



## Christianity in the Princely State of Mysore During 1831-1947

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### ABSTRACT

The origin of Christianity in India has been the subject of controversy because valid and reliable dates about early Christianity in India are not historically ascertainable. But a small section of the people has a strong belief that the beginning of Christianity in India dates back to the first century A.D. In the first century A.D., merchants of the Roman empire regularly set sail from the ports of Egypt, down the Arabian Sea to Malabar where they exchanged Roman gold coins and the products of the Mediterranean World for Indian textiles, pearls and spices. St. Thomas, one of Jesus's chosen. Apostles might have reached India on such a merchant ship. Pothacarnury, a Catholic Arch Bishop of Bangalore made a strong claim that St. Thomas, the Apostle brought Christianity to our country in 52, A.D.

### KEYWORDS

**Introduction:** The Medieval India Church is the Church of the west that is the period between late antiquity about 600 A.D. and the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 A.D. The first European Christian missionary of this period to come to India was Fr. John of Monte Corvine, an Italian Franciscan. He arrived in 1291 A.D. on his way to China and he started his missionary activities in India. Another Franciscan missionary who came to India was Friar John Marignolly, who erected a marble cross at Cape Comorin. (Kanyakumari). Since the latter half of the 13th century, Franciscan and Dominican missionaries entered the country and established themselves at centres like Quilon and Cranganore. One of the most notable of these missionaries was the French Dominican Friar Jourdain De Sevrac. In 1329, Pope John XXII appointed Jourdain as Bishop of Quilon. Quilon was the first diocese in the Indies ever established by the Vatican.

The modern expansion of Christianity in India began with the arrival of the Portuguese, that is from 1498 onwards on the Malabar coast. This began with the arrival of Vasco Da Gama at Calicut. The Portuguese arrival in Asia was not only the beginning of Western domination in the political field but also opened a chapter in the expansion of Christianity. By 1534, they opened trading stations in Diu, Chaul, Bassein, Salsette, Calicut, Cochin and Quilon in the west; Tuticorin and Colombo in the south. Nagapatnam and Mylapore on the Coromandel coast, and Chittagong in the delta of the Ganges. The real expansion of Christianity begins with the arrival of St. Francis Xavier and Fr. Robert de Nobili. St. Francis Xavier, the Apostle of India and the patron of missions began his great missionary work in India in 1542. He launched his activities on the Indian soil and his efforts set a new direction in the sphere of Indian life, thought and culture.

The 16th century witnessed large sections of Christians, breaking away from the Church of Rome and establishing different Churches of their own. To combat the errors, Pope Paul II called a general council in which doctrinal errors were condemned and Catholic teaching was reaffirmed. The Pope insisted on the reformation from religious indifference to a fervent Christian living. This is called the famous Counter Reformation. During this time, new religious orders came to combat heresy, The most important among them were the Capuchins and the Jesuits. The Capuchins together with the Jesuits, were the most effective preachers and missionaries of the 16th and 17th centuries.

Jean Antoine Dubois left France in 1792 for Puducherry. As soon as he arrived, he realized that in order to have access

to the people, it was necessary to live according to their customs. Dubois succeeded well in his praise-worthy project. He travelled throughout the Kingdom as a brave missionary and took extreme care for the upliftment of the people especially in healthcare. He got the support of Colonel Wellesley, the Governor of the town, whose protection was essential for the success of his missionary work. At Ganjam, a Church was constructed in the year 1800. He travelled throughout the country and built many churches in Mysore, Coimbatore and Dharmapuri. Another work which brought credit to the missionary was the introduction of vaccination. Small Pox was causing great havoc among the population of Mysore. In 1726, Chamaraja Wodeyar was himself a victim of this epidemic. He made known to the Government the great advantage of vaccination.

In 1840 he added an aisle to the Church of Setthihalli. He built a Chapel at Fraserpet and the following year a Church at Shimoga. In spite of his illness, he was anxious to complete a Church in the town of Mysore. Krishna Raja Wodeyar was the then Raja of Mysore. Being very liberal, he knew that the priests required a lot of money to build the Church and came forward to support him with financial gifts. During this period cholera in Mysore and Hunsur had complicated his task. With his strenuous work he managed to finish the Church of Mysore. The Church was blessed on January 1, 1843 by Charbonnaux. He was then called back to Bangalore.

In 1889, new missionaries came from France and all of them worked as hard as their predecessors. 1891 was a memorable year for the State. His Highness Sri Krishnarajendra Wodeyar IV was installed as Maharaja. His Highness bestowed gifts to the orphanages and other charitable institutions. Bishop Coadou was chosen as the last Vicar apostolic and the first Bishop of the Diocese of Mysore. He administered successfully the Christians of Setthihalli, Shimoga and Virajpet, gaining everywhere the reputation of being a zealous, saintly missionary. St. Joseph's College in Bangalore was started during this period. In the year 1884 Bishop Coadou decided to start the hospital of St. Martha's in Bangalore. Thus, every year a new project was proposed while the earlier ones continued to develop. On January 4, 1887, Coadou blessed the chapel of Mount Kattay near Setthihalli.

Bishop Basle constructed a number of convents and Churches in Bangalore. It was to his credit that a Home for the Aged was constructed for the first time in Bangalore. On August 22, 1916 he was appointed Bishop of the Diocese. His episcopate was laid in a period of strain and hardship because of the

Great War, Bishop Teissier was able to manage all the existing good works and the functioning of the various institutions. The last Bishop of the French Foreign Missionary was Bishop Despatures from 1922-1942. The young and energetic priest arrived at Bangalore on September 22, 1897. On October 29, 1912 Fr. Despatures was Consecrated as Bishop of Mysore. Several important personages of the Maharaja's court assisted in the ceremony and, Krishna Raja Wodeyar III sent him a telegram of congratulation. He became a friend of the Maharaja, who, on several occasions, presented gifts to the Diocese, permitting the Bishop to construct new Churches, schools and Convents. Because of his financial assistance, a new bulletin called "Doota of the Sacred Heart of Jesus" was published in the year 1924.

Another remarkable achievement was in the year 1927. when he added one more storey to St. Martha's Hospital. St. Peter's Provincial Seminary was opened on Aug 3, 1934. In 1936, St. Philomena's Shrine at Mysore, an architectural gem was solemnly blessed. Its foundation stone was laid amidst a great concourse of people, on 28th October 1933, by Krishna Raja Wodeyar, St. Philomena's Cathedral is undoubtedly among the grandest Churches in India. It is in Gothic style. Today, St. Philomena's Cathedral is known as St. Joseph's Cathedral. It is admired by all the tourists who visit this city of palaces.

Another masterpiece of architecture, is known as St. Francis Xavier's Church. It was opened on the feast of Corpus Christi on May 26, 1932. The time had now come for the splitting of the mission into two Dioceses namely, the Diocese of Mysore and the Diocese of Bangalore in the year of 1942. Since 1845, Bangalore had Bishop Thomas Pothacamury appointed as Bishop of the Diocese of Bangalore and the Diocese of Mysore was entrusted to Bishop Feuga. A new order of things had set in and the history of the Diocese of Mysore began a new chapter.

**Conclusion:** From the general survey of the MEP in the Diocese of Mysore from 1776--1942, we find they worked hard, their trials were great in a country so different from their own in language, manners, customs, habits of living and climate, They worked with heroic zeal, selfless spirit and unshakable confidence. It is certainly a great compliment to these Bishops that they spread the message of Christianity in the princely State of Mysore. The golden memories left behind by these eminent personalities are being cherished by today's generation. The fruits of their hard labour are being relished by the young and the old, the clergy and the laity. Their spirit still vibrates through the length and breadth, and every nook and corner of Mysore in the sphere of education, health care and architecture.

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