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ROLE OF WOMEN AND NUNS IN EVANGELIZATION OF THE KODAIKANAL CHURCHES

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Abstract

It is always the primary duty of every member of the Church to witness by life and word to Jesus Christ, who came into the world to save the sinners. In this work of Evangelization both individuals and groups are taking part using special methods. Along with men, women also have played a very good role in religious activities. Their sincerity and hard working later gave them place and power in their religious orders.

The sisters are doing different kinds of work in different places in India. Among the nuns there are ordained women, medical Doctors, teachers in Schools, Colleges and Theological and Religious institutions, working in orphanages and so on. Along with these kinds of Bible women, Evangelists, and sisters of the order for women, there are women who have joined together and organized themselves and formed women's fellowship. These groups of women have organized conferences, seminars and discussed religious and work for the church in an enthusiastic way.

Key words: *Evangelization, congregation, Dispensary*

1. Introduction

Kodaikanal was founded by the American and European missionaries, Christian churches are abundant in Kodaikanal. The Kodaikanal churches are helping the poor people of Kodaikanal. The churches are greatly contributing to the development of the communities in that region and also in the adjoining places.

Christian's schools not only provide education but also good discipline and good results. We may note here the proliferation of Christian schools with 'St' name all over the streets. Christian hospitals are noted for best services, care and cleanliness etc. The nursing sister is like an angel rendering services to the hospitalized.

2. Bible Women

Women, being the home makers, finish all their household works in time and spend their valuable time in evangelization ministry. They are more voluntary, spontaneous and active. Their enthusiasm finds no bounds. As they get involved in such a priceless work, they are able to practice the Christos centric values in their own families¹. Many of the working women also participate in this ministry.

The work of Bible women is different in many aspects from other form of organized mission work. Bible women have to attend mission work and to visit schools, hospitals and congregations. The meetings of congregations and churches have their hours of attendance and hospitals have their times².

3. The Carmelite Monastery

The missionary activities of the Carmelites extended to the southernmost part of Tamilnadu from the 18th century onwards. The Carmelite monastery at Shenbaganur, Kodaikanal was founded in the year 1944³. The total members solemnly professed are 15 with one external sister.

The Carmelite nuns withdraw completely from the world and they dedicate themselves entirely to a life of prayer and penance. The nuns have never stepped outside their cells. From the time they rise in the morning they chant the praises of God until they return to their cells at nights. They join at the age of 13 or 14 and spend their life inside the monastery until their death.

They reside in their protective walls of monastery and spend the days in Holy mass, singing, spiritual reading and rosary etc. They have never stepped out of their premises and in exceptionally serious cases few are hospitalized. They live in a cloistered monasteries and follow a completely contemplative life and they themselves become a living prayer. They have found their life by giving themselves to God.

4. Sisters of St. Anne's (Trichy)

The society was founded at Trichirapalli it spreads its roots and shoots off at Kodaikanal on the 17th of February 1980⁴. To benefit and uplift the down trodden and poor students as well as suppressed lower community people they started typewriting, short hand and sewing schools and will remain a top in the days to come with their

tireless efforts. Similarly the students of this organization have received several prizes in the school final government examinations thus bringing laurels to the organization.

Further, the organization plays an active role in rebuilding several broken marriages through molding the young minds. They take up religious teaching (seminary) and discussions thereby, feeding the people with religious thoughts too.

5. The society of the Daughters of Mary Immaculate

This society was started as a small group at the village of Kavunji, Munjikkal, Kodaikanal on the 1st of May, 1989 with the help of Jesuit society (Society of Jesus)⁵. The people of this village remained backward in all means of growth and development as no other missionary organizations till then had approached this part of Kodaikanal. According to the basic principles of this organization, they mingled and lived amongst these people and showed the ways to live an exemplary life according to the scriptures. Instead of converting the people to Christianity, they began to function according to the changing needs of the people with time and environment in bringing out socio economical improvement in education, sanitation upliftment of women. They conducted classes to the different segments of the people viz. those who were attending schools, school dropouts and adults. They impart awareness programmes to these people by forming smaller groups to educate the people on environmental sanitation, small savings schemes and women rights. They also organize classes and discussions by inviting experts in specialized areas as part of creating awareness. This organization faces certain obstacles from the people time to time which they face happily.

6. Franciscan Sisters of St. Joseph's

The members of this society together work a prayerful apostolic living. Further to meet the changing needs of the church they work for providing better medical facility, education and social works. In Tamil Nadu they are located at various places including Kodaikanal. They run two convents at Kodaikanal namely Loretta convent and Loyola convent. It was established on the 8th of December, 1936. After two years of establishment this convent progressed towards its goal⁶. They provide training in tailoring and concentrate in social welfare development activities in addition to preaching the Gospel.

7. Sisters of St. Mary

This society was started on 18th May, 1965 at kodaikanal. The sisters of this society came to do social development works for the people of kodaikanal and till date are doing it. They established themselves in the village of Attuvampatti in 1970 and continue to do their social work. The society concentrates mainly on Women's liberation, upliftment and social works.

8. Servites of Mary

The Servites of Mary formerly called sisters of Dolours first entered Madurai in 1882 and opened a school in East Gate area, now occupied by the local sisters of the congregation of Immaculate Conception. When the new local congregation needed a place to start work, the Servites were asked to choose between Madurai and Dindigul. The Servites have the Juliana dispensary in Ugarte Nagar Shembaganur from 1965. Besides caring for medical needs of Ugarte Nagar they go to Attuvampatti, a village away from Kodaikanal.

9. Missionary Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (ICM)

The ICM sisters were interested in the welfare of the people of Kodaikanal and initially established the St. Jhon's Primary school, which developed into a middle school and in 1964-65 to a High school and finally upgraded to Higher Secondary school in 1984. Majority of the young women of Kodaikanal were educated from this school⁷.

In addition to the School they also established the St. Antony's Dispensary near the bus stand to provide basic medical facility and alleviate the distress of local people.

10. The Congregation of St. Louis Gonzaga

The sisters of this congregation came to Shenbaganur, through the efforts of Fr. Peter Saverimuthu, S.J. From Shenbaganur they used to go daily to Pragasapuram and return. At present they have a school and a boarding and a dispensary in Pragasapuram. The Shenbaganur sisters run a Nursery School, teach Catechism, and visit houses. In Naidupuram and Munjikkal they conduct Typewriting and Tailoring Institutes.

11. Holy Cross Sisters

This convent was started by sisters Augustine, veronica and Annelencea in the summer house of Belvedar on 21st June, 1939 at Kodaikanal. Today located on the

hillock of kodaikanal St. Theresa's middle school in its unique way continues its educational service.

Though the three sisters came to spread the gospel by seeing the condition of the people of Kodaikanal then, out of compassion for these people and to wipe out their ignorance they started primary education comprising standards 1 and 2 in the house of Belvedar where they resided. Rev. Stephen Manji who had left France and come to India to establish Catholic Church activities at the hamlet of Munchikal was the school's first chairman. The school started with 48 students in 1939 under the chairmanship of Sister Ignatius began its third standard and begin to spread. However, due to lack of space the school shifted to hut tenement near la Salette campus.

In 1940 the school chairmanship transferred to the hands of mother Julie who has retired from her college service. During her tenure, third and fourth standards were started at the school and Sister Ignatius joined as its third teacher. With great difficulty leading a simple life the sisters bought for Rs.3990, the present day campus spread over an area of 6 acres and 65 cents from the then wife of the municipal councilor Mrs. Carolene Beatrice van Samarine. Due to the location of the school the area surrounding the school was called Theresalpuram.

Today the school functions with 740 students and 18 teachers and a physical education teacher and arts teacher. The school has won a special place in the hearts of the people of Kodaikanal. About 150 students stay in the school hostel and pursue their studies.

In 1954 St. Joseph's dispensary was opened to be of service not only to the orphans but to the poor tribal's around. In 1970 Shanthigiri was purchased and it serves as a house of prayer. In the 1974 the sisters undertook a new apostolate at Mercy Home, run by the CORSOCK for the aged and the forsaken members of society.

12. Presentation Sisters of the B.V.M

These sisters started in 1917 in Kodaikanal a European High School. Being of a high standard, it attracted students even from the North. To this school of the rich was added a school for the poorer people, in Tamil medium in 1919 which has now become a Higher Secondary School; the medium school is being phased out towards its complete

closures in 1990. The Marian dispensary was inaugurated in 1970, which gives Medical aid to at least seven villages.

13. Conclusion

The sisters are highly responsible for spreading education, providing self-employment and uplifting the status of poor, downtrodden, women and children in and around Kodaikanal. The women fellowship of a church is not only concerned about the affairs of the particular church but also interested in the affairs of the church and problems of the people in and around it.

End Notes

1. The Annual Report of the American Madurai Mission, Madurai, 1842, p.25.
2. Ibid, 1842.pp20-21, 70-71.
3. Interview with Rev. Fr. Jayaraj, Co-coordinator-Pastoral Center, Madurai Arch diocese, Madurai on 4-4-2005.
4. V.M. Gnanapragasam S.J, **A Pearl of Great Price**, Vijaya Printers, Madurai, 1988, p.220.
5. Interview with Sr. Peno Mary (Lourthu Annai Dispensary) Age 78, Dated 6-5-2007.
6. Kenneth E. Gill, **Count us Equal; The ministry of women in the church of south India**, Association of Theologically trained women in India, Bangalore, 1990, p.14.
7. Interview with Sr. Alphonse (headmistress in St. John's School, Kodaikanal) Age 78, Dated 6-5-2007.