tamil Nadu.

In considering the religio-cultural rituals of the Catholics, we observe that they relate to both the religious and the socio-cultural domain of the believers. The socio-cultural domain pre-existed Christianity and therefore had its autonomy in terms of rituals, symbols, agency and meanings. It is a terrain where the interaction of people is largely centred on the temporal aspects of the converts. Under the religious domain, the interaction is directed towards the 'Absolute' and to the 'Almighty Power.' The symbols and rituals that are enacted in the direction of the 'Absolute' are considered sacred, which are performed as a community. The persons who perform these rituals are considered

sacred persons. Considering the nature and the sphere of these rituals, we can make three main lines of distinction:

- There are two sets of rituals: the Church-prescribed and the native. The Church-prescribed rituals are specifically religious, and are narrowly defined and least flexible. They give little scope for indigenisation. The native rituals are exhaustive, and are all encompassing and incorporating in meaning. They are people oriented and more flexible. They give greater scope for indigenisation.
- There are two spheres in the performance of these rituals: the church and the domestic.
- There are two categories of actors: the official religious (clergy/priest, and *kooyilpiLLai*) and the ordinary religious (laity) as the key performers of the rituals.

Levels of Indigenisation in Various Spheres

We may recall the lead questions raised in the introductory chapter in order to identify the patterns of indigenisation of Catholicism. In the first place, what are the native cultural symbols that have been retained by the converts? We observe that there is a good deal of native rituals and symbols in the Catholic Church. The density of these rituals and symbols is not, however, even in various spheres of the Catholics' life. It is high in the spheres of the rites of passage, agriculture, quotidian life, shrines and ashram, and is low in worship and in the expressive domain.

The first ritual sphere considered in this thesis concerns worship and celebrations, both of which fall in the religious domain. Among Catholics, the Mass is the most important form of worship, and it also happens to be the most protected sphere when it comes to indigenisation. From the time Christianity was established in India, the rituals

observed during the Mass have retained their special character, and these rituals are known as the Latin Rite. While the Church permitted many indigenous practices in other aspects of the Christian life, it never allowed any change in the rituals followed in the Mass until 1965.

After the Second Vatican Council (1962-65), by the initiation of the Church, the Mass was the single most important element of Catholic religious practice that was sought to be substantially altered by the incorporation of indigenous religious elements. However, as our study has shown, even this effort by the Church has been limited to some centres, such as the NBCLC and Catholic ashrams, and it hardly made much headway in the rural areas. When it became public it was, in fact, resisted fiercely by groups of Catholics under the banner 'Save the Faith Movement.' Not surprisingly, most churches still stick on to the elements of the Latin Rite.

The main reason for not accepting or partially accepting the indigenisation of the Mass was the perception that the Mass constitutes the kernel of the Catholic faith and that indigenising it in toto dilutes the kernel of the faith. This is not the case with other religious practices, about which we will discuss shortly. This shows that there are core and peripheral rituals in any religious community. While the believers are not willing to dilute the core rituals, they may be flexible with regard to the peripheral rituals. Even when the believers selectively adopt some indigenous elements, as in the case of the worship in rural communities, they are keen that the main structure of the ritual is maintained. For example, in the case of the Mass, they want to maintain the prayer of forgiveness and the breaking of Bread. However, they may light an oil lamp instead of a candle, do the *aaratti*, use the local language, and sing in local tunes. Over the years,

there has been a slow but steady permeation of these indigenous elements in different churches. It is noteworthy that lighting *kuttuviLakku*, instead of candles, and doing *aaratti* have been slowly incorporated into the Mass, as they do not affect the basic structure of the Latin Rite.

In this context, it is important to observe that resistance to indigenisation generally occurs only among the elite. The common people show more flexibility vis-à-vis indigenisation. Also, from the response of the people to the indigenisation of the Mass, we notice the difference in the understanding of indigenisation that is held by the people and the Church. For the Church, it is the theology which needs to be Christian while the symbols can be in tune with the native culture. For people, on the other hand, theology is too vague, and they look for symbols which are typically Christian, those which are different from those of the religion from which they have converted. Thus, the Church's perception of and approach to indigenisation is different from that of the people.

This, however, rises the question: why does the Church seek to indigenise the Mass at all. From our interviews with the clergy, we gather that from the point of the Church, the Mass is a sphere that is exclusively under their purview and that indigenisation of Catholicism is meaningful only when this core ritual defining the essence of this religion is indigenised.

The second set of rituals within the religious domain consists of the many Catholic calandrical feasts. As compared to the Mass, this sphere is observed to be less protected. Despite these rituals being part of the Christian liturgical celebrations, they have accommodated many native elements. This is evidenced in the case of the celebration of Christmas, the practices during the Lent. The consideration for allowing

such changes was the compatibility with the Christian faith of such indigenous beliefs and practices as lamentation (*oppaari*) and eating of *akatti kiirai* on Good Friday. At the same time the norm of preserving the structure of the Roman liturgy was not compromised.

The third set of rituals in the religious domain relate to the *uur tiruvizaa*, which is the sphere least protected from indigenisation. This is because it is the sphere of the Catholics as people belonging to a larger geographical entity called the village, which also consists of the Hindus. At the same time, it is not an independent sphere since it concerns religion. The dilemma of the Catholics being members of the larger village community and at the same time belonging to a religious community (i.e., the Catholic Church) has been resolved by the latter by lending some of its own symbols and rituals to be incorporated into the Hindu way of celebrating the annual village festival. To be sure, this was not the creation of European Missionaries. Such practices existed in the local culture, as is evident from the annual village festivals celebrated with similar features by the Hindus in Tamil Nadu.

Over all, in the religious sphere we observe that when the *new* religion brings with it a definite set of core rituals (e.g., the Mass), it limits the scope for indigenisation. On the other hand, the adherents of this *new* religion relate its rituals to their existing cultural practices (as, e.g., in Christmas and the Lenten practices). However, in areas where the *new* religion does not offer any prescribed set of rituals, there appears to be greater scope for indigenisation (as, e.g., *uur tiruvizaa*).

Moving from the religious to the social-cum-religious (or the semi-religious) domain, we find that the rituals fall into both domestic and the church spheres. In the

social-cum-religious domain, we first considered the rituals relating to rites of passage. The rites of passage constitute the second most important space for religious expression. They are concerned about the 'self' and its need to cope up with the crises contingent upon the different stages of life. Dealing as they do with the life-cycle rituals of an individual-in-community, they relate to the individual and the community at the same time. As such, they seem to address both psychological and social needs. They invoke the religious spirits as and when needed and blend them with social imperatives followed in the community.

As individuals and a community the Catholics had been following certain rituals rooted in their socio-religious milieu before embracing Christianity. After becoming Christians, they had to reconcile their life-cycle rituals with the symbols and rituals of the Church. Obviously, the situation is complex, as the Church has its own set of life-cycle rituals evolved in the socio-religious milieu of Europe. The case of puberty ritual exemplifies this complexity. Though it is not a religious ritual *per se* among the Hindus, it is accorded a high degree of importance in the Hindu culture. Whereas, in European Christianity, this ritual is important neither in religion nor in culture. Similarly, baptism, which is of cardinal importance in Catholicism, has no significance to the Hindus.

At this sphere, the rituals are more elaborate, lending greater scope for indigenisation. We have earlier presented them in the order of their performance in the church and in the domestic spheres, highlighting the similarities and the differences. The rituals that are carried out in the church are Church-prescribed, though some native elements (e.g., *taali*, *niirmaalai*, etc.) are added to it. While the rituals that are performed in the domestic sphere are similar to those of the Hindus, the Catholics have Christianised

the native rituals (e.g., puberty). Moreover, even while retaining the native rituals the Catholics have been selective: They have given up those which are explicitly religious in orientation and retained those that are basically social in nature. In the ritual configuration of the community, the Catholics have also made simple substitutions (e.g., candle in place of camphor) and additions (e.g., Christian prayer while performing the native rituals).

In the agrarian socio-economic life we observe that Christianity did not present an entirely different set of rituals for the Catholics, as it did not alter the occupational pattern of the people drastically. The rituals retained are generally symbolic devices adopted by human communities to deal with forces that are beyond their control. They deal with these forces by pleasing and by appealing. Survival is the basic need of human communities and nature is viewed as a force beyond the control of the human beings. People generally believe god to be the ultimate force controlling the uncontrollable nature. An agricultural community, such as the one we studied, is replete with rituals seeking to please god to ensure timely and sufficient rains, protection of crop and for a good yield. While the Catholics grant a space for their native rituals, they combine the same with the Catholic religious symbols.

Like in the rituals related to agricultural operations, the quotidian life too remained outside the purview of the Church. The notions of auspiciousness, inauspiciousness were not part of the Catholic theology. The same was the case with the notion of casting evil eye. The absence of a clear-cut official policy concerning these gave the people the freedom to adopt in totality the practices of the Hindus. Thus, 'replication' has been one of the ways of indigenisation of Catholicism. However, this

has been achieved by transferring the form and content of certain Hindu practices and placing them within the Christian paradigm.

One point that emerges from our study is that Christianity has not been comprehensive in meeting the spiritual and social needs of the native Christians, as the latter are determined entirely by the local socio-economic and cultural contexts. For those needs, the native Christians have been at liberty to draw from the local religious symbols and rituals and Christianise them wherever possible. The official Church seems to have conceded to this process as long as it did not violate the principles of Christianity. In brief, when a religion fails to address their existential beliefs, the people may take recourse to alternatives to handle them. This may or may not be in keeping with the official teachings of the religion.

Thus, it is important to note here that at the level of pastoral monitoring the Church did not employ adequate or effective mechanisms to assist and supervise the converts as they developed their own methods of coping with life-crises. Thus, in this sphere, in the absence of well-articulated official practices coupled with considerable freedom available to them, the laity had no difficulty from the beginning to retain or replicate almost in totality the religio-cultural practices of the Hindus.

The rituals referred to in the foregoing paragraphs were observed within the context of the villages covered by our study. However, the rituals considered under pilgrimage lie outside the locale of everyday existence of the Catholics. It is observed that pilgrimage provides a conducive ambience for effective indigenisation of the Catholic faith. This is because the rituals observed during pilgrimage come close to the native religious practices. Furthermore, though they fall within the sphere of the church, they

remain beyond the purview of the official religion and are free from any monitoring by the official agency. Hence, in pilgrimage there is a free mixing of different religions and interplay of different religious symbols, rituals and practices.

Based on a participant observation study of the Vailankanni pilgrimage, it is observed that the Catholics have adopted the entire structure of the Hindu pilgrimage and replaced some of its elements with typical Christian elements. Wearing 'rosary' instead of the typical Hindu *rutraaksa maalai* during pilgrimage is an example. The rituals carried out in the pilgrim centre reveal that the Catholics have retained those practices that are devoid of any core Hindu symbols like the icons of the deities. Thus, for example, tonsuring, going bare foot, etc., are adopted in toto.

Dealing with the expressive domain, we note that later Christianity came to India as a fully evolved religion, with its forms of worship reflected in its art, architecture, music, etc. This meant that Christianity offered a new set of religious expressions for the converts, e.g., the church replaced the temple, the Christian music replaced the indigenous religious music and the Christian art and architecture replaced the indigenous art and architecture. Since Christianity has its set of well-defined expressive forms, at this level indigenisation had to be a more conscious effort on the part of the Church rather than a felt need of the laity.

In the expressive domain we observe that different elements experience different levels of indigenisation. In the sphere of architecture, there is a mixed reaction considering the response of the laity. Some have associated the art that was imported from Europe with distinctive Christian symbols. Thus, they are not prepared to give up this distinct Christian art and architecture, which substitute the temple as their place of

worship. Others appreciate the indigenous architecture, but look out for the Christian symbols such as the cross on the top of the place of worship and the Christian icons in the place of worship. To them, the core element in the church is the symbol of cross and the Christian icons. Thus, while the structure of the place of worship could be altered, the Christian divinities cannot be transformed, as it would lead to distortion of the sufficiently relevant elements.

Lastly, we dealt with Catholic *ashram* as an instance of indigenisation. We observe that the clergy, who had already adopted the monastic way of life in keeping with the Catholic tradition, played a pioneering role in this sphere. It was exclusively an effort of the clergy, with the lay Catholics having no role in it at all. Since celibate religious life is a voluntary option of only a few, it is only a few among the clergy who embraced the monastic way of life, known for its total exclusion from the common people. As men who spent much of their time in prayer, reading and reflection, they provided an elaborate intellectual articulation to their initiative. Seeking a way to indigenise their faith and way of life, they adopted the *ashramic* life in the high tradition of Brahminism with its established system of philosophy. This is another feature that distinguishes the Christian *ashram* as in the instance of indigenisation from the efforts of the common people in this regard.

In the way the clergy engaged with the native *ashramic* tradition, we find them playing a pioneering and crucial role. If we consider all the features of the Saccidananda Ashram, we realise that a good number of them have been incorporated in their original form. The architecture of the church, the ritual objects such as camphor, timings of worship, etc. are clearly Hindu in nature, and are totally alien to Catholicism. Even the

superimposition of Christian icons, such as the four beasts, the saints, etc. are drawn out of the Hindu belief-system. Because of the compatibility of their philosophies governing monasticism, the Catholic monastic life gave way for total incorporation of many of the symbols and rituals found in the Hindu forms of worship and *ashramic* way of life. By the same token, wherever possible, the Christian symbols were merged with their Hindu counterparts. This is evident in the way the place of worship has been designed in these Ashrams. Some peripheral aspects of monastic life were dropped in favour of native aspects. For instance, the idea of abbot was dropped in preference to that of the *guru* in these Ashrams. Thus, the process of indigenisation initiated by the clerics is altogether different as compared to the process adopted by the laity.

The laity draw from their local religio-cultural practices in the process of indigenising their life-cycle rituals, agrarian and quotidian life, etc. In this they give importance not to theology, but to lived experience of religion they profess. For the clergy, indigenisation meant the expression of the Christian religious experience in theology, spirituality, liturgy and symbols which are drawn from the indigenous culture. In their quest they drew from the tradition of ancient Hinduism; the formation of the Catholic *ashram*, and the establishment of the Indian Rite Mass are typical illustrations.

Analysing the extent or levels of indigenisation of Catholicism in various spheres, we find Nadel's (1969: 31-35) distinction among 'core,' 'peripheral' and 'sufficiently relevant' elements with reference to role analysis to be an useful conceptual tool. Indigenisation has been a spontaneous process when it has to do with the peripheral elements of Christianity. This is so because when native elements are incorporated at the periphery it does not affect the perception or effectiveness of the Christian ritual that is

being performed. But, there has been a certain degree of resistance to any change of the core elements. This is so because the core makes up the character of any given ritual. In worship, for example, the core element is the Mass, while the native music which has been introduced in worship is an example of the peripheral element. The native music that is incorporated in worship has not resulted in any loss or distortion of the core element. The same applies to the *paaskaa*, a Christian drama that is performed in a native dramatic form, namely, *kuuttu*. What is sufficiently relevant in the drama is the Christian theme. Thus, the core is distinctively Christian and the adaptation of peripheral native forms does not affect the perception or effectiveness of the Christian worship or the Christian drama.

It must be noted that in indigenisation, the Catholics are faced with two types of native cultural elements. Some elements are mainly social and others are heavily loaded with religious meaning. Those that are social are retained in toto (e.g., *naleer kaTTutal*, *naaLvitai eTuttal*). However, they are quite reluctant while considering the latter, and they ensure that such elements are either not included or are altered at the material level. For example, while accepting the religious significance of wearing beads during *paatayaattirai*, the Catholics find a parallel in their own repository (rosary). Same is the case with *taali* with a cross as a marriage symbol, or with *ciluvaikampuvaittal* while performing the last rites for an individual.

From our interviews with the Catholics it is understood that while the Church-prescribed rituals are *necessary*, they are not *sufficient*. For example, in marriage and in death, the elaborate rituals consist of native rituals which are Christianised since the Church-prescribed rituals are minimum though significant. The areas not addressed by

the Church are covered by the cultural rootedness of the people, as in the agriculture and quotidian domains.

Retention of the native rituals either in toto or partially reveals that conversion does not mean a total break with the past. The past continues even after conversion, as in the case of the rituals associated with agricultural operations and also a few special events such as construction of houses. It is noteworthy that the Church has not prescribed any rituals regarding these. In the absence of prescribed Christian rituals, the Catholics, spontaneous response has been to retain their native rituals. In doing so, the Catholics felt the need to relate some of these rituals to their newly acquired faith and began to Christianise them. Subsequently, they sought and got the services of the *kooyilpiLLai* (see Appendix 10.1) for some of the rituals, thus giving scope for indigenisation.

Furthermore, we make a point that indigenisation is not limited to certain rituals or completed at one point of time. What emerges from our study is that there is a 'process,' an unending dynamism, an urge and a need, that enables the Church to integrate people and their beliefs and practices amidst differences. And people, on their part, retain their distinctive Christian identity and Christianise their native rituals, beliefs and practices, and indigenise the Christian ones.

Modes in Indigenisation

Our second lead question was: what are the modes adopted by the Catholics and the Church in the process of indigenising Catholicism? This question sought to probe the ways in which the indigenous symbols and rituals travelled or crossed over to the Catholic Church. Our study has established that indigenisation has taken different modes:

Parallelism is observed when the rituals carried out by the Catholics are similar to those of the Hindus. The similarity is primarily observed in the patterns, for example, the Catholics have replaced the *OM* generally found in Hindu wedding cards with the sign of the cross in their wedding cards. The unity can be observed at the level of meaning, too, for example, both the Catholics and the Hindus feel the need to wear a special dress while going on a pilgrimage. Thus, the pre-existing unity in belief is one of the important contributors in indegenising a religion.

Retention and *reproduction* are the easiest options, since the Catholics are familiar with their native rituals and their choice for them is automatic. It involves retaining the native ritual configuration. This is observed in employing the same ritual functionaries (e.g., the Vannaan and Ampataien) and the use of the symbolic materials in marriage, death, and puberty; in their beliefs about the dead, and in their ideas about evil forces. They have been very selective in that only those native symbols that do not have any explicit symbols of Hinduism are retained. The Catholics themselves have assumed certain degree of responsibility for this mode of indigenisation. Exorcism is a typical illustration. The Church has maintained a distance, except when the official functionaries involve themselves in actively promoting these practices.

Transference of certain symbols from the Hindu religious repertoire is also a method by which the Catholics have sought to maintain their social link with the Hindus even while conducting the ritual in the Christian way. Applying turmeric paste on the corners of the invitation card or on the envelope is an example. While playing the role as containers of evil, Catholics have adopted the familiar mode of *transferring* the typically

Hindu practices to Catholicism and *superimposing* Christian forms and content. The St. Anthony *yantra* could be cited as an example.

Yet another mode of indigenisation is *reversion*, that is, going back to the native rituals when the new religion does not help handle their needs. For example, the Hindu practice of setting the evil spirit on one's enemies, which is locally known as *pilli cuuNiyam vaittal*. The very nature of the action implies the cover of secrecy. When the Catholics resort to this practice they have an additional reason to do so. They are aware that the official Church will not permit it as it involves keeping an association with the devil. This is supposed to pollute the person. Despite the disapproval of the Church, this practice continues to be followed by some Catholics. When they want to 'punish' someone, they seek the help of the Hindu *puucaari*. We may call this 'indigenisation under the cover of secrecy.'

Religious *syncretism* is another mode through which indigenisation has occurred. It is the process of religious fusion, irrespective of the presence of fusion in its advanced sense (Hultkrantz 1969:15). The term syncretism is used here to denote the mixture of two religions, whereby the elements from one religion (Hinduism) are fused into another (Catholicism) without basically changing the character of the latter (see Ringgren 1969:7). Specifically, with reference to the Catholic *ashram*, and pilgrim centres we observe that the religious traditions of Hinduism and Catholicism have almost merged to form a syncretic tradition. There does not seem to be any opposition to this, because what is incorporated is not opposed to the religious elements of the religion that is absorbing these aspects.

The differences in the modes of indigenisation can be explained by reference to the density of the Catholic rituals and symbols in different spheres of life. In those spheres, like worship, where the Catholic rituals are densely present, the mode of total abandonment of indigenous practices has occurred. In the same way, where the former was present least, as in agrarian and quotidian spheres, total retention is noticeable.

Thus, there is *complete* to *partial* retention of native rituals. When the symbols are neutral, without a religious association, and where the Church has not prescribed specific rituals, there is complete retention. There is partial retention when the native rituals are employed along with those prescribed by the Church. Devising *parallels* to Hindu rituals and symbols from within the Catholic religious repertoire is yet another way indigenising their religious beliefs.

Overall, we observe the following forms of indigenisation:

Native form + Alien content - E.g., *taali* with a cross, symbol of Christian marriage, etc.

Native content + Alien form - E.g., to ward off evil by keeping the cross in the house, etc.

Alien form + Alien content - E.g., Holy Communion.

Native form + Native content - E.g., *aalaatti* (waving of light), belief in auspicious time, etc.

Thus, drawing a conclusion on the modes of indigenisation, we find that the process of adaptation follows a multidirectional course. It was never comprehensive in the sense that it did not reach every aspect of the old culture. The converts played an active role in the way they adapted the Hindu and the Christian practices. They were selective and their social context determined what they adopted and what they

abandoned. The process of adaptation was not confined to rituals and symbols. Furthermore, the process was not confined to one or a few in the community of converts. Every individual had to go through this process. What was once adapted did not remain unchanged or abandoned. Those native elements that cannot be accommodated as part of the official Catholic religion are allowed in the privacy of the homes of the converts.

The Agencies in Indigenisation

The third lead question focused on the human agency in the process of indigenisation. The Catholic Church in India, as elsewhere in the world, has a highly organised and well-established structure of authority. There is a closely-guarded gap between the vast majority of lay believers or the laity and a small section of the clergy which exercises religious authority over the laity. How did these segments within the Catholic Church involve themselves in the process of indigenisation in South India, was the question raised.

As regards indigenisation, our study notes a distinction between the Catholic Church as a *religious institution* and the converts to Catholicism as a *community of believers*. Furthermore, this study has foregrounded the converts as a community occupying a middle ground between the Catholic Church and the Hindu religion: As converts, they have moved away from Hinduism; yet, as laity, they still maintain a distance from the institutional Church, which for all practical purposes has not been able to absorb them completely. By emphasising the relative autonomy of the converts, this study has shown that the indigenous symbols and rituals have found their location in the Catholic Church by a selective process.

In this selective process, the laity played a significant role in specific spheres of life depending on the extent to which the official Church wielded power. Wherever the official Church was not present in terms of either its rituals or its actors, the laity played an independent role. While the laity brought in the native Hindu elements into Catholicism, they gave a Christian interpretation to all their native practices and explicitly Christianised them. Often, they also sought some religious sanction by roping in the *kooyilpiLLai* to assist in the rituals. The laity are flexible to that extent of limiting their practices to the domestic sphere when they are social in nature, and take only the essentially Catholic rituals to be performed in the sphere of the church. On its part, the official Church has been found to give legitimacy to the indigenisation that laity had earlier carried out on their own. There had been some occasions, no doubt, when the official Church interfered in the autonomy of the laity resulting in conflict between the two, as for instance, with reference to the caste-based *maNTakappaTi*.

Thus, we observe that in the process of indigenising Catholicism, the Catholic converts and the official Church occupy two different terrains and seek to merge them without losing their significance. They have done this by deploying different strategies. While insisting on the ritual of baptism, the official Church has affirmed the socio-cultural roots of the laity by Tamilising the foreign sounding Christian names. Similarly, in the socio-cultural ritual performed on a girl attaining puberty, the Catholics lead the girl to the church and make her seek the blessings of the Christian deities. Neither does the priest intercede in nor does he object to the ritual being held in the church. Another strategy employed by the laity to obtain religious recognition for any socio-cultural ritual is to solicit the services of the *kooyilpiLLai* who occupies a middling position in the ritual

hierarchy. He is lower than the parish priest, but is 'eligible' to perform non-official rituals and officiate on occasions that do not fall within the prescribed sacred categories.

Dealing with the rites of passage, we observed that the Church had its own set of life-cycle rituals, and the laity and clergy have jointly negotiated the native rituals and evolved a style of their own. In the case of agricultural operations, the Catholic Church has no ritual of its own. Finding this ritual space free, the Catholic converts filled it by 'transferring' some of the native practices. Mary (the mother of Jesus) taking the place of Mariamma (a goddess in the Hindu pantheon) as rain-goddess is an example of this kind. During such transference, they Christianised some of their native practices. The official Church did not challenge this transferring, as it had no alternative to offer.

What we observe here is that the laity became the sole agency in this process of indigenisation. It is important to note that the Church, which had hitherto remained largely passive to this process of indigenisation of the Catholic faith by the laity, began to play a more active role after the Second Vatican Council. Nowadays, in many parishes, the priests themselves organise the *poMkal* (harvest festival) celebrations with many innovations. It must be clarified that indigenisation has been an on-going process within the Church; it is not to be viewed narrowly as involving only the adoption or abandonment of a particular ritual or symbol once and for all. The same ritual can go through many changes in the course of time in terms of its form or meaning, or its actor or beneficiaries. The celebration of *poMkal* becoming an important rituals in the official Church is a case in point.

With regard to the agency which has played a crucial role in replicating the Hindu practices, we observe a difference. In rituals relating to agricultural practices, it is

difficult to pinpoint the agency. Since the whole community is engaged in these practices we hold that it is the 'community' that has acquired the role of an agency and has introduced many adaptations. While doing so the community has got the rituals legitimised by getting the *kooyilpiLLai* perform them. In the case of quotidian life, we could identify some specific actors known as exorcists, soothsayers, etc., in the community. These constitute the third type of agency in the process of indigenisation in South India. The woman who is considered to be the medium of Mary in the shrine of Vailankanni is a case in point.

A pilgrim centre like Vailankanni draws not only Catholics, but also a large number of Hindus. It is possible that initially only the Hindus 'transported' the practices followed in the Hindu pilgrim centres, such as offering cradle, tying of saffron thread, etc. A Catholic, who is familiar with the meaning of these symbols and associated practices, follows the same when he or she is faced with similar needs thus endowing them a Christian character. From the point of the agency, the Hindus who visit the Catholic shrine too contribute to the indigenisation of the practices carried out in the shrine. Thus, the Hindu pilgrims constitute yet another agency of indigenisation though their role is marginal.

In the expressive domain, both the laity and the clergy have played their role in indigenisation, though there is difference in what is adopted. The laity, while indigenising drama, and music, draw from their local culture which is conceptualised as the 'little tradition.' The clergy have heavily drawn from the 'great tradition' while indigenising the place of worship, music and art.

The prime agency in the indigenisation of Catholic monastery is a small section of the clergy and women religious. In their venture, as in the expressive domain, they have also drawn heavily from the 'great tradition.'

Focusing exclusively on the agents of indigenisation, we observe that when the clergy initiates indigenisation of Catholicism it is done consciously. For example, national centres, such as NBCLC, are set up to realise this objective. The explicitly European forms have been consciously reformulated in the case of church art, architecture, music, and in the celebration of the Mass, etc. The laity have done so largely without a pre-planned strategy guiding them, at the same time consciously incorporating the Christian symbols along with the native rituals they have retained. This has been the observation from the findings presented in Chapters 3 to 8.

We have identified five different agencies in the process of indigenisation. They are: the Catholic priests (clergy), the lay believers (laity), the *kooyilpiLLai*, the soothsayers and exorcists within the Catholic community, and the Hindu pilgrims. Each of these has a definite location/sphere from which they have initiated indigenisation or contributed to the process. The clergy plays a prime role in the sphere of the church; the laity primarily in the domestic sphere, and marginally in the sphere of the church; and the soothsayers and exorcists and the Hindus play a limited role in the sphere of the church and the domestic circle.

As regards the reasons for the clergy to adopt the 'great tradition,' we note two streams of indigenisation in the post-Vatican period. When the first wave of indigenisation took place after the Second Vatican Council, it directed itself towards a stream of Indian culture shared by people occupying the upper layers of the society. This

wave of indigenisation was confined to the clergy who had been largely the earlier converts from the upper castes. In a way, this can be described as the 'Sanskritisation' of Catholicism. In the recent years, however, the wider society has witnessed a good deal of debate on the rights of the people belonging to the lower layers of the caste order. The Church also has gone through its impact. The forms of art in possession of the people belonging to the lower layers of the society are gradually finding a place in the expressive domain of the Church.

Response to Indigenisation

From the point of view of the Church, we note four different types of response to the indigenisation of Catholicism by the laity. First is the *approval* of certain practices like rituals related to agriculture, marriage and death, as they are considered to be purely cultural, and exorcism, as there is reference to the evil spirits in the Bible. Second is *tolerance* towards the observance of (in)auspicious time, space and directions, and animal sacrifice, tonsuring, tying a cradle in the church compound, bathing in the sea, etc., since such practices are viewed as being neither good nor bad. The third response is *opposition* and *total disapproval* from the Church: for instance, setting an evil on someone is considered morally unacceptable, and belief in sorcery is unacceptable as it is directed against persons and is destructive in intention. The fourth type being *ambivalence*: for instance, with regard to the practices associated with the notions of auspiciousness, inauspiciousness, the disposition of the Church reflects some ambivalence. These practices are perceived to be superstitious and, therefore, they are tolerated hoping that when the believers are educated such practices will disappear.

On their part, the laity have particularly resisted the indigenisation of the Mass by the Church. This again is largely confined to the urban-based and educated Catholics than the believers in the rural communities. In terms of the familiar concepts of change and continuity in understanding indigenisation, changes take place largely in the peripheral elements, while continuity is characteristic of the core elements. However, resistance to change is not universal.

The role played by the lay believers in the indigenisation of Catholicism is noteworthy. The official Church has only responded to the demands of the people. In fact, the Church has played a prominent role only in the third phase of indigenisation, that is, after the Second Vatican Council. This is perhaps explained by the social character of the clergy who represented the official Church. Prior to the Second Vatican Council, the European missionaries had invincible influence on the functioning of the Church. In the post-Vatican period, the clergy were largely Indians and they were familiar with the cultural moorings of the faithful. They were able to understand the demands of the lay believers and they had the power and resources to respond positively. In areas where the laity showed resistance, as for instance, in the introduction of Indian Rite Mass, the Church brought in certain indigenous elements of this Rite only after securing a consensus from the laity.

Considering the 'movement' that has taken place in the Church after the Second Vatican Council, it can be expected that more and more traditional practices performed in the domestic and social spheres will be brought into the religious sphere. The modern theology of incarnation of faith and the openness of the Church may expedite this

'movement.' This Church is now identifying the parallels for traditional rituals, which had been done successfully by the laity initially.

From this study it becomes clear that indigenisation is an inevitable process in the evolution of an implanted religion. The implanted religion cannot easily subdue the native religio-cultural practices. Indigenisation is an indication of the way people belonging to a particular culture can absorb and accommodate the new religion they have come to profess. At the same time this new religion confers on them a different identity. No wonder, indigenisation has never been a perplexing issue for the Tamil Catholics, as it has been to the Church!

On the whole, as a community, we find the Catholic Church in South India to be well integrated with the local religious-cultural system. It has come to be so through a sustained process of indigenisation carried out in complex ways by both the official Church and the lay believers. The way Christianity is lived in Tamil Nadu is not the same elsewhere where Christianity is practised. That is, indigenisation can also be viewed as a process through which an universalistic religion gets locally particularised.

APPENDICES

- 1.1 Instruments of Data Collection
- 3.1 An Order of the Mass for India
- 3.2 Lamentation of Mary
- 6.1 Translation of the Prayers in St. Anthony's *yantra*
- 6.2 The Prayer to St. Anthony
- 8.1 *neertikkaTan* (Making a Vow)
- 9.1 Prayers in the Saccidananda Ashram
- 9.2 Glory to *Saccidananda*
- 10.1 The *kooyilpiLLai*

APPENDIX 1.1

INSTRUMENTS OF DATA COLLECTION

OBSERVATION CHART

OCCASION	MEDIUM	PROCEDURE
<p>Worship and celebrations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mass 2. Christmas 3. Lent and Easter 4. All Souls Day 5. Patron's feast a) Preparation for the feast, e.g., hoisting of the flag b) Festival proper, e.g., liturgy and para-liturgy. c) Cultural performances. 6. <i>paaska</i> (Passion play). 7. <i>paatayaattirai</i> (pilgrimage on foot). <p>Life-cycle Rituals</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Baptism 2. Tonsuring and ear piercing 3. First Holy Communion 4. Puberty ritual 5. Marriage 6. Pregnancy and child birth 7. Anointing of the sick 8. Death <p>Agricultural Rituals</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Ploughing 2. Sowing 3. Seeking rain 4. Harvesting <p>Other Occasions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. House Construction 2. Craft and rituals <p>Native Celebrations</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>poMkal</i> 2. <i>tiippaavaLi</i> 3. <i>aayudapoojai</i> <p>Indigenous Art, Architecture and Music in the place of worship.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Objects Native ritual items: flower, light, coconuts etc. 2. Actors Priest, Catechist, Elders - men and women. 3. Sound Bells, musical instruments, vocal sounds, prayers. 4. Space Location and direction of the ritual objects, actors. 5. Time Timing of the rituals - Auspicious and inauspicious time. 6. Movement Movement of objects and actors – direction. 	<p>Step-1: Noted the 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' governing the way the media are organised in the rituals.</p> <p>Step-2: Gathered the rationale behind the 'Dos' and 'Don'ts' from knowledgeable persons.</p> <p>Step-3: Compared the similarities and dissimilarities between the Catholics and the Hindus.</p> <p>Step-4: Analysed the extent and nature of indigenisation in each of these areas.</p>

The study covered four types of informants:

1. The Catholics and the Hindus engaged in day-to-day religious practices in the selected villages.
2. The Catholics and the Hindus in the selected pilgrim centers.
3. The Catholics residing in the Ashram and the visitors to the Ashram.
4. The Catholic clergy and lay religious leaders.

The first category of informants constituted the core of the universe in the study. The chart given above was devised mainly for this category of informants. The researcher covered all the events mentioned in the first column. By adopting observation (participatory in some occasions, e.g., village liturgical celebrations, pilgrimage and ashram) technique, the researcher noted down the details relating to various aspects of the rituals mentioned in the second column. Since the meanings of the ways in which the rituals have been organised are not always self-evident, the researcher adopted the interview method to ascertain the meanings from some of the participants in the rituals. The informants were selected across different age-groups in both the genders.

Following the symbolic constructions identified in the way rituals are organised in the communities and the deconstruction of the same by the people gathered in the interviews, the researcher analysed the rationalisations offered by the people in terms of what is right and what is not right. The researcher sought to identify the frame of reference against which their notions of right (the Dos) and wrong (Don'ts) are constructed. The similarities and dissimilarities noticed in the way the rituals are externally organised were recorded.

The following instruments guided the interviews with different actors in the process of indigenisation.

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Identify the number of times an indigenous element occurs/belief held in a particular ceremony in the church, in the church complex and in the domestic circle. Focus on life cycle rituals, agricultural rituals, house construction rituals, auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, sickness, evil and exorcism.

Interview people and priests (1) How do they view these indigenous elements – Christian or non-Christian. If non-Christian, why have they retained or allowed? If Christian, in what way they are different from the Church-prescribed rituals and how are they different from the Hindus who carry out similar rituals? What is the underlying principle in retaining them? (2) Does the Church allow these practices? If 'yes,' why? If 'no,' why not?

To the pilgrims to Vailankanni

Persons preparing for the pilgrimage were interviewed

Preparatory stage:

How long the persons prepare for the pilgrimage and the kind of fast undertaken.

Starting the journey:

Where and what are the rituals followed.

Journey to Vailankanni:

The daily programme till they reach the pilgrimage sites (the route, the halting place, food, rest and bath).

Reaching the pilgrimage site and the rituals followed there.

Return journey and the way the individuals are reintegrated into the community.

1. Who organises the pilgrimage and how?
2. Who is the leader and how is the person referred?
3. What are the rules laid down by the leader?
4. What is the dress code? What is the significance of it?
5. Who undertake the pilgrimage, the purpose and the number of years?
6. What are the individual vows carried out in the pilgrimage site and their purpose?
7. Do you experience a special social status as a pilgrim?

Saccidananda Ashram

Observe the life in the ashram – Prayer, silence, dress and food habits, living quarters, etc.

Find out:

1. What is an ashram? On what basis is this called an Indian Catholic Ashram?
2. What kind of spirituality the ashram follows and the methods of prayer?
3. Monastery and ashram, *guru* and abbot, *guru* and priest - are they same? If not, how are they different?
4. Who is the *guru*, how does he assume this position?
5. In what way Saccidananda Ashram is different from Benedictine monastery?
6. What are the main objectives of the ashram?
7. Has the Ashram evolved an indigenous formative programme for the seekers? How does a person become the member of the Ashram?
8. Today there is no *guru*, how does the Ashram function?

Questions to the Knowledgeable Priests in the Parishes

1. Could you describe how you handle indigenous practices in your parish situation?
2. Have you been instrumental in introducing any indigenous practice?
 - Where and what kind of practices?
 - What was the response of the people/priests?
 - Did you succeed when you had opposition?
 - How did you succeed? OR
 - Did you oppose anything of indigenous practices of people?
 - To what extent and how did you succeed in your opposition?
3. What is your assessment of the approach and attitude of your bishop and the diocese as a whole regarding the indigenous practices found among the people?
4. What is your opinion regarding sanctification of social customs followed on occasions like puberty celebration?
5. What is your role as a priest during the village patron's feast? Are there any indigenous practices that need to be dropped? Why?
6. What is your role as a religious functionary when the Catholics go on a pilgrimage to the Catholic shrines?
7. Could you specify some indigenous practice around which tension/conflict arose between the priests and the Catholics?
8. Do you notice any indigenous practice being dropped? What are the causes for it?
9. Do you find any new practices (be it ritual or doctrine) within the Church in recent past which could be considered overtly Western?
10. Do you find any new practices of indigenisation emerging in the recent past?

Questions to the Theologians in the Church

1. What role have the theologians played in the area of indigenisation of Roman Catholicism?
2. Could you describe how indigenisation occurred in Tamil Nadu? Is it that indigenisation occurred on its own and you as theologians, affirmed it by theologising on it or you provided a theology of indigenisation first and others evolved certain practice out of it?
3. There are many indigenous practices that people develop spontaneously. Could you say that the theologians theologise on them and help them to be integrating with the practices of the Church?
4. Which are the indigenous practices the Church is able to negotiate and not able to negotiate?
5. What are the difficulties/obstacles faced by the Church and the people vis-a-vis indigenisation?

On Ashrams

1. How far is ashram relevant to the Catholic community in India?
2. In what way do you find ashram as a part of the indigenisation process? Or in the process of indigenisation of the Church what role can the ashram play?

Indigenous Art

1. How far is the indigenous art being incorporated in the architecture of the places of worship and in the designing of the statues? And how important are they in the process of the Church becoming indigenous?
2. The indigenous art has not been welcomed by the priests at the parish level says Jyoti Sahi who has spent his lifetime in dialoguing with the Hindu and the Christian art. What is the reason for this?

NBCLC

1. The Indian Rite Mass is too Brahminical, say some of the priests and laity. How would you respond to this?
2. The Indian Rite Mass is celebrated in the NBCLC, some of the religious houses on special occasions and in the ashram. What do you think are the reason for not being celebrated in the parishes?
3. What are the responses from persons visiting the NBCLC with regard to the Indian Rite Mass?
4. What are your suggestions in the area of indigenous liturgy, music, art and architecture?

APPENDIX 3.1
AN ORDER OF THE MASS FOR INDIA

INTRODUCTORY RITE

Reception and Welcome:

As the people congregate *bhajans* or devotional hymns are sung. This serves as a remote preparation for the Eucharist. The participants leave their footwear outside the place of worship as a mark of reverence. They place near the entrance the offering, which they have brought with them. They squat on the floor covered with mat or carpet. Those who cannot sit on the floor may sit on chairs or benches. After the *bhajan* singings, the commentator reads the following commentary:

Today we celebrate the mystery of our salvation in the reality of our life and history through an authentic form of worship which springs from our religious and cultural traditions of centuries. Let us consecrate to the author of all good the deepest yearnings of our countrymen, the highest religious values of our ancestors, the whole heritage of the past, the present, achievements of our nation and our plans for future progress.

The celebrant, as a sign of Jesus Christ, is now welcomed on behalf of the community. *arati* is done with flowers (*pushparati*). The celebrant then welcomes the community with *pushparati*.

The celebrant sits down on the floor behind a *peeta* (low altar) and greets the community singing the following *sloka*:

<i>Om purnam adah purnam idam</i>	: Fullness there, fullness here
<i>Purnat purnam udacyate</i>	: from fullness fullness proceeds
<i>Purnasya purnam adaya</i>	: once fullness has proceeded from fullness
<i>Purnam evavashishyate</i>	: fullness remains
<i>Om shanti, shanti, shanti!</i>	: peace, peace, peace

Celebrant introduces the Liturgy of the day - (The lightening of the lamp may be done at this time)

Reconciliation rites

Now we begin a process of five-fold reconciliation or purification, in order to experience harmony with the universe, fellowship with our sisters and brothers and peace within ourselves with God.

Long form :

Jala Shuddhī : The vessel of water is placed on the *peeta*. The celebrant blesses the water with *unbhavamudra*, singing or saying:

<i>Om shuddhaya namah</i>	: praise to the most holy
<i>Om pavanaya namah</i>	: praise to the sanctifier
<i>Om vishva jivanaya namah</i>	: praise to the life-giver

Sthala Shuddi : The priest sprinkles water on the four sides of the altar.

<i>Om jagat rakshankaya namah</i>	: praise to the savior of the world
<i>Om jagannivasays namah</i>	: praise to the one who indwells the entire universe
<i>Om jagannadays namah</i>	: praise to the Lord who rules over the Universe
<i>Om sarvato mukhaya namah</i>	: praise to him whose face is turned towards all things.

Dehatma Shuddi : The celebrant washes his hands and sips the water thrice saying:
As our body is made clean by this water may our soul be made spotless by your grace.

janaloka Shuddi : The priest sprinkles the congregation with water singing or saying:

<i>Om vishveshvaraya namah</i>	: praise to the Lord of all things
<i>Om mekteshvaraya namah</i>	: praise to the Lord of Salvation
<i>Om uttaneshtvarayan namah</i>	: praise to the Lord who is our resurrection
<i>Om amrteshvaraya namah</i>	: praise to the Lord who imparts immortality

Purana Shuddi : The celebrant invites all to review their life. The people keep their hand crossed on their chest in silent recognition of their sinfulness.

Celebrant:

<i>Om Sarvasya brahatasharanaya namah</i>	: Praise to the great refuge of all
<i>Om krpakaraya namah</i>	: Praise to the most merciful
<i>Om nitya shuddhaya namha</i>	: Praise to him who is eternal purity
<i>Om nirmalaya namah</i>	: Praise to the spotless one
<i>Om pavanaya namah</i>	: Praise to the destroyer of sin
<i>Om shishta rakshakaya namah</i>	: Praise to the protector of the justice
<i>Om anjana nasakarine nama</i>	: Praise to the remover of Ignorance

Shorter form of purification :

After blessing the water, the celebrant sprinkles the place of worship and the people with the water. He then invites all to review their life for a short period of silence. The rest of the Eucharist as follows.

As a sign of contrition for our sins and yearning for forgiveness and peace we shall make a deep bow or *panchangapranam*.

While they are in this posture, the celebrant pronounces the following or another formula of absolution, holding the right hand and *abhayamudra* and the left on his chest: May the God of peace who brought from the dead our Lord Jesus, The great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal convener. Equip you with everything good, that you may do his will, working in you that which is pleasing in his sight, thought Jesus Christ to whom be glory for ever and ever.

Congregation : Amen.

All arise. The celebrant himself does *panchangapranam*.

When the celebrant rises, all exchange the sign of peace.

Lighting of the Lamp:

By reconciling us God removes all forms of darkness from us. We shall now experience the presence of the Lord who is light as the lamp is lit.

The celebrant lights the oil lamp while the congregation sings one of the following invocations to Christ the light:

<i>Divya jyotishe namah</i>	- Praise to the divine light
<i>Satya jyotishe namah</i>	- Praise to the true light
<i>Jivana jyotishe namah</i>	- Praise to the light of life
<i>Jagat jyotishe namah</i>	- Praise to the light of the world
<i>Atma jyotishe namah</i>	- Praise to the light of the self
<i>Antar jyotishe namah</i>	- Praise to the inner light.

The celebrant says:

Eternal light, shining beyond the heavens, Radiant sun illumining all regions, above, below and across, True light enlightening every man coming into the world, Dispel the darkness of our hearts. And enlighten us with the splendor of your glory.

Congregation: Your word is a lamp for our steps. A light on our path.

By stretching our hands towards the lamp and taking the flame to our hand to our forehead we shall accept Jesus Christ as the Light of our life.

The celebrant touches the flame with the tips of his fingers and then brings his fingers to his eyes. If the congregation is large all turn towards the light and perform the same gesture. In a small congregation the flame is taken around by the celebrant or a minister and each one does as the celebrant.

II LITURGY OF THE WORD

Homage to the Bible is paid to the Bible with double *arati* of flowers and incense (*pushpa, dhupa*) accompanied by an invocation.

As the celebrant incenses the Bible he sings the following chant:

Satyam jnanam anantam brahma- Brahman is truth, knowledge infinite.

The priest blesses the readers with *malamudra*, using the following formula: May he who quickens the intellect and kindles the heart strengthen you with his power to proclaim the saving word.

As a sign of our openness to receive God's word into our life, we shall keep our palms open and turned upwards resting on our knees.

The Old Testament is read. This is followed by;

<i>Asato ma sadgamaya</i>	: From the unreal lead me to the real
<i>Tamaso ma Jyotirgamaya</i>	: From the darkness lead me to light
<i>Mrityorma amritam gamaya</i>	: From death lead me immortality
<i>Om shanti shanti shanti -</i>	: peace, peace, peace

The reading of the Apostle. This is followed by a silent meditation. The people remain with one palm on the other, resting on the lap, both palms turned upwards.

The Gospel is read by the main celebrant. At the end of the reading he venerates the book. There follows the homily. The preacher (celebrant) holds the hands in *upadesha mudra*. The congregation remains seated with palms turned down on the knees.

(This is followed by a silent reflection).

III LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

Offerings are now brought in procession. In this procession the whole universe and all mankind are brought back to God through Jesus Christ. This is best symbolised by the offering of eight flowers, the eight directions of the universe from which the Lord gathers his people.

Preparation of the gifts:

The celebrant receives the gifts and places them on the *peeta*. Along with the offerings of bread and wine, other gifts, especially for the poor, may be brought.

The celebrant invites the community to formulate their intentions and concludes the prayers of the faithful.

The celebrant makes the *arati* with the tray of eight flowers – saying Father, send down your spirit upon these offering. The symbols of our self-gift to you. May we be pleasing in your sight. May we be united with the sacrifice of your Son.

The celebrant places the eight flowers on the tray in the eight directions saying each time one of the following attributes of Jesus Christ.

<i>Om Shri Yesu bhagavate namah</i>	: Jesus, the Lord
<i>Om shri deva putraya namah</i>	: Jesus, the son of God
<i>Om shri mariya putraya namah</i>	: Jesus, the son of Mary
<i>Om shri deva naraya namah</i>	: Jesus, the God-man
<i>Om shri sat purushaya namah</i>	: Jesus the true person
<i>Om shri Yesu abhiskitaya namah</i>	: Jesus, the anointed one
<i>Om shri sad guruve namah</i>	: Jesus, the true teacher
<i>Om shri taraneshaya namah</i>	: Jesus, the saviour.

Making the *dhuparati* over the offerings, the celebrant continues:

Celebrant: To whom with you and the holy spirit be honour and glory now and forever.

Congregation: Amen.

Eucharistic prayer:

During the Doxology: triple *arati* of flowers, incense and fire.

After the Doxology:

As a sign of our identification with Jesus Christ in his total self-oblation to His father and to his brother and sisters, let us now either bow deeply or do *panchangapranam* while the celebrant makes prostration.

COMMUNION RITE

The celebrant says a few words of introduction to the communion rite.

Then the celebrant says the *prasada mantra*:

This is the Bread that came down from Heaven; whoever eats this bread will never die, This is the cup of immortal nectar; Whoever drink the cup will live for ever. For the Lord said, He will have eternal life. And I will raise him up on the last day! Do you believe this?

Congregation: Yes, Lord, we believe, for you have the words of eternal life.

Then the celebrant invites the people to recite the 'Lord's prayer'. All recite with folded hands the Our Father ending with the doxology:

The celebrant breaks the bread for communion saying:

The cup of blessing which we bless is the communion with the blood of Christ. The bread which we break is the communion with the body of Christ.

Congregation: Because there is one Bread, we who are many are one Body, or we all partake of the one Bread.

Then the celebrant invites the congregation to partake of the sacred meal saying:
My feast is ready, say the Lord; Brothers and Sisters, let us joyfully share in His Banquet.
The tray and the cup are taken around by ministers for communion.
The congregation sings a *namjap*. This leads to complete silence.

Manasa Puja: (Interior Offering)

We shall offer our *manasa puja* to Christ who dwells in our hearts. To his humanity by flower, to his Divinity by light and to his Resurrection by ointment.

The celebrant places the flowers on the *peeta* saying:

Celebrant: Hail Jesus fully man.

Congregation: Accept, Lord, the homage of our hearts.

The celebrant places the light on the *peeta* saying:

Celebrant: Hail, Jesus fully God.

Congregation: Accept, Lord our adoration and thanksgiving.

The celebrant places the vessels of ointment on the *peeta* saying:

Celebrant: Hail Jesus, our Resurrection and our life.

Congregation: Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Celebrant says the following or another prayer after communion:

Lord, the light of your glory has flooded our eyes. Your face is bent from above and your eyes have looked down on our eyes. We feel our limbs are made glorious by your touch, and now we humbly beg one final glance from your eyes and our lives will ever be your own. This we ask though the one who has made you known to us today in the breaking of the bread, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Congregation: Amen.

The celebrant addresses a few parting words, inspiring the community with a sense of mission.

Then he imparts the solemn blessing with *abhayamudra* of the right hand and *varamudra* of the left-hand saying:

-May God, beyond all name and form, share with you His glory beyond measure, And make you enter into the mystery of His presence.

Congregation: Amen.

-May God who became manifest in Jesus Christ enlightens your minds, strengthen your wills and fill your hearts with love.

Congregation: Amen.

-May God, the indweller in the cave of your hearts, animate you with His life.

Congregation: Amen.

-And may the grave of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all.

Congregation: Amen.

Concluding - a *bhajan* is sung.

Source: National Biblical Catechetical and Liturgical Center, Bangalore.

APPENDIX 3.2

maata pulampal (Lamentation of Mary)**Lamentation of Mary on the streets of Jerusalem**

aiyaio inta rattam enatu tirukumaaranuTaya tiru rattamoo
en utirattil eTutta inta utiramtaanoo
en puttiran ezuntariliyatam inta vazitaanoo
jeevanuTan ponaro / maRRa upaataikalaal jeevan aTaMki poocoo
inta vicayam keTka yaatoruvaraiyum kaanamaaTTenoo
centaamarai poo ponRa tekamuTaitaana enatu cutanee
kanTatu unTaanaal coluMkal
jerucaleem stirikalee enatu tirukumaaranei ivvaliyaaai kanTatu unTaanaal colluMkal
pavaLam niram ponRa paakiyamuLLa enatu tirukumaaranei kanTatu unTaanaal colluMkal.

(On the streets of Jerusalem Mary laments for her son Jesus. Alas! Is it not my son's holy blood? Oh! Is not this blood taken from my womb! Is it the way in which my son was paraded. Is he alive! Or has he breathed his last due to the sufferings that came upon him. Oh! Will I not find some one who can tell me about my son. You the women of Jerusalem, let me know if you had seen my son, whose body is as soft as lotus. Let me know if you had seen my holy son, who dazzling like a pearl).

ciluvai aTiyil (Under The Cross Mary Laments Her Son)

en makanee, en makanee iniya naayaka kanmaniee
enRumilla ratinamee iniya naayaka kanmaniyee
ivaatai tumpam aTaintiir maTintiir.

naan ini eMkee paarpeen naan pizaikka
vakaiyum illai (aio)
naanilattor utavi illai naTu-naTauMka vaazpaayutee.

panpuTanee naan painRa paiMkiliee aanimutee
paralooka pokisamee (aio)
paavikal vinceeruvataRkko paaTupaTTu uirai izantiir.

ittuyram kaanpatarkko eezai ummai payinReTutu
irukarattinaal anaittu (aio)
iravu pakalaai Tirinte innilattai miiTpaayo.

(My dear Son, You have caused me pain. Where will I go, how will I live, I have no help. Heavenly one, you spent your life to save this world and gave your life. Is it for this I gave birth to you?).

APPENDIX 6.1**TRANSLATION OF THE PRAYERS IN ST. ANTHONY'S *yantra*** (see Picture 6.2).

(Starting from top right to the left).

St. Antony, protect me from all the evil spirits that attack me from the east. In the name of Jesus command them to move away from me.

St. Santiago, win over all the evil powers that came upon me from the South. By the power of the holy cross let the devils move away from me.

St. Michael, the angel of God, fight against all those evil powers that come upon me from the West. Here I have installed the holy cross. By the power of Jesus get away from me. Jesus, the son of David, win over the evil. Jesus, hide thy servant in your heart and redeem me from this world.

Holy Lady of health protect me from all those evil powers. By the power of the holy cross let the evil be banished.

(In the center) Oh most sacred heart of Jesus: Fight against all the evil spirits that try to attack me from all directions and protect me from their hands. Save me Jesus.

(On the corners of the sheet) Holy cross of Jesus, protect me from all dangers.

APPENDIX 6.2

PRAYERS TO ST. ANTHONY

punita Anthoniyaar cattru caMkaara maalai (Prayers to St. Anthony)

*maavaluru caitu mantiramoti vaciyarintu
kavuMkoTutu uruve capitu karuviye enmael
eevaliruntu anupiya peyei eTupoTitu
kaavilurunteny yaanTarulvaai cantanthonN raajatavamuniye.*

*piTipiTi enpatum tuTuyaana peykaLai piTitu nanTraai
eTieTi yaaka eTite enellai viTTu
aTiaTiyaaaka aTite pacace akaTriyapaal
kuTikuTiyaaaka yezuntaruLvaay cantanthonN raajatavamuniye.*

*kaaLiruci kaaTeri cakik karupanyum
kuuLiyruLi kuutaatum pon vayiravanei
aaLimukaton akaro veeracamunTi naalvareium
kozipol muritervaay cantanthonN raajatavamuniye.*

*vaalikku vaali vaLi cantinom vanMumatil
koLLiku munTan kazkuku raajaaLi karupanyum
cuulakapaali nerintiTTa vaali cuTramuni
vaali tiTukiTa varuvaai cantanthonN raajatavamuniye.*

*mupati mukoTi tevaati teva citamparatei
naarpatu tenaayiran rishimuni vaaliyum
kapaalamuTaitu kazutai muritu kacaTarkaLai
appaal muriterivaay cantanthonN raajatavamuniye.*

(In the name of St. Anthony, who has the power over the devils, let me chant the *caMkaara maalai* having sought the protection of our Lord Jesus.

Oh! St. Anthony, the king of sages, protect me and break the waist of the devil that was driven to possess me through the malicious prayers, blood shedding and curses intended on me.

St. Anthony, the king of all sages. Tightly catch hold of the evil spirits and drive them thoroughly and come to live and fill over my living premises.

St. Anthony, the king of all sages, come to over power the evil, who takes to heed seeing you out of fear.

St. Anthony, the king of all sages break of the neck of the great sage who rules the world of spirits).

arc ciluvai maalai (Prayer to the Holy Cross)

*muntiyutitta aatiparan mucuTare muTitaritu
tantai pirappu taniyaka ninTra carvecu parane
untan valuvaai aacirvaatam oMki niTru*

cintayilenni aTayaaLa mutirai tiyaanipatei kaappu.

*necittu ummai tiyaanam ceitu tinamum menmatil
vaacitta vaacakattai manaucaaTanam caitu
paacitunatu aacirupaatam enakku tantaruLi
aacittu unatu aTaiyaalam muttirai aayitaame.*

*ciirkonTa pitacutan ispirittu caantaruL
perkonTa arcisTa ciluvaiye naan pecuvatarckku
kaarkonTa meiparan aranita kuur aaNi muunTru
nerkonTa cesuvin aTayaal mutiraiyitaame.*

*nemikonTa kaaLikaalstri puutapicaacuNinam muTukki
paamikkaninRa vaLkaataan viranpaakai kuuLiturkai
poomikku venRa poota picacu pilli kuraLikaLai
aamikki ninRa kanMkalelaam aTippen ciluvai marataanikonTe.*

*puuta picaacukaL putapilli cuuniyam vaippporu natiniray
kaattu miruntu nimitatil koLLum kaRaTTu muniye
naatan pirampu caaTai maRakkaanaaTi ninRayentan
naatane pola aTipeen culuvai marataanikonTe.*

(To mark myself with the sign of your cross oh Lord, who is the only son of the eternal God and light of God, your cross is the only powerful protection.

By these nails of the cross which pierced the Lord, I will strike the evil spirits, of all sorts of witchcraft and evil influence.

By the power of the nails of the cross I caste the malicious monsters Bathra kali, to unquenchable fire and away with them.

By these nails of the cross, oh devil present in the boundaries of the village, be gone).

APPENDIX 8.1

neertikkaTan (MAKING A VOW)

Purpose	<i>neertikkaTan</i>	Procedure for fulfilling the vows
Health	<i>maaviLakku</i>	Placing lamps made from rice flour and oil on the affected part of the person's body (see Photo 8.1.1).
General wellbeing	<i>moTTai poTutal</i>	Tonsuring is done outside the shrine. ¹
To be married	<i>manjaL kayirukaTTutal</i>	Tie a saffron thread along with a piece of turmeric to a branch of a tree or to the flag mast in the church (see Photo 8.1.2).
Praying for a child	Offer silver cradle or <i>toTTilkaTTutal</i> .	Tie a cradle to the tree in the shrine.
Being blessed with a child	<i>karumputoTTil</i> , offering candle and <i>tennampiLLai</i>	The wedding sari suspended from three sticks of sugarcane, and the child is carried in it around the shrine (see Photo 8.1.3). ² Coconut sprout is also offered (see Photo 8.1.4).
Offering and thanksgiving	<i>cenTu poTutal</i>	In the broken halves of the coconut pour oil and burn. The coconut is then cut into pieces and distributed among people.
-do-	Offering Jasmin buds, salt, and pepper.	These are votive offerings to eliminate itch, warts and the like appearing on the body. ³
Penance	<i>uRunTu kumpiTutal</i> (Rolling on the ground)	Roll around the church or flag mast three times.
-do-	Moving on the knees	Walk on the knees from the sea to the shrine.
-do-	<i>kumpiTu caranam</i>	In wet clothes go round the Church three times prostrating.
-do-	<i>maTipiccai vaaMkutal</i>	Begging from house to house and offering the alms received in the shrine or giving them to the beggars near the shrine.
Thanksgiving	<i>kooTTai</i>	Paddy covered with straw is offered as a thanksgiving for the good harvest. After offering they take a handful of paddy to add it at the time of sowing (see photo 8.1.5).
For all needs	<i>muri elututal or muricciITTu</i>	A written bond or agreement: About forty years back the Catholics wrote their request on a dry palm leaf, specifying at the same time the kind of obligation one intends to discharge as soon as their requests are granted. Today they write this on a sheet of paper. Once the vow is fulfilled the sheet is torn off.

Health	<i>vittu vilakkara iam caital</i>	When a person falls sick frequently, he/she is sold to the church. Then he/she is bought back with a price, and the money goes to the church. This is explained in Chap. 6 as with reference to the cattle.
General wellbeing	<i>iTaikkam</i>	A flag is taken around the church street.
-do-	Circumumbulating	Going round the church three times praying for their intentions.
-do-	<i>attikkilaMkaai</i>	Votive offering of steamed rice balls, which the Hindus call <i>motakam</i> , for boils and pimples and other similar ailments.
-do-	<i>kaacci uttatal</i>	An animal is sacrificed, cooked and served.
Deliverance from evil	Locks on the railings of the flag mast.	As a sign of locking the devil (<i>peey-picaacu</i>) at Vailankanni.
For every need	<i>kaacukaTTivaittal</i>	Tie a piece of white cloth with a coin and offer at the shrine.
Offering and Thanksgiving	<i>poMkaliTutal</i>	Cook sweet-rice in front of the shrine and serve to persons who come to the shrine.
-do-	<i>veenTutal taTTu</i>	A tray of coconut, incense, candle, garland handed at the church, part of which is received back.
Wellbeing	<i>melukuvatti eTuttuvaittal</i>	Offering candles for various favours received or praying for an intention.

Endnotes

1. The underlying belief is expressed as '*uira koTutta aanTavanukku maeirai koTupatu*' (I give my hair to the god who gave me life).
2. When carried out in the village church, especially during the *uur tiruvizaa*, this is done accompanied by a Parayar drummer. To the drummer an amount of Rs.10 or more is paid according to the individual's capacity. After the fulfilment of the vow the sugar cane is distributed to children and people gathered in the church.
3. During the field visits it was observed that the Hindus make solemn promises to offer salt and pepper in Mariamman temple at Thiruvettryur. Similar offerings are made at a Muslim Dharga in Nagore.



8.1.1 *maaviLakku*



8.1.2 Saffron Thread and Cradle Tied to the Tree

APPENDIX 9.1
PRAYERS IN SACCIDANANDA ASHRAM
Morning Prayer

Om – Bhur- Bhuva – Svaha, Tat savitur Varenyam, Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi, Dhiyo yo nah prachodaya.

(Salutation to the world which is present in the earth heavens, and that which is beyond: Let us meditate on the glorious splendour of the divine giver of life. May he illuminate our meditation).

Archana (Litany to Jesus)

<i>Om bhuta krute namah</i>	Salutation to the Creator
<i>Om bhuta bhrute namah</i>	Supporter of beings
<i>Om bhavaya namah</i>	The Source of all
<i>Om bhutatmane namah</i>	The self of beings
<i>Om bhutabbavanaya namah</i>	Giver of existence to being
<i>Om paramatmane namah</i>	The supreme self
<i>Om avyayaya namah</i>	Undecaying
<i>Om purushaya namah</i>	Supreme person
<i>Om sakshine namah</i>	Witness
<i>Om purushottamaya namah</i>	Most high person
<i>Om ishvaraya namah</i>	Lord
<i>Om svayam bhuve namah</i>	Self originating one
<i>Om pavitraya namah</i>	Pure

Archana (Litany to Mary)

<i>Om Shri Matre namah</i>	Holy Mother
<i>Shri Maharajnyai</i>	Holy queen
<i>Bhadramurtyai</i>	Lover of benevolence
<i>Bbhadrapriyayai</i>	Personification of benevolence
<i>Bhaktasaubhagya dayinyai</i>	Bestower of prosperity on devotees
<i>Bhaktapriyayai</i>	Lover of devotees
<i>Bhaktigamyayai</i>	Won by devotion
<i>Bhayapahayai</i>	Dispeller of fear
<i>Sharmadayinyai</i>	Giver of happiness
<i>Sadhvyai</i>	Of unequalled virtue
<i>Niranjanayai</i>	Unstained
<i>Nirlepayai</i>	Free from impurity
<i>Nirmalayai</i>	Free from blemish
<i>Nishkamayai</i>	Free from desire
<i>Nityashuddhayai</i>	Ever pure
<i>Nityabuddhayai</i>	Ever wakeful
<i>Nirmadayai</i>	Free from pride
<i>Madanashinyai</i>	Destroyer of pride
<i>Nirmamayai</i>	Free from thought to self
<i>Nishpapyai</i>	Free from sin
<i>Papanashinyai</i>	Destroyer of sin
<i>Dukhahantryai</i>	Taking away sorrow

APPENDIX 9.2

GLORY TO SACCIDANANDA (HOLY TRINITY)

Vande Saccidanandam - Vande
Bhogi lanchita yogivanchita charamapadam
Parama purana paratparam purna akhanda paravaram
Trisangashuddhama sangabuddham durvedam.
Pitru savitru paramesham ajam bhavavrksa bijam abijam
Akhila karanam ikshna srijana govindam vande
Anahata shabdamanantam – Prasuta Purusa sumahantam
Pitru svarupa chinmayarupa – sumukundam vande
Sacchidor melana saranam – shubha shvasitananda ghanam
Pavana javana vanivadana jivanadam- vande.

I bow to Him who is being, consciousness and Bliss.
 I bow to Him whom worldly minds loathe, whom pure minds yearn for, the Supreme Abode.
 He is the Supreme, the Ancient of days, the transcendent,
 Indivisible Plenitude, Immanent yet above all things,
 Three-fold relation, pure, unrelated knowledge beyond knowledge.
 The Father, Sun, Supreme lord, unborn,
 The seedless Seed of the tree of becoming,
 The Cause of all, Creator; Providence, Lord of the universe.
 The infinite and perfect Word, the Supreme Person begotten,
 Sharing in the Father's nature, Conscious by essence, Giver of true Salvation.
 He who proceeds from Being and Consciousness,
 Replete with the breath of perfect bliss,
 The Purifier, the swift, the revealer of the Word, the Life-giver (Boyd 1969:70).

Source: Saccidananda Ashram, Thannirpalli, Karur District.

APPENDIX 10.1

THE *kooyilpiLLai*

The *kooyilpiLLai* is a Church approved religious functionary. He plays a significant role in the process of indigenisation, which we have referred to in various chapters covering different spheres of religious experience of the Catholics. Since his status and role did not form a specific focus of study in any of these chapters, we present here a brief introduction to his office.

Every village with a church has a Church-approved religious functionary called the catechist. In Tamil Nadu the catechist is known as *kooyilpiLLai* (literally, the child of the church) or *upateeciaar* (spiritual instructor). From the point of view of the people the office of the *kooyilpiLLai* is a prestigious one and it ranks next only to that of the priest. The *kooyilpiLLai* assists the priest, and in the absence of the priest, he assumes charge of the religious life of the people.

The early missionaries appointed them to take care of the faith of the people in the absence of the priest (see Chap. 2). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Jesuits in the Madura Mission appointed *kooyilpiLLai* in all the villages where the Catholics lived. In keeping with the tradition of de Nobili's adaptation method the missionaries appointed *kooyilpiLLai* from the upper castes and thus established a pattern of spiritual leadership. The *kooyilpiLLai* appointed by the missionaries were Vellalars, who though were non-Brahmins belonged to the Hindu priestly lineage and served in the temples as priests. The Vellalars also had the title of Pillaimar or Pillai, an honorific title (see Bayly 1992:411-14). From our informants we gather that the Vellalars were chosen to the role of *kooyilpiLLai* because they were learned and were able to read prayers in the church. The land-owning community of Udayars were ready to pay and have the services of a *kooyilpiLLai* rather than assuming that role themselves. However, the Catholic Nadars and Parayars were formerly excluded from the services of the Vellalar *kooyilpiLLai* and they had their own *kooyilpiLLai* chosen from their caste.

Not surprisingly, it was found that the *kooyilpiLLais* in the villages under study belong to the numerically dominant castes of the respective villages. Thus, for the Nadar community in Keelauchani, a Nadar serves as a *kooyilpiLLai*, and for the Parayar Catholics in Valghiramanickam, a Parayar serves as a *kooyilpiLLai*. This is because the high caste Vellalars refuse to serve as *kooyilpiLLai* for the Nadars (low caste) and Parayars (the 'untouchable' caste). Even in villages where the Vellalars serve as *kooyilpiLLai*, they never enter the living quarters of the Nadars and Parayars and refused cooked food from them.

Today, in some villages this tradition of the Vellalars being the *kooyilpiLLais* is undergoing change. Many educated Vellalars prefer to take up jobs other than that of the *kooyilpiLLai* and members of other caste communities are also accepted as *kooyilpiLLai*. For instance, an Udayar is a *kooyilpiLLai* for the Udayar community in Sengudi. At the same the tradition is continued in a few other villages, for example, in Andavoorani an Udayar Catholic village, the Vellalar continues to function as a *kooyilpiLLai*.

The *kooyilpiLLai* does not generally receive any specialised training to merit his role and, as a rule, he does not belong to any Catholic organisation. In all our villages the sons succeeded their fathers as *kooyilpiLLai* and learned from their fathers the role of a *kooyilpiLLai*. Thus, the office of the *kooyilpiLLai* is more an inherited tradition than one achieved through formal training.

As a Church-approved religious functionary, the *kooyilpiLLai* has a definite routine role to play: ringing the church bell every morning and evening, and reciting morning and evening prayers in the church, including the rosary and other prayers to the saints. He also recites special

prayers during drought for rain, at the funeral rituals, in activities related to agriculture, and for the sick and the dying. He officiates at the Mass. After the Sunday Mass, he reads out announcements related to worship and religious activities, and the marriage banns, if any. He is responsible for handling sacred objects, arranging for the Mass and keeping the altar and tabernacle clean.

The *kooyilpiLLai* is economically supported by the villagers in the following manner. Each family contributes a fixed amount annually to the Church from which the *kooyilpiLLai* is paid. He gets a share of the paddy that is offered in the church before sowing (*naaLvital eTuttal*), after the harvest, during Lent and on All souls Day. He gets a share of the *poMkal* cooked in the church compound. He gets a share in the money offered for the Mass on any day and on All Souls Day (*motcavilakku kaasu*). The *kooyilpiLLai* prays for the dead and in turn is served food by the concerned family on the day the person died and thus making it a weekly practice called *kizamaiccooRu*.

From our observation we find the *kooyilpiLLai* to be more integrated into the life of the village community than the priests. Since they are men of the village and are familiar with the various ritual practices carried out by the Catholics of the village, they are always invited to officiate at the native rituals.

The *kooyilpiLLai* is present at both the Church-prescribed rituals (official) and the native rituals (non-official) carried out by the Catholics. One of the strategies employed by the Catholics to get religious recognition to the native socio-cultural rituals is by soliciting the services of *kooyilpiLLai* who occupies a middle ground in the ritual hierarchy. He is lower than the parish priest and therefore is eligible to perform non-official rituals on occasions that do not fall within the prescribed sacred category.

Thus, he officiates in all the native rituals carried out by the Catholics as a community, e.g., blessing the plough, cattle, the seeds, praying for the dead in the family, etc. The native rituals are legitimately Christianised when the *kooyilpiLLai* officiates at the rituals. He plays a significant role in helping the Catholics deal with the dichotomy between the official and non-official rituals. His presence helps the Catholics carry on the ritual without doubting the validity of the ritual or whether the ritual is Christian or not. When the *kooyilpiLLai* officiates any ritual he makes use of Christian prayers and symbols that make the rituals Christian. Thus, from the point of view of indigenisation of Catholicism the *kooyilpiLLai* is a crucial agency.

GLOSSARY

This glossary provides the English translation of Tamil words and phrases that are used in this thesis. The Tamil words are transliterated into English by using the system of transliteration developed by the Mozi Trust (Chennai), and they are arranged in the English alphabetical order

aacanti	- a Catholic funeral cart/career.
aacirvaatam	- blessing.
aalaatti/aaratti	- an honourific greeting made by the waving of lights or a tray with turmeric water.
AaNi	- the month of June-July.
AaTi	- the month of July-August.
aatmaa	- the soul, spirit.
AavaNi	- the month of August-September.
Aippaci	- the month of October-November.
aiyer	- priest, father, superior, king.
akatti	- <i>sesbania grandiflora</i> plant.
alaMkaaram	- decoration.
amman	- goddess.
ammaavaacai	- new moon.
Ampataien	- barber
amplaar	- village headman
akatikiirai	- a green bitter leaf <i>sesbania grandiflora</i> .
arici	- rice.
aruL	- grace, power.
aTTakkapuucai	- the funeral Mass.
aTakkam	- burial.
bhajan	- a repetitive Hindu devotional song.
caami	- lord, the Catholic priest is addressed thus.
cammantakkutikaarar	- affinal relatives.
cani muuLai	- the auspicious north-east corner.
cantanam	- sandalwood paste.
cantippu	- an honourific gift to an important person.
capparam	- a decorated platform on which the statues of the deity or the Christian divinity are carried.
caastaram	- astrology.
caavu	- death.
caTaMku	- a rite.
ciluvai	- cross.
Cittirai	- the month of June-July.
ciikaikaai	- soap-nut powder.
cooRu	- cooked rice.
cumaMkali	- married woman with children and husband
cuulam	- inauspicious direction.

cuTukaaTu	- burning ghat.
guru	- religious teacher, a priest.
iRaivan	- king, god.
jenmapaavam	- original sin.
kalacam	- small ritual vessel.
kallaRai caTaMku	- the final death rite of a Catholic.
kallaRai tiruvizaa	- All Souls Day.
kalyaaNam	- marriage.
kaaNikkai	- offering in the church.
kanni	- virgin.
kaN tirsTi	- the evil eye.
karumaati	- the final death ritual for a Hindu.
kaTavuL	- god.
kaaTu	- forest, the wilderness.
kaappu	- protection
Kaarttikai	- the month of November-December.
kaavi	- ochre-coloured garb
keetam-vicaarittal	- to condole with mourners.
kiLai	- matrilineal exogamous group.
kiraamam	- village.
koLaaRu	-problem
koTieRRam	- flag hoisting.
koTimaram	- flag mast.
kooyil	- temple/church.
kooyilpiLLai	-catechist
kula teyvam	- lineage - or clan-deity.
kulavai-Tutal/vaital	- a shrill cry made by women at important transition points in rituals.
kuMkumam	- vermilion.
kuTumi	- a lock or tuft of hair on the head of a Brahmin.
kuttuviLakku	- a brass lamp.
Maaci	- the month of February-March.
maalai	- a garland.
Maata	- Virgin Mary, Our Lady.
maattu	- cloth provided by washerman for ritual purposes.
mazai	- rain.
manai	- house.
manjal	- turmeric root or paste.
maNTakappaTi	- expense incurred for receiving a deity during a festival
mantiram	- prescribed prayers.
mantiravaati	- a sorcerer.
maTippiccai	- alms received in one's lion-cloth.
meeLam	- a drum.
moccam	- heaven.
moccaviLakku	- payment for the Mass offered for the souls of the dead.

moTTai	- tonsuring
muNi	- demon.
muTakkattaa	- a green weed (<i>Cardiospermum</i>) used for purification and for the removal of harmful influences. Botanical name is.
nalla maranam	- good death.
nampikkai	- belief, trust.
naanastaanam	- baptism.
nalleNNai	- sesame.
narakam	- hell.
neerttikkaTan	- a vow.
nirainaaLi	- a full measure of paddy.
niirmaalai	- bringing water to bathe the corpse.
oolai	- a palm-leaf manuscript.
oppaari	- mourning song
paccai arici	- raw husked rice.
paalum palamum	- 'milk and fruit.'
paaTai	- a funeral bier of the Hindus.
paMkaaLi	- brothers, male parallel relatives, co-heirs to property.
pantal	- a canopy erected for ceremonial occasions.
paNTaaracaami or pandaarasaami	- a non-Brahmin Saiva priest a Jesuit priest, working among the low castes.
paramparai	- hereditary succession proceeding from generation to generation.
parivaTTam	- garment, cloth, robe.
paTTam	- title.
paurNami	- full moon
peey- picaacu	- evil spirit, demons, ghosts.
pilly cuuNiyam	- sorcery.
piracaatam	- food distributed after offering to the deity.
piranTai	- <i>cissus quadrangularis</i> .
poMkal	- ceremonially cooked rice offering.
punita	- pure.
PuraTTaaci	- the month of September-October.
putunaNmai	- the rite of First Holy Communion.
puuca	- acts of religious worship Catholic Mass.
puucaari	- a temple priest.
Tai	- the month of January-February.
taali	- an ornament worn as an emblem of marriage.
tappu	- a round shaped Parayar drum made of calf skin.
tarmam	- a religious gift.
teeipiRaikaalam	- season of decrease.
teer	- temple or church car.
tennampiLLai	- young coconut tree.
teyvam	- god.
tiicaTTi	- fire-pot carried during the funeral procession or for fulfilling vows at temple or church.
tirusTi	- a malevolent influence.

tiiTTu	- impurity.
tuNTu	- a towel.
tiruvizaa	- festival.
toTTil	- cradle.
tooraNa-vaayil	- ornamented gateway surmounted by an arch.
tuumpaa	- bier.
uur	- village.
urumi	- a Parayar drum used specially during the funeral ritual.
Vaikaaci	- the month of May-June.
vaaikarici	- rice offered to the deceased.
vaLarpiRaikaalam	- season of growth.
Vannaan	- washerman
vari	- tax.
veRRilai paakku	- betel leaf and areca nut.
veesTi	- dhoti, man's cloth (a mode of wearing cloth)
vimaanam	- turret of a temple surmounting the cell in which the chief image is placed.
vipuuti	- sacred ash.
viiTu	- house.
yaattirai	- pilgrimage.

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