

THE IMPLANTATION OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN INDIA: IDEALS, CHALLENGES, ANSWERS, RESULTS

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Introduction

The phase of implantation, expansion and initial consolidation of Salesian presence in India may be considered to be the period from 1906 to 1951/52, i.e. from the arrival of Salesians until the establishment of the two provinces of the North and the South. This paper proposes to study the ideals that led the Salesians during this period, the challenges they faced, their response to these challenges and the results they attained.

This paper has drawn greatly from the monumental work of Joseph Thekkedath¹ on Indian Salesian history, which is the fruit of much painstaking and meticulous research especially on the unpublished materials in the Salesian Central Archives, the Salesian Provincial Archives of India and in the principal Diocesan/ Archdiocesan archives of India. In preparing this paper, besides this work, other precious little material available in print and the same sources in the Salesian Central Archives utilized by Thekkedath have been consulted.

It is not the intention of this paper to trace the development of Salesian works in India during this period, but in keeping with the theme of the seminar only to capture some of the salient features that reflect the ideals that led them, the challenges they confronted, the answers they devised to surmount the same and the results attained.

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¹ Joseph THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India. From the Beginning up to 1951-52*. 2 vols. Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 2005 [Hereafter THEKKEDATH].

After a bird's eye-view of the expansion of the Salesian presence in India during the nearly first half century, the ideals that lead the early Salesians are exposed. Thereafter the major challenges they faced, along with the answers and outcomes corresponding to each, will be delineated.

1. Don Bosco Comes to India

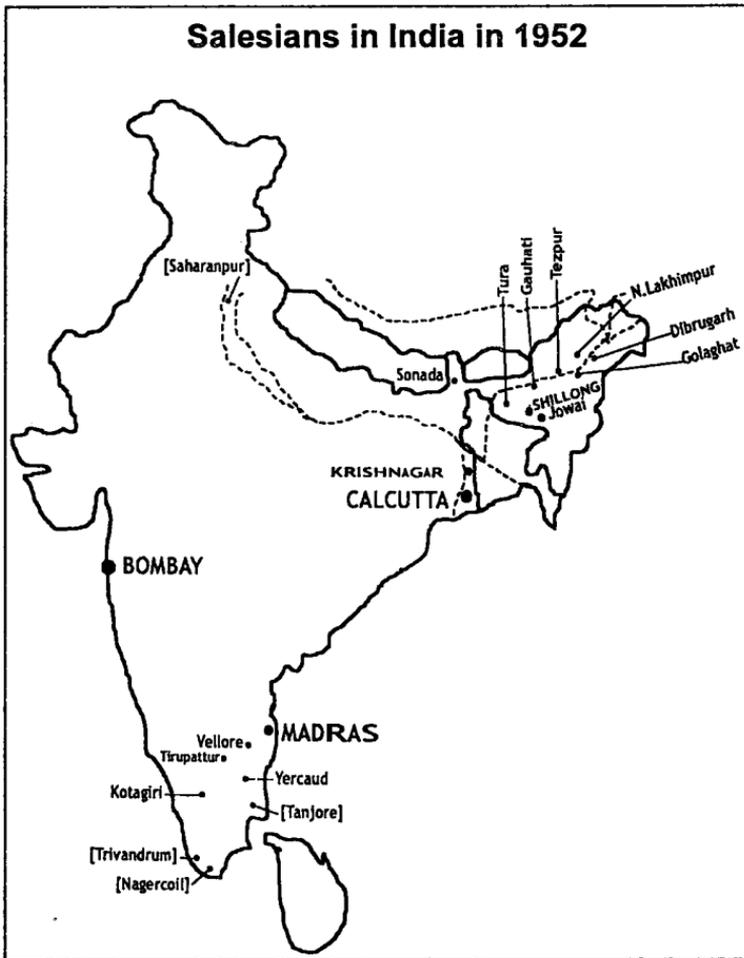
Don Bosco always had before him the dream of sending out missionaries to conquer the various parts of the world for Christ. He was often heard to say, "What a wonderful day that will be when our missionaries will go to evangelize the various regions of America, Australia, India, Egypt and many other lands! I see them already penetrating Africa and Asia and entering China; we shall have a House right in Peking!"²

Though the prospect of an expedition to India in 1877 to take up the Vicariate Apostolic of Mengador (Mangalore) seemed imminent,³ only under Don Rua as Rector Major plans to send Salesians to India materialized. It was at the request of Rt Rev. Antonio de Souza Barroso, the Bishop of the Padroado Diocese of Mylapore and his successor, Msgr. Teotonio Emanuele Ribeiro Vieira de Castro, who could claim a personal rapport with Don Bosco. Salesians landed in Bombay on 5 January 1906 and on the 14th arrived at Tanjore, the field of their apostolate, under the leadership of Fr Giorgio Tomatis.

They took up an orphanage with merely 6 orphans, whose number would however soon rise, and a middle school for boys. In January 1909 San Thome orphanage in Mylapore, Madras, meant for boys of Eurasian descent, was also entrusted to the Salesians. The apostolate at Tanjore expanded with an industrial school with carpentry, weaving and later also a press. A night school was started to

² MB XI 409-410 (Eng edition XI 384).

³ Mathew KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth. History and Relevance of the Early Salesian Presence in India (Tanjore and Mylapore, 1906-1928)*, Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 1989, p. 11-12.



supplement the literary formation of the artisans. The middle school grew to a high school. With the assumption of the Sacred Heart Parish in October 1915, Tanjore became a veritable mission field.⁴

⁴ Cf. Joseph THEKKEDATHU, *St. Francis Xavier's Orphanage and Industrial School at Tanjore, South India (1906-1928)* in Francesco MOTTO (Ed.), *L'Opera Salesiana dal 1880 al 1922. Significatività e portata sociale. Vol. II. Esperienze particolari in Europa, Africa, Asia.* (= Istituto Storico Salesiano – Studi, 17). Roma, LAS 2001, pp. 390-402.

In the meantime, after the expulsion from North East India of the Salvatorians, who were all Germans, on account of the outbreak of World War I, the handful of Jesuit missionaries were unable to keep the mission going. Hence, succumbing to the insistence of the Holy See the Salesian Superiors accepted the mission of Assam. The Salesians reached Shillong on 13 January 1922 under the dynamic leadership of Fr Louis Mathias and gave to the mission a tremendous growth. Before the end of the year Fr Mathias was made the Prefect Apostolic of Assam, and in 1923 appointed the Superior (“Delegate”) of all the Salesians in India.

On 28 May 1926 “The Province of India of St Thomas the Apostle” was canonically erected, and the decision conveyed to the confreres in March 1927, along with the nomination of Msgr. Mathias as the new Provincial.⁵

Msgr. Mathias was always desirous of starting a Salesian house in Calcutta in order to realize as early as possible Don Bosco’s missionary dream of 9 April 1886, in which he had seen his sons working in Calcutta. It would also be of great advantage to the mission and the missionaries of Assam. In 1925 he was able to purchase the Catholic Orphan Press from the Archdiocese through the extreme goodwill of Archbishop Perier of Calcutta.⁶

The year 1928 witnessed several important events in different parts of India.

The orphanage and the mission of Tanjore, the cradle of Salesian work in India, with its institutions and the orphanage of San Thome, Madras, were handed over to the diocese in 1928, as working there had become practically impossible in the absence of the Bishop and under the hostile attitude of the Vicar General and the clergy of Mylapore.⁷ The painful decision to withdraw from there was taken

⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 1360.

⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 214-216.

⁷ Cf. J. THEKKEDATHU, *St. Francis Xavier’s Orphanage...*, pp.405-408.

by the Extraordinary Visitor, Fr Peter Ricaldone, on 1 May 1928.⁸ The Salesians received as compensation the shrine of Our Lady of Bandel in Calcutta.⁹

It was agreed with Archbishop Elie Joseph Morel that once the Salesians left the diocese of Mylapore they would gradually take over the mission of North Arcot, which then belonged to the Archdiocese of Pondicherry.¹⁰ The Salesians of Tanjore reached Vellore, the headquarters of their new mission of North Arcot, on 31 May 1928 led by Fr Mederlet. Within five weeks, however, with the re-organization of the dioceses at the termination of double jurisdiction in the missions by the Bull *Ad maius religionis incrementum* of 3 July 1928, North Arcot passed to the Archdiocese of Madras,¹¹ which was entrusted to the Salesians and as Archbishop was appointed Fr Mederlet, who thus became the first Salesian Bishop in India.¹²

In 1928 the Holy See practically forced the Salesians to take up the Diocese of Krishnagar, even though they pleaded that they had neither personnel nor means to develop it.¹³ The same year the Salesians entered Bombay (Mumbai) with the assumption of an existing Catholic school at Tardeo.¹⁴

⁸ ASC 398 Tanjore: *Relazione della Casa Missione di Tanjore (Sud India) Novembre 1925 - Maggio 1928* of A. Frasson, dated December 1974.

⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 79-80.

¹⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 83.

¹¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 424-425.

¹² M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth...*, p. 71.

¹³ THEKKEDATH, p. 311-313. At certain point in the negotiations there was even the danger that this mission would have to be accepted at the cost of renouncing that of North Arcot: cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 422-423.

¹⁴ Joseph THEKKEDATHU, *The Starting of the First Salesian Work in Bombay and its Consolidation (1928-1950)* in Francesco MOTTO, *Insedimenti e iniziative salesiane dopo Don Bosco. Saggi di storiografia*, Roma, LAS 1996, pp.249-251.

South India was made a Vice-Province in March 1933 with Fr Cinato as the Superior¹⁵, and on 8 February 1934 raised to a Province with Fr Cinato himself as Provincial.¹⁶

Salesian presence in the North East made substantial progress. New missions were started at Dibrugarh, Tezpur and Tura and in 1934 the Holy See raised Shillong to the status of a Diocese with Msgr. Mathias as the first Bishop. At the same time Fr Stephen Ferrando was appointed Bishop of Krishnagar. After the sudden death of Msgr. Mederlet at the end of 1934, Msgr. Mathias was translated to the Archdiocese of Madras as the new Archbishop. With his arrival also the mission of the South acquired remarkable progress. During his thirty years in Madras he proved himself to be one of the most energetic of the Bishops of India – an acknowledged leader, always ready at the forefront to defend the interests of the Church anywhere in India.

2. The Ideals

The ideals which orient our lives or we strive to uphold are often not explicitly articulated. Nevertheless they reveal themselves in our actions, attitudes and approaches. At some instances in our life they are more evident than others. We shall consider a few of these instances to have a glimpse of the ideals cherished by the Salesians in India. The documents – personal correspondence, chronicles, official reports etc. – do highlight some of these elements, always not explicitly expressed, while others can be culled from the overall style of their lives and from particular circumstances.

Among the ideals that guided the Salesians in India we are able to identify the following: (i) Trust in God, (ii) Love for the Heart of Jesus, (iii) Love and devotion to Mary Help of Christians, (iv) Love and loyalty to Don Bosco and the Congregation, (v) Missionary

¹⁵ Even after this, Msgr. Mathias continued to be, at least in theory, the Provincial of the whole of India, and Fr Cinato was to some extent under him.

¹⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 1361-1362.

zeal coupled with a spirit of sacrifice and work, (vi) Love for the poor. These elements did not exist in isolated or mutually exclusive forms, but as parts of a whole, as can be easily understood from the following recommendations which, when visiting the mortal remains of Don Bosco at Valsalice, Fr Mathias gave to the group that was to set out with him for Assam, prior to their missionary journey: 1. always bring honour to their mother the congregation; 2. spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians; 3. persevere in the fulfilment of their vows.¹⁷

2.1. *Trust in God*

Don Bosco was famous for his trust in Divine Providence. He was even accused of bending Divine Providence to his needs. There is a wonderful testimony to the Salesians' trust in God's providence rendered by Archbishop Roberts of Bombay in the religious journal *The Examiner* of 7 Feb 1942, after the completion of the school at Matunga in record time and under adverse conditions:

"I would like to repeat here what I said to several audiences at Matunga, that if the Salesians never did anything else in Bombay, they would still have taught us the lesson most needed by us human beings for whom the trust of children in their Father is the condition of being saved... The new building is a lesson in stone about the miracles possible to those who, like St John Bosco, became like little children... It would be difficult to imagine any condition more unfavourable to Father Maschio than the present ones. The war, difficulties of staffing, trouble with materials, their ever rising cost – all these were treated as just so many challenges to trust in God in proportion to the difficulty. God's answer has been quite astounding."¹⁸

One of the spontaneous expressions of their trust in God was prayer, which the Salesians did not overlook as a solution to the

¹⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 98.

¹⁸ Quoted in J. THEKKEDATHU, *The Starting of the First Salesian Work in Bombay...*, p. 269.

problems. In the example just cited, the great efficiency of the contractor and the large number of workers employed was seconded by the prayers of the boy who conducted a campaign of prayers and visits to the Blessed Sacrament in the months from June to September 1941.¹⁹

Success in the work of evangelization too was recommended to the power of prayers. About 300 baptisms realized in a particular village in 1932 under peculiar circumstances were attributed by Msgr. Mederlet to the efficacy of the prayers of Benedictine nuns in a convent in Belgium.²⁰

2.2. *Love for the Heart of Jesus*

The essence and centre of the Salesian spirit is pastoral charity, of which the model and source is the very Heart of Christ.²¹ The Salesians in India had a great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, to keep alive in them the same pastoral charity that blazed in Don Bosco. Fr Carreño made his novices to fall in love with the Heart of Jesus when he was the novice master and helped them to give themselves completely to Him.²² When he took up the direction of the Province of South India in 1943, in the very first meeting of the Provincial Council it was decided to consecrate the Province to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, so that He might protect and guide it. The consecration was officially done at Tirupattur in 1943 on the feast of the Sacred Heart in a solemn ceremony along with other important functions like the blessing of the new church and consecration of the altar, priestly ordinations and inauguration of the aspirantate. Even years later, it was the general conviction that the extraordinary growth

¹⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 291-292.

²⁰ Cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 446.

²¹ Cf. SDB Const. 10,11.

²² THEKKEDATH, p. 1375.

thereafter of the Southern Province was the result of this consecration to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.²³

2.3. *Devotion to Mary Help of Christians*

The early Salesians in India were very zealous in trying to make Mary Help of Christians known and loved. Within a short time of their arrival in Tanjore the devotion to the Help of Christians began to gain ground and several graces were reported to have been obtained through her motherly intercession.²⁴

As already mentioned, one of the recommendations given by Fr Louis Mathias to the first group of missionaries to Assam was to spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Their joy at seeing the statue of Mary Help of Christians in the church when they reached Shillong, the solemn celebration of her feast on 24 May 1922, the entrustment of themselves and the mission to her that evening, their enthusiastic decision in January 1923 to celebrate the 24th of every month in her honour, all go to show their filial devotion to her and their commitment to spreading it.

In the South, a special effort was made by Fr Carreño to spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians, in particular, after the strenna of the Rector Major for 1948, which was to “increase in ourselves and to spread everywhere the devotion to Mary Help of Christians”. Thanks to his efforts, no less than 43 bishops of South India sent their petition to the Holy See for the extension of the feast of Mary Help of Christians to the universal church. Very successful Marian congresses and exhibitions were held in six different places in the Province. More than 100,000 pictures were printed for circulation.²⁵

²³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1376.

²⁴ M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth...*, p. 87-88.

²⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 1378.

2.4. *Love and Attachment to Don Bosco and the Congregation*

To love Don Bosco, make him known, follow his educational system, strive for his educative goals were their priorities, and bringing honour to his name was what was uppermost in the thoughts and plans of the Salesians in India. In November 1930 a monthly, "Don Bosco in India", was started for the purpose of making Don Bosco and the Salesian work known to a wider public.²⁶ "Don Bosco's Madonna" from Bombay and another magazine in Hindi were published with the aim of spreading devotion to Mary Help of Christians and making Don Bosco known.²⁷

When Msgr. Mathias was transferred from Assam to Madras as its Archbishop, though it meant a great sacrifice for him to leave the field of apostolate to which he had dedicated himself so long, he accepted the transfer in obedience. The memorable words he uttered on this occasion were expression of his love and attachment to Don Bosco: "My ambition is to make Don Bosco known and loved. I would like to flood India with Don Bosco. This filial and ardent desire which almost devours me, makes me daring, strong and courageous, [...]"²⁸

Don Bosco was aware of the importance of making himself and especially his work for boys known, in order to garner help from various quarters. The Salesians in India too did not hesitate to follow suit. When they reached Bombay and took up an already existing school, they soon changed the school's name to "Don Bosco High School".²⁹ At great financial sacrifice a brass band was started, which soon became famous and was invited to different places to play on important occasions. Right from the beginning the band was thought of as a good means of publicity.³⁰

²⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 158.

²⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 186, 286.

²⁸ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 455.

²⁹ J. THEKKEDATHU, *The Starting of the First Salesian Work in Bombay...*, pp. 252-253.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 254.

During the novena for the feast of Don Bosco in 1940, some special effort was made by the Salesians in Bombay to make Don Bosco better known and loved by the boys. The reading in the church after Holy Mass and in the refectory, the good night talks and sermons during the novena service were all on Don Bosco.³¹

To commemorate the centenary of the priestly ordination of Don Bosco in 1941 a big programme was organized at Vellore with a view to instilling into the hearts of the people the dignity of the priesthood and encouraging priestly vocations, making Don Bosco and his catechetical work in the Oratories known, and promoting the efficient teaching of catechism. A solemn triduum with sermons on the priesthood, a catechetical competition and an exhibition were the highlights.³²

Love for Don Bosco found expression also on the operative level through their commitment to the application of his educational system. The Salesian staff of Poonamallee³³ seminary applied the educational system of Don Bosco successfully in the formation of the seminarians.³⁴

Also the confreres working with youth showed the same zeal in educating in Don Bosco's spirit. At Nagercoil the 'good night' talks were used to transmit to the boys the Salesian ideals. In the very first 'good night' Fr Gatti, the rector, exhorted the boys to put up with inconveniences, be dutiful and avoid sin. The second was on the family spirit, in particular familiarity with the superiors, and the third on devotion to Mary Help of Christians.³⁵

When the school of Tardeo, Bombay, was taken up, besides financial insecurity the Salesians had to face also indiscipline and

³¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 288.

³² THEKKEDATH, p. 515

³³ Poonamallee seminary was started by Msgr. Mathias in Madras for the formation of the diocesan clergy and was entrusted to the Salesians for running it.

³⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 992.

³⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 1054-1055.

laziness to which the boys had become accustomed. Nevertheless, in compliance with the system of Don Bosco, they did away with the stick in the school.³⁶

Faithful to Don Bosco's educational ideals, the Salesians strove to form good Christians and honest citizens. Great importance was given to religious education and the training of the boys. At Don Bosco, Liluah, Calcutta, the final results and promotions were based on the marks obtained during the entire year and no prizes were awarded if good marks were not scored in catechism. As a result of the good religious formation, several boys from the school opted to join the aspirantate.³⁷ No less attention was paid to forming the boys to become good and respectful citizens. Under the caption "Good citizenship in Don Bosco's High School", Bombay, a well known journal, *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, of 13 September 1942 wrote: "Courtesy, a regard for others as a guiding principle in life, and idealism have their appeal to youth, and these qualities are being fostered and admirably exploited by the priests who run this grand institution".³⁸

Though far from other confreres in a distant part of the globe, attachment to the Congregation and union with the Superiors in Turin was a mark of the Salesian missionaries in India. Fr Tomatis, who led the first group to Tanjore, wrote to Fr Albera: "The word of the Superior General is always a great comfort to those who are far away, lost among the Indian pagodas."³⁹ The love and grief manifested at the death of the then Rector Major Fr Albera by the first batch about to leave to Shillong through their participation in the vigil near the body and in the funeral, and later on the expressions of filial love and loyalty to the newly elected Rector Major, Fr Rinaldi, are ample proofs. At the first baptisms in Shillong on 24 December 1922 the

³⁶ J. THEKKEDATHU, *The Starting of the First Salesian Work in Bombay...*, p. 253.

³⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 252-254.

³⁸ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 295.

³⁹ ASC 389 Tanjore: *Letter Tomatis to Albera*, Mylapore 15 November 1916.

boys were given names of the members of the General Council and a girl that of the Mother General of the FMAs.⁴⁰

Love and attachment to the Superiors and to the Centre of the congregation were evident in the letters that Fr Carreño sent to Turin immediately after the war, when it became possible once again to get in touch with the Superiors. The same filial attachment and a sense of gratitude to them on the part of the Province were shown in the desire he expressed immediately after the end of the war in Europe to help the Superiors even financially.⁴¹

This same love and unity was also seen in the case of the local superior. All the confreres of the North felt like a closely knit family, united with Fr Mathias, their leader. This continued to be the case for many years.⁴²

2.5. *Missionary Zeal*

It was their missionary zeal that inspired and motivated the Salesian missionaries to leave their homeland, near and dear ones and set out for a totally unknown land, people and customs, desirous “to work much in India for the propagation of the faith”, as Fr Carpené wrote to Fr Albera.⁴³ For this reason the early Salesians at Tanjore eagerly looked forward to taking up the parish in order to do direct evangelization.

In the act of entrustment the first group of Salesians made of themselves and the mission of Assam to Mary Help of Christians at Shillong on 24 May 1922 the missionary intent of the early Salesians in India is quite evident: “to work with all our strength and with all our soul for the conversion of the peoples of these lands and for the propagation of your cult and to make you known, praised and loved together with the fruit of your virginal womb, Jesus...”⁴⁴

⁴⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 100.

⁴¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1377.

⁴² THEKKEDATH, p. 100.

⁴³ M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth...*, p. 83.

⁴⁴ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 99.

One of the most important reasons of the quick progress in the mission was the zealous and sacrificing work of the missionaries. They did not spare themselves, but toured the territory frequently.⁴⁵ We are told in the chronicles of the Mission of Assam that the missionaries went there “with their hearts full of enthusiasm and with a strong desire to work”⁴⁶.

In the mission of North Arcot the missionaries worked with great zeal and good will. They worked in conditions that were really hard and their zealous and charitable work filled Fr Pianazzi, the Provincial, with admiration. In North Arcot there did not exist the consolations of Assam, but the spirit of the missionaries was not inferior.⁴⁷

2.6. *Predilection for the Poor*

The history of the implantation of Salesian works in India is a saga of interventions on behalf of the poor. The several orphanages that were accepted or started in different parts of India were an expression of love for the poor boys – poor economically and socially in the first place. The first institution in India (Tanjore) was an orphanage; so also the second one at Mylapore. In Assam too they opened the St. Antony’s orphanage. Practically everywhere they went the Salesians had an orphanage to look after the poor boys. Just a few months after reaching Goa the Salesians began to accept poor orphans and thus began the orphanage which created great enthusiasm among the people who realized that the Salesians meant what they said.⁴⁸ The many technical schools started at different places were primarily to give the poor boys a chance to come up in life by learning a trade.

⁴⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 101.

⁴⁶ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 101.

⁴⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 879.

⁴⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 724.

Love for the poor people also urged them to initiate various interventions for the social and economic wellbeing of the people. In every mission center there were several social works to help the Christians. The Assam Mission had five crèches with 225 children, three orphanages which cared for 308 boys and 468 girls, two houses for old people and nine dispensaries under the supervision of the sisters. Various cooperative banks were started in order to save the simple people from the hands of unscrupulous money-lenders, by lending money, rice, etc. The Christians were also helped before tribunals.⁴⁹

In the Tura mission, the Salesians went to the aid of the people especially during the terrible famine of 1943, by distributing rice, medicines etc.⁵⁰ When Fr Anthony Alessi worked in the mission of Tezpur, it was the help given them against the oppression of the *Zamindars* and the *Marwaris* that attracted the poor immigrants from Chotanagpur.⁵¹

With funds gathered from his native country, Bishop Morrow of Krishnagar had a plan to provide elementary education and religious instruction to all the boys and girls of the mission. More than 1000 boys and girls were maintained by the diocese in the boardings of the Salesians and the Sisters of Charity. Bishop Morrow made energetic efforts to alleviate the misery of the people of Krishnagar during the disastrous Bengal famine of 1943-44 and also later.⁵²

3. Challenges, Answers, Results

The XVIII century ended disastrously for the Catholic missions in India. The numerous wars and political upheavals of that century led to the destruction of its structures and properties and the dispersion of its members in some parts of the country. The expulsion of the

⁴⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1098.

⁵⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 1350.

⁵¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1300, 1383.

⁵² THEKKEDATH, p. 337-338, 1389-1390.

Jesuits from Portugal and its colonies in 1759 and the suppression of their Society by the Pope in 1773 deprived India of the majority of its most active missionaries. The French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars prevented the arrival of other missionaries to take their place. The position was made worse by the inability of Portugal, which still stubbornly stuck to its patronal (*padroado*) rights over the whole of India, to fill even the four existing Sees, much less establish new ones.⁵³

Within this larger context we shall see some of the challenges faced by the Salesians in India, of which the lack of personnel and insufficient finance were the two major ones. This is the appraisal also of Thekkedath in the concluding chapter of his monumental work.⁵⁴

3.1. *Lack of Personnel*

The only visitation of India by a Salesian Provincial between 1905 and 1924 was carried out by Fr Cogliolo, the Provincial of Portugal⁵⁵ in the period between the end of 1909 and the beginning of 1910. After visiting the houses of Tanjore and Mylapore he felt that if the Salesians were to remain honorably in India the communities needed to be consistent with regard to the number of members. He promised to do the needful, but could not on account of the Portuguese revolution of 1910. The situation of the Salesians in India at that time was quite difficult on account of their small number. There were altogether only four Salesians – two at Tanjore and two at Mylapore. The Bishop was ready to give the parish, which they needed in order to give the Salesian community some missionary activity and not merely the management of a small orphanage and technical school. But the

⁵³ THEKKEDATH, p. 6.

⁵⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1368; Cf. also p. 110-111.

⁵⁵ At that time the two houses were attached to the Portuguese Province, on account of the *padroado* connection. By November 1911 the Indian Salesian houses were made part of the Roman Province.

personnel was not arriving. One of the confreres, Fr Balestra, got so discouraged on account of this that he decided to leave for Italy.⁵⁶

The situation of the personnel in India in 1929 – year of Don Bosco's beatification – was so precarious that Msgr. Mathias was undecided whether he should go to Italy at all for the General Chapter leaving the confreres in such dire straits.⁵⁷ Though Vicar Apostolic and Provincial, often he had also to assume the rectorship of houses, as for instance of St Antony's Industrial School and Orphanage in 1928 when it was separated from the school.⁵⁸

When Msgr. Mederlet took over as the Archbishop of Madras, the most serious problem which he confronted was the lack of sufficient priests for the needs of the Archdiocese. Many priests who worked there earlier were going to work in other dioceses.⁵⁹ Even Mgr Mathias who was in the North decried the shortage of personnel in Madras and wrote to the Rector Major in 1930, urging him to send priests to the Archdiocese:

“We are cutting a very poor figure in Madras, where, after accepting one of the most important Archdioceses of India, we are not putting in personnel and all the neighbouring Bishops are withdrawing their subjects. There are parishes without parish priests. As soon as the schools close, please choose at once and send personnel. Otherwise we are going to have regrets.”⁶⁰

The scarcity of priests was so real that Msgr. Mederlet himself acted as parish priest of Polur in North Arcot for some months from July 1930.⁶¹

⁵⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 44-46.

⁵⁷ Archimede PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell'Assam. La storia di una missione*, Leumann (Torino), LDC 1983, p.128.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.122,128.

⁵⁹ Cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 430.

⁶⁰ ASC B7290108 *Letter Mathias-Rinaldi*, Shillong, 19.3.30.

⁶¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 435-436.

The shortage of personnel was an enduring problem. Fr Pianazzi, after taking over as the Provincial of the South, presenting his report to the Superiors in August 1952 highlighted that the most serious difficulty in the mission was the shortage of personnel.⁶²

One of the repeated complaints of Bishop Ferrando to the Superiors in Turin was that there were too few missionaries in Assam to cope with the immense amount of work. He wrote to Fr Ricaldone, the Rector Major, at the end of June 1936 that at Dibrugarh which had 20,000 Catholics, there were only three priests, of whom one could not tour. At Tezpur there were only two priests for 12,000 Catholics.⁶³

3.1.1 Answers

The Salesians in India devised various ways to find the needed personnel.

Appeal to the Superiors: Obviously, the first solution was to turn to the Superiors in Turin. The responses to the appeals for fresh hands were varied. Msgr. Mathias with his inimitable ways was more successful than some others. Msgr. Mathias wrote and got others to write to the Superiors in Turin.

Starting a novitiate: Msgr. Mathias envisaged a plan which would eventually solve the problem of personnel to a large extent. He proposed to bring in trained aspirants from Europe, who would begin their novitiate in India along with aspirants recruited from India itself. The mixing and living together of Indian and European candidates right from the novitiate would be of help to both groups. They would learn to understand, appreciate and love each other, and put up with each other's limitations. Young Europeans would be able to adapt themselves more easily to the climatic, social and cultural conditions

⁶² THEKKEDATH, p. 885.

⁶³ ASC A8910214 *Letter Ferrando-Ricaldone*, Shillong, 30.6.36.

of the mission field and learn the local languages, history, customs and manners with greater facility.⁶⁴

A minor seminary in Madras: After the existing seminary of the Archdiocese passed on to the newly created diocese of Nellore, the minor seminary of Madras, named after the then reigning Pontiff Pius XI, was started on 17 June 1929. The seminarians consisted of those doing high school or studying Latin for two years after their high school prior to going to the major seminary. Later, in 1931, Don Bosco Apostolic School of Vellore was started for those seminarians who were doing their middle school.⁶⁵

A novitiate in the South: In his report sent to the “Superior Chapter” (General Council) in May 1932 Msgr. Mathias, the Provincial of India, strongly recommended starting a novitiate also in the South because the North was too far, the climate very different, and the languages even more so.⁶⁶

Formation of the local clergy: The first and primary undertaking of Archbishop Mathias was the establishment of a major seminary for the training of the clergy. In his first pastoral letter on 19 September 1935 he floated the idea and started a campaign of propaganda.⁶⁷

Promoting indigenous vocations to Salesian life: the crisis in personnel following World War II and the internment of Italian and German Salesians made the Southern Province think of taking the bold step of cultivating indigenous vocations, although until then it had been very cautious. After getting to know the Syrian Catholics of Kerala the Province increased enormously the number of aspirants. They had been Catholics for more than 15 centuries and the families

⁶⁴ A. PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell'Assam*, p.77; [Luigi MATHIAS], *Quarant'anni di missione in India. Memorie di Sua Eccellenza Monsignor Luigi Mathias*. Vol. I. *In Assam 1921-1935*, Torino-Leumann, LDC 1965, pp. 103-105.

⁶⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 434.

⁶⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 445.

⁶⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 458.

were well known for their solid piety and austere morality. Ecclesiastical vocations abounded among them.⁶⁸

Besides the senior aspirants (post SSLC) who were at Tirupattur from 1943, Fr Carreño decided to recruit young high school boys. The first group of these boys from Travancore arrived in 1945.⁶⁹ In a couple of years the number of aspirants went up to about 200.⁷⁰

School of the Salesian Coadjutor. Fr Carreño had very much at heart the quality formation of the future coadjutors. In his first circular of 1948 he wrote about the starting of a professional school exclusively intended for future coadjutors at Tirupattur. He told the province:

“We must cultivate the vocation of our would-be coadjutors with as much zeal and care as we are devoting to the training of our young aspirants to the priesthood ... [to] be able to send to all the corners of South India the type of Salesians needed for the moment – men full of zeal and imbued with the Salesian spirit, trained in the different crafts, possessing a firm, moral and intellectual background, capable of teaching catechism and manning oratories.”⁷¹

Although he was told by the Rector Major not to open any new house for three years, he was allowed to have the school for coadjutors temporarily at Tirupattur.⁷² It was started in 1948 with five trades – weaving and tailoring, carpentry, mechanics, art section and printing.⁷³

Involvement of catechists: The shortage of Salesians was to a great degree made up by the catechists, who played a vital role in

⁶⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 810.

⁶⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 912.

⁷⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 922.

⁷¹ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 817.

⁷² THEKKEDATH, p. 817.

⁷³ THEKKEDATH, p. 919-921.

the work of evangelization.⁷⁴ Their importance can be gathered from what Fr Pianazzi wrote to Fr Zaggiotti:

“Without catechists the missionaries cannot instruct the Christians who are baptized when they are still very ignorant. The priests visit the villages only 3 or 4 times a year. Generally they reach the evening and leave the following morning. So it is the catechists who have to instruct [the cristians].”⁷⁵

Even if some of the catechists were illiterate or nearly so, they were often men of such faith and piety that the example of their lives made up for their lack of instruction.⁷⁶

In order to have a sufficient number of trained catechists, a temporary school for catechists was opened by Fr Alessi at Tezpur.⁷⁷ Fr Alessi also appointed catechist-inspectors who would supervise the work of catechists in ten or twelve villages or tea gardens and report to the missionaries.⁷⁸ The Tezpur mission, adjudged to be one of the best in 1937 by Fr Candela, the Extraordinary Visitor, could boast of a small army of 104 catechists and 11 catechist-inspectors.⁷⁹

In-service refresher courses were offered to the catechists. A school of catechists started at Jessore (Krishnagar diocese) in 1937 went on till 1941. The programme consisted of a two-year course in catechism, the gospels, apologetics, languages (Bengali & English), comparative religion and mathematics.⁸⁰

Some innovative projects: To tide over the scarcity of specialized personnel, Fr Carreño came out with some novel ideas, which were clearly ahead of their times, and hence frowned upon by the Superiors.

⁷⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 190.

⁷⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 1125.

⁷⁶ A. PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell'Assam*, pp.102-103.

⁷⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 192-193.

⁷⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 195, 1383.

⁷⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1300.

⁸⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 330.

- a) Introduction of lay volunteers: He envisaged bringing to India professionally qualified persons as “volunteers”, who would dedicate some years of their life to mission work. In fact Fr Carreño had asked Fr Anderson, an English Salesian who returned to England after being in India, to advertise in the Catholic papers for Catholic engineers, printers etc. to serve three years in the missions on a “bread and paradise” basis.⁸¹
- b) Technical training for clerical candidates: Another proposal of Fr Carreño was to offer some regular technical training to clerical aspirants in South India before sending them to the novitiate. His reasons were: (i) difficulty of getting coadjutors, (ii) the type of priest produced by the seminaries tended to be inactive and concentrated on himself, (iii) there were so many requests for Salesian technical schools that even if the Province had all the coadjutors from Cumiana and Rebaudengo, they would not suffice, (iv) a technical ability would increase the prestige of the Salesian priest and help him to find ways of helping his poor Christians and would help to preserve chastity by keeping him busy, (v) if the communists gained power in India, they would not want the priest, but would welcome the technician.⁸²

Getting entry permits: When it became difficult to obtain entry permits for Salesians to come from Europe to India, and since there weren't as many confreres to send to Goa⁸³ as was needed, it was resolved in 1949 that the confreres from Europe should first go to Goa, where missionaries could easily enter. They could help there for some time and in the meantime try to get entry permits to India.⁸⁴

⁸¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 844.

⁸² THEKKEDATH, p. 844-845.

⁸³ Even after the Independence of India from the British, Goa continued to be a Portuguese colony.

⁸⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 733.

3.1.2 Results

The idea of Mgr Mathias to start a novitiate in Shillong with trained aspirants from Europe and those recruited from India itself, met with the approval of Fr Rinaldi. From the first group of 8 novices from Europe who reached Shillong on 22 December 1923, there blossomed several very important figures in the history of Salesian India, among them Orestes Marengo (the first Bishop of Dibrugarh and later of Tezpur) and Eligius Cinato (the first Provincial of South India). The group from Europe was joined by four novices from South India.⁸⁵

The proposal to start a novitiate for the South too was accepted by the Superiors. In fact, Fr Ricaldone in his letter of 25 Aug 1931 to Msgr. Mederlet had proposed the formation of personnel *in loco* also for the South. He offered to send a group of novices from Italy every three years.⁸⁶ The novitiate was started at Tirupattur in December 1933 with ten novices and Fr Carreño as novice master. Six of the novices came from Europe.⁸⁷

For starting the major seminary in Madras, a large building at Poonamallee with 25 acres of land was purchased from the Administrator of Mylapore Diocese. The seminary was solemnly inaugurated on 8 September 1936 with 21 students.⁸⁸

The urge for having more aspirants at times ended in choosing those of poor quality.⁸⁹ This notwithstanding, the bold venture of Fr Carreño of bringing young aspirants from Kerala turned out to be a great success.⁹⁰ Fr M. Alves who spent some months in India wrote to Fr Ricaldone,

⁸⁵ A. PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell'Assam*, pp.77-78; [L. MATHIAS], *Quarant'Anni...*, pp.121-123.

⁸⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 441.

⁸⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 520-521.

⁸⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 458.

⁸⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1008-1009.

⁹⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 1368-1369

“I think that we will be able to draw from them [the aspirants of Tirupattur] a strong and splendid generation of new Salesians who will change the face of India from the vocational point of view. It is a holy revolution, a great triumph brought about by our dear Fr Carreño, wonderful soul, totally Don Bosco’s man ...”⁹¹

The success of this venture forced some, especially in the North, who were initially critical and even derisive of this undertaking, not only to change their stance but even adopt the same method.⁹²

At the end of the three year ban on opening of new houses Fr Carreño wanted to shift the School of the Salesian Coadjutor from Tirupattur where it had been started temporarily to some place in Madras. Though Archbishop Mathias offered land at Madhavaram on the outskirts of the city, he preferred “Lu Ville”, about a mile from Basin Bridge, as it presented several advantages over the former. However, due to the opposition of Msgr. Mathias, the Superiors declined to approve the plan. The controversy over Madavaram or “Lu Ville” turned out to be a serious blow to the project itself, and the aspirants were finally shifted to Basin Bridge along with other students.⁹³

The project of introducing lay volunteers to help in the missions did not find favour with the Superiors, as they considered it unwise since it would introduce externs to the communities and the volunteers generally don’t render the service that is expected of them.⁹⁴

As for the technical training of clerical candidates, the superiors turned down the project for two reasons: (i) Tradition did not allow the introduction of an important innovation in a systematic and universal form. (ii) The reaction of the coadjutors. When superiors introduced

⁹¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 821-822.

⁹² THEKKEDATH, p. 918-919, 1184-1185.

⁹³ THEKKEDATH, p. 846-854, 1378.

⁹⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 844.

Fr Zola from Goa at Colle Don Bosco as a voluntary printer, there was almost a rebellion among the coadjutors there.⁹⁵

We know that these ideas floated by Fr Carreño and disapproved by the Superiors are now universally accepted and very much in vogue.

3.2. *Insufficient Finance*

Lack of funds to carry out the mission work was a serious challenge the Salesians were faced with. Speaking of the progress made by the Assam mission during the first ten years, the Catholic weekly of Calcutta, *The Herald* of 1 May 1932, highlighted this problem:

“But for economic difficulties over which they [Salesians] had no control, their progress would have been even greater. A number of schemes have had to be laid by until the arrival of better times and enterprises which have been begun have not received that attention they would have received in a more prosperous decade.”⁹⁶

When the effects of the “*great depression*” that started in the USA in 1929 began to be felt in Assam in 1931, in spite of the programme of expansion he had set in motion by opening new mission stations, Msgr. Mathias warned his confreres not to make expenses which were not essential. They were not to begin any new construction or appoint new teachers or catechists without formal permission.⁹⁷

Almost all the mission stations and institutions were faced with financial difficulties. The finances of the St Antony’s School, Shillong, were in a bad shape. One of the lay teachers was asked to look for a job elsewhere as the school was unable to pay him.⁹⁸ The two

⁹⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 844-845.

⁹⁶ Quoted in THEKKEDATH, p. 161.

⁹⁷ A. PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell’Assam*, p.134.

⁹⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 170.

missionaries of Tezpur mission lived in extreme poverty. They were too poor even to buy a bicycle and hence they had to walk distances of 15 to 20 miles under the scorching tropical sun.⁹⁹

In the Diocese of Krishnagar the catechists and teachers, not receiving their pay and not having other resources, were forced to leave, with serious consequences to the apostolate.¹⁰⁰ The subsidy of the Propaganda was sufficient just for three months of the year, and no money was coming from Italy because of the sanctions imposed on it by the League of Nations after Italy had attacked Ethiopia.¹⁰¹

In the mission of North Arcot too there was very great difficulty for money.¹⁰² The Province did not have any house which brought in an income, except that of Bombay. The houses were all formation houses or of charity.¹⁰³ Towards the end of 1935 or the beginning of 1936 Fr Cinato who was still in Italy addressed a memorandum to Fr Ricaldone, describing the nearly desperate condition of the finances of the Province. He begged Fr Ricaldone to do everything possible to help him out.¹⁰⁴

The financial situation of the novitiate house of Tirupattur was very bad at times. There was grinding poverty, not to say misery, though much good spirit and holy cheerfulness existed in compensation. On various occasions there was not a pie and the house owed money even to the grocer, dhoby and milkman.¹⁰⁵

The financial condition of the studentate of Sonada was very bad in the first years. Fr Pianazzi, the rector, wrote to the Rector Major in February 1939 that the clerics were united and happy and

⁹⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 192.

¹⁰⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 317.

¹⁰¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 327-328.

¹⁰² THEKKEDATH, p. 431, 889.

¹⁰³ THEKKEDATH, p. 889.

¹⁰⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 487-488.

¹⁰⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 531, 540.

practiced poverty with love. The only difficulty was that this poverty was a bit too much. At times the house lacked even bread, and the shopkeepers were on the verge of refusing to give provisions.¹⁰⁶

Naturally, propaganda was the chief source of finance. But caution had to be applied to the Indian propaganda, following complaints from several Ordinaries (Bombay, Pune, Calcutta) and the Apostolic Delegate regarding the manner of propaganda in India. The Provincial prohibited propaganda through printed or duplicated matter. Efforts had to be made to dispel the impression that the Salesians wanted to take away from others (e.g. parish priests) the offerings due to them. All appeals had to be made through *Don Bosco in India* or approved Catholic papers like *The Herald*, *The Catholic Leader* etc. Propaganda through strictly personal letters could continue, but with prudence, restraint and absolute honesty.¹⁰⁷

3.2.1 Answers

Appeal to benefactors: To solve to some extent the problem of the insufficiency of financial resources, Msgr. Mathias decentralized the “propaganda” for monetary help and encouraged all his missionaries to make known the pressing needs of their mission station or institution by writing to magazines and private persons. Naturally, he himself gave the example by setting up his own office in Shillong.¹⁰⁸

Following the proposal of the Extraordinary Visitors Fr Candela and Fr Berruti in 1937 it was decided to start a centre for propaganda in which the houses were free but encouraged to participate, especially those houses which were completely dependent on the Province. At the cost of great sacrifice the Province set aside three confreres for the purpose.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 122, 51226.

¹⁰⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 1137.

¹⁰⁸ [L. MATHIAS], *Quarant'Anni...*, pp.102.

¹⁰⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1145.

Concerns such as the increasing number of aspirants, the need of putting up a house of formation, the expectation of the city of Madras for a first class technical school from the sons of Don Bosco, prompted Fr Carreño to think of a journey to Spain to look for funds and personnel.¹¹⁰

Fund raising programmes: Several unusual ways of raising money were devised. For the project of a school and technical school at Matunga, Bombay, *charity dances* were organized, one of which was held at the Taj Mahal Hotel, under the patronage of Lady Lumley, wife of the Governor. More than the money collected (Rs 4000 & 2500), it made many people aware of Don Bosco and his works in Bombay. Another means used was the “*Don Bosco Donation Scheme*”, under which coupons were distributed in return for a small donation of one Rupee. Prizes, including a deluxe motor-car, were offered to the winners of the lucky numbers.¹¹¹

Loans: Taking a loan was deemed a way out of the financial crisis. With a loan to the tune of \$12000 it was planned to furnish the Tirupattur college laboratory and library, put the Sagayathottam (Uriurkuppam) agricultural colony on production lines by making canals and digging more wells, get the technical school of Basin Bridge moving and transfer the press from Tirupattur to Madras. The Sagayathottam agricultural colony and the press would serve to make the Province more self-sufficient. The workshops at Basin Bridge and at St Gabriel’s when set right, would enable the Province to pay back the loan and slowly free itself from the dangerous dependence on mass stipends.¹¹²

3.2.2 Results

Appeals which appeared in the *Bolletino Salesiano* as part of the propaganda plan mooted by Msgr. Mathias were helpful and the

¹¹⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 804.

¹¹¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 289.

¹¹² THEKKEDATH, p. 855-856, 874.

Salesian Cooperators responded generously. Divine providence also raised up locally a number of generous benefactors.¹¹³

The plan for a central propaganda office proposed by Fr Candela and Fr Berruti had to be abandoned at the outbreak of the war and nothing more was heard of it afterwards.¹¹⁴

The trip of Fr Carreño to Spain proved quite fruitful. He received a lathe and formal promises for five others. He was also able to find a number of benefactors willing to adopt aspirants and meet their expenses.¹¹⁵

In spite of the persuasive eloquence of Fr Carreño, the Superiors refused permission to take the loan to invest in the agricultural colony at Sagayathottam and in the workshops at Basin Bridge. Even Fr Pianazzi, who succeeded Fr Carreño, was of the opinion that with a loan of about Rs 50,000/- the expensive machines, which were lying idle at Basin Bridge could have been made productive.¹¹⁶

3.3. *Hardships of Missionary Life*

One of the major challenges to the missionaries, especially those from Europe, came from the geographic and meteorological conditions of India. The tropical climate, the difficult terrain and the great distances in India not only caused discomfort but posed real hardships to them.

In North East India visiting the Christians meant walking hundreds of miles, as they were dispersed in several villages, which were at times in a radius of 50, 100 or 150 miles. As in many places there were absolutely no roads or any kind of transport the journeys had to be done trudging on foot, passing through virgin forests, inhabited by wild animals.¹¹⁷ Occasionally they had to ford streams and rivers

¹¹³ [L. MATHIAS], *Quarant'Anni...*, pp.102-103.

¹¹⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1145.

¹¹⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 805, 807.

¹¹⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 856, 874.

¹¹⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 177, 1352.

or cross them on a bamboo raft.¹¹⁸ The big rivers were infested by sharks, crocodiles and pirates.¹¹⁹

The missionaries had plenty of work. Most of the time they would be busy touring the villages or subdistricts, even upto 25 to 28 consecutive days, stopping in some villages for the night in order to avoid the dangers of the forest (tigers, bears and elephants), working among the Christians in the morning and then moving on again after lunch, in order to reach the next village before nightfall.¹²⁰

The mission stations of North Arcot too were very tough, on account of both the climate and the character of the people who were poor financially and morally. The chief work of the missionaries was to bring back the very large number of apostates and descendants of apostates. Their number was as high as twenty to thirty thousand.¹²¹ Uriurkuppam in the South was a very difficult place because of the primitive conditions of life and the lack of communication. The food was poor in quality and the house was uncomfortable. The enormous heat caused skin eruptions that were very annoying and lasting.¹²²

The inclemencies of nature at times were the cause of sicknesses and in certain cases even death. Fr Biebuyck who was at Tanjore was operated on for a carbuncle and had to return to Europe. The death of the first Salesian on Indian soil took place less than two years after their arrival, the first victim being Fr Vigneron who died in November 1907.¹²³ The second, Fr Leonidas Gatti, passed away in August 1914.¹²⁴ In the Assam missions the first deaths were in 1928, of two clerics in practical training – Paul Prando and John Zaetta.¹²⁵

¹¹⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 1343.

¹¹⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 379.

¹²⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 1343, 1295.

¹²¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 884-885.

¹²² THEKKEDATH, p. 887.

¹²³ THEKKEDATH, p. 22.

¹²⁴ M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, p. 21.

¹²⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 152.

The very few fathers who were in the Diocese of Krishnagar were constantly getting sick and had to be hospitalized often because of the terrible climate of Central Bengal. Some of them like Fr Igino Ricaldone, Fr Pisano, Fr Piesiur had even to go away definitely from the mission.¹²⁶ Fr John Castro, a young Spanish Salesian contracted typhoid while on a missionary tour of the Sunderbans and died in the first week of March 1936.¹²⁷

3.3.1 Answers

To cope with the hardships of missionary life, besides the involvement of more collaborators, the Salesians adopted suitable methods. We have already seen the important role played by catechists. In places far from the resident mission stations, a catechist would in general be in charge of teaching the prayers and the fundamental truths of the faith.¹²⁸

The missionary method used by Fr Vendrame, one of the most zealous and effective missionaries of the North East, was simple. His preaching of the faith was preceded by love, affection, friendship and sympathy for the simple people and identification with them.¹²⁹

The yearly *Mahasabha* or annual assembly, Eucharistic procession and other large gatherings of the faithful were utilized by the Salesians as effective means of evangelization, especially in the North. These gave the Catholics a sense of their strength and also attracted non-Christians.¹³⁰ The annual celebrations were not merely festivities; much solid instruction accompanied the celebrations. About 2000 persons attended the functions in 1938, most of them being

¹²⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 317.

¹²⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 327.

¹²⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 447-448.

¹²⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 119. A similar approach was adopted also in the South: cf. M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, p. 85-86.

¹³⁰ Cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 193.

members of the Catholic Action. The feast was followed by a three-day retreat for nearly 100 catechists.¹³¹

Catholic Action was vigorously promoted in the parishes of the mission. Its members were real apostles among their brothers and sisters and helped the missionary in spreading the catholic faith, preparing for feasts, processions etc. Their example encouraged the Christians to live better lives and drew non-Christians to the church. In Shillong alone Catholic Action had 700 members and it was organized separately for men and women, boys and girls. The young women of Catholic Action organized the festive oratories for girls. Young volunteers carried out a work of charity among the shelterless poor.¹³²

The Catholic press which was especially cared for in the Northern Province helped greatly the work of evangelization. The report of Fr Candela after his Extraordinary Visit mentioned the following journals and leaflets: *Ka ling Kristan* (Khasi) - 700 copies, *U Symbai* (Khasi) - 2000 copies, *Salesian Kabaren* (Hindi) - 1500 copies, *Don Bosco in India* (English) - 1200 copies, *Sengbaa* (the Dawn, Garo) - 400 copies. Besides these regular publications, catechisms, prayer books, Bible histories and even some scholastic books had been published in several languages.¹³³

3.3.2 Results

In North Arcot the hard work of the missionaries bore fruit especially in some districts because of their sacrifice, zeal and charity. There were some conversions also among caste people, who were somewhat better of financially.¹³⁴

The mission of the North East had a remarkable growth. Fr Peter Ricaldone considered Assam mission to be the most responsive

¹³¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1301, 1307.

¹³² THEKKEDATH, p. 1316-1317.

¹³³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1097.

¹³⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 885.

of all the Salesian missions at that time.¹³⁵ What the Salesians took up as the Prefecture of Assam had already grown into two dioceses at the conclusion of the period under purview. In addition, the Salesians developed also the Diocese of Krishnagar. The following table would give an idea of the rapid growth of the mission of Assam from the time it was taken up in 1922 upto 1933.¹³⁶

From a report of Bishop Ferrando to the Propaganda Fide we know that in 1951 the Assam mission had 86,511 catholics, 56 priests, 128 sisters of which 57 Indians, 439 catechists and 2877 catechumens. All the priests were Salesians.¹³⁷

	1922	1933
Catholics	5,844	24,459
Priests	6	28
Clerics	0	58
Salesian Brothers	5	13
Irish Christian Brothers	8	9
Sisters	17	37
Catechists	48	273
Christian centres	93	329
Churches for more than 400	6	24
Chapels	20	204
Orphanages	2	7
Orphans	100	484
Technical & Agricultural schools	1	3
Primary Schools	31	280
Pupils	638	5,128
Teachers	47	145
Colleges & High Schools	2	4
Dispensaries	1	8

¹³⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 162.

¹³⁶ ASC A8900316 *Letter (copy) Ricaldone - Fumasoni Biondi*, Torino, 15.12.1933.

¹³⁷ Cf. A. PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell'Assam*, p.205

3.4. *Internal Differences*

It cannot be forgotten that the early Salesians in India came from different backgrounds and nationalities. As such, problems of adaptation and accommodation in interpersonal relationships and in living and working together were inevitable. In the *Breve relazione* of Fr Tomatis we read:

“The small number of the confreres, the differences of character, nationality and formation, the insufficiency of work [in the earlier period at Tanjore], the isolation, the privation of relationships, the distance from other confreres and Superiors in an extremely hot climate make the individuals always ill-tempered and prone to quarrels.”¹³⁸

Msgr. Mathias on being informed about his transfer to the Archdiocese of Madras, writing to Fr Ricaldone voiced among other things that the milieu in the South was narrow and divided.¹³⁹

Despite the intense growth of Salesian works and the great esteem the Salesians enjoyed in Goa, there were internal divisions and problems of interpersonal relationships in the community. From December 1949 until the middle of 1951 there was much tension, dissatisfaction and grumbling among the confreres of Don Bosco, Panjim. Their grievance was that Fr Scuderi and Fr Moja decided everything and that the others were hardly taken into confidence.¹⁴⁰

At Tirupattur too with a large community having many activities and persons with different tastes and belonging to different nationalities, it was difficult to satisfy everyone.¹⁴¹

In a letter to the Rector Major, after mentioning many positive things about the house of Kotagiri, Fr Maschio added that there was jealousy and a lack of understanding between Fr Meliga (the rector)

¹³⁸ ASC 389 Tanjore: *Breve relazione* of G. Tomatis, 17 settembre 1908.

¹³⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 454.

¹⁴⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 739, cf. also p. 745.

¹⁴¹ Cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 923.

and Fr Mantovani (the novice master); but for this Kotagiri would have been a model house.¹⁴²

In the Northern Province there were some difficulties in the late 30's with regard to the English and Irish confreres. They were thought to possess a "completely different mentality", lacking a religious spirit, sense of sacrifice and poverty.¹⁴³ At Sacred Heart College, Mawlai, the Extraordinary Visitor Fr A. Fedrigotti found that the union of hearts left something to be desired. There was some disquiet between nationalities; the Indians and the English felt that they were not properly understood.¹⁴⁴

In the Diocese of Krishnagar there was much tension between Bishop Morrow and the missionaries during the war and till about the middle of 1948, on account of the way they were treated. The missionaries felt that the Bishop treated them more like his servants or clerks than as priests.¹⁴⁵

Even Shillong, which in the words of Fr Piasecki, was "such a peaceful and promising Diocese before, especially as regards grumbling",¹⁴⁶ had its share of woes. In the Assam Mission there was widespread dissatisfaction, mostly due to Msgr. Ferrando's ways of settling matters, and also to the Provincial who was not liked by many. The Bishop lacked leadership and organization.¹⁴⁷

3.4.1 Answers

Msgr. Mathias made great efforts to keep his confreres united and fervent. One of his great achievements in Assam was the creation and maintenance of the "family spirit", especially in the formation house. The solemn celebration of feasts like the Provincial's Day and

¹⁴² THEKKEDATH, p. 955-956.

¹⁴³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1147-1149.

¹⁴⁴ See THEKKEDATH, p. 1221.

¹⁴⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 340-343.

¹⁴⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 1113.

¹⁴⁷ Cf THEKKEDATH, p. 1114, 1124-1125.

the Rector's Day was not only allowed but even encouraged, because he knew that they were a wonderful means to keep the Salesians united and enthusiastic.¹⁴⁸

Fr Alvin Fedrigotti, the Extraordinary Visitor to Salesian India in 1949-50 visited Goa in February 1950. He invited all to cooperate in wiping out the evil of discontent and criticism by means of good example. He recommended regular meetings of the chapter of the house, where everything was to be freely and openly discussed with the greatest freedom, calmness and with an eye on the facts of the case.¹⁴⁹

To the complaints regarding the Anglo-Irish confreres, Fr Berruti asked Fr Scuderi to recommend to the confreres charity without limits, making an effort, above all, to avoid anything which could cause displeasure to others. "You know better than I do that majorities always tend to dominate", he wrote.¹⁵⁰

A bulletin called *Inter Nos* was started in May 1943 in the Southern province to give news about the activities of the houses and missions to those who were far away in the internment camps at Dehra Dun and elsewhere. It helped much to maintain union and charity among the confreres.¹⁵¹

3.4.2 Results

The internal divisions among the Salesians was at times hard to overcome. In Goa the situation did not seem to improve even after the intervention of the Extraordinary Visitor. According to a letter of Fr McGlinchey to Fr Carreño, "[...] the visit of Fr Fedrigotti made no impression. Nothing of his recommendations has been carried out here at all, except maybe in some petty points".¹⁵²

¹⁴⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 163, 1369.

¹⁴⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 740.

¹⁵⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 1148.

¹⁵¹ ASC B7290149 *Letter Mathias - Berruti*, Yercaud, 17.10.44.

¹⁵² THEKKEDATH, p. 745.

Fr Di Fiore, the prefect of studies of the theologate of the South at Yercaud, wrote to the Provincial Fr Pianazzi after his visitation that the visit had done much good, but added that the division of nationalities, that is, the ill-feeling between the Indian and the European clerics, still continued.¹⁵³

The overall picture was not, however, that bleak. After the creation of a separate Province in the South, there was a general feeling of satisfaction among the confreres at the improvement in Salesian spirit and fraternal charity in the Province. Fr Cinato testified that even those who had earlier been cold, if not hostile, were slowly becoming better.¹⁵⁴

Fr Cinato found the novitiate at Tirupattur to be going on well in 1934. There was plenty of poverty, but also cordiality and joy.¹⁵⁵ He reaffirmed the same in 1935. Even though from several countries, the newly arrived got integrated quickly, showed good spirit and good will.¹⁵⁶ Fr Berruti too found the house in 1937 very poor, but there was an abundance of gaiety, good spirit and attachment to the superiors. The soul of the house was the rector, Fr Carreño, young, happy, intelligent and extremely active. He noticed in the boys an attachment to the superiors and “a joy which one hardly finds in the boardings of Europe”. He saw there genuine family spirit, and had the feeling of being in the first days of the Oratory.¹⁵⁷

The extraordinary visitor Fr Candela visited the house and parish of Vellore in December 1936. He judged the spirit of the house to be excellent. Piety, religious observance and fraternal union reigned there. Fr Berruti who visited the house in the company of Fr Candela in November 1937 had only words of praise for the excellent spirit in

¹⁵³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1019.

¹⁵⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 484-485.

¹⁵⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 522.

¹⁵⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 527.

¹⁵⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 493-494.

the house. "The spirit of Don Bosco marvellously flourishes there," he wrote.¹⁵⁸

The prevalence of genuine Salesian spirit and union of hearts in the Southern Province was attested to by several highly qualified witnesses like Archbishop Mathias, Fr Maschio, Fr Scuderi, Fr Tuena etc. in their letters to the Superiors. They had no hesitation in attributing the credit for this enviable state of things to Fr Carreño.¹⁵⁹ The bulletin *Inter Nos* had gone a long way in maintaining unity and charity among the confreres, especially among those who were not in the camp.¹⁶⁰ Even Fr Pianazzi, who succeeded Fr Carreño as Provincial, despite his reservations regarding the latter's financial administration, found the spirit in the province to be very good.¹⁶¹

Fr A. Fedrigotti, Extraordinary Visitor to the two Provinces of India in 1949, affirmed at the end of his visit to the North that the disorientation of spirit that existed during the war when many of the confreres had been interned seemed to be a thing of the past, and the Salesian spirit and Salesian work flourished everywhere.¹⁶²

Fr Pianazzi who visited all the houses and missions of the Northern Province in the period September 1950 - February 1951 felt that good spirit reigned everywhere.¹⁶³ The majority of the confreres were Italians; but there were also small groups of Englishmen, Belgians, Spaniards, Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Czechoslovaks, Germans and two or three others. All were well integrated.¹⁶⁴

3.5. *Difficulties Posed by World War II*

Two days after the German armies invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, Great Britain declared war on Germany. France

¹⁵⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 510-511.

¹⁵⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 857, 1377-1378.

¹⁶⁰ ASC B7290149 *Letter Mathias-Berruti*, Yercaud, 17.10.44.

¹⁶¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 875.

¹⁶² THEKKEDATH, p. 1179.

¹⁶³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1185-1186.

¹⁶⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1186.

joined in six hours later and the Second World War started. In the evening of the same day, a total of nine German Salesian missionaries working in Assam, Bengal and South India were taken to internment camps. They were later released in December. The German missionaries of Assam were not disturbed any more until the general internment of the Italians; but the two German Salesians who were in the South were again interned in July 1940.¹⁶⁵

Italy declared war on Great Britain and France on 10 June 1940. Thus the Italians became enemy "aliens" and hence there started the internment of the Italian Salesians working in different parts of India.¹⁶⁶

With the entry of Japan into the war in December 1941 and her rapid advance towards Singapore, tighter restrictions were imposed on enemy nationals in India. The Government of India decided to intern all the missionaries from enemy countries who had not spent at least 16 uninterrupted years in India.¹⁶⁷

The War, as is to be imagined, adversely affected the work of the missionaries due to reduction in personnel and in finance. Until the entry of Italy on the side of Germany the war did not affect very much missionary work, but the income of the missions was seriously impaired.¹⁶⁸ Help from Europe stopped and the prices of things shot up. The financial situation of all the houses was bad in general. Fr Iginio Ricaldone from Don Bosco, Shillong, wrote to the Rector Major, who was his own uncle, that he found Don Bosco Orphanage financially in a hopeless condition. There were continual threats from the creditors to take the Salesians to court.¹⁶⁹

In Assam (1943) many catechists left since their salaries were not increased in proportion to the rise in the cost of living, due to the

¹⁶⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 655-657.

¹⁶⁶ Cf. THEKKEDATH, p. 657-661.

¹⁶⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 667.

¹⁶⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 1102.

¹⁶⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1254-1255.

shortage of funds. Due to the lack of finance, many schools, especially in the plains, had to be closed down. The restrictions on the missionaries' travels became even more stringent than before. A number of Christian communities could scarcely be visited even once in 12 months, though some priests were on tour almost all the time.¹⁷⁰

3.5.1 Answers

As soon as the Second World War broke out and again when Italy was about to enter the war, Fr Scuderi asked all the confreres to be very prudent in speaking, among themselves as well as with outsiders. They were not to interest themselves in politics. He forbade everyone except the rectors to read the newspapers or listen to the radio.¹⁷¹ When it was almost clear that Italy was going to war on the side of Germany, Fr Cinato, the Provincial of the South, warmly recommended that all should strictly observe article 14 of the Constitutions, which urged the avoidance of politics and contests of nationality, whether among the members themselves or with outsiders.¹⁷²

When Italy entered the war as an ally of Germany on 10 June 1940, on the following day a squad of soldiers surrounded the compound of Don Bosco, Shillong, not allowing anyone to go out for a month. The council of the house then took some very important decisions to cope with the situation of financial crunch as well as the political climate: (i) dismiss all the workers, (ii) continue with all the boys of the orphanage for some months; if it were to become impossible to carry on like that send home half the number of boys.¹⁷³

Austerity measures were taken to counteract the financial crisis. Fr Uguet insisted on the houses not spending a farthing more than

¹⁷⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 1108.

¹⁷¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1146-1147.

¹⁷² THEKKEDATH, p. 500-501.

¹⁷³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1256.

was required, and when every other means failed to reduce the number of boys.¹⁷⁴

Fr Carreño exhorted the novitiate community of Tirupattur to practice poverty, going to such minute details as having two bananas less per day, jaggery instead of sugar for tea, cutting on post, etc.¹⁷⁵

At Sonada all the servants who could be dispensed with, including the cook, were dismissed. The clerics did the cooking, washing of plates and cutlery and the laying of tables. Every day there was work for all, even in the place of the customary Thursday walk. To save on light, the time table was anticipated, going to bed earlier and rising earlier. All the confreres cooperated by accepting these decisions cheerfully.¹⁷⁶

Measures were taken to ensure “regular life”, especially with regard to those in formation. The two Provincials Fr Cinato and Fr Uguet met in Madras in 1941 and took certain decisions like the unification of the formation houses to lessen some of the difficulties caused by the war. They agreed to send all the novices to Tirupattur and all the theologians to Mawlai (Shillong).

When the interned Salesians from Calcutta and its neighbourhood were shifted from Ahmadnagar to Deolali on 25 February 1941, it was decided that the clerics should have theology classes in the camp itself. There were five students and four professors.¹⁷⁷ Since the theologate of Mawlai was converted into a parole camp for the interned Salesians of Assam from the beginning of February 1942, it became necessary to open also a theologate in the south, which was started on 14 February 1942.¹⁷⁸

Fr Cinato who visited the internment camp at Deoli in Jan 1943, using his extraordinary war-time faculties and as the delegate of

¹⁷⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1153.

¹⁷⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 540.

¹⁷⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 1229.

¹⁷⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 664-665.

¹⁷⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 546.

Fr Uguet, the Provincial of the North, constituted the Salesians at Deoli into one Province and two houses with regular house chapters, so that ordinations, professions etc. could be conducted more regularly.¹⁷⁹ The classes for the students of philosophy and theology started on 3 February. For the priests a kind of pastoral course was organized, with a lecture per day on moral and dogmatic questions, Hinduism, Islam, sociology, youth movement of the Catholic Action.¹⁸⁰

To remedy the scarcity of clerics in the houses, the Provincial Council of the South decided in May 1943 to keep the first year theologians of the following year at Vellore, where they would learn theology and also help in the house. The students of philosophy would be asked to hurry up and finish their course in two years instead of three.¹⁸¹

The Salesian internees did not remain idle in the camp, instead engaged themselves in various apostolates to the extent they could. They provided religious assistance to the civilian internees and in the nearby Camp of the Prisoners of War. During Holy Week and Easter they were particularly busy, and had the joy of seeing more than half of the civilian internees performing their Easter duties.¹⁸² Fr Scuderi was full of initiatives and tried to keep everyone usefully occupied. He tried to prepare a book for the Italian public with all kinds of information on India. He also began in April 1942 a weekly called "*Fides Nostra*", a much-appreciated pamphlet of about ten pages, for circulation among the internees.¹⁸³

When it became impossible to find Salesians for certain posts in the houses, lay collaborators were asked to take their places. When at the approach of the Japanese forces towards India, the government ordered the Salesians to leave St Gabriel's and go to the parole camp

¹⁷⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 677-678.

¹⁸⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 679.

¹⁸¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 785.

¹⁸² THEKKEDATH, p. 662, 665.

¹⁸³ THEKKEDATH, p. 670.

at Tirupattur, Mr S Natarajan, the assistant master, was entrusted with the headmastership of the school.¹⁸⁴

3.5.2 Results

Several measures adopted to counter the wartime crisis met with positive outcome. The efforts to obtain freedom for as many Salesians as possible produced significant results. When Archbishop Mathias met the Governor of Madras after Italy entered the war, he was assured that the latter was doing his best to save the missionaries from internment, though he could not guarantee that fresh orders would not come from the centre.¹⁸⁵ When the Government of India was planning to remove all the Italian missionaries of South India to an internment camp in the North, Archbishop Mathias appealed to the Viceroy on 10 Nov 1942 and got Fr Mora and Fr Dabove exempted for service at the seminary.¹⁸⁶

Archbishop Mathias met the Chief Secretary of Madras on 22 Sept 1942 and on the following day the Chief Adviser (the final authority) and was able to obtain the postponement of the internment of those at Tirupattur by a few months, so that the school year could be ended normally and the Archdiocesan Synod held. The order for internment could not be waived as it was issued from Delhi and not Madras.¹⁸⁷

A request to release on parole the Salesians of Assam who were ordered by the government to assemble at Shillong in June 1940 was favourably received. A statement was then drawn up and signed by Fr Uguet pointing out that the Salesian Society was not an Italian congregation. By the end of the month most of the fathers were

¹⁸⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 564-565. When Fr Mariota was made the parish priest of Perambur and consequently was less and less available in the school, Mr S Natarajan was again made headmaster in 1947.

¹⁸⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 660.

¹⁸⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 559.

¹⁸⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 676.

allowed to return to their mission stations and the rest by the third week of July.¹⁸⁸

When in December 1941 after the entry of Japan into the war the government decided to intern all the missionaries from enemy countries, Bishop Ferrando and Fr Uguet requested the Chief Secretary to the Government of Assam for some special concessions in order to have at least a skeleton staff in all the mission stations. In addition to those who had completed 16 uninterrupted years in India, six others were allowed to stay on.¹⁸⁹

Normally the Italian missionaries of Krishnagar Diocese should have been interned like the others. But Bishop Louis Morrow, a citizen of the USA, was influential enough to get exemption from internment for 21 missionaries so that they could remain on in their own places with the existing restrictions.¹⁹⁰

Help arrived also to surmount the financial crunch. At the beginning of 1940 Fr Ricaldone informed Fr Scuderi, the Provincial, that he had directed Fr Tozzi, the Provincial of England, to help the house of Sonada in his name.¹⁹¹ The Rector Major sent help also at other times, for instance in 1945 from Ireland.¹⁹²

The Rector Major was mindful also of his sons at Tirupattur. Again he arranged with Fr Tozzi in January 1940 to send a fairly good help in his name to Fr Carreño. He also allowed Fr Carreño for the duration of the war to keep the alms received from the Masses of the work of the Sacred Heart.¹⁹³

The war proved detrimental to the missions by halting missionary work or by slowing it down. Though the number of baptisms in general

¹⁸⁸ THEKKEDATH, p. 661.

¹⁸⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 667-668.

¹⁹⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 677.

¹⁹¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1226.

¹⁹² THEKKEDATH, p. 1234-1235.

¹⁹³ THEKKEDATH, p. 541.

was consoling, there were many defections.¹⁹⁴ The strength of St Antony's College, Shillong, diminished very much because the students were afraid that it might not have been allowed to continue as the college authorities were Italian. The Catholic associations were badly affected. Participation in public religious manifestations like the Eucharistic procession diminished drastically. Buildings of many catholic institutions were taken over by the government.¹⁹⁵

The Salesians released from the internment camps were allowed to return to Assam in October. Even after their return everything was not all right with the mission. The concentration camp had brought much uneasiness and lack of balance in the Salesians. In the Assam Mission the confusion was such that an intervention of the Superiors was deemed necessary.¹⁹⁶ Even Bishop Ferrando had to suffer on account of those who came out of the camp. For those of the North, according to Msgr. Mathias, the camp was certainly not a school for perfecting themselves and they had become difficult to satisfy.¹⁹⁷

Amidst all the hassles caused by the war, there was a streak of silver lining. The war brought with it also some benefits. One of the positive outcomes of the war was that it brought the missions into contact with many American and British soldiers, who, seeing the sacrificing lives of the missionaries and sisters, were generous with money and provisions. This contact was useful for the mission later on as well.¹⁹⁸

During the war the Salesians encountered also the goodwill of the government. We have seen how both in the South and in the North the officials helped the Salesians to stay on in their field of work. Seeing the financial straits in which the mission found itself,

¹⁹⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1319.

¹⁹⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 1104-1105.

¹⁹⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 1112.

¹⁹⁷ THEKKEDATH, p. 1112-1113.

¹⁹⁸ ASC A8130705 *Relazione missionaria del Vescovo di Shillong sulla Missione dell'Assam*, Shillong, 17.10.1945; THEKKEDATH, p. 1303.

the Government of Assam offered a grant of Rs 7000 to St Antony's College, despite opposition from certain officials.¹⁹⁹

The presence of the Salesians in the camp really helped bring about a new atmosphere, as in the camp at Deoli. The solemn celebration of the feast of Don Bosco along with the academy on the occasion and the theatrical performance on the subsequent day contributed to this change. Prior to that many, including Msgr. Poli, had been depressed. Msgr. Poli himself attributed the change to the presence of the Salesians.²⁰⁰

The confreres showed a great spirit of sacrifice and abnegation during the difficult years of the war. If the report of Don Bosco Industrial School and Orphanage is anything to go by, the greatest cordiality and charity prevailed among the confreres during the war years and they were like in a family, though belonging to 12 different nations at war among themselves.²⁰¹

Conclusion

“The Salesians of Don Bosco who were hardly known in India at the beginning of the 20th century, became well known and esteemed by the middle of that century,” affirms Joseph Thekkedath.²⁰² When the Salesians, their technical schools and their services in favour of poor boys became more widely known and appreciated there was also an increasing number of requests for new foundations.²⁰³ Among the other achievements of the Salesians during this period, worth mentioning are the establishment of three University Colleges – St Antony's College, Shillong; Salesian College, Sonada and Sacred Heart College, Tirupattur; and the foundation of two religious

¹⁹⁹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1161.

²⁰⁰ THEKKEDATH, p. 678.

²⁰¹ THEKKEDATH, p. 1262.

²⁰² THEKKEDATH, p. 1367.

²⁰³ THEKKEDATH, p. 1367.

congregations of sisters – the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC) and the Sisters of Mary Immaculate (SMI).

The founding of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians by Bishop Ferrando in 1942 was a step that helped the Assam Missions in a big way in the course of time. Those sisters filled a real need. They were ready to remain in remote villages for several days at a time in order to evangelize, prepare catechumens for baptism and the sacraments and engage in basic health care. Bishop Morrow founded the Sisters of Mary Immaculate in 1948, with the scope of giving professional assistance to women and children in all possible ways.²⁰⁴

When the Salesians came to Tanjore in 1906 the group numbered six, and at the end of our period in 1952 they numbered 208 in South India.²⁰⁵ A group of 11 Salesians reached Shillong in 1922, and in 1951 the Northern Province had a total of 200 Salesians.²⁰⁶

	<i>Southern Province</i>		<i>Northern Province</i>	
	1906	1952	1922	1951
Priests	3	92	6	120
Clerics	1	90		39
Brothers	1	26	5	41
Novices	-	14	-	3

The growth of the Salesians in India in terms of members and activities was, as exposed above, accompanied by the infusion and diffusion of genuine Salesian spirit. The nearly first 50 years of Salesian presence saw the progressive implantation of the Salesian charism on Indian soil on firm foundations with prospects of a bright and promising future.

²⁰⁴ THEKKEDATH, p. 1388-1389.

²⁰⁵ THEKKEDATH, p. 884.

²⁰⁶ THEKKEDATH, p. 1187.