

## Chapter IV

# THE SPREAD OF THE CHURCH

Encouraged by the initial success, the missionaries sought additional ways to spread the faith among the Tribals and Dalits. In their efforts to win the hearts of the people, the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales (MSFS) received encouragement from their superiors, who appointed certain energetic missionaries well equipped for the difficult task that lay ahead of them. For example, Msgr. J.M. Tissot, vicar apostolic of Visakhapatnam, expressed his willingness to open new stations in the Kondh Mountains, though he lamented the scarcity of personnel and money and cautioned the missionaries to go slow. However, the missionaries were convinced of the need to spread the faith in the interior villages, and they felt that they were ‘well prepared’—they were familiar with both the language and the culture of the people; they were confident that they had finally been able to develop an effective strategy for evangelisation; and they were eager to move into the interior and “attack the strongholds of paganism”, as the missionaries would call. It was natural, therefore, that the missionaries began to expand their activities from established centres such as Surada, Cuttack, and Berhampur. Whenever or wherever small Christian communities were established, the missionaries constructed a chapel and appointed a ‘teacher-catechist’, who not only taught the children but also instructed both adults and children in catechism.

Though the missionaries occasionally evangelised certain villages in Ganjam, they rarely had the opportunity to nurture these villages because of the distances involved. They were restricted to their annual visits and, as a result, the villages were almost abandoned or left to the good will of a few catechists. In this study, many of these villages are grouped together and linked to a number of leading centres in which a priest resided, or which he visited often.<sup>1</sup>

The Belgian Jesuits undertook arduous expeditions to the villages that sent deputations from various areas of Gangpur. Though the Hamirpur region in the eastern part was now a separate mission, with two resident priests, Kesramal felt the burden of evangelising a vast territory. The efforts to establish a station at Behrenbasa, in the western part of the Gangpur, did not materialise. Somehow, the missionaries kept up the *Mouvement de la Grâce* by regular *tarikhs*,<sup>2</sup> usually conducted in Behrenbasa, and by regular visits. Fr. H. Floor took the initiative to contact both the raja and the dewan seeking permission to start a new station in Gaibira. These two parishes (Hamirpur and Gaibira) illustrate how the mission expanded in Gangpur.

---

<sup>1</sup> The following areas are examined in the first part of this chapter: 1) Surada, Thotavally and Torobady; 2) Cuttack and Puri; 3) Berhampur and Gopalpur; 4) Katingia 5) Dantholinghy and Russellkonda 6) Dighy, Jeypore, Koraput and Padangui.

<sup>2</sup> *Tarikhs* were monthly meetings of catechists and teachers which were usually conducted on the first Friday, when they rendered the monthly account of their activities to the priest. The missionary usually gave some instruction either on Christianity or the course of action for the coming month. Before leaving for their villages they received their salary.

## 4.1 Ganjam Mission

### 4.1.1 Expansion of the Established Centres

There were three established centres [Surada (1853), Cuttack (1850) and Berhampur (1851)],<sup>3</sup> from which the missionaries moved to the remote villages for evangelisation. Therefore, it is important to understand the development of these centres before describing the subsequent founding of new stations.

#### 4.1.1.1 Surada: the Capital of Ganjam Mission

By 1870, Surada was a full-fledged parish with resident priests and Sisters, schools and orphanages. It continued to be one of the centres of expansion under the MSFS.<sup>4</sup> Even after almost seventeen years since the foundation of the Surada mission, the influence of Fr. J.M. Dupont continued. He maintained a good rapport with the local people, as he was fluent both in *Kui* and Oriya. In one of his letters to Fr. Clavel, Fr. Richard wrote that he would prefer that the mission was not so much the owner of the villages but that the priests were primarily concerned with the spiritual welfare of the people.<sup>5</sup> He added:

I would like Fr. J.M. Dupont, who speaks Oriya fluently, if he recuperates his health well, to establish himself near the villages of Dantholinghy and Pipalponga to work for their conversion. Before Pipalponga came to the mission, a good number of persons had started to receive instructions. However, for a long time they have continued to say: *hominem non habemus*. One more priest at Surada and a third at Thotavally (Joseph Konda) could have under them some confident persons. Besides our properties of Borady and Thotavally, we need to have six more villages there.<sup>6</sup>

Msgr. J.M. Tissot noted the progress when he went on a pastoral tour to the northern part of his vicariate in 1881. Among the mission stations that he visited, Surada was certainly better developed with all the infrastructure that characterised it as an important centre. Local Catholics responded positively to work there. However, he felt that more could still be done.<sup>7</sup>

When Fr. Descombes came to Surada in October 1881, it had two resident priests (Frs. Bonaventure and Descombes) and two chapels. However, this situation changed dramatically when Fr. Bonaventure left for Koraput (Jeypur) on a fact-finding

---

<sup>3</sup> The years within bracket refer to the time when the MSFS began to reside in those centres. Cf. F. MOGET, *Early Days of the Visakhapatnam Mission 1846-1920*, pp. 146-149.

<sup>4</sup> Since Surada was located at the foot of the mountains, it served as a resting place for those coming from Visakhapatnam before they continued their upward journey. The Sisters at Surada sent provisions for the missionaries while they were on expedition, and if they fell ill, they came back to Surada for treatment.

<sup>5</sup> Fr. Richard wished that: "Dans le district de Souradah (Surada), je ne voudrais pas que la mission se contentât pour-ainsi-dire, d'être un gros propriétaire, ayant de villages; j'aimerais que les prêtres eussent à s'y occuper principalement du spirituel". Then he desired that Fr. Dupont's service might be made available for Surada. Cf. Richard to Clavel, Visakhapatnam, August 8, 1870, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Attendance during Mass on Sundays and feast days, the work of the Sisters in the orphanage and the school, and other activities were advanced compared to other stations in the Ganjam Mission. Cf. Bonaventure to Philippe, Surada, November 19, 1881, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

mission in 1885, and Fr. Descombes was left alone with five chapels to care for. Besides, Dantholinghy was also attached to Surada.<sup>8</sup> One can imagine the magnitude of the demands placed on the shoulders of the young missionary. Even before the departure of Fr. Bonaventure, Msgr. Tissot shared a similar concern. Writing in 1881, Msgr. Tissot mentioned that Surada required more missionaries to attend to the increasing number of Christians, including those orphans brought up by the mission.<sup>9</sup> However, there was relief, in 1883, when Fr. Dupont became the chaplain of the orphanage and the administrator of the paddy field. These were tasks carried out previously by Fr. Bonaventure.

When Fr. Bonaventure left for Koraput (Jeypur), the catechumenate, numbering between 60 and 100 persons, was entrusted to the care of Fr. J.M. Descombes. Three catechists were also employed to teach them the prayers. Their combined efforts brought many people into the church. In response to the call of the missionaries, the Christians of Surada even promised to lead an exemplary life. Although there was no serious direct opposition from the Hindus at this time, the calumnious rumours that the missionaries would take the Christians to their home countries persisted. However, in some instances, the Christians themselves challenged the rumours by stating that they continued to live in the same village for many years without ever being transported to Europe.<sup>10</sup>

#### **4.1.1.1.1 Surada, a Cursed land?**

The initial enthusiasm of the Catholics at Surada soon waned, and Christian life became stagnant, which caused some concern to the missionaries. Though perilous at times, the inhospitable Kondh mountains were not the real cause of concern for the missionaries, most of whom were brave and willingly went wherever their superiors sent them. In spite of the initial growth of the mission and the hard work of the missionaries, Surada did not record an increase in the number of adherents to the faith; the people continued with their superstitious practices. The villagers' critical attitudes towards the mission led the missionaries to describe the Surada mission as a 'cursed land.' What was the reason? Fr. Bonaventure reported: "The mission, for long years, has given us no consolation. Among ourselves, we call it 'the cursed land.' We propose to make a last attempt. If it succeeds, all glory to the Sacred Heart! If it fails, it may influence the final decision to abandon this unfortunate country."<sup>11</sup>

Although the Catholics regularly attended Mass and prayers, they did not recognise the authority of the missionaries, who in their unsuccessful attempts to

---

<sup>8</sup> Torobody, Karikotte, Thotavally and Dantholinghy were centres that were under Surada where Fr. J.M. Descombes used to offer Sunday Masses. Cf. J.M. Descombes to Allard, Dantholinghy, May 19, 1885, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>9</sup> J.M. Tissot to his friend in France, Surada, March 14, 1881, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>10</sup> Descombes to J. Tissot, Surada, May 8, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>11</sup> Fr. Bonaventure described: "Surada est une station qui, depuis de longues années, ne nous donne aucune consolation. On dit parmi nous que c'est la 'terre maudite' [cursed land]. Nous nous proposons d'y faire un dernier essai: s'il réussit, toute gloire en sera rendue au Sacré Coeur, s'il ne réussit pas, cela pourrait influencer sur la decision definitive d'abandonner ce malheureux pays." Bonaventure to Clavel, Surada, December 12, 1879, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

evangelise the villages, concentrated their efforts on the orphanages at Karicotte, Dantholinghy and Thotavally. These villages had large farms. They had hoped that the nucleus of Christian families would eventually produce a sizeable population that could bear witness to the faith in a non-Christian setting. Contrary to their expectations, however, the people were discontented and complained that the missionaries somehow failed to provide them with what they rightfully deserved.<sup>12</sup>

In 1883 Fr. Bonaventure lamented the decadence of Surada, once a flourishing and promising mission. This was partly due to the death of several pioneers, who could not be replaced and partly due to the fact that the priests were unable to visit many of the centres more than once a year. Some villages had not seen even the 'shadow of a priest'.<sup>13</sup> In spite of their toils, there prevailed the 'cult of the devil'<sup>14</sup> which no doubt saddened them immensely. Reporting on the manner of offering sacrifices to the local deities, Fr. Bonaventure wrote:

Every Tuesday morning, crowds of pagans gather to the strains of a musical band, a few steps from our house, to offer sacrifices to *Tacorani* [*Thakurani*], the goddess of evil, represented by a red-painted wooden post; kids, young goats, are immolated to it and offerings of milk poured on it. A *pythoiness* (a witch) who I believe to be really possessed, proclaims oracles and indicates with wild gestures the decisions of the goddess. The first time I saw this sight, I couldn't help weeping. And this is the people we have to convert.<sup>15</sup>

The missionaries seemed unable to inspire the people. The combination of a hardened disposition and the missionaries' nagging sense of failure forced them to take a final decision whether or not to continue the mission.

#### 4.1.1.1.2 'Apostleship of Prayer' in Surada

The indifference and tepid outlook of the Christians at Surada challenged the missionaries to look for new ways to proclaim God's Word to the people. Committed as they were to the care of Christians, particularly the families in Dantholinghy and other villages, the missionaries made several attempts at instilling a spirit of fervour in the people. Fr. Bonaventure introduced the 'Apostleship of Prayer'<sup>16</sup> among them, and soon

---

<sup>12</sup> For the decline of the Surada mission see F. MOGET, *Early Days of Visakhapatnam*, pp. 161 – 162.

<sup>13</sup> Bonaventure to J. Tissot, Berhampur, March 19, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>14</sup> This is how the missionaries viewed the worship of Hindus.

<sup>15</sup> Bonaventure to Clavel, Surada, December 12, 1879, AMSFS 5H5-2/2. Fr. Bonaventure is referring to the *Thakurani Jatra*, which is one of the most important festivals in Berhampur. It is celebrated with pomp and splendour for a period of about one month. Each day seven women carried in procession the consecrated *Kalasa*s (small earthen pots containing some holy objects) to different sectors of the town. Cf. N.C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer*, vol. II, Cuttack 1991, p. 268.

<sup>16</sup> The Apostleship of Prayer, a pious association, which is neither a sodality nor a confraternity, and which is otherwise known as a league of prayer in union with the Heart of Jesus, was well diffused in the second part of the nineteenth-century Catholic world. It was founded at Vals, France, on December 3, 1844 by Fr. Francis X. Gautrelet S.J. The growth and diffusion of the association was due to the work of Fr. Henry Ramière, S.J., who in 1861, adapted its organization for parishes and various Catholic institutions, and made it known by his book *The Apostleship of Prayer, the Holy League of Hearers United to the Heart of Jesus* and by the *Messenger of the Heart of Jesus* which were translated into many

he realised that the people themselves responded positively, because of the elaborate nature of the initiation rites that called forth their enthusiastic participation. Many enrolled in it. On feast days the priest gave a short explanation highlighting the importance of the organisation.<sup>17</sup> A good number of orphans were also happy to register their names.

One of the devices that Fr. Bonaventure followed was to give more solemnity to simple religious occasions such as receiving the scapular. The people were fond of solemnities and feasts. He described the manner of the celebration: "I keep a small table in the centre of the church, with a picture of the Sacred Heart, a register and some Sacred Heart scapulars sent by my sister. After a short talk and a hymn to our Lord, I write down the names. Then I call the boys one by one and place around their neck the scapular. I bless each with the sign of the cross and send him back to his place."<sup>18</sup> In order to make it an association, he planned to introduce the enrolment card. Since he found a positive response in Surada, Fr. Bonaventure asked that a director for the Apostleship of Prayer be appointed for the vicariate.

#### 4.1.1.1.3 Activities of Fr. Descombes

Fr. J.M. Descombes' work was very much connected with the growth of the Surada mission. At his arrival in 1881 he decided to lead an austere life. He practiced one of the methods of Fr. Robert de Nobili, namely, preaching the gospel as an itinerant monk. His principal desire was to go to the villages and preach our Lord.<sup>19</sup> He was encouraged in his efforts by missionaries like Fr. Thevenet, who used to tell him: "Take with you a small tent and settle in a village to preach Christianity. If they listen to you, convert them. If they don't, shake the dust off your shoes and go elsewhere."<sup>20</sup> Fr. Dupont also encouraged him in his efforts. Fr. Descombes was convinced that his duty was to proclaim the gospel and that conversions depended on God. He was not alone in this way of life; other itinerant monks included Frs. Payraud and Buttay.<sup>21</sup>

Fascinated by the methods of evangelisation adopted by Fr. Robert de Nobili, Fr. Descombes desired to become a Brahmin in order to convert that race. However, both Msgr. Tissot and the confreres were against such an initiative for two reasons: (1) it

---

languages. In 1879, Pope Pius IX approved the statutes of the association. The motives, as mentioned in the statutes, clearly indicate the promotion of prayer for the mutual intentions of the members in union with the intercession of Christ. The members are also urged to observe the practice of the Holy Hour, spent in meditation on the Passion. Cf. F. SCHÖBERG, "Apostleship of Prayer", in *The New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, vol. I, p. 687; LUDWIG KOCH, *Jesuiten – Lexikon. Die Gesellschaft Jesu einst und jetzt*, Paderborn 1934, p. 21.

<sup>17</sup> Bonaventure to Philippe, Surada, February 21, 1882, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>18</sup> Bonaventure to Philippe, Surada, February 21, 1882, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Descombes to J. Tissot, Surada, January 8, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2; It is obviously an allusion to the mission discourse of Jesus (Mt.10: 14). Fr. Bonaventure observed: "Son principal désir est de voyager dans les villages pour prêcher notre Seigneur. P. Thevenet l'incourage. 'ayez une petite tente, lui dit-il, et établissez vous dans un village pour y prêcher la religion, se l'on vous écoute, convertissez, se non, secouez la poussière de vos souliers et allez ailleurs'". Bonaventure to Philippe, Surada, February 21, 1882, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>21</sup> Bonaventure to J. Tissot, Surada, October 30, 1881. AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

might become a stumbling block to the conversion of Panos and others of lower origin; and (2) the method proved to be ineffective in the Ganjam mission.<sup>22</sup> Even a great linguist such as Fr. Joseph Seigneur could not convert the Brahmins. Hence Fr. Descombes was persuaded by his confreres to abandon these initiatives despite his own convictions that if he lived alone, avoiding any contact with people of lower castes and the missionaries who served them, he might be able to win a few Brahmins.<sup>23</sup>

In his wanderings Fr. J.M. Descombes soon realised the importance of caring for those who were already Christians. Fr. Descombes described his way to his superior general: “When I began to convert the villagers of Badossai and Alossai, I first gained the important men of these villages, who declared themselves favourable. Winning other villages up to a distance of 50 kms took place at the meetings with the villagers. How great were the fears of our catechists at the time of these meetings. Two days later, one of the catechists told me, ‘Ah, father, all went well, but I lost my appetite for several days’.”<sup>24</sup> Due to his charismatic leadership, many Panos began to attend the prayers. Even some Protestants (Baptists) wanted to join them as well.<sup>25</sup> Fr. Descombes distributed medicines, which the people took regularly. They had a preference for the holy water, blessed by the priest, which they took home after the Sunday services.<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.1.1.1.4 The Court Case of Surada

A particular court case severely tested the mission. The missionaries thought that if they lost the case, it would send a negative signal to the people and might even be ruinous to the objectives of the mission. They took all the precautions because they did not want it to appear to the Protestants that their efforts to convert the Kondhs and Panos had been futile. They wanted to be victorious in this particular case, since the missionaries claimed that the Wesleyan Protestants were helping Andrew, who denounced the missionaries in the court. The missionaries were of the opinion that a person who had worked with them for many years could only turn against them if he was influenced by the Protestants. In order to help Fr. Bonaventure with the case, Fr. Dupont, who knew the laws well and had solved many disputes in the mountains, volunteered to go to Surada.<sup>27</sup> Fr. Bonaventure wrote: “Since my arrival at Surada [1878], I have been busy with court cases. It is an inheritance from Fr. Dupont who was so fond of chicanery. Up to now, I have always won the cases. I have still one to be decided by the Madras High Court, the last one.”<sup>28</sup>

Fr. Dupont’s liberal policy, particularly in the administration of the farms, suffered a set back. In order to redeem the situation and revitalise the mission, Fr.

---

<sup>22</sup> In the previous chapter (3.1.9) the adaptation method followed by the MSFS in Ganjam and its failure are presented.

<sup>23</sup> J.M. Tissot to J. Tissot, Vizagapatam, August 10, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>24</sup> Descombes to J. Tissot, Surada, May 8, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>25</sup> Riccaz to Bonaventure, Surada, May 10, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>26</sup> Descombes to Allard, Dantholinghy, May 19, 1885, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>27</sup> Dupont to his friend, Visakhapatnam, September 14, 1882, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>28</sup> Bonaventure to Philippe, Surada, October 30, 1881. AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

Ricczaz<sup>29</sup> was sent to Surada with a clear mandate to keep the mission in order, especially the farms. Having seen no reliable person to supervise the farm, he decided to lease it out for five years in 1878 to Andrew, one of the orphans educated in the mission, in 1877. Since Andrew produced a written document, the mission advanced him 400 hectolitres of rice and 73 pairs of bullocks. However, Andrew did not get along well with Fr. Dupont, when the latter was the parish priest. In the meantime, when Fr. Bonaventure took charge of the mission, Andrew assured him that he would abide by the previous agreement. However, in view of his worsening drunkenness, Fr. Bonaventure dismissed Andrew and asked other farmers in the village to seize all the bullocks given him. He even took on himself the management of the fields. Infuriated by these developments, Andrew denounced the missionary for theft and usurpation of property and took him to court. When the outcome was unsatisfactory, Andrew appealed to the court in Berhampur. However, the judge was not favourable to the mission and ruled in favour of Andrew, releasing those who had given false witness. In his attempt to defame the missionary further, Andrew lodged another complaint in the court of Aska where the judge decided against him. But when he appealed to the judge in Berhampur, the latter sent the papers to Madras, which in its turn remanded the case to Aska. Fr. Bonaventure thought that the Protestants were behind this prolonged legal battle.<sup>30</sup> The judge at Berhampur was unfavourable toward the missionaries, since Msgr. J.M. Tissot complained against him in the Madras High Court.<sup>31</sup>

In the meantime, Andrew also lodged a complaint at the court of Berhampur in the hope of obtaining a compensation of Rs. 7000/-. This time he pleaded his case as a pauper. Since the mission had neglected to follow the procedures in dismissing Andrew, the judge awarded him Rs. 700/- as remuneration for his services. But since he had admitted in court that he owed Rs. 1000/- to the missionaries, they actually received Rs. 300/- from him instead.<sup>32</sup>

#### 4.1.1.1.5 Thotavally

---

<sup>29</sup> Alexis Ricczaz was born on January 26, 1834, at St. Jean d'Arves, Maurienne. After his ordination on June 23, 1861, he arrived in the Visakhapatnam mission on January 22, 1862. He worked as a teacher in St. Aloysius School (Visakhapatnam) and as a pioneer in Gnanapuram (1872-1881). In 1877 he was sent to Surada for a short period to help the mission. He served as the vicar general till 1887, when the diocese was divided and he became the first bishop of Nagpur. He was consecrated in Nagpur on November 20, 1887. He worked tirelessly for the new diocese until his death on September 8, 1892, at Jabalpur. Cf. *Tableau Genèral*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4; F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 80.

<sup>30</sup> Describing the situation of the mission, Fr. Bonaventure wrote to Fr. Philippe: "This year (1882) I had conversions everywhere. The process takes a lot of my time. In spite of my desire I can't do anything. I came to know that this was a conspiracy. The Wesleyans of Berhampur helped our adversaries. The judge is against us, specially his secretary. Given these difficulties, we cannot think of any success. We have nothing but God and the constitution on our side." Bonaventure to Philippe, Surada, September 30, 1882. AMSFS 5H5-2/2; Foulex to Philippe, Cuttack, January 27, 1882, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>31</sup> Bonaventure to Philippe, Surada, October 30, 1881. AMSFS 5H5-2/2; Foulex to J. Tissot, Cuttack, August 9, 1881, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>32</sup> Bonaventure to J. Tissot, Visakhapatnam, April 12, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

Thotavally was a small village eight kms. away from Surada. In 1867 Fr. Guillermin purchased a forest here, with the intention of settling the families of orphans gathered during the great famine. Since trees and bushes covered the land, a number of Kondh families were engaged to clear the forest.<sup>33</sup> Though the Kondhs were exposed to Christian influence, they were not touched by the missionaries' preaching. Only in 1881 did they begin to respond. Initially Fr. Guillermin spent much establishing the station, which was called *Josepattah* or *St. Joseph Kondah* (village of St. Joseph). The missionaries intended to transfer the boys' orphanage to Thotavally, thus separating it from the girls' orphanage, which had been entrusted to the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy.<sup>34</sup> In 1871 Fr. H. Moenne-Loccoz came to Thotavally to take charge of the orphanage and its 67 children. The girls' orphanage in Surada had about 130 to 150 children and 20 widows. These were looked after by three St. Joseph Sisters, two native Sisters and a helper.<sup>35</sup>

Some of the grown-up boys from the orphanage were asked to clear the forest and help with farming. They learned to plough as well as to read and write. The missionaries thought that if the orphans children married and settled on the land cleared for cultivation, eventually a number of Christian villages would emerge. Such settlements, they hoped, could carry on the work of evangelisation. Writing in March 1872, Fr. Moenne-Loccoz described the beginning of this settlement: "There were already eight families, of which three families had a child each."<sup>36</sup> Two more villages also belonged to the mission--Dantholinghy and Pipalpanga. For these the missionaries paid a nominal tax to the government. Fr. Dupont seemed to have converted a good number of people in Pipalpanga when he was appointed to look after the orphans.<sup>37</sup> However, their preparations for baptism were minimal.

The first to enter the Catholic Church in Thotavally was a Protestant woman, Jesse, who as a girl was probably rescued from being sacrificed as *Meriah*. The Protestants brought her up in an orphanage. She was married to one of the Kondhs working as a woodcutter in Thotavally. Jesse knew how to read and write. When she came to Thotavally with her husband she listened to the instructions of Fr. Dupont and requested to be received into the church. Soon a catechumenate began in order to instruct other Kondhs. Despite the missionaries' efforts, the catechumenate did not progress well due to the disturbance caused by a sorcerer who frightened the Kondhs. When the cause for the disturbance was discovered, the sorcerer was chased out of the village. Soon a dozen families received baptism.

The nascent Christian community of Thotavally grew under the guidance of Fr. Décarre, who was appointed the priest in charge of the mission in 1889. He spent much time with the people. He built a new village with a spacious church in Thotavally. He

---

<sup>33</sup> Bonaventure to Philippe, Surada, December 5, 1881, AMSFS 5H5-2/2. Fr. Décarre wrote that Fr. Guillermin was instrumental in the purchase of 200 acres of land from the Government at a cost of Rs. 1000/-. Cf. Décarre to J. Tissot, Thotavally, March 1889, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>34</sup> Souchon to Clavel, Berhampur, May 16, 1867, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>35</sup> H. Moenne-Loccoz to Clavel, Surada, September 1, 1871, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>36</sup> H. Moenne-Loccoz to Clavel, Thotavally, March 1872, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*; H. Moenne-Loccoz to Payraud, Surada, March 17, 1872, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

saw to that the instructions continued. Under his influence some 20 families accepted the Christian faith. He offered work in the fields to the pagans, provided that they agreed to take part in prayers and instructions. In this way he managed to convert about 200 of them. Under Fr. Décarre, Thotavally became an important centre with a flourishing parish with a church, a cemetery and a catechumenate.<sup>38</sup>

#### 4.1.1.1.6. Torobady

Torobady, a village inhabited both by Kondhs and by Panos, lies about 50 kms from Surada and about 12 kms from KouSSIPanga, where the missionaries established their first church among the Kondhs. The Kondhs, who lived with a tiny minority of Panos, were free here, as there was no dominance by the *Oriyas*.<sup>39</sup> The story of the conversion of Torobady began in May 1886, when a strange disease that claimed quite a number of lives was rampant in the village. Since the Panos became the first victims, the Kondhs ordered them to leave the place. Not knowing a way out, the Panos returned to their relatives who were living in Surada, who advised them that only the Catholic priests could relieve them of their affliction. The afflicted Panos approached Fr. J.M. Descombes, who agreed to visit Torobady on the assurance that if they were delivered from the evil spirits, they would become Christians. In June 1886 he moved into a hut and celebrated Mass on the feast of the Ascension, which was attended by many villagers. During the Mass he was informed of two possessed women who could not be controlled. He went there with the assistance of boys carrying the cross. No sooner did the possessed women see him than they became violent, causing panic among the bystanders who had gathered to observe the responses of the missionary. After reading the prologue of St. John, the priest sprinkled holy water on the possessed women. They became calm and normal. The people considered this a miracle and asked the priest to bless every house with his '*mantram*',<sup>40</sup> which contained supernatural power. The priest obliged the village chief to accompany the procession with a bucket of holy water on his head. From that day everyone in the village wanted to be instructed in the new faith.<sup>41</sup> By 1889 all of them had abandoned their superstitious ways and were baptised, leading a Christian life.

#### 4.1.1.2 Cuttack

Cuttack<sup>42</sup> attracted the attention of Catholic missionaries not because of its political importance but for its growing Christian community, which existed even

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Bonaventure to Fr. Philippe, Surada, December 5, 1881, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>39</sup> *Oriyas* were synonymous with the oppressors or moneylenders. They spoke *Oriya* as their mother tongue. They were Hindus and belonged to a higher caste. They were literate and occupied the influential jobs, like *Patros* and *Karnams*.

<sup>40</sup> A short formula, generally recited by a *guru*, is said to be efficacious when repeated by the individuals who received it in piety.

<sup>41</sup> Descombes to Allard, Dantholinghy, May 19, 1885, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>42</sup> Cuttack, the capital city of the Orissa division, is situated in 20° 29' N. and 85° 52' E. Writing on the meaning of the word Cuttack, the Orissa Gazetteer remarks: "The word 'Cuttack' is anglicised from the Sanskrit word '*kataka*' which signifies seven different meanings out of which the two noted below are applicable here. The first meaning is the military camp and the second is the fort of the capital or the seat

before the arrival of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales. The Imperial Gazetteer refers to the Catholics in Cuttack as follows: “A Roman Catholic mission, founded in 1845, maintains in Cuttack city a chapel, a church, a convent, and a boys’ school.”<sup>43</sup> Before the arrival of MSFS, the Catholic community was composed of those who came from outside Orissa, and it was under the jurisdiction of Calcutta. Later, for practical reasons, such as geographical proximity and the scarcity of priests, Cuttack was attached to the mission of Visakhapatnam, from which a missionary visited it annually. Fr. Domenge provided some information regarding the early history of the mission dating as far back as to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when the Jesuits from Balasore visited Cuttack to administer the sacraments.<sup>44</sup> A year after the death of Fr. Francis Sermet (1850), Fr. Balmand was appointed to look after the vast territory that included Ganjam, Berhampur and Cuttack. Because he could not remain in Cuttack, he chose Berhampur, a central location, for his residence. Only in 1855 did Cuttack have its own resident priest in Fr. Richard, who purchased land for the mission and built a modest chapel in 1859 dedicated to Our Lady.<sup>45</sup>

In 1868, when Fr. Décarre was transferred from Vizianagram to Cuttack, the town had a population of 35,000 to 45,000, of which the Catholics numbered about 600, composed of Europeans, East Indians and Malabars or Tamils who worked in the army (32<sup>nd</sup> Madras Regiment). A few high-ranking officers--such as the commissioner of Orissa and his wife, Lady Thompson-- were the patrons and protectors of the work of the missionaries.<sup>46</sup>

#### **4.1.1.2.1 Activities of the Sisters in Cuttack**

In 1872 a group of Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy came to Cuttack at the invitation of the missionaries to work among the women and the girls. Their arrival in Cuttack brought an added joy to the missionaries.<sup>47</sup> Initially the Sisters were living in a house formerly used by the Fathers, who vacated it for them. The Sisters used the church building for a school. Due to some difficulties, the Sisters left Cuttack in January

---

of the Government.” The city stands at the apex of the delta of the Mahanadi, the great river. The place gained its importance in the tenth century, ‘when protecting dykes were built and a fort was constructed by the Hindu king Makar Kesari.’ Barabati Kila, an ancient fort built by one of the Hindu kings, is still one of the conspicuous monuments in the city. Cuttack was declared a municipality in 1876 and became the headquarters of the Orissa division. The city is noted for filigree work. Towards the last quarter of the nineteenth century Cuttack had some important educational institutions, obviously founded by Christian missionaries, i.e. Baptists and Roman Catholics. Cf. *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. XI, Oxford 1908, pp. 85-99; N. C. BEHURIA (ed.), *Orissa State Gazetteer*, vol. II, pp. 283-291.

<sup>43</sup> *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. XI, Oxford 1908, p. 90.

<sup>44</sup> For details of the early history of the church in Cuttack, cf. M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, pp. 452, 453 and 456.

<sup>45</sup> J. TABOADO, *En las Selvas del Ganjam*, pp. 141 – 147.

<sup>46</sup> Décarre to Philippe, Cuttack, May 1868, AMSFS 5H5-2/2; Décarre to the Mother General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Gopalpur, December 18, 1885, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, 2H, J4. A.

<sup>47</sup> Girard to his friend, Cuttack, February 9, 1872, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

1877 and returned in November 1879.<sup>48</sup> Realising the need for a more spacious place for their activities, Fr. Décarre requested a site on the northern side of the church. Fr. Foulex<sup>49</sup> considered it a beautiful location near the sea. Thanks to the kindness of the colonel of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Madras Regiment and also to the commissioner of Orissa, that land was given to the mission for constructing a new school for girls and a convent for the Sisters.<sup>50</sup>

In July 1881 the foundation was laid, which was attended by the commissioner of Orissa and his wife, Lady Thompson, as the chief guests, plus other important personalities of the city. In a letter to Sr. Cèsarie, Sr. Claire reported:

Last Thursday (July 6, 1881), we had a beautiful ceremony; the blessing of the first stone of our new convent. You need to know that the government has given to the mission a very big plot of terrain. Our good Fr. Décarre has done a good job in taking the work ahead: the foundations are already completed; the compound wall is almost finished. Returning to the blessing of the first stone, the Chief-Commissioner [commissioner], who takes the place of the Viceroy, had agreed to preside over the musical band, instead of the colonel of the regiment, who consented to assist. The music was pleasant. All the top officers of Cuttack wanted to be present for the ceremony.<sup>51</sup>

Many of those who attended the inauguration greeted the Sisters in appreciation of their dedication. For the construction of the convent and for the running of the orphanage, the Sisters had organised a fair, which turned out to be a great success.<sup>52</sup> It covered a part of the expenses, which reached a sum of 50,000 francs. However, the vicar apostolic was displeased, since the other convents in the vicariate apostolic had cost far less.<sup>53</sup> When in 1882 the number of orphans reached 30, the Sisters accommodated the little ones in the convent because of the limited space available in

---

<sup>48</sup> The ‘Annals of the Sisters of St. Joseph’ mentioned that the Sisters had to leave Cuttack because of the false propaganda of the Baptists. Though the reason in itself might have been trivial, the competition between the Catholics and Baptists was a cause of concern. They came back in November 1879 when the situation was favourable. Cf. *Annales des Soeurs de Saint Joseph. Diocese de Vizagapatam. 1897 – 1906*, vol. II, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Annecy, 161-162, 219.

<sup>49</sup> Jean François Foulex was born on September 19, 1851, at Charvonneux, Savoy. He reached Visakhapatnam mission in October 1874. He was ordained a priest on May 26, 1877. He worked in Cuttack as assistant priest in 1881. In 1894, he was transferred to Nagpur. He worked in Kamptee, Khandwa, and in the last years of his life he served as vicar general of Nagpur. He died on June 6, 1923. Cf. *Tableau Genèral*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4, F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 59.

<sup>50</sup> Foulex to J. Tissot, Cuttack, July 7, 1881, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>51</sup> Sr. Claire wrote: “Nous avons eu une belle cérémonie Jeudi passé; la bénédiction de la première pierre, de notre nouveau couvent. Vous devez savoir que le gouvernement a donné à la mission un très grand morceau de terrain. Notre bon père Décarre a déjà bien fait avancé son ouvrage; les foundations sont déjà tout creusées; le mur de clôture est presque tout fini. Revenons à la bénédiction de notre première pierre le Chief Commissioner celui qui tient la place du Vice-Roi à bien voulu présider la bande de musique, ainsi que le Colonel du régiment ont bien voulu y assister. La musique a été très agreeable. Toutes les personnes de première rang de Cuttack ont bien voulu aussi y assister.” Sr. Claire to Sr. Cèsarie, Cuttack, July 10, 1881, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, 2H, J3. B.

<sup>52</sup> Décarre to companion, Cuttack, November 2, 1881, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>53</sup> J.M. Tissot to Philippe, Surada, Vizagapatam, August 9, 1884, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

the orphanage.<sup>54</sup> By 1884 the construction was finished and the Sisters started to use the convent.

In November 1885, Fr. Décarre started a dispensary in Cuttack under the patronage of Lady Thompson, the wife of the commissioner of Orissa, whose subsequent visits to the dispensary encouraged the missionaries. Since Cuttack was an important centre for the province, the missionaries felt the need to establish such a dispensary, where the missionaries could also recuperate and rest. The Sisters baptised several children *in articulo mortis* and treated about 110 patients during October 1887. In spite of their devotion to their work and the recognition from the people, the British government required them to have a professional qualification--which they did not have. So there was the danger of having to turn the dispensary over to some certified nurses.<sup>55</sup> Fr. Décarre wrote to the Mother General about the Sisters:

I am sure Mother St. Charles might have written to you about our good work in Cuttack and the need to begin a dispensary that would bring an abundant harvest of people to heaven. I have written to our bishop requesting him to give you the details of the project and I ask your help in providing personnel for the work. I have no doubt that you are ready for any type of sacrifice so that we may obtain success and prove to the government that the Sisters are capable of taking control of the work.<sup>56</sup>

The Cuttack municipality wanted to open a dispensary exclusively for women which would be run by women doctors and attendants to avoid receiving treatment from men. Many women would rather die than submit themselves to the gaze of a male physician. When the municipality requested help from the mission, one of the Sisters was made available for this apostolate.<sup>57</sup> It required learning both Oriya and *Hindustani*, both spoken by a majority of people.<sup>58</sup> Later, in 1908, when the Government built a hospital, two Sisters took up residence there and served as nurses. Initially they looked after the laundry and the kitchen, but later the Sisters were asked to supervise everything. Their good work and their devotion brought general satisfaction among the people, including the Hindu doctors.<sup>59</sup>

#### **4.1.1.2.2 Mission Schools in Cuttack**

Initially, the work of the MSFS in Cuttack consisted mainly in administering sacraments to the Tamils of the 32<sup>nd</sup> Madras Regiment and in running the school for

---

<sup>54</sup> Foulex to Philippe, Cuttack, January 27, 1882, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>55</sup> Décarre to J. Tissot, Cuttack, September 15, 1887, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>56</sup> Décarre to Mother General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Gopalpur, December 18, 1885, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, 2H, J4. A.

<sup>57</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 454.

<sup>58</sup> Foulex to J. Tissot, Cuttack, August 9, 1881, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>59</sup> The work of the Sisters consisted of supervising of the kitchen, the laundry and the general cleanliness of the hospital premises. They helped the doctors in the operations and with nursing. P. Rossillon to Superior, Kottavasala, July 23, 1911, AMSFS 5H5-2/2. 5H4; A. Rey to Constant Bouvard, Visakhapatnam, May 20, 1908, AMSFS 5H5-2/2; F. MOGET, *Early Days of Visakhapatnam*, pp. 144 – 145.

boys. As soon as he arrived in Cuttack in 1868, Fr. Décarre was busy starting a school for Catholic boys. His experience in Vizianagram, where he had set up a school with 160 students and 6 teachers, prompted him to begin one in the new station. Initially, he had 30 students and a teacher who had studied at St. Xavier's College in Calcutta.<sup>60</sup> Time permitting, the missionaries also involved themselves in the schoolwork. For example, Fr. Girard used to spend five hours each day teaching algebra, geometry and English literature.<sup>61</sup> Fr. Foulex described the nature of his work as follows: "I am the headmaster. I am happy to supervise and to take some classes to earn Rs. 20 per month. Our school is a small *Babil* (tower of Babel)."<sup>62</sup>

The quality of education was high, and by 1872 there were 90 boys in the school -- mostly Catholic students. Even though non-Christian students expressed their willingness to pay, the missionaries turned down their requests for admission. They did not take more students because they wanted to apply to the government for the grant-in-aid intended for religious minority schools.<sup>63</sup> Fr. Souchon had cultivated a personal rapport with the officials, especially with the commissioner and the inspector of schools, and he applied for the grant-in-aid. Not only did the missionaries excel in imparting the prescribed courses to the pupils but also in instilling certain moral values. The Catholic students, as a rule, had to attend catechism classes and pass the examinations conducted by the Fathers from Visakhapatnam. For example, in 1911 Fr. Rossillon<sup>64</sup> went to Cuttack for a dual purpose: (1) to conduct exams in catechism at the school; and (2) to preach a retreat for those receiving their first communion.<sup>65</sup> In December 1898, Sir Jean Woodburn, lieutenant governor of Bengal, visited the Cuttack

---

<sup>60</sup> Writing to Fr. Philippe, Fr. Décarre narrated: "Votre serviteur est dans la station de l'état, station isolée où je suis de nouveau en train avec une école; j'ai déjà 30 élèves avec un bon professeur qui a fait son éducation au Collège des jésuites à Calcutta. J'espère que cette école ira bien aussi, Dieu aidant, et que les écoles du diable tomberont aussi en présence de la nôtre comme cela est arrivée à Vizianagram par la grâce du tout bon Jésus." Décarre to Philippe, Cuttack, May 1868, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>61</sup> Girard to his friend, Cuttack, February 9, 1872, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>62</sup> Besides English, Oriya, Tamil, Telugu and Hinduistani were also taught. The missionaries had to learn all these languages. Tamil was used with the Catholics who worked in the 32<sup>nd</sup> Madras Regiment, since most of them were from the south. Telugu was also widely spoken among the Catholics. In addition to these languages, the missionaries had to acquire a working knowledge of Oriya. Cf. Foulex to J. Tissot, Cuttack, August 9, 1881, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>63</sup> It is a form of subsidy from the government to pay the salary of teachers in non-governmental institutions. Cf. Girard to his friend, Cuttack, February 9, 1872, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>64</sup> Pierre Rossillon was born on September 22, 1874, at La Biolle, Savoy. He entered the MSFS in August 1893. He came to Gopalpur in India to continue his philosophical and theological studies under Fr. Anselme Rey. He was ordained a priest on June 5, 1898, at Visakhapatnam. He served the mission in various capacities: as teacher in St. Aloysius School, as parish priest of Gnanapuram (1899-1908), as a missionary in Kottadabah. He served as the regional superior in 1911. During the war years, 1914-1918, he worked as a teacher at Florimont, Geneva. He was consecrated the coadjutor bishop of Visakhapatnam on May 7, 1919, at Annecy. He guided the diocese of Visakhapatnam for 21 years and gave new life to the mission through his organisational skills. He was one of those prolific writers who explained the missionary situation to the West. He died at the age 72 on March 22, 1947. Cf. F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 37; J. REY, *Son Excellence Msgr. Pierre Rossillon*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4.

<sup>65</sup> In preparation for their first communion, a retreat was organised for the communicants. Fr. P. Rossillon preached the retreat in 1911. Cf. P. Rossillon to Bouvard, Kottavasala, July 23, 1911, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

school. Although the annals refer to the favour received from his official visit, it is not clear what this favour actually was. However, the visit itself must have been an honour bestowed on the Fathers and Sisters in recognition of their dedication.<sup>66</sup>

#### 4.1.1.2.3 Growth of the Cuttack mission

Though Cuttack never recorded any mass conversions, there were occasional adult baptisms that marked the growth of the mission. In 1882 Fr. Foulex began a 'Reading Club', which was strongly criticised by his colleagues, since the journals read were Protestant, although they were subscribed by those who had been educated in the mission's orphanage.<sup>67</sup> Since there was a general feeling that exposing Catholics to Protestant literature would create unnecessary tensions, Fr. Foulex was encouraged to spend his time more usefully with the conversion.<sup>68</sup>

After a three-year absence, on June 28, 1884, Msgr. Tissot, vicar apostolic of Visakhapatnam, made a pastoral visit to Cuttack. He received a warm reception with the 32<sup>nd</sup> Regiment playing the band. When the vicar apostolic celebrated the Mass, the church overflowed with a large number of participants, both Catholics and non-Catholics, who came to witness that great event. The occasion was also used to confirm 60 adults, and 40 children received Holy Communion for the first time.<sup>69</sup> By the time his successor Msgr. Clerc<sup>70</sup> took over, Cuttack had grown into an established station. In his report to the Holy See, Msgr. Clerc conveyed that Cuttack with its two small stations: Khurda Road and Puri, was the principal centre of the northern part of his vicariate. He wrote:

Cuttack is the principal and more ancient of the cities. It possesses a resident priest, a beautiful church with three naves and a convent of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, who are in charge of the hospital of the city, an English school and an

---

<sup>66</sup> *Annales des Soeurs de Saint Joseph. Diocese de Vizagapatam. 1897-1906, II*, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Annecy, p. 28.

<sup>67</sup> Bonaventure to Philippe, Berhampur, November 1882, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>68</sup> Fr. Décarre distinguished Baptists from other denominations by using the expression 'Baptists and Protestants'. Expressing his impressions of the Baptists, Fr. Décarre wrote: "Cuttack est une assez belle et grande ville pour l'Inde, mais les gens n'y sont pas meilleurs que dans les autres stations; nous avons surtout ici les fameux Baptistes qui sont vraiment le cauchemar du missionnaire catholique, et Cuttack est leur rempart dans l'Inde. Les protestants proprement dit, sont, en general, assez tolerants, nous aidant même assez volontiers; tandis que catholiques et Baptistes ne pourront jamais tirer à la corde ensemble. On dirait que le principe fondamental cette secte est une haine implacable pour le catholicisme, inde irae." Décarre to Philippe, Cuttack, January 15, 1884, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>69</sup> The presence of non-Catholics might have been due to the innate curiosity of Indians for a stranger and for the colourful pageantry. Cf. Décarre to Tissot, "Informations Diverses: Vizagapatam (Hindoustan)", in *LMC* 16 (1884) p. 423.

<sup>70</sup> Jean-Marie Clerc was born on March 21, 1841, at Ballaison, Savoy. He was ordained a priest on May 25, 1872. Between 1872 and 1880, he was known to be an accomplished preacher in Savoy. In May 1881, he went to India with the special mandate of helping the administration. He served the mission in various capacities, i.e regional superior and vicar general of Visakhapatnam. He succeeded Bishop J.M. Tissot on July 26, 1891, when he was consecrated as the Bishop of Visakhapatnam. He died on June 18, 1926. Cf. *Tableau Général*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4; F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 62.

orphanage for the European and Eurasian children, for the expansion of which the new provincial government of Bihar and Orissa allotted a sum of Rs. 20,000.00.<sup>71</sup>

#### 4.1.1.2.4 Hostilities with the Baptists

The relation between the Catholics and the Baptists was never very good, since each perceived the other as intruders. From its inception the girls' school run by the Sisters annoyed the Baptists who started their own school on July 1, 1881. The Baptists forbade their own children from studying at the Catholic School.<sup>72</sup> They were hostile toward school in Cuttack and toward the Catholic missionaries.<sup>73</sup> In November 1898 the Annals of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy reported that their work in the school had suffered from Baptist competition, since some of their students transferred to the Baptist school. However, the Sisters were pleased with the growth of the orphanages and of the home for the widows. They were also pleased with the dispensary, where they had baptised about 200 people.<sup>74</sup> However, Fr. Descombes acknowledged the contribution of Protestants when he was in need of money to print a book in Oriya.<sup>75</sup>

#### 4.1.1.2.5 Puri

Puri,<sup>76</sup> situated about 80 kms from Cuttack on the Bay of Bengal, has been and still is one of the most important Hindu pilgrim centres. It attracted (and still attracts) not only tens of thousands of pilgrims for its annual *Ratha Yathra* (car festival) but also Protestant preachers who used this opportunity to preach the gospel. There were also

---

<sup>71</sup> Msgr. Clerc reported: "Cuttack est la principale et la plus ancienne (ville). Elle possède un prêtre résident une belle église à trois nefs (naves) et un couvent de Soeurs de St. Joseph en charge de l'hôpital de la ville, d'une école anglaise et d'un grand orphelinat de filles européens ou eurasiennes pour l'agrandissement duquel le gouvernement de la nouvelle province du Bihar et Orissa vient d'accorder un subside de 20000 roupies." Msgr. Clerc to Cardinal Gotti, March 4, 1914, APF Rubrica 128/1914, vol. 534, ff. 44–45.

<sup>72</sup> Sr. Claire to Sr. Césarie, Cuttack, July 10, 1881, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, 2H, J3. B; Foulex to J. Tissot, Cuttack, July 7, 1881, AMSFS 5H5-2/2; *Annales des Soeurs de Saint Joseph. Diocèse de Vizagapatam. 1897 – 1906*, vol. II, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Annecy, p. 226.

<sup>73</sup> Décarre to Bonaventure, Cuttack, May 8, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>74</sup> This was the number of children whom they baptised *in articulo mortis* in 1906. Cf. *Annales des Soeurs de Saint Joseph. Diocèse de Vizagapatam. 1897 – 1906*, vol. II, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Annecy, p. 17.

<sup>75</sup> Descombes to Superior General, Torobody, November 14, 1900, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>76</sup> Puri is generally believed by Hindus to be the city of Lord Jagannath, the Lord of the universe. Hence it is considered to be one of the most important holy cities in India. It is situated on lat. 19°47'55''N., long. 85°49'5'' E. It possesses a natural beauty, as it lies on the shores of the Bay of Bengal. A map of the city would appear like a conch shell, the symbol of Lord Jagannath. At the centre of the town is the temple of Jagannath. The main road of the town is called *Badadanda*. It is a spacious street, at the end of which the Gundicha temple is found, where the three deities are housed for ten days during the *Ratha Yatra*. Among other edifices, one finds the palace of the raja of Puri on this street. It is said that more than 6,000 adult male priests are employed in the temple. Cf. N.C. BEHURIA (ed), *Orissa State Gazetteer*, vol. II, pp. 366 – 380.

other festivals that attracted pilgrims and which provided the Protestant missionaries opportunities for conversions.<sup>77</sup>

The Catholic missionaries similarly wanted to make use of the opportunity. In one of his letters to Cardinal Simeoni, Prefect of the Propaganda Fide, Msgr. Tissot stated that it was impossible to get a piece of land in Puri. However, thanks to the generosity of a Protestant who became Catholic, the mission was able to buy a plot with a small house.<sup>78</sup> At that time (1881), there were two local families whose Christian background could be traced to the conversion of their grandfather, an orphan baptised and instructed by Mr. Madeira, a Catholic who was a local health care officer.<sup>79</sup> The Catholic missionaries planned to start a school which would provide a platform to launch their mission work. However, Fr. Riccaz (missionary in Visakhapatnam) suggested that several factors must be kept in view before opening a school as proposed. First, the school should not be established in order to seek converts but to educate them, whenever a sufficient number of Christian boys is found. Thus, the school would become a medium for instructing the Catholic students in the faith. Second, once established, the school could provide a favourable setting for the conversions of non-Catholic students who might attend the school. The missionaries were to emphasise that those who wished to enrol in the school had to participate in the prayers and attend catechism classes.<sup>80</sup> As the assistant priest of Cuttack in 1882, Fr. Foulex went to celebrate Easter at Puri, where there were about 25 communicants. The small Catholic community consisted of a few government officers and their servants from Madras. Having seen the growth of the community, Fr. Décarre (the Parish Priest of Cuttack) and his companion, Fr. Foulex decided to build a chapel, which they hoped would compete with the temple of Puri.<sup>81</sup>

In June 1884 Msgr. Tissot visited Puri, where he found a good number of Christians. This pleased him, as there had been none during his previous visit.<sup>82</sup> Fr. Rey

---

<sup>77</sup> The *Ratha Yatra*, Car Festival, is celebrated in the month of Asadha (June or July). The Protestant missionaries of almost all denominations that worked in Bengal and Orissa made it a point to attend it. At the festival the European missionaries and native preachers explain the gospel to small groups. In order to attract the attention of the crowds the missionaries and native preachers would sing a hymn in Oriya. As soon as a considerable number had gathered, they would present the Christian doctrines with occasional attacks on idolatry. They used the occasion to project themselves as friends of the poor and the destitutes. Except for 1857, when the Sepoy Mutiny occurred, the Protestant missionaries gathered at Puri uninterruptedly between 1822 and 1900. Cf. M. DHALL, *The British Rule. Missionary Activities in Orissa 1822-1947*, New Delhi 1997, pp. 110-112.

<sup>78</sup> Msgr. Tissot to Cardinal Simeoni, Vizagapatam, April 20, 1881, APF Indie Orientali: Scritture riferite nei Congressi, vol. 22, ff. 1252-1253.

<sup>79</sup> J. TABOADA, *En las Selvas del Ganjam*, pp. 189-190.

<sup>80</sup> Riccaz to Foulex, Visakhapatnam, October 20, 1881, AMSFS, 5H5-2/2. However, there is no mention of a school begun by the MSFS in Puri.

<sup>81</sup> Fr. Décarre wrote: "Père John revient de Puri où il est allé passer quelques jours pour les Pâques; il a eu 25 communions. Aussitôt que faire se pourra, nous pensons bâtir une petite chapelle dans cette dernière station pour essayer de faire concurrence au fameux Jaggernath." Décarre to Bonaventure, Cuttack, May 8, 1882, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

disclosed the plan for Puri in the following sentences: “We are making plans for Puri. We are planning to install a beautiful statue of Our Lady in a small chapel, close to which we will have a hospital for cholera victims and dying persons, all these in view of attacking the devil where it is strong and to start a pilgrimage for Our Lady in place of Jagannath.”<sup>83</sup> Although the plan appeared plausible, it had to wait many years before it was realised.

In 1887 Fr. Décarre requested Fr. Superior to send him a statue of St. Benedict to be installed in Puri, where, he said, paganism was rampant. He even hoped that the Lord Jagannath might tremble before him.<sup>84</sup> However, Fr. Décarre was convinced that the acts of kindness of the missionaries would naturally attract the people. Realising the religious fervour of the Hindu pilgrims who visited Puri, the missionary rightly realised that proselytism not only would produce a negative result but also might bring more difficulties for the missionaries. So he proposed to start a hospital to care for the abandoned sick in the city, especially during the time of the annual *Rath Yatra* (car festival). Fr. Décarre observed:

For one who has seen with his eyes the manner in which the poor miserable pilgrims were abandoned to their sad lot, specially when death is imminent, there is no doubt that the Sisters with a hospital could do an immense good. Under such a treatment filled with charity, who could resist the grace? All other methods of conversion one might attempt in Puri [especially in the beginning] would be far from giving the consolation of success, and I would say, could even arouse some difficulties.<sup>85</sup>

With this in mind, Fr. Décarre obtained the permission of Msgr. J.M. Tissot to correspond with the collector of Puri in order to purchase a dilapidated house, which could initially serve as the accommodation of the Sisters. From there they could go to the hospital, which was about to be built in the neighbourhood.

<sup>82</sup> Décarre, “Informations Diverses: Vizagapatam (Hindoustan)”, in *LMC* 16 (1884), p. 423.

<sup>83</sup> Rey expressed the plans for Puri: “Nous faisons des plans pour Pouree (Puri); nous nous proposons d’obtenir une jolie chapelle puis à côté une espèce d’hôpital pour les choléris et les mourants, tout cela pour attaquer le diable dans sa place forte et pour ériger une pèlerinage à la bonne Mère au lieu de Jagannath.” Rey to the Director, Cuttack, August 6, 1884, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>84</sup> One of the acts of paganism, according to the missionaries, was self-immolation. It used to be a common practice to immolate oneself by placing oneself under the wheels of the car of Jagannath. This is obviously motivated by the belief that once killed under the wheels of the car of Jagannath one attains salvation. They probably wanted to introduce the devotion to St. Benedict to extirpate paganism. Décarre wrote: “Je me doute que le vieux Jagannath tremble devant lui, et que grâce à la protection de ce grand saint, nous arrivions à arracher au vieux fauve, quelques unes des ses pauvres victimes qui, par centaines de milles, viennent chaque année se prosterner devant lui.” Décarre to the Superior, Cuttack, September 15, 1887, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>85</sup> Décarre observed: “Pour un qui a vu de ses propres yeux la manière dont ces pauvres misérables pèlerins sont abandonnés à leur triste sort, surtout lorsqu’ils sont aux étreintes avec la mort, il n’y a pas de doute que des sœurs chargées d’un hôpital pourraient faire un bien immense. Sous leur traitement tout de charité, il y en aurait bien peu qui résisteraient à la grâce. Tout autre moyen de conversion que l’on pourrait tenter à Pooree (surtout au début) serait loin de présenter les mêmes chances de succès, et je dirai même, pourrait nous susciter bien des difficultés.” Décarre to the Superior, Cuttack, September 15, 1887, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

Most of the early Christians came from among the pilgrims who were on the threshold of death and who needed gentle care. They were baptised immediately without giving much thought to instruction or to their understanding of the faith.<sup>86</sup> Fr. Décarre also planned to establish a leprosarium, which would be of immense help to those with leprosy who came to Puri. His vision received further encouragement from the Puri municipality, which offered him both a site and the money for the construction. It also expressed the willingness to allocate Rs. 60 per month for the support of the Sisters. Fr. Décarre offered the services of a catechist known for his goodness and helpfulness to the Sisters.<sup>87</sup> Although the documents are silent whether or not the proposed plan was executed, one can conclude that it was not, since there were only a handful of Christians whom the missionaries visited regularly.

In 1890 the MSFS acquired a plot of land and constructed a chapel in Puri. For unknown reasons the chapel deteriorated and was abandoned by 1900. It was auctioned subsequently without the knowledge of the missionaries, who continued to pay taxes on the property. When the missionaries learned that the chapel was being demolished, they presented a petition to the judge seeking a restraining order. The judge found the new buyer, a government employee, negligent for failing to realise that the missionaries owned the property. In 1905 the missionaries applied to the collector for a plot of free land on which they could construct a church, an orphanage and a school for poor children. The collector granted the request, and a chapel was built there in 1910.<sup>88</sup>

#### 4.1.1.3 Berhampur

Berhampur<sup>89</sup> was another mission, founded before the arrival of MSFS, where many Catholic merchants and soldiers lived. They were under the pastoral care of a priest from Balasore. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Fr. Martin, a Jesuit, visited the Christians a few times. Later the Goan priests belonging to the Golconda mission built a chapel. But the station remained underdeveloped due to the unavailability of priests. The first priest to reside at Berhampur was Fr. Balmand in 1851, when he was appointed to the northern part of the vicariate. Later, in 1854, when Fr. Richard was appointed to Berhampur, he took care of Cuttack as well. Within the precinct occupied by the troops there was a small-dilapidated chapel built of mud and a few logs. Since this was in poor condition and its space inadequate for a growing community, Fr. Richard asked the commandant if he could undertake the construction of a new chapel. He initiated a

---

<sup>86</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 410.

<sup>87</sup> The catechist was Rayappa Sanyasi Das. There is no information on how the Sisters responded to the plan. Cf. Décarre to Mother General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Cuttack, July 7, 1900, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy 2 H. J4. B.

<sup>88</sup> J. TABOADA, *En las Selvas del Ganjam*, p. 190.

<sup>89</sup> Berhampur, situated on lat. 19°20' N. and long. 84°50' E. is the headquarters of Ganjam district. The name is derived from Lord Brahmeswar, whose temple is situated at Lathi about 4 Kms from the town. Due to the Ganjam fever in 1815, the collector's office was shifted to Berhampur in 1816. The *Thakurani Jatra* is one of the most important festivals in Berhampur, which is celebrated with pomp and splendour. For 15 days the town takes on a festive look with colourful decorations, dances, jatra parties, sweetmeat stalls, etc. Cf. N.C. BEHURIA (ed), *Orissa State Gazetteer*, vol. II, pp. 267- 269; *The Imperial Gazetteer of India*, vol. VIII, Oxford 1908, pp. 2-3.

monthly subscription to which the soldiers could contribute towards the project. It was said that even Protestants and Brahmins contributed generously, and the church was dedicated on July 16, 1865. The chapel survived until 1909.

Fr. Michael Perissin, who replaced Fr. Richard in 1866, rendered valuable service in Berhampur during the great famine of 1866. Besides baptising many children *in articulo mortis*, he brought them to the orphanage, which was later transferred to Surada. The Catholics in Berhampur were mainly Tamil soldiers and their families and a handful of Eurasians. During the time of Fr. Riccaz (1883) the existing chapel was converted into a presbytery, and a new church was built in 1884. The chapel remained unaltered till the arrival of Fr. Gangloff, who rebuilt the church in 1909 after a violent cyclone caused enormous damage to the property.<sup>90</sup> Once the troops left the city, the Christian community of Berhampur was reduced to a small community.<sup>91</sup>

#### 4.1.1.3.1 Gopalpur

Gopalpur<sup>92</sup> was and still is a maritime town situated about 14 kms. from Berhampur. Unlike other stations founded by the MSFS, it had neither the presence of a para-military force nor of a strong community of Kondhs and Panos. The motives for starting a mission station at Gopalpur were to have a place for convalescence from the fatiguing expeditions in the mountains and to recuperate from the effects of malaria. The first reference to Gopalpur is found in the letter of Fr. Chéminal to *La Feuillette* (Mother house of the MSFS in Annecy, France) in 1855, after he had met with the colonel appointed to civilise the Kondhs. On arrival of Frs. Chéminal and Balmand in

---

<sup>90</sup> Cf. F. MOGET, *Early Days of Visakhapatnam*, pp. 146 – 148. Besides the constructing the church in 1909, Fr. A. Gangloff, who came to Berhampur in 1909, contacted Mme. Ross, the owner of a house, who expressed her desire to sell it since she was leaving Berhampur definitively. The price proposed was Rs. 7000. The club (soldiers) wanted to purchase it, but it gave the mission precedence, which was ready to rent it for Rs. 70 a month. Mme. Ross was willing to accept Rs. 5000 immediately; the rest could be paid in instalments. Fr. Gangloff felt that the old house of the mission could be sold to the government for a reasonable price, since the engineer who appraised the house was known to him personally. Fearing that the renovation of the old house might consume more money, it was sold and the money from the sale of the seminary in Gopalpur was advanced for the purchase of the clubhouse in Berhampur. Cf. Gangloff to J.M. Clerc, Berhampur, January 22, 1916, AMSFS 5H5-2/4. For some details of the cyclone that affected the Berhampur mission on October 29, 1909, see J. REY, *Les Missionnaires de Saint François de Sales d'Annecy*, p. 418.

<sup>91</sup> The year when the soldiers departed is not known. Cf. J. TABOADA, *En las Selvas del Ganjam*, pp. 183-184.

<sup>92</sup> Gopalpur or Gopalpur-on-Sea (then known as Mansurkota) was a flourishing port town that served as a harbour for the maritime trade activities of Kalinga with the Southeast Asian countries. It lies in latitude 19° 31' N. and 85° 0' E. One of the chief ports during British rule, it was frequented by steamers of the British India Steam Navigation Company. Regarding the origin of its name, nothing is known for certain. The *Orissa Gazetteer* says: "It is said that towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century A. D. [18<sup>th</sup> century], one Gopal Rao, a leader of the Telugu fishermen community (Nolias) established a large settlement near the sea-beach after whose name the place was named Gopal Rao Petta which was abbreviated into Gopalpur in the course of time." N.C. BEHURIA (ed), *Orissa State Gazetteer*, vol. II, p. 301. Another version, which seems plausible, is that the village is named after Lord Gopal Krishna, who is the presiding deity of the place. Even today, he is highly revered by the people of this area.

Gopalpur they met with a small Catholic group.<sup>93</sup> But, there was no mention of the missionaries until 1881 when the missionaries went there to request the governor to grant them some land to construct a home. The governor granted their request but stipulated that they had to construct the house within six months and that the property should revert to the government when the missionaries left the place.<sup>94</sup>

With its artificial bay, a small dock and a huge storehouse, Gopalpur functioned as a seaport from 1880 to 1895. There were many merchants and immigration agencies involved in the transportation of labourers to Burma, among whom there were a few Christians. Probably this was one of the reasons for constructing a house in Gopalpur.<sup>95</sup> Fr. J.M. Dupont founded a Christian community among the fishermen, and the nascent community had a church in 1883.<sup>96</sup> The missionaries built also a sanatorium for the Kondh mission as well.

In the absence of a resident priest in Gopalpur, the church did not register any significant growth until 1889, when cholera broke out, claiming a heavy toll.<sup>97</sup> The missionaries, both priests and Sisters, provided relief to the affected people. Fr. Alphonse Voisin,<sup>98</sup> the priest in charge at the time, informed the Mother General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy that Sr. Hippolyte had already baptised a few children *in articulo mortis* but that most of them died immediately. While Sr. Hippolyte was busy baptising children, Fr. Voisin was busy burying the dead. In their misery the parents were eager to sell their little children. Fr. Voisin reported that Sr. Hippolyte even bought a little girl for a rupee.<sup>99</sup> Once the famine and cholera were over, the mission was faced with an inundation which carried away people and property. Most of the livestock also perished. The brave and timely demonstration of Christian charity performed by both

---

<sup>93</sup> Frs. Chéminal and Balmand had met with the general of the Agency Tract to obtain his permission to start a mission among the Kondhs. The general received them well but he declined to give them the permission, as the Protestants had also been refused. However, they were still hopeful of receiving permission. Cf. Chéminal to La Feuillette, Yanaon, August 3, 1855, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

<sup>94</sup> J. TABOADA, *En las Selvas del Ganjam*, p. 227.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 228.

<sup>96</sup> Riccaz to Bonaventure, Surada, May 10, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2; Msgr. Tissot to Cardinal Simeoni, Vizagapatam, March 23, 1885, APF Indie Orientali: Scritture riferite nei Congressi, vol. 25, f. 890.

<sup>97</sup> Fr. Alphonse Voisin narrated the situation in these words: “Le plupart n’osant sortir de leur maison à cause du choléra, meurt de misère chez eux. D’ordinaire les païens brûlent les cadavres, mais maintenant, pour ne pas épouvanter les gens, ils se contentent de les jeter derrière les buissons, ai ils deviennent la proie de bêtes fauves. Aussi de longtemps dit-on, on n’avait vu les chacals, les tigres, les ours et les sangliers sauvages si bien portant.” Alphonse Voisin to Mother General, Jeanne Marie Louise, Gopalpur, May 24, 1889, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Annecy, 2H, J4. A.

<sup>98</sup> Alphonse Voisin was born on December 25, 1864, at Duingt, Savoy. He came to the Visakhapatnam mission in October 1887. He was ordained on May 10, 1888. Between 1888 and 1893 he worked in the Surada mission. Between 1893 and his death (June 14, 1931) he worked in Vizianagram. Cf. Tableau Général, *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4; F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p.61.

<sup>99</sup> Alphonse Voisin to Mother General Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Jeanne Marie Louise, Gopalpur, May 24, 1889, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Annecy, 2H, J4. A.

Fr. Voisin and the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy brought about 400 people into the church.<sup>100</sup>

The missionaries succeeded in purchasing a substantial piece of property on which they could develop a number of institutions, including a school and a seminary that offered instruction in philosophy and theology under Fr. Marie Eugène Gojon.<sup>101</sup> The Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, who started a convent in Gopalpur in 1890, ran the school.<sup>102</sup> Informing their Mother General about their work in Gopalpur, Sr. Hippolyte wrote: “We arrived on March 14 (1890). They asked us to open a school. We could not do it immediately since we did not have anything. But we are going to begin a school on the 12<sup>th</sup> of this month (May 1890) under the protection of the Holy Virgin. Sr. Stanislas is with me, who took final vows.”<sup>103</sup>

Apart from the conversions during the natural calamity, there were a few additions to the church. Reporting on such events, Fr. Voisin wrote: “Conversions do take place; yesterday I was happy of being able to baptise 42 adults, of whom 3 have already reached 70 years of age, and 17 children in young age. Entire villages come for learning prayers. All are submissive and very docile . . . They learn prayers and catechism with an extraordinary facility.”<sup>104</sup> The number of Christians diminished once many left for Assam to work in the tea gardens, which was considered to be lucrative.<sup>105</sup> Although the people who grew up in the orphanages were settled in the territory with some rice fields, a hut, a pair of bullocks and a plough, they felt it was too much work.

---

<sup>100</sup> *Annales des Soeurs de Saint Joseph. Diocese de Vizagapatam. 1897-1906*, vol. II, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Annecy, 312 -318.

<sup>101</sup> Marie Eugène Gojon was born in Savigny, Savoy, on April 2, 1849. He entered the MSFS in 1873 and was ordained a priest on May 25, 1875. Between 1875 and 1886 he served in Savoy and was professor at Evian College. He reached India in August 1886 and taught at the SFS School for two years (1887-1889). He became novice master and rector of Gopalpur seminary from 1889 until his election as superior general of the congregation on September 26, 1894. After having guided the Society through a difficult time of persecution, he resigned in August 1904 for health reasons. He died on October 25, 1905. Cf. *Tableau Général*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4; F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 91; F. MOGET, *The Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales of Annecy*, pp. 171 - 173.

<sup>102</sup> Once the missionaries were in Gopalpur, they became familiar with the surroundings. There was a huge ranch of 13 acres which belonged to Madame Camil, widow of the Count of Salaberry. She lived at that time in France. Probably the property was acquired a quarter of a century earlier when Ganjam was under the French. Now under the British government, the proprietor wanted to get rid of the possession and sold it for 3,500 pesetas, which was definitely an act of charity. Cf. J. TABOADA, *En las Selvas del Ganjam*, p. 228.

<sup>103</sup> Sr. Hippolyte to Mother General Jeanne Marie Louise, Gopalpur, May 10, 1890, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, 2H, J4. A; Alphonse Voisin to Mother General Jeanne Marie Louise, Gopalpur, May 22, 1890, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, 2H, J4. A.

<sup>104</sup> Alphonse Voisin to Mother General Jeanne Marie Louise, Gopalpur, May 22, 1890, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, 2H, J4. A.

<sup>105</sup> A. Voisin recorded: “Notre congrégation de Surada a perdu plus de 500 chrétiens; des enrôleurs d’hommes et de femmes ont parcouru le pays et en ont ammené un très grand nombre dans le pays d’Assam. Tout ce monde a été enrôlé sous de fausses promesses, et nos 500 chrétiens de Surada ont été des dupès comme les autres.” Alphonse Voisin to Mother General Jeanne Marie Louise, Gopalpur, May 22, 1890, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, 2H, J4. A.

Therefore they sold the property and moved to Assam.<sup>106</sup> Writing to his uncle, Fr. Allard mentioned: “The fisher folk of Gopalpur have just started to listen to our religion. Their chief is also well disposed. Two months back, when many of them were affected by fever, they came to the chapel to receive a blessing. One week ago Fr. Descombes told that he converted 50 people this year [1892].”<sup>107</sup>

Between 1895 and 1924 Gopalpur deteriorated as the seaport was closed by 1895 and the huge storehouse was also abandoned. Except for the Immigration Agency, there was no activity. The seminary itself was moved to Visakhapatnam after complaints from both Fathers and students.<sup>108</sup>

#### 4.1.1.3.2 The Seminary at Gopalpur

Two major considerations -- both political and pragmatic -- underlay the missionaries' motivation for establishing the seminary at Gopalpur. First, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the French chamber voted a law that obliged the clerics to perform a year of military service. This law, known as ‘*les curés sac au dos*’, came into effect in the autumn of 1889. One of the articles stipulated that an ‘ecclesiastical student’ would have to complete three years of military service (normally it was two years) if he did not persevere in his vocation. Another article stated that all priests who had attained the age of twenty-six and had not occupied a post recognised by the state would be called to the barracks if they had not received the benefit of exemption. This law created consternation among ecclesiastics, resulting in a number of defections. In order to limit such dangers and to safeguard the vocations of youngsters, the superiors of MSFS decided to start a seminary in India. Second, the missionaries who had been trained in the West had to learn the language and customs of the people before they could commence their missionary activities. A seminary established in the area of their labour could therefore formally introduce them to the local culture and enable them to become acclimatised. Thus, the superiors thought, future missionaries would be better prepared and could avoid military service altogether.<sup>109</sup>

Thus in 1889 Fr. J. Tissot, superior general of MSFS, decided, along with the bishop of Visakhapatnam, to found a seminary for those who had completed high school.<sup>110</sup> The seminary began in 1890 with 3 students and Fr. Gojon, as the first Rector. The curriculum and rules were similar to the ones that existed in Europe, namely, long hours of study and short period of recreation. But because of the ill health of some of the students, the rules had to be modified, allowing more time for recreation,

---

<sup>106</sup> J. REY, *Les Missionnaires de Saint-François de Sales d’Annecy*, p. 444.

<sup>107</sup> F. M. Allard to his uncle, Gopalpur, October 19, 1891, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>108</sup> J. TABOADA, *En las Selvas del Ganjam*, p. 228.

<sup>109</sup> J. Rey cited from the *Missionnaire Indien*: “Ces jeunes gens, lisons-nous dans le *Missionnaire Indien*, sortiraient de cet établissement tout équipés pour le travail des missions, acclimatés au pays, avec une connaissance des ses coutumes, des ses mœurs et de ses langues que seules peuvent donner la vie sur place et des études commencées alors que la mémoire conserve encore toute son activité.” J. REY, *Les Missionnaires de Saint-François de Sales d’Annecy*, p. 329.

<sup>110</sup> F. MOGET, *The Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales and the formation of an Indian Clergy*, (MSS) in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4.

games and walks. Besides English, the students had to learn Oriya and Telugu under Brahmin teachers. Fr. Gojon continued to be the rector until his election as the superior general of the congregation in 1895, when Fr. Anselme Rey replaced him. Later, in December 1898, the seminary was transferred to Visakhapatnam Cathedral.<sup>111</sup> The seminary was closed between 1912 and 1915, and later the seminarians were sent for a short period to Ranchi.<sup>112</sup> Besides theology and philosophy, the seminarians were given homework on Sundays to improve their knowledge of French.<sup>113</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Other new centres

The urge to proclaim Christianity to as many as possible took the missionaries to some interior places. Some of them were set apart for what is known as *missio extra muros*, where they concentrated on some simple ways to draw the attention of the people.

##### 4.1.2.1 Katingia

Katingia, the domain of Kondh raja, was an interior village surrounded by mountains and valleys. Situated at a distance of about 28 kms. from Surada, it counted a population of about 600 people. It became a centre for many villages of Kondhs and Panos. Since it was located in the interior, there was very little possibility of finding essential commodities. However, the British government established a police station there in order to maintain law and order among the Kondhs.<sup>114</sup> The territory was under the rule of a tribal chief, and the people had to pay a nominal tax regularly plus an extraordinary tax whenever someone died or some important function took place in the family of the chief. In their status as outsiders, the Panos refused to pay the tax, although the chief demanded that they pay like everyone else. He prohibited them from cultivating the land and denounced them in the court of Berhampur. Because of their unfamiliarity with the language and court procedures and being unable to employ a competent lawyer, they decided to approach Fr. Dupont, who was known to be both knowledgeable and just in all his dealings. A delegation was sent to the missionary in 1883.

So just when the Fathers of Surada were contemplating a *missio extra muros* the deputation of Panos arrived from Katingia. Fr. Dupont agreed to help them. As anticipated, the judge passed a verdict in favour of the Panos, and the chief was found guilty. Touched by the kindness of the missionary, the Panos requested him to establish

---

<sup>111</sup> When the seminary was established in 1890, the Sisters were invited to take care of the laundry of the Fathers and the seminarians. Later, they were requested to run a school and a dispensary. The Sisters accepted this invitation because the climate was better in Gopalpur, compared to the climate in the mountains. Cf. *Annales des Soeurs de Saint Joseph. Diocèse de Vizagapatam. 1897-1906*, vol. II, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Annecy, p. 322; F. Moget, *The Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales of Annecy*, p. 165.

<sup>112</sup> F. MOGET, *The Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales and the formation of an Indian Clergy*, (MSS) in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4.

<sup>113</sup> F. M. Allard to his Uncle, Gopalpur, August 4, 1895, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>114</sup> Bonaventure to Philippe, Surada, February 21, 1882, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

a mission station in their place so that they could benefit from the religion of the missionary. Fr. Dupont, encouraged by this overwhelming response, decided to live in the village. He started his apostolate on the Feast of the Immaculate Conception of Mary (December 8, 1883), the protector of the mission. Initially the priest lived under a tree, a fairly normal practice in starting a new mission.<sup>115</sup> Afterwards Fr. Dupont had to be content with a hut. He thought that if he succeeded in converting some people, he might build a better house. He began instructing a small group, and others later followed. As Christmas approached, he decided to celebrate the feast with solemnity. Soon a good number of people asked for baptism.<sup>116</sup>

#### **4.1.2.1.1 The Influence of Fr. Dupont**

One of the institutions that Fr. Dupont established after his arrival in Katingia was a school for children. Right from the beginning the Roman Catholic School at Katingia exerted its influence on the people. It attracted converts from among the Panos in Katingia and in Goddapur. By becoming Christians, the people of Katingia thought that they were no longer under the control of *Potros*; they even refused to do collaborate with the government. These difficulties were later settled through the intervention of the missionaries. In order to encourage his neophytes, Fr. Dupont used to organise activities for certain church feasts, depending on the availability of funds. He used such occasions to impart knowledge about the faith.<sup>117</sup>

In his long career as a missionary Fr. Dupont was also known as a doctor. He had a practical knowledge of Indian diseases, and he distributed medicines accordingly. Often the diseases were minor and were caused by malnutrition. His services brought certain relief to those Kondhs and Panos who generally went to the sorcerers (often village medicine men). In their ignorance, the latter attributed the diseases to the wrath of offended spirits that needed to be appeased through sacrifices. Adjacent to his hut Fr. Dupont erected a shed, which served as a hospital where he often shared his food with the patients. His reputation as a caring doctor spread, and he did not fail to speak about God and salvation to anyone who sought medicinal help. Through this simple technique he won a good number of Catholics in the vicinity, especially in the villages of Solima, Saragoudi and Possopodoro.<sup>118</sup>

#### **4.1.2.1.2 Hardships and Obstacles**

However, Fr. Dupont was faced with numerous obstacles when he decided to construct a church. The chief of Katingia prohibited him from collecting the wood

---

<sup>115</sup> Descombes to Superior, Torobady (Surada mission), November 14, 1900, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>116</sup> Writing on the arrival of Fr. J.M. Dupont in Katingia and the welcome given to him, Jean Rey narrated: "Cédant à leurs instances, le P. J.M. Dupont arriva le 8 décembre dans leur village. Son renom de défenseur des faibles et des pauvres, de père des orphelins l'y avait précédé et ses amis le reçurent avec force démonstrations de joie et de reconnaissance. Douze familles de Pahnos vinrent tout de suite apprendre les prières et le catéchisme. Sous un toit de feuillage, devant un autel garni de belles images et de lampions, la fête de Noël revêtit un grand éclat." J. REY, *Les Missionnaires de Saint-François de Sales d'Annecy*, p. 255; M. DOMEGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 354.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 355.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 358.

needed for the chapel from the ruler's territory. Moreover, the raja vented his displeasure by driving away the person who had given the land to the missionary and by ordering the Kondhs to have no contact with him. Undeterred by such restrictions, he approached the raja of Bodogoro, who gave all the timber necessary for the construction. Furthermore, the raja dragged the missionary to court for encroachment upon a plot of land that did not legally belong to latter. However, convinced by the missionary's respect for the law, the judge decided in his favour. The chief was not the only opponent that Fr. Dupont had to deal with; there were also the *Potros* and *Karnams* who incited the hatred of the chief toward the missionary. Since the *Karnams* were the ones who knew how to read and write, the Kondhs depended on them for their links with the government. Realising their vulnerability, the *Karnams* tried to turn the Kondhs against the missionaries by preventing their children from attending the missionary school. They forbade the villagers to sell the missionary essential items, and they even barred him from entering their village. Fr. Dupont was also accused of illegally involving himself in the sale of properties that did not belong to him. Yet all this did not deter the people from placing their trust in him and rendering the support that he needed for establishing the mission.<sup>119</sup>

#### 4.1.2.1.3 Katingia after Fr. Dupont

Katingia became one of the flourishing communities in the mountains established by the hard-working and kind-hearted missionary, Fr. Dupont. He chose a catechist who could also work as a teacher in the school and who wielded much influence among the Kondhs. After the death of Fr. Dupont (June 17, 1887), Fr. Descombes took over the care of the community. The provisional church was almost collapsing, so the people requested him to build another one. Fr. Descombes was interested in building a chapel with stones and mortar, which would cost him Rs. 800. He asked Msgr. Tissot to approve a plan of constructing a small residence for priests, where the missionaries could live during their annual visits. Msgr. Tissot approved it.<sup>120</sup> Thanks to the school the number of Christians who knew how to read and write increased. This fact increased interest in printed prayer books, just like the Protestants had. Looking at the prospects of conversion in the mountains, Fr. Descombes commented:

The ground is quite suitable for conversion. Except in the mountain district of Goomsur, the Protestants have not touched the populations, the Brahmins do not keep them under their yoke, and Europeans are almost unknown. The great obstacle is that we are not able to travel by bullock cart, and that communications are more difficult than anywhere else. Besides, it is difficult to find in these parts fruit, sugar, eggs, and milk. We have to carry along all provisions for the journey.<sup>121</sup>

By the time Fr. Descombes took over the mission, there were changes in the village. Fr. Descombes visited the station only four times a year, but in his absence the people gathered for evening prayers and the recitation of the rosary. The missionary was

---

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., pp. 355-357.

<sup>120</sup> The letter is written in form of an appeal for funds to construct a church in Katingia. Cf. Descombes to Superior, Torobody (Surada mission), November 14, 1900, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>121</sup> Descombes to J. Tissot, Surada, December (no date) 1892, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

elated when people greeted him by genuflecting, while the children called out 'praised be Jesus Christ'. When they met the priest they knelt down to receive his blessings. Fr. Descombes went to the villages around Katingia to gather the people for Christ.<sup>122</sup> In 1897 he administered baptism to 36 catechumens, both children and adults, at Didrobady. Most of them were victims of famine. He recorded that one of the neophytes had practically nothing, except some herbs and roots for food.<sup>123</sup> During his sojourn at Gojolibady he sent messengers to invite the Christians of Gosta and Pondacalo for worship but they discovered that the men were away seeking work in the mountains and that the women were so debilitated that they could not undertake the two-hour journey. The missionary therefore arranged for the distribution of rice, which brought them momentary relief.<sup>124</sup>

Even in difficult times when very little progress was visible, the plan of abandoning the mission at Katingia itself was abandoned, due to the toil of the veteran missionaries. They felt it would be a great loss to give up a place where the missionaries had spent so much energy in spreading the gospel.<sup>125</sup> In 1911 Fr. Descombes received 2500 francs for the construction of the mission in Katingia. It was proposed that a more comfortable house be built for the missionaries there.

#### **4.1.2.1.4 Conversion of the Villages around Katingia**

In the last decade of the nineteenth century Fr. Descombes spearheaded the process of conversion in the Ganjam mission. It was at Katingia that he came in contact with the people who needed his help against either the police or the usurious Zamindars. Advised by the Christians of Katingia, the people came to the missionary and expressed their willingness to place themselves under his protection. Sometimes as a sign of gratitude the chief would offer the missionary a plot of land to construct a church, as happened in Cutruca.<sup>126</sup> Once the missionary pitched his tent among the Kondhs,

---

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Descombes to Clerc, Merycot, (no month and date) 1897, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Descombes to Bouvard, Surada, March 29, 1911, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

<sup>126</sup> Descombes to J. Tissot, Surada, December (no date) 1892, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

interest in Christianity grew--even from the neighbouring villages.<sup>127</sup> Gutuli,<sup>128</sup> Eperma, Solima,<sup>129</sup> Goomsur, Saragood and Killama were all attracted to the faith.

Kondhs in general are a shy people. If they don't know someone, they will hide behind the door and peep through the little opening to observe the person. Such was the behaviour of the Kondhs in Cutruca, Eperma and other villages, which Fr. Descombes had visited. But their behaviour changed when the missionary started to live with them. They were now used to the missionaries. However, some of their traditional religious beliefs still impeded the growth of the mission. For example, if a person died of smallpox, the Kondhs would not even touch the body much less take part in the funeral.<sup>130</sup> They were also obsessed with their prescribed sacrifices.<sup>131</sup>

It was also not easy for the people (Kondhs and Panos) to accept the new religion of the missionary because their oppressors continued their threats and intimidations. Although the manager of the raja of Boroguda threatened the new Christians with sanctions they remained faithful. Convinced of their positive response and their interest in the new religion, the missionary built a chapel wherever he had baptised the people. By 1900, most of the villages had chapels.<sup>132</sup>

---

<sup>127</sup> P. DESCOMBES, "Diocèse de Vizagapatam: Lettre du R.P. Petrus Descombes", in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 72 (1900), pp. 111-112; Descombes to Clerc, Merycot, (no month and date) 1897, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>128</sup> Gutuli was one of the centres where freed *Meriah*s lived. The British government took several measures to rehabilitate them. One of them was the distribution of land for cultivation. It was then that Fr. Descombes helped them to obtain the privilege from the government. He even helped them to purchase bullocks and seeds for cultivation. He redeemed the land that was sold during the famine. Realising the goodness of the missionary, the people of Gutuli expressed their willingness to become Christians and invited the priest to build a chapel in their village. Cf. Descombes to Clerc, Gutuli, (no month and date) 1900, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

<sup>129</sup> The conversion of Solima was the work of Alex, the trusted mason of Fr. Descombes. In spite of the intimidation of the raja of Bodogodo, he kept the people together and helped the priest in the construction of chapels in the mountains. Descombes to J. Tissot, Surada, December (no date) 1892, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>130</sup> P. DESCOMBES, "Diocèse de Vizagapatam: Lettre du R.P. Petrus Descombes", in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 72 (1900), p. 97.

<sup>131</sup> Fr. Descombes clearly indicated: "One of the main obstacles in the conversion is their attachment to sacrifices. They hold this belief above all others; 'no sacrifice, no harvest!' is their principle. According to them, it's the sacrifice that brings the rain. It's the sacrifice that stops it when it's abundant. 'There is no means more efficacious to cure fever, to drive away the tiger, to preserve from epidemics'. Every harvest requires 3 sacrifices; the victim being a he-goat or a pig: (1) at the time of sowing; (2) when the ears come out; and (3) on the eve of the harvest." Descombes to J. Tissot, Surada, December (no date) 1892, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>132</sup> Descombes to Clerc, Gutuli, (no month and date) 1900, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

#### 4.1.2.1.5 Additional Centres visited by Fr. J.M. Descombes

The Kondhs invited the missionaries to open a station in Baliguda, where there was hope of a good harvest.<sup>133</sup> The itinerary of Fr. Descombes in March 1905 indicates the immense work that he undertook. Here is his account:

In this valley (Didrobady) all the villages except one are learning prayers. At Koussipanga, 60 families are under instruction. On Tuesday, 2 hours walk took us to Dighy where I met dear Fr. Suiffet . . . Eight villages are favourable to us. Only in one village is the chief our adversary. Next day, we left for the valley of Raikia, where 6 villages are under instruction. We visited 3, two of them are to be baptised soon. It's from here that 18 families had sent delegates to Fr. Suiffet, requesting the missionary to make them Christians. On the road for 3½ hours, we went through 3 big villages Kritigia, Tsantsiri, Krootigiah, which look like towns, with well laid-out houses. A crown of big mango trees surrounds each village.<sup>134</sup>

Continuing his tour in the mountains, he wrote:

We arrived finally where there was a cluster of villages, Cuttoghia, with Gumagarra as the head of the villages. A chief who was guiding us, said: 'here is your house'. There are three rooms, the chapel, in the middle, with the kitchen on one side and the stable on the other. Entering the chapel, we knelt down to thank God for our safe journey. We got out: the village is there to see us. This village counts 200 families of diverse castes, the Kondhs in the majority. I begin the conversation in *Kui*. At once, people smile. We are considered old friends . . . On Sunday the crowd of onlookers in front of the chapel was numerous. Twice a day, morning and evening, catechism and prayers are held for men in the chapel, and for women in the village. One of my two catechists has opened a small dispensary and distributes medicines . . . I am resolved to remain here as long as possible. We can hope for good results. 9 other families have joined the initial 18 families. Some local chiefs' tyranny was the occasion for people to seek the protection from the missionaries. One of the chiefs said: 'We are going to unearth the treasure of our ancestors to fight against the sahibs (Europeans) and drive them out'. While this house was under construction, these chiefs sent people to take out the pillars, threatening the catechumens.<sup>135</sup>

#### 4.1.2.2 Russellkonda

A small chapel along with a cemetery existed since the establishment of a military outpost in Russelkonda.<sup>136</sup> Soldiers had been sent there in order to capture the

---

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Descombes to Clerc, Gumagarra, June 25, 1905, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Russellkonda or Russell's Hill is known today as Bhanjanagar, which after independence was named after the Bhanja dynasty that ruled the area for a long time. Russellkonda, situated in lat. 20°56'N. and long. 84°37'E. was a sub-divisional town in Ganjam district. The climate is generally salubrious during the year, except March, April and May when the heat is oppressive. Maltby wrote: "This small town, situated in the midst of a charming scenery, was named in 1837 at the termination of the second Goomsur campaign after Mr. Russell, the able special Commissioner in Ganjam." T.J. MALTBY, *The Ganjam District Manual*, Madras 1882, p. 53; N.C. BEHURIA, *Orissa State Gazetteer*, vol. II, pp. 255 – 256.

fugitive raja of Goomsur and to eradicate the horrendous human sacrifices. The Vincentians, who later took over from the MSFS, found a document that referred to the presence of Christians in Russelkonda. It deals with the resolutions that the soldiers of the 18<sup>th</sup> Regiment had sent to the vicar apostolic of Visakhapatnam. The resolutions stated:

(1) That no Christian would participate in the pagan religious ceremonies; (2) that all should fulfil the Easter obligations, under the threat of being marginalized from the community and being denied a Christian burial; and (3) that everybody should attend on Sundays the divine cult in the big chapel, and to solve disputes Christians should appeal to the community council without any kind of interference on the pagan side. Should anybody dare to infringe these laws, the document ends, he would be punished with 40 strokes or 30 rupees and 20 candles.<sup>137</sup>

This document reveals that the Christian community had existed even before the arrival of MSFS, although one cannot be certain when it actually began. The chapel was maintained at the expense of the state due to the presence of some important monuments.<sup>138</sup>

#### 4.1.2.3 Digby

Digby<sup>139</sup> is situated about 30 miles from Surada. This was a centre where the Kondhs were living in large numbers. Until 1900 they were victims of injustice and oppression by the chiefs and merchants, who even took away their lands. On hearing that they could get help from a missionary, they sent a delegation to meet Fr. Descombes and possibly to bring him to their village. In 1900 he visited the place for the first time and decided to begin a station there.<sup>140</sup> By the end of 1901 almost all the people of Mondosoro were Christians. In 1902 the missionary visited about 118 villages, resulting in an increase of 173 families. At this time Fr. Suiffet began to reside in Mondosoro with a view to move on to other villages. Between 1903 and 1905, forty-three families became Christian when the missionary visited Boregada and Padangui. Since many nearby villages requested the service of a priest, Msgr. J.M. Clerc advised Fr. Suiffet to build a presbytery in Digby.

In July 1909 Fr. Suiffet claimed that he had baptised 850 individuals living in 3 large villages. The new Christians built a hut for the priest as evidence of their changed faith, and they requested him to visit them regularly. It was not easy for the missionary to convince the people of Christianity. Sometimes they ignored the priests' presence among them and continued their pagan practices. Fr. Petitjean wrote: "Five days ago in

---

<sup>137</sup> J. Taboada, in his book, *En las Selvas del Ganjam*, refers to the document of 1850, which is said to have been preserved in the Cuttack diocesan archives, but he did not cite the content of the document. If the document dates back to 1850, then the bishop's name should read Msgr. Neyret, who was the vicar apostolic of Visakhapatnam from 1849 until his death in 1862, instead of Msgr. Tissot, who was appointed his successor. Cf. J. TABOADA, *En las Selvas del Ganjam*, p. 207.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. P. Descombes, "Chez les Khondes 1891", in *Extrait du Petit Salesien* (1891), AMSFS.

<sup>139</sup> The village of Mondosoro and the surrounding area were called Digby. The same name was also used in government records.

<sup>140</sup> P. ROSSILLON, "Cent Kilomètres sur des Épaules Kondes", in *LMC* 44 (1912), p. 63.

one of the turns to visit villages I stayed in a village where they speak Oriya. In my six days of stay there I never received any consolation from the Christians. There is a school. However when I was about to depart I was given a fowl as a gift by them.”<sup>141</sup> When he made his pastoral visit to the northern mission, Msgr. Clerc deputed Fr. Rossillon to visit Dighy. He did so with much enthusiasm, braving difficulties crossing rivers and trekking the mountains. In his short stay in Dighy (1909) Fr. Rossillon witnessed the positive response of the Kondh chiefs. He narrated for the readers of *Echos Salésiens*:

Forty-one chiefs came to meet us at Dighy on Sunday, where we had given them the appointment. As each had brought two or three men from their respective villages, we had there a feast the likes of which I have not seen in my life. Though pagans they (villagers) followed the Mass with respect and approved the sermon with head movements and small cries. Once the Mass was over, in order to manifest their joy, they executed mock hunts of buffaloes and dances with raised axes. All danced to the rhythm of their drums!<sup>142</sup>

The representatives came with the request that the Fathers and the catechists be sent so that they might have the opportunity to love God. The representatives claimed that they were the spokespersons for seventy villages that wished to become Christians, if the missionaries were interested.<sup>143</sup> Looking at the Dighy mission in 1924, Fr. J.M. Fernandez (a Spanish Vincentian and the superior of the first group of missionaries who had inherited the Ganjam mission from MSFS) acknowledged the hard labours of the missionaries full of hope and apostolic zeal, but who had had to abandon the mission in the face of their dwindling numbers caused by the First World War.<sup>144</sup>

At times the Sisters from Surada went to Dighy to provide medicines for the remote villages. Their presence added a certain glimmer of hope to the mission. Fr. Petitjean recorded one such event: “Recently one of the Sisters from Surada came here to explore the terrain. She was carried in an armchair. Her coming here raised the curiosity of many Kondh women. During her stay of three weeks in Dighy she had an

---

<sup>141</sup> Petitjean to a confrere, Dighy, April 6, 1908, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>142</sup> Rossillon narrated: “Quarante et un chefs vinrent un dimanche nous trouver à Dighy, où nous leur avions donné rendez-vous. Comme ils avaient amené chacun deux or trois hommes de leur village respectif, nous eûmes là une fête comme de ma vie je n’en avais encore vue. Quoique païens, ils entendirent la messe avec respect, approuvant le sermon par des signes de tête et de petits cris significatifs; et la messe finie, pour nous manifester leur joie, ils exécutèrent divers simulacres de chasses aux bisons et des danses à la hache de mieux enlevées, le tout au son rythmé de leurs tambourines.” P. ROSSILLON, “Au lendemain des Cyclones. Une visite épiscopale dans le district de Ganjam”, in *Echos Salésiens* 4 (1910), p. 159.

<sup>143</sup> Jean Rey cited from the letter of Fr. Rossillon: “Nous voulons des prêtres et catéchistes pour nous apprendre à aimer Dieu. Nous sommes ici les porte-voix de soixante-dix villages qui se feront chrétiens si vous venez.” J. REY, *Les Missionnaires de Saint-François de Sales d’Annecy*, p. 415.

<sup>144</sup> Fernandez to Verdier, Surada, May 30, 1924, Archives of the Congregation of the Mission, Supérieur de la Mission Cuttack Indes 1922-1927; J. REY, *Les Missionnaires de Saint-François de Sales d’Annecy*, p. 447.

attack of fever that prevented her from visiting the sick in the villages.”<sup>145</sup> In 1913 Frs. Fleury and Bouchet were appointed to Dighy. While the former remained in Dighy to help Fr. Suiffet, the latter was asked to look after Padangui. But when both were asked to serve in the war, their work was interrupted considerably. Fr. Suiffet was again left with the burden of taking care of a large area, including Dighy, Daringbadi and Padangui, until Fr. Rey joined him in 1914.

Though Frs. Fleury and Bouchet returned to Dighy after the war in 1918, they could not accomplish much, as Fr. Suiffet died that year and Fr. Fleury in 1921. Fr. Rey remained alone in Dighy, since Fr. Bouchet was transferred to other places with greater needs. Since it was difficult to struggle alone, Fr. Rey was forced to close the orphanages in 1919. Realising the challenges that he was faced with, the superior appointed him to Surada with the possibility of visiting Dighy occasionally to take care of the Christians. At the request of the bishop of Visakhapatnam to furnish the statistics of the mission, Fr. Rey wrote: “In my districts of Dighy, I have 500 baptised (Christians). They are from Kondhs and Ghazis. The majority of them live in the valleys of Daringbady, Kerubady, and Didrovadi, and there are 22 ‘criados de la Mission’ (employees of the mission), both teachers and workers.”<sup>146</sup>

---

<sup>145</sup> Petit Jean to a confrere, Dighy, April 6, 1908, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>146</sup> J.Taboada cites Fr. Rey in the following words: “En mi Distrito de Dighy, dice, tengo 500 bautizados entre kondos y ghazis, la mayoria de los cuales viven en los valles de Daringobadi, Keruvadi y Didrovadi, y 22 criados de la Misión entre maestros et jornaleros.” J. TABOADA, *En las Selvas de Ganjam*, p. 168.

#### 4.1.2.4 Padangui

The impact of Christianity might have been felt in Padangui in 1901, when the Kondhs of Mondosoro (Dighy) invited the missionary to mediate in their disputes. Recognising the influence of the missionary, the timid Tribals of the area accepted Christianity slowly. Padangui's turn came in 1905, after many other villages between Raikia and Boregada had already taken a positive step. Fr. Suiffet who was sent to visit the new communities in Raisinguia, Sukamanda and Boroga, near Baliguda. Fr. Tohu and Fr. Julien Vulliez later assisted him. Fr. Bouchet took up residence in Padangui in 1913, where he led 200 families to Christianity.

Writing in *Les Missions Catholiques*, Fr. Bouchet commented that on January 29, 1914, the missionaries acquired a patch of land on which they had intended to build a church and a priests' residence. This was believed to be a central place for the valley.<sup>147</sup> The people donated some trees that were consecrated to their gods (Lona Penu). The missionaries later re-consecrated them through the sprinkling of holy water. Writing on March 4, 1914, Msgr. J.M. Clerc informed Cardinal Gotti that they were planning to open a new station in the eastern part of the Kondh mission at Padangui, a central place for the surrounding villages where there were many catechumens.<sup>148</sup> However, Fr. Bouchet had to leave for France and serve as a soldier during the First World War, which unleashed disastrous consequences for the mission. Writing about the conditions of the mission when Fr. Bouchet returned to Padangui, Fr. Jesús Taboada commented:

On his return from France in 1918, he didn't find the result of his labour but rather ruins and smoking ashes. Sheltered under a miserable hovel of three metres large and three metres wide, he resolved to reconstruct the ruins. Only a few came after the 'whistle of the pastor,' and before being able to organise an effective plan of re-evangelisation, he was called to Visakhapatnam in 1919. Two years later the mission was handed over to the Spanish Vincentians of the Province of Madrid.<sup>149</sup>

#### 4.1.2.5 Expedition to Jeypore

On hearing that there were great opportunities for evangelisation in the kingdom of Jeypore,<sup>150</sup> Msgr. Tissot despatched three MSFS (Frs. Bonaventure, Payraud and Domenge) to ascertain the prospects for starting a mission in the kingdom, where a good number of Kondhs lived. Msgr. Tissot appointed Fr. Bonaventure as leader of the

---

<sup>147</sup> BOUCHET, "Informations Diverses: Vizagapatam (Hindoustan)", in *LMC* 46 (1914), p. 522.

<sup>148</sup> Msgr. Clerc to Cardinal Gotti, Vizagapatam, March 4, 1914, APF Rubrica, vol. 546, ff. 41 – 42.

<sup>149</sup> Jesús Taboada wrote: "Al volver de Francia, en 1918, no encontró de su labor más que escombros y cenizas humeantes. Albergado en un tugurio miserable de tres metros de largo por tres de ancho, se resolvió, animoso, a levantar tanta ruina. Pocos acudieron al silbido de su antiguo Pastor, y antes de poder organizar de nuevo un plan efectivo de reconquista, fué llamado a Vizagapatám en 1919. Dos años más tarde, la Misión fué transferida a los Padres Paúles españoles de la Provincia de Madrid." J. TABOADA, *En las Selvas del Ganjam*, p. 172.

<sup>150</sup> Jeypore, or the 'city of victory,' is the most important town in the district of Koraput where the ex-maharaja lives. The town gained its prominence when Vira Vikram Deo (1648 -1660) shifted his capital from Nandapur in the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century A. D., which was considered to be auspicious. Sometimes the name of the town is spelt as Jeypur. Cf. N.C. BEHURIA (ed), *Orissa State Gazetteer*, vol. II, pp. 320-323.

expedition, since he was able to speak Oriya. At the time of the expedition (1883), Jeypore was a town of about 4000 to 5000 people. The streets were narrow and the houses were built with mud, including the palace.<sup>151</sup> The people worshipped *Tacorani* [Thakurani], a goddess and the presiding Hindu deity who was also part of the Kondh pantheon. Narrating his journey to Jeypore to his uncle, Fr. Philippe, Fr. Bonaventure wrote:

I am today at Sonky, in the centre of the forests of the southern Range of the Kondh country. I walked 85 miles in three days. I am the guest of a good (brave) Catholic Irish engineer, (his name was Harris), in charge of the building up of a road through the forests. I shall leave tomorrow for Koraput where I will arrive after a three-days' walk. The carriers are there to take my bag. As for me, I walk. Monsignor has sent me to try a mission among the Kondhs. I recommend this mission to your prayers. I am full of courage and everybody gives me hope.<sup>152</sup>

When they arrived in Jeypore, the missionaries were welcomed with all the formalities that the small kingdom could afford. The dewan and a few senior ministers were at their service and as a token of recognition for the missionaries, the raja himself sent some fruit for the priests and expressed his willingness to pay a visit. The missionaries declined the offer, since the protocol was that they should first call on the king. However, the intended meeting did not take place, as the king himself was busy with state affairs. The dewan took the missionaries to a school, where the king desired them to work. This visit was an eye-opener when the missionaries discovered the people's expectations and fears: namely, (1) that the missionaries had come to preach a new religion or new English gods; (2) that by introducing a new religion the priest might make the people lose caste (the Brahmins of the place were especially concerned about this); and (3) that they had come to teach European science and civilisation. The missionaries stated in no uncertain terms that their motive was to preach Christianity.<sup>153</sup>

In his report to Msgr. Tissot, later published in the journal *Propagation de la Foi*, Fr. Bonaventure explained the advantages of opening a station either in Koraput or Pottinghy. The following were the reasons for starting a station at Koraput: First, though situated beyond the chain of mountains, Koraput could be well connected with the rest of the mission, as the missionaries could easily reach Nagpur, Kamptee and

---

<sup>151</sup> Even though establishing a station in Jeypore did not materialise, the expedition was considered for the sole reason of founding some stations that would be conducive to the missionary enterprises. The information thus gathered helped the missionaries in founding a station at a later period. Cf. M. DOMENGE, "Au pays du Khondes: Voyage Raconté par le P. Domenge", in *LMC* 15 (1883), p. 484.

<sup>152</sup> Bonaventure wrote: "Je suis aujourd'hui à Sonky, au centre des forêts du sud. J'ai fait 85 miles en trois jours. Je suis l'hôte d'un brave ingénieur irlandais et catholique, en charge de la construction d'une route à travers les forêts. Je partirai d'ici demain pour Koraput où j'arriverai après trois jours de marche. J'ai des porteurs pour mon bagage, moi je marche à pied. Msgr. m'envoie pour essayer une mission parmi les Khondes. Je recommande cette mission à vos bonnes prières. Je suis plein de courage et tout le monde me donne des espérances." Bonaventure to Philippe, Visakhapatnam, April 11, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2. For another account of the expedition see M. PAYRAUD, "Lettre du M. Payraud, missionnaire apostolique, à M. Tissot, supérieur de la Société de Saint-François de Sales d'Annecy", in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 55 (1883), pp. 238-242.

<sup>153</sup> M. DOMENGE, "Au pays du Khondes: Voyage Raconté par le P. Domenge", pp. 484-486.

Visakhapatnam for retreats and meetings.<sup>154</sup> Second, the climate was pleasant, almost like the climate in Europe, and certainly not feverish (as in the Kondh mountains). Third, the missionaries liked the picturesque mountains of Koraput, and they were also encouraged by the welcome they had received from the local authorities and the people. Fourth, the missionaries felt that their mission in Jeypore might bring them some success,<sup>155</sup> for despite the dominance of the Brahmins, they wielded little or no influence on the Kondhs.<sup>156</sup> Even the Protestants were not there to compete with the Catholics.<sup>157</sup> In sum, satisfied with the visit, the Fathers presented a recommendation to Msgr. Tissot to start a mission immediately. However, only after an informal consultation between the bishop and the missionaries and the superior in Annecy, did Msgr. Tissot decide to start in Koraput. He appointed Fr. Bonaventure, young and energetic, to commence the mission.<sup>158</sup>

#### 4.1.2.5.1 The Attempts to establish a Mission in Koraput

Though in one of his letters to his uncle, Fr. Philippe, Fr. Bonaventure mentioned that the project to open a station in Koraput was beyond his strength, he accepted the request of Msgr. J.M. Tissot.<sup>159</sup> Following his experience in Surada, Fr. Bonaventure wanted to purchase a large farm in Koraput, with the hope of working like

---

<sup>154</sup> Bonaventure wrote: “En outre, je dis qu’il est nécessaire que nous ouvrons cette station sans délai. La gloire de Dieu l’exige; c’est la ligne qui va enfin relier la mission du Sud avec celle du Nord, le missionnaire de Koraput pourra faire sa retraite aussi facilement à Nagpore qu’à Kamptee et à Vizagapatam. Les protestants d’ailleurs veulent s’y implanter: or, les premiers venus seront les premiers servis; et les bonnes places sont rares soit à Pottinghy, soit à Koraput.” E. BONAVENTURE, “Lettre du R. P. Bonaventure, de la Société saint François de Sales d’Annecy, à Msgr. J.M. Tissot, Vicaire apostolique de Vizagapatam”, in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 55 (1883), p. 237.

<sup>155</sup> Here Msgr. J.M. Tissot expressed his eagerness to begin a mission, since the place is well situated and the climate salubrious. The climate is similar to the one in Europe. For more details: J.M. Tissot to Philippe, Vizagapatam, January 20, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2; Bonaventure to J. Tissot, Visakhapatnam, January 6, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>156</sup> Domenge observed: “Mais le pays est tout entier sous l’empire des brahmes les plus fanatiques et les plus arriérés de toute l’Inde, et l’on y aurait en général plus de difficultés et moins de chances de succès qu’en beaucoup d’autres endroits”. M. DOMENGE, “Au pays du Khondes: Voyage Raconté par le P. Domenge”, p. 485.

<sup>157</sup> Domenge commented: “Chez le Khondes, c’est un pays nouveau, où les brahmes n’exercent aucune influence, le climat nous y offre des avantages que nous ne trouverons nulle part ailleurs dans notre mission, et pour longtemps encore les protestants ne viendront pas empêcher les conversions par les contradictions de leurs doctrines. Le missionnaire de Khorapett pourrait faire une visite à Jeypoor une ou deux fois l’an, pour sonder les dispositions et préparer les voies. Si une mission s’y établissait, elle dépendrait plus naturellement de Kamptee que de Vizagapatam.” Ibid., pp. 485 - 486.

<sup>158</sup> The choice of Fr. Bonaventure was based on the consultation that Msgr. J.M. Tissot had with the missionaries, who were unanimous in favour of starting a mission immediately. Cf. J.M. Tissot to Philippe, Vizagapatam, March 15, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2; M. DOMENGE, “Au pays du Khondes: Voyage Raconté par le P. Domenge”, p. 485.

<sup>159</sup> Bonaventure to Philippe, Koraput, May 16, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

a benevolent landowner, where he could employ people as he did in Thotavally.<sup>160</sup> It was widely known that such a method had worked well in Thotavally, especially among the Kondhs or Panos, whereas the people he encountered in Koraput were a mixed population of both Kondhs and Oriyas.<sup>161</sup> However, Fr. Bonaventure was unable to assume responsibility because he fell ill. Later, when he had recovered, he was transferred to Nagpur (1898) and eventually he became the fourth bishop of Nagpur (1904).

### 4.1.3 The Missionaries' Outlook and Strategies

#### 4.1.3.1 The Famine of 1889

Orissa experienced yet another famine in 1889, caused by poor rains in 1888 that resulted in scarcity and misery. Though the market price for a measure of rice was Rs. 4, it was very difficult to obtain any even at the rate of Rs. 10. Fr. Décarre reported that he had sent servants more than 150 kms away to buy rice for the boarding school in Surada. The people were scavenging for food. When they found nothing, they ate grass, roots, leaves and even tree bark. Some of them ate mud.<sup>162</sup> The tragedy struck the families immeasurably: some parents killed their children, sold them for a few rupees, or abandoned them along the roadside in hopes that someone would show pity and give them a chance to live. Many such children were brought to the mission orphanages, where some died before they could be nurtured back to life.

The governor of the Madras Presidency, Lord Connemara, visited Ganjam district to avert criticism of administrative negligence. Msgr. Tissot went to Gopalpur to offer his respects to the illustrious visitor. Fr. Décarre went to meet the governor at Aska, where he was taking care of about 400 to 600 people. Having noticed such acts of mercy and kindness, the governor acknowledged the services of the missionaries and gave orders to open a distribution centre in Surada, under the supervision of Fr. Décarre.<sup>163</sup>

In the face of this natural calamity many sought relief from the church. The selflessness and charity of the missionaries had positive influence on the people; some of them became Christians. Writing on November 8, 1889, Fr. Descombes recorded: "Thanks to the famine, a good number of souls have found the way to heaven, that is

<sup>160</sup> Domenge declared: "Nous y avons donc choisi un terrain assez vaste et bien situé, que le gouvernement paraît disposé à nous céder, pour y former notre future établissement." M. Domenge, "Au pays du Khondes: Voyage Raconté par le P. Domenge", p. 478.

<sup>161</sup> Domenge to Montagnoux, Vizianagram, August 9, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>162</sup> To understand the intensity of the famine and the sufferings of the people, see P. DESCOMBES, "La Famine & le Choléra à Vizagapatam", in *LMC* 21 (1889), pp. 591 – 594.

<sup>163</sup> Here is a moving account of the effect of the famine: "Un jour, Mgr. Tissot traversait notre village de Dantholinghy. Il vit ce bois que l'on faisait sécher devant chaque maison, et en demanda la raison. C'est pour faire de la soupe: fut-il répondu. Notre bon évêque goûta de cette farine et, la voyant extrêmement insipide, il prit des mesures pour faire donner du travail immédiatement à ces neophytes." P. DESCOMBES, "La Famine & le Choléra à Vizagapatam", p. 592. On May 1, 1889, Lord Connemara, the governor of the Madras Presidency, was in Gopalpur. He spent about a week in Ganjam to assess the severity of the crisis and to provide relief.

opened for them through baptism.”<sup>164</sup> The famine had dramatically increased the number of orphans, for whom the missionaries sought help from the outside. When the much-needed help failed to arrive, they reluctantly had to limit the number of children granted admission to the orphanages.

#### 4.1.3.2 The Motives for Conversion

The missionaries utilised every possible opportunity to gain people for the kingdom of God, but at the same time they were fully aware of the mixed motives of people to accept who accepted Christianity. But what mattered ultimately was their adherence to the faith. One of the recurring motives for the conversion of Panos and Kondhs was the belief that the “white” missionaries, with their easy access to the British government, would protect them from the tyranny of landlords, *Karnams*, *Patros* and others who oppressed them. The missionaries would also prevent the destruction of their harvest by the *Karnams* and *Patros* and Oriyas when they wanted to instil fear among the people. The missionaries had certain medicines that could cure their sickness. The charitable-minded missionaries were the first ones to provide food during the famine.<sup>165</sup> Unwilling to divulge their real motives initially because the missionary might refuse to visit their village, the villagers as a rule would send a delegation stating that many of them were willing to receive baptism. Once the missionary arrived in their midst, they would reveal to him the extent of their troubles, such as exploitation by the moneylenders, who took away their lands.<sup>166</sup> Then the missionary would have a meeting with the villagers that might last for a few days, and he would attempt to persuade the usurers to return the lands.<sup>167</sup> In sum, the presence of missionaries in their midst brought

---

<sup>164</sup> P. Descombes wrote: “Grâce à la famine, un bon nombre d’âmes ont trouvé le chemin du Ciel ouvert devant elles par le baptême.” *Ibid.*, p. 594.

<sup>165</sup> Descombes wrote: “Le Swami, se disent ces païens, est un homme influent. Le Swami me protégera. Le Swami empêchera qu’on détruise mes moissons. Le Swami, qui est quelque peu médecin (puisque, pour ces gens-là, la science de la médecine est un don inné dont le bon Dieu fait cadeau à tous les blancs), le Swami me donnera des remèdes, si je tombe malade. Le Swami est un homme charitable; en temps de famine, il me fera l’aumône. Allons donc à lui, car un être aussi parfait ne peut qu’enseigner la vérité. Et ils viennent par certaines.” P. DESCOMBES, “Lettre du R.P. Descombes”, in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 72 (1900), p. 112.

<sup>166</sup> Fr. J.J. Vuillez commented: “Le motif qui les amène n’est pas très surnaturel. C’est la plupart du temps la protection du missionnaire à obtenir contre certains chefs trop exigeants, c’est une dette à payer, un différent à juger, des semences à avancer etc. Comme vous le voyez, le motif n’est pas très surnaturel, mais du moins la volonté est sincère. Si en ces moments critiques nous pourrions prendre leurs cas en mains, et commencer de suite leur instruction religieuse, nous obtiendrions de bons résultats. Une petite banque agricole qui consisterait à avancer une certaine quantité de graines au début des semailles quite à nous les faire rendre à la récolte avec un petit intérêt, constituerait à Dighy un moyen de persévérance après le baptême. Nous avons actuellement à Dighy près de 800 baptisés et entre cinq à six mille catechumènes.” J.J. Vuillez to Superior, Ranchi September 18, 1910, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>167</sup> After the arrival of Fr. J.M. Descombes in Gumgarra, the catechumens gave him the names of usurers who took away their lands. As a result of the persuasion of the missionary, 12 paddy fields, the property of 6 families, were returned to their owners, and the legal deeds were made in the presence of witnesses. According to Fr. J.M. Descombes, this was only one quarter of the work. They might have to approach the court in order to deal with other usurers. Since some of them had their accountants in the town, it was difficult to persuade them. Cf. Descombes to Clerc, Gumagarra, June 25, 1905, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

assurance, protection and opportunity. The people became ever more confident when the missionaries continued to visit their villages.

#### 4.1.3.3 Problems in sending the Children to School

In spite of the missionaries' efforts at establishing schools even in the remotest villages, the Kondhs and Panos showed little enthusiasm for education. Although there were a few schools on the mountain, they were established by the government, and they were far from Kondh territory. Moreover, the teachers taught in Oriya and did not speak *Kui*, while the Kondh children did not know Oriya. Also the Kondhs felt that in order to eat one must work, and that included children. Fr. J.M. Descombes observed: "The Kondhs will eat only if they work. They say: It's fieldwork and not reading books that feeds us.' Parents hesitated to send their children to school saying that if they were educated, the missionaries would appoint them as catechists and teachers in the school. Hence they would not be with the family."<sup>168</sup> These were some of the obstacles in sending the children to the school. It took many years to remove this unfounded fear from the minds of the ordinary people.

#### 4.1.3.4 The Plan for the Ganjam Mission

In 1906 Bishop Jean Marie Clerc and the regional superior, Fr. A. Rey travelled, to the missions in the north and visited (among other places) Digby, Katingia and Dantholinghy. Fr. Rey was on horseback while the Kondhs, sent by Fr. Suiffet from Digby, carried the bishop on a chair.<sup>169</sup> Ever since his return from Europe, Bishop Clerc gave importance both to the spiritual as well to the material growth of the diocese. In his letter to Fr. Bouvard, the bishop wrote that the missionaries working in the northern part of the Visakhapatnam mission had agreed to divide Surada mission into four units: Surada, Dantholinghy, Katingia and Digby.<sup>170</sup>

In 1906 Fr. Petrus Descombes, nephew of Fr. J.M. Descombes, became the priest in charge of Surada. He was also in charge of the farms. The Catholic population at that time was about 500. There were two separate schools, one for boys and another for girls. An orphan girl, supervised by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, taught 30 girls catechism, sewing, reading and writing. An intelligent Pano Christian, who prepared the students for a certificate course at the primary level, ran the school for boys.<sup>171</sup> Fr. Petrus Descombes wrote that he was happy to bless the marriage of the orphans brought up in the orphanage.<sup>172</sup>

---

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Clerc to Bouvard, Surada, February 17, 1906, AMSFS 5H5-2/4; P. Descombes to Bouvard, Surada, February 20, 1906, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>170</sup> Clerc to Bouvard, Surada, March 6, 1906, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>171</sup> Descombes to Bouvard, Surada, April 23, 1906, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>172</sup> Descombes commented that marriages always took place in the morning at the Mass, where the couple received Holy Communion. The whole village accompanied the couple to the church, followed by a festive meal offered by the newly-weds. Cf. P. Descombes to Bouvard, Surada, February 20, 1906, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

Planning for the future of Surada, Fr. P. Descombes said: “We are trying to provide local resources for our maintenance. The Surada mission has much land, about a thousand acres of land, a part of which is made of forests, which could be cleared and turned into rice fields, but that needs much work, time and money. The Fathers from the mountains come to Surada to rest and get cured of their fever.”<sup>173</sup>

Though the death of several missionaries (including Fr. J.M. Descombes who established about 30 stations in his 27 years as a missionary in this inhospitable region) was a blow to the mission, it continued to flourish. Fr. P. Descombes witnessed a great conversion movement among the Kondhs in Digby and Didrobady in 1907. He felt that the times had changed. Formerly the missionaries went to the people with the intention of converting them, and now it was their turn to come to the missionaries. Accompanied by the village chiefs, they came to the missionary with the request to establish a station in their village.<sup>174</sup>

#### 4.1.3.5 Difficulties in explaining Christian Beliefs and Literary Work

Explaining the major tenets of Christianity – such as the concept of God, the Holy Spirit, original sin, etc. – to a simple and illiterate group of Kondhs was never easy for the missionaries. Since the Kondhs understanding of God and the ‘other world’ was different, the missionary found it difficult to explain a concept such as ‘God is formless.’ Fr. Descombes tried to compare God with wind, heat and life, but he did not receive the peoples’ usual nod of approval, which meant that they understood the preaching of the missionary. He wrote:

One day, a catechumen provided the proper word, ‘*Ishwaro eloo maneru*’, God is spirit. *Eloo* could also mean either memory or intelligence. They also found a suitable word for original sin or *vele papo*, which meant the first sin. Moreover, very few Kondhs understood Oriya and particularly the women did not understand it at all. Therefore, the missionaries were forced to translate Bible history into *Kui*.<sup>175</sup>

Fr. Descombes took up the challenge and by 1905 his manuscript was available. With the help of a teacher he wrote the prayers, catechism, songs in *Kui*.<sup>176</sup>

Besides Fr. Descombes, others were also involved in literary activities. Fr. Jules Rey was busy composing songs in Oriya and translating the life of the saints.<sup>177</sup> In their efforts at disseminating the Word among the literate population, the missionaries felt the need to start a press in order to publish the books they needed in Oriya.<sup>178</sup> There was a

---

<sup>173</sup> Descombes to Bouvard, Surada, February 20, 1906, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>174</sup> Descombes to Bouvard, Surada, June 21, 1907, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>175</sup> Descombes to Clerc, Gumagarra, June 25, 1905, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>176</sup> Unfortunately the General Archives of MSFS do not have any of the works mentioned above. Cf. A. Rey, *Souvenirs*, Rédigés à la demande du P. Comerson en 1933 (MSS), AMSFS.

<sup>177</sup> Descombes to Constant Bouvard, Surada, March 29, 1911, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

<sup>178</sup> Fr. Descombes wrote from Surada: “Nous avons de multiples besoins dans notre pauvre mission, et l’un des plus urgents est de nous procurer une petite presse à bras, pour imprimer nous-même les divers livres qui nous sont très nécessaires. Nous venons de faire imprimer, en Oryah, une histoire Sainte; cela nous a coûté 230 francs. C’est maintenant le tour d’un grand catéchisme (coût 300 francs), qui sera suivi

sense of urgency because of the infiltration of Protestant literature, which was published at their press in Cuttack and to which the Catholics were exposed.

#### 4.1.3.6 The Importance of Catechists

Among the many things thought to be fundamental to the growth of the mission were the trained catechists and money, but the Ganjam mission lacked both.<sup>179</sup> Catechists were considered to be vital to the progress of the mission which to a large extent rested on their formation and dedication. The missionaries used to organise three-day annual retreats for catechists so that they would receive some spiritual formation besides the usual discussion on mission matters.<sup>180</sup> The appeal for good and dedicated catechists was constant in the letters of the missionaries.<sup>181</sup> The Synod of Visakhapatnam recognised that the formation and the role of catechists was indispensable for the progress of the mission.<sup>182</sup> Catechists, despite their modest salaries, were responsible for children, who attended classes on religion, and for the catechumens, who learned the prayers and the principles of Christianity. The Synod rightly recognised the dedicated life of catechists when it stated: “The life of a good catechist is in fact a life of devotion, of plenty of work and of tiredness. One can never easily find a catechist for the modest salary we offer them. They are disposed to all kinds of sacrifices.”<sup>183</sup>

The catechists conducted monthly meetings at the centre in the presence of the missionaries. The annual retreats, as a rule, were followed by a general assembly, where certain issues vital to the progress of the mission were discussed. In 1906 there were two separate retreats for catechists – one for Telugu speaking catechists and the other for Oriya speakers – preached by Fr. P. Descombes in clear and practical language.

---

d'un petit catéchisme à l'usage des premières communiantes. Pour l'année prochaine, nous préparons une Histoire de l'Eglise; après quoi viendra un proissen.” P. DESCOMBES, “Informations Diverses: Vizagapatam (Hindoustan)”, in *LMC* 44 (1912), pp. 100 -101

<sup>179</sup> SUIFFET, “Informations Diverses: Vizagapatam (Hindoustan)”, in *LMC* 41 (1909), p. 39.

<sup>180</sup> P. ROSSILLON, “Cent Kilomètres sur des Epauls Kondes”, in *LMC* 44 (1912) p. 342.

<sup>181</sup> Fr. P. Descombes observed: “On the plateau of Didrobady, there are 8 villages with a population of 1100 Kondhs, some of whom are baptised and others under instruction. Another dozen villages, with 1,500 Kondhs have approached us. We need an army of good catechists to teach catechism and prayers. And we have only 2 real catechists.” Cf. Peter Descombes to Constant Bouvard, Surada, June 21, 1907, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>182</sup> The Synod of Visakhapatnam stated in the 4<sup>th</sup> article of the fourth day: “La formation de bons catechists est de la plus grande importance; ils sont indispensables aux missionnaires et les aident beaucoup, lorsqu'ils sont dignes de leurs fonctions, soit pour l'instruction des enfants et des catechumènes, soit pour le maintien des bonnes mœurs dans les congrégations. Ils gagnent aussi plus facilement que le prêtre, l'amitié et la confiance des païens, lui préparent les voies dans les endroits où il n'est pas encore connu. S'ils sont de bonne caste leur exemple même est une preuve que l'on peut être chrétien, à quelque race qu'on appartienne.” *Actes et Ordonances du Synode de Vizagapatam tenu en Septembre 1888*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4 Inde.

<sup>183</sup> Continuing on the life of catechists, the Synod stated: “La vie d'un bon catéchiste est, en effet, une vie de dévouement, de beaucoup de travail et de fatigue, et l'on n'en trouvera jamais facilement qui, pour le modeste salaire que nous leur offrons, soient disposés à tous ces sacrifices.” *Ibid.*

Both Fr. Muffat and Fr. Suiffet were also present at that time.<sup>184</sup> At the end of the retreat, on November 1, 1906 a *Panchayat* (general assembly) for the Catholics of the mission was held. After listening to one of the catechists, who made a long but inspiring presentation, the assembly took three important decisions:

- (1) that everyone should pledge to give up pagan sacrifices;
- (2) that if someone was found guilty, he would pay Rs. 50 as a fine; and
- (3) that if the entire village was found guilty, it would be punished.<sup>185</sup>

#### 4.1.3.6.1 Establishment of a Catechetical School

The Baptists in Orissa had a centre in Udaygiri for training catechists. Probably due to the quality of catechists who came out of the centre, the Baptists were able to reap a 'good harvest' in Orissa. The catechists employed in the Catholic mission were recent converts who lacked proper training. Therefore, their understanding of Christianity was limited and there was little difference between them and the menial labourers.<sup>186</sup> These reasons, among others, prompted the missionaries to start a catechetical school. Fr. J. Vuillez wrote:

This work is going on at Surada. This is an important work. Without the catechist the missionary can do nothing. The native population has always some reservation about the Europeans. They will never share a secret with a European, even if he is a respected and known priest, whom they know and esteem. Left to himself the missionary would never know the detailed history, the background of things.<sup>187</sup>

Generally, the priest never went to minor stations except during the annual visit. Therefore, the following questions might be asked: How did the priest instruct the people? Who kept them united? He had no one to go to except the catechist, who was a resident of the village. In fact, it was the catechist who often represented and sometimes even replaced the missionary in that village. In order to be effective in persuading the people to accept Christianity, he needed special training. The training lasted generally for five or six years. When a catechist got married, the couple was sent to a village with a double charge: to be the catechist as well as the teacher of the local school.<sup>188</sup> Fr. Cyrille Ailloud was busy digging the foundation for the proposed school for the catechists in Surada in 1911.<sup>189</sup> Fr. Alphonse Favrat, delegate of the superior general,

---

<sup>184</sup> Henri Petitjean to Constant Bouvard, Surada November 12, 1906, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> Fr. J.M. Descombes wrote: "Nos catechistes sont généralement des convertis de date assez récente; sans aptitudes littéraires, laissés à eux seuls, ils ne différerait en rien des gens de peine." P. Descombes, "Lettre du R.P. Descombes au R.P. Messelod, Solima, de la même Congregation (September 10, 1890)", in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 63 (1891), p. 120.

<sup>187</sup> Fr. J. J. Vuillez confided that: "Cette oeuvre est actuellement à Surada, l'oeuvre la plus importante, sans catéchiste, le missionnaire ne peut rien faire. Le natif a toujours une certaine réserve avec l'euro péen. Il ne lui fera jamais ses confidences, même a un prêtre qu'il connaît et estime. Le missionnaire ne pourra jamais par lui seul connaître les petites histoires, les dessous des choses etc." J. J. Vuillez to Superior, Ranchi September 18, 1910, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

<sup>188</sup> J. J. Vuillez to Superior, Ranchi September 18, 1910, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

<sup>189</sup> Descombes to Constant Bouvard, Surada, March 29, 1911, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

inaugurated it in March 1912. Writing on the importance of such a school, Fr. P. Descombes wrote:

The formation of catechists is essential. That's why I started a catechists' school in Surada. I have accepted two candidates: a Pano and a Kondh. Candidates are not lacking, but we need a building, money, and a Father to be in charge. These young men should be kept here several years, to pass the exams required to be school masters whilst getting a good training in religion and catechism.<sup>190</sup>

In 1915 another school was established at Digby for Kondh catechists.

#### 4.1.3.6.2 Rayappa Sanyasi Das: a devoted Catechist

While everyone acknowledged that the service of the catechists was pivotal to the progress of the mission, hardly any one remembered their self-effacing sacrifices at a time when the church revolved around clerics and religious. Their work was either deemed secondary to that of priests and religious. However, the life and service of catechist Rayappa Sanyasi Das was so outstanding in that he found a place in the annals of Ganjam mission. A polyglot, he was able to converse fluently in Telugu, Kui and Oriya. In fact, he was the only interpreter for many missionaries who worked in Surada. Fr. A. Rey acknowledged that he had personally received much help from Rayappa, who had a great influence on the new converts.<sup>191</sup>

During the 1867 famine, the parents of Rayappa brought him to Surada while he was still an infant. At the age of 12 his mother came to take him back so that he would be received into the caste. But to her dismay Rayappa refused to accompany her, as it would mean that he had abandoned Christianity. He chose to remain with the Fathers, who educated him and later employed him as a catechist. People had much respect for him, as he was strict with his caste practices and prudent in his dealings with women. Fr. Décarre sent Rayappa to Puri as a catechist, where he converted two or three families. Fr. A. Rey wrote: "For the service rendered to me I gave him Rs. 12/- per month. He offered something from that to the poor. He never took drinks with the Kondhs, nor meals, except one in the evening after work. The people used to call him "Sanyasi" [a monk or religious] and in reality he was."<sup>192</sup>

Rayappa Sanyasi Das' influence within the mission was so great that in the absence of the missionary he could sanction certain punishments against the guilty and impose fines. He organised meetings to settle disputes among the parishioners, and in so doing he had made certain crucial decisions on matters pertaining to the operation of the mission.<sup>193</sup> Rayappa Sanyasi Das' good service was widely acknowledged in the final

---

<sup>190</sup> Descombes to Constant Bouvard, Surada, June 21, 1907, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>191</sup> A. Rey, *Souvenirs*, Rédigés à la demande du P. Comerson en 1933, AMSFS.

<sup>192</sup> Fr. A. Rey recalled: "A mon service, je lui donnai 12 Roupees par mois. Il en donnait quelques unes aux pauvres. Il ne prenait jamais de boisson avec les khonds, ne prenait qu'un repas le soir après son travail. Les gens l'appelaient "Sanyassi" (religieux) et il l'était en réalité." A. REY, *Souvenirs*, Rédigés à la demande du P. Comerson en 1933, (MSS), AMSFS.

<sup>193</sup> Here are a few examples that clearly indicate the respect that Rayappa Sanyasi Das had in the mission. In June 1909, Anthony Nidhi, Catechist and teacher of Didrobady, went to Mondoro for the salary. Catechist Rayappa Sanyasi Das was there in the absence of Fr. A. Suiffet who was in France for holidays.

settlement of the lands at Dantholinghy. He died in 1919 as peacefully as he had lived. Though unwell at times, he never missed his daily Mass and Holy Communion. Reporting on the way he died, Fr. Cyrille wrote:

In the evening he said his prayers as usual and went to bed in the dormitory of the children of Dighy and Katingia. At about 1 A.M. the children came to call us, and we found him in his last agony. After giving him the last sacraments and a plenary indulgence, the children kept watch over him, while went to say Mass. He died about 6 A.M. as the children were praying for him, their arms extended in the form of cross. The first thing that the children told us was: ‘See, how happy he is, he’s laughing.’ He was about 65.<sup>194</sup>

#### 4.1.3.7 A time of Trial for the Orphanages

Again there was both famine and cholera in 1918, when children in the orphanage (Surada) suffered. The orphanage had about 60 children. The people did not expect the plague, but it broke out in Ganjam. In June 1918, it arrived in Surada and its surroundings in the shape of cholera, which claimed the lives of a number of children despite all precautions. Some of them, especially those who were in good health, were sent to Berhampur, where the missionaries attended to the sick and dying. The entire presbytery, it seemed, was turned into a hospital for two months. Mother Fabienne and the Sisters devoted themselves day and night to the care of the little ones.<sup>195</sup>

Exhorting the work of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Msgr. Tissot shared his concerns for the orphanage for girls:

I am happy with our poor orphans. They have lost their uncouth manners and in general they are good and very attached to their teachers and the establishment. I had to announce to them the bad news of the stopping of the subsidy from the government. I have them to producing castor oil that I have promised to sell for their profit. Others go to collect cotton and spin it. We have two looms to make canvas. Unfortunately it all goes at the pace of the country, slowly, in a way a little bit uncouth. They receive the sacraments and pray a lot, even when they go to the forest to cut trees. I will do all I can to feed and clothe this brood.<sup>196</sup>

---

He found out that Kobi was offering sacrifice and he was fined Rs. 3/-. He was fined in the presence of Rayappa Sanyasi Das. Yet another sacrifice was found in Koruma, where Tatty was preparing a sacrifice with a he – goat. The catechist snatched the he-goat and took it to Rayappa. The goat had a value of Rs. 4. After a few days Rayappa came to Didrobady and convoked a meeting of the Christians of Koruma, Kudevady, Padassy and Laurano. Catechists Anthony Mondalo and Anthony Nidhi were also invited for the meeting. In the meeting Rayappa Sanyasi Das condemned Tatty to a fine of Rs.10 and five strokes with a cane. Cf. Anthony Nidhi to Suiffet, Didrobady, July 1909, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>194</sup> Cyrille wrote: “Le soir il a fait sa prière comme de coutume et s’est couché avec les enfants de Dighy et Katingia. Vers 1h du matin on est venu nous appeler, nous l’avons trouvé à l’agonie. Après l’avoir administré et lui avoir donné l’Indulgence plenaire, les enfants l’ont veillé et nous sommes allés dire nos messes. Il est mort vers les 6h du matin alors que les orphelins priaient les bras en croix par lui. La première chose que les enfants ont dite, c’est : voyez comme il est content, il rit. Il était agé environ 65 ans.” Cyrille to Rossillon, Surada, December 5, 1919, AMSFS 5H5-2/4; Jacob Malico to J. Bouchet, Surada, November 30, 1919, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

<sup>195</sup> J.J. Vuillez to Constant Bouvard, Visakhapatnam, October 21, 1919, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

<sup>196</sup> Msgr. J.M. Tissot writes: “Je suis content de nos pauvres orphelines. Elles ont perdu leur air et leurs manières sauvages, en général elles sont bonnes et très attachées à leurs maitresses et à l’établissement. J’ai eu à leur annoncer une assez mauvaise nouvelle, la cessation du subsidie que nous passait le

Whenever there was a financial crisis, the farms helped the mission considerably, particularly the orphanages. Writing in 1919, Fr. Cyrille recorded how useful were the farms maintained by the mission:

It is due to the fields that the orphanage and the school have been maintained. This year alone, I was able to get back the Rs. 3,000 I had spent on the pond of Dantholinghy. I have still some bags of rice for sale . . . if we had a brother who could look after the fields and someone who loved God and was ready to work for him, what a difference it would make! . . . This year the harvest is excellent. But here is another cross. Hilary, our supervisor, has been ill for a month, just at the most critical moment of harvest. I leave to God the care to look after the feeding of his children.<sup>197</sup>

#### 4.1.4 Some of the Major Events of the Mission

##### 4.1.4.1 Canonical Visit (1885)

The need for a canonical visit to assess the mission was felt by the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales, both in India, where the first mission of the congregation was operative, and in Annecy, France.<sup>198</sup> Though the superiors general had desired to visit the mission at Visakhapatnam, neither Monsieur Mermier nor his successor Fr. Clavel could manage the long and tiring voyage, the prolonged absence from the office, and the huge expenditure. Though epistolary communication with the mission was useful, personal contacts with the missionaries in the field would expose the circumstances under which they lived and worked, as well as the culture and linguistic barriers that impeded evangelisation. This probably persuaded Rev. Fr. Joseph Tissot, the superior general of the congregation, to visit the mission in India. Yet his confreres and doctors advised him to be prudent, as he was suffering from an illness that could prove to be fatal if care was neglected. So he delegated Fr. François Philippe to visit the mission.<sup>199</sup>

Overwhelmed by the announcement of the visitor, Msgr. J.M. Tissot wrote to Fr. Philippe: “You have accepted the proposal of our dear Superior to do the visitation of the mission in his name. I will do all I can in my power, so that this may not be a penance. I repeat that I will accompany you everywhere and I will furnish all information either by me or by our Fathers, so that you may get a clear picture of the

gouvernement pour elles... Je leur fais faire de l’huile de ricin que je leur ai promis de faire vendre à leur profit. D’autres vont ramasser le coton, le filent et nous avons deux metiers pour faire la toile. Malheureusement tout cela se fait à la mode du pays, d’une manière un peu sauvage, l’ouvrage va lentement... Si vous les voyiez à la chapelle. Elles fréquentent souvent les sacrements, elles prient beaucoup, même en allant couper leur bois à la forêt. Je fais prendre tous moyens possibles pour trouver de quoi nourrir et habiller tout ce petit monde.” J.M. Tissot to Mother General of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Surada, March 16, 1874, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Annecy, 2H, J3. B.

<sup>197</sup> Cyrille to Rossillon, Surada, December 5, 1919, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

<sup>198</sup> In one of his letters to the director, Msgr. J.M. Tissot wrote: “Je crois qu’il est de la plus haute importance, pour ne pas dire indispensable, que Mr. le Supérieur ou vous veniez visiter la Mission *in persona*, si notre chère congrégation veut la garder.” J.M. Tissot to Philippe, Vizagapatam, July 7, 1883, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>199</sup> In his letter to Cardinal Simeoni, Rev. Fr. Joseph Tissot, the superior general, reiterated the importance of the visit and justified the choice of the person who was appointed for such task. Cf. Fr. Joseph Tissot to Cardinal Simeoni, Annecy, November 15, 1884, APF Indie Orientali: Scrittura riferite nei Congressi, vol. 25, f. 456; J. REY, *Les Missionnaires de Saint-François de Sales d’Annecy*, pp. 287-295.

mission.”<sup>200</sup> In preparation for the general visit, Fr. J.M. Dupont was asked to write a history of the mission of Surada.<sup>201</sup> Despite his carefully made plans, Fr. Philippe did not visit either Surada or Cuttack.<sup>202</sup> Informing the Cardinal Simeoni about Fr. Philippe’s travels in India, Msgr. Tissot observed: “Fr. Philippe, who came to visit the mission, had to return to Savoy towards the end of February without having visited all the stations of the southern and the northern part of the mission. He has seen the principal localities and all the principal establishments.”<sup>203</sup>

Having recognised the talents of Fr. Philippe, Msgr. Tissot petitioned the Holy See to appoint him as his coadjutor. He also sent letters to Father Superior General Tissot requesting him to recommend his proposal to the Holy See. With strong recommendations both from Bishop Tissot and the superior general, Fr. Philippe was appointed against his own wishes. Even after the consecration, Msgr. François Philippe kept postponing his departure for India, citing his ill health. Frustrated by this, Msgr. J.M. Tissot wrote to Fr. Berod:

I asked him (Card Simeoni) once again to give me Msgr. Philippe as coadjutor, at least provisionally. I must tell you, my dear confrere, that Msgr. Philippe completely ignores the request I made. He writes me time to time, but never a word regarding this affair nor a word of blame against the superior and the council. My aim in not interrupting the correspondence with him was not to give him an occasion to say that I don’t want him any more. He has written to me that he never asked for the office of coadjutor, but it was given to him, based on the explication of the state of his health, as someone explained to him. I must necessarily be taken for somebody who holds on to his see and who seeks by all means to remain at the head of the mission.<sup>204</sup>

Msgr. Philippe never exhibited any keen desire to work in the missions. His presence in *La Feuillet*, the mother house of MSFS, was not received well by the confreres. Finally,

---

<sup>200</sup> Tissot to Philippe, Surada, July 23, 1884, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>201</sup> Tissot to Philippe, Surada, August 25, 1885, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.

<sup>202</sup> In a letter to the Sisters, the visitor excused himself for his inability to visit them in Cuttack and Surada. Cf. *Annales des Soeurs de Saint Joseph. Diocese de Vizagapatam. 1897-1906, II*, Archives of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, Annecy, p. 265.

<sup>203</sup> Msgr. Tissot wrote: “Le père Philippe, qui était venu visiter la mission, a dû rentrer en Savoie vers la fin de Février sans avoir pu visiter toutes les stations de Sud et du Nord de la mission. Il a vu les principales localités et toutes les principaux établissements.” Fr. Joseph Tissot to Cardinal Simeoni, Annecy, April 6, 1886, APF Indie Orientali: Scrittura riferite nei Congressi, vol. 26, ff. 487-488.

<sup>204</sup> “Je lui demandais de nouveau de me donner Mgr. Philippe pour le Coadjuteur au moins provisoirement. Je dois vous dire mon cher confrère, que Mgr. Philippe ignore complètement la demande que j’ai faite. Il m’écrit de temps en temps, mais jamais de ce qui le regarde, ni un mot de blâme contre Mr le Supérieur ou contre le Conseil. Mon but de ne pas rompre toute correspondance a été de ne pas lui fournir l’occasion de dire que je ne voulais plus de lui. Il m’a écrit qu’il n’avait jamais demandé sa décharge de Coadjuteur mais, qu’on la lui avait donnée, sur l’exposé qu’il avait fait de son état. Je dois nécessairement passer pour un homme qui se cramponne a son siège et qui veut a tout prix rester à la tête de la mission.” J.M. Tissot to Berod, Surada, August 20, 1890, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

the Holy See released him of his obligations. He spent his days at Les Allinges and Evian until his death on April 16, 1904.<sup>205</sup>

In 1912 Fr. Alphonse Favrat was delegated by the superior general to visit the mission. He appreciated whole heartedly the work of the missionaries and marvelled at the way that they lived in such difficult places. He spent much time in the Orissa mission. On his return to Annecy, he gave a positive report to Rev. Fr. Bouvard, the superior general.<sup>206</sup>

#### 4.1.4.2 The Synod of Visakhapatnam and its Impact on the Orissa Mission (1888)

Msgr. J.M. Tissot convoked a synod when the missionaries were in Visakhapatnam for their annual retreat. The reasons for the synod were clearly spelt out in the very first paragraph of *Actes et Ordonnances du Synode de Vizagapatam tenu en Septembre 1888*: (1) to discuss the principal difficulties of ministry in the country; (2) to formulate certain rules for guiding the apostolic endeavours of the missionaries; and (3) to have a uniform approach both to the Christians already living in the mission and to the non-Christians who would be converted.<sup>207</sup> Sixteen priests as well as the bishop attended the synod, which took place September 10-17, 1888. In general, the deliberations were very similar to those of the Directory of Pondicherry Mission.

First, the synod declared that every missionary should work towards the formation of an indigenous clergy. It was recommended that the missionaries choose suitable pious and intelligent candidates from their congregations and teach them the rudiments of Latin and other required subjects in preparation for the seminary. In theory, the children of all castes could be candidates, but prudence dictated that those who belonged to a higher caste should be generally selected. The missionaries of St. Francis de Sales had always considered caste a purely civil institution outside the purview of religion.<sup>208</sup> Just like the missionaries of Pondicherry, so too did the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales bring into the church those customs which did not militate against either sound faith or good manners.<sup>209</sup>

Second, the synod listed the missionaries' duties in the care of souls (*cura animarum*):

---

<sup>205</sup> F. Moget, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 44.

<sup>206</sup> J. REY, *Les Missionnaires de Saint-François de Sales d'Annecy*, p. 445.

<sup>207</sup> The Synodal document clarified its aims: "...discuter avec eux (les missionnaires) les principales difficultés du ministère dans ce pays; pour formuler quelques règles pour la direction des missionnaires et établir par là une certaine uniformité dans leur manière d'agir soit avec les chrétiens déjà existants, soit auprès des infidèles qu'ils ont à convertir". *Actes et Ordonnances du Synode de Vizagapatam tenu en Septembre 1888*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4 Inde, p. 1.

<sup>208</sup> The synodal document stated: "Fondés sur cette recommandation, les missionnaires de St. François de Sales se sont toujours fait un devoir de considérer la caste comme une institution purement civile, séculier et étranger à la religion; et de n'en danner que les abus qui seraient très évidemment (certissime) contraires à la religion et aux bonnes mœurs". *Actes et Ordonnances du Synode de Vizagapatam tenu en Septembre 1888*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4 Inde, p. 12.

<sup>209</sup> They have taken the instruction given by the Sacred Congregation to the first bishops of Missions Étrangères de Paris. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

(1) residing at his assigned station; (2) visiting and instructing the faithful regularly; (3) administering the sacraments and leading a life of piety; (4) caring for the sick and the poor; and, finally (5) safeguarding church property and revenue.

Third, the synod encouraged the missionaries to correspond regularly with their superiors and with confreres, sharing with them both successes and failures.<sup>210</sup> Every missionary was recommended to organise an annual retreat of three days for the parishioners, to which one of the confreres could be invited to guide the spiritual exercises. Finally the missionaries were exhorted to start primary schools, so that the children might avoid negative influences and have regular religious instructions.<sup>211</sup>

#### **4.1.4.3 The Visit of the Apostolic Delegate**

The visit of Apostolic Delegate Msgr. Zaleski (January 3-10, 1913) was very beneficial to the mission of Visakhapatnam.<sup>212</sup> He visited some of the most important stations and manifested an appreciation for the work of the missionaries of St. Francis de Sales. He wished that the Visakhapatnam mission would flourish like the Chotanagpur mission begun by the Belgian Jesuits.<sup>213</sup> A meeting was organised in which not only the ecclesiastical dignitaries but also the council of the bishop of Visakhapatnam took part. During the meeting some important decisions were made: 1) the areas in both Orissa and the Central Provinces which were dependent on Visakhapatnam Mission should be turned over to a congregation which had both the personnel and the resources for further expansion; 2) a minor seminary should be established for Europeans, Eurasians and Indians at the cathedral of Visakhapatnam; 3) priests should be freed mainly for sacramental work, whereas the responsibilities for the schools should be given to a community of Brothers who were specialists in the educational apostolate; and 4) two new schools should be opened for catechists -- one in Surada for those who spoke Oriya and Kui and the other in Kottavasala for Telugu speakers.<sup>214</sup>

Though the MSFS welcomed the decision, they realised that it entailed a great sacrifice to give up the two districts of Cuttack and Ganjam. The thought about leaving Surada, where many of their confreres had worked and died and where the mission had

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>211</sup> The Synodal document exhorts: “Les missionnaires sont invités à établir une école primaire dans toutes les principales stations, où il n’en a pas encore. C’est un des meilleurs moyens pour éloigner les enfants de la rue et des mauvais exemples qu’ils y rencontrent, de les prévenir contre l’oisiveté, les habituer au travail, enfin leur assurer une instruction religieuse plus pratique et plus complète.” Ibid., pp. 25 – 26.

<sup>212</sup> J.M. Clerc to Constant Bouvard, Visakhapatnam, March 14, 1914, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

<sup>213</sup> Msgr. Clerc to Cardinal Gotti, Vizagapatam, January 28, 1913, APF Rubrica 128/1913, vol. 533, f. 18; Msgr. Clerc to Constant Bouvard, Visakhapatnam, April 9, 1914, AMSFS 5H5-2/4.

<sup>214</sup> Msgr. J.M. Clerc reported: “Les vastes territoires du diocèse de Vizag (Visakhapatnam) qui dépendent de l’Orissa et des provinces centrales, seront confiés à d’autres congrégations, et notre diocèse se trouvera ainsi restreint aux districts du Godavery, de Vizag et de Ganjam... Comme moyen efficace d’augmenter et de fortifier notre personnel, Son Excellence le Déléгат a insisté sur la nécessité d’un petit séminaire, le remplacement des pères au collège par une congrégation de frères enseignants et la fondation d’écoles de catéchistes... deux écoles de catéchistes seront fondées, l’une à Surada pour les aspirants catéchistes Oriyas et Khonds, e l’autre à Kottavasala pour les aspirants Telugus”. Msgr. Clerc to Cardinal Gotti, Visakhapatnam, January 28, 1913, APF Rubrica 128/1913, 533/18ff.

spent a lot of their resources, was disturbing. Though it was painful to cede a part of the mission, there were also some advantages: they could avoid a place of endemic fever and they could concentrate their work in Visakhapatnam, where only Telugu is spoken.

#### 4.1.4.4 The Reasons for a Separation

Realising the immense task entrusted to the small congregation, the apostolic delegate in India searched for a way in which to relieve the MSFS of that part of the mission which called for greater sacrifices.<sup>215</sup> In one of his letters to the superior general, Msgr. Pierre Rossillon (coadjutor bishop of Visakhapatnam) explained the state of the mission and the position of the congregation in the following words: “In giving up Ganjam and Orissa, we cede a part that is feverish. We free ourselves from Oriya, in order to learn Telugu as our principal language. The advantages of the language are enormous. While making their tours till now, the Fathers of Surada spend about two thirds of their lives in travel and in being ill.”<sup>216</sup> In another letter Msgr. Rossillon stated:

It is sufficient to note that at this moment among the missions in India, only our mission is static for twenty years. Recently I wrote to the apostolic delegate in India explaining the status of our mission and I did not hide anything. He has given me an appointment to meet him at Madras to discuss more about it at the Marian Congress that takes place in Madras on the 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> of January 1921.<sup>217</sup>

It was no secret that some of the Fathers – namely Vulliez, Baviel and Descombes -- working in the Ganjam mission were unable to withstand the inclement mountain weather.<sup>218</sup>

The bishop of Visakhapatnam and his council agreed subsequently to separate both Cuttack and Ganjam districts in Orissa and entrust them to a new congregation.

---

<sup>215</sup> Fr. Jules Rey recalled that “Depuis 1912, sur les conseils de Msgr. Zaleski, alors Délégué Apostolique pour l’Inde, Msgr. Clerc était en tractation avec Rome en vue d’une division du diocèse de Vizagapatam. L’affaire traîna. Il était dur à l’évêque de céder ce Ganjam et cet Orissa, pays de langue oryia, où ses prêtres avaient le plus travaillé et possédaient autour de Surada leur centre de mission le mieux équipé comme le plus florissant. En 1920, Msgr. Rossillon hâta cette cession et, dès que les Lazarists espagnols arrivèrent, en 1921, il commença à retirer ses missionnaires pour les utiliser à l’intérieur de son diocèse. Afin d’augmenter leur nombre et de suppléer aux recrues d’Europe alors presque inexistantes, il amorça tout de suite le mouvement des vocations indigènes.” JULES REY, *Son Excellence Msgr. Pierre Rossillon*, AMSFS.

<sup>216</sup> Msgr. Rossillon wrote: “En donnant le Ganjam et l’Orissa, nous cédons la partie la plus fiévreuse. Nous nous débarrassons à peu près de l’Orya, pour ne garder que le Telugu comme langue principale à apprendre. Ces avantages, à la langue, sont énormes. En faisant le total, on trouve jusqu’ici, que les pères de Surada passent les deux tiers de leur vie à voyager et à être malades.” P. Rossillon to Favrat, Vizagapatam, July 7, 1920, AMSFS 5H5-2/5.

<sup>217</sup> Msgr. Rossillon explained the state of the mission in Ganjam: “Il suffit de constater qu’en ce moment toutes les missions de l’Inde sont en progrès excepté la nôtre qui est en recul depuis 20 ans... Dernièrement, j’ai dû écrire au Délégué Apostolique pour lui expliquer cet état singulier et, ma foi, je n’ai rien caché. Il m’a donné rendez-vous à Madras pour plus amples explications. Au congrès Marial, qui doit avoir lieu à Madras le 12, 13 et 14 Janvier 1921.” P. Rossillon to the Superior General, Vizagapatam, October 11, 1920, AMSFS 5H5-2/5.

<sup>218</sup> Health problems plagued the missionaries. Fr. Julien Vulliez died at Surada on July 21, 1921 at the age of 45 and Fr. François Fleury died at Surada on November 29, 1921 at the age of 39. Cf. F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, pp. 69, 100.

The missionaries who had worked in Orissa felt that handing over Surada and the northern mission entailed an enormous sacrifice. Fr. J.J. Vulliez expressed a similar feeling to Fr. A. Favrat, the superior general: "Materially, and also spiritually, we abandon the best part of our diocese, the part which holds the most promise for the future."<sup>219</sup> Msgr. Rossillon, however, was determined to divide the mission:

We would leave a country of endemic fevers, where the Fathers have not been able to live, and would be freed from the Oriya language and a territory which we could never evangelise fully. Two things were to be sought: the consent of the Fathers of Surada, who would certainly find it difficult to accept, and the acceptance of the Fathers of La Salette to whom I wrote.<sup>220</sup>

It was not easy for the missionaries to abandon a part of the mission that represented their identity as a congregation and whose work had been significant. Besides, there were the tombs of those who had sacrificed their lives amidst the inclement weather. However, they needed to decide.<sup>221</sup> The blessing of the new church in Surada took place on March 7, 1920, after which the coadjutor announced that the Ganjam mission comprising Cuttack and Ganjam would be given to a new congregation. Initially the La Salette Fathers were contacted, but they declined the offer. Meanwhile, Propaganda Fide contacted the Congregation of the Mission, popularly known as the Vincentians.<sup>222</sup>

---

<sup>219</sup> J.J. Vulliez to A. Favrat, Surada, April 4, 1921, AMSFS 5H5-2/5.

<sup>220</sup> Msgr. Rossillon thought that: "Nous quitterions un pays très fiévreux où les pères n'ont, jusqu'ici, pas trouvé le moyen de vivre, et nous serions débarrassés de la langue Oriya et d'un territoire que nous n'avons jamais pu embrasser. Il ne reste plus qu' à obtenir deux choses: le consentement des pères de Surada – ils auront de la peine à accepter – puis l'acceptation des pères à La Salette auxquels je me suis adressé." P. Rossillon to Constant Bouvard, Visakhapatnam, February 26, 1920, AMSFS 5H5-2/5.

<sup>221</sup> Fr. Vuillez wrote about the cessation of the mission: "La cession du Ganjam et de l'Orissa à une autre congrégation étant chose réglée! Cette question, comme vous pouvez le supposer, ne nous laisse pas indifférents. Nous abandonons la meilleure partie de notre diocèse, celle où nous avons le plus travaillé et aussi celle qui nous donne le plus d'espérances. Tout cela évidemment ne nous regarde pas, c'est l'affaire des supérieurs et ils connaissent assez le pour et le contre de la question. Pour nous, nous n'aurons qu'à obéir quand le moment sera venu. Malheureusement en attendant ce moment, qui est long à venir, notre situation n'est pas des plus brillantes. A la retraite on nous avait annoncé que la cession se ferait dans quelques mois - maintenant nous apprenons que les pères de la Salette ont refusé. Entre-temps nous avons l'ordre de ne rien entreprendre d'important, de ne commencer aucune œuvre nouvelle." Vuillez to Constant Bouvard, Surada, April 4, 1921, AMSFS 5H5-2/5.

<sup>222</sup> A sermon, an exhortation and an invitation to make a general confession, given by St. Vincent de Paul on January 25, 1617, in the church of Folleville laid the foundation for a future congregation officially begun in 1625, that was known as the Congregation of the Mission. Its members are generally called Vincentians in English, Lazarists in French and Paules in Spanish. Vincent and his first companions declared that they had joined together "to live in a community or confraternity and to devote themselves to the salvation of the poor country people". Edified by their labour, Jean-François de Gondi, Archbishop of Paris, approved the first community on April 24, 1626. This is one of the rare cases in history where a community was approved before it even existed physically. The pontifical authorisation of the community took place with the bull 'Salvatoris Nostri', on January 12, 1632. On January 8, 1632, Vincent took possession of the house of St. Lazare, which became the headquarters for the Congregation of the Mission. For a detailed history on the Congregation of the Mission in English, see, S. POOLE, *A History of the Congregation of the Mission, 1625-1843*, California 1972.

#### 4.1.4.5 Arrival of the Spanish Vincentians

Even before the MSFS felt the need for a change, Propaganda Fide was urging the Congregation of the Mission to concentrate on one or the other territory in India and to develop it.<sup>223</sup> When the urgent need arose to substitute the MSFS working in the Ganjam Mission, Cardinal Van Rossum requested Rev. Fr. F. Verdier, the superior general of the Congregation of the Mission, to accept the separated part of the Visakhapatnam mission with the hope that the Vincentians would be able to provide the reinforcement that the MSFS could not.<sup>224</sup> The request of Propaganda Fide was forwarded to the Province of Madrid, which accepted after some hesitation.

Once the acceptance of the Province of Madrid was communicated to Propaganda Fide, Cardinal Van Rossum sent an immediate reply thanking them for their positive response.<sup>225</sup> Fr. Joaquin Atienza, visitor of Madrid Province, initiated a dialogue with the Vincentian superior general and Cardinal van Rossum, the prefect of the Sacred Congregation of the Propaganda Fide, and made arrangements for the first group of missionaries to travel to India. Arriving in Berhampur on January 10, 1922, the four Spanish Vincentians were sent to different parishes to get acquainted with the place, language and culture of the people. On February 3, 1922, on the occasion of confirmation at Surada, Bishop Rossillon formally announced the separation of the mission and handed over the mission to the Spanish Vincentians.<sup>226</sup> However, a few MSFS Fathers were asked to remain till the newcomers got used to the mission. The Vincentians exhibited a genuine interest in learning from their predecessors, who had begun earlier their apostolic work in a *terra ignota*.<sup>227</sup> On the eve of the Feast of Immaculate Conception in 1922, the Vincentian Fathers took over the Cuttack parish.<sup>228</sup>

---

<sup>223</sup> A few territories had been suggested for their consideration: a part of Hyderabad diocese or the Arakan which actually depends on Dacca, situated on the bay of Bengal closer to Burma. Cf. S. Congregazione 'de Propaganda Fide' to Francesco Verdier, August 9, 1920, Protocollo N. 1229/920, Archives of the Congregation of the Mission, f. 79.

<sup>224</sup> S. Congregazione 'de Propaganda Fide' to Francesco Verdier, November 20, 1920, Protocollo N. 3346/20, Archives of the Congregation of the Mission, f. 86; S. Congregazione 'de Propaganda Fide' to Francesco Verdier, December 30, 1920, Protocollo N. 3957/20, Archives of the Congregation of the Mission, f. 90.

<sup>225</sup> S. Congregazione 'de Propaganda Fide' to Francesco Verdier, April 30, 1921, Protocollo N. 1213/21, Archives of the Congregation of the Mission, f. 112.

<sup>226</sup> Vuillez to Constant Bouvard, Surada, April 4, 1920, AMSFS 5H5-2/2.; Rossillon to Bouvard, March 20, 1920; J. J. Vuillez to Favrat, Surada, April 4, 1921; Msgr. Joseph Baud expressed that, "Enfin la mission de Surada qui fut cédée, âmes et biens aux Lazaristes espagnols dès 1922, pour le plus grand bien de Surada et de Vizag." J. BAUD, *L'œuvre de Msgr. Rossillon*, Vizagapatam, May 5, 1947, AMSFS 5H5-2/5.

<sup>227</sup> The names of the first group of missionaries are: Frs. Jose Maria Fernandez (who was the first superior), Ramon Ferrer, Valerian Guemes and Rey Coello. Cf. C. WILSON, "Vincentians in India", in Idem (ed.), *Silver Jubilee Souvenir of the Indian Province of the Congregation of the Mission*, Vijoy Bhavan, Berhampur 1995, p. 5.

<sup>228</sup> Fernandez to Verdier, Cuttack, December 12, 1922, Superior of the Mission 1922 – 1927, Archives of the Congregation of the Mission.

The departure of Frs. Jules Rey and Cyril Ailloud, the last MSFS to leave Surada on December 8, 1923, marks the end of the mission work of MSFS in Orissa.<sup>229</sup>

#### 4.1.4.6 The Cuttack Mission

The division of the diocese of Vizagapatam was approved by Rome and the districts of Ganjam and Orissa were formally offered to the Spanish Vincentians. Reporting about the beginning of a new mission, one of the leading Catholic weeklies in India, 'The Examiner' commented:

Five missionaries are expected at the end of the year, but the actual transfer of the mission will not take place before a year or two. Their chief work in the beginning will be to study the vernacular, namely Oriya and get acquainted with the country and customs and manners of the people. It is only after acquainting themselves with the special circumstances and conditions of ministry in this country, that they will take charge. The present territory of Visakhapatnam extends over an area of 62,567 square miles with a Catholic population of nearly 14,000.<sup>230</sup>

The Vincentians were not fully aware of the extension and the nature of the territory of the new mission entrusted to them. Meanwhile, a rumour began to circulate that certain parts of the Orissa mission – namely, Balasore, Krishnachandrapur and Gangpur, would be integrated into the Cuttack mission. The Jesuit missionaries working in Balasore and Krishnachandrapur did not feel the loss, since there was never a *mouvement de la grace* in those areas. However, when the rumour was purported about the severance of the Gangpur mission as well, many Jesuits working in the Ranchi mission thought that such action needed to be re-evaluated.<sup>231</sup> On February 3, 1922, the Spanish Vincentians clarified all doubts when they took over the mission territory where the MSFS worked. A letter from Rome, which arrived on July 28, 1928, formally constituted the Orissa and Ganjam districts<sup>232</sup> into an independent mission, *missio sui juris*, with its centre at Cuttack. The newly created Cuttack mission was placed under the administration of Fr. Valeriano Gümes C. M., who was called the 'Ecclesiastical Superior' of the Mission.<sup>233</sup>

It is worth noting here once more that the scarcity of missionaries was one of the major problems that impeded the spread of Christianity, forcing the MSFS to cede certain parts of their mission to a new congregation.

## 4.2 Gangpur Mission: Establishment of Hamirpur and Gaibira

---

<sup>229</sup> V. URBANEJA, *El Padre Guemes al Descubierta. Cincuenta Años de su vida. Dia a Dia su diario el Diario de una mision, 1921-1978*, St. Vincent's, Gopalpur-on-Sea, Unpublished Manuscript, pp. 3-4.

<sup>230</sup> The Examiner, 72/39 (1921), 389 – 390.

<sup>231</sup> Mauritius Veys to Provincial, Calcutta, January 11, 1922, APBS India 2 – 23/4.

<sup>232</sup> It is to be borne in mind that Ganjam district was in the Madras Presidency and the Cuttack and Puri districts were in the Orissa division of the Bengal Presidency.

<sup>233</sup> C. WILSON, "Vincentians in India", in *Silver Jubilee Souvenir of the Indian Province of the Congregation of the Mission 1970 – 1995*, Vijoy Bhavan, Berhampur 1995, pp. 10-11; F. MOGET, *Early days of Visakhapatnam*, p. 277.

Even after the foundation of Kesramal in 1908, the new parish did not include all the Catholic villages that were found in Gangpur. Considering the distance, some villages were allowed to remain with the parishes in Samtoli, Kurdega and Biru. But they were gradually given to Kesramal. “At the beginning of 1912”, wrote Fr. Alary, “some Gangpur villages belonging to Samtoli and Kurdeg were added to Kesramal. The distances were increased, so also the number of catechumens. As a result, a third missionary was sent to Kesramal. Finally, towards the end of 1912, the last part of Gangpur was detached from Biru and was given to Kesramal.”<sup>234</sup>

Being a new parish, Kesramal had the difficult task of caring for the pastoral needs of Christians spread over a vast area of 2,492 square miles. There were four priests assigned to the parish, which by 1914 had a population of 22,252 Christians.<sup>235</sup> Of the four priests assigned to Kesramal, two were sent to the eastern part of Gangpur (Nagra-Khinjir area) to establish a new mission station. The distances involved made it impossible for the missionaries to pay an annual visit to many Christian villages, although the catechists had done much of the groundwork. It was the promise of regular help and the presence of the missionaries that motivated the Tribals to agree to cut off their *chundis*, the tuft of hair, and to profess the Christian faith.<sup>236</sup> The initial difficulties with the raja of Gangpur seem to have dissipated. No reference could be found whether the young raja had given permission to begin a new station or had forbidden it.

#### 4.2.1 The Status of Gangpur Catholics

Even though the eastern part of Kesramal was taken care of by the missionaries, they seemed to have neglected the western and northern regions of the mission in Gangpur. Kesramal had its difficulties in the expansion of the mission. One such difficulty was reported in the *Missions Belges* of 1920. No sooner had Fr. Henry Floor<sup>237</sup> taken charge of Kesramal than he undertook two important visits. In February and March 1920 he visited the northern area (towards Biru), and in April 1920 he travelled to the southern region around Bamra and Jashpur. He passed through about twenty villages during each visit and was able to observe the conditions of the mission in that part of Gangpur. He felt obliged to send a report of his observations to the archbishop of Calcutta.

Most of the village chapels had deteriorated due to neglect by the catechists and others in maintaining them. Fr. Floor’s report also contained a number of very significant observations on the state of the Christians. First, a large number of Kisans (Berga Oraons

---

<sup>234</sup> Alary to Superior General, Kesramal, July 11, 1916, ARSI, Calcut. 1005-XIII, 8.

<sup>235</sup> It was S. Grosjean who made detailed statistics of Gangpur for the year 1914. Cf. M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 99.

<sup>236</sup> The decision to receive baptism was generally decided with the missionary in a Panchayat. Generally the missionary promised to extend help to the village and villagers who expressed their readiness to receive baptisms. As a sign of their agreement, the Tribals cut off their *chundis* (tuft of hair). With this act they often resorted to hearty laughter, saying that the evil spirit had been gotten rid of.

<sup>237</sup> Henry Floor was born on June 1, 1874, at Brugge, Belgium. He entered the Society of Jesus on September 23, 1893. He took his fourth vow on February 2, 1910. He was instrumental in establishing a parish in Gaibira in 1922, and he served as its first parish priest. He died on December 12, 1947, at Ranchi. Cf. R. MENDIZÁBAL, *Catalogus Defunctorum in renata Societate Iesu ab a. 1814 ad a. 1970*, p. 439.

or Gangpuria Oraons) were leaving the church because they could not find suitable marriage partners within their own Catholic tribal groups. As a result many sought partners among the non-Christians. Second, these defections were also due in part to the scarcity of visits by the missionaries, who ministered to a vast territory with numerous villages scattered far from one another. Moreover, some of the catechists were notorious for their moral depravity.<sup>238</sup> Third, *Tana Bhagatism* continued to play havoc in the lives of the Tribals, as it lured away many from Christianity.<sup>239</sup>

Fr. Floor proposed the following measures to remedy the situation: (1) by 1921, Behrenbasa, in the western region of Gangpur, should have a resident priest, since the priest's presence had been limited to the *tarikhs* (monthly meetings); (2) the ruined chapels should be repaired as soon as possible, assuring continuity of worship and regular schooling for the children; (3) the catechumenate that had been closed because of financial difficulties and World War I should be resumed;<sup>240</sup> and (4) teachers and catechists should be brought from Biru, since the local catechists were unable to make an impact on the people and their behaviour was often odious.<sup>241</sup>

However, as Kesramal grew steadily it required an additional reinforcement of personnel and money for consolidating the existing Christian community. By 1921 the parish had 22,000 Catholics, 68 chapels with catechists (where the Holy Eucharist was celebrated two or three times each year) and 74 mission schools.<sup>242</sup>

#### 4.2.2 Eastern Gangpur

The steady growth of the Gangpur mission demanded a new centre to meet the numerous deputations that came from villages far and near to meet the missionaries in Kesramal. The missionaries initially concentrated on the east as it was geographically close to Kesramal, the centre of their activities since 1908.

---

<sup>238</sup> In a letter dated May 3, 1920, Fr. Floor reported on the status of the mission he had inherited and proposed certain remedies for the improvement in the quality of life. Cf. M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 180.

<sup>239</sup> Cardon to Superior General, Rengarih, July 10, 1917, ARSI Calcut. 1005-X, 7. A short description of Tana Bhagatism is mentioned in the third chapter of this study (foot note no. 232).

<sup>240</sup> H. FLOOR, "Simples Réflexions d'un Missionnaire VII", in *MB* (1920) pp. 226 – 227.

<sup>241</sup> In 1917 when the missionary visited the villages near Kutra, he chose a common place for celebrating the Mass. The catechist of Kutra and his wife came to the place after entrusting the key to their house with a neighbour. When they returned, the catechist discovered that he had lost Rs. 60 that he had in the house. He lodged a complaint. The police, instead of nabbing the culprit, threatened the whole village and imposed a fine of Rs. 30 for them and Rs. 60 for the catechist. In order to pay the fine some villagers had to sell their cattle and mortgage their fields. They felt that the fine had been imposed on them unjustly, because, they said, 'it is the fault of the catechist, we don't go any more to the church'. Later, with the help of two youths from Tunmura, Fr. Floor turned the situation into a favourable one for the church when he appointed two dynamic persons as a catechist and a master of the school, replacing the old catechist who had lost his credibility when he complained to the police. Fr. Floor wrote: "Ils vendent leurs bœufs, hypothèquent leurs champs, ils sont appauvris, endettés. 'C'est la faute du catéchiste! Nous n'allons plus à l'église'." H. FLOOR, "Simples Réflexions d'un Missionnaire", in *MB* (1920), p. 40; M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, pp. 186-187.

<sup>242</sup> VAN DER SCHUEREN, "Au Chota Nagpore", in *MB* (1921), p. 32.

#### 4.2.2.1 An Account of the Early Evangelisation of Nagra-Khinjir

The first reference to the presence of Christians in the Nagra-Khinjir area (Hamirpur station) is found in the diary of Fr. Robays. The entry in February 1904 stated: “In Gangpur I am supposed to look only after the people of Nagra district. It would be preferable to give me Nagra and all the Christians that are living to the East and North of the Sunkh, except the small corner of the west of Borkhonda wali [river].”<sup>243</sup> He also mentioned a visit to Gangpur in November 1904, when the Christians received him warmly. In November 1905 Fr. Robays visited a number of sub stations, including Babaimohan, Salangabhar, Jhamankia, Jhurmul, Kasbahara and Goilo.

According to the 1905 statistics, Samtoli had about 8680 Christians, of whom 2590 were supposedly from Gangpur.<sup>244</sup> A look at the map reveals that the eastern part of Gangpur is closer to Samtoli. In 1904, when Fr. De Smet joined Fr. Robays in Samtoli, the latter asked the former to concentrate on his efforts on Gangpur. Subsequently many delegations from Gangpur villages met with Fr. De Smet, requesting him to accept them into the church. The village of Gobira (Nagra region), for example, sent a delegation on November 9, 1906, to convey to the missionaries their willingness to profess the Christian faith. Fr. De Smet sent Johan the *Munshi* (clerk) and Johan the catechist to gather information about the possibilities of starting a station in the Nagra region. They were very optimistic about the area but felt that several catechists would be needed. On January 12, 1907, the catechists from Nagra brought the news that some tribal groups, including some Lutherans of Joketa, were willing to become Catholics.<sup>245</sup> The willingness of these Tribals was also conveyed to the missionaries at Samtoli on November 29, 1907 by two *Zamindars* from Nagra, who were ready to donate land for a mission station.<sup>246</sup> They later provided detailed information on the families willing to become Christians.<sup>247</sup> Yet some *Zamindars* in Nagra were opposed to the progress of the mission, since they thought that the Catholics would seek redress in court against them.

The deputations continued to arrive from other villages in Gangpur, such as Tangarani and Ragunathpali. On January 22, 1908, Francis, the catechist of Gobira, came to Samtoli with 16 men, to announce that a good number of people from the Nagra area had been added to the catechumanate.<sup>248</sup>

#### 4.2.2.2 Proposals for a Mission Station in the Eastern Gangpur

Fr. De Smet thought that “to manage the north of Nagra-Khinjir and the south of Nagra, we want a new station, in Rourkela . . . Otherwise the Anglicans of Chaibasa, who

<sup>243</sup> M. Vermeire, *Biru Mission History: Samtoli*, vol. IV, Section II, ARSI. Beng. 2004, p. 21.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>246</sup> It is possible that these *Zamindars*, having seen the work in Chotanagpur and the influence of the missionaries with the government, wanted to avail of their friendship. *Ibid.*, pp. 30-31.

<sup>247</sup> The following families of Nagra were ready to become Catholics: 40 families from Banailata, 20 from Goghea, 60 from Ranakato, 15 from Konokela, 5 from Demta and 60 from Katajir. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

<sup>248</sup> The new catechumenate villagers of Nagra were: 43 from Banailata, 28 from Goghea, 15 from Ranakata, 4 from Bemta, 10 from Olhaintola, 11 from Katajhar, 8 from Karaqua and 3 from Kusum *Tola* (hamlet). Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 34.

have already adherents around Ragunathpali, and the Lutherans of Chakradharpur will sweep away Saranda”.<sup>249</sup> He added that “from Ambadanr (Raiboga), where Samtoli has built, with Government consent, a school-chapel and rooms for the priest, we can easily visit Nagra-Khinjir north of the Sunkh and keep our people in trim”.<sup>250</sup> The distance between Kesramal and Nagra-Khinjir, the difficulties of transport, and the enervating climate were factors that influenced the missionaries’ decision to search for a suitable place in the eastern part of the mission where they could settle.

#### 4.2.2.2.1 Setting of Hamirpur

Hamirpur is adorned with hills and valleys, among which runs a dangerous and wide river, the Koel. It often ran dry during the summer and produced catastrophic floods when it rained.<sup>251</sup> This annual phenomenon often isolated the poor Tribals from the rest of the country, and there was very little possibility of reaching them except by boat--something they could not afford.<sup>252</sup>

During the monsoon season Gerdhai<sup>253</sup> was an inaccessible island. The acts of charity of the Catholic mission during the flood of July 1920 gained considerable numbers to her fold. In times of inundation the victims sought shelter at the mission, thus providing an occasion for the missionaries to instruct those who were willing. Therefore, the presence of the missionaries in Hamirpur helped the people to prepare themselves for the reception of the sacraments.<sup>254</sup> An examination of mission documents reveals a backward and needy people.

The climate was difficult if not dangerous for the missionaries.

Gangpur was a country where people could almost suddenly be exposed to a terrible danger . . . Fr. Lambot, then in charge of Hamirpur, went to the district for 8 days touring. It was during the hottest time of the year, this was rather dangerous. The first day he visited a Catholic centre called Bispur. “The chapel had lost a good deal of its roof, carried off by a storm. To save me from lodging there, the Christians had quickly prepared a thatched shed for me. The roof was so badly made that during the Mass, I had hardly any protection against the burning rays of the sun. The people were on their knees in the blazing sun and yet seemed not to mind it at all. From my part I had

---

<sup>249</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission History: Samtoli*, vol. IV, Section II, ARSI. Beng. 2004, p. 39.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> In a moving narration of the catastrophic effects of the flood that took place in July and August 1921, Fr. T. Lambot portrayed the precarious life conditions of the Tribals living in the Nagra region because of the ‘capricious and cruel river’ called Koel. Cf. T. Lambot, “Scènes Tragiques”, in *MB* (1921) pp. 129-131. In another article, Fr. H. Floor narrated how it was difficult for the missionaries to respond to invitations during the monsoon. He was unable to move in the torrential rain, when the rivers were usually full, which prompted him to build a boat, called *Patras*, Peter, for the parish of Kesramal. Cf. H. Floor, “La Barque de Kesramal”, in *MB* (1921), pp. 369 - 370.

<sup>252</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 149.

<sup>253</sup> Gerdhai was a village situated in the Nagra region, which was close to Hamirpur. Now it is part of Rourkela city. Cf. Ibid., p. 131.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

to bear that heat till mid-afternoon when it was time to move to the second Catholic centre.<sup>255</sup>

In the second place a torrential rain interrupted the Mass, and he was forced to give the final blessing after reading the Gospel.<sup>256</sup> The Easter ceremonies of 1917 were celebrated in a rickety barn. The people were so poor that they could not afford a place that could protect either the missionaries or themselves from the extremities of the weather.

#### 4.2.2.2.2 A New Start

Fr. H. Grignard,<sup>257</sup> who used a tent as a chapel in some places, began constructing chapels in several villages. But he was told that there was no hope of building a presbytery in the Nagra area, where it was difficult to obtain land. But Fr. Grignard happened to meet Mr. Craven, the dewan of Gangpur, when they travelled together on a train. Utilising the opportunity, Fr. Grignard quietly broached the topic of granting some land for the mission, as the officers of the king obtained land freely. In his willing response, the dewan asked the missionary to submit a formal request, which he promptly did. Archbishop Meuleman of Calcutta also sent a request to the dewan, once he had chosen the place where he wanted to build the mission. Meanwhile, the old raja, who had been opposed to the missionaries building a residence in Gangpur, died on June 16, 1917.<sup>258</sup> Since the crown prince was a minor, Mr. Craven became the superintendent of the state. The new ruler, Raja Bhawani Sanker Deo, gave permission to purchase land and to open a station in Gerdhai (July 8, 1917).<sup>259</sup> This allowed the missionaries to purchase seven acres of land at Hamirpur along the Koel, three miles north of the Bengal-Nagpur Railway.<sup>260</sup>

#### 4.2.2.2.3 Hamirpur under Fr. Grignard

In March 1918 Fr. Grignard went to Gerdhai-Hamirpur for a pastoral visit, spending several days with the Christians and helping them in their struggles. His rather frequent visits were facilitated by the railway connections between Rajgangpur and Rourkela.<sup>261</sup> He was also very keen to take part in the *tarikhs* (monthly meetings) of the Nagra region. Chapels had already been built in several places--Olhain, Potob, Kansikon, Godha, Bailmunda, Bispur, Joketa, Harumunda, Tangrain, Gerdhai, Dudenta

---

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Hadelin Grignard was born on September 1, 1875, at Verviers in Belgium. He entered the Society of Jesus on November 21, 1893. He was ordained a priest on February 2, 1912. After having worked hard for the progress of the mission, he breathed his last on May 31, 1942, at Ranchi. Cf. R. MENDIZÁBAL, *Catalogus Defunctorum in renata Societate Iesu ab a. 1814 ad a. 1970*, p. 402.

<sup>258</sup> The Indian mission found at Alken after the death of Camiel Lievens, Archief Belges. India 2, Box15/5; M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 107; H. JOSSON, *La Mission du Bengale Occidental*, vol. II, p. 409.

<sup>259</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 134.

<sup>260</sup> H. JOSSON, *La Mission du Bengale Occidental*, vol. II, p. 409.

<sup>261</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 108.

(Bisra), Dunetra, Jorobahar and Goilo<sup>262</sup>--and he began to build more in different villages. The diaries of 1918 and 1919 mention regular visits of Fr. Grignard to the Nagra region, where he settled disputes and prepared the ground for the future Hamirpur station.<sup>263</sup> He wanted to build a presbytery in a central place, and he invited the Archbishop to choose a convenient spot. After having visited Tumkera and Ramkela, "(Tumkera is first visited, and he [Archbishop] is not much pleased. Archbishop and Fr. Grignard pass the night in Gerdhai chapel) in the morning they take to Ramkela. Waiting for the train, the Archbishop manifests a liking for Gerdhai: near the railway station. Fr. Grignard jumped at it. Gerdhai is chosen. Fr. Grignard settles in Gerdhai chapel, on the bank of the river".<sup>264</sup>

#### 4.2.2.2.4 The Nature of Hamirpur Station

In an article in *Missions Belges* (1920), Fr. Victor Gheysens,<sup>265</sup> one of the pioneers and companions of Fr. Theophile Lambot,<sup>266</sup> described the nature and prospects of evangelisation at the station that had just been started. He obviously felt encouraged by the numerous delegations that sought admission into the Church. He wrote:

I feel sure that our Hamirpur station is developing so fast that in the near future it will officially take rank among the oldest stations of our great mission... At present two schools, one for the boys, the other for the girls are being built. We hope to have them ready in months. In the meantime, we are lodged, all of us Fathers, masters and pupils in the small buildings constructed last year. We have at present some 30 boarders and some 20 externs, a crowd is expected as soon as there are more rooms. Most of our Christians are people that have left Chotanagpur, to acquire fields by clearing jungles in Gangpur. Among them there are Oraons, Mundas, Kharias, Gangpuria Oraons [Kisans]. The different languages spoken by each clan are a great difficulty in our ministry.<sup>267</sup>

In 1920, when Fr. Floor took charge of Kesramal, he assigned two priests to Kesramal and two to Hamirpur.<sup>268</sup> Though the exact date when missionaries took residence in Hamirpur is not clear, one could conclude from the letters of Fr. Floor and Fr. Frédéric Ernest that by the first week of January 1920 the two priests (Frs. Grignard and Lambot) took up their residence there.<sup>269</sup> Although Fr. Grignard spent much time in

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., pp. 109-110.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>265</sup> Victor Gheysens was born on July 12, 1886, at Gentbrugge, Belgium. He entered the Society of Jesus on September 23, 1908. After an exemplary carrier in the mission he died on July 29, 1948. Cf. R. MENDIZÁBAL, *Catalogus Defunctorum in renata Societate Iesu ab a. 1814 ad a. 1970*, p. 443.

<sup>266</sup> Theophile Lambot was born on December 28, 1882, at Petit-Fayt (Namur), Belgium. He entered the Society of Jesus on September 13, 1909. He took his fourth vow on February 2, 1918. After having worked in India, he died on May 5, 1927, at Calcutta. Cf. Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>267</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 132.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

<sup>269</sup> Floor remarked: "Depuis 1920 en janvier, deux pères y eurent leur résidence fixé." Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, December 29, 1920, APBS India 2 – 29/2. In his letter to the Provincial Fr. Frédéric Ernest mentions that due to the division of the district two priests could take up residence in Hamirpur. F. Ernest to Provincial, Rengarih, July 15, 1920, APBS India 2 – 29/2.

Hamirpur, the beginning of the mission was attributed at a later date due to its dependence on Kesramal.<sup>270</sup>

With the establishment of the mission stations at Kesramal and Hamirpur, the missionaries now had easy access to the villages that were sending delegations. A friendly government at Suadi helped with the evangelisation of a vast territory, where a number of mission stations were established quickly. Fr. Grignard and Fr. Lambot, who were later joined by Fr. Gheysens, undertook the construction of the buildings in Hamirpur.<sup>271</sup> The Hamirpur diary for October 1920 recorded: “Ten houses of Loakera (the Oraon hamlets) came over in a body. Incidentally they were asking protection against their *Ganju*. As the settlement is soon to take place, the *pauchas* of the rayats should be put in order . . .”<sup>272</sup>

#### 4.2.2.2.5 The Missionaries’ Response to the Flood of 1920

The monsoon of 1920 was devastating, since the Koel River destroyed crops, fields, and even some houses. There were times when people were stranded by the swollen waters. The missionaries provided them with shelter and fed them in the mission station till they could return to their villages. During their stay at the mission house in Hamirpur, the people were instructed and a few were even admitted to the catechumenate. Fr. Vermeire recorded: “The mission gained by the catechumenate for the whole of Gerdhai, as they could easily be prepared for the Sacraments during their stay at Hamirpur. What had caused the greatest loss to these poor people was a good part of their fields now covered with sand, in some places so thick that there may be no hope of redeeming them.”<sup>273</sup>

#### 4.2.2.2.6 Growth of Hamirpur under Fr. Lambot

Fr. Lambot and his companion, Fr. Gheysens, had to endure the initial difficulties of establishing a mission station. They lived in extreme poverty and persevered through all sorts of privations. Fr. H. Floor lauded the natural talents of Fr. Lambot in the following words: “Fr. Lambot is zealous, active and prudent. He follows the directions given with a laudable punctuality. Left to himself, I don’t think he would be able to manage.”<sup>274</sup> Despite financial constraints, he built many chapels in the mission. In order to sustain progress, the Hamirpur mission needed money and catechists. In the 1920 issue of *Missions Belges*, Fr.

---

<sup>270</sup> From a letter of Fr. H. Grignard, dated Rajgangpur, near Kesramal, October 27, 1919, one can understand that he had been put in charge of the whole Gangpur area by Fr. Alary. At that time Fr. Grignard was busy building the new residence of Hamirpur. Due to his rigorous work schedule combined with bouts of malaria attacks, he fell very ill and endured all sorts of privations until January 1920, when someone else joined him. In the beginning Fr. Grignard used to live under a tent next to a stable. Later he lived in a godown (hut), as the missionaries called it, and finally in a corner of the kitchen. Cf. M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 130.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid., p. 137.

<sup>273</sup> Fr. Lambot reported this tragic incident, which took place in July 1920. Cf. M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 150.

<sup>274</sup> Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, December 29, 1920, APBS, India 2 – 29/2.

Lambot wrote that Hamirpur, formerly called Gerdhai, had become an independent station separate from Kesramal.

We are two Fathers. Gheysens (is) in charge of the school and I (am) of visiting the district; more than 8000 Christians had to be visited and instructed; there were 39 catechists; plus 7 school masters. We must increase the number of Christians, and acquire still more lands. From several places, villagers want to become Christians, wish to have a chapel, catechists and schoolmasters. I have to find 10 more catechists, build many chapels, revive groups of Christians that were dying from want of instruction. These last years, the Nagra region has suffered very much from the loss of the missionaries and catechists who disappeared and were not replaced. Many Christians here, on that account, suffer from want of instruction, because they think that we had neglected them. I have visited them and now they renew their appeal to us.<sup>275</sup>

Fr. Lambot noted both the willingness of the youth and the stubbornness of the old. He saw a change in the people, as they were willing to be instructed. The people of Dalki, including three Lutheran families, showed a keen interest in learning the *Dharam*, the religion of the Catholic missionaries. Some of the Anglicans of Bajnathpur were also willing to come over to the Catholic Church.<sup>276</sup> Since January 1920 there was a great movement of conversions in Bonai, one of the native states situated in the southern part of Hamirpur.<sup>277</sup> Villages sent deputations to the Fathers at Hamirpur. For example, a deputation from Banrutola (Tumkera) arrived on November 21, 1920. It was led by the village head himself, and it sought assistance in curbing a cattle disease that devastated their village. Normally such villagers would have consulted a sorcerer for the cure.<sup>278</sup> The catechists played a leading role in bringing people to the Catholic Church. However, since the abrupt stopping of *Bethbegari* (forced labour) on Sundays which often escalated the tensions,<sup>279</sup> the catechists were requested to report, if any problem, to Hamirpur so that the missionaries themselves could handle them.

---

<sup>275</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 131.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>277</sup> Bonai, named after its capital Bonaigarh, was a semi-independent state ruled by a native chief. The state had an area of 1,296 square miles and a population of about 68,186 at the beginning of the nineteenth century. It experienced a similar fortune as Gangpur, its neighbour. It was ceded to the British government in 1803 by the treaty of Deogaon by Rahuji Bhonsla, to whom it was restored by a special arrangement in 1806. It reverted to the British in 1818 and was finally ceded by a treaty in 1826. In order to maintain its semi-independence, the raja was required to pay a tribute of Rs. 500 per annum, which was liable to revision. The relationship between the chief and the British government was regulated by the *sanad* granted in 1899 and reissued in 1905, when the state was transferred to the Orissa division from Chotanagpur. Raja Dharanidhar Indra Deo Deb, a *Kshatriya* by caste, succeeded to the *Gadi*, crown on February 13, 1902. Babu Bharat Chandra Naik was appointed dewan of the state. Cf. *Feudatory States of Bihar and Orissa. List of the Ruling Chiefs and Leading Personages*, Government of India Central Publication Branch, Calcutta 1924, pp. 7- 8; M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 139.

<sup>278</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 138.

<sup>279</sup> Joseph, the catechist of Vigera, was punished severely at the police station of Banki, where, in his effort to stop all *begari* (labour) on Sundays, he stopped a group of Catholics from the important work of carrying ice to the raja who was ill. With the intervention of the dewan, the raja himself agreed to drop the procedure against the catechist. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

### 4.2.2.3 Missionary Activities in Hamirpur

Initially the activities of the missionaries were mainly to invite the people to attend the Holy Mass and the *Panchayat*, at which there were discussions on cooperative banks, schools, the *Dhan Gola*, the *Dharam* School and drunkenness.<sup>280</sup> During his visit to Goelo on December 13, 1922, Fr. Lambot preached on the villagers' negligence in maintaining their cooperative bank and on other matters. He condemned their celebration of the *Ind*, their night dances and their practice of *Puja*.<sup>281</sup> As he went through the villages, Fr. Lambot noticed the poor conditions of the village chapels and did all he could to repair them.<sup>282</sup>

#### 4.2.2.3.1 School Apostolate

Since the missionaries gave priority to education, each village that accepted the faith, as a rule, had a school. According to the missionaries, the school was an important way of conserving the faith. Fr. Lambot encouraged his catechists through a one-rupee increase of their monthly salaries for their efficiency in teaching religion and in attracting others to the faith. The results were brought to the presbytery every two months, where they were examined and rewarded if found worthy.<sup>283</sup> A school for boys was constructed in Hamirpur by April 1920, and one for girls by June 1920, in addition to the lower primary school that had already been in operation.<sup>284</sup> School attendance in the district improved, and it was given further impetus when Mr. Lucas, the *dewan* of Gangpur, showed interest in education. The schoolmasters were required to submit reports, which were later sent to the District Inspector of Schools at Kuarmunda. In this way the laxity of the schoolmasters was controlled.<sup>285</sup>

Fr. G. Pierret<sup>286</sup> described the need for the schools in an article in *Missions Belges* of July 1922: "We must develop our schools in order that our Christians may find among the youth that leave the school future chiefs who can defend them against pagan strangers who arrive from all sides and want to crush the Christians and to occupy all the most remunerative posts."<sup>287</sup> He added: "If our people advance morally from their religion, intellectually from our schools, materially from their work, after some years they will be able to maintain their religion, as they already do partly by keeping up their schools."<sup>288</sup>

---

<sup>280</sup> Ibid.

<sup>281</sup> Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>282</sup> For more details see the article of T. LAMBOT, "En Tournée Apostolique", in *MB* (1921), pp. 85-87.

<sup>283</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 141.

<sup>284</sup> H. JOSSON, *La Mission du Bengale Occidental*, vol. II, p. 409.

<sup>285</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 138.

<sup>286</sup> Gustav Pierret was born on May 17, 1855, at Etalle (Luxembourg). He entered the Society of Jesus on September 26, 1918. He died on June 14, 1926, at Kesramal. Cf. R. MENDIZÁBAL, *Catalogus Defunctorum in renata Societate Iesu ab a. 1814 ad a. 1970*, p. 309.

<sup>287</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 189.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., p. 189.

Despite the lofty idealism of the missionaries, a number of the schools operated poorly, and the students were unable to acquire proper skills in reading and writing. In his effort to teach them, Fr. Lambot ordered the children to bring sand. Then he made them write in it with their fingers. The people became curious and began to show some interest in the education of their children.<sup>289</sup> Low attendance in the schools was regular during the harvest season, because the children were expected to perform household activities, such as tending the cattle, babysitting, etc., while their parents were away in the fields.

#### 4.2.2.3.2 Programme of Self-help

The missionaries instilled in the people's minds the importance of contributing to the maintenance of the church even if their donations were meagre. Their contribution was called *Mission Madait* or Mission Help, and it was collected at the end of the month by the catechist and submitted to the missionary at the *tarikhs*. Every Catholic family, as a result, paid *1 anna*<sup>290</sup> to help the mission. Often people contributed in kind, especially with rice. On September 16, 1922, for example, the Christians of Hamirpur asked the missionaries to bless the harvested new rice and each family offered a cupful for the maintenance of the missionaries.

#### 4.2.2.3.3 A Crusade against Oppressive Traditions

The missionaries condemned the practices of *Ind*<sup>291</sup> (a communal feast accompanied by night dancing) and *Puja*,<sup>292</sup> (sacrifice). In Goghea the zealous missionary refused to administer sacraments to those who took part in *Ind* and *Puja*, and delivered a strong homily against the non-Christian practices.<sup>293</sup> They were convinced that strong measures alone would dissuade the Tribals from such non-Christian practices and would help them to realise the differences between good and evil. When the *Panchayat* or the

---

<sup>289</sup> There was an inspection of the district schools at Hamirpur. Only a few of the catechists, who also served as schoolteachers, turned up. The Inspector of Schools was unhappy with the inspection he conducted in Dumandiri on October 25, 1922. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>290</sup> An *anna* was the last category in the pre-independent Indian currency. Sixteen *annas* constituted a rupee. A missionary residing at Kurdeg at that time (1905) claimed that he bought 23 *ser*s of uncooked rice for a rupee. A *ser* of uncooked rice would weigh more or less about 900 grams. Cf. M. Vermeire, *Biru Mission History. Section. III. Kurdeg*, ARSI. Beng. 2005, p. 16.

<sup>291</sup> *Ind* was a Hindu festival imitated in some villages by the Mundas (tribes) and consisting essentially of a sacrifice followed by dancing. In a few villages where the *Ind* was regularly celebrated, a high ground was set apart for it, where a heavy wooden frame remained firmly and permanently fixed. People gathered in the afternoon at the pole. "The crowd", wrote Fr. Hoffmann, "is made up of dancers and few spectators. Only youths and maidens visit the *Ind* ground, with, may be, a slight sprinkling of married people, not to be taken into account". The spinsters and bachelors of the same village visit the fair in separate groups. And on their way back from the *Ind*, the group of youths of one village often exchanges lewd jests with the girls of another village. Cf. J.B. HOFFMANN, *Encyclopedia Mundarica*, vol. VII, Patna 1932, pp. 1911-1913.

<sup>292</sup> *Puja*, as performed by Hindus, is ritual in which certain articles -- such as flowers, fruit or milk -- were offered to the deity. Sometimes fowls and animals were slaughtered for the deity. Here it was mainly applied to the offerings of inanimate objects to a deity by magicians, witch-finders, snake venom "sweepers" and the like. Cf. J.B. HOFFMANN, *Encyclopedia Mundarica*, vol. XI, Patna 1938, p. 3419.

<sup>293</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 146.

village council on December 22, 1922, enacted a fine for participation in the *Ind* and its resultant drunkenness, it could not be collected, since most of those were very poor. However, in some villages, like Konsikona, the strong measures taken by the missionaries produced positive results.<sup>294</sup>

During the *Panchayat* at Tunmura on November 27, 1922, all those present took a pledge that they would give up drinking *Daru* or country liquor. They also decided that any one violating the decree would pay a fine of Re. 1, while any catechist found guilty would pay Rs. 10.<sup>295</sup>

#### 4.2.2.3.4 Rapport with the Officials

The missionaries realised that good relations with local officials would not only keep them out of trouble but would also help to obtain certain benefits for the church in the long run. For example, during his visit to Panposh on November 29, 1922, Fr. Lambot obtained various gifts from the manager of the quarries: lime for the chapel, boxes, wires and a rope for the well.<sup>296</sup> When the *dewan* of Gangpur offered to help the people buy bullocks, the Khinjir people responded in large numbers, while those at Nagra were very diffident. Only one Christian and a few pagans applied. Fr. Lambot, saw this as a sign of the oppression suffered by the *rayats* in Nagra.<sup>297</sup> In October 1922, he visited Lal Sahib, the *Thakur* or *Zamindar* of Khinjir, who had been satisfied that the Catholics had not joined either the Germans (Protestants) or the pagans in creating trouble by sending petitions to Sundargarh. Fr. Lambot said: "I showed them that we give much to the State; the result obtained in the Kesramal area is proof of it, for we help the police and State officials. We are a conservative power in the state. The *Daroga* of Hathibari told me that he had least troubles where there are Catholics."<sup>298</sup>

#### 4.2.2.4 Troubles and Opposition

The steady progress of Christianity did not fail to draw the attention of the *Zamindars*, the lords of the land, who often punished the catechists for their free-lance preaching. However, troubles in the villages could be controlled by an able catechist, either by timely intervention or by reporting it to the authorities. Therefore, the progress of the mission largely depended on the initiative and character of the catechist, who also had a moral duty to educate and gradually prepare the people for Christian living.<sup>299</sup>

During the first week of October 1922, Marcus, the catechist of Hamirpur, responded to an urgent call from Olhain, where trouble had been brewing. It was caused by a former Hindu *chowkidar*, a lower-grade government employee. He not only ignored the decisions of the *Panchayat* but also seemed to have instigated some people to return to their former religion. Fr. Lambot said: "He uses his *sarkari*, the governmental kit (uniform), to bring others back to paganism. Peace is to be re-established by getting rid of

---

<sup>294</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 152.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid., p. 143.

that undesirable person, as he refuses to pay all fines as well as to amend his ways and he is cut off from the Bank and from the *Dhan Gola*, I am taking steps to have his *chowkidari* also cancelled."<sup>300</sup> There was also trouble in Konsikona, where nine girls were alleged to have taken part in the *Ind* and where a villager had been performing *puja*. They were fined. In Goghea, all who had contributed to start the *Ind* refused to pay any fine. The missionary had to intervene and settle the matter, as the villagers were unwilling to listen to the catechists. It was reported from Potob that on *Karam*<sup>301</sup> night, the apostates of Jamdara deliberately desecrated the chapel. Since the people were insolent and unwilling to make reparation, a complaint was lodged with the police to take the necessary action.

A *Panchayat* was held in Kerketa on October 8, 1922, to discuss various local issues: the formation of a cooperative bank, the *Dhan Gola*, schools, complaints against the *Dharam*, and other difficulties. The missionary took immediate steps to implement the decision of the *Panchayat*. He wrote: "I have asked for a new license for a chapel. There is hope. Kerketa is turning round for good. The young people are very good."<sup>302</sup> In his visit to Bispur on October 9, 1922, Fr. Lambot noticed that the ignorance of the catechists was causing a great deal of troubles to the villagers. He was unable to bring the people together and was drinking. Fr. Lambot commented: "Bispur has no chance. The actual catechist is worth nothing. The school is ill [in poor condition]. That shows the catechist's worth. So he must be changed or discarded."<sup>303</sup> Seeing the miserable condition of the school in Arundah, the missionary had a *Panchayat* on October 15, 1922, with the parents of both the Christian and non-Christian children. He was satisfied to establish contacts with the Christians who did not practice Catholicism. In some villages, the people wanted the mission schools but declined to accept Christianity.<sup>304</sup>

Even though he was well received at Balenda in November 1922, Fr. Lambot was unable to baptise any one there. The catechist did not prepare them for the sacrament, and the people were also not interested. The missionary was disturbed to discover that the girls were not attending the church and seemed to have been working on Sundays. The people

---

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>301</sup> This feast is observed in honour of the Hindu Divinity Karma. Fr. J. B. Hoffmann writes: "His cult starts when the consultation of the witch finders or sorcerers has revealed him to be responsible for the harm which has befallen a certain person or his family. From this moment the latter become Karma's devotee, promising him a yearly sacrifice at the *Karam* feast, blessed by him with material prosperity if faithful to his cult; punished if remiss. As a token of the promise a *dali* basket is hung up under the roof of the house or on the wall". The Hindu *Karam* feast is kept on the *chautha* (4th day) of *Bhado* (August-September) but the Oraons only plant their *Jawa* (maize grains that have just germinated) some days later, in preparation for their *Karam* which is celebrated on the '*ekha dashi*' day of *Karam* (on the eleventh day). On this day many boys and girls keep a strict fast from 0600 Hrs till 1900 Hrs. The youth put on their nice dresses and feathers and yak's tails and *Jawa* only for the narration of the legend and for the night dance. They dance at the foot of the *Karam* tree (*Nauclea parvifolia*). Cf. E. CAMPION, "Uraon Customs", in *The Chota Nagpur Mission Letter* 9 (1935), pp. 118-121, 151-155; J.B. HOFFMANN, *Encyclopedia Mundarica*, vol. VIII, Patna 1933, pp. 2227-2231.

<sup>302</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 143.

<sup>303</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>304</sup> Tahinda, a new village that had appealed only for a schoolteacher i.e., they did not want to learn *Dharam* but only to have a school. Cf. Ibid.

felt that they should go to the church only if their case against the *Ganju* was settled.<sup>305</sup> Fr. Lambot observed that similar situations persisted in both Jorodabiri and Garjan. Certain industries in the region were also a cause for concern, as Catholics were obliged to work on Sunday. However, the missionaries thought that the problem could be addressed with the management and that the Christians, even if they did not get a holiday for the entire day, could attend Sunday services at chapels established by the owners. There were 28 such chapels in Kesramal parish, they helped to bring about an increase in Mass attendance from the *Girja Ilaka* (church zone).<sup>306</sup>

In spite of the challenges and difficulties, the socio-religious movement spearheaded by the dedicated and talented missionaries did not diminish. Fr. Vermeire wrote: “The Hamirpur diary in Fr. Lambot's time was very well kept up. It gives an insight in many aspects, most of all, the mission progress, as was to be expected. Much is said about the villages where Christianity is penetrating. Regular tours were made among them by the missionaries in charge.”<sup>307</sup>

---

<sup>305</sup> Ibid., p. 151.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

### 4.2.3 Western Gangpur

In the second chapter reference was made to the beginning of the conversion movement, originating from Kurdeg station in Rengarih district under the able leadership of Fr. Edmund De Gryse. He made extensive journeys in the western Gangpur, visiting villages and bringing them into the Catholic fold. The visits of Msgr. Brice Meuleman, Archbishop of Calcutta, in 1905 encouraged the people and increased the prospects of conversion in Gangpur.<sup>308</sup> The annual retreats and missionary meetings in Calcutta provided opportunities for the missionaries to pass through Gangpur and thus spend some time with the neophytes. They celebrated the Holy Eucharist together and discussed their concerns.<sup>309</sup> The missionaries had to pass through western Gangpur in order to catch a train either at Bamra or at Jharsuguda.

#### 4.2.3.1 The Reasons for an Extension

In a report to the archbishop Fr. Floor mentioned some of the difficulties in the region:

Evidently the district is too big and the good Fathers 'kill' themselves, unable to give sufficient care to the people. This situation still goes on, and it is impossible for me to take the responsibility of Kesramal and Behrenbasa. Most of the villages of the Kharias and Oraons left no account of the visits of the catechists and the *Bhagat* movement was to be taken into account . . . The *Labour Corps* had also contributed its share in disrupting the progress, for many catechists and teachers left their work at home to join the *Corps*; the mission was left without any replacement. There were also insufficient schools for a large territory.<sup>310</sup>

As is clear from the report, the arduous of journeys from station to station, which often were about 50 miles apart, exhausted the already over-burdened missionaries. The constant presence of the missionaries was also required to assist the 32 catechists employed in the Behrenbasa substation, as some of them seemed to be of dubious character. Eager though they were, no progress was being made in the instruction of about 4700 Christians.<sup>311</sup> There were about 20 chapels and another 20 under construction in Behrenbasa.<sup>312</sup> Yet the lack of personnel did not allow for a resident priest in Behrenbasa. Fr. Floor felt strongly that the Christian population in Behrenbasa would grow steadily under the leadership and guidance of an able missionary.<sup>313</sup>

#### 4.2.3.2 Establishment of a Substation at Behrenbasa

---

<sup>308</sup> M. Vermeire, *Biru Mission History: Kurdeg*, vol. IV Section III, ARSI, Beng. 2006, pp. 46-47.

<sup>309</sup> H. Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, June 27, 1920, APBS India 2 – 28/2.

<sup>310</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 182.

<sup>311</sup> H. Floor to General, Kesramal, July 1, 1920, ARSI, Beng. 1006, II-16.

<sup>312</sup> H. Floor to General, Kesramal, June 29, 1921, ARSI, Beng. 1006, III-49.

<sup>313</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 183.

A mission station was established at Behrenbasa, situated close to the border of Gangpur in 1905.<sup>314</sup> It remained one of the important stations of western Gangpur, as it often provided temporary shelter for the travelling missionaries and a contact place for the people of the area.<sup>315</sup> In 1915 it became a secondary station of Kesramal without a resident priest. Visits by priests were restricted to a few days, especially for *tarikh* or monthly meetings, when both the catechists and schoolteachers rendered account of their activities. Such visits were often concluded with spiritual exercises and instructions for the coming month.<sup>316</sup> However, the visits grew more frequent in 1920. Although the missionaries' regular visits had stopped the Tribals' defections *en masse* to their former state, they did not improve their way of life.<sup>317</sup> The missionaries themselves realized that a practical solution was to establish a mission in the western Gangpur. As a result they chose a place, more or less at the centre of Western Gangpur, to nurture the more than 6500 Christians (3000 baptized and 3550 catechumens) there. Writing in 1920, Fr. Floor remarked that a house had been constructed but no priest had yet been appointed. A resident priest in Behrenbasa was necessary to stop the defections in the area.<sup>318</sup> Fr. H. Floor wrote to the provincial in Belgium: "This year we have organised this part (well). Out of 25 chapels to be built, we have completed 19 of them. There are catechists everywhere and a good number of teachers. Due to the distance, this part [Behrenbasa] should be separated from Kesramal."<sup>319</sup>

#### 4.2.3.2.1 A mission at Kusumdegi?

In 1921 a consultation took place with regard to the beginning of another station in Gangpur. The superior and consultors decided that it could be started at Kusumdegi, one of the important villages in western Gangpur. But this decision did not materialise. Fr. Djardin accused Fr. Floor of manipulation when he asked for and received the approval of the archbishop of Calcutta for a station in Gaibira. He wrote: "Last year we were consulted on the location of the new station in Gangpur. The consultors and I decided on Kusumdegi.

---

<sup>314</sup> It was Fr. De Gryse who purchased the land for a church and presbytery at the border between Biru and Gangpur. The place was considered to be suitable for evangelisation in the western part of Gangpur, which depended on Kurdeg mission. cf. Waelkans to Provincial, Calcutta, Mach 21, 1906, APBS India 2 – 22/5.

<sup>315</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission History: Kurdeg*, vol. IV Section III, ARSI. Beng. 2006, pp. 46-47.

<sup>316</sup> Fr. H. Floor wrote: "Il n'y a pas encore de prêtre résident, mais un prêtre vient ici pour la réunion des catéchistes, le premier vendredi de chaque mois, il reste pour le dimanche suivant et ainsi les gens ont souvent l'occasion de communier. Le père est également ici les jours de grandes fêtes." H. FLOOR, "Simple Réflexions d'un Missionnaire VI", in *MB* (1920), p. 206.

<sup>317</sup> Fr. Floor reported: "Cette partie s'étend jusqu'à 50 miles (75 kms) à l'ouest, c'est assez dire qu'il n'y a pas moyen d'administrer et de développer cette partie d'ici. Il faut absolument un prêtre résident à Behrenbasa. Ni les catéchistes ni les chrétiens ne viennent ici. La réunion mensuelle et le paiement des salaires se fait là, causant un long et pénible voyage aux pères." Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, December 29, 1920, APBS India 2 – 29/2.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>319</sup> Fr. H. Floor reported: "Nous avons organisé cette partie cette année, sur 25 chapelles à bâtir, 19 sont terminées, partout il y a des catéchistes et déjà un bon nombre de maîtres. Il faut séparer cette partie de Kesramal a cause des distances." Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, June 22, 1921, APBS India 2 – 29/3.

This year Fr. Floor went for his retreat (to Calcutta), where he spoke with the Archbishop. What happened there, I don't know. The fact is that I received a letter after a month informing me that the new station would be Gaibira."<sup>320</sup>

#### 4.2.3.3 Evangelisation in Gaibira

Fr. De Gryse undertook an extensive tour in the western part of Gangpur mission in July 1905. he reported that he had lost about 35 families, of whom 8 fled and 27 returned to paganism. Those who left the church did so because they had gotten married to non-Christian Tribals; they were repulsed by the drunkenness and contentious behaviour of the catechists (who had imposed exorbitant fines on the neophytes), or they were disillusioned that they had not received anticipated material benefits.<sup>321</sup> In April 1906 Fr. Van Hecke visited 11 villages in western Gangpur. Similar visits took place in June, September, October and November.<sup>322</sup> One of the remedies suggested to stop defections was to increase the number of catechists and schoolteachers.<sup>323</sup> With more frequent visits by the missionaries and the constant guidance and instruction given to the catechists, the defections were arrested to a large extent.

Fifteen years later Fr. Floor could report: "There is a movement of conversion in Gangpur. In 1921 there were 2000 conversions before the month of July and conversions in December there were about 1500."<sup>324</sup> The Oraons in the west as far as the native State of Jashpur were ready to become Christians. There was a possibility of a true *mouvement de la grace*, where tens of thousands of Christians could be ascribed to the Church.

#### 4.2.3.4 The Founding of a Mission in Gaibira

Gaibira is situated 34 miles west of Kesramal and 15 miles northeast of Suadi, the capital of Gangpur. It is located not far from the Ib river. Its territory covered an area of 800 square miles.<sup>325</sup> The people of Gaibira had been waiting a long time for the arrival of the missionaries. Their village deputations started arriving in 1906, inviting the

---

<sup>320</sup> Djardin complained: "L'année dernière nous avons consulté sur l'emplacement d'une nouvelle station au Ganpur. Les consultants et moi même, nous tombons d'accord sur Kusumdegi. Cette année le P. Floor va pour sa retraite, où il a parlé avec l'Archêveque, que s'est-il passé, je n'en sais rien. Le fait est-il qu'il y a un mois je reçois une de ses letters me disant que la nouvelle station sera Gaibira." Djardin to Provincial, Rengarih, August 10, 1922, APBS India 2 – 29/2, Djardin to Provincial, Kesramal, August 26, 1922, APBS India 2 – 29/2.

<sup>321</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission Histor: Kurdeg*, vol. IV, APBS India 1 – 3 / ser. B, India Lievens, Gen. Sources, p. 55.

<sup>322</sup> Some of the main villages visited in western Gangpur were: Sakiabahr, Korai, Saunamara, Rauldega, Borobahal, Maiabahal, Gaibira, Deogaon, Kirelega, Kusumdegi. Cf. Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, October 20, 1920, APBS India 2 – 29/2.

<sup>324</sup> Fr. Floor wrote: "Au Gangpur, il y a un mouvement de conversions. En 1921 avant juillet il y a eu 2000 conversions et en decembre environ 1500." Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, January 14, 1922, APBS India 2 – 29/2.

<sup>325</sup> T. VAN DER SCHUEREN, *The Belgian Mission of Bengal. Among the Aboriginal Tribes of Chota Nagpur*, vol. II, Calcutta 1922, p. 81.

missionaries to baptise them and to receive them into the church. In 1922 alone 21 villages sent deputations to Fr. Floor at Kesramal, requesting him to baptise them.<sup>326</sup>

It made a good sense to start a mission at Gaibira: (1) Gaibira was the centre of the conversion movement in western Gangpur; (2) Gaibira was in the semi-independent state of Gangpur, whereas Behrenbasa was in British territory;<sup>327</sup> and (3) there was no difficulty in obtaining land. In fact, the people had already built a hut for a missionary there.

On July 1, 1922, Fr. H. Floor visited the raja at Suadi to seek permission to purchase a few acres of land at Gaibira. The raja rejected the request because he had been displeased with the Christians and the catechists of Talsera, near Gaibira. When Fr. Floor tried to explain the cause of the agitation, the raja refused even to listen to him. When the Raja had finally finished with his litany of accusation against the Christians, the missionary took responsibility for their behaviour and suggested that the situation would have been different had a missionary been residing among them. This seemed to persuade the ruler. Fr. Floor received a positive reply from the *dewan*, Mr. H. D. Christian, authorising him to buy 20 acres of land for the Gaibira mission.<sup>328</sup>

In his letter to the archbishop, on July 10, 1922, Fr. Floor wrote: "I secured 15 acres of land at Gaibira, the lease of which will be written in Your Grace's name."<sup>329</sup> He wrote again, on August 12, 1922: "With your approval I can start residing there from the beginning of September. My dwelling will be the boys' school, which is ready. It has four rooms. I intend pushing actively the erection of the convent and girls' school, as I would like to get native Sisters already in January for the marriage catechumenate. Many pagan marriages have to be settled."<sup>330</sup> Initially Fr. Floor had to endure numerous inconveniences, which Fr. Camil Lievens later described: "His Church, a small hut! His rectory, another hut! His furniture, a bed, a table, a chair, and... that was it! His parish carried the burden of 6000 Christians and all who had to be converted in a area of 2200 square kilometres."<sup>331</sup>

Fr. Pierret in his rather short diary of nine pages has an entry for August 19, 1922, which reads: "Father Floor receives news. He is to settle in Gaibira on September 1, 1922. There will be 3 stations in Gangpur from that date; Gaibira with Fr. Floor, Hamirpur with Fr. Lambot and Kesramal with Fr. Pierret."<sup>332</sup> Though the founding of Gaibira as a separate parish came into effect on September 1, 1922, Fr. Floor actually took possession

---

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>327</sup> Fr. Floor wrote: "Gaibira est à 50 kms à l'ouest de Kesramal, au centre même du mouvement des conversions. C'est pour ce motif que Monseigneur a préféré Gaibira à Behrenbasa. Un second motif: il desire traiter le Gangpur comme une unite séparée. Behrenbasa est situé sur la frontière du Gangpur. Biru est sur territoire anglais." Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, August 26, 1922, APBS India 2 – 29/2

<sup>328</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, pp. 131, 253.

<sup>329</sup> Ibid., pp. 204 – 205. Fr. Floor wrote: "Nous venons d'obtenir un terrain de 15 acres." Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, July 13, 1922, APBS India 2 – 29/4.

<sup>330</sup> Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, July 13, 1922, APBS India 2 – 29/2; M. Vermeire, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 205; VAN DER SCHUEREN, *The Belgian Mission of Bengal*, vol. II, p. 81.

<sup>331</sup> The Indian mission found at Alken after the death of Camiel Lievens, Archief Belges. India 2, Box 15/5.

<sup>332</sup> Mauritius Veys to Provincial, Calcutta, August 17, 1922, APBS India 2 - 23/4; Van der Schueren to Josson, June 7, 1923, APBS India 2 - 15/4; M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 199.

on September 8, 1922.<sup>333</sup> The missionaries adopted the native system in the construction of the house. The roof was to be covered with native Mangalore tiles. Local carpenters would make the needed furniture. The missionary adhered to this style of construction for two reasons: (1) the financial difficulties faced by the mission during and after the war; and (2) the uncertainty regarding the status of the Gangpur mission, namely, whether it would remain with the Jesuits or it would be passed on to the new Orissa mission of the Vincentians.<sup>334</sup> The dewan, a Protestant European, was sympathetic to the Catholic mission and helped it in every way possible, such as granting permission to fell the trees for the construction of the house or fixing a nominal tax on the land (about 15 acres). With such generosity on the part of the dewan, plans were finalised to build a chapel, a presbytery, schools for boys and girls, and a convent for the Indian Sisters.<sup>335</sup>

The news of a parish established at Gaibira spread throughout the immediate area: four villages around Dirga and three villages near Sundargarh approached the missionary. In a letter to the archbishop, Fr. Floor underscored the prospects of the new station: "I have studied the map with the catechists: there is hope of conversion for the 16 Uraon (Oraon) villages, and 15 Kharia villages and 7 Gangpuria villages. These 38 villages should give between 3 and 4 thousand souls. This refers to the vicinity of Gaibira, and the country along the west of the Ib river up to Sundargarh [Suadi]."<sup>336</sup> There were also other villages that sent delegations, such as Dipatoli, Kitgaon, Tangarbhuri, Suadi, Tumulia, Sadagar, Pataimunda, Chatasarga, Koensera and Kirelaga.<sup>337</sup> The *dewan* offered a sum of Rs. 2000 to purchase cattle for the people after the Tribals had sustained a heavy loss of livestock with the outbreak of Rinderpest (cattle plague). This indirectly influenced the conversion of the Tribals.<sup>338</sup>

Archbishop Meuleman declared on August 20, 1922 that the three stations of Gangpur -- Kesramal, Hamirpur and Gaibira -- would become independent. They would be detached from the district of Rengarih and form a separate district of their own.<sup>339</sup> There

---

<sup>333</sup> Fr. Floor wrote: "J'ai pris possession de Gaibira le jour de la nativité de la Ste. Vierge. Puisse notre mère du ciel la prendre sous sa protection." Floor to Provincial, Gaibira, October 18, 1922, APBS India 2 – 29/2.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> Floor to Provincial, Gaibira, October 18, 1922, APBS India 2 – 29/2.

<sup>336</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. II, Diocesan Archives, Bishop's House, Rourkela, (Unpublished Manuscripts), p. 213.

<sup>337</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 205. Fr. Floor wrote to the Archbishop on December 12, 1922, "Since my last letter 3 Kharia *tollas* (hamlets) on the side of Behrenbasa came over . . . So far the Uraons are afraid of the Raja and do not join us." M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. II, p. 215.

<sup>338</sup> Fr. Floor remarked: "Le Dewan m'a offert 2000 roupies pour aider les natifs ruinés par les peste bovine. Les largesses que cette décision me permettre de faire, contribuent sans doute à étendre la mission." Floor to Provincial, Gaibira, October 18, 1922, APBS India 2 – 29/2; M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. II, p. 214.

<sup>339</sup> The members of the Society of Jesus were grouped in districts under a district superior. They used to gather in a common place at least four times a year, mainly to conduct the examination of conscience and to discuss matters relating to the mission. This division was necessitated by the long distances and the

were 6,051 Christians in the new station of Gaibira, while Kesramal had 12,019 and Hamirpur 8,500. This made a total of 26,570 Catholics in Gangpur.<sup>340</sup>

#### 4.2.3.5 Obstacles

One of the difficulties that Fr. Floor had to face in the new Gaibira mission was an insufficient number of catechists (who were often ill-formed and unmotivated) to meet the growing requests of the villages in and around Gaibira. In order to respond to the village delegations, he needed a minimum of 28 catechists. Yet Fr. Floor could not even afford to provide the meagre salary he was paying to his present catechists.<sup>341</sup> The missionaries had also to address the drunkenness of both the catechists and the people.

#### 4.3 Conclusion

The establishment of new centres signalled the vitality and the dedication of the missionaries, who, despite their foreign appearance and attire, could feel at home among the Tribals and the Dalits. Their sufferings and trials were not in vain. Their exhausting expeditions across the mountains and their frequent exposure to various dangers brought the desired results, for the simple people recognised the missionaries' sacrifices on their behalf. As ignorance and superstition reigned supreme, the missionaries established schools, although they were fully aware that education would not automatically guarantee the social and moral regeneration of the people. Therefore, they appointed an Inspector of Schools, whose duty, besides efficiency and good results, was to provide direction for a value-based education.

Though the First World War paralysed mission activities, the church did not register a great loss, thanks to the handful of missionaries who remained in India and took care of the flock. Once the War was over, the MSFS looked for another congregation that could provide more personnel and resources for the Ganjam Mission. As a result, in 1922 the Spanish Vincentians arrived to take over the Ganjam Mission, later known as the Cuttack Mission. In the north-western frontier of Orissa the Belgian Jesuits enjoyed a springtime of missionary activity, though they had to manage with a handful of missionaries. Certain of their methods, the Jesuits continued the expansion of the mission by establishing some new parishes during the subsequent years.<sup>342</sup>

---

difficulties of travel during the monsoon season. Cf. Cardon to Provincial, July 12, 1920, Samtoli, APBS India 2 – 29/2.

<sup>340</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 206.

<sup>341</sup> Van der Schueren to Josson, June 7, 1923, APBS India/Lievens Box. 15/4.

<sup>342</sup> The Belgian Jesuits' work of expansion came to a halt with the establishment of Kusumdegi, the 5<sup>th</sup> parish of the Gangpur mission, in 1933. Jhunmur, the fourth station, was established in 1925. Unable to provide personnel for the growing needs of the Gangpur mission, they also looked for a congregation that could provide for the needs of the mission. When Gangpur state merged with Orissa, they were obliged to learn Oriya, the state language. The Divine Word Missionaries took up the task of guiding a mission that required rejuvenation and expansion. Their arrival in 1948 marked a new phase in the history of Gangpur mission.