

## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE DIOCESE OF KOTTAR'S HISTORY

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### ABSTRACT

Christianity had reached India at the very outset of the Christian era, or in the first century A.D. You might be surprised to learn that Christianity originated in India before it spread to England or Western Europe, and that even in Rome, it was despised as a forbidden sect, according to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. Christian missionaries arrived in South India via water about 100 years after the passing of Jesus Christ. They received kind treatment and were allowed to spread the word about their new faith. By taking advantage of the circumstances present in the state, they were able to convert a substantial number of individuals as well as those who lived there as their descendants. The thesis's conclusion summarises Bishop Peter Remigius' contributions to the growth of the educational, socioeconomic, and religious sectors in the dioceses of Kumbakonam and Kottar and also includes a discussion of the findings.

**Keywords:** Christianity, Christian missionaries

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Every village in the Kottar region's Kanniyakumari is renowned for having a Roman Catholic church in addition to other facilities like a post office, rest area (stone ambalam), and a small temple. It suggests that the Catholic religion had a strong presence in this region. The Roman Catholic religion, also known as the Papal Christian religion, was first brought to this region by Thomas. The next group to introduce Christianity to this country was the Portuguese. The habits, manners, and practises of Europe have an impact on almost every aspect of society, but the catholic society in India is particularly influenced by Portuguese, Spanish, and French traditions. Christianity is the second most popular religion in this area after Hinduism. The Kottar diocese is almost territorially contiguous with the civil district of Kanniyakumari on the southernmost tip of the Indian subcontinent, covering an area of approximately 1684 square kilometers, of which about one-fourth is covered by exuberant hills and picturesque forests. The Arabian Sea on the west and the Western Ghats mountains on the east encircle this region. She was with the Indian State of Travancore-Cochin until the significant reorganisation of Indian States in 1956, when she was able to be combined with Tamilnadu.

## 1.1 The Strands of Christianity

The institutional structures and historical contexts of the three branches of Christianity that make up the Indian church serve as markers of distinction. With roots in St. Thomas, one of Jesus Christ's apostles, the first and oldest group consists of churches that adhere to oriental rites. These are referred to as Syrian churches due to the subsequent support they received from the Syrian churches in West Asia. Members of several churches in India self-identify as St. Thomas Christians. The second category consists of churches that were primarily founded in the 16th century by missionaries who were a part of the so-called "patronage system" of the Portuguese kings, which historians also refer to as the Padroado. A 48-kilometer stretch of the Kottar diocese's coastline is dotted with Christian settlements that date back to this Padroado. The third category includes all churches that were started after the seventeenth century by Catholic and Protestant missionaries from the West, and in the case of Catholics, under the influence of the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples, which was founded in Rome in 1622.

## 1.2 Origin of Christianity

Christianity initially arrived in India in the first century A.D., at the very beginning of the Christian period. When referring to the origins of Christianity in India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had said, "You may be shocked to find that it came to India long before it moved to England or Western Europe." At the very beginning of the Christian era, in the first century A.D., Christianity had reached India. "Even at Rome, Christianity was reviled and a prohibited sect." Regarding the origin of Christianity in India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru once said, "You may be surprised to learn that it came to India long before it went to England or Western Europe, and that even in Rome it was despised and a proscribed sect." In the first hundred years or so after Jesus Christ's death, Christian missionaries came by sea to South India. They received kind treatment and were allowed to spread the word about their new faith. They converted a sizable number of people by taking advantage of the state's conditions, and their descendants have continued to live there with varying degrees of success. Most of them continue to practise historic Christian sects that are no longer practised in Europe.

## 2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity are all practised in the Kanyakumari District, as they are throughout the Tamilnadu State. The city of Kollam is home to the first Catholic diocese in India, the Roman Catholic Diocese of Quilon. The diocese, which has a 1,950 km<sup>2</sup> area (753 square miles). It was initially built on August 9, 1329. Quilon (Kollam), the second of the seven churches mentioned above, is said to have been founded by St. Thomas the Apostle near the southern portion of India's west coast. It was allegedly built by Thomas the Apostle in 57 AD and is known as Thiruvithancode Arappally or Thomaiyar Kovil, as named by the then-Chera King Uthiyan Cheralatan. His son Nedum Cheralathan succeeded him in the fourth century. It is situated in the Thiruvithancode neighbourhood of Tamil Nadu, India's Kannyakumari District.

### 2.1 St. Francis Xavier Father and Teacher of Kottar

Xavier was a superb educator who upheld the Jesuit tradition. He didn't spare any time

in establishing a trustworthy system to regularly train his illiterate flock along the coast, which included men, women, and both young and old. In December 1544, he wrote Mansilhas a letter.

After reading this letter, the author humbly implores the reader to "be ready to go to the Christians on the coast of Travancore whom I have already baptised and in each hamlet set up a school for the children with a teacher to train them."

His assertion that it is the duty of the Christian educator to respect the local community, their customs, their clothes, and their cuisine surprised the Portuguese officials and the missionaries. He was of the opinion that a missionary should be conversant in Malabar, which in his writings comprised both Tamil and Malayalam.

When he declined to give Portuguese surnames to the Mukkuvas from Poovar to Pallam whom he had personally baptised, he showed his prophetic insight despite making himself known as a part of the Portuguese machinery in India. The parochial arrangement of having a Kanakapillai and a Melinchi (the bell ringer) in each parish has continued since Xavier and is still in use now. The fact that the Melinchi\*, who is now only a sexton in coastal parish, earlier served as "in charge of the jail" is amusing.

Ample proof that Francis Xavier was a loving father figure to the disadvantaged and uneducated people entrusted to his care can be found in his sermons and other activities. He risked his own life to ensure their physical protection, and in doing so, he gave the Portuguese tyrants who persecuted his Christians a hard time. He even threatened to leave the expedition in an effort to persuade Cosmo de Paiva to stop taking advantage of the fishermen in Tuticorin. He pleaded, like a parent would, for the reduction of Portuguese levies on his Christian subjects. He cracked a well-known joke on the slipper money of the Portuguese monarch. He formed a self-supporting Church, which resulted in 1567–1568 in what Wicki calls "probably a unique situation at that time," when the local population supported the priests in the coastal parishes of the modern dioceses of Tuticorin and Kottar financially.

### **3. AREA AND PERIOD OF THE STUDY**

The Kumbakonam diocese and the Kottar diocese in Kanniyakumari District, which is the most significant micro-region of the south district, are the subjects of the thesis's study of time and place. In the year 52 AD, St. Thomas, one of Jesus Christ's disciples, paid a visit to the area that is now Kanniyakumari. A new chapter in the history of the Christian church in Travancore was nonetheless begun with the arrival of St. Francis Xavier in 1526, who won the hearts of thousands of converts. He led a significant number of Hindus to Christianity. One of the primary Catholic churches in South India is St. Xavier's Church in Kottar. Devasahayam's mortal bones were interred at the St. Francis Xavier Church, which was later transformed in 1930 into the Cathedral of the Diocese of Kottar. The Kottar Diocese held a significant position for Christianity, particularly Roman Catholicism. The diocese of Kottar was established on October 5, 1930. New Kottar Bishop Rev. Lawrence Pereira was installed in office. Between 2007 and 2017, Bishop Peter Remigius, who is the fifth Bishop of Kottar, was installed. Prior to that, from 1990 until 2007, he served as the bishop of Kumbakonam. On June 30, 2007, he was traded to Kottar.

#### 4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to bring to light the following issues and themes.

- ❖ To locate the district of Kanniyakumari's Christian presence.
- ❖ To determine how the Kottar diocese came to be in the Kanniyakumari district.
- ❖ To evaluate the Kottar diocese's bishops and their offerings there and nearby.
- ❖ To highlight Bishop Peter Remigius's initiatives to advance education in and around Kumbakonam and Kottar.
- ❖ To further emphasise Bishop Peter Remigius' contribution to the advancement of Laypeople in Kottar.
- ❖ The Kottar Social Service Society, Perambalur Social Service Society, and Kumbakonam Social Service Society will be discussed.
- ❖ To describe Bishop Peter Remigius's contributions to society and religion, such as his work with Caritas India, the Laymen of the Kumbakonam diocese, the Bishop's little savings programme, the permanent housing programme, the central pool fund, women's day, etc.
- ❖ To outline the contributions made by Bishop Peter Remigius in establishing numerous churches, the Tamilnadu Bishops' Council, World Yoga Day, Prison Ministry India, the Bishops Catholic Conference of India, Prison Ministry Sunday, and other international initiatives, conferences, and programmes.
- ❖ To present the study's results and conclusion.

#### 5. SCOPE AND PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of the present study is to analyse the life and services of Bishop Peter Remigius in the separate dioceses of Kumbakonam and Kottar; particularly his services, educational contribution, socioeconomic contribution, and religious commitment. This project spans the years 1990 to 2017. The study looks at the socioeconomic, religious, and educational contributions made by Bishop Peter Remigius during his time in Kumbakonam and Kottar. In Kumbakonam and Kottar, socio-religious systems that have been in place for a long time have a few distinctive characteristics. The Laymen's and other peoples' social standing has improved thanks to Bishop Peter Remigius' efforts. It aims to close this historical gap by highlighting Bishop Peter Remigius' contributions to religious, social, medical, and educational causes. The study runs from 1990 to 2017, the year of the Most Reverend Peter Remigius' election as Bishop of Kumbakonam and Kottar. The Kottar diocese was established on October 5th, 1930. Bishop Peter Remigius in Kumbakonam and Kottar's future studies on the economic and socio-religious progress are anticipated to benefit from this work's increased arguments and interpretation.

#### 6. HYPOTHESIS

The importance of regional history in helping the reconstruction of the history of a country is hard to overstate. The important fusion of general history includes regional history as a crucial component. It highlights regional, cultural, and social differences that are still present despite the nation's overall cultural and social cohesion. Many eminent scholars

have attempted to write regional works in Tamilnadu as well as in various regions of India. The study "Life and Sketch of Bishop Peter Remigius" aims to trace the introduction of Christianity, the establishment of the Kottar diocese, the appointment of Bishop Peter Remigius to lead it, his early life and services, as well as his socio-religious contributions. The following hypothesis was developed to fulfil the study's goals. Those are:

- ❖ To understand the history of Christianity in the Kottar Diocese.
- ❖ To determine the function of Christian organisations in promoting social justice.
- ❖ To learn how education is doing in Kumbakonam and Kottar under Bishop Peter Remigius.
- ❖ How Bishop Peter Remigius serves the people of Kumbakonam and the Kottar Diocese and to what extent.
- ❖ How much Bishop Peter Remigius contributed to educational advancement?
- ❖ To understand the effects of education and the socio-religious climate under Bishop Peter Remigius and how much it altered society.

## 7. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES OF THE STUDY

The current study makes an effort to explain the life story and contributions of Bishop Peter Remigius (1990–2017) by using an analytical, descriptive, and critical technique to identify the sources of all the information in the thesis. The study's source materials are dispersed across numerous archive repositories in India, Rome, and the catholic nations around the world. The archives of the bishop's residences in Kottar, Quilon, Cochin, Trivandrum, Goa, and Madurai deserve special mention. More information about the study of the Diocese of Kottar can be found at the Tamil Nadu State Archives in Chennai, the Kerala State Archives in Trivandrum, and the National Archives in New Delhi. Inscriptions located throughout the diocese, archival records, council acts and files, papal bulls and edicts, previous oral letters of the Bishops, civil enactments and orders pertaining to ecclesiastical matters, monastic rules, constitutions, liturgies, confessional writings, epistles, diaries, reports, etc. are the main sources. These included written works, printed materials, and CDs.

Both primary and secondary sources were used to create this study. The Hindu College Library in Nagercoil, the Tamil Nadu States Archives in Egmore, the Connemara Public Library in Madras, the Raja Muthia Library in Madras, the Tirunelveli District Library in Tirunelveli, the Kanyakumari District Library in Kanyakumari, the Nagercoil District Library, the Nesamoniational College in Marthandam, the University Library in Trivandrum, the Campus Library in Kariavattom The scholar was able to enlighten and improve the work with new information thanks to the interview with senior clergymen and high officials.'

### 7.1 Kottar under Cochin Diocese

New groups of other Jesuits arrived in our region from Europe in 1545 and 1548 after St. Francis Xavier disappeared from the scene and only made two brief appearances in India before his death in 1552. The diocese of Cochin was established in 1557 as a subdiocese of Goa. Essentially the entire southern peninsula, the east coast up to Burma, and the island of Ceylon were all included in the Sea of Cochin, India's second diocese. From it was born the diocese of Mylapore in 1605. In and around Cochin and the southern shore of the Quilon

region, the Jesuits established themselves. To prepare young people to become catechists and priests for Travancore and the fishing coasts, Father Lancilotto built a centre in Quilon. He served as the Jesuit house's first superior.

The Franciscans and other men of various religious orders worked north of Quilon, while the Jesuits worked south of it, as part of the Cochin Diocese's religious mission there. The relationship between the religious orders was not always cordial, with the Franciscans and others accusing the Jesuits of being partial to the numerous Padroado system norms. Cochin Bishop André de Santa

Maria (1588–1615), a Franciscan herself, fell out of favour with both the Jesuits and the Franciscans. From 1580 to 1640, Portugal was in charge of Spain. Rome sided with Spain after Portugal gained its freedom in 1640 and initially disapproved of the Padroado system's bishop nominations. This led to indiscipline in Portugal and the nascent churches in the East.

Relazione del Bescovatto di Cochino, a report authored and signed by Bshop Andre de Santa Maria OFM on January 4, 1598, states that the Jesuits provided care for the roughly 14,000 Catholics who lived between Quilon and Cape Comorin. The commotions in Portugal and the Cochin ecclesiastical chambers surely disrupted the management of the newly founded parishes in the Church of Kottar. But a significant catastrophe occurred in 1663 when the Dutch defeated the Portuguese, upsetting first the delicate Christian plant that Xavier had treasured in Tuticorin, then taking control of Cochin, expelling the bishop and all the Catholic priests, turning the Catholic cathedral into the company's main warehouse, and ultimately compelling the Latin-rite Christians to join the Dutch army.

The Travancore College had to be relocated from Quilon to Kottar, which is halfway between Muttom and Kadiapattanam. This college at Thope served as the site of both the catechist training centre and the Jesuit provincialate of Malabar. The Bishop of Cochin moved from Cochin to Anjengo, which resulted in the sad Sea of Cochin remaining empty until its suppression by Rome in 1838. (Anjuthengu). On the eve of Cochin's capitulation to the Dutch, according to Schurhammer, there were 17 churches and chapels in the region of the present diocese of Kottar along the coast, and there were about 7500 Catholics residing there.

## 8. CONCLUSION

It would have been wise to impose a plastics ban for the 2009–2010 academic year in all catholic institutions even before the district government of Kanyakumari made its request. Another prized custom of the spiritual father is the annual pastoral visitation of the bishop, which entails lodging at the vicariate headquarters, visiting every parish, and maintaining contact with the priests, nuns, and faithful. Palavilai St. Antony's Church was elevated to the status of a parish on May 14, 2010, bringing the total number of parish residences to 155. His Holiness, Pope Francis, announced that a new diocese with the name Kuzhithurai would be established. The first bishop of the Kottar diocese was Msgr. Jerome Dhas Varuvel S.D.B., a native priest of the diocese. On February 24, 2015, Msgr. Jerome Dhas Varuvel S.D.B. was dedicated. The newly established diocese began its journey toward spiritual growth under the

direction of its new bishop. Following the split, the diocese of Kottar started making plans for its pastoral, social, academic, and economic development. The parishes of Vellamadam, Elankadai, and Erachakulam were consequently established. With its 93 parishes, 217 diocese priests, 33 religious priests, 15 religious brothers and 470 sisters, and 2,62,899 lay believers living in harmony with other Christians in the District of Kanniyakumari, the Diocese of Kottar is currently rejoicing greatly in the Lord..

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