

SIGNIFICANT EDUCATIVE EXPERIENCES OF SALESIANS IN INDIA FROM 1906 UP TO 1951

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By mid-nineteenth century the British were the masters of the whole of India and it was brought directly under the British Crown until India became independent in 1947². The first stage of Church in India began with the arrival of St. Thomas the Apostle in AD 52, but was limited to Malabar (the present Federal State of Kerala). The second stage began only in the 16th century, with the proselytization of Asia linked to the Portuguese colonial policy and the Papal bull – *Romanus Pontifex* - written on 8th January 1455 by Pope Nicholas V to King Alfonso V of Portugal by which it was confirmed to the Crown of Portugal the dominion over all lands discovered or conquered during the age of discovery. The patronage of the propagation of the Christian faith in Asia was given to the Portuguese. The missionaries of the different orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, Augustinians, etc.) reached India for evangelization but the presence of the Latin Church in India began with the arrival of the Catalan (or French) Dominicans in Surat in 1320, and then in Quilon (1323), Calicut, Mangalore, Thane and Broach³. The history of Portuguese missionaries in India started with the neo-apostles who reached Kappad near Kozhikode on 20 May 1498 but reached the apex with the arrival of St. Francis Xavier and other Jesuit missionaries to Goa in the mid-16th century, around 1540⁴. The suppression of the Jesuit Society by the Pope in 1773 deprived India of the majority of its missionaries⁵. The third stage began with the setting up of new vicariates apostolic by the Holy See of Madras, Bengal, the Coromandel (Pondicherry) in the 1830ies and others depending on the availability of missionaries and the arrival of missionaries from various religious congregations (the Foreign Missionaries in Tamil Nadu and Mysore, diocesan priests from Ireland in Madras, the Jesuits who returned in 1838 to Madurai, MSFS in 1845 to Visakhapatnam, the Milan Fathers in Hyderabad and Vijayawada, the Mill Hill Fathers in Nellore and Guntur, the Carmelites – OCD – in Verapoly, the German Jesuits in Maharashtra and Gujarat, Jesuits from Venice in Mangalore, the Jesuits from Belgium to Bengal, the Holy Cross fathers in East

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² Cf Joseph THEKKEDATH, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India*. Vol. 1. Bangalore, Christu Jyoti Publications 2005, p. 2. [From here on this work will be referred to as: JT, vol. 1].

³ Cf *Christianity in India*, in http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christianity_in_India, (visited on 8 November 2014).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Cf JT, vol. 1, p. 6.

Bengal – today Bangladesh – the Milan Fathers in Krishnagar, the Capuchins in northern and north-western India)⁶.

Don Bosco founded the Salesian Society in 1859 and at the time of his death in 1888, there were more than one thousand Salesians working in 57 institutions in Italy, France, Spain, England, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil. The first Salesian missionary expedition was sent to Argentina in 1875⁷. In the missionary dream which Don Bosco had on 9 April 1886 he saw his sons working in Calcutta⁸. In 1876 and 1877 after his visits to Pope Pius IX Don Bosco thought seriously of sending his sons to India, to take up the vicariate apostolic of Mangalore. But he could not realize this project due to lack of personnel⁹.

The fame of Don Bosco as an educator of the young, especially the poor and abandoned, spread far and wide, beyond Italy, Europe and some Latin American countries. In 1883-84, Mgr. Goethals, vicar apostolic of Calcutta invited Don Bosco to start an orphanage at Giridih (Bihar)¹⁰. It was a very attractive offer but Don Bosco could not accept due to lack of personnel. After several years of epistolary as well as personal contacts and negotiations, first between Bishop Antonio de Souza Barroso of the *padroado* diocese of Mylapore and then after his demise in 1899 between his successor Bishop Teotonio Manuel Ribeiro Vieira de Castro, who had even personally met Don Bosco at Mathi in 1885 and Don Rua in Turin on 19 December 1904¹¹, that Don Rua finally sent the first group of six Salesians who reached Tanjore (belonging to the Diocese of Mylapore), a province of the Madras Presidency India¹², on 14th January (15th?) 1906¹³, to take up an orphanage with an attached elementary school (St. Francis Xavier) and a technical school (St. Xavier's Industrial School)¹⁴.

In this paper I intend to present some of the salient characteristics of the educative experiences of the Salesians in India from the beginning of their presence, i.e. from 1906 up to 1951-52, relying on the available historical documents. In a word

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁸ Archivio Salesiano Centrale Roma F177 [from here on abbreviate: ASC with file number] [ASC F177]; cf *Note confidenziali lasciate da Mgr. L. Mathias sull'Opera salesiana di Calcutta*; JT, vol. 1, p. 214.

⁹ Cf Mathew KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth. History and Relevance of the Early Salesian Presence in India. Tanjore and Mylapore, 1906-1928*. Bangalore 1989, pp. 10-12 (Hereinafter referred to as KAPPLI).

¹⁰ Cf George KOTTUPPALLIL, *Don Bosco, Don Rua in India*, in "Indian Missiological Review" 10 (1988) 54-56.

¹¹ Cf JT, vol. 1, p. 1.

¹² It is important to note that the history of Salesian presences in India between 1906 and 1950/1 is within the arc of pre-Independence India under the British Rule. Independence of India took place on 15 august 1947.

¹³ Cf Eugenio CERIA, *Annali della Società Salesiana*. Vol. III. Torino 1945, p. 610; KAPPLI, p. 16; JT, vol. 1, p. 9 (note 3).

¹⁴ Cf KAPPLI, pp. 12-15. Cf *Annali* III 606-609.

it can be stated that the Salesian missionaries who were invited to take up some of the already existing orphanages, elementary and/or high schools, and technical schools transformed them into *replicas* of Valdocco, on the footsteps of Don Bosco and the educative charism that he had realized and transmitted to his sons. Similarly any new presence, especially boarding for elementary and high school boys as well as for technical school students, was typically permeated with the *Valdocco spirit*. Preference was for orphan boys most of whom were Christians and other poor boys. Practically in all mission stations, where the Salesians were zealously and actively involved in Evangelization (preaching, catechizing, converting, baptizing, pastoral ministries, etc.) there existed and still exist schools, often boarding schools as well attached to the residence of the Salesians, including technical schools, where reigned and still reigns the Valdocco spirit. The first Salesian missionaries were imbibed with the Valdocco spirit and they just transmitted that spirit wherever they went and wherever they were present. I had the fortune and joy of knowing and living with some of the early Salesian missionaries and am a fruit as well as a witness of their educative presence in India.

1. Schools: Elementary, Middle and High Schools, Technical Schools and University Colleges

The Salesian missionaries set out for India with two precise scopes in keeping with the charism transmitted by Don Bosco: 1. education of the young and 2. evangelization of peoples, by taking up missions (parishes, dioceses) entrusted to them for taking care of the faithful but more especially by direct evangelization of non-Christians, who for the most part belonged to various ethnic tribal groups, leading them to conversion and baptism. In the field of evangelization the Salesian missionaries were filled with missionary zeal, just like St. Paul, and they risked everything, including health - some of whom died young in the very first years of their arrival and missionary engagement - to preach Jesus Christ and his Gospel. They were men of great faith in Jesus Christ, with deep rooted loving devotion for Mary Help of Christians and Don Bosco. They have had great success: the number of converts increased and numerous Christian communities flourished; new centers and new parishes were opened; new dioceses were entrusted to the Salesians. A true miracle of evangelization, perhaps one of the biggest in the recent history of the Church!

Education of young people, in particular poor and abandoned boys, was the primary objective of the Salesian missionaries who arrived in India. It is significant that the first missionary expedition to India in 1906, was to Tanjore, to take charge of an already existing work: an orphanage with a primary and a technical school (vocational school) attached to it, and this for an explicit reason, viz., that the Salesians were known to be good educators and that they put into practice a particular system of education which they received as charism from their Father and Founder Don Bosco. Like Don Bosco who had dedicated his entire life to educate and take care of the young, especially the poorest and most abandoned, the Salesian missionaries set

themselves to educate the children / youngsters of the orphanage at Tanjore, to form them into “good Christians and honest citizens.”

“The object of this institution [St. Francis Xavier Orphanage Tanjore] is primarily to provide a house for poor and destitute orphans and to give them all the rudiments of an elementary education, besides teaching them a suitable trade by means of which they may be enabled to earn an honest livelihood. [...] Those boys who show an aptitude for higher studies are allowed to pursue the same; but this is left to the discretion of the Superior of the Institution”¹⁵. The boys belonged to various castes/dalits. They were together in the chapel, dormitory, study-hall, for games and walks. For meals, washing and bathing they had two separate places. In spite of this separation of castes, there was much family spirit in the house¹⁶.

When the Salesians took up the orphanage and the direction of the elementary school of the parish there were just 6 orphans and 130 children attending the school. In 1927 the number of children at the orphanage rose to 120¹⁷. The elementary school grew up to a full-fledged high school of excellence – St. Anthony’s High School - with 650 students enrolled in 1927¹⁸.

In 1907, within a few months of their presence in Tanjore, the Salesians started the St. Xavier’s Industrial School with two workshops (sheds with thatched roofs) with two unpopular trades, blacksmith and shoemaker¹⁹, and changed them for two other trades, cabinet-making (carpentry) and weaving. Within few months the industrial school was granted government recognition and also offered a small annual subsidy. It became one of the best schools in the Madras presidency²⁰. In the public examinations held by the Government the technical school got 100% success. Naturally for running the industrial school they got the help of local crafts-masters as instructors. New concrete buildings for the technical school were built in 1928 (the year when the Salesians left Tanjore).

It is also interesting to note that, as per charism received from Don Bosco, within three weeks the Salesians started a unit of the Salesian cooperators and a festive oratory, where in the evenings an hour of catechism was conducted for the boys and the new cooperators²¹. A unit of scouts was also started and it won the appreciation of the people of Tanjore because of their services rendered at public functions. The school used to take part in the various competitions, especially in sports and games held at the District level and they returned with trophies, often got the first prizes.

¹⁵ ASC F186; cf *Annual Report of Dec. 1909 by the Director of the Orphanage and Industrial School*, pp. 13-14; Quoted in JT, vol. 1, p. 54.

¹⁶ *Salesian Provincial Archives Madras* (abbreviated from now on as SPAM); cf copy of *Relazione della Casa-Missione di Tanjore (Sud India) Novembre 1925-Maggio 1928*, by Bro. A. Frasson in December 1974; cf JT, vol. 1, p. 56.

¹⁷ Cf JT, vol. 1, pp. 53-54; KAPPLI, p. 18.

¹⁸ JT, vol. 1, pp. 56-57; KAPPLI, p. 26; ASC F177 *Report of Fr. Ricaldone on Tanjore*; SPAM, file *Mederlet-Tanjore* (1922-27), letter *Mederlet-Mathias* 12.1.1923.

¹⁹ Wrong choices for a caste-ridden Tanjore population.

²⁰ Cf KAPPLI, p. 90.

²¹ Cf JT, vol. 1, p. 20; See also KAPPLI, p. 17.

Similarly, the second presence in Madras-Mylapore was to take charge of an already existing orphanage (San Thome) with an annexed primary and technical school, which was offered to the Salesians by Bishop de Castro. The orphanage was in existence for over a century and was meant for Anglo-Indian boys. There were just 30 boys, living in poor conditions, when Fr. Tomatis took charge of the orphanage on 10th January 1909²². The government was very much concerned and interested in their education, even paid for their maintenance. The three Salesians settled down to run the orphanage in the Salesian way, viz., putting into practice the spirit and method of Don Bosco, which included the teaching of catechism, holding catechism competition, preparing the boys for first communion and other sacraments, celebrating the liturgical functions of the Feasts of the Blessed Virgin Mary especially Assumption and Mary Help of Christians with solemn mass, procession with hymns, music, fireworks, etc., which brought new life in the orphanage²³. They built a chapel as well. Year by year the number of boys increased from 50 (1907) to 180 (1924)²⁴. The boys attended the school run by the diocese. The smaller boys attended the nearby convent school run by the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary and the rest of the boys at St. Bede's High School that was newly erected in the orphanage compound²⁵. The orphanage building too was enlarged to accommodate more boys; there were 184 in 1925²⁶. New life emanated from the orphanage which took on the characteristics of a true Salesian house. The Salesians were very much appreciated by the public in general, even by Protestants and non-Christians²⁷. In 1927, however, the Salesians withdrew from Madras-Mylapore.

The third Salesian presence in the South was at Vellore in the North Arcot District. In 1928 the Salesians took over an existing primary school run by the French Missionaries of Pondicherry. An orphanage and a technical school (the Don Bosco Industrial School) were added later in 1931.

The second Salesian missionary expedition to North-East India (1922) was to take possession of the Prefecture of Assam which started off by taking charge of the parish and the St. Anthony's School in Shillong. It was an orphanage (50 boys) with an attached Middle English school (up to then run by the Holy Cross Congregation) and a technical school (which up to then was managed by the Salvatorian missionaries)²⁸. In 1931 the St. Anthony's School was officially recognized as high school²⁹, later in 1934/35 raised to the level of Junior College (I.A. or Intermediate Arts), recognized and affiliated to the University of Calcutta and in 1937 raised

²² JT, vol. 1, p. 25.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

²⁴ Cf ASC F186 *letters Tomatis-Gusmano* 2.5.1912; *Tomatis-Albera* 14.2.1917; 25.2.1917; 8.3.1920; JT, vol. 1, pp. 26-27; KAPPLI, p. 36.

²⁵ Cf SPAM, file no. 6 *Mgr. Mederlet*, containing a note-book entitled *Monografia della Casa Salesiana di Meliapor*; JT, vol. 1, pp. 28-29.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Cf KAPPLI, p. 36; JT, vol. 1, p. 27.

²⁸ Cf JT, vol. 1, pp. 107, 121-125.

²⁹ Cf JT, vol. 1, pp. 169-170.

to the B.A. level College (St. Anthony's College)³⁰. The orphanage and industrial school too made similar progress. In 1928 the Don Bosco Industrial School and Orphanage had a good number of artisans in various trades: carpentry, mechanics, tailoring, shoemaking and printing³¹.

In 1926 Fr. Marmol put up an orphanage and school for boys as well as a small industrial school at Guwahati³². Other orphanages and schools were set up. In fact in the first ten years (1922-1932) of Salesian presence in North-East India, the number of Catholics went up from 5,844 to 20,000; the number of priests from 6 to 26; the clerics from nil to 80; Salesian brothers from nil to 16, Christian centers from 93 to 298; orphanages from 2 to 7; professional and agricultural schools from 1 to 3; colleges and high schools from 2 to 4; oratories from nil to 10³³.

It was the same story with every Salesian presence in different parts of India. The primary mission of the Salesians, especially in different cities: Don Bosco School (1928) and Don Bosco Industrial School and Orphanage (1936) in Krishnagar; St. John's School in Bandel (started around 1870 as Middle school and High school in 1920, handed over to the Salesians in 1928); Don Bosco School in Tardeo (1928), which was shifted to Matunga and known as Don Bosco School Matunga in Mumbai (1941); St. Gabriel's High School in Madras (handed over to the Salesians in 1929); Don Bosco Orphanage and School (1929), Don Bosco School in Liluah, Calcutta (1937) with attached technical school with the following trades: mechanical, motor or electrical engineering, carpentry, cabinet-making, printing and book-binding; Lafon Memorial School in Mandalay, Myanmar (1939); Salesian College Sonada raised to Intermediate College and affiliated to the Calcutta University (1939); Dominic Savio Orphanage and School at Tirupattur (1942), Don Bosco school in Panjim, Goa (1946-1947); St. Joseph's English High School, Trivandrum, taken over from the Belgian Carmelites (1946); Carmel High School, Nagercoil which was run by Brothers of Charity from Belgium (1947); St. Joseph's Technical School, Basin Bridge Madras (1950); Don Bosco Matriculation and Don Bosco Junior College [the Sacred Heart College] affiliated to the University of Madras in Tirupattur (1951) etc., was to impart education especially to orphans and to poor and abandoned boys. In fact, almost all these and other schools, which the Salesians accepted, were orphanages with attached primary, secondary and technical schools. The Salesians were invited to revive, renew and improve those institutions in terms of both quantity and quality, turning them into good schools, precisely *Don Bosco Schools*, modelling on the school at Valdocco, by putting into practice the Educational System (Preventive System) transmitted by Don Bosco.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 171; cf. Joseph THELEKAT, *A History of the Salesians of Don Bosco in India*. Vol. 2. Bangalore, Christu Jyoti Publications 2005, pp. 1249, 1252 [From here on this work will be referred to as: JT, vol. 2]. This is the first university college in Salesian India and perhaps the first in the whole Salesian Congregation.

³¹ Cf JT, vol. 1, p. 173.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 138.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

In fact, the Don Bosco schools soon qualified themselves as among the best in India, officially recognized by the Ministry of Education, not only for the number of students who attended them (the number of day-scholars rose constantly: 50-100-500-1000-1500-2000 and more, and boarders from 6-50-100-150-200 and more), but also for academic achievements, discipline, good conduct and for extracurricular activities, like interschool general knowledge competitions, talent competitions, elocution, games, sports, theatre, music, etc. Even to this day, most of the Salesian schools in India, in competition with other private and public schools, are at the apex of the list for curricular and extracurricular activities. Similarly, the number of technical students increased year by year and the Don Bosco technical schools were (are) considered among the best in India and most of them have received official recognition from the Department of Technical Education of the State, and the passed-out students easily found (find) jobs in various fields: factories, railways, businesses offices, corporations and other sectors. Even those who had only completed some non-formal training in a technical profession got jobs and were able to find a living.

The vast majority of the boarding school boys, who attended Salesian schools, especially those established in the cities, were Catholics, especially Anglo-Indians, but there were also Protestants, Jews, Hindus and Muslims, as for example in Don Bosco School Liluah, Calcutta. Most of the day-scholars, however, were non-Christians, Hindus, Muslims and others. In the same way many of the teachers of the Salesian schools were laity: Catholics, some of whom were (are) Salesian Cooperators, but also many non-Catholics (Hindus and Muslims). St. John's High School, adjacent to Bandel Church, for example, as highlighted in the report (report of the extraordinary visit) of Don Candela in 1937, was practically in the hands of teachers, who were all Hindu and Muslims³⁴.

The Salesians, true to their charism, had a particular attachment for the youngsters of their technical schools (vocational schools), most of whom were Christians, orphans as well as poor, who were in need of some technical / professional training to get jobs and thus make a living and get involved in the normal social and political life. The trades provided were mainly those of mechanics: turner, fitter, driller, auto-mechanics, and others such as: electrical engineering, carpentry, cabinet making, printing, bookbinding, etc., all job-oriented trades. An interesting aspect was that the young students, as they learned a trade, also contributed to some monetary gain for the school as well. For example, the Salesians were well aware of the importance of the press, as was for Don Bosco, and in 1924 opened a printing press in the technical school in Tanjore, where the students, many of whom were orphans, while learning the printing technology, did some printing jobs that brought in some financial remuneration for the school. The typography (Don Bosco Technical School, Tanjore) printed and published Catholic literature on requests made by dioceses, parishes, schools, individuals, etc.; it undertook printing jobs offered by various government departments of the State, such as government decrees, orders, judgments,

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 259.

publications for the railways, and so on. The Salesians made full use of the printing departments of their technical schools for their own publications as well: books, pamphlets, literature for liturgical ministry, magazines, Salesian news, Salesian Bulletin, etc. Some of the publications were intended to make publicity for the Salesians themselves, thus for example, the *Life of Don Bosco* and the *Life of Dominic Savio*, translated into Tamil by one Mr. T. S. D'Sami, were printed and published³⁵. The printing technology had (has) a privileged place among the various trades offered in the Salesian technical schools (Don Bosco Technical School in Shillong, the Catholic Orphan Press / COP in Calcutta, etc.).

A special feature, characteristic of the Don Bosco technical schools, was the attention that was given to the humanistic education / formation of their technical students, and for this purpose the Salesians invented the so-called *Don Bosco Night Schools*. Progressively with their vocational training, at the night schools, the students were given general education in the various disciplines / subjects: English, Sociology, Economics, Geography, History, Human Formation, Etiquette, Religious Education, Theater, Music, etc., besides Catechism, Liturgy, Bible Studies, etc. For example, as early as in 1910, Fr. Mederlet started the *Don Bosco Night School* in Tanjore, where students of the technical school, after their technical training, received regular courses of general education in the evening, which lasted from 17.30 to 20.00 hours³⁶. Similarly, evening classes / *night schools* became a special feature in other Salesian technical schools as well: St. Anthony's School in Shillong, Don Bosco Technical School in Liluah, etc.

Another interesting and important aspect of educational commitment of the Salesians was that virtually in every missionary center (parish and the attached villages) entrusted to the Salesians - for example, Tanjore, Madras-Mylapore, Shillong, parishes and villages in North-East India, Calcutta, Krishnagar, Madras, Bombay, etc. - the Salesians made sure to run at least an elementary and middle school, often also a high school for the education of children, especially Christian children (and not only) of the villages, who were poor and many of whom belonged to the lowest castes (dalits, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward classes - OBC). Practically, to every parish residence of the Salesians was attached also a boarding for boys, who attended private, often run by the Salesians themselves, or public schools run by the State. The boarders attended school during school hours and for the rest they spent their time at the boarding, with a regular time-table for study, work, games, practices of piety, etc., assisted by one or more Salesians and others, especially catechists.

Without hesitation one can confirm that education of the young, through schools both primary and secondary, as well as technical schools and colleges, affiliated to the State universities, was (is) the top priority of every Salesian presence in India.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 58-61.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

2. Educative Method (the Preventive System)

What could have been the main reason for the vast growth and expansion of Don Bosco Schools in India in such a short time? The answer lies in the educative method that the Salesians followed. In imparting education to boys the Salesians put into practice the *Preventive System*, the educative method transmitted by Don Bosco. This characteristic, specific of Salesian *charism*, was the main reason for Salesians being invited to take up or start new schools. The Salesians were known to be good educators endowed with a particular spirit and method, experts especially in offering vocational training (technical schools), and that was the main reason for their being called to take up already existing schools or start new ones. Don Bosco's method of education, an absolute novelty, put into practice by the Salesians, was the reason behind their great success and appreciation by the Church and civil authorities³⁷.

The Salesians transformed their schools, particularly orphanages and boarding schools into *educative communities* where the Preventive System based on *Reason, Religion* and *Loving Kindness*, reigned supreme. Both the Salesians and the boys inter-mingled with one another, the *Salesian assistance*, put into practice in the traditional roles or components of any Salesian community, viz., rector, prefect, prefect of studies, catechist, assistants, was emblematic of every Salesian presence / school. The boys felt themselves wanted and loved, the corner stone of preventive system and the basis of all success. The Salesians, faithful to Don Bosco's recommendation: "It is not enough that you love the young, but they must know that they are loved", made sure to love them and in return the boys loved the Salesians as their elder brothers and fathers.

3. Schools Permeated with Valdocco Spirit

In every school, particularly boarding schools, the Salesians implemented the *Valdocco experience* in the field of education and formation. Thus, for example, the Salesians took over the responsibility of running the San Thome Orphanage in Mylapore on January 10, 1909. The three Salesians immediately set to work and began to manage the orphanage in the Salesian way, following the educative method of Don Bosco, which included, among other things, a time table with daily morning, evening and night prayers, recitation of the holy rosary, attendance at Mass, frequent confession and communion, and Benediction of the Blessed Sacrament on Sundays. Special attention was given to the teaching and learning of catechism. Important

³⁷ Just to offer one example, among so many. Mr. A. T. Pannirselvam, president of the District Board of Tajore, addressing the Salesians in a public meeting on 18 April 1928, inter alia said: "The Salesian Fathers certainly work with a view to help the poor, true to the principle with which the great Ven. Don Bosco started the Salesian Society over 75 years ago. The principle is to provide a good number of orphans and defenseless children the means of earning their livelihood. [...] that is the good work the Salesian Fathers have been doing..." (SPAM, file no. 15 *Provincial Correspondence 1926-1934*); JT, vol. 1, p. 55.

liturgical celebrations (Feasts of Our Lady, Corpus Christi) were solemnized with processions accompanied with music band, singing and ending with artificial fireworks etc. - all of which were important and dear to Don Bosco and hence also to the Salesians. And of course, the solemn celebration of the feast of Don Bosco (January 31 after his canonization)! In this manner the Salesians brought new life to the boys of the orphanage and to the youngsters of the technical school. They transformed the orphanage into a community / a home where the boys and the Salesians lived together as a family. Of course, the Salesians did not spare themselves, did everything possible to improve the lives of the boys: better food, took care of the material needs of the boys (clothes, shoes, stationaries, etc.). They repaired and expanded the existing building, built new structures as required for community life and for the school³⁸.

Such novelties were brought about by the Salesians not only in the orphanage in Mylapore, but in all other Salesian centers / presences as well all over India. So for example, in the first year of their arrival in Shillong, in 1922, the Salesians were entrusted together with the parish the St. Anthony's Orphanage and the ex-technical school, which was run by the Salvatorians. Within a short time the St. Anthony's Orphanage was transformed into a house of Don Bosco, permeated with Salesian spirit and customs. Besides the above mentioned practices and customs the Salesians introduced other practices customary in every Salesian house as in Valdocco and other houses in Italy: night prayer followed by 'good night' talk, normally given by the Rector the house, hanging pictures of Mary Help of Christians on the walls of classrooms, study halls, corridors, etc. The boys were invited to recite the traditional three Hail Mary's before going to bed, to wear a medal of Mary Help of Christians around the neck, to make good confessions, to celebrate with solemnity the feast of the Immaculate Conception, very dear to the Salesians, to learn well catechism, to follow religious instruction, to prepare well for baptism and first communion by those who had not received baptism, to enroll themselves in the various sodalities and pious associations organized by the Salesians, to participate in monthly recollection (exercise for happy death) and annual retreat, etc.³⁹.

Such was the *spirit* (just like that which prevailed at Valdocco) that permeated all the other Don Bosco institutions (boarding, orphanages, technical and day-schools): Don Bosco Liluah, Don Bosco Krlshnagar, Don Bosco Tardeo, Don Bosco Matunga, Don Bosco Madras, Don Bosco Tirupattur, Don Bosco Goa, etc.

4. Don Bosco Schools: Bubbling with Educative and Formative Activities

Don Bosco Schools were uninterruptedly bubbling with various types of formative activities, besides the academic which of course was of maximum importance.

³⁸ Cf JT, vol. 1, pp. 24-30.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 168-176.

The Salesians gave lot of importance to many extracurricular activities, where the boys and the youngsters could find fulfilment and satisfaction.

4.1. *Music*

“A Salesian house without music is a body without a soul” (DB). Following the example of Don Bosco and the first Salesians at Valdocco, the Salesians in India gave great importance to music and considered it essential for the formation of youngsters. Practically in every orphanage and Don Bosco School the Salesians made sure to buy musical instruments and organized a musical band. The Salesians were known to be good collectors of funds (here too, following the example of Don Bosco) and they got help from benefactors for many projects, including the purchase of musical instruments for bands, most of which were brought or imported from Italy. The San Thome Orphanage in Mylapore, for example, used to receive financial support from benefactors of the British aristocracy of Madras for meeting some of the extra costs of the orphanage, and although their support was insufficient, the Salesians managed to buy 25 new musical instruments from Italy and started a musical band – the San Thome Orphanage Band – in 1913, which became famous throughout the Madras Presidency, and was invited to play in different places in and around Madras. Similarly other Don Bosco Bands (Don Bosco Band Tanjore⁴⁰, Don Bosco Band Vellore⁴¹, Don Bosco Band Shillong, Don Bosco Band Krishnagar, Band and Choir of Our Lady’s House Shillong, Don Bosco Band Tardeo, Don Bosco Band Matunga, etc.) were all famous and were constantly invited to play in official functions of the Church and of the State. Apart from learning music as well as learning to play musical instruments, the Don Bosco Bands made good propaganda for the Salesians and for their schools. With the introduction of the bands, the Salesians offered to their boys not only the opportunity to learn and play musical instruments, but transmitted the educative value of music in human formation, especially the value of happiness and joy, typical of the Salesian spirit.

⁴⁰ The Don Bosco Band Tanjore was the first Salesian band in India. In 1910 with the generous contribution of the cooperators a brass band was started and in the course of time the Don Bosco Band became so popular that it was often invited for various functions (religious feasts, weddings, etc.) including government, at Tanjore and it accompanied the pilgrims of Mylapore to Goa on the occasion of the third centenary of the canonization of St. Francis Xavier and also gave a public concert on that occasion, highly appreciated by all (KAPPLI, p. 40; SPAM file 13 *Mylapore, letter Tomatis-Mathias* 11.12.1922; JT, vol. 1, p. 54)

⁴¹ For example, Don Bosco Vellore played during the Eucharistic Congress Procession in Madras (JT, vol. 1, p. 511).

4.2. Sports

Sports got maximum importance among the various extra-curricular activities of Don Bosco Schools. The Salesians were well aware of the educational value of sports. Organization of the annual sports-day at every school became a tradition. Don Bosco Clubs for sports had prominent place in all Don Bosco Schools. Many of those clubs were very popular, for example, the Don Bosco Laitumkhrah Athletic Club, started in 1923⁴², became number one in sports and athletics in the whole of North-East India. Athletes from Don Bosco Schools used to participate in many athletic and sports competitions organized by school as well as civil authorities and often the Don Bosco boys won most of the trophies and went home proud of the premiums they received. Participation of the Don Bosco School boys in sports and athletic events organized by civil authorities made great publicity for the Salesians and their schools.

4.3. Games

Salesians, true to their spirit, like what the boys like and the boys like games. Hence they gave great importance to indoor and outdoor games: football, basketball, cricket, hockey, volleyball, throw-ball etc. The boarding school boys, for example, had at least an hour every day for games. Football, basketball, cricket, hockey, volleyball teams were organized at the school level. Even in games, the Don Bosco teams were often the best at the District as well as at the State (Federal) level. For example, the Don Bosco Matunga Hockey Team⁴³, the Don Bosco Krishnagar Football Team⁴⁴ were considered the best teams in their Districts. Likewise, other Don Bosco School teams, scattered in various parts of India, were judged among the best.

4.4. Entertainments

Theatre, acting, musical instrument contests, singing competitions and other types of entertainments, both at the school as well as at the inter-school levels were given great importance in the Don Bosco Schools.

5. Internationality: One Family

One of the important characteristics, very evident of the first, second and other groups of Salesian missionaries who came to India was their *internationality*. The first thing we note is the internationality of the first group who landed in Tanjore in

⁴² Cf JT, vol. 1, p. 121.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 299-300.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 364.

1906: men hailing from different nations (3 priests: Fr. George Tomatis, an Italian as superior, Fr. Richard Biebuyck, a Belgian, Fr. Ernest Octave Vigneron, a French, Cleric Mario Balestra, an Italian, Bro. John Rostano, an Italian, blacksmith by profession and Bro. Hadrian Rovetto, an Italian aspirant, a shoemaker)⁴⁵. The same was the case of the second missionary expedition to Assam in 1922, which consisted of six priests (Fr. Louis Mathias, a French, as leader, Fr. John Deponti, an Italian, Fr. Emmanuel Bars, a Spaniard, Fr. Joseph Gil, a Spaniard, Fr. Joseph Hauber, a French, Fr. Paul Bonardi, an Italian, who left in 1930 and became a Trappist in Italy⁴⁶) and 5 coadjutor brothers (Bro. Peter Aprile, an Italian, Bro. Mario Calzi, an Italian, Bro. Gumersindo Cid, a Spaniard, Bro. Augustine Conti, an Italian and Bro. Laureano Santana, a Spaniard). Similar was the case of other groups of missionaries or individuals who joined the missions in the South or North-East India⁴⁷.

In a letter sent by Fr. Philip Rinaldi, the acting Rector Major, which reached Shillong in February 1922, he wrote: "Then, it is a mission of confreres of all nations, representing the universality and catholicity of our Congregation"⁴⁸. They were Salesians, sons of Don Bosco, and that was enough; they formed one family⁴⁹.

Right from the beginning of their arrival in India, the Salesians began to promote indigenous vocations as well. Already in the second year of their presence in Tanjore, in 1907, two adults, Ignatius Muthu (28 years) and Maria Arulsamy (also late vocation) were admitted as aspirants; in the following years they made their novitiate and did philosophy in Portugal and Italy; they returned to India in the month of November 1911 and were sent to the orphanage / school in Mylapore as Salesian assistants, and at the same time studied theology at the Seminary of San Thome and were ordained priests - a new edition of the formation of the first Salesians in Valdocco under the guidance of Don Bosco! Soon, other young men who joined the Salesians were Paul Mariaselvam who did his studies in Italy and ordained in 1922; Joseph Sandanam, the younger brother of Paul Mariaselvam, M. Lourdes Doraisami and Savarimuthu, who made their novitiate in Shillong in 1924 and professed in 1925⁵⁰; David Marianayagam, etc.⁵¹. Other young men followed them, not only from Tanjore but also from other Salesian presences, for example, from Don Bo-

⁴⁵ Cf KAPPLI, p. 16.

⁴⁶ Cf JT, vol. 1, p. 155.

⁴⁷ New groups of missionaries to the North-East in 1922: 4 priests (a French, a Spaniard, an Italian and a Pole (cf JT, vol. 1, p. 106); 3 more on 27 February 1923 (cf JT, vol. 1, p. 111); 3 more in December 1929: Fr. Edward Gutiérrez (Spaniard), Fr. Albino Comba and Bro. Santo Mantarro (Italians).

⁴⁸ Quoted in JT, vol. 1, p. 100.

⁴⁹ Perhaps this particular characteristic, specific of the Salesians and one of the main reasons for numerous vocations and expansion of the Salesian Congregation in India, has been forgotten since recent years. Many religious congregations in India did not develop nor expand for the lack of this characteristic.

⁵⁰ Cf SPAM, File *Mederlet-Tanjore (1922-1927)*, letter *Mederlet-Mathias* 12.1.1923; cf JT, vol. 1, p. 52.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

sco Boarding School in Liluah (opened on 8th December 1937, meant mainly for Anglo-Indian boys), the cradle of the first Anglo-Indian Salesians: O'Hara, Peter Lourdes and Felix; from Don Bosco Matunga: Bro. George Viegas, Dennis Duarte, Oscar Misquitta etc.

In fact, in his report of 1947, Fr. Carreño states that the Salesians of the Southern Province hailed from 16 different nations [foreigners] who formed the majority, the professed Indian Salesians numbered 37 of whom 11 were priests and all the 15 novices were Indians (Tamilians, Anglo-Indians, East Indians, Goans, Mangaloreans, Telugus and Keralites); and as per statistics, prepared by him in 1949 of the Salesian Province of South India there were 93 priests, 52 clerics, 27 coadjutors. In 1951, as per statistics given by Fr. Archimedes Pianazzi, in the Northern Province the total number of Salesians was 203 (including two Indian priests, several Indian coadjutors and young Indian students in formation); the majority of the confreres were Italians, there were small groups of Englishmen, Belgians, Spaniards, Frenchmen, Dutchmen, Czechoslovaks, Germans and two or three others. Fr. Pianazzi added that "all were well-blended". The Salesians in India, hailing from various nations and different parts of India, thus, represented and testified to the universality and catholicity of the Salesian Congregation.

This particular feature, specific of the Salesians, was one of the main reasons for many vocations and the expansion of the Salesian Congregation in India. In fact, several religious congregations (of European origin) in India have not grown for lack of vocations coming from their own countries abroad, nor developed, some even ceased to exist, due to lack of this characteristic. They did not give importance to cultivating native vocations. The Salesians, instead, were at the forefront in this field. Perhaps, and I say it with little bit of nostalgia and sadness that, this internationality aspect has been forgotten or perhaps it was not taken seriously by the Salesians in India since the last 3-4 decades. India is perhaps the most multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-linguistic country in the world. The emergence of ethno-cultural-linguistic regionalism, especially in recent decades, has influenced and intruded not only in politics but also in the Indian Church, and as a result also in religious congregations. In fact various religious congregations, including the Salesian Congregation, got fractured and divided on the basis of regionalism (culture, language, ethnicity, caste etc.) which to some extent is inevitable and perhaps also needed, but at the same time has become a counter-witness to the total commitment in following Jesus Christ and his message, as well as following in the footsteps of Don Bosco. The Indian Church as well as religious congregations should be on the constant guard and try to overcome all forms of divisions based on an exaggerated form of regionalism based on caste, class, ethnicity, language, culture etc.!

6. Family Spirit

The first missionaries were very united among themselves and with their local superior. They felt like brothers of one family and they had a close-knit relationship

especially with the rector of the house, just as Don Bosco wanted. The so-called *family spirit*, a trait received and passed on by Don Bosco himself, existed in every Salesian presence, especially in houses of formation, which was really enviable. For example, anyone who reads the chronicles of the early years of Salesian presence in Shillong and North-East India will be struck by three things: first, a great spirit of unity around their superior (Mgr. Mathias); everyone had great respect, veneration and attachment towards him. The way in which his birthday, feast day, anniversary of priestly and bishopric ordination were celebrated in almost every Salesian house, especially in the houses of formation (Our Lady's House, for example), in St. Anthony's school, in the parish at Shillong etc., testify to this fact. Second, the constant journeys made by Mgr. Mathias, their superior, from one mission station to another, from one Salesian house to another, bear witness to the fact of his personal appreciation and love for his confreres and their boundless missionary commitment, and in return his confreres appreciated and loved him. Thirdly, the spirit of sacrifice and the missionary zeal of Mgr. Mathias, whose motto was *aude et spera*, were greatly appreciated and his confreres tried to put into practice that same missionary zeal⁵². That same family spirit was imparted and inculcated by the Salesian missionaries in every Salesian institution.

In his letter to Fr. Candela, dated 1st May 1946, Mgr. Mathias wrote about the good spirit and union of hearts that existed in the province: "Before closing [this letter] I am happy to assure you that there in the South our dear confreres work well and with very good spirit. Mgr. Carreño who has a golden heart does a lot of good among the salesians and it is pleasure to see the union and charity which reigns among them"⁵³. And to Fr. Ricaldone on 19th June 1946, he wrote: "In the South all are well disposed and there is a great union of hearts, thanks to Mgr. Carreño who knows how to win over hearts"⁵⁴.

Another characteristic was the deep love/attachment that the first Salesian missionaries had for the Congregation and for their Superiors (in Turin), which they transmitted and inculcated in their boys as well as in those with whom they shared their life. For example, in the letters of Mgr. Mathias to the Rector Major Philip Rinaldi and the responses of the Rector Major reveal the deep attachment that Mgr. Mathias and his confreres had for the Rector Major, the Superiors and for the Congregation, as well as the high esteem and affection that the Rector Major and other Superiors had towards him and his confreres⁵⁵. Constant epistolary contacts and personal visits to the Superiors, not only by Mgr. Mathias but also by many other Salesians (bishops, provincials and missionaries), documented in the chronicles of Salesian history, bear witness to the profound attachment of the Salesians in India

⁵² Cf *Archiepiscopal Archives*, Shillong [AAS], *Cronaca Missione Salesiana dell'Assam*, vol. 1, pp. 168-69; cf JT, vol. 1, pp. 100-101.

⁵³ SPAM, file *Correspondence of Turin with Mgr Mathias (1937-1960)*, letter *Mathias-Candela* 1.5.46; cf JT, vol. 2, pp. 798-799.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Cf, JT, vol. 1, pp. 99-100.

to the Superiors and to the Congregation. Another example is Mgr. Carreño's letter to Fr. Berruti dated 9th April 1945: "How intense is our joy to know that you are safe and to be able to communicate with you! I hasten to send you the expressions of our filial affection: we love the superiors more than ever: we want to be faithful to their teachings; we say three Hail Marys every day after night prayers, so that the Lord may protect them, and we yearn for the day when our Superior General, Fr. Ricaldone, may be given back to us in perfect health and with all his energy..."⁵⁶. Or again, Mgr. Carreño's letter to Fr. Ricaldone dated 24th November 1945: "I have received Fr. Berruti's letter of 9.8.45 from Turin and I hasten to manifest the immense joy that we feel in knowing that our Don Bosco V has been preserved for us after terrible trials. Dearest Father Ricaldone, please accept the assurance of our intense love and our unconditional loyalty... Please know that your sons in South India lavish on their living Don Bosco all the affection they have for DON BOSCO"⁵⁷. Such attachment to the Superiors in Turin was also manifested in concrete gestures like the contribution made by Fr. Aurelio Maschio to the solidarity fund of the Rector Major during the years of World War II⁵⁸.

The annual celebration of the 'rector's day' was a very important event in every Salesian presence; it was the family feast, a day set apart to express love and gratitude especially to the rector of the house.

7. Love for Don Bosco

Another characteristic specific of the Salesian missionaries was their love and deep attachment to Don Bosco, which they transmitted and inculcated in every Salesian presence (boarding schools, elementary and high schools, technical schools, parishes, mission centers, etc.). Fr. Tomatis, for example, leader and superior of the first missionary expedition to India had known and lived with Don Bosco for 8 years (1880 – 1888), and loved Don Bosco dearly⁵⁹. Imitating his father Don Bosco, Fr. Tomatis had special love for his poor boys and they too loved him as their father. Attachment and love for Don Bosco of the team of first missionaries to Assam, led by Fr. Luis Mathias, is clear from the fact that after the farewell function in the basilica of Mary Help of Christians in Turin on 23 October 1921, they went to Valsalice on 18th December to pay homage and get the blessings of Don Bosco (buried there), to Becchi (birthplace of Don Bosco) on 19th for the "exercise for happy death" and on 20th December met in Don Bosco's room where Fr. Peter Ricaldone celebrated mass for them, before they boarded the ship to India on 23rd December 1821 and landed at Bombay on 6th January 1922⁶⁰. The testimony of Mgr. Mathias' love for

⁵⁶ ASC F186 *letter Carreno-Berruti* 9.4.45; quoted in JT, vol. 2, p. 794.

⁵⁷ ASC F186 *letter Carreno-Amatissimo Padre* 24.11.45; quoted in JT, vol. 2, pp. 794-795.

⁵⁸ Cf JT, vol. 2, p. 795.

⁵⁹ Cf JT, vol. 1, footnote no. 4, p. 19.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

Don Bosco is even more emblematic. “The thought that God is everywhere and that working for Him we should be happy and contented everywhere, strengthens me... 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, even though I am no longer so strong as I was once”. The same can be said of most of the other Salesians as well. Their love and devotion to Don Bosco are amply evidenced in the chronicles of the History of Salesians in India. They were convinced that Don Bosco was with them in every step, especially in difficult and dangerous moments. Thus for example, they had no doubt that the complete healing of Fr. Bonardi after a serious road accident was a miracle wrought by Don Bosco. With deep faith in Don Bosco they placed the piece of cloth, that had touched the relic (head) of Don Bosco (which the Salesians had brought with them) on Fr. Bonardi and within days Fr. Bonardi was cured and returned to work⁶¹!

The Salesians felt the need and urgency to demonstrate publicly their love and devotion to Don Bosco, which was also the best way to spread love and devotion to Don Bosco wherever they were present: schools, parishes, oratories, mission stations. Interpersonal exchanges, conferences, good night talks were often on Don Bosco, for example narrating the dreams of Don Bosco. The boys were encouraged to read the life of Don Bosco. Like the Salesians, their boys and parishioners too had great desire to know Don Bosco and they did know lots about him but above all they loved him as their father. The event of his canonization, April 1, 1934, was celebrated with enthusiasm and great solemnity in all Salesian institutions and presences. The solemn celebration of this event brought about a stronger attachment and love for Don Bosco not only on part of the Salesians but also of their boys, their parishioners and the general public as well. The Salesians’ love for Don Bosco transformed itself into people’s love for him. For example, the erection of the monument (a bronze statue of Don Bosco) in the central square of the city of Shillong⁶² – with due permission of the civil authority – and the great enthusiasm shown by the public in general (Catholics, Protestant Christians and non-Christians) in participating in the various religious and civic functions organized to honor of Don Bosco on the occasion of his canonization, not only in Shillong but also in Calcutta⁶³ and in all the other Salesian centers (communities, schools, parishes, speakers) speak volumes for the great love that they had for Don Bosco. India’s first church in honour of St. John Bosco, for example, was blessed on 8th December 1937 in Liluah, Calcutta⁶⁴.

⁶¹ Cf *Cronaca Missione Salesiana dell’Assam (AAS)*, vol. 1, pp. 142-44; cf Archives Don Bosco Shillong (ADBS), *Chronicle of St. Anthony’s (1922-5)*; cf JT, vol. 1, pp. 122-23.

⁶² ASC F176, copy of *Cronaca Missione Salesiana dell’Assam (AAS)*, p. 272; cf JT, vol. 1, p. 200; Cf *The Herald*, 18 November 1934.

⁶³ For example, in the Cathedral of Calcutta, where the Salesians were in-charge of the pastoral ministry, a statue of Don Bosco was erected and placed in a place of honor. The catholic community took active part in the celebrations in honor of Don Bosco. On that occasion, on 6th January 1935, Mgr. Mathias gave a speech on Don Bosco: life, work, method of education the preventive system (cf JT, vol. 1, p. 224).

⁶⁴ Cf JT, vol. 1, p. 240.

8. Devotion to Mary Help of Christians

Following in the footsteps of Don Bosco, who affirmed that “all his [my] work began with a simple Hail Mary for Our Lady’s help”, the Salesians had a tender and loving devotion to Don Bosco’s Madonna, Mary Help of Christians. Their love and devotion for her was so great that they just could not keep it closed within themselves but tried every means possible to spread that love and devotion wherever they were present (schools, oratories, parishes, villages, mission centers etc.). The most palpable devotion in all Salesian presences was to Mary Help of Christians. For example, the first group of Salesians who reached Tanjore concluded the program organized to welcome them with a prayer of thanksgiving and by imparting the blessing of Mary Help of Christians⁶⁵. The foundation stone of the first house for the Salesians and the first chapel dedicated to Mary Help of Christians was placed on the feast of the Immaculate Conception in 1906 (the very same year of their arrival) and was blessed in August 1907⁶⁶.

Mgr. Mathias, before leaving for India, among other things, insistently advised his companions to spread always and everywhere devotion to Mary Help of Christians. The second missionary expedition led by Mgr. Mathias reached Shillong, the final destination, on 13 January 1922 and on entering the church, had a great and pleasant surprise: to find a statue of Mary Help of Christians placed on the right side of the main altar. They were literally moved to tears. Their Madonna – Don Bosco’s Madonna – had preceded them to prepare the place for them. At the end of the long and enthusiastic welcoming function, the Salesians gave to every participant a holy picture of Mary Help of Christians⁶⁷. After the first solemn celebration of her feast, on May 24 1922, in the evening of that same day so important to them, the Salesians made the solemn entrustment of themselves to Mary Help of Christians and custody of their mission and apostolic work in Assam to her (Our Lady). In January 1923 the Salesians enthusiastically decided to start the pious practice of commemorating the 24th of each month in her honor, in keeping with the recommendation of Don Bosco: to the spread always and everywhere devotion to Mary Help of Christians⁶⁸.

On 5th September 1943, at the height of the Second World War, in the Cathedral of Madras Mgr. Mathias on the occasion of the renewal of the consecration of the Archdiocese to the Immaculate Heart of Mary, made the following solemn promise: “we, Louis Mathias, Archbishop of Madras, solemnly promise to erect soon after the war and, if possible, to begin during the war, in the city of Madras, preferably in the locality of Kilpauk or Chetpet, a church in honour of the Immaculate

⁶⁵ Cf Giorgio TOMATIS, *Notizie dei Missionari partiti per l’India*, in “Bollettino Salesiano” XXX (marzo 1906) 79-82; cf JT, vol. 1, p. 20.

⁶⁶ Cf *Annali* III 611. ASC D870, p. 152, no. 1210; cf JT, vol. 1, p. 21.

⁶⁷ Cf AAS, vol. 1, pp. 12-31; cf also ASC F176, copy of *Cronaca Missione Salesiana dell’Assam*, pp. 10-24; cf JT, vol. 1, pp. 97-98.

⁶⁸ Cf JT, vol. 1, p. 99; cf ASC F176, copy of *Cronaca Missione Salesiana dell’Assam*, pp. 15, 20, 39-42, 64.

Heart of Mary as a votive church, asking in return, for the duration of the war and after, the protection of our Heavenly Mother and Queen over the Archdiocese and Missions, over all our parishes, churches and chapels, institutions, convents, colleges, orphanages and schools... our Clergy, Priests and Religious, all our people... and even those who do not belong to our fold"⁶⁹. On 22nd August 1946 at Tirupattur Fr. Carreño solemnly consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Mary Help of Christians the Salesian Province of South India. The same act was repeated on the same day in all the other houses of the Province⁷⁰. To put into practice the stenna of the Rector Major for 1948 "to increase in ourselves and to spread everywhere the devotion to Mary Help of Christians", at the meeting of the rectors of the province, held at Tirupattur (4-6 September) several measures were decided upon to spread such devotion in India: 1) to secure as many petitions as possible from the bishops of India for the extension of the feast of Mary Help of Christians to the universal Church; 2) to write to Mgr. Mathias to lead this campaign by requesting Rome to extend the liturgical feast of Mary Help of Christians to the archdiocese of Madras; 3) to propose His Grace the holding of a Marian congress in the archdiocese, which should be prepared by holding Marian congresses in the parishes; 4) to print 30.000 copies of a lithograph of Mary Help of Christians. The title "Mary Help of Christians" should be printed on it in English, Tamil and Malayalam; 5) to resume work on the church at Nagercoil, with the intention of making it the first church of Mary Help of Christians in the province; 6) marian congresses and exhibitions would be held in six centers of the province⁷¹.

A robust and tender devotion to Mary Help of Christians as well as spreading this devotion in all who came into contact with them were particular characteristics of the Salesians. Mary Help of Christians was to be the mother of all educational presences of the Salesians. The boys and the faithful of the Salesian presences were deeply devoted to Mary Help of Christians. They expressed their devotion to her in various ways: daily recitation of the holy rosary, personal and community prayer before the statue / image of Mary Help of Christians, wearing her medal around the neck, reciting the three Hail Mary's kneeling on the bedside before going to sleep, celebrating her feasts devoutly by making good confessions, participating in the novena in her honor, receiving Holy Communion with extra devotion, and so on.

Conclusion

I presume that it could be said beyond any doubt that the spirit of Don Bosco and his educational experience, transplanted in India, bore fruit beyond all expectations. Today, India is the country that has the highest number of Salesians in the world.

In 1951-52, there were only two provinces: the Northern Province and the

⁶⁹ ASC F188 *Inter Nos*, no. 3, p. 51; JT, vol. 2, p. 763.

⁷⁰ Cf JT, vol. 2, p. 803.

⁷¹ Cf SPAM, *Verballi delle Riunioni*, pp. 75-76; cf JT, vol. 2, pp. 823-824.

Southern Province. The total number of Salesians, including novices, in both the provinces added up to 443, actively involved in imparting education to children and youth and in the mission of evangelization.

According to statistics (May 1951) furnished by Fr. Archimedes Pianazzi, the number of Salesians in the Northern Province was 203 (120 priests, 10 students of theology, 18 clerics in practical training, 11 students of philosophy, 3 novices and 41 Salesian brothers, of which 21+ students in formation: in formation houses; 82 in the missions of Assam and Krishnagar, 78 in Salesian houses (boarding, schools, technical schools); and 4 who did parish work in the archdiocese of Calcutta and in the archdiocese of Mandalay⁷². As per statistics sent to Turin in 1952 by Fr. Archimedes Pianazzi the number of Salesians in the Province of South India, including 24 novices was: 240 (97 priests, 90 clerics and 29 coadjutors)⁷³. In 1952 the Southern Province had: 6 boarding, 7 parishes and 11 mission stations, 4 of the boarding had schools attached to them. Besides these, in Madras the Salesians were in charge of two high schools meant only for day-scholars, one of which belonged to the Salesians and the other to the Archdiocese, and an agricultural school was building up in Uriurkuppam⁷⁴.

61 years later (June 2013), the total number of Salesians in India, including novices, reached up to 2,540, forming into 11 Provinces. According to statistics (June 2013), the Salesians in India are engaged in 415 schools (elementary, middle and high schools, colleges, evening and night schools, schools for abandoned and street children, boarding, orphanages, hospices) and in 105 technical schools / vocational training (formal and non-formal) centers, apart from parishes, mission stations, oratories, youth centers, formation houses: aspirantates / minor seminaries, philosophical and theological centers / colleges, catechetical centers, centers of spirituality, etc. The number of children reached through our schools, including technical schools, amounts to more than 200,000 in the different parts of India⁷⁵.

Commenting on the extraordinary growth of Salesian works in India, Fr. Pascual Chávez, Rector Major, on the occasion of the Celebration of the Centenary (1906-2006) of Salesian Presence in India, in New Delhi on February 28 called these first hundred years “a miraculous epic story” and then added, “We cannot but be amazed at the enormous expansion of Don Bosco’s charism, the flowering of vocations, the development of the Salesian Family to the point where we can today say that the Congregation has an Indian face”⁷⁶.

⁷² Cf ASC F176, *Resoconto sull’Ispettorato del N. India – 1951*; JT, vol. 2, pp. 1186-11858.

⁷³ Cf *Salesian Provincial Archives, Calcutta* (SPAC, A.25.1; cf also *Statistiche Salesiane of the South Indian Province in 1952*; cf JT, vol. 2, p. 894).

⁷⁴ Cf JT, vol. 2, p. 884.

⁷⁵ Statistics drawn up, by the author, from: *Salesian Province of New Delhi. Directory 2013-2014*, Bosco Society for Printing & Graphic Training, Okhla Road, New Delhi 11025, June 2013; *Salesiani di Don Bosco. Annuario 2014, Direzione Generale Opere Don Bosco*. Roma, Editrice SDB 2013.

⁷⁶ Cf *A Journey with the Young. Don Bosco India. Centenary 1906-2006*. New Delhi, Salesian Provincial Conference of South Asia 2006, p. 51.