

## Chapter III

# A NEW BEGINNING

Just as the growth of any social organism depends on the constant care of responsible people, so too did the nascent Catholic community in Orissa depend on the presence of the missionaries. Though the catechists did their best to strengthen the bonds that kept the community united and fervent in the faith, there was no progress in the quality of Christian life. In fact, there were even some defections from the community. Hence, the future of the Catholic community depended largely on the establishment of mission stations so that the missionaries, by means of schools, orphanages and other infrastructures, could nurture their faith in a systematic manner.

This chapter explores the circumstances relating to the establishment of the first stations in the Ganjam mission – i.e., Surada, Koussipanga and Gojolibady – which went through a difficult time of ‘waxing and waning’. Though the established mission centres at Berhampur and Cuttack remained an attraction for the missionaries, these centres provided them with a *pied-à-terre* to spread into other areas, such as Puri and Khurda. This will be discussed in the following chapter. The sufferings that the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales (MSFS) had to endure for commencing work in the ill-fated mountains and some of their missionary responses, especially in the face of natural calamities, are discussed here in order to analyse their efforts to win the people for Christ.

The centrifugal approach of the Belgian Jesuits was visible when they sought to expand their mission to the semi-independent states of Gangpur (Orissa) and Jashpur (Chhatisgarh). The extension of the mission to the Gangpur state was a long-cherished desire of the people, and the missionaries had the sympathy of those living across the border. But their desire could not be realised due to the intransigent attitude of the Raja of Gangpur. The Jesuits had even established a station at Behrembasa in 1905, on the western border of Gangpur with Chotanagpur, in order to extend the care of the missionaries to the neophytes living across the border. The missionaries used their influence with the government authorities in the hope of pressuring the raja of Gangpur to grant a plot for a mission. But their efforts were futile until 1907, when the raja finally gave his consent and turned over 7½ acres of land in Kesramal. The initial struggles and enthusiasm of the missionaries along with the approaches to win the tribes to Christ are considered in this chapter. Mention is also made of the beginning of two religious congregations of sisters in the mission: the St. Joseph Sisters of Annecy in Surada and the Daughters of the Cross in Kesramal.

### 3.1 Ganjam Mission

#### 3.1.1 A new Venture

In spite of the paucity of personnel and the vast territory to be served, the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales had registered considerable progress since their arrival at Visakhapatnam in 1845. By 1853 the progress was well marked by the construction of churches and convents, and almost all the centres had at least two resident priests. In fact, considering the existing circumstances, it was by no means a small achievement for a young congregation. When the congregation experienced

steady progress, the missionaries felt the need to start the ‘conversion of pagans’, which was always very dear to the missionaries.<sup>1</sup> They looked for new avenues and opportunities to realise their desire.

The ill-fated exploration of 1850 forced the missionaries to retreat and to postpone their quest to spread the kingdom of God.<sup>2</sup> In spite of a positive report by Fr. J.M. Tissot,<sup>3</sup> which described the openness of the inhabitants of the Kondh Mountains<sup>4</sup> to God and the readiness of the Tribals to ameliorate their life conditions, Msgr. Neyret was unwilling to sacrifice his confreres until they had acquired a better understanding of the mission and took every precaution against the fatal mountain fever. This required both time and personnel. However, the desire to establish a mission among the Kondhs and Panos did not diminish in the heart of the missionaries. The ‘almost savage life’ of the Tribals in the dense forests – content with whatever the forest offered them as food, often falling prey to wild and ferocious animals – cut them off from the *civilised world*<sup>5</sup> with no possibility of educating themselves and their children and deprived them of modern medical facilities. In short, the abject poverty of the Kondhs and the Panos attracted the attention of the missionaries.

However, the need to send missionaries to the northern part of the mission, particularly to look after the Christians in Berhampur and Cuttack, was realised after a pastoral visit by Msgr. Neyret, who, having seen the deplorable conditions of the

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<sup>1</sup> Most of the reports sent by the vicar apostolic of Visakhapatnam contained some remarks about the conversion of pagans. See *Règles de conduite pour les Missions de la Côte d’Orissa*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4.

<sup>2</sup> For a brief report on the mission, especially the early attempts to evangelise the Kondhs in the Ganjam Mountains and the ill-fated expedition by Frs. Tissot and Sermet in 1850, cf. Msgr. Neyret to Cardinal Fransoni, Vizagapatam, September 2, 1851, APF Indie Orientali: Scrittura Riferite nei Congressi, vol. XIII, f. 591.

<sup>3</sup> Writing to Monsieur Mermier, Fr. J.M. Tissot gave a positive report of the Kondh Mission: “Cependant il y a une chose, Mr. le Supérieur, que j’ai besoin de vous répéter ici: c’est la réponse que nous avons partout et constamment recue lorsque nous parlions de Dieu, de la fin de l’homme. Ils ont une idée confuse de la Divinité, mais de la bonté de Dieu et des grandes destinées de l’homme, ils nous répondaient avec ingénuité: nous ne savons rien de tout cela; nous ne sommes que de pauvres condés (Kondhs). Nous n’avons pas de gros livres comme vous. Nous serions bien contents si quelqu’un venait nous enseigner la bonne voie. Nous l’écouterions volontiers et suivrions ses avis.” Tissot to Mermier, Visakhapatnam, December 3, 1850, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

<sup>4</sup> The word ‘Kondh Mountains’ denotes a chain of mountains, where the Kondhs and Panos live: “Le pays konde est affreux, couvert de nombreuses chaînes de montagnes, d’immenses forêts et d’horribles défis.” Richard to Monsieur Billiet, Berhampur, March 15, 1856, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1; Cf. Msgr. Neyret to Cardinal Fransoni, Vizagapatam, November 5, 1850, APF Indie Orientali: Scrittura Riferite nei Congressi, vol. 12, ff. 1107-1109.

<sup>5</sup> Often non-tribals tend to condemn the tribals as ‘uncivilised’ people as they do not conform to the manners of non-tribals. A similar attitude was found among the missionaries, especially when they narrated the horrendous practice of Meriah and the infamous practice of female infanticide among the tribal people of Ganjam. Therefore the phrase ‘civilised world’ is used in italics. Cf. *Ibid.*; Msgr. Neyret to Cardinal Fransoni, Vizagapatam, February 22, 1852, APF Indie Orientali: Scrittura Riferite nei Congressi, vol. 13, ff. 841-842.

Christians sent his priests to these stations.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, Fr. Balmand was appointed to Berhampur with the view of administering to the needs of Christians on the east coast, particularly in Ganjam, Berhampur, Russelkonda, Chatrapur and Cuttack.<sup>7</sup>

### 3.1.2 The First Expedition

In May 1853 Msgr. Neyret wrote to Fr. Jean Marie Dupont<sup>8</sup> in Berhampur, instructing him to proceed to the coastal area where the fishermen were said to have been open to the Word of God. Deterred by unpredictable climatic conditions on the coast, Fr. Dupont prolonged his stay. As he waited for a more suitable time to proceed to the proposed mission, he decided to explore the Kondh territory, especially the frontier.<sup>9</sup> He sought the assistance of Fr. Philippe Richard-Cugnet<sup>10</sup> in his search for a suitable place at the foot of the Kondh Mountains where they could begin their apostolic work. Initially, they set out without any precise plans or destination, depending totally on providence to guide them to the right place.<sup>11</sup> After a few days, they reached a hut in

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<sup>6</sup> At the request of the vicar apostolic of Calcutta, Msgr. Neyret had agreed to send a missionary to Cuttack, Berhampur, Aska, Ganjam, etc. This decision was arrived at since Cuttack was geographically close to Visakhapatnam and was one of the important stations that existed prior to the arrival of MSFS; the Theatines had their ministry extended to Cuttack and other coastal towns. Moreover, the firsthand information regarding the state of Christianity obtained during the pastoral visit of Msgr. Neyret convinced him to send a missionary to the above-mentioned places. Cf. Msgr. Neyret to Cardinal Fransoni, Vizagapatam, July 30, 1850, APF Indie Orientali: Scritture Riferite nei Congressi, vol. 12, ff. 944-945.

<sup>7</sup> F. MOGET, *Early Days of the Visakhapatnam Mission 1846 – 1920*, Bangalore 1997, p. 57.

<sup>8</sup> Jean Marie Dupont was born on June 25, 1816, at Thônes, Savoy. He came to the Visakhapatnam mission in 1847. He spent his life in the missions: in Yanam 1847-1853, Surada 1853-1861, Palcondah 1861-1865, Surada 1865-1887. He attracted many to Christ with the simplicity of life and his knowledge of medicine. His decisions in the disputes were sought and accepted as just and impartial. He died on June 17, 1887, at Surada. Cf. M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatnam*, pp. 363 – 364; F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 62.

<sup>9</sup> In his letter to Fr. Gaiddon, Fr. Dupont described the beginning of the mission in the following sentences: “au lieu d’aller commencer ma visite des Païens du côté de la mer à l’Est, je me dirigeai, accompagné du Père Richard, du côté de Soorada pays des montagnes, au pied des Gondhes et à l’ouest de Berhampore”. Dupont to Mermier, Berhampur, July 26, 1853, AMSFS 5H5-2 1. It is probable that after having realised that the climatic conditions were unsuitable for an easy movement in the coastal area, Fr. Dupont might have thought of looking for a place at the foot of the Kondh Mountains. M. Domenge mentioned: “Mais, à cette époque, des vents extraordinaires soufflaient dans ces parages, balayant avec violence un sable desséché et subtil, qui aveuglait les voyageurs, rendait la circulation difficile et le pays malasin”. It has to be borne in mind that due to the typical nature of the bay, coastal Orissa often becomes a victim of climatic aberrations, like inundations, cyclones, depressions, etc. Cf. M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatnam*, p. 212.

<sup>10</sup> Fr. Philippe Richard-Cugnet was born on October 22, 1824, at Serraval, Savoy. He was ordained a priest on April 5, 1851. In the same year he left for the mission of Visakhapatnam. He was a pioneer at Surada and Cuttack. He was the parish priest of Berhampur from 1852. He served as the vicar general of Visakhapatnam diocese from 1866. He was also the parish priest of Visakhapatnam, where he was at the same time a municipal councillor. He died on April 12, 1880, at Visakhapatnam. Cf. *Tableau Général*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4, F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 44.

<sup>11</sup> F. Moget is of the opinion that: “Fr. Dupont knew only Telugu, Fr. Richard spoke English and Tamil. They were accompanied by a servant speaking Telugu and Oriya, who could be their interpreter”. F.

Surada with the hope of staying there, but the people told them that it had been reserved for someone else. Expressing their indomitable courage and their resolve to win the people for Christ, Fr. Dupont wrote to Fr. Gaiddon:

After we reached the place, the heat was very strong and it was absolutely necessary to get a place where we could protect ourselves from the scorching heat. But there was no way of obtaining a hut where we could rest. However, we saw a miserable hangar and we were told that we could stay there. Thinking that this would be lesser grace, but even this favour was accorded to us. Some people were found at the occasion of the anniversary of the death of one of their parents, in memory of whom a meal was held. For this reason, they told us that the place would be free in the evening. Therefore, we thought it would be better to go immediately to a forest nearby, situated on the banks of a river and at the foot of the mountain . . . Thus, instead of returning, I went ahead till the centre of the village where I was surrounded by the majority of the inhabitants. As you may well think, I profited from a beautiful occasion to preach the truths of salvation. Till then, the poor people had never seen a person who preached the kingdom of God and who created them and the destination for which they were made. All that I announced was new for them.<sup>12</sup>

The servants of the missionaries warned them that the inhabitants of the village were ‘thieves and assassins’ and that there was no certainty that one would return safely upon entering the village.<sup>13</sup> By any standard it was a daring expedition as the missionaries were least prepared for any eventuality. The language of the people was unknown to them. It was very difficult for them to make themselves understood. Yet, they were courageous. These initial obstacles obviously did not deter them.

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MOGET, *Early days of Visakhapatnam Mission*, p. 71. Moget is of the opinion that the first exploration that took the missionaries to Montacallau, a village near Surada, was in January 1853 and the people who listened to the preaching of Fr. Dupont were Panos or Pariahs. The details of the expedition to Montacallau are mentioned in the letter of Fr. Richard to the central council members of the Society for the Propagation of Faith. For more details on the issue, Cf. RICHARD, “Lettre de M. Richard Cugnet, Vicaire general de la mission de Vizagapatam, à MM. les Membres des Conseils centraux de l’Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi”, in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 52 (1880), pp. 108 - 109.

<sup>12</sup> Fr. Dupont narrated his experience to Fr. Gaiddon: “Lorsque nous y arrivâmes, les chaleurs étaient très fortes et il nous fallait absolument un lieu pour nous garantir contre les ardeurs du soleil, mais il n’y eut pas moyen d’obtenir la moindre maisonnette où il nous fut permis de nous retirer. On aperçut cependant un misérable hangar où on nous dit qu’on pourrait aller se placer. Nous pensions que ce serait au moins la moindre des grâces, mais encore cette faveur ne nous fut pas de suite accordé. Il s’y trouvait plusieurs personnes réunies à l’occasion de l’anniversaire d’un de leur parent défunt, en mémoire duquel on donnait un repas. Pour cette raison, on nous dit que la place ne pourrait être libre qu’au soir. Là-dessus, nous crûmes que le mieux était de nous aller promptement enfoncer dans une forêt voisine située sur les bords d’une rivière et au pied d’une belle montagne. . . Ainsi, au lieu de me retourner, je m’avançai jusqu’au sommet du village où je fus bientôt entouré de la plupart des habitants. Comme vous le pensez bien, je profitai d’une si belle occasion pour leur prêcher les vérités du salut. Jusque là, ces pauvres gens n’avaient vu personne qui leur annonçait le Règne de Dieu, qui leur fit connaître celui qui les avait créés, et la fin pour laquelle il les avait fait. Tout ce que je leur annonçais était nouveau pour eux.” Dupont to Gaiddon, Berhampur, July 29, 1853, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

<sup>13</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 212.

### 3.1.3 Montacallau (Surada)

The village they selected was called Montacallau,<sup>14</sup> situated on the outskirts of Surada. As Fr. Dupont approached the village most of the inhabitants surrounded him – their proverbial curiosity drew them to look at the ‘white man’ and to observe his manners and way of speaking. For a missionary who longs to make a breakthrough, everything is a god-sent opportunity to preach the message of love. So, Fr. Dupont used the chance to proclaim the Christian faith, despite the language barriers between the missionaries and their listeners. That was probably the first time that the villagers had ever met a missionary. Fr. Dupont sensed that their concept of God was very ‘different and insufficient’ as he came to know more about their superstitious practices, that he called ‘offering sacrifices to demon’.<sup>15</sup> In the audience he found an old man, who served as a starting point for his future missionary endeavours. Narrating the incident to Fr. Gaiddon, Fr. Dupont wrote:

One of the chiefs was moved by what I said regarding hell, of which he did not have any knowledge at all. I believe that the fear of hell forced him to convert himself immediately. But not knowing who I was, he asked: who would free me from my sins? Who would put me on the true path that leads to heaven? Where could I find someone who would instruct me in the true Religion in this country, is nobody capable of this? Then I said to him, if he truly desires to renounce the demons and serve only God, God himself would furnish all the necessary means. At that he told me: I am old and soon I will die, what is there, then, for me to do, if not to serve the Lord and to gain paradise for me? Seeing him well disposed, I said to him, the person necessary for him to know the ways of salvation and all that was needed to reach heaven was there. That man has been sent to you by the Lord and toward that end he wished that I go after him, I was his minister and my work was to work for the salvation of souls.<sup>16</sup>

The man subsequently explained to the people the importance of the matter under discussion with the stranger. Since it was getting late, the villagers agreed to come on the following day to listen to him. Considering it to be a positive response, the missionaries hoped for a rich harvest. That motivated them to remain there and to look after the people who came into contact with them. The missionaries thus abandoned the idea of going to the seacoast for mission work, as Msgr. Neyret had wanted them.

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<sup>14</sup> In a footnote M. Domenge mentioned that Montacallau was the place where Fr. Dupont fixed his tent. The village was close to Surada. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 219.

<sup>15</sup> The religious practices of Kondhs and Panos are dealt with in the first chapter (1.2.3.1.2 [Kondhs] and 1.2.3.2.1 [Panos]).

<sup>16</sup> Here is the text of Fr. Dupont’s encounter with the elderly man in the village: “Un des principaux fut surtout ému de ce que je dis de l’enfer dont il n’avait pas connaissance et je crois que ce fut cette crainte qu’il en éprouva qui le détermina de suite à se convertir. Mais, ne sachant pas qui j’étais, il disait: qui pourra m’enlever mes péchés, qui pourra me mettre dans la voie qui conduit au ciel? Où pourrais-je trouver quelqu’un qui m’instruise de vraie Religion... dans ce Pays, il n’y a personne qui soit capable de cela. – Alors, je lui dis que, ‘s’il désirait vraiment renoncer au démon et ne servir que Dieu Seul, Dieu Lui-même lui fournirait tous les moyens nécessaires’. A cela, il me répondait: ‘je suis vieux et bientôt je vais mourir, que me reste-t-il donc à faire, sinon servir Dieu et travailler pour m’assurer le paradis’. – le voyant ainsi disposé, je lui dis: ‘Eh –bien! L’homme qui vous est nécessaire pour arriver au ciel, cet homme, le Seigneur vous l’a envoyé maintenant et c’est à cette fin qu’il a voulu que je me dirigeasse auprès de vous, moi qui suis son ministre et dont la fonction est de travailler au salut des âmes.’” Dupont to Gaiddon, Berhampur, July 29, 1853, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

Without knowing the local language it was not easy for Fr. Dupont to build a rapport with the people, much less discuss religion. He thought that his servant might be able to interpret what the missionary was saying in Telugu. But he later discovered that his translation was defective, and so he felt the need to learn the language. For the moment he memorised the translations of Christian truth, which he used to repeat in front of the gathered people. He insisted that his neophytes learn them by heart as well.

As the missionaries did not have a thorough knowledge of the people – their culture, their language, and their economic and political conditions – they had no specific method of evangelisation. Initially, they did not even bother with such concerns. All that they were interested in then was to find a breakthrough, which would bear fruit. Whatever they did, they did it to the best of their ability and according to the knowledge based on the only information available, which was an account of the military operations dealing with the insurgencies arising from *Meriah* and female infanticide.<sup>17</sup> Thus, one could conclude that the missionaries did not convert the people through the elegance of their discourses or by the lure of money, but by the simplicity of their lives and beliefs. This was confirmed by one of the village chiefs a few days after his baptism: “I don’t know anything, but I believe in whatever you believe. I want to do all that you ask of me.”<sup>18</sup>

Having experienced difficulties in finding a house, the missionaries had to be content with a simple place outside the village. Frs. Dupont and Richard sat under the big tree close to Montacallau, which became their favourite spot for teaching catechism and discussing topics on religion.<sup>19</sup> After six months, 184 persons were baptised.

As mentioned earlier, the missionaries’ intention was to explore the possibility of establishing themselves at the foot of the Kondh Mountains, which, according to their calculations, would have kept them there for a short time. Therefore, they did not even take along enough provisions. However, they soon realised the openness of the people, and so they sought to establish a mission station at Surada. They chose a place by the riverside to build a provisional hut made up of bamboo-and-foilage roof and mud walls. Since their hut was on the same level as that of the river, it was quite humid there. In his letter to Monsieur Mermier, Fr. Dupont wrote:

During the first days, our place of refuge for the night was a hut. This place was open to all the winds, and it [the place where they chose to pitch their tent] was visible to passer-by and it was difficult for us to celebrate the sacred mystery. Every day we were obliged to go to the river. Soon we built a small hut closer to

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<sup>17</sup> See the first chapter for more information on *Meriah* and female infanticide. When Captain Macpherson visited Surada in 1842, there prevailed female infanticide. Since he was affected by the mountain fever, he was unable to continue with the expedition. Cf. J.C.B. CAMPBELL, *Narrative by Major General John Cambell C. B. in hill tracts of Orissa for the suppression of human sacrifices and female infanticide*, London 1861, p. 50.

<sup>18</sup> The following information is given by Fr. Dupont: “Peu de jours après son baptême, ce chef me disait: “je ne sais rien, mais je crois tout ce que vous croyez et je veux faire tout ce que vous me direz.” Dupont to Mermier, Berhampur, July 26, 1853, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

<sup>19</sup> Moget narrates the first encounter with these glowing words: “Fr. Dupont told them that God had sent him to teach them the means of purifying their souls and insuring their eternal salvation. These simple people were quite ready to believe in something. They were Panos, Pariahs, happy to learn that, despised by Hindu society, they were the children of God.” F. Moget, *Early days of Visakhapatnam*, p. 72.

the river with the help of branches and leaves. We imitated the Kondhs who live around us.<sup>20</sup>

As the river rose during the monsoon, their hut was threatened and they decided to leave the place till the end of rainy season, as suggested Msgr. Neyret.<sup>21</sup> However, after four months they were back again in the same place to continue their apostolate among the Panos. Fr. Richard's transfer to Berhampur in March 1854 did not end the initial enthusiasm of Fr. Dupont. His enthusiasm was encouraged when he received a band of young and energetic missionaries to assist him in continuing the mission in Montacallau. They were: Fr. Antoine Guillermin,<sup>22</sup> Fr. Joseph Seigneur<sup>23</sup> and Br. Jean Pierre Piccot.<sup>24</sup> They were also instructed to extend their mission among the Kondhs.

### 3.1.3.1 Surada: The First Church in Ganjam

The participation of the Christians in Surada at Holy Mass and the evening prayers (e. g., the rosary) was encouraging, and one could witness the difference in their lives.<sup>25</sup> Placed at the foot of the Kondh Mountains, the nascent community of Surada had soon assumed a certain importance in the work of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales. It was the centre of their mission in the north, from where one could easily reach Berhampur, Cuttack and Ganjam. Therefore they wanted to build a 'decent and beautiful' church in the desert. Since they also had great hopes of winning more converts around Surada -- many villages invited the missionaries for instruction -- they decided to construct a presbytery there. They began the construction of the church in 1857, under the supervision of the superior of the mission, Fr. J.M. Tissot, who also had the difficult task of collecting the money for the project. The missionaries even

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<sup>20</sup> Dupont to Mermier, Berhampur, July 26, 1853, in *Lettres des Missionnaires 1845-1857*, ASMFS 7Z/5H5.

<sup>21</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatnam*, p. 214.

<sup>22</sup> Antoine Guillermin was born on April 5, 1822, at Poisy, Savoy. He came to Visakhapatnam mission in 1853. He spent most of his life on the Kondh Mountains with 'semi-savage' people. He was a pioneer missionary at Ganjam, Koussipanga and Surada. During the time of the temporary closure of the mission he was left alone in Surada from 1859-1865. He was instrumental in building the churches at Surada, Berhampur and many other places. He founded the orphanage at Thotavally. He died at Surada on December 8, 1869. Cf. M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatnam*, pp. 346-347; F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 104.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph -Eugène Seigneur was born at Megève, Savoy, in 1827. He was ordained in 1852 and in the following year he reached the Visakhapatnam mission. He was noted for his skills in learning Indian languages. He learned Sanskrit and studied Hindu scriptures. He was called "Singharayya Swami". He died on May 3, 1861. Cf. M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatnam*, p. 252; F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 49.

<sup>24</sup> Jean Pierre Piccot was born at Luillin, Savoy. He came to the Visakhapatnam mission in 1853. He worked in Koussipanga and other stations in Orissa. He was a carpenter and his help in the construction of churches in the mission was much sought after. He died on December 3, 1871, at Aska. Cf. F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 102.

<sup>25</sup> In his letter to Msgr. Neyret of April 27, 1855, Fr. Tissot says that there was a considerable change in the life of the people. People were pious and attentive during the Mass and prayers. Cf. Tissot to Neyret, Surada, April 27, 1855, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

collected money from Protestants who contributed willingly.<sup>26</sup> They bought a suitable site in Surada, which was large enough even to have a dairy later on, and which included some paddy fields.<sup>27</sup> In one of the reports sent to the *Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi*, Paris, Msgr. Neyret wrote that the number of Catholics in Surada in 1855 was 600, but all of them were dispersed in the forest.<sup>28</sup>

### 3.1.3.2 Obstacles

This initial work was not without obstacles that retarded the movement of grace, even if the missionaries had no power to avoid them. There were a number of issues that created an anti-Christian sentiment among the neophytes. To mention a few: there was a rumour among the people that the missionaries had a hidden agenda in the interest they had shown for the people and their families. The people believed that once the missionaries had learned the language and had become acclimatised to the ways of the villagers, they might kidnap some and send them to Europe, where they would become slaves or be forced into prostitution.<sup>29</sup> This obviously did not destroy the nascent mission, but it certainly slowed the movement that had begun with much promise. Even though there had been no reason to confirm their fears and doubts, the people were hesitant to cooperate with the missionaries when they asked the neophytes to come for prayers and worship.<sup>30</sup> The missionaries found it difficult to catechise the women, who were naturally shy and would not talk to strangers.

Their hut in Montacallau was inconvenient and unhealthy. In order to reach out to a growing community, they needed to move to a more central location. They decided to establish themselves in Surada, but obtaining land proved to be very difficult, since the British officials did not grant the necessary permission. Realising the difficulties in obtaining permission, the missionaries were initially resigned to living in solitary places in the forest. There they feared being attacked by wild beasts such as bears, lions, and other ferocious animals. There were also serpents, scorpions, etc., to deal with. Fr. Dupont described the situation:

We are here more than a month, my confrere and I live at the beginning of the forest where the bears, lions and other ferocious animals roam around. Some have visited our house. When I went to sleep outside (the house) due to the heat, I was

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<sup>26</sup> Fr. Dupont mentioned Surada to Fr. Clavel: “Comme Sooradah est pour le présent le chef lieu de notre Mission Konde, un lieu d’où l’on peut se rendre de tous côtés dans les montagnes et que nous y avons en outre un assez grand nombre de chrétiens, nous nous sommes vus dans la nécessité de viser aux moyens de construire une Eglise et un presbytère un peu passable . . . J’ai même frappé à plusieurs portes protestantes pour trouver quelques secours à cette fin.” Dupont to Clavel, Surada, February 7, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1; Tissot to Gaidon, Surada, April 29, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>27</sup> Dupont to Clavel, Surada, February 7, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>28</sup> Msgr. Neyret, *La Mission de Vizagapatam, Extrait du Registre Officiel, 1845*, ASMFS 8Z.

<sup>29</sup> At the time when there was a trade of coolies – very similar to the slave trade in the preceding centuries – a suspicion of ‘white men’ as secret agents was in circulation among the people of Surada. It might have been a weapon used by the Brahmins in order to arrest the spread of a new religion. Cf. Dupont to Gaidon, Berhampur, July 29, 1853, ASMFS 5H5-2 1; Dupont to Mermier, Berhampur, July 26, 1853, in *Lettres des Missionnaires 1845–1857*, ASMFS 7Z/5H5; M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 216.

<sup>30</sup> Dupont to Gaidon, Berhampur, July 29, 1853, ASMFS, 5H5-2/1; Dupont to Mermier, Berhampur, July 26, 1853, in *Lettres des Missionnaires 1845–1857*, ASMFS 7Z/5H5.



woken up to find a big serpent staying very close to my head. At that sight I pulled myself back for the moment. At another time we found a big black scorpion. We killed it and keep it as a souvenir.<sup>31</sup>

In addition, there were the initial difficulties of learning the language and the culture of the people. Since the Panos were the ones who responded to the missionaries, the missionaries had to learn Oriya, the common language of the people, and to adapt to their culture.

### 3.1.4 Koussipanga

In March 1854, when more personnel arrived, the missionaries left their first and provisional place (Montacallau) and went ahead to ‘attack the enemy’ at the frontier. They ventured into the interior of the forest with the hope making more contacts. The number of villages in the Kondh Mountains raised their hopes. One of the Kondhs who accompanied the missionaries stated that on this trip they visited about 4,000 villagers.<sup>32</sup> Urged by the desire to convert the Kondhs, Msgr. Neyret, the vicar apostolic of Visakhapatnam, expressed his desire to begin a centre among the Kondhs in the mountains. In the beginning the missionaries were in favour of establishing themselves at Daringbadi, where the climate was healthier. There were many surrounding villages where the missionaries could preach the word of God.<sup>33</sup>

In their expedition to Daringbadi, the servants of the missionaries were the ones who knew the language and the place. As they went along they stopped at Koussipanga,<sup>34</sup> a commercial centre in the mountains, where the servants had relatives. In the hope of obtaining the missionaries’ favour, the servants pre-arranged an impressive welcome for them. The servants convinced the villagers that they were accompanying some important, powerful and learned men, whose presence might bring them good fortune. According to their custom, the village chief came forward to meet the visiting dignitaries with fruit and other gifts. As a sign of respect and welcome, the chief prostrated himself until Fr. Dupont asked him to get up. The missionaries were highly moved by the unexpected welcome accorded to them. At the request of the people, they pitched their tents among them on March 25, 1854.<sup>35</sup> They were happy to

<sup>31</sup> Dupont to Gaidon, Berhampur, July 29, 1853, ASMFS 5H5-2/1.

<sup>32</sup> Dupont to Mermier, Berhampur, July 26, 1853, in *Lettres des Missionnaires 1845–1857*, ASMFS 7Z/5H5.

<sup>33</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 224.

<sup>34</sup> Koussipanga was an ill-situated village in the mountains. One could not make a long sojourn there, as it was isolated and lost in a cluster of mountains. There was no possibility of contact with the outside world. Even communication with the neighbourhood was rare. Once a year a merchant came with some essential items. The villagers purchased these with wax, food grains and tiger skins. The climate was insalubrious. Therefore the missionaries considered the village a provisory residence. Cf. M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 223. For a narration of personal experience in Koussipanga: see *Ibid.*, p. 344.

<sup>35</sup> To quote the letter of Fr. Guillermin to Fr. Gaidon: “La nuit venue ils nous envoyèrent des présents, ensuite une députation pour nous prier de les instruire avant d’aller plus loin, puis ils se rendirent auprès de nous dans la matinée et que l’on déciderait cette importante affaire. Les chefs qui sont au nombre de cinq, furent fidèles au rendez-vous, ils porteraient nos effets quand nous voudrions partir; ils nous donneraient des fruits, du riz, des poules, etc. etc. Voyant de si belles dispositions, le Père résolut

announce the Good News on the feast of the Annunciation, but soon realised that their words fell on deaf ears. The situation did not improve either, for they met with indifference and hostility. They were quite different from the Panos of Montacallau.<sup>36</sup>

In view of the incomprehensible indifference of the Kondhs, the missionaries began to re-evaluate their strategy of reaching people. They thought that preaching in the streets and market places might bring similar reactions. The missionaries wanted to conform themselves to the customs of the country and give the people enough time to realise that the missionaries were genuinely interested in them. So, they decided to learn *Kui*, the language of the people. As the vehicle of communication, *Kui* helped them to relate better to the people.<sup>37</sup> They were convinced that a personal rapport with the people was a precondition to any proclamation. The new situation demanded a different approach, and they decided to formulate a suitable strategy. They tried to introduce the great mysteries in ‘little doses’ – i.e. God, the soul and its immortality, sin and virtues, heaven and hell – so that these mysteries would be understood by the simple and illiterate people.<sup>38</sup>

Since they were ill-prepared for a long sojourn in the mountains, their physical endurance was drained when the temperature reached 36° or 37°C, leaving them prone to mountain fever. All fell ill at the same time. The people saw this as a curse from their god and kept themselves aloof, fearing that they too might be affected by the displeasure of their god. The situation worsened when their servants went to Berhampur to procure provisions and there was none to help them. But, in their dire need, a kind person came forward to collect water from the stream and to boil it.<sup>39</sup> Also, contrary to their expectations, the woodcutter smiled and showed them kindness. These were the first gracious signs that Fr. Dupont received from the people. Realising the goodness of the Kondhs, he asked them to help him in building their residence. So they helped the missionaries to cut the wood necessary for their house.<sup>40</sup>

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d'évangéliser ce village, quoique ce ne fut pas celui auquel nous avions mission de nous rendre." Guillermin to Gaidon, Koussipanga, May 1854, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1; M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 218.

<sup>36</sup> The impression of the missionaries was that it was their preoccupation with the after-life, which made the Panos readily accept the message of the missionaries. However, the Kondhs believed in the transmigration of souls, i.e. deceased people are born again as animals, persons, etc. It was probably for this reason that the missionaries were initially hesitant to kill animals. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 219 – 220; NEYRET, "Extrait d'une lettre de Msgr. Neyret, évêque d'Olène et Vicaire Apostolic de Visagapatam, à MM. les Directeurs de l'Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi", in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 27 (1855), p. 357.

<sup>37</sup> They even tried to take part in the hunting expeditions, but as it proved to be very dangerous, they sought an exemption with the sole condition that they be given a share in the hunt. "Lorsqu'on est bien avec le khonde, disait le P. Dupont, on trouve en lui un excellent ami; mais, si on a le malheur de se l'aliéner, il devient un ennemi implacable." M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 220.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 221.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Msgr. Neyret reported the event with following words: "Vous voyez, leur dit-il [Fr. Dupont], que nous périssons ici de chaleur, faute d'avoir un abri convenable contre les ardeurs du soleil; vous irez donc, dès demain, nous couper du bois dans la forêt, pour nous aider à bâtir une maison." NEYRET, "Extrait d'une lettre de Msgr. Neyret, évêque d'Olène et Vicaire Apostolic de Visagapatam, à MM. les Directeurs de

From that moment the missionaries were considered as friends, and the villagers did everything to help them. Nevertheless, their hearts were closed to accepting the Christian message. By the end of July 1854, after four months at KouSSIPanga, not a single person asked for baptism. Fr. Dupont did not want to give up, for he hoped to win the Kondhs one day. He wished that at least one person would be converted to justify prolonging his sojourn in KouSSIPanga -- even during the times of mountain fever. The hope of reaping a rich harvest was always present in the mind of Fr. Dupont, as can be seen from the letter that contains an account of conversions among the Kondhs.<sup>41</sup>

With the approach of the monsoon season the missionaries rightly thought of descending to Berhampur. Frs. Seigneur and Guillermin were sent first, while Fr. Dupont and Brother Piccot remained for a while longer. As he continued with his preaching, Fr. Dupont discovered to his great surprise that many were willing to receive baptism. Within two weeks he baptised about 250 persons. In spite of the invitations from other villages, he felt it prudent to retreat from the mountains but promised to come back once the rainy season was over.<sup>42</sup> However, the unexpected success brought a temporary cancellation of plans to establish a station at Daringbadi. Instead, they decided to build a chapel and a residence for the priest at the place indicated by the chief. Even though they later left KouSSIPanga for Surada, they continued to have contact with the people there, since they came down regularly to Surada to make purchases. It was quite natural for the Christians to pay a courtesy visit to the missionaries there.<sup>43</sup> The presence of the missionaries in Surada added colour to the festive mood when 18 persons received their First Holy Communion on September 15, 1854.

In order to foster a speedy evangelisation of the mission territory, Fr. J.M. Tissot persuaded Monsieur Mermier to appoint a superior to look after the northern part. He made clear that the suggestion was not meant to relieve him from the difficult task of organising the mission in the north but to organise it more efficiently. The great distance between Visakhapatnam and Ganjam was one of the reasons for the proposal.<sup>44</sup> At the annual retreat for the eight missionaries in Visakhapatnam, they had opportunities to reflect together on two important issues: (a) the observance of the rule of their congregation and (b) ways to advance the mission work entrusted to their care.<sup>45</sup> They wanted to put their reflections into a written form for their superiors.<sup>46</sup>

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l'Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi", pp. 358 – 359; Dupont to Neyret, KouSSIPanga, April 10, 1854, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

<sup>41</sup> Dupont to Mermier, (no place), October 10, 1854, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Cf. R. CUGNET, "Lettre de M. Richard Cugnet, Vicaire general de la mission de Vizagapatam, à MM. les Membres des Conseils centraux de l'Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi", in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 52 (1880), p. 109.

<sup>44</sup> Tissot to Mermier, Surada, April 29, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>45</sup> Tissot to Mermier, Surada, January 20, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>46</sup> For details see *Règles de conduite pour les Missions de la Côte d'Orissa*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4..

By 1860 the mission at Koussipanga had grown from its infancy to a developed station with a chapel and a small community of 360 Christians. The *pradhan*, the chief of the Kondhs, was very friendly to the missionaries, who recorded his kind treatment in a letter to the superiors and confreres in France. Undoubtedly the rapport the missionaries had with the *pradhan* helped the progress of the mission.<sup>47</sup>

#### 3.1.4.1 Obstacles

In addition to the slow growth of Christianity, the missionaries were unhappy with the quality of life among the Kondhs. Fr. Dupont reported:

Humanly speaking, looking at the happenings in Coussipanga [Koussipanga], especially at the beginning (of the mission), we could not expect great success. The drunkenness of the men, their indifference to salvation, their disinclination to receive us, the extreme savagery of the women who fled us because we looked dreadful, the state of health that each of us was in, none of these yielded a great hope for any success.<sup>48</sup>

The devotion and sacrifice of the missionaries did not produce the desired results. The attitude of the Kondhs gave the impression that they were not affected by the presence of the missionaries and that their effort to bring about a qualitative change in the lives of the Kondhs were futile. The Kondhs were used to a free and easy-going life. It was very difficult for the missionaries to assemble them for instructions. Hence, they were Christians only in name, and they would resort to various superstitious practices. At the outbreak of any epidemic, for example, they would sacrifice a fowl to propitiate the angry god.<sup>49</sup>

The place where the missionaries lived was a good distance from the plain. The only provisions that they could procure such as salt, tobacco and other small items were sold locally by the merchants and were meant for the Kondhs. Time and again the missionaries had to send their servants to Berhampur. However, Mr. Snaize, a doctor who resided at Aska and was employed at its sugar factory, also helped them.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. E. BONAVENTURE, "Lettre du R.P. E. Bonaventure, de la Société de Saint François de Sales d'Annecy, Missionnaire au Vizagapatam, au T.R.P. Tissot, Supérieur", in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 55 (1883), p. 52.

<sup>48</sup> Fr. Dupont wrote: "Humainement parlant en voyant comment les choses à Coussipanga surtout dans le commencement, nous ne pouvions pas beaucoup nous promettre grande réussite. L'ivrognerie des hommes, leur indifférence pour les choses du salut, leur indisposition à notre égard, l'extrême sauvagerie des femmes qui nous fuyaient comme des êtres redoutables, ensuite l'état maladif où chacun de nous s'est trouvé, rien de tout cela n'était de nature à fournir grand espoir de succès." Dupont to Neyret, Berhampur, September 4, 1854, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>49</sup> Even a small viral fever could play appalling havoc among the Kondhs. The tiger, monarch of the forest, tormented the lives of the people, and could be controlled only by propitiating an angry god or by moving to a different place. Every calamity was taken as a sign of divine displeasure which had to be placated. Cf. M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 225.

<sup>50</sup> The missionaries had a benefactor in Mr. Snaize, who was probably the only expert in mountain fever in that part of the country. His house was open to the missionaries whenever they came down for health reasons. He not only treated them but also entertained them at his house till they were completely cured. If needed, he would send essential items to Surada and Koussipanga whenever the missionaries were in need of them. He would do their linen and send their letters. Even the superior would leave some money

A point of contention was the burial of the dead, a custom introduced by the missionaries.<sup>51</sup> The recently-converted Christians preferred to retain their tradition of cremating the deceased. But the missionaries, especially Fr. Dupont, insisted on burial. After much persuasion the people agreed. Unfortunately, unpleasant incident marred the beginnings of this practice. At the insistence of Fr. Dupont, the family of a deceased young man agreed to bury him. But the villagers did not want the burial. As a result, they quickly dug a shallow grave and buried the young man there. The following night hyenas and jackals devoured the body. People were angry with the missionaries. However, they increased the depth of the graves and employed guards at night.<sup>52</sup> The missionaries felt the need to protect the cemetery from jackals, bears and other wild animals.<sup>53</sup>

### 3.1.4.2 Further Development in KouSSIPANGA

In his letter to Monsieur Mermier, Msgr. Neyret wrote that before the missionaries came down to convalesce, they had prepared about 20 Christians for their First Communion and tried to train some of them as catechists. As the missionaries contracted mountain fever, they realised that it would require no small sacrifice on their part to continue the mission on the mountain.<sup>54</sup> Fr. Dupont received many invitations from the villages around KouSSIPANGA but found it very difficult to travel with mountain fever.<sup>55</sup>

When he returned to his beloved mission, Fr. Dupont continued the work of evangelisation in the neighbourhood of KouSSIPANGA. This time he was invited to one of the central places of the Kondh Mountains. He started his work in Arigadi, a village situated two *lieux* (four miles) from KouSSIPANGA. While the disposition of the Kondhs was not encouraging, the enthusiasm of the Panos was more edifying. The missionaries often utilised the services of Panos as interlocutors when they approached a place where

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with Snaize, so that he would be able to procure whatever the missionaries needed. Fr. Guillermin referred to him in the following words: “C’est monsieur qui nous envoie toutes nos provisions à Souradah et à Coussi, qui fait blanchir notre ligne, qui nous envoie nos lettres etc. . . il se dit tout dévoué à la mission de Conde, et même il s’appelle le quatrième missionnaire Conde. De fait il est rare qu’il nous envoie des provisions sans qu’il nous envoie quelque chose du sien. Sa maison est assez grande, pourtant il veut en bâtir une autre dans sa cour pour nous, afin que nous soyons plus libres. Il est marié et n’a encore qu’une héritière. C’est chez lui qu’on porta le cher P. Richard quand il fut malade en descendant des forêts condes”. Guillermin to Mermier, Ganjam, October 22, 1854, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1. For more information regarding the services of Snaize, see Dupont to Neyret, April 18, 1854, AMSFS 5H5-2/1; Guillermin to Neyret, March 27, 1854, AMSFS 5H5-2/1; M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, pp. 223 – 224.

<sup>51</sup> The local tradition was cremation, whereas the Catholic Church insisted on the burial of the dead.

<sup>52</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, pp. 216 – 217.

<sup>53</sup> Guillermin to Gaidon, Surada, February 21, 1862, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>54</sup> Msgr. Neyret informed Monsieur Mermier: “Ils ont amené dernièrement des montagnes une vingtaine de Néophytes pour les préparer à la 1ère communion et essayer d’en former quelques-uns pour catechistes. Cette Mission nous coûtera beaucoup mais pas autant que nous désirerions à défaut être d’ouvriers nécessaires pour récolter une moisson.” Neyret to Mermier, Visakhapatnam, September 13, 1854, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>55</sup> Tissot to Mermier, Visakhapatnam, December 12, 1854, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

the Kondhs lived. In general, the Panos readily responded to the missionaries' invitation, whereas the Kondhs would wait and follow the Panos.<sup>56</sup> The Panos in Arigadi were so enthusiastic that they expressed their desire to have the presence of a priest among them. In fact, they went to KouSSIPanga twice in order to add weight to their request for a missionary who might stay in their village.<sup>57</sup>

Possession by evil spirits was common among the people, and they looked for remedy to this problem. Often they conducted rites and offered sacrifices with the hope that they would bring an end to the torment of the spirits' victims. In their desperation they turned to the missionaries for help. Fr. Dupont prayed over them and tried to drive the evil spirits away by sprinkling holy water. The people were discouraged when the prayers and blessings of the priest did not bring immediate healing.<sup>58</sup> However, there were some instances of successful exorcisms, which, besides creating an atmosphere of awe and fear among the people, provided a reason for them to trust the missionaries.

Since the Kondh mission did not bring the expected results – many Kondhs were still indifferent and converts often quickly fell away from the church--the missionaries decided to abandon the mission for a while. Added to this was the conviction that a longer stay was impossible without contracting the perilous mountain fever. Concerned for the well-being of his confreres, Msgr. Neyret decided to abandon the mission for a time.<sup>59</sup>

### 3.1.5 Mission at Gojolibady

When the missionaries returned to Berhampur during the monsoon, they were forced to halt at Gojolibady,<sup>60</sup> since the rivers were swollen. Unable to proceed further, their Indian helpers indicated a village where they took refuge. The *Bainihas* (Banias), a

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<sup>56</sup> Fr. Dupont reported the situation of KouSSIPanga to Monsieur Mermier: "Le père Dupont est déjà à CouSSIPanga au sein des montagnes Condes, où il a visité un village appelé Arigadi à deux lieus de CouSSIPanga. C'est un des principaux de tout le pays. Les dispositions des habitans ne paraissent pas encore bien favorables de la part des Condes proprement dits, mais elles sont très consolantes de la part des Panans dont vous avez peut-être entendu parler. C'est un peuple qui n'a pas de nationalité proprement dite. Il n'est ni conde, ni Oriya...Quand nous paraissions dans un village Conde nos principaux interlocuteurs sont les Panans. Nos premières conquêtes, sont les Panans et nous nous servons des Panans pour gagner les autres. Les Condes se contentent de venir après, de répondre après et selon l'intelligence." Dupont to Mermier, December 4, 1854, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>57</sup> Dupont to Mermier, (no place) December 4, 1854, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>58</sup> Fr. M. Domenge wrote: "Cette fois-ci, le Père n'y rien pu, le diable est plus fort que lui". M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 218.

<sup>59</sup> To quote from Fr. Guillermin's letter to Fr. Gaidon: "Le motif de la première décision est l'impossibilité de rentrer à CouSSIPanga, sans y ramasser une fièvre qui nous met à deux doigts du tombeau et l'impossibilité aussi de pouvoir faire un assez long séjour dans ces montagnes pour habituer les habitans à des pratiques religieuses." Guillermin to Gaidon, Berhampur, September 14, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>60</sup> Gojolibady, often referred as Godolobadi, Godervadi, Gayelbadi, etc., a sub-station of the parish of Surada, was the village where Fr. Dupont seemed to have converted a few *Banias*, whom the missionaries called *Bainihas*. As the names of the villages in the mission were difficult, the missionaries pronounced them as close as possible. Very few took steps to spell them correctly. Sometimes the names of the villages are not spelt correctly; they may have found it difficult to record them. For the sake of uniformity the name Gojolibady is used in this study.

kolarian tribe, inhabited the village, and the servants had some relatives there. As Fr. Dupont preached, the people listened to him. They were even willing to be baptised. Thus divine providence helped them to found a new community of Christians.<sup>61</sup> In his report to Msgr. Neyret, Fr. Dupont narrated their harvest in Gojolibady:

On August 4, we reached Godervadi [Gojolibady] where we had the joy of meeting some Christians whom we had baptised last year in Surada. They seemed to be very happy to see us. Since we had the intention of reaching Berhampur at the earliest, we did not think of staying more than a night at Godervadi (Gojolibady). But someone told us that the rivers are full and that it is impossible to cross. We were obliged to stay a few days. But I did not want to spend the days doing nothing. I made an appeal to the inhabitants of a pagan village to adopt Christianity, and the majority of them appeared to be disposed. I hastened to baptise them, and 54 of them received it before our departure. With the other Christians who were there they formed a small congregation of 64. I hope that when we return the number may increase to about 20 more.<sup>62</sup>

In his indomitable courage and missionary spirit, Fr. Dupont proceeded to Ganjam (October 23, 1854) to build a hut among the fishermen, as there was some hope of instructing many of them. Fr. Richard accompanied him. He stayed there ten days for the instructions, after which he went back to KouSSIPANGA.<sup>63</sup>

### 3.1.6 Adaptation and the Emergence of Brahmin Christians

At a time when the missionaries were preoccupied with soul-winning, they were happy to employ any method deemed useful and relevant for their mission work among the people of Orissa. The missionaries were convinced that Christianity had to be preached in a way acceptable to all, irrespective of castes and that restricting Christianity to the people of low-birth would only mean contempt. So far the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales (MSFS) found reception only among the Panos and Kondhs, both from humble origins. Therefore, they commenced evangelisation among those of higher castes, especially the Brahmins.<sup>64</sup> According to the missionaries, the Brahmins did not want to accept Christianity for the fear of losing caste, a social stigma that would bring ostracism.<sup>65</sup> The missionaries were convinced that the caste system could not be dispensed with, because it was embedded in the Indian psyche. To carry on the work among them, one had to be reconciled with this fact.<sup>66</sup> Although the missionaries sought Brahmin converts, they also realised that their hard labour among

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<sup>61</sup> NEYRET, "Extrait d'une lettre de Msgr. Neyret, évêque d'Olène et Vicaire Apostolic de Visagapatam, à MM. les Directeurs de l'Œuvre de la Propagation de la Foi", p. 360.

<sup>62</sup> For a detailed report on the conversion at Gojolibady, Cf. Dupont to Neyret, Berhampur, September 4, 1854, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>63</sup> Guillermin to Mermier, Ganjam, October 22, 1854, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>64</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 227.

<sup>65</sup> Tissot to Gaiddon, Surada, April 29, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>66</sup> Dupont commented: "Pour l'indien, l'affaire de caste est tout et le reste l'intéresse bien peu. Généralement parlant, les choses de la vie future ne le touchent pas et le préoccupent encore moins." Dupont to Mermier, Surada, November 8, 1858, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

the Panos or others from a lower caste was justified--despite the discouraging results--since true conversions marked deeper attitudinal changes on the part of such people who had been stigmatised as criminals.<sup>67</sup> Fr. Tissot stated that Fr. Seigneur had already found his first Brahmin followers in 1857. Fr. Seigneur had planned to instruct them in Christianity so that one day they could become catechists and would lead both Brahmins and others to Christ.

### 3.1.6.1 Opting for the Adaptation Method

The reasons for choosing the adaptation method became clearer when the missionaries read the work of Fr. Joseph Bertrand, *La Mission du Maduré d'après les documents inédits*. The work illustrated the approach of the Jesuit missionaries in Madurai in converting both the Brahmins and other Hindus. The MSFS fathers in the Ganjam mission were fascinated by the content of the book; they admired particularly the method used by Fr. Robert de Nobili. They were searching for ways to penetrate into the interior areas, and so they were convinced that the best way of leading the entire populace to Christ would be through the conversion of the Brahmins, who had a respectable position in the caste hierarchy. The missionaries read the work several times and wanted to apply the methods used by Fr. De Nobili in the Ganjam mission.<sup>68</sup> Once their approach was even praised by a village chief, who stated that "If we come now, the others would not come; but if they start and if we follow, then they would not say anything".<sup>69</sup> Fr. Seigneur explained:

Our progress in the ministry of the divine word met with great obstacles among the honourable portion of the Indian population. This difficulty comes, as you know, from the insurmountable horror that they have for foreigners or rather for those who do not belong by birth to both the faith and the strong fidelity to the customs of the caste, do not belong to the hierarchy of the pretended nobility. During the first years of our stay in Surada, knowing their touchiness on this point, we stayed in a village away from the capital. Our hut was hidden in the jungle. We could scarcely have contact with anyone but pariahs. But afterwards, having placed our

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<sup>67</sup> Fr. J.M. Tissot informed Fr. Gaiddon: "Avant que l'Angleterre se rendait maître de ces contrées, ils (the panos) étaient la terreur de tout le pays, c'étaient de vrais brigands. Vous comprenez par là que l'oeuvre qui a été commencée n'est que l'oeuvre d'un jour, il faudra bien du temps pour les changer entièrement. Cependant, je dois vous dire, mon cher, que j'ai trouvé en eux un grand changement. Dimanche dernier, un bon nombre d'enfants ont reçu la sainte communion. Quand ils viennent confesser ils disent: Père je viens vous trouver pour dire d'enlever mes péchés. Si vous les voyiez à la chapelle prier, chanter, vous en seriez content, j'en suis sûr." Tissot to Gaiddon, Surada, April 29, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>68</sup> Fr. Seigneur wrote: "Pour avoir une idée de la réserve et du qui vive dans les quels nous vivons depuis ce changement d'habitudes vous n'avez qu'à lire, si vous la trouvez, l'histoire des missions du Maduré et du Carnatic sous les reverends pères Robert de Nobilibus (Nobilis), Conçalve Fernandez, Bouchet. Ceux là étaient parvenus à déguiser leur origine." Seigneur to Gaiddon, Surada, February 12, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1; Fr. Dupont sent some favourable arguments for the method used by the missionaries to Clavel: "Comme ici les Brahms sont les plus considérés et qu'ils se regardent eux-mêmes comme de petits dieux, la conversion de quelques-uns d'entre eux fait plus de bien que celle de plusieurs autres personnes de basse condition." Dupont to Clavel, Surada, February 7, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>69</sup> Fr. J.M. Tissot narrated the incident in following manner: "Nous voudrions bien vous trouver maintenant, nous autres pauvres gens, mais si nous venons les autres ne voudront pas venir: si eux commencent et que nous venions après, ils ne diront rien." Tissot to Gaiddon, Surada, April 29, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.



confidence in the infinite mercy of God and also foreseeing that we could not succeed even with the people of lower origin, when our holy religion became only the religion of latter, we chose a site for a chapel at the entrance of the big town of Surada.<sup>70</sup>

The missionaries recognised that the earliest converts from the lower castes did not have a favourable reputation among the rest of the population.<sup>71</sup> Therefore they wanted to begin their apostolic work among the Brahmins. In this way, they believed that they would remove the stigma attached to Christianity as *Parangi Margam* (the way of the Westerners or those who had been westernised). However, it is worth noting that the desire to obtain Brahmin Christians compelled them to refuse the request for baptism from none other than the village chief himself!<sup>72</sup>

### 3.1.6.2 Some of the Customs Adapted by the Missionaries

In observing the practices of higher castes, one has to keep in view certain fundamental principles: (1) the Brahmins were forbidden to drink liquor and to eat meat; (2) they had to avoid any contact with the people of a lower origin, such as the Panos, the untouchables; (3) the higher castes did not like to leave a corpse in the house for fear of pollution; and (4) the use of saliva in the baptismal rite as the use of saliva had to be dropped, as it is an unacceptable practice for an Indian. Fr. Seigneur tried to follow all the above-mentioned principles.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Fr. Seigneur described the importance of choosing the method: “Notre progress dans le ministère de la parole divine rencontre de grands obstacles parmi la portion honorable de la population indienne. Ces difficultés proviennent comme vous le savez de l’horreur insurmontable qu’ils ont pour les étrangers ou plutôt pour tous ceux qui par naissance et par une fidélité à toute épreuve aux usages de la caste, ne se trouvent pas ranagés parmi les degrés de leur prétendu noblesse. Durant les premières années de notre séjour à Sourada connaissant leur susceptibilité sur ce point, nous restâmes dans un village un peu éloigné de la capitale. Notre cabane était cachée dans un bois et nous n’avions guère de rapports qu’avec des parias. Mais ensuite nous confiant en l’infine miséricorde de Dieu et prévoyant aussi que nous n’irons pas bien loin même avec les gens de basse naissance si notre sainte religion devenait seulement la religion de ces derniers. Nous choisîmes un emplacement pour une chapelle à la porte de la grande ville de Surada.” Seigneur to Gaidon, Surada, February 12, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>71</sup> Tissot to Gaidon, Surada, April 29, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> The first principle does not require any elucidation as the Brahmins ate vegetarian food. Regarding the second principle: Though the majority of the Christians of the Ganjam mission were Panos, the missionaries who practised adaptation did not keep contact with them. Once one of the Fathers visited Fr. Seigneur at Surada to administer a certain medicine. Fr. Seigneur came out to meet the visitor, who was given a corner in which to sit, following the custom of the people. He was not invited by Fr. Seigneur to enter the house. So strong was the mentality that a Pano could not even touch their cooking utensils. The third principle: In order to avoid polluting the house, the higher castes took all precautions in not allowing a person to die in it. When the person was on his deathbed, they took his bed and other belongings to the rear side of the house. The fourth: Whatever touches the mouth cannot be used, as it is polluted. The higher castes do not touch the lips with the glass when they drink water. They have their own plates for a meal, i.e. a banana leaf, which can be disposed of after its use. They use the right hand to take food. The Indians kiss a venerable object with the eyes, and not with the mouth. They never allow spitting in the house. Cf. Périssin to Faber, Surada, February 12, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2 1.

Fr. J.M. Tissot, superior of the mission in the north, argued in favour of applying the adaptation method in order to convert more people to Catholicism. The principal accusations hurled at the missionaries were that they buried the dead instead of cremating them and that both the pariahs and noble people were allowed to worship in the same chapel. There were no purificatory ceremonies in Christianity, especially after the death of the family members. There were also other less significant accusations.<sup>74</sup> Fr. Seigneur insisted that the adaptation method was not the fantasy of a single person but a collective decision. He wrote: “Before we decided to live this way of life in Surada [as *gurus*, teachers or *sanyasis*, holy men], we went to Visakhapatnam for our annual retreat and examined the means or methods for the success of our project. The proposal to live a life of a *Sanyasi*, a scholar well-versed in religion [who commanded the respect of the people], was accepted as the method.”<sup>75</sup> In order to avoid any misunderstanding, a certain distance was to be kept from other Europeans, as they were considered to be *Sahibos* or lords (a title usually frowned upon as it recalled fear).<sup>76</sup>

Following the practice of Fr. Robert de Nobili, they learned and observed the manners and customs of the higher castes of the place. They wanted to imitate the lifestyle of the *Gurus* or *Sanyasis* by observing such practices as walking barefoot or using wooden sandals, eating only vegetarian food (rice, milk, vegetables and fruit) and avoiding the use of meat and any food prepared by someone other than a Brahmin. They also adopted certain purificatory rite: such as morning ablutions and cleansing oneself after contact with impure objects or persons.<sup>77</sup> They avoided interactions with the pariahs; whenever they had to deal with pariahs they followed the custom of

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> It is worth recording some aspects of the letter of Fr. Seigneur to Fr. Gaiddon here: “Car à proprement parler ce titre de *Sanyasis* ne vient de droit, qu’à nous seuls, puisque non seulement aux yeux des hommes, mais aussi sous les regards de la divine majesté nous nous vouons à une chasteté perpétuelle et que notre qualité de religieux et de chrétiens nous engage à ne nous attacher à aucune chose au monde. Ce qui est la soit - disant vie des *Sanyasis*. Car sachez le bien, le désir d’obtenir une place dans leur prétendu *baikonto* (paradis) n’est pas ce qui les tourmente. La gloire de passer sur la terre pour une espèce de divinité est en general le dernier repos de leur ambition.” Seigneur to Gaiddon, Surada, February 12, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1. Information regarding the retreat and the need to find a suitable method and some rules for guiding their missionary endeavours are mentioned in the letter of Fr. Tissot. Cf. Tissot to Mermier, Surada, January 20, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>76</sup> Perissin to Faber, Surada, February 12, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>77</sup> Here is a list of items that are forbidden for the caste: “1. Il faut quand on mange à la maison, que personne ne vienne regarder, soit à la fenêtre, soit à la porte. 2. Il ne faut pas toucher une personne de basse caste, pas même un morceau de bois, quand elle le toucherait en même temps. 3. Il faut bien se garder de mettre les pieds sur une natte où il y aurait une personne de base caste. 4. Il faut se moucher avec les doigts sans difficulté. 5. Il ne faut pas manger de la vache ni boire aucune liqueur. 6. Il ne faut pas manger d’oignons, ni d’oeufs. 7. Ni de la poule, ni du porc, ni de l’ours, ni du renard et d’un grand nombre d’animaux, surtout des oiseaux d’ici, et dont je ne sais pas les noms. 8. Il faut se baigner tous les jours et plusieurs fois par jour, il faut priser beaucoup de tabac. 9. Il faut bien se garder, quoi que vous mettiez, à le toucher; cet objet est souillé. Il faut bien se garder en cachetant une lettre de radoucir le cachet avec de la salive, s’ils le voyaient, ils ne voudraient pas la porter à la poste... 10. il faut chaque fois que l’on va manger, changer d’habit, etc”. Piccot to Gaiddon, Surada, May 10, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1. Fr. Perissin recorded four important aspects held by brahmins: 1. prohibition of liquor and meat; 2. avoidance of any contact with pariahs and other polluting castes; 3. prohibition of a corpse at home; and 4. avoidance of saliva. Cf. Périssin to Faber, Surada, February 12, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

maintaining a prescribed distance. They also preferred to give up their western habits of dress and used the saffron cloth for the cassock. Following the example of the *pundits*, the literati of Orissa, Fr. Seigneur used a pair of wooden sandals and a turban.<sup>78</sup>

Once a Brahmin from Benares who was on pilgrimage to Jagannath Puri with his two sons met with Fr. Michel Périssin,<sup>79</sup> who was then in charge of the Cuttack Mission. As the missionary explained to him the true path to salvation, the Brahmin decided to embrace Christianity. He received baptism and was sent to Surada where he worked as a cook.<sup>80</sup> He thus made it possible for the missionaries, who had been eager to reach the higher castes like the Brahmins, to observe the typical mode of behaviour befitting a Brahmin. One of their subsequent successes in the village was the conversion of an influential Brahmin, who requested the missionaries to baptise him. He was known to be intelligent and commanded the respect of the people. The missionaries took pride in this conquest, as his presence in the village and his work would bring an immense benefit to the church.<sup>81</sup>

### 3.1.6.3 Fr. Joseph Seigneur, the ‘Robert de Nobili’ of Orissa

Since his appointment to Berhampur District, Fr. Joseph Seigneur was noted for his ability to learn the different languages of the place. He had been with Fr. Dupont on the Kondh Mountain for some time but was unable to remain there because of mountain fever. He was later sent to Surada to continue the work of evangelisation.

Following the illustrious example of Fr. Robert de Nobili, Fr. Seigneur adopted certain customs of the people, which, he thought, did not have any religious overtones. He used to meet regularly with the Brahmins to converse with them. Due to the constant flow of visitors, he was unable to keep a regular correspondence with Europe. Fr. Seigneur was also busy with the formation of catechists. However, he was concerned

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<sup>78</sup> Fr. Avrillon wrote: “Ainsi ils ont adopté une chaussure à la brahmine, un ornement ou un surtout à la brahmine, une soutane de couleur des toiles de Brames. Il paraît que le bon Dieu va bénir. N’est-ce pas le vieux principe de se faire tout à tous? Un célèbre missionnaire, le Rev. Père de Nobili disait: je me fais indien pour sauver les Indiens., et il n’en a pas peu converti. (Histoire du Maduré).” Avrillon to Clavel, Berhampur, February 14, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1; Dupont to Clavel, Surada, February 7, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1; P. ROSSILLON, *La Croisade pour la Conversion du Monde. Les Missionnaires de S. François de Sales dans l’Hindoustan*, Chambéry 1926, p. 18; M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 227.

<sup>79</sup> Michel Périssin-Faber was born on June 14, 1827, at Grand-Bornand. He was one of the great grand nephews (on his mother’s side) of Blessed Peter Faber, one of the first companions of St. Ignatius Loyola. Before his entrance into the Society he repaired the chapel built in the birthplace of Faber (Villaret). He was a missionary at Cuttack between 1857 and 1866. He worked also in Berhampur and Surada. He was very active during the great famine in collecting the children and providing help for them. He might have baptised about 1200 children during that epoch. He spent time with the orphan children and they had great respect for him. He died at Surada on November 10, 1874. Cf. M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, *op. cit.* p. 350; F. Moget, *MSFS Obituary*, p. 95.

<sup>80</sup> Seigneur to Gaiddon, Surada, February 12, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2 1.

<sup>81</sup> Fr. Dupont wrote about a precious conquest of an influential and intelligent Brahmin: “Il s’impose déjà de traduire en vers les compositions... que fait le père Seigneur sur diverses matières. Sa première pièce a été le symbole de sainte Athanase avec une courte mais petite invocation à la Très Sainte Trinité qu’il a faite lui-même. Maintenant il s’occupe de la traduction d’un traité du paradis dont il a déjà quelques milliers de vers. Un jour qu’il en lisait un chapitre il ne pouvait contenir ses larmes tant il paraissait ému du sujet.” Dupont to Mermier, Surada, November 10, 1858, AMSFS, 5H5-2 1.

about the lack of good catechetical literature (prayers, hymns and songs in Oriya), which would serve the catechists when they went to the villages to evangelise. He wrote to Monsieur Mermier that he had a constant flow of Brahmin visitors who came to discuss religion with him.<sup>82</sup> Reporting on the manner of life of the confreres, Fr. Périssin wrote: “Our dear confreres of this station conform scrupulously to all the rules of caste, i.e. Brahmin. Their lives are like those of the Brahmins and even more perfect than theirs, because many things are allowed for the Brahmins but prohibited for our confreres. On this aspect I have no fear to propose this as an important model for all Indians to follow. Fr. Seigneur, this good father, would not even allow himself a slight transgression from the rules of caste.”<sup>83</sup> Great were the sacrifices of the missionaries, and they did this willingly with a hope of winning souls for Christ.<sup>84</sup>

Unlike Fr. De Nobili, Fr. Seigneur did not build a hut in the Brahmin quarters, but he built one separate from the presbytery. He would retire there for study and prayer. He would receive visitors at certain hours only. The conversations with the Brahmins and other literati treated God, the soul, religion and some philosophical truths. Constant discussion about Hindu sacred texts obliged Fr. Seigneur to study Sanskrit.<sup>85</sup> Soon his fame spread, and people came from far and wide to discuss religion with him. He was also kind to those who would approach him for any blessing. He would bless the children brought by their mothers, who appreciated the fact that he held the children in his own hands, a symbolic gesture of special grace conferred by a religious person.<sup>86</sup>

He was so strict with the observance of vegetarianism that he reprimanded his cook one day when he found him roasting meat. He was aware that this could estrange people from the missionary, and it would be hard to remove any misunderstandings caused by this. In his heroic efforts of adaptation he quickly ruined his health. Disappointed by the lack of interest shown by the Brahmins, Fr. Seigneur and the other missionaries freely decided to give up their efforts of evangelising them in Orissa. In

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<sup>82</sup> Seigneur to Mermier, Surada, February 13, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2 1; Tissot to Gaiddon, Surada, April 29, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2 1.

<sup>83</sup> Périssin to Faber, Surada, February 12, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2 1. One could note the frustration in the letter of Fr. Guillermin, who felt that the adaptation method practised by the missionaries went to an extreme: “Nous avons eu beau nous assujeter à tous les usages de caste, aller même plus loin qu’eux sur ce point, faire des choses les plus révoltantes et les plus opposées à nos idées Européennes, nous ne passerons jamais pour des gens de caste.” Guillermin to Gaiddon, Berhampur, September 14, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2 1.

<sup>84</sup> In his report to the Holy See, Msgr. Neyret wrote: “Per nonnullos annos quidam missionarii ex illa spe quod si semel infideles nobilioris castae conversaeissent omnes ceateri facile illos sequerentur, toto animo et magnum cum privationibus et sacrificiis in illorum conversione incuberunt; sed frustra omnio ideo illos derelinquentes ad infideles infirmae castae”. Msgr. Neyret to Cardinal Barnabò, Vizagapatam, October 25, 1860, APF Indie Orientali: Scrittura Riferite nei Congressi, vol. 17, ff. 1408 – 1414.

<sup>85</sup> Fr. Decompoix illustrated the need to learn many languages in the mission to Gaiddon: “un ouvrier plein de zèle et de forces, pour qui l’étude des langues était un amusement, une jouissance; aussi savait-il le Malabar (Tamil), le Telingu, le konde (kui), l’oria (Oriya), l’Indoustani (Hindustani, which is now called Hindi), et l’anglais.” Decompoix to Gaiddon, Vizagapatam, May 7, 1861, AMSFS 5H5-2 1; for Fr. Seigneur’s linguistic abilities see, M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 230.

<sup>86</sup> Tissot to Gaiddon, Surada, April 29, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

1860 Fr. Seigneur was transferred to Palkonda, where he died at the age of 36 of cholera contracted from the mangoes offered by one of his disciples.<sup>87</sup>

### 3.1.6.3.1 Fr. Seigneur and Aroto Misro, a Brahmin convert

One of the Brahmins who had an influence on the people of Surada and who had the talent of composing lyrics in Oriya was converted by Fr. Seigneur. His name was Aroto Misro. Fr. Seigneur used the special talents of the Brahmin convert to compose lyrics in Oriya in order to explain the truths of the Christian faith, Christian morals and the sacraments.<sup>88</sup> With his knowledge of the sacred scriptures of the Hindus, he was a great help to Fr. Seigneur whenever the people came to him to discuss certain important aspects of the Christian faith. Together with Aroto Misro, Fr. Seigneur wrote the *Catholic Bhagavata*, considered to be on a par with the *Bhagavat Gita*, a pearl of the literature and philosophy of the Hindus. Some of the missionaries even thought that the *Catholic Bhagavata* replaced the *Bhagavat Gita* of the Hindus. Fr. Seigneur wrote: “Since we are the first missionaries in the Oriya land, we are obliged to write ourselves the prayers, songs, etc. I am in charge of this work and I have under me one of the important Brahmins of this place. He asked me to baptise him many times, but it needs to be seen. His little daughter is baptised and she is called Mary. The name of the Brahmin is Aroto Misro.”<sup>89</sup> Contrary to the claims of some of the missionaries, it is probable that Aroto Misro wrote the *Catholic Bhagavata* in its poetic form. Inspired by Dante’s ‘Divine Comedy’, Fr. Seigneur might have encouraged the erudite Brahmin to put Catholic teaching into an epic form, modelling it after the current literary style. The work, the missionary claimed, was considered to be excellent by the educated and was generally appreciated.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, Aroto Misro was an invaluable addition to the mission. He had the intention of working as catechist. His first work was the ‘Symbol of St. Athanasius’, which included a short invocation to the Holy Trinity. He also busied himself with a treatise on paradise, which ran for thousands of verses.<sup>91</sup> The conversion of Aroto Misro raised the hope of the missionaries for a richer harvest.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> P. ROSSILLON, *La Croisade pour la Conversion du Monde*, p. 18.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 18. Speaking of the songs composed by the Brahmin convert of Fr. Seigneur, Fr. Domenge wrote that there were only two complete copies. The songs showed the verve and talent of the author. The latter claimed that those who knew Oriya appreciated the work. Unfortunately no copy of the work is found in AMSFS. Cf. M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 229.

<sup>89</sup> Seigneur to Gaiddon, Surada, February 12, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1; P. ROSSILLON, *La Croisade pour la Conversion du Monde*, p. 18. For a detailed study on *Catholic Bhagavata* see I. SORENG, *Odiyare o Odiya Sahithyore Khristodharmo* (Christianity in Orissa and Oriya Literature) (in Oriya), Berhampur 1998, pp. 324 – 340.

<sup>90</sup> It is possible that Fr. Seigneur composed the *Catholic Bhagavata* based on Dante’s Divine Comedy, for which Misro rendered the poetic form. This claim is substantiated by the similarity in structures. Fr. Dupont reported that in 1858, while translating the treatise on Paradise, Misro was in tears. Cf. Dupont to Monsieur Mermier, Surada, November 10, 1858, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1; I. SORENG, *Odiyare o Odiya Sahithyore Khristodharmo*, pp. 324 – 340.

<sup>91</sup> Dupont to Mermier, Surada, November 10, 1858, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

<sup>92</sup> Fr. Dupont presented Aroto Misro to Monsieur Mermier: “Sans rien dire de plus de ce nouveau disciple, vous voyez combien la conquête en serait précieuse quand il viendrait: ex toto corde, son

### 3.1.6.4 Failure

In spite of their earnest efforts to remove the stigma attached to Christianity, i.e. that it belonged to the lower caste people, the missionaries felt that their efforts were futile. In his letter to Monsieur Mermier, Fr. Dupont described the difficulty in getting the Brahmins into the Church: “In spite of our efforts to live and act like them, in the hope of winning more distinguished people, we need to wait. Whatever we do, there is always the indelible fact that we are Europeans and neither Brahmins nor penitent Indians. We cannot change our origin. Yet the Indians have a certain aversion to the Europeans, their manners and customs.”<sup>93</sup>

The situation of Fr. Robert de Nobili was different. During the time of De Nobili Europeans were relatively unknown, and he could use his identity as a priest and his noble birth to influence the Brahmins. It proved to be effective, and the people readily accepted his claims. However, after several centuries of uninterrupted contact with Europeans, and more specially when people began to harbour a certain hatred for them, it was more difficult for Fr. Seigneur and his companions to touch the hearts of the Brahmins.<sup>94</sup>

Although Fr. Dupont emphasised in his letters that some individuals from higher castes had come to Christianity out of pure motives and showed interest in learning the prayers, their number was always negligible. He did not favour their service and was convinced that there was no hope for them. The only person who remained faithful was the cook, whose children were sent to the orphanage at Surada. In sum, the efforts at Surada to convert the Brahmins did not produce the desired results. There were only four Brahmin Christians, and these in fact were their domestic workers. Fr. Seigneur instructed them in view of training them as catechists.<sup>95</sup> However, one thing was clear: whether their converts were Brahmins or pariahs, they were all under the influence of the Hindus. If their chiefs were favourable to Christianity, they would have no problem in accepting it. Otherwise, even after having received baptism, they were inclined to return to their former religion.<sup>96</sup>

There was a rumour among the Panos that the missionaries received plenty of money from Europe for the people but spent it on themselves rather than distributing it to the newly-converted Christians. Without verifying such allegations, the Panos

exemple et ses œuvres nous seraient un bien immense et on pourrait presque conclure à la réussite de notre œuvre.” Dupont to Mermier, Surada, November 10, 1858, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

<sup>93</sup> Dupont to Mermier, Surada, November 8, 1858, AMSFS, 5H5-2 1; Dupont expressed the concern that due to shortage of funds the missionaries could not have trained catechists to follow up the mission among the higher castes, especially where the Europeans were unwanted guests. They even resolved to sacrifice some their comforts in order to raise the resource needed for this end. Cf. Dupont to Clavel, Surada, February 7, 1857, AMSFS, 5H5-2 1.

<sup>94</sup> It is worth recalling the general hatred which exploded against Europeans during the *Sepoy Mutiny* of 1857, a violent rebellion of Indian soldiers in northern and central India. Dupont to Mermier, Surada, November 8, 1858, AMSFS 5H5-2/1; M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, pp. 231- 232.

<sup>95</sup> In his letter to the superior Fr. Périssin wrote: “que tous les efforts de nos Pères furent inutiles. One ne voulut plus entendre parler de notre sainte religion”. Périssin to Superior, (no place) September 12, 1858, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

<sup>96</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 233.

demanded their share of money. The missionaries protested against such calumnious attacks but to no avail. It was certainly for this reason that some of the village chiefs deserted Christianity. Fr. Dupont commented: “The Christian Panos, except the chiefs who received two *annas* on every Sunday, were no longer coming to the Church.”<sup>97</sup> The Panos also resented the favouritism shown to the Brahmins and others of higher caste.

In their desire to convert the people of high caste, the missionaries adopted the local dietary practices, which ultimately affected their health. Hence, it proved impossible to live in such a difficult climate. Fr. Dupont complained that it was rare to find a conversion based on the purest of motives. The Panos and Kondhs looked for temporal rewards. Even Aroto Misro left the mission and took up the job of a priest in one of the temples because he thought that he had not been rewarded sufficiently for his conversion. It was said that some of the Brahmin Christians never received the sacraments of penance and Eucharist.

In view of such discouraging results and mixed motives on the part of the local Christians, the missionaries decided to send a memorandum to the vicar apostolic of Visakhapatnam asking to select a more favourable place for them to exercise their missionary activity. Instead in May 1859 Msgr. Neyret sent Fr. Tissot to study the situation of the mission and send him a report.<sup>98</sup> Having received the report, Msgr. Neyret went to Cuttack on a pastoral visit. On the way there he paid a visit to Surada (in 1860) to assess the situation personally. He finally decided to abandon the project of evangelising the people of higher castes in Surada.

### 3.1.7 Guiding Principles for the Orissa Mission

Once conversions began to increase, the missionaries felt the need to coordinate their efforts through certain common principles, which would secure the unity and continuity of the Ganjam mission. The missionaries gathered together for discussion in October 1858 under the leadership of Fr. Tissot, Superior of the Mission. This was the first time that they ever came together to decide on a course of action, which normally was left to the discretion of the individual. The Guiding Principles for the Orissa Mission were approved them in October 1858 by Msgr. Neyret, vicar apostolic of Visakhapatnam. All missionaries working in Orissa were exhorted to read these rules during their retreat and to reflect on their implementation. The rules touched every aspect of their life and the mission.

A summary of these guiding principles (a rather long list divided into thirteen subsections) follows.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Domenge cites Fr. Dupont who wrote: “Les Chrétiens pâhnos à l’exception des chefs, à qui l’on donne deux annas par Dimanche, ne viennent plus à l’église.” Ibid., p. 234. An *anna* was smallest denomination of money, which was equivalent to 6 paise.

<sup>98</sup> Apart from the reference found in M. Domenge’s *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, no document relating to the report has survived in the General Archives of the MSFS. One is left only with the information that Fr. J. Tissot presented the report to Msgr. Neyret in view of the larger interests of the mission. Cf. Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>99</sup> The general archives of MSFS do not indicate whether these principles were actually in force in the Ganjam mission. The letters and reports consulted are silent about this.

Having recognised the role of the village chiefs (headman, catechist, clerk, *salvady*, etc.), the missionaries were asked to maintain a good rapport with them and to work in close collaboration with them, giving them due respect. The respect accorded to the chiefs should be equal to that shown to elder confreres. In general, the missionaries should not accept a candidate for the sacraments (i.e. baptism, marriage and confession) unless presented by the chief. Those guilty of an offense should be punished according to the local custom, but the chief should take the lead in rendering justice. Missionaries should intervene only when they felt that the punishment was unjust. The *salvady* and the poor of the chapel should be the priest's consultors. In case the missionary wished to talk to one of the Christians, it was best to call him or her through these consultors.

In general, the priest should not approve the chief's verdict of excommunication, since that affected the members of a family.

Baptism should be celebrated according to the custom of the universal Church. The children should be baptised within a period of ten days, in order to avoid mortal sin. The missionaries should ensure that the catechist knew how to administer baptism. However, he was not allowed to baptise, where a priest resided, except in *articulo mortis*. If he had to perform a baptism, he should do it in the presence of the chief.

Wherever the priest resided, First Communion should be celebrated with solemnity. The first communicants should be taught the catechism for a determined period. They should be asked to read a chapter of the catechism before Mass, instead of reciting prayers.

The first time a priest visits a community he should begin with a census, recording all the particulars possible. The visits of the missionaries should always be announced in advance. The missionary had to see to it that the faithful did not follow superstitious practices, visit temples, or visit the tombs of pagans. They also must not indulge in criminal activities. It would be good to bless their houses each year.

According to the local custom, the community on certain occasions forced some people to marry. On such occasions the priest should close an eye and allow them to do so. If the person refused to marry the girl he had seduced, he should be condemned and be made to pay for the damages according to the rules of the community. The gift offered to the priest during the time of marriage should be accepted in the presence of the village chief. The community should provide for the expenses of the priest.

Only priests, brothers and sisters on a journey could stay at the church. Without the permission of the parish priest no one should be allowed to bury their dead in the cemetery. The priest may or may not accompany the dead body to the cemetery. In all this local custom should prevail.

Missionaries should allow the people to celebrate the Christian feasts according to their custom, i.e. Christmas, Good Friday, etc. The beating of drums should be tolerated for the feast but should not be allowed in the church. Plays, if not scandalous to the manners of the locality, should be allowed.

The principal aim of the schools should be to impart religious instruction. Therefore, the missionary should ensure that the catechism is taught in the school. If time permits, he himself should teach catechism. The children from Malabar (Tamils) who study in English schools should be encouraged to learn the prayers in their own language. Non-Christians could be admitted to our schools. The offerings should be fixed for marriage,



Mass and burial in the cemetery. The benefactors should be buried in the cemetery without any charge.

Every year there should be spiritual exercises conducted by one of the priests. Children before their first communion should also be asked to go through this spiritual exercise. It is desirable that the community recite the essential aspects of our faith before the Eucharist.

### **3.1.8 Reasons for abandoning the Ganjam Mission**

The missionaries decided to abandon the Ganjam mission temporarily for the following reasons:

First, experience proved that the missionaries could not penetrate the jungle and live in the area without contracting mountain fever, which forced them to leave the place. Those falling victim to the disease found it very difficult to regain their health and to continue their ministry there.<sup>100</sup>

Second, the missionaries found it difficult to employ suitable catechists to instruct the neophytes. A new mission like Ganjam could not prosper without the assistance of trained catechists. Being well-versed in the local customs and language, they could explain the Christian truth in a way acceptable to the simple people. The presence and work of one of their neighbours or relatives as a catechist motivated the people to enter the church in great numbers. Since the missionaries still did not have an adequate knowledge of the local languages, they often depended on their domestic servants, whose translations were defective and who themselves were in need of instruction in the Christian faith.

Finally, in spite of the presence of the priests and their prayers, superstitious beliefs and practices continued to reign among Kondhs. Epidemics or natural calamities or accidents were thought to be the deed of evil spirits. The people still offered sacrifices to placate them.<sup>101</sup> The missionaries did their best to stop all such superstitious practices, but their efforts were fruitless. In their frustration they decided to abandon the mission for a while. However, it was never a question of abandoning centres like Surada. They felt the need to leave a priest there to continue the work among the Panos, and if needed he could also help the Kondhs. Fr. Dupont made it clear: "Our ministry has met indifference, obstacles and contradictions everywhere. Those who are already converted do not correspond to their vocation. In addition to this, there is the usage and prejudices of the caste system, almost ready to ruin all our projects."<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Guillermin to Gaidon, Berhampur, September 14, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>101</sup> There was an outbreak of cholera in the environs of Surada in 1862. Many became victims of the disease. Some of them thought that the epidemic was the result of the anger of the devils; hence they started offering sacrifices to propitiate the angry spirits. Since the Christians lived among the pagans, they were also forced to participate in the sacrifices, which were offered at every full moon. Cf. Guillermin to Gaidon, Surada, February 21, 1862, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>102</sup> Dupont to Mermier, Surada, November 8, 1858, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

These difficulties convinced the missionaries to abandon this part of the mission for the time being.<sup>103</sup> Reflecting on the information provided by the missionaries, Msgr. Neyret felt that the time for the conversion of the place had not yet arrived. Therefore, it was futile to sacrifice the health of the missionaries. He was convinced that their energies and goodwill could be used better elsewhere where they were most needed. Accordingly he decided to leave Fr. Guillermin alone in Surada with the task of helping the existing Christians, while Fr. Seigneur accompanied Msgr. Neyret to Palkondah, where he concentrated on the conversion of the pariahs.<sup>104</sup>

### 3.1.9 Defections and Renegades

#### 3.1.9.1 Defection in Koussipanga

The initial enthusiasm of the Kondhs in Koussipanga soon died down. Christians were unwilling to take part in church activities, and their lukewarmness was accentuated by an incident that provided a cause for defection in 1862. In that year a severe famine was accompanied by an outbreak of smallpox, which ravaged the area. The Kondhs who had been afflicted by this calamity attributed it to the wrath of God because of the toleration and acceptance of the Christian faith and the missionaries in the Kondh Mountains. This view was held by their priest, who claimed that the God of the Christians was the cause for this misfortune in the country. This led to a widespread hatred of the missionaries. At the direction of the *Guru*, a general sacrifice was performed by the traditional priests of the Kondhs in order to propitiate the wrath of God. The people were advised to burn down the hut of the missionary, and if they were to do so in the dead of the night they might be able to burn the missionary as well. However, learning the villagers' evil intentions ahead of time, the missionary's servant removed the priest's belongings and advised him to escape. His belongings were hidden under a tree. Later, Fr. Guillermin found some coolies (porters) to transport them to Surada. Despite the prescribed animal sacrifices and the 'burning of the missionary' along with his hut, the smallpox remained unabated. The villagers were confused as to who could be the cause of this malady. They went again to the site where the hut of the missionary once stood to find out whether the missionary left anything that could continue to cause the calamity. At last they found a stone. Thinking it to be the God of the missionaries, they took it to Surada with due respect. The missionaries had a hearty laugh and explained to the Kondhs that the stone was used by Br. Piccot to sharpen his scythes and tools.<sup>105</sup> Ten years later the people came to Surada and requested Fr. Dupont to visit them. About 18 years after the missionaries left the place, Fr. Jean-Marie Descombes<sup>106</sup> visited Koussipanga.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Perrissin to Faber, February 12, 1859, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1; M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 235.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 341 – 343.

<sup>106</sup> Jean-Marie Descombes was born on January 11, 1856, at Savigny, Savoy. He was ordained a priest on April 24, 1881. He left for India in June 1881. He worked at the Surada mission establishing new mission stations. He was a pioneer at Torobady, where he was fondly called 'the eternal father' by his confreres. Due to illness he returned to France, where he died on arriving at the port of Marseilles on April 24, 1907. Cf. *Tableau Général*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4, F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p.46.

### 3.1.9.2 Defection in Surada (1864)

In spite of the painful decision in 1860 to refrain from seeking converts from higher castes and from the Kondhs at Koussipanga, the mission work among the Panos of Surada continued. Fr. Guillermin was left in Surada to keep the church alive in the two centres where there were some faithful. He also visited a few villages. However, his hard work in Surada met with indifference and coldness. This might have been due to the expectation of the village chiefs, who wanted monetary benefits for their role in bringing the people to the church. When they did not receive something, they prohibited the Christians from going to the church. A warning was circulated that Christianity was incompatible with the traditional religion and that anyone continuing to practice the Catholic religion would be ostracised -- an undesirable state for the Tribals.

The chiefs also convoked an assembly of elders and announced that Christianity was incompatible with the ancient practice of the caste system. They advised all Panos to follow their traditional religion.<sup>108</sup> This arrested the progress of the mission work. Fr. Guillermin consulted legal experts before he took action against the chiefs, who were acting against the law of the land. The case was brought to a superior court in Russelkonda, though the lower court at Surada was competent to investigate it. Realising that they were breaking the law of the land, the chiefs wanted to be reconciled with the priest and the Christians. They offered to revoke the excommunication and to pay a just compensation provided the case against them was withdrawn. However, Fr. Guillermin refused to withdraw it in the hope of teaching the chiefs a lesson so that they would neither trouble him nor the Christians in the future. In order to plead the cause, Fr. Dupont was called from Palcondah. But the verdict turned against the Christians, who did not explain themselves well in the court, whereas the pagan chiefs declared that they neither held an assembly nor prevented the Christians from practicing their religion. In fact the Pano chiefs denied all the accusations. The judge realised that there was little evidence to prove the claims of the Christians, and so he exonerated the chiefs.<sup>109</sup> This decision affected the Pano Catholics in Surada, since they were still a very tiny minority within the community. It led to a general defection of the Panos in 1864.<sup>110</sup> Though they did not apostatise, their practice of religion was paralysed and the

<sup>107</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 343.

<sup>108</sup> Fr. M. Domenge recorded that: "On en vint à convoquer une assemblée générale de toute leur caste, où ils firent déclarer que le christianisme ayant été reconnu incompatible avec les antiques et invariables usages de la caste, défense était faite à tous les *pahnos* de se conformer à cette religion. Ceux qui l'avaient embrassée étaient invités à y renoncer pour toujours; que si quelqu'un persistait à s'en reconnaître l'adepte, il encourrait, par le fait même, le déplaisir de ses concitoyens et serait chassé de la caste." Ibid., p. 339.

<sup>109</sup> Referring to the verdict, Fr. M. Domenge mentioned: "Enfin dit-il [the Judge] aux chrétiens, ne pouvez-vous pas vous tirer d'embarras sans les païens? Quel besoin avez-vous d'eux? Nous n'en avons nullement besoin, répondirent-ils sans voir où tendait cette question. Alors répliqua le juge, réglez vos affaires entre vous, et laissez les païens traiter les leurs." Ibid., p. 341.

<sup>110</sup> Writing about the event, Fr. F. Moget commented on the effect of the court verdict: "The Pano chiefs were triumphant and the Christians crestfallen. It was the end of the Montacallau parish – these poor people did not declare themselves Christians and no conversion could take place any more." F. MOGET, *Early days of the Vishakapatnam Mission 1846-1920*, p. 153.

number of conversions came to a standstill, resulting in the closing of the catechumenate.

In spite of the efforts of the missionaries, all but five families returned to paganism. What was most painful and difficult to understand was the attendant malice and hatred.<sup>111</sup> When Fr. Dupont came to the scene in 1865, the mission was practically in ruins. Writing to the *Propagation de la Foi*, Fr. Etienne Bonaventure<sup>112</sup> narrated:

Because of the mischief and hatred, a schism was caused. In spite of the efforts and tears of the priests, with the exception of five families, all returned to their idols. The church was deserted, they abandoned the priest, the cohabitation was put on the agenda, the children were raised without baptism and the dead burnt in the forest according to their pagan rites.<sup>113</sup>

The church was empty and no one bothered about the Christian faith. Fr. Dupont had the difficult task of rebuilding the community, which he did through his simplicity of life and knowledge of medicine. The Panos and Kondhs appreciated his service. People approached him to settle disputes. He gathered the children who had lost their parents and kept them in orphanages.

### **3.1.10 The Church during the Great Famine**

The Orissa famine or the great famine of 1866 was one of the greatest natural calamities that befell the land. Due to the problem of communication with the rest of the country, Orissa remained isolated. It especially vulnerable because there was no transportation to bring in the necessary commodities. It caused untold suffering for millions of people and left about 3,700,000 dead.<sup>114</sup>

#### **3.1.10.1 Causes of the Famine**

Since Orissa was located at the far corners of two presidencies (Bengal and Madras), the state remained a mere appendix. There was gross negligence of economic development, particularly in agriculture. Since the rivers had not been harnessed to

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<sup>111</sup> E. BONAVENTURE, "Lettre du R. P. E. Bonaventure, de la Société de Saint François-de-Sales d'Annecy, Missionnaire à Vizagapatam, au T. R. P. Tissot, Supérieur", in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 55 (1883), p. 53.

<sup>112</sup> Etienne Bonaventure was born on April 26, 1851, at Dingy-St.Claire, Savoy. He entered the MSFS on January 29, 1872 and was ordained priest on May 26, 1877. In the same year he left for India. He served in the Surada mission up to 1885. In 1885 he was one of three who went to Koraput to explore the possibilities of starting a mission there. He was appointed to establish a station, but sickness did not permit him. He was the principal of St. Aloysius 1888-1891, SFS in Nagpur 1891-1894, St. Aloysius in Visakhapatnam 1894-1898. In 1901 he was made the vicar general of Nagpur, and he succeeded to the see in 1904. He died in France on March 12, 1907, while on holidays to recuperate his health. Cf. *Tableau Général*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4, F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, pp. 33-34.

<sup>113</sup> E. BONAVENTURE, "Lettre du R. P. E. Bonaventure, de la Société de Saint François-de-Sales d'Annecy, Missionnaire à Vizagapatam, au T. R. P. Tissot, Supérieur", in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 55 (1883), p. 53.

<sup>114</sup> For a governmental report of the famine see *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Enquire into the Famine in Bengal and Orissa in 1866*, 2 Vols., Office of Superintendent Government Printing, Calcutta 1867; N.K. SAHU et al., *History of Orissa*, Cuttack 1989, p. 415.

provide irrigation, the people were left to the mercy of the rains.<sup>115</sup> Also, the Madras government did not implement any measure to provide help in times of drought and other natural calamities, and it had no reserve stocks of food. The rainfall in 1865 was scanty, which led to a scarcity of food.<sup>116</sup> The *Zamindars* and the other wealthy individuals had plenty of food and grain, but the government either took no control or relinquished its responsibility. Food was even exported to other parts of India. The price of grain rapidly doubled. Although the exorbitant price temporarily closed the markets, grain began to reach the district through the seaports and was available -- provided there was money to pay for it.<sup>117</sup> The poor were generally illiterate, shy and ignorant of the ways of reporting their misery to the authorities. In his description of the famine, Sahu observes:

In January 1866 rice was not available at any price in Balasore and Puri. It became difficult for the Cantonment authorities to procure grains. In February numerous reports were received of incidents of grain-robbery and deaths on account of starvation. Conditions in the interior areas became so severe that some famine-stricken persons in Mahanga were reported to be eating human flesh by removing it from the dead bodies.<sup>118</sup>

The situation worsened in March 1866 with the outbreak of cholera and smallpox, which claimed a heavy toll in human lives. Drinking water became scarce, followed by widespread reports of the deaths from starvation of both people and cattle in all corners of the district. Realising the gravity of the situation, the commissioner imported grain, but it could not be distributed on account of heavy rains and floods between July and September 1866. Although the government tried to maintain a number of famine centres where cooked food was provided to the poor, they were shut down due to the irregular supply of grain.

### 3.1.10.2 Effects of the Famine

The devastating famine depleted the resources of the people, who sold everything they had (jewels, animals, land, etc.) in order to procure rice, which was sold at exorbitant prices. Gradually the people began to lose their loved ones: many perished during the

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<sup>115</sup> For further information on the misery of the people and on the negligence of the administration, see: G.T. HALY, *Appeal for the Sufferers by the Present Famine in Orissa*, London 1866; N.K. SAHU et al., *History of Orissa*, p. 414; A.C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, Bhubaneswar 1988, p. 285. For a general understanding of the cause of the famine, see *Memorandum of the Scarcity and Drought of 1866-67*, from the *Report on the Administration of the Madras Presidency during the Year 1866-67*, Madras 1867, Appendix iii, lxxvi.

<sup>116</sup> A general report on the mission of Visakhapatnam published in 1866 under the title *Notice sur la Mission de Vizagapatam* declares that there was no production in India and that there was a drought for three years. Cf. Anonymous, *Notice sur la Mission de Vizagapatam*, Annecy 1866, APF Indie Orientali: Scritture Riferite nei Congressi, vol. 19, f. 637.

<sup>117</sup> In his letter Fr. Guillermin lamented the exorbitant price they had to pay for essential commodities. People were leaving the village for the towns with the hope of finding something to fill their stomach. Cf. Guillermin to Tissot, Surada, September 30, 1866, AMSFS, 7Z 5H5.

<sup>118</sup> N.K. SAHU et al., *History of Orissa*, p. 418.

famine and some families even sold their children.<sup>119</sup> The poor in the district began to migrate to places where they could fill their stomachs, while others tried to survive on wild roots and leaves. Fr. Guillermin described the situation with a heavy heart to his bishop, Msgr. Tissot, who was on a visit to Europe: “Almost all the villages around here have suffered more or less. Some of the villages are almost half destroyed and others fully. The misery will not end for them with the harvest. Some people sowed a little part of their land and others nothing at all. What will these miserable people harvest?”<sup>120</sup> According to a report presented in the ‘Annual Report’ of the Madras Presidency, the effect of the famine was horrifying, since more than one third of the population of the Ganjam district perished, and many were left as orphans.<sup>121</sup> The *Administrative Report of the Madras Presidency for the 1866-67* states:

The superficial extent of the area affected by the famine in this district was 2,500 square miles, and the population 631,929 . . . After the distress was over, it was found that 550 orphans had been left without protectors. The Roman Catholic and Baptist missionaries took charge of 400, the government contributing 975 rupees monthly for their support. The maintenance of the remaining 150 was also undertaken by the State, till such time, as they may be able to earn their own subsistence.<sup>122</sup>

Sir Stafford Northcote (the secretary of state for India) gave a speech in the House of Commons which summarised the gravity of the tragedy and acknowledged the gross negligence of the British administration.<sup>123</sup> As a follow-up, the government started

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<sup>119</sup> The general report of the mission narrated: “Impossible de décrire quelles proportions a prises la misère en ces pays, dans ces dernières temps: c’est par milliers qu’il faut chaque jour compter ses victimes. Dans les lieux où le gouvernement ne peut exercer sa surveillance - on trouve plusieurs cadavres sur les routes; personne, tant leur nombre est grand, ne prend soin de les enterrer. Nos missionnaires ont fait un suprême effort, ils ont rassemblé toutes leur ressources, frappé à toutes les portes, contracté de gros emprunts pour soulager une si épouvantable détresse. Leur résidences sont assaillis par les habitants affamés. D’après une lettre récente, on en avait vu plus de cent demander à la fois un peu de riz à un de nos confrères.” Anonymous, *Notice sur la Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 637; M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 335.

<sup>120</sup> Fr. Guillermin observed: “presque tous les villages dans les environs ont plus ou moins souffert; quelques uns sont à moitié détruits d’autres le sont entièrement. Pour eux la misère ne finira pas avec la récolte, car les uns n’ont semé qu’une petite partie de leurs terres, d’autres n’ont absolument rien semé! Que récolteront-ils les pauvres malheureux!” Guillermin to Tissot, Surada, September 30, 1866, AMSFS, 7Z 5H5.

<sup>121</sup> A.C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, p. 290.

<sup>122</sup> Initially the collector relied on the local contribution to overcome the tragedy: the zamindars organised free kitchens on their estates and with the local contribution, the government distributed cooked food in many centres. Besides the ordinary allotment of Rupees 110,215/-, Rupees 48,153/- was spent on relief works during the distress. The governor’s [civil head of the Madras Presidency] visit to Ganjam expedited the relief measures. Cf. *Memorandum of the Scarcity and Drought of 1866-67*, from the *Report on the Administration of the Madras Presidency during the Year 1866-67*, Madras 1867. p. xxix.

<sup>123</sup> Sir Stafford Northcote, the then secretary of state for India, summed up the effect of the Orissa famine in the British House of Commons: “The catastrophe must always remain a monument of our failure, a humiliation to the people of this country, to the government of this country and to those of our Indian officials of whom we had perhaps been a little too proud. At the same time, we must hope that we might derive from it lessons which might be of real value to ourselves, and that out of this deplorable evil, good

many programmes for the social uplift of the people. Besides schools and irrigation canals, the government took the initiative to frame what is known as the Famine Code for India.

### 3.1.10.3 Response of the Missionaries of St. Francis de Sales

During the great famine a good number of Catholics (Panos) left their villages in search of food. Some of them moved into the mountains with the Kondhs with the hope of finding something to fill their stomach.<sup>124</sup> In his letter to Msgr. Tissot, Fr. Richard described the misery of the Christians: “In Surada about 40 people (adults and children) slept in the Lord after having received holy baptism. Frs. Dupont and Guillermin have about 200 people without instruction, but till they are instructed and show a disposition to receive baptism, they cannot be accepted. They need someone in whom they can confide.”<sup>125</sup> As the number of destitute children of both sexes increased, it required immediate attention on the part of the missionaries, who responded rather willingly but, as usual, struggled for funds to undertake such a gigantic enterprise.

Irrespective of their denominations the Christian missionaries were the first to respond to the calamity. Summing up the work of the missionaries in Orissa, Dasarathi Swaro commented: “They were the first men to sound a note of warning with a view to drawing the Government’s attention to the impending problem and rousing the public conscience to the need of alleviating the distress of these people. They raised funds, efficiently organised relief operations, strongly criticised the Government’s in-action and then heartily cooperated with it when it woke up to its responsibility.”<sup>126</sup> The government established kitchens which distributed cooked food. The Brahmins refused this service fearing social ostracism from their caste for taking the food cooked by members of a lower caste.<sup>127</sup> The disastrous effects of the famine required immediate action from the MSFS for especially in favour of abandoned and orphaned children. The missionaries went around gathering children who could be brought to the orphanage, but some of them died on the way. Between June and September 1866, the priest in charge of Berhampur, Fr. Périssin, baptised about 544 children: a good number of them died and the rest were placed in the hands of their non-Christian parents. These were in addition to 125 children gathered at the beginning of September 1865.<sup>128</sup> Writing to Fr. Clavel in 1872, Fr. Périssin observed:

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of no insignificant kind might ultimately arise.” N.C. BEHURIA (ed), *Orissa State Gazetteer*, vol. I, p. 222; N.K. SAHU et al., *History of Orissa*, p. 425; A.C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, p. 290.

<sup>124</sup> Cf. Richard to Clavel, Visakhapatnam, December 18, 1866, AMSFS, 7Z 5H5.

<sup>125</sup> Frs. Dupont and Guillermin were busy with the work of gathering the children and providing them help. They wanted to gather as many as possible, but they had neither personnel nor resources. Cf. Richard to Tissot, Visakhapatnam, October 18, 1866, AMSFS, 7Z 5H5

<sup>126</sup> D. SWARO, *The Christian Missionaries in Orissa*, p. 164.

<sup>127</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 335.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Anonymous, *Notice sur la Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 637. At the beginning of the great famine, Fr. Périssin was in charge of the two mission stations: Cuttack and Berhampur. He went around helping the people in their dire needs. M. Domenge wrote: “Dès le commencement de la famine, il s’était mis à parcourir les villes et les villages de sa juridiction, cherchant surtout les enfants qu’il pourrait baptiser *in articulo mortis*, sans oublier les adultes, que ses aumônes ou leur extrême misère pourraient disposer à

When a few months later the great famine broke out and I had to shelter 5 caste children reduced to misery, I was happy to be in India. Soon, my family counted 15 children, then 20, then 100 – then several hundred which, with the help of Brother John Mary Punisset, I had to clothe, feed, shelter, instruct for baptism and burial. Within 6 months, helped by a few natives, I gave baptism to more than a thousand persons. 245 died in our arms out of 325 I baptised in the chapel, 88 of them during the month of October.<sup>129</sup>

Some of the tales were heart-rending, such as the child found on the dead body of his mother. Francis the catechist generally accompanied the missionary when they went looking for the children. The ones who were sick would be baptised immediately and the others would be taken home. Upon his return the missionary would offer a rupee or two to the family obtaining a promise that they would never reclaim the child after the famine. The children gathered this way would be sent to Berhampur.<sup>130</sup> The number of children under the care of the mission grew, as did the costs. The missionaries needed about 5,000 franks to build an orphanage to accommodate more children.<sup>131</sup> In any case, the missionaries were satisfied with the possibility of baptising them *in articulo mortis*. Mentioning the work of Francis, *Assainissement des marais* recorded: “Brother [catechist] Francis was sent by Father Richard to a place called Khurda, during the famine of 1865 [1866] to baptise the children *in articulo mortis*. When he had baptised nearly 700 of such children, he was accused by the people as a sorcerer and was put into prison, because they said that every child on whom he poured water died, as a rule.”<sup>132</sup> The missionaries were thus constrained to maintain orphanages in Orissa. Every effort was taken to sustain the orphanages with funds collected from abroad and from the government,<sup>133</sup> which paid a monthly allowance of two rupees.<sup>134</sup>

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recevoir sa parole. Il n'eut que peu de succès auprès de ces derniers, mais il recueillit une riche moisson d'enfants. En temps ordinaire, il n'aurait trouvé personne; car, le Hindous ne lui auraient pas permis d'entrer chez eux. Mais, comme leurs maison seraient, selon les préjugés du pays, irrévocablement souillées, si quelqu'un venait à y mourir, ils en faisaient sortir tous les malades dès qu'ils étaient à l'agonie: aussi dans toutes les rues, rencontrait-on des morts et des mourants.” M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 336; R. CUGNET, “Lettre de M. Richard Cugnet, Vicaire general de la mission de Vizagapatam, à MM. les Membres des Conseils centraux de l'Oeuvre de la Propagation de la Foi”, in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 52 (1880), pp. 109 - 110.

<sup>129</sup> Périssin to Clavel, Vizagapatam, May 20, 1872, AMSFS 5H5-2/1.

<sup>130</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 337.

<sup>131</sup> The resources of the missionaries were insufficient to meet the growing needs arising out of the great famine of Orissa. At some time they had to stop taking children to the orphanage. Even the work of the Holy Childhood that was operative in the vicariate of Visakhapatnam was unable to provide for the ever-increasing needs of the people. Cf. Anonymous, *Notice sur la Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 638; *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, Extraite du Registre Officiel, 1845, ASMFS 8Z.

<sup>132</sup> Brother Francis is none other than Francis, the catechist. He was arrested in Khurda for stealing children and giving some medicines that expedited the death of children. After three days, at the intervention of the collector Mr. Francis was released with the injunction that he should not set foot again in the district. Cf. *Assainissement des marais*, *Coupres de Journeaux*, October 17, 1891, AMSFS 5H5-2/3; Richard to Clavel, Visakhapatnam, December 18, 1866, AMSFS, 5H5-2/1.

<sup>133</sup> They were hoping that the number in the orphanage might increase, as the great famine in Orissa was rampant. Cf. *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, Extrait du Registre officiel 1845, AMSFS, 8Z.



Since the missionaries were busy gathering the children, their care was given to some of the women, who were also victims of the famine. They received food and protection from the missionaries. As the number of children grew, they felt the need to open yet another orphanage in Surada itself. Writing about the achievement of Msgr. Tissot, a newspaper cutting of July 25, 1891 says: “The foundation of the agricultural settlements of Surada and adjacent villages which he [Msg. Tissot] made to rise out of the jungles on the hilly tracts of the Ganjam district . . . provided comfort and provision for hundreds of orphans and a large number of paupers.”<sup>135</sup> The missionaries thought of establishing it at Surada, where they had vast enclosures that could serve the purpose. Frs. Dupont, and Guillermin were given charge of the orphanages. The children ranged between eight and ten years of age and sometimes even younger. The older ones were taught to take care of the younger ones. As the health of the little ones was so feeble, many of them soon fell ill. The orphanage looked as though it were a hospital. With their paltry resources the missionaries could not cope with the extra expenses, so they appealed to the charity of the public. The orphanage was enriched by the presence of Dr. Clarke and his wife who, after having served in the British army, came with a pension sufficient to look after themselves. He decided to help the mission in whatever way possible.<sup>136</sup> The order of the day in the orphanage consisted of ‘attending class’, which simply meant that they learnt to read and write Oriya and learnt the rudiments of arithmetic. Since the missionaries prepared the children to take up the cultivation of the fields, the basic knowledge provided, according to their view, would suffice. With the hope of bringing them up as solid Christians, an explanation of the faith was given them. In their free time the children learnt some hymns, which they sang joyfully whenever they went to work.<sup>137</sup>

In order to provide sufficient resources for the orphans and the poor Christians as well as to be self-sufficient, the missionaries purchased two villages: Dantholinghy and Caricotte. The government gave them these places at a minimal cost with the privilege of tax exemption, since they were for charitable purposes.<sup>138</sup> They bought the land at the rate of 10 francs per acre in the northern part of the mission. Though the property was well situated, it was covered with shrubs and needed a lot of work before it could be turned into arable fields. The boys were sent to this property, while the girls remained in Surada with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy, who took care of the girls’ orphanage. The boys went to the forest every day to fell trees and to demarcate fields

<sup>134</sup> Writing on the condition of the orphanage in Orissa, D. Swaro commented: “The orphan boys were looked after by the money until seventeen years of age and for girls the age limit was sixteen. In orphanages boys were trained in various crafts such as weaving, carpentry and blacksmith work. Some were trained as tailors, cooks, servants, bearers, gardeners, etc.; in the mission schools several were engaged as monitors; girls were trained in house-wifery, knitting and needle work.” D. SWARO, *The Christian Missionaries in Orissa*, p. 171; A.C. PRADHAN, *A Study of History of Orissa*, p. 289.

<sup>135</sup> *Coupures de Journeaux*, July 25, 1891, AMSFS 5H5-2/3.

<sup>136</sup> M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 345.

<sup>137</sup> P. ROSSILLON, “Cent Kilomètres sur des Epaules Kondes”, in *Echos Saliènes* 5/10 (1912), p. 153.

<sup>138</sup> Anonymous, *Notice sur la Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 638; Msgr. Tissot to Cardinal Prefect, Vizagapatam, September 13, 1866, APF Indie Orientali: Scrittura Riferite nei Congressi, vol. 19, ff. 652 - 654; *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, Extraite du Registre Officiel, 1845, ASMFS 8Z.

for cultivation. Fr. Guillermin hired some Kondhs to help them, but due to fatigue compounded by the heat and the insalubrious air, he himself contracted a disease that led to his premature death on December 8, 1869, at the age of 47. At the death of Fr. Guillermin, Fr. François Louis Décarre<sup>139</sup> was called from Cuttack and was sent immediately to Thotavally. At this time the children wanted to visit their parents and relatives. Some of them left the orphanage without telling of Fr. Dupont, but later they were brought back to the orphanage. Soon this became a precedent. The missionaries knew well that their return to their relatives was tantamount to returning to paganism. Therefore they took all precautions to avoid that.<sup>140</sup>

When the boys grew up they married the young ladies brought up in the orphanage run by the Sisters of St. Joseph of Annecy in Surada. Such marriages were celebrated with solemnity and pomp. The newly weds were settled in a small village set aside for this purpose; they were also given a plot of land for cultivation, bulls, and other items necessary for a family. This was the dream of the missionaries that the children raised up in such manner would turn out to be faithful Christians.<sup>141</sup> In this way two Christian villages arose in Caricotte and Dantholinghy. As had been hoped, the Catholics brought up in the orphanages and settled on the land allotted to them by the mission proved to be faithful. In writing to the *Propagation de la Foi*, Fr. Bonaventure reported:

We have now 47 families with a lot of little children. The number of the total orphans raised in the orphanage is 237 persons, fully under the charge of the mission. The missionary was their father, their judge, and their doctor. Without any doubt, modern civilisation has not yet reached them; but our children know how to read and write in Oriya; they are able to manage their accounts or counting; they know their morning and evening prayers by heart; and they are able to understand well the truth of their faith.”<sup>142</sup>

There is no doubt that the orphanages brought a qualitative change in the life of the people.

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<sup>139</sup> François Louis Décarre, native of Sales (Annecy, Savoy), was born on December 30, 1840. He was ordained on December 6, 1866. Arriving in India in 1867, he was sent to Vizianagram where he built a school. Upon his arrival in Cuttack 1867-1869 he continued with the school apostolate. As a priest in charge of Surada 1869-1870, he built the orphanage of Thotavally. He also worked as a missionary in Yanam 1870 – 1874. The last years of his life he spent in Cuttack 1874-1905. His end came on October 10, 1906, at Visakhapatnam. Cf. *Tableau Général*, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4, F. MOGET, *MSFS Obituary*, p.88.

<sup>140</sup> To instil fear in the children, the missionaries punished the children who left the orphanage without the permission of the missionary. Cf. M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, pp. 348 – 349.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Fr. Bonaventure informed *Propagation de la Foi* about the progress of the mission: “Nous avons maintenant quarante-sept familles, avec de nombreux petits enfants. Le nombre total des orphelins s’élève à deux cent trente-sept personnes, entièrement à la charge de la mission. Le missionnaire est leur père, leur juge, leur médecin. Sans doute la civilisation moderne n’est pas encore parvenue jusqu’à eux; ils sont capables de tenir leur comptes; ils savent par coeur leur prière du matin et du soir; et peuvent comprendre les vérités de leur foi.” E. Bonaventure, “Lettre du R.P. E. Bonaventure, de la Société de Saint François de Sales d’Annecy, Missionnaire au Vizagapatam, au T.R.P. Tissot, Supérieur”, in *Annales de la Propagation de la Foi* 55 (1883), p. 55.

### 3.1.11 Literary Activities

Language is the vehicle through which one can enter into the life or spirit of any cultural or linguistic group. The missionaries understood this very early, and they profited from the time allotted for learning the language. In the absence of a developed method for learning *Kui*, the language of the Kondhs, the missionaries spent a lot of time studying it. Initially, Fr. Dupont carried a pocket notebook and a pencil to note down the new words that he might learn from the people. In order to learn the right pronunciation, he repeated the sentence till they would approve his pronunciation.<sup>143</sup> In this way, he compiled a dictionary that would serve the French missionaries sent to the Kondh Mountains for mission work. Informing Monsieur Mermier about his activities, Fr. Guillermin wrote:

As for me, when I had a few good moments, I used them to copy a Dictionary, written by the Rev. Fr. Dupont. Some time after I had finished this work that took me a lot of days, I lost it without finding any trace of the same, which I consider a great loss. Such a loss that I did not have the courage to write it again, before the author revised and corrected the edition, because the first edition had many words that were not Cond [Kui]. In the meantime I took down the words that I heard and understood. I had a good number of them when I came down. But unfortunately I lost this new notebook. I recovered it however much later.<sup>144</sup>

As the MSFS were the pioneers in that part of Orissa, out of necessity they had to compose all the prayers and songs in Oriya.

Just as any beginning demands its price and sacrifice, so too did the planting of the church in the Kondh Mountains require dedication and toil. But the missionaries never wavered from that. In spite of the relatively short distance between Ganjam and Gangpur, the inhabitants of the semi-independent state of Gangpur had a different approach to the missionaries and to Christianity. On the Gangpur mission was considered to be a place of punishment because of its isolation both from Calcutta and from Ranchi and because of the need to learn Oriya, Sadri and the tribal languages. But on the other hand, the Belgian Jesuits felt at home in Gangpur, because they did not encounter a new people and in fact, it was an extension of the Chotanagpur mission.

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<sup>143</sup> History of Evangelisation: Method followed, in *Histoire de la Mission*, AMSFS 5H4 Inde.

<sup>144</sup> To quote the letter of Fr. Guillermin to Monsieur Mermier: “Pour moi, quand j’avais quelques bons moments, je les passais à copier un Dictionnaire, fait par le Rd. Père Dupont. Quelques temps après que j’eus fini ce travail qui me prit bien des jours, je les perdus sans jamais trouver aucune trace de cette perte, que je puis appeler grand. Tellement que je n’eus pas le courage d’en faire un second exemplaire avant qu’il eût une seconde édition revue et corrigée par l’Auteur parce qu’il s’y trouvait beaucoup de mots qui n’étaient pas Condes. En attendant je prenais les mots que j’entendais et que je comprenais, et j’en avais un certain nombre quand je descendis: par comble de malheur je perdus ce nouveau cahier. Je le retrouvais cependant beaucoup plus tard.” Guillermin to Mermier, Ganjam October 22, 1854, AMSFS, 7Z 5H5. M. Domenge makes a similar statement: “Dans les intervalles que leur laissait la fièvre, ils faisaient parler les khondes, cherchaient à deviner leur idiôme, enrichissaient leur trésor de chaque mot nouveau. Point de dictionnaire à consulter; point de grammaire où étudier les déclinaisons, les conjugaisons et la syntaxe.” M. DOMENGE, *La Mission de Vizagapatam*, p. 225.

## 3.2 Gangpur Mission

### 3.2.1 Evangelisation in Gangpur

An exceptional characteristic of the conversions in Chotanagpur was their spontaneity. Normally a village delegation conveyed to the missionaries its willingness to accept Christianity.<sup>145</sup> Having noticed the change in their kinsmen across the border, the Tribals of Gangpur sent deputations to Biru so that they too might receive the services of the missionaries.<sup>146</sup> The missionaries continued to receive such deputations from among the tribes of the remote jungles of Chotanagpur. The impulse on the part of the missionaries to extend the mission towards the semi-independent State of Gangpur came because of the ethnic affinity that the Tribals of Chotanagpur had with those of Gangpur.<sup>147</sup>

#### 3.2.1.1 Living Conditions of the Tribals in Gangpur

Like their kinsmen of Chotanagpur, the Tribals of Gangpur experienced a similar hardship; an economic oppression that consigned them to the lowest state, a condition which the missionaries vowed to eradicate among the Tribals of Chotanagpur. Thus, the missionaries found it easy to apply the same methods which had produced good results in Chotanagpur.

The periodic visits of the priests to Gangpur prior to 1908 did not ameliorate the condition of the people. There were defections even among those who had been liberated from *Bethbegari*, the forced labour, while others had fallen prey to the mounting economic tensions. They did not receive the help they had expected from the missionaries, whose visits were infrequent. The presence of the missionaries among the neophytes was essential for their spiritual growth and economic progress.<sup>148</sup> The catechists appointed by the missionaries as contact persons and upon whom much of the expansion work depended were inefficient and often immoral. There were complaints of drunkenness and quarrels. However, the periodic visits of the missionaries kept the Christians together. The missionaries hoped that if the permission to commence a station in Gangpur were granted, the Jesuits would be ready to live among the people to guide them and protect them from

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<sup>145</sup> H. JOSSON, *Un Chef de Mission aux Indes*, p. 364.

<sup>146</sup> The origin of the Chotanagpur tribals is mentioned in the first chapter. It is apt here to recall that due to the population growth and in their natural inclination to seek new terrains the tribals migrated to the neighbouring states of Jashpur, Sirguja, Gangpur, Bonai and Bamra. M. Vermeire was of the opinion that "The aborigines of Chotanagpur, declining any other occupation, are accustomed to earn their livelihood through cultivating fields. When the latter are lacking they migrated southwards towards the interior Orissa, to the hilly and jungly tracts. There after having cut down the trees and levelled the ground they get the permission to prepare fields and fix a home." M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission History: Biru Common*, vol. I, Part II, APBS India Lievens. Ser. B. Box. 4, p. 49.

<sup>147</sup> In his letter to the Provincial, Fr. Grosjean mentioned: "Le Gangpur fait suite au Biru. Nous touchons par le nord aux territoires de Rengarh et de Samtoli. Les langues, le races et cōtumes sont identiques". Grosjean to Provincial, Kesramal, September 12, 1912, APBS India 1- 12/ Grosjean letters. At the arrival of Fr. Grosjean at Kesramal in November 1908 the Catholic population of Kesramal consisted mainly of emigrants or the descendants of the emigrants of Chotanagpur. They were from the following tribes: Oraons (about 55%), Kharias (about 35%), and Mundas (about 10%). Cf. H. JOSSON, *Un Chef de Mission aux Indes*, p. 365.

<sup>148</sup> Waelkens to Provincial, Calcutta, 1906, APBS, India 2 – 22/5.

the usurious moneylenders and landlords. Fortunately some of the Catholics of Gangpur sent their children to schools across the border, i.e. to Kurdeg, Samtoli and Rengarih. This provided them with occasions to contact the missionaries and the catechists.<sup>149</sup>

### 3.2.1.2 Activities of the Jesuits: Frs. Van Rabays and De Smet

After the historic visit of Fr. Fierens, which took him through Gangpur, Fr. De Smet was the pioneer of the Gangpur mission. While he was the assistant parish priest at Biru, he had the task of evangelising the people from the southern part of Biru. In his letter to the provincial, he wrote:

It is necessary for me to build a second station at the limits of Biru and Gangpur, about 5 to 6 miles from here in a place called Salangabaha. I will dedicate the mission to Our Lady of the Immaculate Conception. This is the dream of my life. It was I who, in 1889, was the first missionary to set foot in Gangpur. I can remember it well; it was on a Saturday. I came back from the small kingdom of Anandpur, where a priest had never entered since Adam. I visited 11 Christian villages in a day, while passing by woods and mountains. I was told, 'this village far away is Naogaon, a Lutheran village. This is Gangpur'. They showed me the stone of separation (boundary stone). But in fact there were at Gangpur only a few immigrant Catholics. All the others were pagan and a few Lutherans. I descended from my horse and, as it was Saturday, I consecrated myself, a poor missionary, and the Gangpur to the Immaculate. That happened in December 1889. My Reverend Father, may she who had destroyed all heresies . . . come to help us at Gangpur. The German Lutherans have two stations, but we only recently could acquire ground on which to build.<sup>150</sup>

Fr. van Rabays was interested in the work of the Gangpur mission in 1904. His diary is full of references to the mission in the eastern part of Gangpur (Nagra district or the present Rourkela and Jhunmur parish territories). He made his first tour of the mission in November 1904. Vermeire recorded the following entry from the diary of van Rabays:

This month I went to Gangpur and visited all the villages except Goilo. I was everywhere very well received and the Christians seem to be well disposed, but know very little. Jaedega and Babaimohan knew the most. I had to dismiss the *prachar* (catechist) of Ghaghari, Dharmdas, who it seems has left his wife in Barway and has taken a girl of Kadobaha.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Waelkens to Provincial, Calcutta, March 21, 1906, APBS, India 2 – 22/6.

<sup>150</sup> Fr. De Smet informed the provincial of the need to build a station for Gangpur and the possibility of the spread of Lutheranism. Cf. De Smet to Provincial, July 6, 1906, APBS, India Lievens: box 4, Samtoli.

<sup>151</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission History: Samtoli 1904-1940*, vol. III, APBS, India Lievens. General Sources, p. 21.

In his second tour, he visited most of the villages and recorded in his diary the conditions and the need of the Christians.<sup>152</sup> Explaining the condition of the Gangpur mission, Fr. van Rabays wrote:

In Gangpur, 10 hours from here (Samtoli), there are 3000 Christians who ask for a chapel, schools and masters. The Lutherans have much money at their disposal. Over 5 years we have gained many of their villages and we have not lost any. Almighty God helps us visibly and I should not be surprised at all if in this year 1905, I might still win over 8 more villages to the Catholic Church.<sup>153</sup>

After the death of Fr. van Rabays, the work of evangelisation in Gangpur was placed in the hands of Fr. De Smet. In response to a village delegation that came to Samtoli to meet him, he sent both Johan *Munshi* (clerk) and Johan *Prachar* (catechist) to gather information about Gangpur, especially in the eastern part of the state, i.e. the Rourkela region. They spent about two weeks there and gave a positive report of their visit.<sup>154</sup> In the eastern part of the mission a considerable number of Catholics came from Lutheranism.<sup>155</sup>

During his first tour of Gangpur, Fr. De Smet was very impressed. He mentioned this in his diary:

(On) 13 May 1907, I am off to Gangpur and the eastern part of Biru. Everywhere well received; people were well disposed; in many places Mass (was celebrated) underneath a large tree, because the chapels are not ready. I baptised people of at least 3 years adherence in the villages. I did not baptise any children of the *Berxa* [*Berga*] Uraons; that will be for the next time . . . In Gobira (Nagra) some people, all new catechumens, objected to going to Church, saying they would lose their caste! They wrote a *mchilka* [undertaking] stating that they would go regularly. In Nagra, the Zamindars are against us because our people go to court for redress of grievances, not against Lutherans. Our fellows are threatened a great deal.<sup>156</sup>

### 3.2.1.3 Obstacles to the Progress of the Mission in Nagra

In the Nagra region the *Zamindars* were against the Catholics as the latter turned to the court to redress their grievances. Since the Lutherans did not do the same, they were preferred. Efforts were made to arrest the catechists and some of the leaders in order to intimidate the people. The threats were accompanied by visits of the police inspector and of armed policemen. Fr. De Smet described the situation in these words:

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<sup>152</sup> Some of the villages he visited during the second trip were Babaimohan, Salangabhar, Jhamankera, Jhurmul (Jhunmur), Padrasilla, Kasbahar, Jharbera, Jaedega, Kadobahar, Dukatoli, Gaghari, Amko and Sakambahar. *Ibid.*, pp. 22- 24.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>155</sup> M. Vermeire wrote the following account from the diary of Fr. De Smet: "As regards Ragunathpali, the diary has the following: (p.53) Eliazar Kujur, Anglican Uraon of Amba-Jharain, 4 kms from Ragunathpali (Bombay Railway), comes again to say that he and some 12 houses (some Anglicans and some Lutherans, who are or ought to be visited by the Chakradharpur Lutherans or the Chaibassa Anglicans but are not) complain of being abandoned and wish to come over to us". *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 31.

The Rangunathpali Inspector with ten men with guns, swords and sticks went to Gobira on 20 September. He told the *prachar* [catechist] Francis: we do not want Romans in Nagra; go away, it is the order of the *Dewan Saheb* of Suadi [the capital of Gangpur]. Francis answered the Inspector: ‘You and I are servants. If my *saheb* tells me to go away, I’ll do so, but not before.’ Then the Inspector went away to the *bhandar*. Thus a vain threat!<sup>157</sup>

The Zamindars and the police harassed the Catholics and their catechist. Fearing that there might be resistance from the Catholics, they sought help from the armed police and obtained an order to shoot if there was any resistance when they arrested the catechist Francis. Realising that intimidation and threats did not produce results, the police wanted Francis and the Gobira people to sign a paper, but they refused, as the content was not disclosed to them. At this, Francis was arrested and taken to Rangunathpali, and none of his companions were allowed to meet him there. He was later acquitted at the intervention of the *Dewan* of Gangpur, M. Craven,<sup>158</sup> a Catholic and a friend of Archbishop Brice Meuleman of Calcutta.<sup>159</sup> However, these threats and difficulties did not arrest the progress of the mission.<sup>160</sup> Fr. De Smet had this entry in his diary:

5 April 1908. I went to Gangpur – Kinjir for 36 days. Everywhere well received by those poor children. A glass of beer [*Hanria* = rice beer], sometimes drinkable, sometimes wretched, yet I must take it, or when nauseous, give it to the small brats about me. In some villages the women and girls had never seen a European and they were shy like jackals, but later on they came to perform a dance, for their pleasure and in my honour. May the Lord have mercy on them. Goilo, Jorobahar, Chuanbahal, Kokrema, etc, were grand. In many villages Mass under a tree!<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>158</sup> Mr. Craven, the *Dewan* or the prime minister of Gangpur, was a former student of St. Xavier's College, Calcutta, where van der Schueren was also a professor. Fr. Vermeire stated that Mr. Craven was a Catholic and hence well disposed towards the spread of Catholicism. After the establishment of a parish at Kesramal in 1908, a priest would go to Suadi, now Sundargarh, to offer him the possibility to participate in the Christmas and Easter liturgy. There were also times when Mr. Craven and his family would drop in at Kesramal on a Sunday to participate in the Eucharist. On the eve of his departure to East Africa, he resigned in December 1919. He was succeeded by another alumnus of St. Xavier's college, M. Lucas. Cf. van der Schueren to Superior General, Calcutta, May 1921, ARSI, Calcut. 1005, XIV-13, p. 3; M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, pp. 7-8; H. JOSSON, *La Mission du Bengal Occidental*, vol. II, p. 410.

<sup>159</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission History: Samtoli 1904-1940*, vol. III, APBS, India Lievens. General Sources, pp. 32-33.

<sup>160</sup> Fr. De Smet's diary of January 22, 1908 reads: “Francis, the Gobira (Nagra) catechist comes with 16 men: they want a catechist, or better, two. Francis says that the following have become catechumens, all from paganism & that many more will join: 1. Banailata 43 houses, Uraons and Kharias; 2. Goghea 28 houses, Uraons, Kharias and Mundas; 3. Ranakata 15 houses, Kharias; 4. Benta 4 houses, Kharias; 5. Olhaintola 10 houses, Uraons and Mundas; 6. Katajar (Katajhar) 11 houses, Kharias and Mundas; 7. Karanjua 8 houses, Kharias and Mundas; 8. Kusumtola 3 houses, Mundas.” *Ibid.*, p. 34.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 35.

In spite of the pecuniary difficulties, Fr. De Smet sent catechists and *chaprasis*<sup>162</sup> wherever possible so that they might establish contact with the people. During his second tour of 19 days in April 1908, he contacted a large number of villages in the north of the Sankh river, particularly in the Nagra and Kinjir region. Altogether one could count about 6,000 catechumens, and he felt that “to manage the north of Nagra – Kinjir and the south of Nagra, we need a new Gangpur station, say in Rourkela . . . otherwise the Anglicans of Chaibasa, who already have a few adherents round about Ragunathpali, and the Lutherans of Chakradharpur will sweep away Saranda, etc.”<sup>163</sup> It was indeed the perseverance of the people that brought the zealous missionary to them despite the scorching heat.<sup>164</sup>

### 3.2.1.4 A New Beginning

In 1907 the Gangpur mission had about 6,700 adherents (baptised and catechumens). The first contacts seemed to have come from Noatoli in 1901 when the missionaries established their residence in Biru, not very far from the frontier of Gangpur at Kompala.<sup>165</sup> Until 1904 only the Rengarih mission station was catering to the needs of the Gangpur Catholics. Later Samtoli and Kurdeg were divided, and these continued the expansion work. A geographical view of these stations would place them along the length of Gangpur State. Rengarih, the central station, was to take care of the expansion in and around the present Kusumdegi station. Samtoli, in the eastern part of the mission, catered to the spiritual needs of Kesramal, Hamirpur and Jhunmur. Kurdeg, in the western part, served as a base for the expansion work in and around Gaibira and in the next semi-independent State of Jashpur.<sup>166</sup>

### 3.2.1.5 Early Impediments to Missionary Extension

From the beginning the Catholic mission was ordered by the British government not to start a mission in the native states without their permission.<sup>167</sup> As noted earlier, the interest in the expansion of the mission in Gangpur was sparked by the first deputations from Gangpur. The missionaries could not take a decisive step until the appointment of a new archbishop of Calcutta, Msgr. Brice Meuleman. In 1901 he gave the permission for an expansion into the independent states. However, the raja of Gangpur was an absolute ruler, and he restricted the movement of Europeans within his state. Therefore, no European

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<sup>162</sup> This was one of the institutions founded by Fr. C. Lievens in Chotanagpur. Their function is illustrated in the fifth chapter.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39

<sup>164</sup> Fr. De Smet described his journey to Gangpur: “Very arduous, when it was terribly hot. Until now, for the sake of prudence, we had hardly baptised in Gangpur. But seeing the perseverance of those nice people and their good dispositions, I have baptised during this tour 11 adults and 558 children under 6 years.” *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>165</sup> H. JOSSON, *Un Chef de Mission aux Indes*, p. 365.

<sup>166</sup> Frs. Cardon and his assistant De Smet did much of the expansion work from Rengarih, especially the latter with his periodic visits to Gangpur. Fr. Van Rabays received the deputations from Gangpur with kindness and kept them in contact with the mission, but his initiative was limited due to a lack of funds. Frs. De Gryse and Van Hoeck spearheaded the expansion work in Kurdeg.

<sup>167</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 2.



missionary could reside within Gangpur without his permission. Despite of the persistent requests of the missionaries, the raja was reluctant to grant permission for the acquisition of land.

### 3.2.1.6 Early Attempts to establish a Mission Station in Gangpur

In 1903 Fr. Hoffmann, due to the good rapport he enjoyed with the British government officials, went to meet the raja at Suadi, the capital of Gangpur, carrying a letter of recommendation from Mr. Slacke, the commissioner of Chotanagpur. Although Fr. Hoffmann was initially reluctant to meet with the raja, he changed his mind after receiving the support of Craven, the *Dewan* or prime minister of Gangpur. Craven told the raja about Fr. Hoffmann, especially his work among the tribal population and for the British government in India. He suggested that on acquaintance with Fr. Hoffmann would benefit his state.<sup>168</sup> The raja consented to an audience, but he held to his position of not granting the permission to establish a mission station in Gangpur. Discouraged by the outcome of the meeting, Craven wrote to Msgr. Meuleman that the raja had invited a man to travel the distance from Ranchi, at the height of the rainy season, simply to tell him that it was impossible to grant his request. Such an answer any civilized person could have conveyed through a letter. It seems clear that the Raja wanted to reject the mission in the most insulting manner he could find.<sup>169</sup>

Informing Fr. Grosjean about his excursion to Suadi, Fr. Hoffmann wrote that it was useless to try anything with the raja, since he was angry with the missionaries because of the false charges made by Dr. Nottrott against him to the commissioner, viz., that he had made over his *rayats* in *Bethbegari* to a European timber merchant.<sup>170</sup>

Craven, the *Dewan*, was also present during an audience when the raja became indignant and described the troubles that the missionaries (obviously the Lutherans) had caused. He underscored at least two of them: (1) the upset created in the local administration by Birsa and his followers<sup>171</sup> -- the Raja thought they were Catholics; and (2) the complaints that Dr. Nottrott had made to the British authorities in India against the raja, who was said to have imposed the drudgery of *bethbegari* or forced labour.<sup>172</sup> The raja was infuriated at the mention of these complaints and used certain derogatory remarks against the Lutheran missionaries. It is quite clear that the raja was unable to differentiate between the various Christian denominations that were present in his kingdom.<sup>173</sup> Thus the Catholics had to expiate for the sins of the Lutherans.<sup>174</sup>

Before the submission of a formal application to the raja of Gangpur through Fr. Hoffmann in 1903, Msgr. Meuleman had already sent a letter on May 20, 1903 to the raja, explaining the advantages of allowing European missionaries in his state. He wrote: "The

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<sup>168</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>171</sup> The life of Birsa Munda and his activities are dealt with in the first chapter, footnote no. 218.

<sup>172</sup> H. JOSSON, *La Mission du Bengale Occidental*, vol. II, p. 399.

<sup>173</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, pp. 38-39.

<sup>174</sup> H. JOSSON, *La Mission du Bengale Occidentale*, vol. II, p. 399.

presence of a European missionary would highly contribute to the improvement of the Christians, already becoming numerous, and to the temporal welfare of his honour's subjects, by diffusing secular instruction and education, and by developing habits of thrift and industry."<sup>175</sup>

F. A. Slacke, the commissioner of Chotanagpur, was kind enough to send a letter of recommendation to the Raja of Gangpur, gratefully acknowledging the services that the missionaries rendered to the Tribals of Chotanagpur. He recommended that the raja grant his permission so that the Tribals of Gangpur too could avail themselves of the services of the missionaries. However well intended might have been the recommendation, the raja refused to be influenced by such and was very unrelenting in his decision.<sup>176</sup>

### 3.2.1.7 Reasons for the Entry in Gangpur

No sooner had the Raja of Gangpur turned down the request than the Fathers applied for general permission to visit the Catholics and administer the sacraments. Slacke, the commissioner, responded favourably without any appeal to the raja.<sup>177</sup> As a result, the missionaries were able to enter Gangpur to administer the sacraments and to board the train to Calcutta, where they were expected to attend the annual retreat and to meet with their superiors. The train journeys to Calcutta and back enabled the missionaries to offer spiritual help to the Christians, who otherwise had only the services of the catechists. Each time a missionary boarded the train in one of the railway stations in Gangpur, he sent ahead a message to the villages to be visited. The catechists organised the people in these villages for receiving the sacraments, which was normally preceded by a *Panchayat* or village council.<sup>178</sup> The missionaries also hoped to check the growth of Lutheranism under the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Church, whose work in the area had already been noted by Fr. Fierens in 1884. He noticed a large, well-organised congregation at Raiboga. Since the Lutheran mission prospered, Fr. Alary perceived that his mission was in danger, and he

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<sup>175</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 7.

<sup>176</sup> The raja wrote to the commissioner on July 16, 1903, informing him, "I have found that such missionaries as have hitherto been allowed to reside in the state have not refrained from interfering in matters of administration. I am thus unable to pass any order permitting the establishment of any new mission". *Ibid.*, p. 7.

<sup>177</sup> There were three main reasons for the requests: (1) to baptise the children and those who were unable to come to the mission station; (2) to administer the Sacrament of Anointing the Sick; and (3) to visit the Catholics who were emigrants of Ranchi District or the relatives of those in Ranchi. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 10-12. In order to visit the existing Christians and to administer the sacraments, it was sufficient to obtain the permission of the commissioner.

<sup>178</sup> *Panchayat* is a kind of 'home rule'. It is an assembly of five or more reputable elders selected from the community to settle issues relating to the community or tribe. They name themselves *Panches*; at their head is a man called, *Sar Panch*. The *panchayat* is responsible for law in the village. They are also responsible for the smooth running of schools and the bank. Fr. Van der Schueren observed: "truly the *Panchayat* is a great institution: by it the people are kept together, faults are combated, intelligence about a hundred things is conveyed to the people, quarrels are settled and it is a very efficient school for the moral and social education and uplifting of our people". Van der Schueren to Superior General, Calcutta, May 1921, ARSI, Calcut. 1005-XIV, 13.

wrote to his superior general accordingly. Therefore the missionaries of Gangpur made every effort to convert the Lutherans also.<sup>179</sup>

### 3.2.2 Kesramal: First Parish of Gangpur

#### 3.2.2.1 Setting of Kesramal

Gangpur was a semi-independent state, and the raja was its sole ruler, but it was under the suzerainty of the British Raj. Fr. Vermeire wrote that "the Raja depended for his semi-independence on the good graces of the Government [British] and dread[ed] nothing more than a commissioner's investigation into his behaviour".<sup>180</sup> The only control exercised by the British government was through the political agent<sup>181</sup> residing in Sambalpur and his control generally consisted of an annual visit to the state. An important feature of the state was the presence of a major railway line that promoted trade and commerce. The whole length of Gangpur, about 70 miles, was crossed by one of the chief railways of India, the Bengal - Nagpur Railway.

Kesramal lies in the plains which are surrounded on all sides by hills. During the summer the heat is intense, rising up to 112° F in the shade and about 160° F under the open sun.<sup>182</sup> The superior regular of the mission forbade his missionaries to leave the presbytery between 10.00 A.M. and 4.00 P.M. There were about 300,000 people, mostly Hindus, all of whom were subject to the Raja of Gangpur. As Kesramal was far from the mission stations of Chotanagpur, the missionaries felt isolated there. Sometimes they were unable to take part in meetings due to the distance and the rains, which made it difficult for them to cross many rivers.<sup>183</sup> However, a visionary like Fr. Grosjean would not fail to see the strategic importance of Kesramal as a central place in the central provinces. From Kesramal the missionaries could travel to Singhbhum territory in the east, to Orissa in the south and to the central provinces in the west.<sup>184</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> In his letter to the superior general, Fr. Alary reported the situation of Gangpur: "Les luthériens avaient pratiquement conquis le pays avant notre arrivée. Ils étaient parfaitement établis au Gangpur (maisons, écoles etc.) alors que nous ne pouvions y faire que de rares visites. La plupart de nos chrétiens viennent de chez eux; mais impossible ou presque impossible d'attaquer ceux qui leur restent, ils sont absolument attachés à leur mission. Beaucoup de nos missionnaires ont fait cette remarque si les luthériens n'ont pas la masse, il est certain toutefois qu'ils sont réussi à s'attacher fortement un certain nombre de leurs adeptes. Actuellement, bien que les missionnaires luthériens aient dû quitter le pays depuis tantôt 2 ans, les catéchistes continuent l'oeuvre, et du moins ici au Gangpur, nous ne faisons pas de nouvelles conquêtes. Que feraient nos chrétiens dans les mêmes conditions?" Alary to Superior General, Kesramal, July 14, 1916, ARSI, Calcut. 1005, XIII-23.

<sup>180</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 9.

<sup>181</sup> The Political Agent was the representative of a group of semi-independent states in India. Generally he did not interfere in matters unless the state itself asked for it, or when he found evidence of maladministration. Once a year the political agent toured the states that were under his control. The political agent for the state of Gangpur resided at Sambalpur. Cf. H. JOSSON, *The Mission of West Bengal*, trans. L. Clarysse, Ranchi 1993, p. 266.

<sup>182</sup> Van der Schueren to Superior General, Calcutta, May 1921, ARSI, Calcut.1005, XIV- 13.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Grosjean to Provincial, Kesramal, July 30, 1913 APBS, India 1 – 12/Grosjean letters.

<sup>184</sup> In his letter to Fr. Provincial, Fr. Grosjean wrote: "Le Gangpur est admirablement situé pour propager ce mouvement à l'Est, dans le Singhbhum; au Sud, dans l'Orissa; à l'Ouest, dans les Central Provinces.

Despite the initial misgivings about allowing the Catholic missionaries in the territories and his adamant refusal to grant their petitions, the raja seemed to have had a change of heart in 1907. This change was due to the presence of Mr. Craven, who was then appointed as the raja's prime minister. Through his good offices and -- more effectively still -- through the good offices of Sir Andrew Fraser, the lieutenant governor of Bengal, the raja was forced to concede. The hostility of the Raja did not deter the missionaries from pursuing their aim to establish a mission station in Gangpur. Regarding the purchase of land at Kesramal, Fr. Cardon wrote:

Fr. Hoffmann had been sent to the Raja of Gangpur in August 1905, if I remember correctly, to ask for a plot of ground and leave to establish a station in his State. He was flatly refused. In May 1906, His Grace (Msgr. Meuleman) went to the Political Agent at Sambalpur. I was with him. The Political Agent then settled the business with the Raja, who then gave us a bit of land, 7 ½ acres, at Kesramal. This was gotten in the beginning of 1907.<sup>185</sup>

Earlier, Sir Andrew Fraser, the lieutenant governor of Bengal, had directed the Raja of Gangpur to concede a plot for the use by the Catholic mission; should the Raja fail to comply he would then be forced to grant it. This move forced the raja to permit the missionaries in Gangpur. They acquired 7 ½ acres of land at Kesramal, six miles to the north of the Rajgangpur railway station.<sup>186</sup> Fr. van Severen had the privilege of being the first priest of the newly-erected parish. In 1909, Br. Rotsaert, an architect-builder, was sent to construct a convent for the Sisters, Daughters of the Cross, from Liège, Belgium.<sup>187</sup>

### 3.2.2.2 The Contributions of the three Pioneers

Two of the pioneers of the Kesramal station were Frs. Grosjean and Alary, whose years of hardships and hard work won thousands of Catholics to the Church.<sup>188</sup> A third pioneer was Fr. van Severen, who, as the first missionary, experienced considerable difficulty in undertaking this task alone.

#### 3.2.2.2.1 Kesramal under Fr. Emile van Severen

Kesramal began on May 13, 1908 with the arrival of Fr. van Severen from Rengarih, the ecclesiastical district headquarters (at that time Fr. Cardon was the district superior).<sup>189</sup> When Fr. van Severen took charge of the mission he inherited 6,874

Cela se fera si Dieu le veut. Ses dessins sont inscrutables; mais on peut croire qu'ils sont tels que la situation du Gangpur suggère." Grosjean to the Provincial, Manresa House, Ranchi, November 10, 1909, APBS, India 1 – 12/ Grosjean letters; H. JOSSON, *Un Chef de Mission aux Indes*, p. 363.

<sup>185</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 38; M. Vermeire, *Biru Mission History: Biru Common*, vol. I, Part II, APBS, India Lievens. Ser. B, General Sources, Box4, p. 30.

<sup>186</sup> M. Vermeire, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 42; The Indian mission found at Alken after the death of Camiel Lievens, APBS, India 2, Box15/5, p. 2; M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission History: Biru Common*, vol. I, Part II, APBS, India Lievens. Ser. B. Box. 4, p. 31.

<sup>187</sup> Alary to Superior General, Kesramal, July 11, 1916, ARSI, Calcut. 1005-XIII, 8; M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 42.

<sup>188</sup> Van der Schueren to Superior General, Calcutta, May 1921, ARSI, Calcut. 1005, XIV-13.

<sup>189</sup> Alary to Superior General, Kesramal, July 11, 1916, ARSI, Calcut. 1005-XIII, 8; The Indian mission found at Alken after the death of Camiel Lievens, Archief Belges. India 2, Box15/5, p. 2.

Christians.<sup>190</sup> Initially he lived in a *tugurium*, a peasant's hut. Describing the initial difficulties which Fr. van Severen had to endure, Fr. Camiel Lievens wrote: "Father van Severen crossed over in the heat of the warm season, since the rainy season would start soon. His only shelter was a small tent, which he arranged as a chapel, and an old hut of 7 X 10 feet. Soon he constructed a building, which, he thought, would later become a boys' school."<sup>191</sup> The charity of the mission during the famine of 1908, which affected the whole of India, brought about 2,000 new adherents to the Catholic Church, among whom about 700 were Lutherans.<sup>192</sup> The new Kesramal station had a distinct character from the rest of the mission in Chotanagpur. In addition to the local languages – Hindi, Sadri, Mundari, Kurukh and Kharia – the missionaries also had to learn Oriya, the official language of the state. In May 1908, when a school for the boys was built, it served also as a residence for the priest and as a chapel. During the monsoon, a severe outbreak of cholera killed about 20 people. This was immediately followed by smallpox.

In January 1909 that Msgr. Meuleman and the superior regular of the Mission, Fr. Hippolite Waelkan, paid a visit to the new mission station of Gangpur to assess the situation.<sup>193</sup> Fr. Vermeire did not record the initial missionary endeavours of Fr. van Severen, but he explained the reason why he was transferred to Khunti: "As to Father van Severen remaining only one year, the chief reason was the shortage of missionaries. Since a new language had to be learned, Uriya [Oriya], for the schools of Gangpur, it was better to take a new and younger missionary like Father Alary than to keep the elderly Fr. van Severen there, accustomed to the Mundas and their difficult languages."<sup>194</sup>

Thus, Fr. van Severen gave way to a younger missionary, Fr. Alary, who took over the mission on February 9, 1909. It was during the time of Fr. Alary that systematic village visitation and socio-economic projects were implemented.

### 3.2.2.2.2 Kesramal under Fr. Alary

Fr. Alary was the head of the mission in Gangpur between February 1909 and November 1909 and again from September 1915 till his death in September 1918. During this time Fr. Alary spearheaded the evangelisation work. His diary is full of references to his many visits to Gangpur where his main responsibility was to gather the people and listen to their grievances. He used the visits to instruct them in the faith, to celebrate Holy Mass with them, and to hold the *panchayat*, the village council, with the *panches*, the village elders. He introduced the devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the first Friday of the month, which was always attended by many. The attendance was so great that the ordinary people, with the exception of children from the school, were unable to distinguish between Sundays and Fridays.

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<sup>190</sup> M. Vermeire cited the statistics compiled by Fr. Grosjean, a known statistician of the mission. Cf. M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission History: Biru Common*, vol. I, Part II, APBS, India Lievens. Ser. B. Box. 4, p. 22.

<sup>191</sup> The Indian mission found at Alken after the death of Camiel Lievens, APBS, India 2, Box 15/5, p. 3.

<sup>192</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 43; The Indian mission found at Alken after the death of Camiel Lievens, APBS, India 2, Box 15/5, p. 4.

<sup>193</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 43.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

During his village visits Fr. Alary noticed the absence of women in the church.<sup>195</sup> This was because several of the women were Lutheran and their marriages were not rectified. He showed a special interest in settling marriage cases.<sup>196</sup> The marriage settlement, he thought, would restrict the spread of Lutheranism, which had always remained a constant threat to the Catholic missionaries. The Lutherans had enough funds at their disposal and were well organized. In contrast, the scattered villages and the difficult communication between the catechists and the missionaries caused great fatigue to the missionaries.<sup>197</sup> A breakthrough came the blessing of several couples from the *Berga Oraons*, known as *Kisans*, a group that followed the tribal religion and was very orthodox in their beliefs.<sup>198</sup> In fact, Fr. Cardon declared, this was the first time that Berga Oraons accepted Christianity. Following the example of the first group, there were several couples from the Berga Oraons who were baptised in the Catholic Church. There were two or three 'rajas' among the baptised, a positive note for the mission, since they had a certain prestige in their tribe.<sup>199</sup> Kusumdegi, one of the Lutheran fortresses decided to join Catholicism. However, the distance created problems for the missionaries, since they were unable to

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<sup>195</sup> During his visit to Tummura on March 17, 1909 and Dumloi on the following day, Fr. Alary noticed the absence of women in the church. He took on as the special task the winning over the womenfolk to the Catholic fold. To quote the words of Fr. Alary as cited in the work of Fr. Vermeire: "The women do not come to the church, because they are afraid to lose caste. I saw they were keeping aloof from our cooking utensils. I am told they feared contamination." *Ibid.*, pp. 45 - 46, 50.

<sup>196</sup> His diary of 16th of March 1909 under Katang reads: "[There was] a good assistance at Mass. I find in Litibera a couple whose marriage is surely illicit if not invalid. They were married years ago by a German catechist because the girl was a Lutheran." Here he felt the need to appoint a catechist for a Catholic village that could cater to the need of the neighbouring non-Catholic villages. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

<sup>197</sup> Here is an entry from the diary of Fr. Alary on March 19, 1909, as recorded by Fr. Vermeire: "It seems my arrival was known too late, the catechist was in Raikani. I could visit only Mandaria and Kumarkela... The census is in awful state of confusion, catechist had to do it twice, there is still more *gulmal* (confusion or fight), than ever, and the fellow was not there. I was badly received in the houses. Lutheranism is everywhere. I shall go back to visit Panposh, Lachmimal, Noagaon and Jargara. Some new arrangements have to be made for working properly in that part of the district." *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>198</sup> In addition to the Mundas, Kharias and Oraons, the *Berga Oraons* or *Kisans* were a race that the missionaries had the fortune of evangelising in Gangpur. They were also sometimes referred as 'Gangpuria Oraons', because they speak a similar language, i.e. Kurukh with slight variations. *Kisans* themselves say that they had a common origin with the Oraons, then they migrated to Gangpur in search of new terrain. Fr. H. Floor was of the opinion that it was probably the *Kisans* who migrated first to Gangpur and cleared the forest. Their habitat in the midst of forest and the large property they own are cited as evidence of this claim. Due to their interest in cultivation the *Kisans* are called *Koha Kisans*, 'cultivators par excellence'. But unfortunately much of the land was lost due to laziness, drunkenness and usury. This reduced the *Kisans* to a state of *sukh-basi*, without property, leaving them to find work in the mines and railways. Pointing out some of the habitual traits of *Kisans*, Fr. Floor wrote: "plus ivrogne, moins chaste, fanatiquement attaché à ses diableries, flatteur, menteur systématique, promettant tout, sans difficulté, mais bien déterminé à ne rien tenir". The first missionary who approached the *Kisans* in Gangpur was Fr. L. Cardon, and Fr. Alary followed him. Cf. V. GHEYSENS, "Hamirpur", in *MB* (1920), p. 142; H. FLOOR, "Les *Kisans*", in *MB* (1922), pp. 18-19.

<sup>199</sup> The 'rajas' of Berga Oraons, *Kisans*, have a special competence concerning the protection and observance of tribal laws and customs. If these were against the mission, then it would be difficult to get anyone from the group, since the 'rajas' can ostracise families and individuals from the tribe. Cf. Cardon to Provincial, Rengarih, July 23, 1909, APBS, India 2 - 29/1; Cardon to Provincial, Rengarih, January 13, 1910, APBS, India 2 - 29/1.

make regular visits.<sup>200</sup> A distinguishing mark of the tribal Catholics was their numerous church-attendance on feasts and other solemn occasions, for example Christmas and Easter.

Fr. Alary used his village visits to gather children for the new schools he had opened in the mission. The Jesuits considered this apostolate as important one for the betterment of the Tribals in Chotanagpur.<sup>201</sup> Even though the village visits were not very encouraging at times, he was still optimistic. His diary on August 28, 1909, reads: "I visited Kora. I see all the *tollas* (hamlets). It was not quite as bad as I thought. Parantolla is the only one that is going the wrong way. The Kharia *tolla* is not so bad. Perhaps the Gangapurias of *Khas Kokra* might have fewer rows. In the morning I had only a few people at church, it may have been due to the bad weather."<sup>202</sup>

In his attempt to eradicate illiteracy and teach *Dharam* (religion) to the adults, Fr. Alary established evening schools in Langiberna, in July 1910. This was followed by further requests from other villages as can be seen from his diary: "The Rengarbahar people also expressed their desire to have somebody to teach them at night. If possible their wishes will be complied with. I believe it is the only means to check the Lutherans, whose emissaries are everywhere on the move."<sup>203</sup> Through his personal influence as a missionary, Fr. Alary also settled some land disputes without ever going to court.<sup>204</sup> Even the tropical heat did not deter him from reaching out to his neophytes, and his longing for new contacts prevented him from becoming sedentary.<sup>205</sup> Commenting on Fr. Alary's work, Fr. Vermeire observed

that he was a true missionary, eager to bring over many to the Catholic Church, therefore carrying on a true apostolate, there is no doubt. A true apostle must be ready at all times, even very trying, to go and meet the lost sheep. Was he not this type? How often do we not see him abandon the little comforts he could find at the only station for a district several times the magnitude of Barway or Biru? Again and again we see Fr. Alary plunge into this or that side, in the hope of conquering new groups hidden in Jungle.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 48.

<sup>201</sup> Under the date of April 7, 1910, Fr. Alary mentioned: "(At Hatimunda I) scolded the people a good deal for not sending their children to school. They have no excuse, there are plenty of schools." *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>204</sup> In October 1912, Fr. Alary settled a land dispute at Bagpur. Regarding that he mentioned in his diary: "The *Ganju* (the landlord) was creating some annoyance for a widow, in fact, he has been cultivating her land for some time. This year again he ploughed a part. Before everybody the *Ganju* declared most emphatically that the land belonged to the old lady, and if he did not give it up, she was quite justified in prosecuting him before court... Of course the *Ganju* felt somewhat ill at ease when I told him, that there and then he could be forcefully prosecuted for forcibly retaining the *parcha* (documents). The discussion was polite and courteous on both sides." *Ibid.*, p. 56.

<sup>205</sup> Here are some villages that Fr. Alary visited during the summer month of April 1910: Simarmur, Hatimunda, Gyanpali, Bihaband, Tilaimal, Dahijira, Sahajbahal, Aludega, Pomra, Deogaon, Sakjor, Ambapani, Baiskar, Beratoli, Godratoli, Kumarkela and Kukurbuka. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 48-50.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56.

It was during his second appointment as parish priest in Kesramal that Fr. Alary died prematurely at the age of 44 on July 10, 1918. He succumbed to pneumonia.

### 3.2.2.2.3 Kesramal under Fr. Sylvain Grosjean

Fr. Grosjean arrived at Kesramal on November 26, 1909.<sup>207</sup> At the age of 63 he volunteered to work in the recently-established parish as a simple parish priest after having served in a number of leading posts of the Society.<sup>208</sup> He seemed to like the situation at Kesramal, which could not be described as a traditional parish: there was no presbytery, no church and no school. Everything had to be started from scratch, and Fr. Grosjean enjoyed such challenges.<sup>209</sup> His diary is full of references to Jhunmur (spelt Jhunmul, Jhurmul), where he took great care to establish a chapel for the growing community of Catholics.<sup>210</sup> Being very meticulous, he furnished the statistics on the number of people who had received the sacraments.<sup>211</sup>

Describing his apostolic endeavours, Fr. Camiel Lievens writes: “Father Grosjean, although in his mid-sixties, wanted to work like Fathers Lievens, Dehoy and Cardon, whom he had earlier seen at work on their wonderful journeys, and he wanted to forget his 35 years of missionary life. His zeal knew no limit. During his last years he was still studying *Sadri*.<sup>212</sup> He was travelling all the time from village to village through all kinds of weather.”<sup>213</sup> He showed a great interest in the education of the Tribals. In order to improve their standards, he periodically inspected the schools, especially to control the absence of the teachers.<sup>214</sup> Fr. Grosjean’s apostolic endeavour in Kesramal was not without hardships. He struggled to obtain funds to realise the plans for a new station. H. Jossen quoted one of the letters of Fr. Grosjean to the latter’s sister: “At the moment, my deposit with the procurator general in Calcutta has fallen to zero. 65 Catechists, 50 assistant catechists, 12 school teachers, domestic servants will be here next Tuesday (for their

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<sup>207</sup> Alary to Superior General, Kesramal, July 11, 1916, ARSI, Calcut. 1005-XIII, 8.

<sup>208</sup> Writing to the Provincial on November 10, 1909, Fr. Grosjean showed his enthusiasm for the new mission: “Je partirai tout aussi vite pour les jungles du Gangpur. Que je le veuille ou non, mes pensées s’envolent de ce côté. C’est bien la place qu’il me fallait. Il n’y a ni maison, ni église, ni école: c’est le rôle de pionnier, qui m’est devenu familier.” Grosjean to Provincial, Ranchi, November 10, 1909, APBS, India 1 – 12/ Grosjean Letters.

<sup>209</sup> H. JOSSON, *Un Chef de Mission aux Indes*, p. 363.

<sup>210</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 58.

<sup>211</sup> His diary on May 15, 1912 mentioned that there were 4 confessions and communions at Ambadanr. Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>212</sup> *Sadri* is a *lingua franca* of the Tribal Catholics of Chotanagpur, Gangpur and Jashpur.

<sup>213</sup> The Indian mission found at Alken after the death of Camiel Lievens, APBS, India 2, Box15/5, p. 3.

<sup>214</sup> Fr. Grosjean wrote: “On my way back from Rengarh, at Danrpani, examination of the schools. Zacharias, our headmaster, who had accompanied me, helped to examine the boys. There are now three village schools at Jhurmul, Jomonkera and Danrpani, with about 20, 30 and 12 boys respectively. I examined the Jhurmul School on the 12th of May, and found excellent results. Jomonkera was examined on Friday; it proved very raw, but there is much good and the parents appear to take interest in the schools.” M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 61.



monthly payment). They will demand Rupees 500/-, very little for this army.”<sup>215</sup> The financial constraints made Fr. Grosjean postpone his plans to build a church immediately, but he did build a hall, which served as a provisional church.

When Fr. De Smet arrived at Kesramal, he became the third missionary in residence there. The three divided the mission field into three parts: Frs. Alary and De Smet were assigned to the Bonai and Hamirpur areas respectively, whereas Fr. Grosjean looked after Kesramal and the district beyond the Sankh river, i.e. the present Jhunmur parish and its vicinity. Fr. Vermeire wrote: "Grosjean was entrusted [with] the part towards Jhunmur, which he developed with intrepid zeal, in spite of his great [advanced] age. After his death it was said that he had made (of) it the best portion of the vineyard."<sup>216</sup> When Br. Rotsaert was advised to return to Belgium for medical treatment, Fr. Grosjean had to carry on the construction work started by the brother, in addition to his own tasks of teaching, visiting the stations, and raising funds.<sup>217</sup>

The diaries of 1913 and 1914 are full of references to the village visits of the missionaries. In July 1913 Fr. Grosjean mentioned that the Catholic population of Gangpur, which included members “inherited” from the three stations of the Biru district, was 22,252, of whom 7,958 were baptized and 15,194 were catechumens. There were 2,301 communicants.<sup>218</sup>

### 3.2.2.3 Kesramal after the Pioneers

When Fr. Alary died in 1918, Fr. Grignard succeeded him as the head of the Gangpur mission. After a short period he was transferred to Ranchi, and Fr. Henry Floor succeeded him. Though there were changes in personnel, the mission progressed steadily, thanks to the common programme. A school had been built, and a convent with a large girls' school was entrusted to the Daughters of the Cross from Liège in Belgium. More than 50 chapels were built and served by the catechists, who instructed the new converts and prepared them for baptism and the other sacraments. Also more than 50 schools were opened. Fr. van de Schueren recorded: “There are at present 5 missionaries in the Gangpur mission, viz., two Belgian Jesuits and 3 young native priests from the Seminary of Ranchi. A new church entirely of brick has been erected, and it was to be present at the solemn blessing of this church that I journeyed to Kesramal with His Grace.”<sup>219</sup> Fr. van der Schueren furnished additional statistics of the Gangpur mission in his extensive report of May 1921. The total number of converts was 22,000. There were 68 chapels presided over by catechists in which normally Mass could only be said only two or three times a year

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<sup>215</sup> Fr. Grosjean observed: “En ce moment, mon dépôt à la Procure générale de Calcutta est tombé à zéro!... Nos 65 catéchistes, 50 aides-catéchistes, 12 maîtres d'école, nos domestiques, seront ici mardi prochain [pour la paie mensuelle]. Ils demanderont 500 Rupees; c'est peu pour cette armée.” H. JOSSON, *Un Chef de Mission aux Indes*, p. 370.

<sup>216</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 39.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>219</sup> Van der Schueren to Superior General, Calcutta, May 1921, ARSI, Calcut. 1005 - XIV, 13.

when the missionary was on tour. There were about 74 mission schools; but new schools were being added.<sup>220</sup>

Fr. Floor wrote: "There is a movement of conversion here, which we should try to keep up with God's grace . . . I have some centres with catechists at the head."<sup>221</sup> The building of new chapels and 22 new schools had been started. Fr. Floor had over 1,000 communions and 230 baptisms; the total number of conversions for the year 1921 now exceeded 2,000.<sup>222</sup>

### **3.2.2.4 Assistance given to get a Fortune outside Gangpur**

#### **3.2.2.4.1 Labour Corps**

When World War I broke out in 1914, many Gangpur Catholics wanted to join the Labour Corps because they had heard about the possibilities for better treatment in France and the steady monthly income. Initially, the people were apprehensive of the initiatives taken by the missionaries. According to M. Vermeire, it was due to the rumours spread by the Lutherans.<sup>223</sup> However, when the Tribals realised that it was only a rumour, some of them, mostly Oraons, decided to join the Labour Corps. But they insisted that they would join only if a missionary working in Chotanagpur accompanied them.<sup>224</sup> The first group of recruits from Ranchi left for France on June 13, 1917. A missionary from Chotanagpur was always present there to guide them. Although the agreement was for one year, some of them wanted to stay on, since their treatment in France was satisfactory. Besides, the work was not so heavy as dangerous -- they were exposed to constant dangers on the frontier. The first battalion returned to Ranchi on June 9, 1918, and it was accorded a joyful welcome. Their service in the Labour Corps improved the economic standard of some of the Tribals. All those who had returned from France gave a subsequent contribution of Rs. 10/- towards the construction of the church at Kesramal, which had been delayed for want of money. Msgr. B. Meuleman, the Archbishop of Calcutta, solemnly consecrated the first church in Gangpur on February 2, 1921.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> M. Vermeire recorded one such rumour: "Among the rumours we find: The Padris (fathers) are sending their Christians to be slaughtered in Europe. They are selling your flesh and bones to the *Sarkar* (Government), and you will never come back from there. All the English are being killed, and they want you also to go and fight." Due to this calumnious attack by the Lutherans there was a rebellion among the Santals of Mayurbhunj. People burned and destroyed public property. Cf. M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission History: Biru Common*, vol. I, Part II, APBS, India Lievens. Ser. B. Box. 4, pp. 93 - 94.

<sup>224</sup> Responding positively to the request of the aborigines of Chotanagpur, the missionaries set two conditions for the recruitment of candidates for the labour corps: (a) each corps would be accompanied by a missionary from the Chotanagpur mission; and b) the money transactions would be carried out through the Cooperative Bank of Ranchi. Cf. M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission History: Biru Common*, vol. I, Part II, APBS, India Lievens. Ser. B. Box. 4, p. 100; VAN DER SCHUEREN, "Au Chota Nagpore", in *MB* (1921), p. 33.

<sup>225</sup> M. Vermeire, *Gangpur Mission History I*, p. 103; Fr. Camiel Lievens wrote that "Fr. A. Grignard suggested to 400 men of the 'Labour Corps' to dig in their pockets and bring out some savings to complete the Kesramal church. And that happened indeed! With this money Fr. H. Floor got the roof on the church. Msgr. Meuleman came to bless it on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February 1921." *The Indian mission found at Alken after the*

### 3.2.2.4.2 Emigration to Tea gardens in Assam

Even before the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries, the tribal people from the Chotanagpur plateau began to migrate to the Assam tea plantations to earn their livelihood. Their decision was motivated by a strong desire to escape from the oppression and land alienation in which they found themselves. They had lost their land to the usurious Zamindars, and they feared that if they continued to live in the same village they might have to render *bethbegari* (forced labour) in perpetuity. Seeing no other possibilities locally and following their own natural instinct to survive, they left for the Assam tea gardens. The missionaries too followed their flock and visited them starting from 1908. Initially, the missionaries from Kurseong used to visit the Catholics living in Assam and helped those in need of assistance. They were also well received by the planters, in whose gardens the Catholics worked. Thus they could build some chapels here and there.

With the arrival of German Salvatorians<sup>226</sup> the situation changed, since the people could finally have missionaries living among them. However, the dedicated efforts of the Salvatorians were brought to a halt with World War I, for the German missionaries were interned in different camps and some of them were even repatriated. But soon they were replaced by a handful of Belgian Jesuits who continued the mission until the arrival of the Salesians of Don Bosco in 1921.

While the mission was under the Jesuits, Fr. Stanislaus Carbery was asked to help the Catholics in the tea gardens. Fr. M. Vermeire quoted the diary of Kesramal which had the following entry under December 1913: “At a conference held at Rengarih, the fathers of Biru and Gangpur discussed the proposals of directing the coolies to the plantations of Assam and the Duars that are visited by the priests. But the plan failed due in particular to the bad will of those they intended to protect. Around the end of the war, it was studied again this time by the Catholic cooperative of Ranchi.”<sup>227</sup> The tea garden coolies were settled in *bastis* or lanes, according to their nationality and caste, in different parts of the gardens; they worked in their vicinity. During the growing

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*death of Camiel Lievens*, APBS, India 2, Box15/5, p. 5; H. Josson, *The Mission of West Bengal*, p. 262; All those employed in the Labour Corps had agreed to pay Rupees 10 per head. Cf. H. FLOOR, “Lettre de Kesramal”, in *MB* (1920), p. 193.

<sup>226</sup> The Society of the Divine Saviour (SDS) was founded in Rome, on December 8, 1881, by Fr. Franziskus Maria vom Kreuze Jordan (1848-1918). It was founded for the preservation and spread of the faith through the education of youth, retreats, and missionary work among non-catholics. The society was recognised as a religious congregation in 1883 and received its present name in 1894. The society took up foreign missions when it counted only 6 priests and 17 lay brothers. With two priests (Frs. Otto Hopfenmüller and Angelus Münzloher) and two brothers (Brs. Josef Bächle and Marian Schumm) they began the Mission work in the prefecture apostolic of Assam in 1890. Their apostolic zeal was evident in that they had to take care of a vast territory with a handful of people and by their interest in learning khasi, Bengali and other local languages. For more details on the mission of the Salvatorians in Assam see, C. BECKER, *History of the Catholic Missions in Northeast India (1890-1915)*, trans. G. Stadler and S. Karotemprel, Shillong, 1980; J. EDNARZ, “Missionstätigkeit der Salvatorianer in Assam”, in KIEBELE et al (eds), *Die Salvatorianer in Geschichte und Gegenwart 1881-1981*, Rome 1981, pp. 283 – 291; R. MOLLEN, “Salvatorians”, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. XII, p. 1001.

<sup>227</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission History: Biru Common*, vol. I, Part II, APBS, India Lievens. Ser. B. Box. 4, p. 73. For detailed information regarding the work of the missionaries see pages 72-73, 100-101.

season the work was longer and steadier – but they earned more.<sup>228</sup> As a practical solution to improve the living and moral standards of the Catholics emigrating to the tea gardens in Assam, Fr. Stanislaus Carbery prepared a list of places where there was a catechist and sent the list to the *sar-panches* (the headman of the village) and missionaries for their reference. Although the list does not show the number of Catholics who had immigrated to Assam, it gives some information regarding their place of origin.<sup>229</sup>

### 3.2.2.5 Impediments to Growth

Not all the inhabitants of Gangpur viewed the work of the missionaries as constructive to tribal welfare. In the meantime they also gained more opponents from among the Zamindars. Some of the leaders of Nagra began to harass the Christians because they were afraid that the latter would go to court to redress their grievances. The Lutherans of Nagra were in league with the Zamindars in order to drive all the Roman Catholics out. The harassment meted out to Francis the catechist and to the Catholics in Gobira is an example.<sup>230</sup>

Although there was considerable growth in the conversion of Oraons, the mission had a setback caused by an organisation called *mukti larai* that encouraged -- even forced -- the Christian Oraons to come back to the tribe they lost by becoming Christians.<sup>231</sup> In 1915 some of the influential tribal leaders, no doubt backed by Zamindars, accused the women of pollution, as they took their meal with other tribes. In order to learn the catechism and to prepare for the reception of sacraments, the tribal women used to stay sat times in the convent, where they were also fed. Though the women were cautious, the fear of losing their *Jait* (tribe) resulted in defections, and several families returned to their former religion.

About the same time, Christianity also had to face another powerful enemy, namely *Tana Bhagatism*,<sup>232</sup> which produced many defections from the Catholic faith --

<sup>228</sup> Mission work among tea garden coolies and settlers in Assam, APBS, India 2, Box. 1, Ser. B. p. 3.

<sup>229</sup> Some of the places where the Gangpur Catholics migrated for the work in the tea gardens in Assam: Dibrugarh district: Khobong, Hoogrijan, Nagarkatta and Hatigarh Bagans; Nowgang Distict: Misa Bagan and Tezpur District: Addabari Bagan. Cf. Assam ka Cha Bagan (Tea garden in Assam), Mission work among garden coolies and settlers in Assam, APBS, India 2, Box. 1, Ser. B. p. 5.

<sup>230</sup> P. TETE, *The Kharias and the History of the Catholic Church in Biru*, p. 174.

<sup>231</sup> They call their organization *Mukti larai*, fight for liberation, and it was prevalent in most of the Gangpur villages. They call their leader *Raja* and his assistant *Dewan Sahib*. They contended that the Oraon women who spent some time in the convent schools learning *Dharam*, religion, had taken food cooked in the utensils of other castes. While there, the pagan leaders claimed that the women had irrevocably lost their *jait*, caste, by eating rice cooked by others, a sure way of losing caste. Therefore, they would be readmitted to the caste by drinking the blood of goats, provided that they declare that they would in future sever all connections with Christianity. Fr. Grosjean claims that the Oraon women had their own utensils and they cooked separately to protect them from being contaminated. Cf. M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 81; C. BECK “Three Great Missionaries of Chotanagpur”, in C. SRAMBICAL (ed.), *Lead me to Light. Divine Word Missionaries 1875-1975* (1975), p. 92.

<sup>232</sup> *Tana Bhagatism* was a socio-political movement that began in 1915 with the idea ‘Oraon land for Oraons’. This should logically conclude that all foreigners, i.e. Hindus, Muslims, Europeans without exception, should leave the land. But soon it took on a religious character, for they tried to reform the

including in Kesramal.<sup>233</sup> Following World War I, the movement spread among the Oraons and emphasised their independence, often with slogans against foreigners. While *Tana Bhagatism* was rampaging throughout the entire Chotanagpur plateau, Gangpur was more immune to it. The *Litterae Annuae* of Kesramal for 1916 mentioned: “[that two villages] that had not yet begun to learn the elements of the Christian religion, had gone over to the politico-religious sect, which goes here by the name of the *Bhagat* movement. There seems to be a real danger of several others following their example.”<sup>234</sup> However, the situation began to change in 1919 when many villages that had adhered to the nefarious doctrine of Bhagat began to abandon the fold and started to return to Catholicism. Hence, there arose a great need for recruiting more catechists, whether or not they were trained or suitable.<sup>235</sup>

World War I had devastating effects on the mission. Deprived of their resources, the missionaries had to reduce the salaries of the catechists and teachers. With the reduction of their salaries, one could hardly get any cooperation from them. The schools and villages were practically neglected. The establishment of some industries in the area also had a share in the decline of faith. Since the supervisors and contractors of these factories were Hindus, they cared little for Sunday services. Rather they made the Christians work even on those days.<sup>236</sup>

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traditional religion by abandoning the spirits (*bhuts*) in order to reaffirm their belief in one God and by adopting an austere life – hence they received their name *Bhagats*, ascetics. Contrary to the former religious practice of appeasing the *bhuts* (spirits), the new method advocated that the *bhuts* be chased out. Fr. Walrave, a missionary in Chotanagpur, wrote, “In the incantations the refrain of *Tana, Tana, Fire, Fire* (i. e. chase them out) came back again and again, hence the name Tana Bhagats. To have the power to chase the bhuts, one had to purify oneself, externally through daily ablutions and internally by abstaining from drinks and forbidden food such as fish, pork-meat, chicken, a whole category of vegetables, intoxicating drinks, etc. Moreover, one had to be initiated in a whole ritual of incantations which was the noisy part of the programme to which they gave themselves whole night with unheard-of spirit. They practised their exorcisms on anyone they suspected of being possessed by evil spirits (the *Dain Bisahis*).” The *bhagats* declared that they would achieve their goal by peaceful means, but in some places they were preparing ready with their traditional weapons for war. Cf. R.O. DHAN, “The Problems of the Tana Bhagats of Ranchi District”, in *Bulletin of the Bihar Tribal Research Institute* 2/1 (1960), pp. 136 – 186; H. JOSSON, *The Mission of West Bengal*, pp. 249 – 250.

<sup>233</sup>Citing the diary of Kesramal for 28.9.1916, Fr. Vermeire wrote: “In Ambadanr nearly all the Oraons have become Bhagats. Some 20 families have promised to preserve (the faith)... The movement has surely a political significance about it. In Nagra, the Rourkela side, Bhagatism seemed to be spreading too.” M. Vermeire, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, p. 105. The same author records the loss of a number of Christians in 1915-1917, which was due to the influence of Tana Bhagatism. Cf. M. VERMEIRE, *Biru Mission History: Biru Common*, vol. I, Part II, APBS, India Lievens. Ser. B. Box. 4, p. 26.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 99.

<sup>235</sup> The Indian mission found at Alken after the death of Camiel Lievens, Archief Belges. India 2, Box15/5, p. 4; Commenting on the quality of catechists, Fr. Alary wrote: “La plupart de nos catechists ne sont pas encore à la hauteur de la situation, aussi nos resultats, sont ils moins brillants. Nous avons toutefois obtenu des résultats passables.” Alary to Superior General, Kesramal, July 11, 1916, ARSI, Calcut. 1005 XIII, 8, p. 4.

<sup>236</sup> In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were manganese mines as well as dolomite and lime quarries where Catholics were employed. Cf. H. Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, June 27, 1920, APBS, India 2 – 28/2.

### 3.2.2.6 Efforts of the Daughters of the Cross for the Upliftment of Tribal women

In order to evangelise the tribal women, the Jesuit missionaries invited a group of religious Sisters who would have easier access to the timid tribal women. One of the first buildings to be built, after the provisional one which served as presbytery and chapel, was the convent. In 1909 a group of nuns belonging to the Daughters of the Cross agreed to establish their first convent in Gangpur. Regarding their arrival, H. Josson wrote: "On October 14, 1909, Fr. Alary bid them welcome when they alighted from the train at Rajgangpur; he also met Mother Provincial whose desire it was to preside at the installation of the community."<sup>237</sup> The Belgian province of the Society of Jesus was familiar with the congregation as most of the sisters were from Belgium. The Sisters had a convent in Chaibasa, which is geographically close to the Kesramal mission. Besides running a dispensary, they opened a school for children where they could also teach catechism to women and girls. Writing about the work of the Sisters in Kesramal, Fr. H. Josson recorded: "Only on one account was Kesramal a privileged station: immediately after its foundation it enjoyed the cooperation of religious women. They were of the greatest advantage for the instruction of children, marriage catechumenates, preparation of "old women" for baptism and the other sacraments."<sup>238</sup> They started a small workshop in August 1910 (later enlarged in 1912 with the hope of accommodating more women), for making lace.<sup>239</sup>

Besides their regular work in Kesramal, the Sisters took an interest in visiting villages where they visited the sick and distributed medicine. They gathered children for the school and hostel in Kesramal. To quote from the diary of Kesramal for October 21, 1912: "Sisters Xaveria and Julia go over to Sunkh. On Monday evening (October 21), (they go to) Jhurmul. Next day they see Kolabahar and all or nearly all the *tollas* (hamlets) of Gulikhaman, reaching Ambadanr about 4 P.M."<sup>240</sup> They remained in the area till October 26, visiting most of the villages where the missionaries normally went. In the following month, Srs. Xavier and Mary Ann visited Kokrem and Goghea. They stayed in some of the neighbouring villages for a week.<sup>241</sup>

### 3.2.2.7 The Future of Gangpur Mission

In order to serve a vast territory and place it under efficient administration, Fr. Grosjean divided the parish into 62 circles, which he called *ilakhas*. Each *ilakha* was given to a catechist and a *chaprasi* (servant), who were given a small salary for the service rendered.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>237</sup> H. JOSSON, *The Mission of West Bengal*, p. 261.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264.

<sup>239</sup> Van der Schueren to Superior General, Calcutta, May 1921, ARSI, Calcut. 1005, XIV-13.

<sup>240</sup> M. VERMEIRE, *Gangpur Mission History*, vol. I, pp. 67 – 68.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 70.

<sup>242</sup> The first section comprised the villages Alanda, Haathmunda, Koronga, Kahupani, Somloimunda, Raiberna, Gobarpiti, Simarmur, etc. The second consisted of Panrisila, Jhurmul, Ambadanr, Jambahar, Salangabhar, Babaimohon, Jomonkira, Amko, Jaidega, etc. Cf. Grosjean to Provincial, Kesramal, August 16, 1911, APBS, India 1 – 12/Grosjean letters.

Writing to the superior general of the Society of Jesus, Fr. Alary lamented the fact that the station of Kesramal had to provide for the spiritual needs of about 18,000 Catholics spread over an area of 2,500 square miles, with new converts living at a distance of 45 miles from the church and the missionary's residence. Under such circumstances, further development of the mission would be impossible. It had not been possible to obtain the permission of the native king to build another station in Gangpur.<sup>243</sup> It was absolutely necessary and urgent to divide the mission into three parts, each having at least 800 square miles. Kesramal would continue to remain the centre, but a new mission needed to be opened about 30 miles to the west and another new mission about 30 miles to the east. Sites for these new missions had been acquired at Behrembasa in the west and Hamirpur in the east.<sup>244</sup>

The efforts of the missionaries to evangelise the people in Gangpur did not stop with the Mundas, Oraons and Kharias. They approached one of the more populous but introverted tribal groups known as *Berga Oraons* or *Kisans*. These had not been ignored by the missionaries, but, the information on their entry into Catholicism is scanty, except for Fr. Cardon's comments on their marriages in the church. The tribal chiefs made it difficult for the *Kisans* to embrace Catholicism.<sup>245</sup>

Much of the missionaries' time was spent on visitation, which, due to the enormous distances between the villages, they were unable to undertake often. It was no mean task to live and move in a land of extremes: poverty, famine, sickness, oppression, illiteracy and religious fundamentalism. They were unable to start the proposed western station, since they ran short of funds and personnel. However, Fr. Lambot took up the work in the eastern part.

### 3.2.2.7.1 Changing fortunes of Kesramal

The *Mouvement de la Grâce* initiated by the veteran missionaries of Gangpur, Frs. Grosjean and Alary, experienced a set-back after their departure (deaths). In January 1920, about 84 hamlets returned to paganism. A good number of the chapels were totally or partially ruined. In short, the flourishing mission of Gangpur seemed to be heading for an early demise. Reasons for this decline included World War I (which drained the available sources for evangelisation), *Tana Bhagatism*, (which blocked the people from practicing

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<sup>243</sup> Alary to Superior General, Kesramal, July 14, 1917, ARSI, Calcut. 1005 XIII, 23.

<sup>244</sup> Waelkens informed the provincial that the place bought in Behrembasa was well located. Fr. De Gryse, who purchased the property, had a plan of starting a school, which would be followed by a church and presbytery. Cf. Waelkens to Provincial, Calcutta, March 21, 1906, APBS, India 2 – 22/6; Van der Schueren to Superior General, Calcutta, May 1921, ARSI, Calcut. 1005, XIV-13.

<sup>245</sup> Cardon to Provincial, Rengarih, July 23, 1909, APBS, India 2 – 29/1; Fr. Cardon mentioned the difficulties the missionaries faced with the Berga Oraons, Kisans: "Bon nombre de mariages chrétiens: même les Berga Oraons ont envoyé cinq couples. La providence s'est ménagé deux ou trois hommes de cette tribu qui ont chez les leurs le titre de 'raja' et usent de leur autorité pour introduire les lois et coutumes chrétiennes chez leurs gens. Si ces 'rois' étaient contre nous, humainement parlant, tous les efforts des missionnaires seraient vains pour christianiser ces bergas." Cardon to Provincial, Rengarih, January 13, 1910, APBS, India 2 – 29/1.

their religion, since some of the Hindu employers did not allow Catholic workers to go to Mass on Sundays).<sup>246</sup>

### 3.3 Conclusion

Against all odds, the missionaries (both MSFS and Jesuits) managed to establish mission centres from which they could move to different places according to the needs of the people and the availability of personnel. In addition to the difficulties of acclimatisation, the MSFS suffered from their ignorance of local languages and of the customs of the people. There were some exceptions, like Fr. Joseph Seigneur and Fr. Dupont, who made great efforts at learning the languages, which in the long run helped them to have a lasting contact with the people. However, except for a few, all of them were unable to cope with the climate. The Jesuits did not feel that they were entering a new territory. Gangpur seemed to be an extension of Chotanagpur, particularly when comparing the people, the language and the culture. In fact, tribal affinities with Gangpur was one of the strong motives to pursue mission expansion. Except for the distances and extremes of weather, the missionaries did not feel that they were in a strange land. It is true that they felt isolated there, but they could continue the same methods they had used in Chotanagpur.

Since the initial responses were so encouraging, the missionaries realised that a renewed supply of personnel and resources could change the character of the mission. Therefore, they took the decision to send missionaries to different parts of the mission, often responding to the ever-growing number of requests, which ultimately resulted in establishing more centres, which in turn led to a good number of people adhering to Catholicism.

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<sup>246</sup> H. Floor to Provincial, Kesramal, June 27, 1920, APBS, India 2 – 28/2.