

**ROLE OF ARCHBISHOPS FOR THE EVOLUTION OF
THE PUDUCHERRY MISSION**

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INTRODUCTION

Pondicherry which was a small fishing village unknown to the world was created as the window of the French Culture by the advent of the French¹. Pondicherry, the very word seems to be the correction of Pudicherry² which means a new hamlet. The Union Territory of Pondicherry constituted out of the four French establishments of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Mahe and Yanam has the epoch of history of three hundred and fifty years³. The French showed great interest in promoting the new faith i.e., Christianity apart from their economic trade and commercial motives. The Charter of 1664 had bestowed the Royal French Indian Company perpetual concession over Madagascar and the neighbouring islands an important condition that it should promote the Catholic faith in these areas. Thus the company started its evangelical mission and Pondicherry saw the beginning of the mission by two Capuchin priests, in 1674, who came to Pondicherry along with Francois Martin to spread the Gospel among the strange population⁴.

DEDICATION BY THE CAPUCHINS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF MISSION

The evangelical mission at Puducherry, saw its inception by St. Francis Xavier, which was made known by the two letters written by the saint himself in the year 1545. They reveal vicinity of the mission took in the place called Saveriacheri and they must have experienced the saints evangelical work and there are evidences that the saint made some conversion among the population and since there were no priests the new religion lost its rapport in development⁵. But the Capuchins (Franciscan Missionaries) from 1674 accepted the offer made by Francois Martin and started their mission. The first chapel for the natives was built in 1686 and this was outside the Fort of Pondicherry and dedicated to St.Peter and later this chapel was made as St.Lazarus Church. This place for the construction of the Church was donated by Tanappa Mudaliar who was a convert and had a new name Lazaro de Motha⁶. Suddenly the course of the mission was changed by the Providence and the Capuchins were replaced by the Jesuits.

JESUITS AND THE PONDICHERRY MISSION

The Jesuits obtained permission from the Government and occupied a piece of land in the town to serve the mission. They were given letters of patent by Louis XIV in 1695 and assigned to take care of the Indians⁷. They built their first church in 1692 which was dedicated to Mother Mary and known as Immaculee de la Conception⁸, later it came to be known as St.Pauls

Church but the inhabitants of Pondicherry called it as Samba Koil. By then the population of Pondicherry was around 30,000 in 1703 out of which the Christians of Pondicherry were 2000⁹. Records further give information that around 600 persons were baptized between 1724 and 1725 though the conversion was very difficult and many were from low castes. During this period, a convert to Christianity by name Kanakaraya Mudali built a Church at Ozhukarai at a cost of 700 pagodas¹⁰. The Jesuits were able to build their second Church during 1728-1736 and started a small Boarding High School where they began to teach competently various subjects such as Mathematics, Science, Navigation and Philosophy. It was around 1775 there was a talk about the Societe des Missions Etrangeres to be given charge of the mission replacing the Jesuits and the letters-patent of Louis XVI followed together with the Papal Bull about the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1773 came as a terrible blow from Rome by the Pope Clement XV and the Mission which was rapidly growing was hindered by the capture of the British in 1761 and Pondicherry was in ruins. The Jesuits were persecuted in Europe, but the population of Christians in the mission estimated to 30,000 out of which Pondicherry alone had 10,000 and Karaikal had about 2000¹¹. The Christians formed about one-sixteenth of the total population. The Jesuits were forced to hand over their mission to the new missionaries bidding good bye to Pondicherry hoping to see it at some time.

The Societe des Missions Etrangeres, (M.E.P) and the Vicar Apostolics for the Mission.

The M.E.P Father's intention was to develop the Apostolic Mission that was already done by the Jesuits. For this purpose they constructed a mission house in the year 1771 by name College Generale. They had it one at Siam established in the year 1666 but was closed in 1767 due to invasion from Burma¹². So Pondicherry College Generale became the first of its kind and it acted as a base for the mission.

The Directors of the M.E.P bought a splendid piece of land at Virampatinam, near Pondicherry and constructed a college. In 1775 Pope Pius VI approved the College Generale of Virampatinam and put it under the special care of the Holy See. The first Rector was Fr. Pigneau de Behaine. He remained as Rector till 1774 even though he was nominated coadjutor of Cochin China already in 1771. Due to insufficient number of students in the Seminary, it was closed in the year 1781. With the British attack in the year 1793 the Mission House was used as a hospital for many years. One can see even today the imposing ruins of the former seminary, in a delightful spot on which the Romans had set up an "emporium" in older times¹³. The enormous Roman bricks found in the remains have been used for the building of the Seminary, a few of which are still seen in the portico. The life in the Seminary was studious as it was practical: "Everyday, the brothers spent four hours in study and one hour in gardening, baking, etc.,¹⁴" And it was only in 1807 that the Seminary of its kind was reopened at Penang. But there was a small seminary at Oulgaret established by Fr. Magny which trained the first batch of Tamil Seminarians for the priesthood. The first Pondicherry priest was ordained in the ember days of Advent in 1788. The second was ordained on the octave of Epiphany 1789¹⁵. Thereby the missionaries were able to breed their kind gradually at Pondicherry and other French settlements.

Apparently the Holy See wanted to appoint a Vicar Apostolic for the sheep without a shepherd doesn't look so nice, and so Mgr. Brigot was appointed as the first Vicar Apostolic of the mission with the title Bishop of Tabraca¹⁶. Mgr. Brigot was born at Sully, in the Diocese of Orleans in 1713 and became a priest. During the Burma-Siam war, he was imprisoned and

taken away by the victorious Burmese and later on released and went back to France. By the Grace of God he was appointed as the shepherd for the new mission which extended from Machilipatnam in the north to Karaikal in the south and 180 miles from east to west. From 1776 to 1791, Mgr. Brigot dedicated himself to the service of mankind. Though he was by nature hot-tempered and rough he showed a wonderful gentleness and moderation during his episcopacy. The economic conditions during his tenure was well sufficient and there came about many Catholic establishments and many Congregations came up especially Bon Secours and Saint Louis de Gonzague¹⁷.

Though spirit was willing to work for the Lord, bodily Mgr. Brigot reached 70 years of age and realised that he did not have the strength to manage the mission alone and so asked for Co-adjutor and so Fr. Champenois was appointed soon Mgr. Brigot left the mission management and lived only for five more years spending his time in prayer and awaiting the Lord's call, and answered him in 1791, for he was Vicar apostolic for 36 years facing all difficulties and trails. He has the honour and the merit to have presided over the birth of the Pondicherry Mission and to have given impetus with which it was going to thread its way towards its glorious destiny. Fr. Champenois, the Co-adjutor succeeded Mgr. Brigot as Vicar Apostolic in 1791 and devoted himself most ardently to the formation of indigenous seminarists and the establishments of the Indian Clergy. He was born in 1734 in the Diocese of Reims and became missionary in 1777. He took up the title as Bishop of Dolicha, at the start of the mission development, he saw that the town of Karaikal evangelical work was taken from the Malabar Mission and given to the Capuchins. He constructed a seminary in 1787 and founded a college to impart education the children of the natives. In June 1791, a church was completed where construction was started by the Jesuits in 1770 and on 20th June 1791 Mgr. Champenois dedicated it to Immaculate Conception. He was forced to leave the French territory due to the French Revolution but returned very soon to carry on the mission. During his bishopric, the mission was divided into eleven districts with a Christian population of about 28,000 and the distribution is shown in the following table¹⁸.

* Table Showing the Christian population during Mgr. Champenois

Missionary Place	Total Population of Christians
Pondicherry	6000
Condavir	1500
Punganur	1000
Bangalore	1000
Seringapatnam	4000
Karumattampetty	3500
Dharmapuri	2000
Karaikal	2000

Attipakam – Tirunattu	3500
Vellore	2000
Carvepundy	1500

During the tenure of Mgr. Champenois the first Indian priest was ordained as MEP in 1788 and his name was Fr. Thomas and the second was Fr. Philip. In 1805, Mgr. Champenois was very tired and asked for priest who can assist him and thereby Fr. Herbert was nominated as Co-adjutor, Mgr. Champenois fell very sick where he died in October 1810 after guiding the mission for 33 years. These long years were rough and hard for he faced many trials, wards, persecution and even revolution which forced the mission suspended to get suspended. All these trials and turbulations have strengthened the foundation of the Mission of Pondicherry¹⁹. After Mgr. Champenois, Mgr. Herbert succeeded him in 1806. He was born in Orne and came to Pondicherry in 1792. During this period, the future of the mission was not bright and France faced difficulties which made them to refuse to send the priest and the economic situation was so weak that they wanted to close the seminary where the priest got trained. The Society of the Foreign Missions was officially re-established by Louis XVIII on 2nd March 1815. Mgr. Herbert asked for priests and they sent missionaries like Bonnand, Jarriage and Bigot-Beauclair. Besides these missionaries eight Indian were ordained as priests. New Churches and Chapels were built and the number of converts increased. Epidemics visited the missionary place especially cholera and famine and the economy was very poor. Mgr. Herbert went to the extent of having the sacred vessels melted and sold out to relieve the poor. Slowly the atmosphere started recovering and Mgr. Herbert chose a coadjutor Mgr. Bonnand in 1828 and he was consecrated as Bishop in 1833²⁰. Three years later the mission was declared as Vicariate Apostolic of the Coromandel Coast and Bonnand became its Vicar Apostolic. Between 1836 and 1861, Mgr. Bonnand was in-charge of the mission. He was born at Saint Maurice and ordained as the priest on 17th June 1821. He invited the Jesuits for the mission work and gave them Trichirappalli and Madurai regions where they opened a rest house meant to act as a centre and a college for the Pondicherry population. Mgr. Bonnand and his missionaries viewed the setting up of these institutions as part of the wider Jesuits designs to expand in Tanjore and Pondicherry. It was in 1840 he founded the Mission Press and placed it under the humble care of Fr. Dupuis. In 1844, he encouraged Fr. Dupuis to form the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary and the Carmelite Sisters were brought under the Second Order. The most significant episcopacy happening during Mgr. Bonnand was the Pondicherry Synod held in 1844 of the Vicariate Apostolic of the Coromandal Coast. This synod was the opening to several recommendations regarding the formation of native clergy, schools, seminaries, the administration of Christians, the Sacraments and the missionaries, conversions etc., In 1845, the Vicariate Apostolic was divided into three Vicariates as Pondicherry, Mysore and Coimbatore was entrusted the task of conversion and mission to the Societe des Missions Etrangères. The number of Christians was 83,000 in Pondicherry, 14000 in Mysore and 13000 in Coimbatore. Mgr. Bonnand became the ultimate reason for the formation of Vicariate of Vishakapatnam and entrusted the missionary work to the Congregation of St. Francis de Sales d'Annecy. The Church of Notre-Dame des Anges was constructed in 1855 according to the plan drawn by the

famous engineer Louis Guerre. Several other churches were also constructed during the early half of the 19th century²¹.

** Table showing the status of the mission during Mgr. Bonnard's episcopacy.

Mission	No.
Catechists	102
Kovilpillais	164
Churches	42
Chapels	210
Major	1
French	1
Tamil &	1
Hospitals	2
Convents	2
Orphanages	2
Press	1

In 1858, Indian Missions was able to have new Visiteur Apostolique as Mgr. Bonnard, who was nominated by the Pope, in order to study the working of Catholic Institutions and to submit a report to him. A Minor Seminary was opened called Petit Seminaire for all the students. Mgr. Bonnard too wanted to have a co-adjutor and he chose Fr. Godelle as his successor and on 16th August 1867, he was ordained Bishop. He had three titles as Bishop of Thermopyles, Administrator of Coimbatore and Co-adjutor of Pondicherry. Thus the twenty five years of the episcopate of Bishop Bonnard were certainly very important in the Catholic History of India. He was certainly a great man and highly respected and breathed his last in 1861²². His successor Mgr. Godelle started his missionary work with great zeal like his predecessor but his period faced famine and flood and brought many inhabitants towards new religion and many missionaries left the world together. With Mgr. Godella who was the

Vicariate head for only six years and there was no special event that distinguishes his episcopate but his simplicity always is remembered with great respect in the Mission of Pondicherry²³. Since, there was no co-adjutor for Mgr. Godella, Fr. Laouenan was appointed as Apostolic Vicar of Pondicherry in 1868 and received his Episcopal ordination from Mgr. Charbonnaux on 11th October 1868 in the Cathedral of Pondicherry. The Mission status got improved with the arrival of 48 missionaries from France and 20 Indian Priests. Mgr. Laouenan went to Rome for Ecumenical Council in 1868 and in 1869 took up his pastoral visits to all the parishes of the Mission. By 1873, the Pondicherry Mission had 1,34,000 Christians and in 1886 it rose to 2,03,000. As to the mission, there was a change of the Apostolic Prefecture of Pondicherry was abolished and Pondicherry Vicariate Apostolic was raised to the status of Archdiocese with jurisdiction over the Dioceses of Mysore and Coimbatore. The first Archbishop of the Diocese was Mgr. Laouenan and the mission flourished without much interruption. The Holy See was very pleased and he was raised as Roman Count and an Assistant to the Pontifical Throne. In 1891, his health was not supporting and he got several strokes of cerebral congestion. Though he went to France for treatment, he could not survive and he died on 29th September 1892 at the Sanatorium of Montbeton and the great leader of a great Mission was no more²⁴.

Pondicherry as Archdiocese

Pondicherry Archdiocese extended over the Pondicherry Union Territory and the South Arcot district of Madras State, on 7 August 1953. It was given a new title by Rome: the "Archdiocese of Pondicherry and Cuddalore". Originally, the Archdiocese included the former French settlements of Pondicherry, Karaikal, Chandannagar, Mahe, and Yanam. Chandannagore was re-allocated to the Archdiocese of Calcutta, now Kolkata, and Mahé to the Kerala Diocese of Calicut, now Kozhikode, in 1949. The present Archdiocese of Pondicherry and Cuddalore extends over the Pondicherry and Karaikal districts of Puducherry and Cuddalore and Vilupuram districts of Tamilnadu²⁵.

*** Table showing the Archdiocese of Pondicherry – Cuddalore and the Archbishop who served for the Pondicherry Mission

No.	Name	From	Until	About the Archbishops
1	Archbishop Joseph-Adolphe Gandy, M.E.P.	September 29, 1892	March 25, 1909	
2.	2 Archbishop Elie-Jean-Joseph Morel, M.E.P.	May 11, 1909	August 16, 1929	
3	Archbishop Auguste-Siméon Colas, M.E.P.	June 24, 1930	October 28, 1955	Last foreign bishop. Played an important role in forming Catholic Bishops' Conference of India. A region called Colas Nagar (11.92372°N 79.82652°E [3]) in Puducherry is named after him for the services he rendered for the people of Puducherry.
4	Archbishop Ambrose Rayappan	November 28, 1955	March 17, 1973	First Indigenous Archbishop
5	Archbishop Venmani S. Selvanather	March 17, 1973	1992	He participated in all four sessions of the Second Vatican Council as Church Father
6	Archbishop Michael Augustine	February 18, 1992	June 10, 2004	He was born, ordinate and served as a priest in same diocese. He is the 1 st Archbishop of Pondicherry diocese to be named as its own Archbishop.
7	Archbishop Antony Anandarayar	June 10, 2004	Present	

Bishops and Cardinals from the Archdiocese of Pondicherry – Cuddalore

- Bishops :

There are totally seven bishops of the Roman Catholic church who served were born in the Pondicherry Mission of the Archdiocese. They are:

- Most Rev. Dr. Ubagarasamy Bernadeth, Bishop of Coimbatore (1940)
- Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Mark Gopu, Auxiliary Bishop of Pondicherry (1948), Archbishop of Hyderabad (1953)
- Most Rev. Dr. Joseph Thumma, Bishop of Vijayawada (1970)
- Most Rev. Dr. Michael Duraisamy, Bishop of Salem (1974)
- Most Rev. Dr. Michael Augustine, Auxiliary Bishop of Madras-Mylapore (1978), Bishop of Vellore (1981) and Archbishop of Pondicherry (1992)
- Most Rev. Dr. Yvon Ambrose, Bishop of Tuticorin (2005)
- Most Rev. Dr. Peter Abir Antonisamy, Bishop of Sultanpet (2013)²⁶.

- Cardinal

Pondicherry Mission was able to bring out its own son as the Cardinal and that is Most Rev. Dr. Duraisamy Simon Lourdasamy (1985)

This shows that Christian missionaries in India reached areas hitherto inaccessible to most of the civilized people and there, braving all sorts of hardships and sufferings and extended the benefits of civilization to the most backward and illiterate people²⁷.

Conclusion

Thus, Pondicherry Mission was able to progress by the help of Kingdom of our Lord and the yester years saw many good and active missionaries who were yeomen to pay all their life time and were able to build a huge Puducherry Mission and it has a hoary past spanning over 356 years. This glorious history, is woven is with the flesh and blood of the missionaries, who toiled hard day in and day out. Ineffable sufferings, unexpected twists and turns of events, stringent oppositions, sharp political changes and all sorts of hurdles did not affect their strong will and noble conviction to serve the cause of the Holy Christianity. Their self – less service and preparedness to face all odds rewarded them with the boundless Grace and Mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ and their Holy Mission succeeded at the end.

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