

**The Contributions Of Jesuits Missionary On Social Reformation In  
Pudhucherry: Towards Congregation And Convents – A Study**

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**Abstract**

*Fr. Kerdhu landed on the shore of Puducherry in 1732. He dedicated himself. He dedicated himself to the mission Carmel convent in Puducherry. Fr. Kerdhu fixed his mind only the spreading of the Good News and nothing more. He was sent to work in the Carnatic Mission in 1733. By then women could not go to schools for study. Due to the false interpretation of the Hindu scriptures and the inhuman practices of superstition they were denied interpretation of the Hindu Scriptures and the inhuman practices of superstition they were denied several rights. These injustices made Fr. Keerdhu accelerate his process of instituting a congregation of women to work for the liberation if these women. Fr. Kerdhu , rested in the Lord on 16 June 1779, at the age of 88. Then the convent and the members were taken care are by Fr. Michael Ansaldo and landed in Pudhucherry .*

**Keywords: Destitute, Congregation, Evangelization, Confession, Catechism, Deterioration.**

**Introduction**

Fr. Gaston Laurence kerdhu, was born in France. During the journey to India , as a missionary while his ship was caught in the storm, Fr. Kerdhu vowed to God that if the ship reached safely to the shore , he would establish a convent in honour of our Lady Mount Carmel and a house for the destitute. The sea turned very calm Fr. Keerdhu on the shore of Pudhucherry in 1732<sup>1</sup> He paid the homage to the land and dedicated himself to the mission he planned. The result is Carmel convent in Pudhucherry. The vow of Fr. Kerdhu is the seed that

was down for the foundation of our congregation. This became the origin of our congregation and that of congregation of our Lady of Refuge in Chennai.

In the context of a different culture, language , food and continues. Fr.Keerdhu fixed his mind only the spreading of the Good News and nothing more. After a year of his stay in Pudhucherry, he was sent to work in the Carnaticmission in 1743. He worked very hard in the Carnatic mission in different responsibilities<sup>ii</sup> Nevertheless, he has not forgotten the bow he made during his journey. In spite of his many responsibility he was always looking for a fitting opportunity to fulfil his vow. This paper is focus on Franciscan sisters of St. Aloysius Gonzaga Congregation ay Pudhcuherry.

The people of pudhucherry were discriminated on the basis of their birth. The women were treated as mere objects to be sold and bought at whims and fancies of the men folk. To live as a virgin was thought to be possible issue in the then existing Indian culture . The women could not decide what type of life they could choose to live . The parents of the girl decided their destiny. The existence of child marriage paved the way for earlier widowhood. The sound girls,the premature death of their husbands, cannot get married once again. Women folk could not go schools to study due to the false interpretation of the Hindu scriptures and the inhuman practices of superstition. <sup>iii</sup>These injustices made Fr. Kerdhu , with the help of three generous women from Ariyankuppam, in pudhucherry instituted the Carmel Convent.

The missionary of mission estrangers de Paris(MEP) whose congregation was officially established in Paris on 10th October 1664, deserve to me mentioned for their yeomen service after the missionaries of the society of a Jesus. The pope suspended the society of Jesus in 1773. King Louis XVI of France issued the edict that the Missionaries of MEP congregation must take the responsibility of taking care of evangelization the same type

problems, he looked after the convent and the members with care and concern, Fr. Keerdhu , rested in the Lord on 16 June 1779, at the age of 88. Then the convent and the members were taken by “ Fr. Michael Ansaldo<sup>iv</sup> Fr. Michael Ansaldo is a very good example for a Christian apostle. He is an enlightened man endowed with a magnanimous soul, highly empowered intellect, deep spirituality and a strong conviction of sacrifice”. Here it is highly useful to know the historical background of Fr. Michael And also , was born on 29th September 1739 in the city of Messina in Italy in very pious family. The family was known for its practice of faith and that of the Christian virtues . He completed his primary studies in a school run by the missionaries belonging to the Society of Jesus. The contact with the missionaries inspired in the young virulent mind and heart of Michael Ansaldo the first spark of listening to the call of God and to respond to it by becoming a missionary himself .

Both Michael Ansaldo and his brother Joseph And also to become the members of the Society of Jesus. Michael Ansaldo was just fifteen years old. On 15th January 1755, Michael And also and his brother Joseph And also entered the order. While they learnt all the necessary disciplines to become the members of the society of Jesus, they were also growing very gradually in spiritual listener Brother Joseph And also died due to illness. It took a very long time for Michael to accept the hard fact and to get reconciled with it. Michael Ansaldo went to the major seminary in Palermo in the island of Sicily in 1754 to study physics, medicine and theology. After the completion of his studies in the major seminary, he spent his life for five years as a teacher of literature in one of the Jesuit colleges.

The desire to become a missionary was very alive in the heart of Michael Ansaldo. Therefore he made every effort to know about the lives of a few of those missionaries who travelled oceans to preach the good news. With due permission from the superior general of the Society of Jesus, he began his journey in one of the French ships that was going for India. After nearly five months of struggle with the wind and bad weather on the high seas Fr.

Michael Ansaldo landed in Pudhucherry it was his custom to hear confessions from 5-10 O' clock in the morning. He also managed to get a few able instructors in weaving and made for their livelihood . He did not fail to effectively make use of the occasion instruct the girls about the message of Jesus in the form of Catechism and to lead them into the practices of moral virtues.

Fr. Michael Ansaldo was responsible for the apostolic administration of the region of Pudhucherry. He always utilized his few hours that were over after his missionary activities in learning the local language , writing down his thought and in enhancing his general knowledge about other disciplines that would enable him to the mission in a manner better and more efficient than before . Fr. Michael Ansaldo did not lose sight of the main duty of fulfilling the vow , grapes the existing social and the economic conditions in and around pudhucherry, which made a long lasting impact on his mind. The debilitating condition of the young windows, the refusal of education to the womenfolk, the pitiable condition of the children that wee abandoned on the streets, the poverty of the people at the lower level of the society , and the politicaldeterioration due to civil wars made the missionary do something that would be of some immediate relief in the then existing society.

The solution that struck his mind was that the womenfolk must go to school to learn and must also learn some trade that would make them at least relatively independent at the beginning stage and permanently independent in the long run. This he erected a school for the womenfolk. Unfortunately hr could not mange to run the school for a longer period if time due to the obstacles laid by the fake culture limitationsplaced on the advancement of the womenfolk. Therefore , he was morallyandphysically in a certain sense forced to construct two houses one of the abandoned children of low caste community.v

The Carmel Covent was called ' The major Covent' and the two houses for the avond ended children were together called " the minor convent". Fr. Michael entrusted those houses for the abandoned to the protection and the patronage of st. Louis de Gonzaga, who was his distant relative and canonized in the first part of enlightenment century. He utilized every opportunity to explain the love of God for humanity and especially for the sick and the poor , the abandoned and those who were marginalized in the society.<sup>vi</sup>Fr. Michael Ansaldo , a man who excelled in spiritual life did excel also in administration. The responsibility of guiding the monks of the congregation of Capuchins in Chennai was entrusted by Rome to the archbishop Jean Benoit, who in turn entrusted it. He did not accept it as the command of God. He left for Chennai on 16th October 1805. Fr. Michael Ansaldo reached Puducherry only on 4 November 1805. The death of Fr. Michael Ansaldo created a very big vacuum in the life of orphan children.

The effort of the archbishop bore fruit and find an amount of 1200 pagodas was collected and given to the Malabar mission. At this juncture the Pudhucherry mission handed over the responsibility of administering the houses to Fr. Manmeri, who established the keela cherry mission Fr. Manmeri wrote a willthat the amount of 109 pagodas be given to the maintenance of the congregation and that of the orphanages. For the other expanses the members had to work and earn the necessary amount. As time went on , the maintenance of the congregation was meted out by taking Rs. 42, from the donation of ThambusamyMudaliarfrom kumbakonam. The smooth sailing of the congregation did not last long. It had to face another loss of a person who worked for the development of the congregation. Fr. Manenti died in1806. Besides the pudhucherry mission handed over the responsibility of administering the houses to two women viz Annammamal and Elisa. They managed to run the houses by the donations from the rich from the income of their own work.

The absence of Fr. Manenti did affect the congregation financially. One of the relatives of Susaiyammal, the then procurator of congregation wishes to spend his last days in the convent and therefore he paid for his boarding and lodging till his death. Further, he bequeathed to his sense, viz. Susaiyammal a house and an amount Rs. 120. Susaiyammal also the house and the jewellers and handed over the amount that in spite of all the difficulties and the problems, the Puthucherry mission didn't hesitate a little to take every effort possible to take care of congregation.

Next Annammal Bishop Bonnand, the apostolic vicar of the Coromandel Coast, was the responsible person in organising the two councils. Bishop Bonnand knew the ways and means to raise the necessary funds namely to approach the assistance of the congregation of the Propaganda Fide and Holy Childhood. He thought that the Bon Succours Convent and the congregation of St. Levitra deserve to be mentioned for their unparalleled service in preparing the procedures for the councils, unbanning the necessary approach, and in placing before the house the important issues to be discussed.

Keeping in mind the degrading condition of the women and observing the signs of the time, in the same year 1844 when the first council was concluded, Fr. Dupuis started the congregation of Immaculate Heart of Mary, which is today known as The congregation of the Franciscan Sisters of Immaculate Heart of Mary. A new plan for the orphanages. The discussion centred on the Caramel Convent and the two houses for the abandoned (Bon Succours Convent and the congregation of St. Louis de Gonzaga).

Those thought provoking questions inspired the participants of the council to decide that two homes could be raised to the status of independent religious congregations. Fr. Lecote who was the member to the council was also the person responsible for the administration of the Gonzaga home for the abandoned. Meanwhile, Bishop Bonnand

requested the financial help of the Holy Childhood and took every effort to extend the home for the abandoned. When this effort was going on, the inmates were 60. In the year 1856, the assistance from the holy childhood, was very useful to give education to the children and for the development of the home. In 1855 in the bishop , Bonn and sent a report to Rome . Both for high caste and the low caste people , there are schools in karaikal as well as in Pudhucherry<sup>vii</sup>

Fr. Levitra, write in his diary that he able to find the suitable place. “ By the grave of God , the government gave us a big building that was on the street that leads to the street where the white lived at the centre of the city” . viiiAt present it is that was given to the convent was damaged very much and it required renovation. They had to spend Rs. 400 to repair the house and ti move into it. The height of the building was also increased. Those expanses for their work were met by the Foreign mission society. The people who lived in pudhucherry and particularly Mr. Periyabayagam called Cameron andMr. Bartholomew saverakutty generously contributed to the repairing works of the house . With their help the Altar and the other cornice were set right<sup>ix</sup> After having and the abandoned children went to live in that house.

Here it is worthwhile to understand the elevation of the congregation into the status of Franciscan. The congregation developed and attained the status of Franciscan in due course in honour of St. Francis of Assisi, one of the greatest saints ever lived in the history of half of the nineteenth century . The Franciscan third order was introduced on 4<sup>th</sup>october 1857, at Kurusukkuppam by Fr. Bali. The dedicated life, the involvement that they exhibited in their responsibilities given , and the clarity if the vision anomy their mission op f those who followers Franciscan third order attracted many a people to that order<sup>x</sup>

4th October 1858 , one of those days that is to be printed in golden letters in the annals of the history of our congregation. It was the point of departure on the march as an independent congregation. On this day the ancestors were officially recognised as the new member of the congregation and what was so far only a pious association became a religious congregation and the novitiate was canonically established.<sup>xi</sup> Bishop Goddelle came to India to supervise the Franciscan third order in India and in his presence Fr.Fauli performed the rite of kurushukuppam.

Third order that was approved by the authorities of the church were duly once again introduced in the first Homage community. Accordance with the rules and regulations of Franciscan third order consisted of six members. When Bishop Bonnard was the Bishop of pudhucherry . He was known for his intellectual calibre. He handed over the charges to Fr.Julian Charles Lecote. Julian CharlesLacote was born on 3rd July 1808 ,Danville in the district ofManchie as the son of Charles and Annie Jacqueline. He was baptized on the very next day at Donville.

The young missionary Fr. Julian Charles Lecote was ordained as a priest on June 1832 for the diocese of Pukes. The desire to go as a missionary to the eastern countries was ever alive in his heart. He joined the congregation of missions Estrangers de Paris on 5th July 1832. In the same year he was given the mandate to go to take care of Malabar mission (pudhucherry). He was a very zealous missionary in and around pudhucherry from 1833 to 1837. In the year 1840 he became the in charge of the mission Treasury of pudhucherry mission . He played a very significant role in the two synods. It was he who was the primary cause for the birth and the growth of the Pooja association and Vincentde Paul . In 1858 , with the lofty i tension of raising both our congregation and the Bon secoures congregation, he prepared the sisters to process their vows in accordance with the rules and guidelines of the church. In 1859, he established the Balarsabai . He looked after the seminary from 1860 to 1863. Once again he

became the cathedral parish priest and served very efficiently between the years 1864-1869. This faithful servant of the Lord went to receive his eternal reward from his divine master on 10th October 1869. The sisters who were so far rendering their service in and around pudhucherry , from 1858 went to different parts of Tamil Nadu involve themselves in educating of the children and taking care of the abandoned.

The credit of having elevated what was started as a mere pious association into that of a congregation goes to Fr. Lecote, through a long period of 27 years of toil (1839-1866) . He , at the end of his life on 20th July 1886, handed over the charge to Fr. Daras. After Fr. Dares , Fr. Yignore took charge of running the administration of the congregation and other Agnes was the superior of the house. Since the number of the sisters increase during this period the house that was situated at St. Ange Street was not sufficient for the inmates. Consequently, in 1881, the mother house was expanded at the cost of Rs. 680. The expansion work lasted nearly six months and all the inmates of the house have in variably contributed their labour for this mobile cause. The northern part of the present house became the living area and there was a garden in the middle.<sup>xii</sup>

In pudhucherry , missionaries have always taken a preferential option for those who were pushed to the margin of the society. In the history of pudhucherry mission one can find the following evidence. Since the sisters of St. Aloysius Gonzaga have always taken the preferential option for the Dalit children, they were easily permitted to establish their convent anywhere.<sup>xiii</sup>

Sisters went to serve in other places such as Ootacamund , Vellore and Hyderabad. Archbishop Allen , the Arch bishop of Chennai , who was the Director of the congregation , invited the sisters to strengthen the newly converted Dalit people in faith , to give proper education to the womenfolk and to take of their children<sup>.xiv</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Our congregation that has so far functioned and rendered its service only as a pious association became affiliated to the Franciscan third order on 1858 due to the tireless efforts of Fr. Lecote . Ever since under the guidance of the local bishop and the directors the congregation began its journey having its centre of administration at Pudhucherry the motto of the congregation was “Gospel to the poor” . Even in the twenty first century when human rights are discussed in every book and corner of the street, the women are treated as secondary citizens . Even those who proclaim themselves as those who defend the rights of women that they are not on par with the men folk. Even if women have proved their mental ability in every field , their fundamental rights still continue to be a Utopia.

It is to such women that Fr. Ansaldo paid special attention . Lone, the historian records the existence of the homes for these abandoned women in the Gonzaga and Bon Devoured Convents. In 1858, Bon Secures and Gonzaga Convent sisters were appointed to take care of the house established for the rehabilitation centre of the abandoned women. These women were either widows or those who like St. Mary Magdalene returned to a life of perfection . The home that was meant for this purpose is the present Infant Jesus convent on St. Anne street.

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## **Notes and References**

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<sup>xiii</sup>Verstraeten, S.J., **Ideals about Christian Education in India**, 1973, pp.64-65

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