

INCULTURATION OF THE SALESIAN CHARISM IN INDIA

JOSE KURUVACHIRA¹

Inculturation of the Salesian charism in India implies, making Don Bosco's charism firmly rooted in Indian culture so that it acquires a truly Indian identity. It has been argued that the case of India is one of the amazing success stories of inculturation of Don Bosco's charism in the history of the Salesian congregation. The pioneer groups of Salesians who came to India faithfully and creatively implanted and inculturated the Salesian charism in their "new fatherland", taking into consideration its religious, social, political, economic and cultural ethos and contexts. The fact that this was accomplished in a comparatively short period of time is something that surprises many, both within and outside the Salesian world. The surprise is even greater when one knows that, it happened in a country which is predominantly non-Christian, and where Don Bosco and the Salesian congregation were almost totally unknown until the arrival of the first Salesians in South India in 1906. This paper is a brief study of the history, process and methods of inculturation of the Salesian charism, taking into consideration the first fifty years – from 1906 to 1956 – of Salesian history in India, with some critical observations².

1. Arrival of the Salesians in India and first foundations

The pioneer Salesians reached Tanjore, South India, on 14 January 1906³ where they started their work at the St Francis Xavier orphanage. Three years later they opened a second foundation at Mylapore with another orphanage. But the Salesians had to withdraw from Tanjore and Mylapore in 1928⁴. After this, they took over the

¹ SDB, Professore di Storia delle Religioni e filosofia della religione nella Facoltà di Filosofia (Università Pontificia Salesiana, Roma).

² This article was prepared for the International Congress on Salesian History, with the theme, "The Development of the Charism of Don Bosco till the Middle the 20th Century", which was held in Rome from 19-23 November 2014. I am grateful to Fr. Mathew Kapplikunnel SDB and Fr George Maliekal SDB for carefully reading the text and making their valuable suggestions for improvement. A special thanks to the Salesians and the members of the Salesian family from India who participated in the seminar in Rome, and were generous with their suggestions in order to enrich its contents.

³ For their names and nationalities see Joseph THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India (From the Beginning Up to 1951-52)*, Vol. 1. Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 2005, p. 19.

⁴ Cf Luigi MATHIAS, *Quaran'anni di Missione in India. Memorie di Sua Eccellenza Monsignore Luigi Mathias*. Vol. 1. In *Assam 1921-1935*. Torino, LDC 1965, p. 211.

primary school run by the French Missionaries of Pondicherry at Vellore, in North Arcot, to which an orphanage and a carpentry department were later added. On 13 January 1922 a group of eleven Salesians⁵ arrived in Shillong, Northeast India, and took charge of the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam⁶. The first Salesian province of India was canonically erected on 28 May 1926 with St. Thomas the Apostle as its patron and with Mgr. Louis Mathias as provincial. But it was announced in India only in the following year when Fr Peter Ricaldone came for the extraordinary visitation⁷. In 1934 the province of India was divided into two: South India with St. Thomas the Apostle as its patron, and North India with St. John Bosco as its patron.

2. Salesian charism as lived by the pioneer groups of Salesians in India

The Salesian charism is to be understood as the Salesian patrimony as a whole in its various dimensions⁸. It is synthetically expressed in Don Bosco's motto, *da mihi animas, cetera tolle* (give me souls, take away the rest), and has pastoral charity at its centre. The Salesian charism as lived by the pioneer groups of Salesians who came to India, manifested itself basically in three ways: a) a special predilection for poor and abandoned youth and their education in order to make them "good Christians and honest citizens"; b) mission *ad gentes* and catechesis to implant the Church; c) works of charity and developmental initiatives on behalf of the poor and marginalised people in order to help them to live dignified lives.

2.1. *Special predilection for poor youth*

Go first to the youth was the injunction of Don Bosco to his Salesian missionaries. All the apostolic works which the pioneer Salesians initiated in India manifested a *preferential option for poor youth* and their holistic education. As already mentioned, in 1906, at Tanjore, the Salesians took charge of the existing orphanage of St. Francis Xavier with six boys, and assumed the direction of the elementary school. In the same year itself they started two workshops where they taught the youth smithy and shoemaking which were later changed to weaving and carpentry. In 1910 a night school was started in order to give the orphans general education along with technical training. In a short time, the Tanjore mission had an orphanage and boarding, an industrial school, a night school, a formal school and a press⁹, all

⁵ For their names and nationalities see L. MATHIAS, *Quarant'anni di Missione in India...*, pp. 36-37; 65.

⁶ Cf ASC A890, L. MATHIAS, "Relatio circa Prefecturam Apostolicam de Assam", 1 may 1923.

⁷ Cf ASC A892, *Riunione del Consiglio Ispettorale*, Shillong 31 marzo 1927; ASC F176, *Report of Mariano Uget* 4 june 1947.

⁸ It is not our concern here to define Salesian charism or to elaborate its various elements. It is taken for granted that the reader has a certain familiarity with them.

⁹ Cf Mathew KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth. History and Relevance of the Early Salesian*

catering to really poor youth. The second foundation which the Salesians took up at Mylapore in 1909 had also an orphanage for poor boys. When they closed the missions of Tanjore and Mylapore in 1928 and went over to Vellore, besides looking after an existing school, they also started a small orphanage for boys. In 1922 when the Salesians took over the Prefecture Apostolic of Assam, they had to look after, among other things, two orphanages which by 1932 were increased to seven¹⁰. The institutions which the Salesians founded later, continued to manifest the same predilection for poor and marginalised youth.

The Salesians were convinced that they should give their best energies to the education of the young¹¹. Therefore, the pioneer groups of Salesians in India gave great importance to *formal education*. It was seen as an answer to the problem of high rate of illiteracy and economic backwardness then prevalent in India, and a powerful way of influencing the non-Christians who formed the majority of the Indian population. To combat illiteracy the Salesians established many elementary schools in villages to provide basic education¹². In several Salesian institutions there were night schools which catered to those attending industrial schools or agricultural schools during the day. Children from far away villages were brought to the Salesian boardings where they remained to attend a regular school or an industrial school. The Salesians also established schools in urban and semi-urban areas, and university colleges to promote higher education¹³.

The Salesians started many industrial schools for providing *technical education*, because it was seen as one of the concrete ways of helping the poor section of Indian youth. In a short time they had a network of industrial schools in a number of cities with such trades as, weaving, tailoring, shoemaking, smithy, carpentry, mechanics, composing, printing, binding, etc. Along with industrial schools, *agricultural schools* were also seen as a very practical way of helping the poor people of India, and through them they tried to educate people to cultivate land rationally and by using modern methods¹⁴. Following the Salesian tradition *festive and daily oratories* were also used by the Salesians as powerful means of educating the young.

Presence in India (Tanjore and Mylapore 1906-1928). Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 1989, pp. 17-18, 25-27, 34, 41.

¹⁰ Cf ASC A890, *Relazione sul Progresso della prima decade dei Salesiani nell'Assam*, 8 december 1933.

¹¹ One of the reasons why the Propaganda Fide insisted with the Salesians to take up the Prefecture of Assam was because the Holy See was certain that they would give priority to Christian education in their apostolate. Cf ASC A890, *Letter G. M. Cardinal Van Rossum*, 24 may 1921.

¹² When the Salesians took over the Assam mission in 1922, there were only 31 primary schools and by 1932 there were 160. Cf ASC A890, *Relazione sul Progresso...*

¹³ St. Anthony's College, Shillong in 1934; Salesian College, Sonada in 1938, and a Junior College at Tirupattur in 1951. Initially only St. Anthony's College was open to the general public.

¹⁴ There were agricultural schools at Raliang and Barpetta in the Assam Mission, and Urukuppam in South India. Cf ASC A890, *Relazione sul Progresso...*; ASC F188 *Fedrigotti, Visita Canonica Straordinaria, dall'11 dicembre 1949 al 27 febbraio 1950*, p. 9; ASPF n. 4430, *Ferrando to Propaganda Fide*, 1 october 1948. Though in 1933 the Salesians started an agricultural school at Saharanpur, it was later closed. Cf ASC F178, *Mariano Uget to Berruti*, 31 march 1948.

The proper organisation of these educational institutions following the Salesian method and style, especially the preventive system, brought about many positive changes in the life of the young. Salesian spirit was manifested in the fatherly care and love of the Salesians for the poor youth entrusted to their care. More than doing mere welfare work in favour of youth, they aimed at their integral growth so that they might become God-fearing persons, good human beings and useful citizens of the country, as desired by Don Bosco. The Salesian educational system also produced many outstanding lay leaders who were pillars of society and public life. Lack of economic means and sufficient infrastructure did not deter them from caring for poor youth. They had boundless trust in Divine Providence. Many people, including some Hindus, came forward with generous financial help to support the poor youth, and some of them praised the Salesians publically for their good work on behalf of the poor and marginalized youth. When Fr. Albino Fedrigotti visited Goa in February 1950, one of the prominent personalities of the place said: "the Salesians have conquered Goa; they have conquered the youth of Goa"¹⁵.

2.2. *Mission ad gentes and catechesis*

Inspired by the *da mihi animas* of Don Bosco, the pioneer groups of Salesians in India considered missionary evangelisation as one of their priorities. In fact, missionary zeal was one of their outstanding characteristics, and they were prepared for any sacrifice and were willing to undertake seemingly impossible tasks for the sake of bringing non-Christians to the faith and to implant the Church in the country.

In South India, in 1915, the parish of Sacred Heart of Tanjore was entrusted to the Salesians to look after. The priests constantly visited the villages in order to catechise, administer sacraments, bring back the lapsed, organise educational and welfare activities, and to reach out to non-Christians with the message of the Gospel, and as a result they were able to have conversions. In their orphanage also they had some baptisms¹⁶. At Mylapore they had to take catechism classes daily to the boys of St Bede's School, and occasionally the priests were requested to preach at the cathedral. On the whole, in South India, the Salesians had only moderate success in missionary evangelisation, and practically all the converts to Christianity were from the so-called "depressed classes" (*dalits*).

In the Assam mission of Northeast India, the missionary work of the Salesians met with unprecedented success. When the Salesians took over this mission in 1922, in the entire province of Assam, the Catholics were only 5,419. In the early years they had many *parishes* to look after, and all of them had numerous mission stations attached to them in villages. The missionaries extensively toured the mission terri-

¹⁵ Cf ASC C323, *Aloysius Ravalicco to Ricaldone*, april 1950.

¹⁶ Cf Giorgio TOMATIS, *Tenacia degli Indiani per le loro credenze. Il battesimo di un giovanetto dell'Orfanotrofio*, in BS XXX (agosto 1906) 241; Id., *Inaugurazione della nuova Casa Salesiana a Tanjore*, in BS XXXI (novembre 1907) 332.

tories, and this method was widely used for contacting non-Christians, catechising, administering sacraments to the Catholics, and to bring back the lapsed. Missionaries in general spent most of their time touring the mission districts on foot¹⁷. They stayed in the villages with people for many days, and returned to the mission centre in a month for few days for their common spiritual exercises, for some rest, and to get ready for the next tour. During the Christmas holidays some of the boarding boys of the schools or industrial schools or orphanages or aspirantates accompanied the Salesians from one village to another where they catechised and administered the sacraments¹⁸.

The *schools in villages* played a major role in missionary evangelisation. Missionaries saw them as “entry tickets” to non-Christian villages¹⁹. Some even considered school as “synonym of mission” itself²⁰. Practically all the mission centres had boardings for both students and artisans, and many of them, after having lived with the Salesians, freely asked to be baptised. Often these newly baptised took the Christian faith to their homes and invited the missionaries to visit their villages.

Festive and daily oratories were important means used by the Salesians to bring the Christian faith to non-Christian families and villages. Soon after their arrival at Tanjore, the pioneer Salesians succeeded in starting a festive oratory, where in the evenings, after recreation, the boys had an hour of catechism²¹. Some missionaries called the oratory children “little apostles” (*piccoli apostoli*)²² because many of them were instrumental in bringing the Catholic faith to their parents and families.

Following the example of Don Bosco, the Salesian missionaries did pioneering work in the field of *catechesis*. They conducted regular catechism classes for the youth of their schools, boardings and orphanages, and in some parishes on Sundays. The *apostolate of the press* was effectively used for the propagation of the Christian faith and for religious instruction. This was very much insisted upon by the Salesian superiors, and the Superior chapter of 1929²³. The missionaries translated the Bible, wrote Bible histories, lives of saints, published magazines, periodicals and leaflets and

¹⁷ Cf ASPF n. 1337, *Ferrando to Propaganda Fide*, 26 february 1946, p. 492.

¹⁸ Cf Joseph THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India*. Vol. 2. Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 2005, p. 1245.

¹⁹ Cf Stefano FERRANDO, *Biglietti d'ingresso nei villaggi pagani!*, in BS LXXXI (gennaio 1957) 24.

²⁰ Cf ASPF n. 3786, *Ferrando to Propaganda Fide*, 11 october 1946, p. 500.

²¹ Cf Giorgio TOMATIS, *La prima Conferenza Salesiana. Il lavoro dei Missionari!*, in BS XXX (aprile 1906), p. 115.

²² Cf ASC B709, *Ferrando, “Piccoli Apostoli”*, 18 may 1940.

²³ One of the recommendations of the Superior Chapter of 1929 to the missionaries was to make good use of the press for their apostolate. They were also required to send frequent reports for publication in *Salesian Bulletin*. Cf *Atti del Capitolo Superiore della Società Salesiana*, Anno X, n. 50, 24 ottobre 1929, art. n. 10, pp. 819-820. This Superior Chapter was a very important one from a missionary perspective. It had a section that elaborately dealt with all the fundamental aspects of the Salesian missions, such as, missionary spirit, missionary vocation, missionary formation, apostolic works in the missions, duties of superiors in the missions, etc.

catechism books in English and vernacular languages²⁴. Catechism competitions in different languages, catechetical campaign, theatricals, music, radio programmes, seminars, congresses and conventions on Christian themes for general public lasting for several days, were also effectively used to evangelise and catechise²⁵.

The Salesians promoted pious *associations and movements* of various kinds for boys and girls, young men and women, and adults. They encouraged *popular devotions*²⁶, sacramental piety, and following the Salesian tradition, they inculcated in the young and common people, a special devotion to Jesus in the Blessed Sacrament, Mary Help of Christians, and love for the Church and the Pope. They also took special care to spread devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus.

In the mission territories the lay catechists played a vital role in evangelising and catechising. The missionaries organised special training programmes for them, especially through schools for catechists, in order to make them competent in their task. The catechists played such an indispensable role in missionary evangelisation and catechesis that they were considered as the “*lunga mano*” (extended hand) and “*portavoce*” (mouthpiece) of the missionary²⁷.

2.3. Works of charity and developmental initiatives

Don Bosco was a great organiser of charities, and in imitation of him, the pioneer Salesians in India organised works of charity and humanitarian services on behalf of poor and marginalised people. These took a variety of forms, such as, running orphanages and old age homes²⁸, visit to the sick in villages, instruction in hygiene, care of the sick in dispensaries and hospitals, which the missionaries saw as the “fifth gospel”, care of lepers, refugees and immigrants, those affected by flood, fire, famine,

²⁴ For a list of publications see ASC A890, *Mathias to Propaganda Fide*, 1 october 1928; ASC A890, *Relazione sul Progresso...*

²⁵ Cf ASC A891, *Ferrando to Ricaldone*, 24 january 1941. For an enumeration of the methods used by the missionaries to evangelise and catechise see ASC A890, *Mathias, Relazione Straordinaria per la S. C. de Propaganda Fide*, 15 august 1927, p. 77.

²⁶ For example, first Friday devotion, month of March in honour of St. Joseph, month of May in honour of Our Lady, month of June in honour of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, practice of the commemoration of the 24th of every month in honour of Mary Help of Christians, way of the cross on Fridays of Lent, devotion to St. Francis de Sales, St. Louis Gonzaga, St. Francis Xavier, St. Teresa of Child Jesus, St. Domenic Savio, devotion to Guardian Angels, devotion to the holy souls on 2 November, Benediction with the Blessed Sacrament, recitation of the rosary, novena, *triduum*, processions, etc.

²⁷ Cf ASPF n. 3078, *Ferrando to Propaganda Fide*, 24 september 1936, p. 848.

²⁸ In 1924, in Shillong, the Salesians re-started and extended St. Vincent's Home that was closed down at the departure of the Salvatorians (Society of Divine Saviour) to take care of the elderly and the sick. Cf ASC A890, *Relazione sul Progresso...*; L. MATHIAS, *Quarant'anni di Missione in India...*, p. 127. The mission of Raliang also had an old age home. Cf ASC A813, *Ferrando, Resoconto Missionario dell'anno 1935-1936*, 24 august 1936.

epidemics, drought, earthquake, care of the sick and wounded soldiers in war, free distribution of food, medicine and clothes to the destitute and so on.

Salesians initiated many developmental works in order to raise the standard of life of people. They built houses for the poor²⁹, formed Christian villages by helping families to settle down by giving them land, wells, oxen and seeds; they established crèches for children, co-operative banks of grain and money which helped people to liberate themselves from the hands of unscrupulous money lenders and redeem their lost land, buy property, tools and domestic animals, and instil a sense of economy and responsibility.

The missionaries took initiatives to fight social evils like caste system and racial prejudices, and promoted human dignity. They conscientised people on social justice, Catholic social principles, human rights, harmful effects of alcoholism, skills and livelihood options. They promoted loan system to escape the exploitation of money lenders, associations of consumer and work co-operatives, grain bank to fight famine, and provided assistance to Catholic immigrants. They also defended innocent people before tribunals.

These charitable works and developmental initiatives helped to bring about amazing change in the public opinion regarding the Salesians, and the Catholic Church in general. There were instances of government authorities publically recognizing the humanitarian services of the Salesians³⁰. But it must be reiterated that, the missionaries were convinced that their charitable and developmental works were not mere social work, but means to proclaim Christ.

3. The process and methods of inculturation

The pioneer groups of Salesians in India used many methods and processes in order to inculturate the Salesian charism in the country. The principal ones can be identified as the following:

3.1. Formation of Salesians in loco

The decision of the early Salesians who came to India to form young Salesians *in loco* was a significant move in inculturating the Salesian charism in India. Soon after his arrival in India in 1922, Mgr. Mathias wrote to the superiors in Turin seeking permission to start a novitiate and formation house in Shillong where aspirants to Salesian missionary life would come from Europe and have their initial formation

²⁹ For example, at the mission of Arni, Fr J. Duca built some houses for the poor in the church land. Cf J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India...*, II, p. 1079.

³⁰ For example, in 1925 the government awarded the coveted *Kaiser-i-Hind* gold medal to Fr. Eugene Mederlet for his initiatives for social welfare and development of people. Cf *ibid.*, I, pp. 52-53.

in India, in the company of recruits from this country, so that by the time they would be ordained priests, they would know the country, the people, their language, history, customs and manners so well that they would be able to take up their work with confidence and competence. The immediate result of this decision was the opening of the novitiate house in Shillong on 8 December 1923³¹ called "Our Lady's House", and the beginning of the novitiate proper for twelve novices on 20 January 1924³², the starting of a studentate of philosophy in 1925, and a studentate of theology in 1928³³. By 1932, in Shillong, there were nearly a hundred young Salesians in formation.

The Salesians of South India started a novitiate house at Tirupattur in December 1933. The first batch of novices professed on 29 January 1935. Tirupattur was also the studentate of philosophy from January 1935. Since there were no novices due to the World War II, the novitiate building was reconditioned for students of theology, and the theologate was inaugurated on 1 March 1941³⁴.

In this way, the Salesians of Northern and Southern provinces had their own formation houses in India for all the stages of initial formation. Because of this bold strategy, the early Salesians were able to keep alive their missionary spirit, learn local languages and familiarise themselves with indigenous cultures, customs and practices, and some of them became outstanding contributors to local languages and cultures. But some Salesians lamented that there were too many formation houses in India, when there was a great scarcity of personnel to work in the missions.

3.2. *Fostering of indigenous vocations*

Right from the beginning, efforts were made by the pioneer Salesians to foster indigenous vocations to Salesian life, an initiative which in the early decades of the last century was not at all easy to accomplish. In the early years, the candidates to Salesian life were sent to Europe for their initial formation³⁵. In 1924 among the

³¹ Cf L. MATHIAS, *Quarant'anni di Missione in India...*, p. 104; ASPF n. 3781, *Mathias to Propaganda Fide*, 19 september 1933, p. 730.

³² Cf L. MATHIAS, *Quarant'anni di Missione in India...*, p. 122; ASC A891, *Mathias to Rinaldi*, 1 april 1924.

³³ Cf ASC A891, *Mathias to Rinaldi*, 25 august 1925; ASPF n. 3781, *Mathias to Propaganda Fide*, 19 september 1933, p. 730. With the terrible fire of Shillong of 10 April 1936, which burned down the house of formation in Shillong along with the cathedral, Bishop's house, etc. the formation house of the Salesian province of North India began an "itinerant" phase. The studentate of theology returned to Mawlai, Shillong, in 1938.

³⁴ For one year (1944-1945) the novitiate of Tirupattur was shifted to Dibrugarh. From 1946 to 1953 novitiate was at Kotagiri and after that it was shifted to Yercaud. In 1950 theologate of the Southern province was started at Yercaud. In 1949-1950 when Fr. Fedrigotti made the canonical visitation of the Southern province, the aspirantate was at Tirupattur, and the novitiate and the philosophate were at Kotagiri.

³⁵ The first Indian boy to join the Salesians was Louis Karunai who was sent to Italy in 1907

first batch of twelve novices in Shillong, four were Indians³⁶. According to Mgr. Mathias, it was an attempt to mix European and Indian elements right from the time of novitiate, and it was also the first attempt of its kind in the history of the Catholic missions³⁷. With the outbreak of the World War II, no more novices could come from Europe, and the Salesians were forced to look for indigenous vocations in a more serious way. This resulted in both the Salesian provinces of India having many indigenous vocations. The candidates to Salesian life belonged to different languages, ethnic groups and rites³⁸. Though all the Salesian missionaries who came to India belonged to the Latin rite, they willingly accepted candidates from the ancient Syrian rite (Syro-Malabar) of Kerala³⁹. They also took special care to promote vocations of Salesian coadjutors.

The farsightedness and boldness of the pioneer Salesians to promote indigenous vocations had tremendous positive impact on the future of Salesian work in India. The Acts of the Superior Chapter of 1929 had asked all the Salesian missionaries to promote indigenous vocations with zeal⁴⁰. But the repeated advice of the superiors from Turin to the Salesians in India was that they should select very carefully and choose only the best among them (*"migliori fra gli ottimi"*). With the view to build up local Churches they encouraged the Salesians in India to promote indige-

as an aspirant. From Italy he proceeded to Portugal for his novitiate. Unfortunately he fell ill and died in Lisbon in 1909. In August 1907 Ignatius Muthu and Maria Arulsamy joined the Salesians at Tanjore as aspirants, and both were late vocations. In June 1908 they were sent to Italy for their novitiate. After completing their novitiate and philosophy (in Portugal and Italy) they returned to India in November 1911. Cf Nicholas LO GROU, *History of the Kolkata province of St. John Bosco*. Kolkata, Salesians of Don Bosco 2003, p. 13; J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India...*, I, pp. 22-23; L. MATHIAS, *Quarant'anni di missione in India...*, pp. 121-122.

³⁶ They were Joseph Sandanam, M. Lourdes Doraisamy and Savarimuthu from South India, and Douglas Wollaston, an Anglo-Indian from Shillong. Cf *ibid.*, p. 104; N. LO GROU, *History of the Kolkata province of St. John Bosco...*, pp. 64; J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India...*, I, p. 52.

³⁷ Cf L. MATHIAS, *Quarant'anni di missione in India...*, pp. 104-105. A report of 1933 gives a list of the different nationalities of the European Salesians and the linguistic and cultural provenance of the Indigenous Salesians. Cf ASC A890, *Relazione sul Progresso...*

³⁸ Fr. Joseph Carreño, provincial of South India, in his report of the year 1947 stated that, among the 121 Salesians (including novices) of South India, the professed Indian Salesians were 37, of whom 11 were priests, and all the 15 novices were Indians. He also mentioned that the Indian element in the province consisted of the following groups: Tamilians, Anglo-Indians, East Indians, Goans, Mangalorians, Telugues and Keralites. The vocations from Kerala were divided into those of the Latin and Syrian rites. Cf ASC F187, *Report of Joseph Carreño 1947*, 21 January 1948, p. 1. In the Northern province the Indian element consisted of Keralites, Khasis, Nepalis, Adivasis, Anglo Indians, Burmese, etc.

³⁹ Cf ASC F187, *Report of Carreño 1947*, 21 January 1948, pp. 1-2, 4. In India, the Catholic Church has three liturgical rites: Syrian (Syro-Malabar), Malankara (Syro-Malankara) and Latin. The first two rites trace their origin to the evangelising mission of St. Thomas the Apostle in the first century A.D.

⁴⁰ Cf *Atti del Capitolo Superiore della Società Salesiana*, Anno X, art. n. 6, p. 818.

nous vocations also for the local Churches. The starting of Sacred Heart Seminary, Poonamalle in 1936 by Mgr. Mathias to form future diocesan priests, and entrusting it to the Salesians to look after it, speaks volumes for the significant contribution of the Salesians in building up the local Churches of India.

3.3. Promotion of indigenous cultures

The Salesian missionaries were great promoters of the indigenous cultures of India. The Superior Chapter of 1929 had specifically asked the Salesian missionaries, to undertake in mission lands, studies related to ethnology, glottology, flora, fauna, geology, meteorology, and all that could contribute to scientific progress, literature, art and the development of people⁴¹. Following this guideline, some of the Salesian in India attempted to incorporate elements of local culture into pastoral and liturgical life, provided they did not offend propriety and decorum; some made efforts to learn Sanskrit; some had deep knowledge of Indian history and culture; some were familiar with the Hindu sacred scriptures and cited them in their writings⁴²; some frequently wrote on the historical, social, cultural, anthropological and religious aspects of the people which appeared in magazines, bulletins and scientific reviews, and as monographs⁴³; some collected and preserved with meticulous care cultural artefacts⁴⁴ and rare photos related to the culture and traditions of people.

India has a millennial tradition of well-developed theatre, music and art. The Salesians were quick to realise this, and inculturated many elements of the local culture and customs of people into the life of the Church and their apostolate. For example, at Sacred Heart Parish, Tanjore, they used to have a “passion play” on Maundy Thursday night, with appropriate songs and human actors; the weaving departments of South India produced carpets, cloths of different varieties and silk saris to meet local interests. The Salesians of Assam mission composed numerous religious hymns in local languages, and traditional costumes, cultural dances and music were made part of the solemn feasts and liturgical celebrations; since theatricals, music, games and sports are integral part of the social life of the tribal people,

⁴¹ Cf *ibid.*, art. n. 10, p. 820.

⁴² For example, Bishop Ferrando quoted from the *Brihad Aranyaka Upanisad* (1,3,28) in one of his letters to Propaganda Fide. Cf ASPF n. 3603, *Ferrando to Propaganda Fide*, 24 august 1949.

⁴³ For example, the monographs on the customs, traditions and literature of the Khasis by Fr. Giulius Costa. Cf ASPF n. 5192, *Ferrando to Propaganda Fide*, 28 december 1938, p. 211; the writings of Fr. Aloysius Ravalico on the history religions and cultures of India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka). Cf ASC A887, *Ravalico “India: «il Diadema di Cristo»”*; *“Cristo: «il Gioiello dell’India»”*; *“I Gioielli dell’India”*; *“Le perle e i rubini di Ceylon”*; *“Ceylon la Perla dell’Oriente”*; ASC C323, *Ravalico “La Croce in India”* 27 july 1944.

⁴⁴ For example, in 1925 the Salesians of Assam mission collected and sent, first to Rome and then to Turin, an abundance of cultural artifacts for the missionary exhibition organized to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Salesian missions. Cf L. MATHIAS, *Quarant’anni di missione in India...*, p. 151.

they introduced choir, orchestra, band, dramas, games, sports, drill displays, and so on into their educational system. The practice of blessing the seeds for sowing, bringing the first fruits at the offertory during the Holy Mass and the like, made Christianity in harmony with the traditional religious rituals⁴⁵. They made good use of the custom of holding large gatherings of people for evangelisation and catechesis. Thus when many foreign Christian missionaries were criticised as destroyers of Indian culture, the Salesians strongly affirmed that the Catholic Church embraces all peoples and all cultures, and that it does not destroy any culture but preserves and sanctifies all that is good and true in them.

3.4. *Promotion of local languages*

In the “norms for missionaries” approved in 1929 by the General Chapter XIII, the missionaries were asked to study the language, history and culture of their “new fatherland”⁴⁶. All the Salesian missionaries who came to India made a special effort to learn the local languages of their mission territories. In South India the pioneer Salesians could speak Tamil quite well. There were of some European Salesians who “could not speak English”, which was the common language of communication among the Salesians in India, but they were masters of the local languages of their missions. Many Salesian schools introduced vernacular languages, either as medium of instruction or subjects to be studied by students; in several schools of South India, Tamil was either the medium of instruction or taught as a subject in school; in Assam mission a number of Salesian schools promoted such local languages as Assamese, Hindi, Khasi, Garo, etc. Often catechism competitions were held in vernacular languages. Mention may be made of the famous catechism competition in Shillong, on 7 December 1941, in thirteen languages to mark the centenary celebrations of Don Bosco’s priestly ordination on 5 June, and the first catechism lesson to Bartolomeo Garelli on 8 December. In Assam mission, the Salesians were among the first to produce literature in some of the local languages of Northeast India. Some of them translated into local languages the New Testament, Catechism books, Bible history, prayers, hymns, lives of saints and popes; some regularly edited and published periodicals in local languages, some wrote dictionaries, grammars, and textbooks in local languages for use in Catholic schools, which were officially recognised by the government and proposed for use also in public schools and those run by non-Catholics.

⁴⁵ Cf George MALIEKAL, *History of the Catholic Church among the Khasis*. Shillong, Don Bosco Centre for Indigenous Cultures (DBCIC) Publications, Sacred Heart Theological College 2005, pp. 261-262, 269.

⁴⁶ Cf *Atti del Capitolo Superiore della Società Salesiana*, Anno X, art. n. 7, p. 818.

3.5. *Identification with the people of India*

The Salesians tried their best to identify themselves with the people of India. They shared the poverty and privations of people and their simple style of life. They walked for hours to reach villages to meet people, ate what the people could provide, and slept in their huts. They lived in great poverty, which was at times extreme, so that sometimes they lacked even the basic necessities of life. They patiently accepted the discomforts and inconveniences related to the climate, living conditions, food, travel and sicknesses. They courageously faced problems arising from the multiplicity of languages. They actively participated in the important events in the life of the nation, like Independence Day and Republic Day, and encouraged their pupils and Salesians in formation to do the same. Some of the Salesians made India their permanent home and never returned to their home country to meet their parents or relatives, while others went only after many decades. Several European Salesians freely opted to become Indian citizens.

3.6. *Openness towards followers of other religions*

India is a land of many religions. Right from the start, the Salesians maintained and nurtured a good relationship with all non-Christians. In their institutions like, orphanages, schools, boardings, hostels and university colleges there were numerous students and inmates who were non-Christians. Most of their lay collaborators were non-Christians, and even some benefactors⁴⁷. In their oratories all youth were welcome without distinction of religion. In parishes and mission centres the Salesians easily related with non-Christians in a spirit of mutual acceptance, appreciation and friendship. In their "apostolic excursions" (*passeggiate apostoliche*) and visits to the villages they had contact with many non-Christians. They engaged in missionary evangelisation, catechesis and education respecting the freedom of conscience of people. They related to non-Christians with great respect, openness, and cordiality, and were concerned about their pains, agonies and aspirations, and reached out to them through their works of charity and humanitarian services, especially in times of great need, calamities and misfortunes.

3.7. *Inculturation of key Salesian elements*

The Salesians took special care to introduce and inculturate in India all the key elements of the Salesian charism, spirit, spirituality and traditions, and among them the following may be mentioned:

⁴⁷ For example, a Hindu gentleman donated Rs 10,000 (a large sum of money in those days) to St Xavier's orphanage at Tanjore. Cf J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India...*, I, p. 55.

3.7.1 Devotion to Mary Help of Christians

One of the recommendations of Don Bosco to his first missionaries was to spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians. Therefore, the Salesians who came to India made special efforts to spread devotion to her.

On the day of arrival of the pioneer Salesians at Tanjore on 14 January 1906, there was a cultural programme in their honour, which was concluded with a prayer of thanksgiving and the blessing of Mary Help of Christians; at Tanjore, the Salesians prepared a little altar in one of the rooms with a beautiful statue of Mary Help of Christians and used to gather in front of it for all their practices of piety, except the Holy Mass; on 8 December 1906, on the feast day of Mary Immaculate, an image of Mary Help of Christians made its first “public appearance” at Tanjore; the first chapel of the Salesians at Tanjore blessed on 28 August 1907 was dedicated to Mary Help of Christians; at Mylapore, when the bishop allowed a chapel in the house, Mary Help of Christians occupied a pride of place in it⁴⁸. The pioneer Salesians took pride in speaking about their devotion to Don Bosco’s Madonna.

In Assam mission, when the first Salesians were presented to the people on 15 January 1922, all the people present were given a picture of Mary Help of Christians. On 24 May 1922, the feast of Mary Help of Christians was solemnly celebrated, and pictures and medals were freely distributed to the people. There was a Marian procession in the evening, and all those who took part in it were given a picture of Mary Help of Christians with the novena prayer printed at the back in Khasi. In the night, the small Salesian community prostrated at the feet of Mary Help of Christians and consecrated the whole Assam mission to the Madonna of Don Bosco. Already in 1927 Mgr Mathias was thinking of building a shrine of Mary Help of Christians in the Assam mission. In 1932 on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the arrival of the Salesians in Shillong, there was a great celebration, and they made a public act of entrustment of the Assam mission to Mary Help of Christians⁴⁹.

The first Salesian house they built in Shillong for the novices and the future students of philosophy and theology was called “Our Lady’s House”. On 15 November 1947 the new Cathedral of Shillong (still incomplete without the two wings) was blessed and dedicated to Mary Help of Christians⁵⁰. The church of Sagaing (Burma) dedicated to Mary Help of Christians was inaugurated in August 1948. In July 1949 Fr. Mariano Uget, provincial, forwarded to the Rector Major the petitions of several bishops of North India, requesting the Holy Father to extend the feast of Mary Help of Christians to the whole Church⁵¹. On 15 August 1954 there was the solemn coronation of Mary Help of Christians in the cathedral of Shillong⁵².

⁴⁸ Cf Giorgio TOMATIS, “La nuova casa di Meliapor”, in BS XXXIII (ottobre 1909) 307.

⁴⁹ Cf ASC F176, *Cronaca Ispettorica Salesiana Nord-Indiana*, p. 226, 3 april 1932.

⁵⁰ Cf ASC B709, *Ferrando to Ricaldone*, 19 november 1947. Its foundation stone was laid towards the end of 1936. Cf ASC A813, *Ferrando “Due consolanti notizie”*, 26 october 1936.

⁵¹ Cf J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India...*, II, p. 1177.

⁵² Cf ASPF n. 4100, *Ferrando to Propaganda Fide*, 24 august 1955, p. 83.

The pioneer Salesians used various methods to spread devotion to Mary Help of Christians such as, promotion of the sodality of Mary Help of Christians, Association of Mary Help of Christians, novena to Mary Help of Christians, blessing of Mary Help of Christians, act of entrustment to Mary Help of Christians, Marian processions, practice of taking the statue of Mary Help of Christians from family to family with solemnity and devotion, distribution of pictures and medals, commemoration of the 24th of every month, Marian congresses and exhibitions, Marian publications, building churches, chapels, shrines and cathedrals in honour of Mary Help of Christians, founding indigenous religious congregations with Mary Help of Christians as principal patroness, etc.

3.7.2. Making Don Bosco known and loved

When the Salesians first came to India, Don Bosco was hardly known in the country. But within a few years his name was well known in the land. All the Salesians were fired with the zeal to make their father and founder known and loved by the people of India, and it was succinctly expressed in the words of Mgr Mathias who wrote to the Rector Major, Fr. Ricaldone, on 3 April 1935: "Yes my ambition is to make Don Bosco known and loved. I would like to flood India with Don Bosco, and this filial and ardent desire which almost devours me, makes me daring, strong and courageous"⁵³.

Salesians named their institutions, associations and buildings after Don Bosco. They fully utilised the events of the beatification (1929) and canonisation (1934) of their founder as privileged occasions to make him known and loved by Indians, and the printed word was well utilised for this purpose. Already in 1917 the life of Don Bosco was translated into Tamil by a certain T. S D'Sami⁵⁴; in 1927, in the Assam plains, Fr. Leo Piasecki started a monthly in Hindi called *Salesian Khabarein* which was soon known through the Salesian world as the Salesian Bulletin in Hindi; in 1930 Don Bosco Shillong published a life of Don Bosco in English written by Austin Anderson; in November 1930 the monthly review *Don Bosco in India* was started to make Don Bosco and the Salesian work in India known to a wider public; in 1932, in Shillong, a life of Don Bosco was published in Khasi; in 1930, in Shillong, a bronze bust of Don Bosco was unveiled to mark his beatification⁵⁵; in 1934 a bronze monument in honour of Don Bosco was set up at a public square in Shillong, the first in India and probably also in Asia, to mark his canonisation; in 1937, in Bombay, Fr. Aurelio Maschio started to publish a folder with the title *Don Bosco's Madonna* which over the years grew in size and appearance and in number of copies issued⁵⁶; an Indian edition of the *Salesian*

⁵³ ASC A891, *Mathias to Ricaldone*, 3 april 1935.

⁵⁴ Cf ASC F186, *Tomatis to Albera*, 25 february 1917.

⁵⁵ Cf L. MATHIAS, *Quarant'anni di missione in India...*, p. 289.

⁵⁶ Cf Joseph THEKKEDATH, *Keynote Address. A Historical bird's eye view of the Salesian Mission in India*, in Paul PUTHANANDADY (ed.), *Research Seminar on the Life and Mission of the Salesians in South Asia*. Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti College 2006, p. 82.

Bulletin was started in January 1951⁵⁷; from January 1952 onwards they were printing in Mandalay (Burma) 500 copies of *Don Bosco* with a supplement; and a small magazine with the title *Don Bosco* was also being published in Burmese⁵⁸.

Devotion to St. John Bosco was popularised in various ways, such as, processions with the statue and relics of the saint, novena in preparation for his feast, reading in the refectory, good night talks, commemoration of Don Bosco on the last day of the month, etc. In Burma so many graces and miracles were attributed to the saint that he entered into many families as a great wonder-worker. The Salesians built churches and shrines in his honour. In 1937, at Tezpur, the first Church of St John Bosco in India was started, and it was completed and blessed on 31 January 1947⁵⁹. In 1952 the shrine of St. John Bosco at Cherrapunjee was blessed. Special events in the life of Don Bosco like, the centenary of his priestly ordination, the centenary of the beginning of his work for youth, etc., were fully utilised to make Don Bosco known and loved by people. Two indigenous religious congregations of women – the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC), and the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate (SMI) – founded in India by the Salesians were inspired by the pastoral charity of Don Bosco, and he is one of their principal patron saints.

3.7.3. Inculturation of the preventive system

Pope Pius XI advised Fr. Philip Rinaldi, the Rector Major, to apply the educational system of Don Bosco to all aspects of the mission, assuring him that it would give consoling results everywhere⁶⁰. In 1925 the Apostolic Visitor to India Mgr. Alexis-Henri-Marie Lépiciér after visiting the Salesian institutions told Mgr. Mathias: “fill India with Don Bosco. You have a sure and efficacious method”⁶¹.

Inculturation of the preventive system, which has pastoral charity at its centre, was one of the secrets of success of the Salesian works in India. When the Salesians took charge of the orphanage of Tanjore in 1906, they tried to give it a Salesian identity by organising it according to the Salesian spirit, method and traditions. In their institutions they manifested their love and care for the young in tangible ways, as Don Bosco did at Valdocco, by taking care of all their needs, material, spiritual and psychological. They were constantly present among them at prayer, meals, study and recreation. The boys of the orphanage of Tanjore belonged to various castes or were *dalits*. But they were together in the chapel, dormitory, study hall and for games

⁵⁷ Cf J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India...*, II, p. 838.

⁵⁸ Cf *ibid.*, I, pp. 645, 648.

⁵⁹ Cf ASC A813 *Ravalico* “*La posa della prima pietra della chiesa a San Giovanni Bosco*”, 15 november 1937; ASC B709, *Ferrando to Ricaldone*, 1 october 1947.

⁶⁰ The Pope said: “Nelle missioni applicate in tutta la sua estensione il sistema educativo di Don Bosco: portate in esse l’educazione di Don Bosco, i suoi sistemi, i suoi mezzi, il suo spirito, ed essi daranno dappertutto consolanti risultati.” ASPF n. 3781, *Mathias to Propaganda Fide*, 19 september 1933, p. 727.

⁶¹ L. MATHIAS, *Quaran’anni di Missione in India...*, p. 155.

and walks. For meals, washing and bathing, however, they had two separate places. In spite of this little separation of castes, there was much family spirit in the house. When the Salesians took over the orphanage of Tanjore, there were only six boys, but a few months after their arrival, the number of boys began to increase. A report of August 1924 stated that there were 180 boys in the orphanage⁶².

The special concern for the welfare of poor youth was seen also in the orphanage of Mylapore, which the Salesians took over in 1909. Fr. George Tomatis who was the superior of the house had known Don Bosco personally. A wonderful spirit reigned there, and he was much loved by the orphans to whom he was a true “mother and father”. Fr. Archimede Pianazzi says that Fr. Tomatis radically changed the atmosphere of the orphanage at Mylapore⁶³.

The mission house of Guwahati was noted for family spirit, and Fr. Anthony Alessi, the superior was particularly responsible for it. When he left for Mandalay, Burma, in early January 1939, the house chronicler wrote “the house lost a caring superior”⁶⁴. From 19 to 26 November 1950 there was a grand exhibition at Don Bosco technical school, Shillong, which was opened by the governor. After seeing the exhibits for three hours, the governor spoke enthusiastically to the boys saying: “Now I understand how a boy can be taken from the streets or from the jungle and transformed into an active young man, useful to himself and to society. The educative method of Don Bosco does these marvels”, and referring to Don Bosco he said: “India needs a man like him”⁶⁵.

The preventive system was taught to the young Salesians in formation through the example of life of the Salesians, and by means of study and practice. They were given opportunities to put into practice the preventive system, especially during their Sunday oratory activities, visits to the villages, in schools and boardings. The extraordinary visitors to the Salesian houses in India were never tired of telling the Salesians to practice the preventive system and preserve the spirit of family.

3.7.4. Promotion of Salesian family

The Salesian Family grew out of the genius of Don Bosco to bring together all people of good will who could help him to fulfil his mission on behalf of poor and abandoned youth. The pioneer Salesians in India actively promoted the growth of the members of the Salesian Family like, the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians (FMA)⁶⁶,

⁶² Cf J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India...*, I, p. 26.

⁶³ Cf Archimede PIANAZZI, *Don Bosco nell'Assam: la storia di una missione*. Leumann (To), LDC 1983 p. 15.

⁶⁴ Cf J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India...*, II, p. 1281.

⁶⁵ Cf *ibid.*, p. 1271.

⁶⁶ The first batch of six Salesian sisters reached Tanjore, South India, on 24 November 1922. Six Salesian Sisters reached the Assam mission on 8 December 1923. Cf *ibid.*, I, pp. 51-52.

Salesian Co-operators⁶⁷ and Association of Salesian Past Pupils⁶⁸. The first half of the last century saw the founding of the two flourishing indigenous religious institutes of women that share the charism and spirit of Don Bosco, namely, the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians (MSMHC) and the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate (SMI).

The Institute of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians was founded by the Salesian Bishop Stephen Ferrando (1895-1978) of Shillong as a diocesan congregation on 24 October 1942. The congregation is fully mission oriented with mission *ad gentes* and catechetical instruction as its main charism. It also engages in various forms of works of charity, such as, conducting schools, orphanages, oratories, home for infants, widows and aged, care for the sick in hospitals, etc.⁶⁹. The congregation has a special predilection for women, girls and children, especially of villages and rural areas. The members of the Institute share the charism of Don Bosco and live his spirit and spirituality and practice the preventive system. It has Mary Help of Christians as its principal and titular patroness, and St. John Bosco and St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello among its patron saints⁷⁰.

The Institute of the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate was founded by the Salesian Bishop Louis La Ravoire Morrow (1892-1987) of Krishnagar as a diocesan congregation on 12 December 1948⁷¹. The main charism of the congregation is evangelisation and catechetical instruction of women, girls and children, Catholic

⁶⁷ The pioneer Salesians of Tanjore, within three weeks of their arrival in 1906, succeeded in starting a unit of some forty Salesian Co-operators. Cf Giorgio TOMATIS, *La prima Conferenza Salesiana. Il lavoro dei Missionari*, in BS 30 (aprile 1906) 114. In Goa there were already Salesian Co-operators at the time of Don Michael Rua (died in 1910). Cf J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India...*, II, p. 717. The first meeting of Salesian Cooperators of North India was held on 31.1.1940 at Calcutta. Cf ASC A813, *Vincent Scuderi to Ricaldone*, 17 february 1940.

⁶⁸ In 1937 Past Pupils were in Bombay, and preparations were underway to organize them at Vellore. Cf ASC F187, *Report Eligius Cinato*, 30 september 1937. From August 1937 onwards the Past Pupils of Shillong began to organise themselves, and by 1939 they were a formally established association with an elected the president and secretary. Cf ASC F176, *Cronaca Ispettorica Salesiana Nord-Indiana*, 15 august 1937, p. 313.

⁶⁹ Cf MSMHC, *Constitutions*. Shillong, St Margaret's Convent 1948, art. n. 2.

⁷⁰ Cf MSMHC, *Constitutions* 1948, art. n. 4. Bishop Ferrando spoke figuratively of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians as a branch that separated itself from the trunk of the banyan tree of the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians, and affirmed that Mary Help of Christians is the mother and patroness of the congregation, the spirit of Mornese is the spirit of the congregation, and St. Mary Mazzarello is a model for imitation. Cf ASC A892, *A paper prepared by Ferrando*, c. 1967. In 1978 the Institute became a congregation of Pontifical Right, and in 1986 a member of the Salesian Family.

⁷¹ Cf ASC B715, see cyclostyled "*Memoirs of Father Bishop*", p. 58. Bishop Morrow accepted into his congregation the fifteen Sisters of the former congregation of the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate (*Bhoginis*), started by Bishop Santino Taveggia with the help of the Sisters of Charity of Bartholomea Capitano in 1922, and canonically erected by Mgr. Scuderi in 1937 as the congregation of the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate. Cf *ibid.*, pp. 1-14, 43-66.

and non-Catholic, in towns and villages. The sisters conduct festive and daily oratories, care for the sick in private homes, dispensaries and small hospitals, run schools and orphanages for girls, boarders and for day pupils, infant asylums and maternity wards⁷². The sisters practice the preventive system of Don Bosco⁷³. The congregation has Mary Immaculate Help of Christians as titular patroness and St John Bosco as one of its patron saints⁷⁴.

3.7.5. Promotion of devotion to Salesian saints

The pioneer Salesians in India made special efforts to promote devotion to Salesian saints, like, St. Francis de Sales, St. John Bosco, St. Mary Domenica Mazzarello, St. Domenic Savio, etc. In the early years most of the Salesians made their religious profession on the feast of St. Francis de Sales. The feast of St. John Bosco was solemnly celebrated in all the Salesian houses, often with a novena in preparation for it, and with processions carrying his statue or relic on the feast day. When blessed Mary Mazzarello was canonised on 24 June 1951, celebrations in honour of the new saint were held in many parts of India. When the Salesian Bishop Ferrando founded the congregation of the Missionary Sisters of Mary Help of Christians in 1942, she was presented as model for the novices and sisters to imitate, and included her name among the principal patron saints of the congregation. On 5 March 1950 Dominic Savio was beatified. The Salesians in India presented him as the patron of the young people and celebrated the event with great solemnity with the participation of numerous young people. There were many reports of miraculous cures through the intercession of Salesian saints like St. John Bosco, St. Dominic Savio, Augustus Czartoryski, (declared blessed on 25 April 2004), etc.⁷⁵.

4. Problems faced by Salesians in inculturation

Inculturation of the Salesian charism in India had its own share of problems. Due to the strong opposition from the part of the diocesan clergy, the Salesians were forced to withdraw from Tanjore and Mylapore in 1928, after 22 years of apostolic

⁷² Cf *Constitutions of the Catechist Sisters of Mary Immaculate*, Krishnagar, 1952, art. 5, pp. 38-39.

⁷³ The "Directory of Rules for the Institute" of 1952 has a full chapter on Preventive System entitled The "Preventive System of St. John Bosco". Cf *ibid.*, pp. 141-148. On 7 June 1966 the Institute became a congregation of Pontifical Right and on 10 June 1992 it was officially recognised as a member of the Salesian Family.

⁷⁴ Cf *ibid.*, art. 6, p. 39.

⁷⁵ For example, in October 1924, in Shillong, Fr. Paul Bonardi's miraculous recovery after his serious accident was attributed to Don Bosco; in Burma many miracles and graces were attributed to Don Bosco; in Assam plains, one of the catechists, effected several cures with the relics of St. Dominic Savio and Augustus Czartoryski. Cf L. MATHIAS, *Quarant'anni di Missione in India...*, p. 133; J. THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India...*, I, pp. 187, 605.

labour⁷⁶. In the Assam mission they faced hostility in their work from certain Protestant groups. This was acutely felt in Garo Hills and some parts of Khasi Hills of Meghalaya, in Nagaland and in Manipur. Though the Hindus in general were tolerant towards Christianity, some of them were suspicious of the works of the Christian missionaries, and looked upon Christianity as a foreign religion and considered the missionaries as the extended hand of British imperialism. In the beginning, recruitment of indigenous vocations to Salesian life was not encouraged, and when they began to do it, some were sceptical about the suitability and the ability of the Indian candidates to live Salesian life, and consequently some were explicitly opposed to it. Though the Salesians published much on the religious, historical, social and cultural aspects of India, some of their writings were sensational, exaggerated and negative in nature, and writings on the positive values found in Indian culture were very limited. At times one gets the impression that some Salesians had a feeling of “superiority” over the Indian culture and way of life, which made them look down upon and despise some of their cultural expressions. The pioneer groups of Salesians were composed of persons from different cultural backgrounds, nationalities, formation and character, which at times led to “conflicts” among them, and some returned to their country of origin for various reasons, and this shows that, they were also human beings with weakness and frailties. There were divisions and signs of hostility between the Indian and European groups, especially in some of the formation houses.

5. Some neglected aspects in inculturation

The pioneer groups of Salesians in India neglected, to a great extent, the education of the Hindu elite who were the “rulers” and “policy makers” of the country. A meaningful dialogue with them demanded of the Salesians a deep knowledge of Hinduism, Hindu philosophy and Hindu culture, for which most Salesians did not have the required intellectual and cultural preparation. The same can be said of their knowledge of the other religions found in India, like, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism, Islam, traditional religions, etc., The Salesians appeared to be more of ‘doers’ than scholars and thinkers.

We should take stock of the fact that, the “great success” of Salesian India was mainly among the tribal groups and the so-called *dalits*. The tribal communities did not have “organised religions” of their own with written sacred texts and systematised philosophy and theology in the strict sense of the term. The *dalits* were mostly people who wanted to liberate themselves from the oppressive caste system of Hinduism, and found Christianity as a religion that offered them what they were searching for. One may argue that, these factors contributed, to a great extent, to the success of the missionary, educative and developmental works of the Salesians in India.

⁷⁶ Cf M. KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth...*, p. 77. Bandel, in West Bengal, was offered to the Salesians as compensation for Tanjore and Mylapore. Cf ASC F176, *Mathias to Rinaldi*, 7 may 1928.

Though the Salesians went to India in order to evangelise through education, no serious attempt was made to study the ancient educational systems and methods of India or India's educational centres of antiquity and their contribution to world civilisation. Hardly any effort was made to find ways to inculturate the preventive system in a systematic way by taking into consideration the religious, social and cultural pluralism of India. The Salesians rarely attempted to study seriously the classical languages of the country, like Sanskrit, Pali, Prakrit, etc., which are indispensable tools for interpreting the Indian religions, philosophies and cultures. The Salesians did commendable service to the people of India through their apostolate of education, works of charity and developmental initiatives. But their efforts at empowering Indians to deal with their own problems and to educate them to social consciousness with a critical sense and social responsibility were limited.

One does not find any worthwhile attempt by early Salesians to study in depth the Indian understanding of religious life, ascetical discipline and mysticism or introduce elements of Indian spirituality into their prayer, meditation and liturgical life. Efforts were rarely made to use Indian art and architecture in constructing Churches, shrines, chapels, or in paintings, music and other art forms. The Association of Mary Help of Christians (ADMA), founded by Don Bosco himself, did not take root in India. Though the Salesians had all the stages of initial formation in India, the contents of their philosophical and theological curricula were very much Western and "Eurocentric", and this did not prepare them intellectually for a serious and fruitful dialogue with Indian theologians and philosophers. On the whole, the Salesians were culturally and intellectually unprepared for a genuine dialogue with India, which is one of the ancient civilisations of the world, the birth place of several world religions, the land of many philosophical and theological schools noted for their subtleties of thought, and of sages and mystics with their profound wisdom and intuition. Hence a large portion of Indian culture remained inaccessible to them, and consequently outside purview of inculturation. But we should also remember that we are dealing with a "pre-Vatican" period when concepts such as, inculturation, interreligious dialogue, ecumenism, openness to the modern world, and the conviction that other cultures and religions also have elements that are good, true and noble were not much vogue. This should help us to look at some of their "failures", "errors", and "shortcomings" with understanding, and refrain from making absolute judgments of negative nature regarding what they did or could not succeed in doing.

Conclusion

If there was a particular quality that characterised the pioneer groups of Salesians in India, it was their unflinching fidelity to Don Bosco and their ardent desire to make the Salesian charism firmly rooted in their "new fatherland". In order to achieve this objective, they invested all their energies and resources for it. They were daring, creative, patient and persevering in their efforts, and in spite of their limita-

tions and short comings, they succeeded in their enterprise to a great extent. But one should also acknowledge the ability of the Indian culture to be open and receptive to positive values found in other cultures irrespective of their provenience. This cultural condition also facilitated the inculturation of the Salesian charism, so that when the Salesians reached India, they found a “fertile soil” where Don Bosco’s charism could grow and take root. Therefore, this favourable cultural context of India should also be recognised as one of the factors responsible for the rapid inculturation of the Salesian charism in the country. Further, India inherited a charism which had its origin in a fully Christian context, and it took root in a predominantly non-Christian context. Perhaps, the novelty and uniqueness of the inculturation of the Salesian charism in India consists precisely in this, and it is a proof that the charism of Don Bosco is universal and that it has the ability to incarnate itself in any culture, provided the right processes and methods are employed.