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Compromise: India

Sebastião Gonçalves, a prolific Jesuit historian who resided in Goa in the first decade of the 17th century, musing over the Christianization of Asia under the Portuguese royal *Padroado* (patronage), wove together three crucial historiographical strands for understanding Catholic expansion in India from the 16th to the late 18th centuries, Portuguese early regal messianism, a close relation between "temporal" and "spiritual" colonial intentions; and the central importance of the Society of Jesus in matters of missionary proselytism and conversion (Subrahmayam, "Du Tage au Gange")

"Let me not forget to mention what happened at the time King Dom Manoel sent Vasco da Gama to discover India in the year of one thousand four hundred and ninety-seven, in the same year the Blessed Father Francis Xavier was born in Navarra. For it is understood that God had predestined him to bring the Gospel and to sow the Faith in those vast regions, as soon as the Portuguese armada had opened the way and taken possession; and to that purpose he created him, and he moved the heart of the King of Portugal to begin an adventure which many Portuguese considered to be uncertain and those who are ignorant of navigation considered to be insane. The good King intended it [i.e. the adventure] to disseminate the faith of Christ our Lord, as it was revealed to King Dom Afonso." (*Gonçalves, Primeira parte, vol.1, p. 46*)

Gonçalves's historical imagination fabricates, discursively and chronologically (by replacing, for example, the date of Francis Xavier's birth in 1506 with 1497), the story of cultural, social, religious and economic encounters between the Portuguese and the inhabitants of the Indian subcontinent as a triumph of Christianity. Along similar lines, late 17th and early 18th century apologetic Catholic and missionary historians, such as Francisco de Sousa, Paulo da Trindade and Fernão de Queyroz, among the most important, continued the earlier tradition of depicting the progress of Christianity as a teleological and providential goal and as the

result of the Portuguese presence in India and Asia in general. By digging beneath the fertile soil of such historical generalizations and outright epistemological projects, mostly peddled by the Jesuit missionary intelligentsia, a more complex set of scenarios is unearthed in the immense expanse of Indian cultural and religious encounters. One of the decisive factors throughout this period was Portuguese and Spanish (from 1580 to 1640) royal policy towards missionary activity, with alternating zeal or disinterest, which was often translated in terms of generous or nominal economic support (Gruzinski, "Les mondes mêlés). Translating into practice the royal desires and ordonnances depended on the local government in Goa, or in other Portuguese enclaves, which had the means to speed up or delay decisions indefinitely. The tension between the center and periphery was also reflected in the workings of, on the one hand, the ecclesiastical institutions under direct royal temporal jurisdiction and, on the other hand, of the spiritual, but indirect and often weak, jurisdiction of the Papacy. Open or surreptitious rivalries between religious orders, between missionaries and diocesan priests, between European and non-European priests, between Portuguese missionaries and Italian missionaries and so on, complicated the situation. The list of possible and effective divisions is not only long but also unstable, as the alliances were forged and unmade with remarkable speed and defied all predictability. The colonial chessboard on which various actors strived to pose and position themselves - from "official" Portuguese expatriates (*reinões*) to freelance merchants and outlaws (*casados*, *chatins*, *degradados*) whose lifestyle and progeny were rapidly indigenized, and to "New Christians" in search of a safe haven from intolerant metropolitan policies, as well as "old" St Thomas Christians encountered in Malabar - was further enlarged by mushrooming convert communities. With the establishment of the *Congregation of the Propagation of Faith*, in 1622, by the Papacy and the gradual erosion of the Portuguese royal *padroado* on Indian territory, new missionary enterprises came into being and new actors came to play important roles, such as Descalced Carmelites and French missionaries from the Société des Missions- Étrangères (Launay, *Histoire générale*). The formation of an Indian clergy received a decisive fillip as well. With the Dutch, English and French intruding politically, economically and militarily in the region, with more or less

defined "spiritual" goals, the Christianization of India haltingly separated into different directions. The "liberalisation" of the Indian Christian market and the diversification of the supply of religious specialists multiplied in many ways the areas of friction between European actors and provided a space of creative (spiritual, economic and cultural) freedom for the Indian Christian communities.

Early Portuguese Expansion Overseas: Messianism, Papal Bulls and Patronage

Weakness or authoritarianism, or both, are evoked as explanations for regal messianism in early modern Europe. In the early 16th century, the Portuguese king, Dom Manuel was not alone in dreaming of the Fifth Empire (*quinto império*), conceived as both a colonial empire and a Christian utopia, a new beginning under the banner of the dynasty of Avis. Portuguese maritime "discoveries" and progressive expansion along the West African Coast were conceived already in the middle of the 15th century by Gomes Eanes de Zurara, Henry the Navigator's apologetic chronicler, as yet another utopian project. Besides gold and slave hunting, it was nothing less than a way to reach Prester John, the long-lost mythical Christian king of the East, inhabiting vaguely in European minds the country called Ethiopia, and to enroll him for the final annihilation of Islam and the reconquest of Jerusalem. What Zurara, on the other hand, was not even able to imagine was the fact that at the very moment of his writing, Islam, or rather, Arab and Persian traders, had already brought into being, and without the important work of proselytism, a whole "federation" of Muslim states and communities in Africa and Asia. All along the East African Coast, the first Portuguese expeditions, that of Vasco da Gama in 1498 and of his successor Pedro Álvares Cabral in 1500, discovered to their surprise and dismay that the major commercial centers such as Sofala, Mozambique, Kilwa, Mombasa, Malindi and Mogadiscio were administered by Muslim governors. Moreover, even in India in spite of da Gama's initial mistaken discovery of the lost Christians of the legend, maritime commerce in Calicut, Cochin, Cannanore, Quilon/Kollam, and many other places was solidly in hands of Islamicized communities,

indigenous and foreign. The crusading zeal of the Portuguese against infidels was thus nurtured in the Indian Ocean in combination with the mercantile desire of the state to capture and monopolize the spice trade with Europe.

The early Portuguese activities in the Indian Ocean, therefore, followed the behavior pattern already rehearsed during their violent capture and foundation of *presídios* in Marocco. Thus, in an act of vengeance after the conquest of Goa (1510), Afonso de Albuquerque ordered the massacre of all Muslims - except women, whom he planned to baptize and marry off to Portuguese settlers. Christianity was understood by these early military commanders more as an invigorating and unifying martial ideology than as a system of ethical rules and commandments. The confusion of religious and political goals was neither new nor a passing affair and although the distinction between them became paradoxically both less obvious and more refined, in the decades and centuries to come, the basic contradictions remained intact.

Besides the inherited spirit of the *reconquista*, Dom Manuel nurtured a brand of personal Messianism. Had Providence wanted to fulfill Dom Manuel's dreams, the Christianization of Asia, one might suppose, would have worked itself out naturally with the help of the Prester John's Christians, which is at least partly the reason why proselyte missionary activity before John III's reign never gained impetus. Another important reason lies in the fact that the Papacy and the Church in general showed little initiative, except rhetorically, in such activity. From the 1440s, Eugene IV and his successors issued various bulls regulating the religious side of the future travels of discovery and conquests by Henry the Navigator (Witte, "Les bulles pontificales"). As accorded by the Papacy, Portuguese territorial and political sovereignty over the overseas conquests also implied patronage of the missions and churches within its geographical boundaries. With the power to appoint archbishops and bishops, and to distribute ecclesiastical benefices at his own will, Dom Manuel, and later John III, tried - without fully succeeding - to centralize and control all aspects of Portugal's overseas expansion. Royal privileges and prerogatives implicit in the *padroado* system were many, such as syphoning off church revenues and tithes, or creating a network of dependents from among the appointed benefice holders ; but there were also

certain important and costly obligations concerning the creation of missions, new bishoprics, convents and sanctuaries. However, the overseas ecclesiastical institutions of the Portuguese, reinforced by direct state intervention, should not be equated, in spite of circumstantial convergence, with missionary activity. In fact, they were often at odds, especially from the second part of the 16th century when the transnational Society of Jesus "invented", captured and monopolized the missionary field in Asia (O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*).

Goa: The Center of Missionary Activity in Asia

All Portuguese expeditions in the Indian Ocean were accompanied by one or more official chaplains: members of religious orders or secular priests. On board ships, they acted as spiritual counselors and nurses and were also the first to plant crosses and to bless *padrões* (memorial stones) on the "virgin" land of discovery. The next step in religious implantation was the foundation of churches and chapels, usually built literally on or of the debris of mosques and Hindu temples. In the years to come, especially by the end of the 16th and in the 17th century, larger and more sumptuous religious edifices were erected, and official papal recognition followed through grants of ecclesiastical benefices.

Thus, the chapel of St. Catherine in Goa, initially a mud and palm leaf construction built by Albuquerque shortly after the conquest, in 1510, was replaced in the following decades by a larger stone building and became in 1534 the cathedral of the first Asian diocese, which consisted of a vast territory from the Cape of Good Hope to China. Before March 1539, when the first bishop of Goa, Juan de Albuquerque, a Franciscan Recollect (or Capucho), inaugurated the diocese, small parties of his co-religionists and some diocesan priests were already beginning the work of conversion, very closely following the commercial and political routes and networks of the Portuguese (Meersman, *The Ancient Franciscan Provinces*).

The contemporary Portuguese dilemma concerning the overseas empire, contrasting free trade and royal monopoly and dirigisme, found an echo or simple parallelism among

religious specialists (Subrahmanyam, *Portuguese Empire*). In addition, the overlapping jurisdictions of the royal *padroado* and of the papacy steadily grew, and the question of the center of ecclesiastical authority was therefore always open and disputable. Moreover, in spite of a call for the creation of a new Christian Goa, a kind of utopian dream starting with Afonso de Albuquerque's marriage arrangements for the Portuguese settlers (*casados*) and the Christianization of their native spouses, the proselytising effort was mitigated by practical constraints, such as the fact that Hindu and Muslim merchants brought business into the city and facilitated diplomatic and commercial ties with the Deccan hinterland. Nevertheless, conversion on the *Ilhas*, the five islands of the original conquest of Goa, and on the later additions of Bardez and Salcete after 1543, accelerated, especially among lower and poorer agricultural classes, stimulated by well-orchestrated public rituals, such as solemn mass and baptism celebrations (D'Costa, *Christianization of the Goa Island*). It was through "charitable" institutions, such as the confraternity of *Misericórdia*, that the new Christian communities, including that of the Portuguese settlers with their local spouses and slaves, came under firmer ecclesiastical control. The exercise of Christian charity facilitated communal integration, particularly in far-removed territories where family, class or regional ties were often tenuous because of the vagaries of commercial and military enterprises (Sá, *Quando o rico se faz pobre*). It was not before 1541 that the confraternity of the *Holy Faith* was established for the non-European Christians including a seminary for the education of the indigenous clergy. The finances for this enterprise were raised by taxing the non-Christians and appropriating revenues formerly associated with Hindu places of worship, which were on the way to being massively destroyed throughout the islands of Goa (Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, vol. 1, pp. 756-770).

The intensification of missionary efforts after 1542 consisted mostly in the branching out and refinement of former trends which had been set in motion shortly before the Jesuit arrival and which followed the moods of both metropolitan and local politics. Even if Francis Xavier did write to João III demanding that the Inquisition be established, the first "New Christian" (a Christian of Jewish origin) had been burnt in Goa in 1539. The hardening of

heart against the inhabitants of Jewish descent, provoked partly by local circumstances - the presence of, and rivalry with, Jewish merchants along the Malabar Coast and in Ormuz - was also part and parcel of a new Joanine policy in the second part of the 16th century when Spanish influence began to play a considerable role in Portuguese religious enterprise. During the Regency under the dowager queen Catarina and Infante-Cardinal Henrique, from 1557 until Sebastião's direct rule sometime before 1570, the royal house of Portugal endeavored to modify and efface its "spice merchant" image and began to emulate the Habsbourg ideals of agrarian based aristocracy, always ready to sacrifice commercial profits for the display of noble, pious actions and belated chivalry.

In Asia, moving within and along the frontiers of the expanding social, political and economic world of the Portuguese, the missionaries, Jesuits in particular, were perfect *Doppelgänger* of the other prominent social group: the merchants. They were, in short, spiritual entrepreneurs who endeavored to open new markets and, as a general rule, the farther from the center the more open they were to structures, modes and forms of belief and sociability of the peoples with whom they came in contact. Inversely, the closer to the center, Goa in the case of the Indian missionary field, religious orders endeavored to monopolize all activities regarding ecclesiastical and "spiritual" enterprises and thus inaugurated long and complicated rivalries between European colonial actors, both lay and religious. The conversion methods of the various missionary orders, on the other hand, remained the same: a combination of incentives (solemn baptism, acquisition of property and titles) and threats to use symbolic and "real" violence (eviction from the land, prohibition to use and display local marks of prestige such as the *palanquin*, etc.) (Thekkedath, *History of Christianity in India*).

Estheticization of Religious Propaganda, Inquisition and the Indigenization

Religious feasts and processions in Goa and throughout the Asian strongholds of the Portuguese were social performances of great symbolic and ideological display geared at strengthening communal solidarity, while at the same time opening a "reflexive" space and

encouraging the integration of new social actors. It was often following such ostentatious events that individuals or groups, Christian and non-Christian, rushed to religious institutions and asked for spiritual instruction, confession or baptism. After 1575, the magnificent adult baptism scenes, mostly organized by the Jesuits, were no more in fashion because almost all of the village communities on the Goan islands were Christian. Nevertheless, Jesuits still noted about 500 conversions a year until the end of the century and an even larger number for the first part of the 17th century (Guerreiro, *Relação annual*, vol. 1, p. 4). The Goan religious calendar hardly became less impressive with the decline of solemn baptism, for numerous festivities continued to entertain, amuse, edify and in some cases terrify the population. Various processions and acts of public devotion during the Holy Week presented the most stunning spectacles in which penitents performed flagellation and other mortifications (Rego, *História das Missões*, vol. 1, pp. 495-496).

The growing number of Christians and the simultaneous resistance to conversion posed a new problem: Were these conversions sincere or only a shield for secret "pagan" practices? The ecclesiastical hierarchy, already casting a menacing shadow over the families of *crístãos novos* settled in Cochin and Goa, proved to be lastingly doubtful of Hindu converts, defining them as a second-class Christians and often refusing to ordain even *mestiços* (born to Portuguese fathers) (Tavim, "From Setúbal to the Sublime Porte"). The third provincial council of Goa (1585) had decreed, moreover, that the adult converts could receive ordination only fifteen years after baptism and were to be at least thirty years of age. The fifth provincial council (1606) added a local "caste" flavor to these highly selective restrictions: only Brahmans and other "noble" castes were to be admitted to the priesthood (Cunha Rivara, *Arquivo Portuguez Oriental*, fasc. 4). Indigenous diocesan priests employed in Goan parishes rarely acquired ecclesiastical benefices, those being reserved for the Portuguese. Nevertheless, these "parish jobs" were much coveted and, in the 17th century, Indian diocesan priests resented the presence of religious orders which still retained in their hands nearly two thirds of the parishes (Melo, *The Recruitment*). The religious orders were generally more sympathetic to their new converts, but very few natives or *mestiços* were

permitted to join any religious order before the second half of the 18th century (Boxer, *The Church Militant*, pp. 12-14). The same status was also reserved for Portuguese of Jewish ancestry. After 1622, the newly established *Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of Faith* (often abbreviated as *Propaganda Fide*) in Rome worked actively to undermine the Portuguese *padroado*, considered as ineffective, by stimulating the formation of the local clergy and even conferring higher ecclesiastical benefices on Goan priests (Metzler, *Sacrae Congregationis*). The 17th-century case of Mattheus de Castro, a Goan Brahman, is often taken as an example, although his mandate as a bishop continued to be marred by opposition from the Goan ecclesiastical hierarchy (Ghesquière, *Mathieu de Castro*). It was not until the last decades of the 17th century that the Goan diocesan priests, headed by Joseph Vaz, pulled their ranks together and founded their own congregation - *Oratório do Santa Cruz dos Milagres* - which was finally approved in 1686 by the pope and the king of Portugal under the rules of the Oratory of St. Phillip Neri - and all this in spite of the opposition of the Goan archbishop (Nunes, *Documentação*). A year later, Goan Oratorians started their own Catholic mission in Sri Lanka (Flores, "Um Curto Historia de Ceylan")

Not all archbishops of Goa were adamantly against indigenous clergy. A famous Augustinian archbishop, Dom Aleixo de Menezes (1595-1609) appointed Indian priests to various parishes in Goa, Kanara and the Bassein region. His ordinations *en masse* of St Thomas Christians during the Synod of Udayamperur (Diamper) is another sign of his policy of "indigenization" of ecclesiastical offices stimulated by similar Jesuit success stories in Japan. There was no consistent policy, however, concerning the recruitment of indigenous clergy and the prelate who replaced Menezes, Christóvão de Sá e Lisboa (1616-22), swore on the missal never to ordain any indigenous priest. What he was tacitly denouncing was also the incessant papal efforts to circumvent the Portuguese *padroado* by encouraging missions outside the direct control of the *Estado da Índia* in the midst of "heathen" and "infidel" kingdoms (Rubiés, Joan-Pau "The Jesuit Discovery of Hinduism". The jurisdictional muddle arising from this struggle marked the whole of the 17th and the 18th centuries, until the Marquis of Pombal made sure that the Goan clergy officially achieved equality vis-à-vis

their European counterparts. Another target of Pombal's reforms was the Inquisition, which he simply abolished (1774), although after his own fall from power it was briefly resuscitated until 1820.

Often associated with the second, "Spanish" phase of João III's reign, the *Santo Ofício*, the Inquisition, found its way to Goa only in 1560 during the Regency of the dowager queen Catarina and thrived for almost two and a half centuries, notwithstanding waves of opposition from the secular governments and even from the clergy and archbishops. Conceived as a royal weapon of centralization against the particular interests of just about everybody else in the kingdom, the implantation of the Inquisition in Goa - its jurisdiction often overlapping with that of the secular authorities - provoked endless disputes. This institution eventually grew to become a state within a state with elaborate bureaucracies and clients (Baião, *A Inquisição*). In spite of its busy working schedule in Goa, financed by the local government, in setting up trials - from 1562 to 1774 there were 16,202 registered court cases -, and organizing awe-inspiring *autos-da-fé*, only about two hundred people were actually burnt at the stake. More important was the extent to which the tribunal confiscated the property and riches of the local New Christian families in order to feed its own machine (Amiel, "Les archives de l'Inquisition").

Missionary Frontiers Beyond Goa: The St Thomas Christians and the Parava Converts

From the middle of the sixteenth century, the Portuguese factory-settlements that dotted the west and the east coasts of India, South-East Asia and, later on, Japan and China, endeavored to organize their own religious life in imitation of the Goan Catholic effervescence. Most of them had rather limited and short-lived success due to political, economic and social conditions, while a few managed to survive long into the modern period. Around the time when Goa was elevated to the rank of archbishopric (1558), two dioceses were created - Cochin and Melaka - followed by Macau (1576), Funai in Japan (1588), Angamale on the Malabar coast (1594; it became an archbishopric in 1608) and Mylapore

(1600). In addition to being in charge of the diocesan priests, under the jurisdiction of the bishops, the Portuguese *padroado* was also obliged to provide for the upkeep of the missionaries belonging to different monastic orders. Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits and Augustinians established their missions, colleges, monasteries and other institutions before the end of the sixteenth century. A second wave of missionary orders directly financed by and responsible to the *Propaganda Fide* - Carmelites, Capuchins, Italian Oratorians and Theatines - arrived in the seventeenth. Although in theory they were sent to "help out" the *padroado* and were to be employed in the fields still not covered by the missionary staff, newcomers were often seen as intruders and treated as such by the Portuguese ecclesiastical and colonial administration.

The "discovery" of St Thomas or Syrian Christians on the Malabar coast was considered to be providential by Pedro Álvares Cabral and his successors engaged in Asian pepper empire-building. Due to its corporate control of commercial enterprises, its tradition of martial prowess and its "noble" or "purity conscious" lifestyle, this Christian group (estimated to have numbered between 80 000 and 200 000 in the course of the century) held a privileged position in the social and political fabric of sixteenth-century Kerala, and thus opened the way for the Portuguese traders to profit from local market opportunities. At the same time St. Thomas or Syrian Christians accepted Portuguese patronage in expectation of an enhancement of their own economic and symbolic prestige. However, the centralizing nature of the political and colonial intentions of the *Estado da Índia* was soon in conflict with the existing, segmentary power relations in Kerala, which had previously left to St Thomas Christians a high degree of autonomy. It was through religious patronage that the Portuguese endeavored to gain control of this Indian community which claimed as its founder one of Christ's disciples, St Thomas, and had maintained ecclesiastical connections, from at least the 4th century, with the independent West Asian churches. These ancient religious ties came to be branded by the Portuguese ecclesiastical hierarchy as illegitimate since the doctrine of the Syrian patriarchs was known to be based on Nestorian teaching and was, therefore, "heretic". Furthermore, according to the regulation of the *padroado*, the appointment of the bishops was

the prerogative of the Portuguese king and the pope and thus, all "foreign" ecclesiastical officials sent by the West Asian Patriarchs were potentially seen as transgressors. During the first half of the sixteenth century, Portuguese relations with St Thomas Christians appear to have been relatively harmonious, primarily due to the lack of European missionaries (Mundadan, *History of Christianity*). However, in the long run, the Portuguese endeavored to curtail their religious, liturgical, social and political "liberties" .

Throughout the second part of the sixteenth century, the Jesuits came to dominate the missionary scene along the southernmost Malabar and Fishery Coasts (today called the Gulf of Mannar) and some of them "specialized" in this particular field. Briefly, the European ecclesiastical pressure on the St Thomas Christians increased from the 1550s onwards and various provincial councils of Goa, the third in particular (1585), issued strong decrees concerning the matter. Under such external weight, the community of St Thomas Christians began breaking up into factions of those who were *pro* or *contra* "Latinization". An additional historical contingency that facilitated the splintering of this Christian community which traditionally possessed an endemically unstable religious leadership was the split (1551) within the Chaldean Church itself, with one patriarch acknowledging the union with Rome and the other denying it.

This highly conflictual situation came to a sudden resolution, at least temporarily, through a high-handed gesture of a zealous Goan archbishop, Dom Aleixo de Menezes. Imbued with religious idealism, this noble Portuguese prelate stormed the sacred territory of the Syrian Christians and imposed a complete Latinization of liturgy and customs at the Synod of Udayamperur (Diamper) in 1599. The moment of "union" was short-lived and the religious leadership under the Jesuit bishops continued to be unstable, while other religious orders tried to break this and other Jesuit monopolies by encouraging opposing factions among the St Thomas Christians. To make the situation more complicated, from 1622, the *Propaganda Fide* - with the barely dissembled intention to replace the Portuguese *padroado* - began to send Italian Carmelites as vicars apostolic among the Syrian Christians. The end result was a schism within the community in 1653. Two thirds of the Christians returned to

the Roman fold in 1662, mostly through Carmelite efforts, while the other "rebel" faction elected and consecrated its own bishop, Mar Thoma I (Brown, *The Indian Christians of St Thomas*, pp. 92-109). Except for the St Thomas Christians, all other newly converted Christians in South India belonged to ritually low status groups very often engaged in "polluting" activities such as manual labor and fishing. There were, of course, token Brahmans and some other high caste lineages (such as the Nayars) who for exceptional reasons accepted European religious patronage, but they remained very few throughout the period.

The "romantic" plot of the evangelization of the Parava fishing villages and communities was one of the favorite Jesuit master narratives of conversion because it was an essential part of the biography of St. Francis Xavier, the first Jesuit missionary in Asia. In the early 17th century, in his history of the Jesuit missions in India, Sebastião Gonçalves referred to Xavier as *negoceador das almas*, a soul merchant, who came in search of the "precious stones which are souls of the infidels" in order to transform them through "the holy baptism into carbuncles, diamonds, safires, emeralds and pearls" (Gonçalves, *História*, vol. 1, p. 133). Thus a commercial aspect of the Jesuit proselytizing was underlined in his text by a figurative equation of "infidel souls" and "precious stones". There is, undoubtedly, some truth in his statement, since Paravas can *de facto* be likened to pearls, in a metonymical sense. They were one of the pearl-fishing coastal groups in the Gulf of Mannar or, as the Portuguese would evocatively name it the Fishery Coast (*Costa da Pescaria*). This particular skill was the currency with which they attracted Portuguese patronage and protection. The conversion of Paravas to Catholicism, at least in its early phase in the 16th century, came as a result of a conjunction of political, economic, and cultural factors threatening to undermine Parava corporate economic interests. It seems that the Portuguese presence along the South Indian coast and their naval skirmishes in the 1520s with the Mappilas and Maraikkayars, Muslim trading groups that controlled the pearl-fishery revenues and the bulk of other seaborne trade from the Coromandel coast, disrupted the political and economic power relations in the region (Subrahmanyam, *The Portuguese Empire*, p. 92). In addition, the Portuguese determination to

edge out the Muslims from the local trade networks, by diplomacy or arms, enabled the Paravas to negotiate a more favorable niche in the regional division of pearl-trade profits. Converting to Christianity in the early 16th century was for the Paravas a way of symbolically and ritually cementing the new political alliance.

The "pearl" politics in the Gulf of Mannar was complicated by the shifting alliances between various local groups, and the Portuguese were ultimately able to exploit these divisions, although not without setbacks. According to the Christian foundation story, with a typical overture plot for communal conflict, the tension between Parava and Muslim divers from Palayakāyal rose, in 1532, when a woman was insulted by a Muslim and her husband mutilated. However, from insult to conversion, four years had passed and, incidentally, the initiative for this political move, that is to convert to the religion of the Portuguese, came from an "outsider", a "Malabar" horse merchant from Calicut (Roche, *Fishermen of the Coromandel*, p. 54). According to Sebastião Gonçalves, in 1536 a delegation of 85 Parava leaders officially presented their request to be baptized to the Portuguese Captain in Cochin. The mass baptism took place as soon as a few clerics had been sent to the Fishery Coast and twenty thousand Paravas were baptized in some thirty villages (Gonçalves, *História*, vol. 1, p. 138).

However, when Francis Xavier arrived in the area in 1542, himself a missionary novice, he commenced an intensive Catholic indoctrination and secured the field for Jesuit monopoly until the early 17th century. The *Estado da Índia's* weak presence, the rivalry with local political predators, and the sustained "spiritual" control of the Jesuits, combined with the pre-existing social and family structure of the Paravas, produced in the long run, notwithstanding inevitable internal factional struggles, a coherent and tightly-knit community, an endogamous caste with strong leadership and uniform religious and domestic customs (Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*, pp. 321-379).

What the emerging Parava elite realized soon enough was that Catholicism could be used as a way of transforming their system of kinship into a political structure resembling a South Indian "little kingdom". For this particular task they needed a powerful god/father-

figure, capable of bestowing a permanent sense of legitimation on the "noble" lineages headed by the *jati talaivan* (the caste headman) and his progeny. The confluence of Jesuit proselytism, with Francis Xavier elevated to the role of the Parava tutelary deity, and socio-political interests of the Parava elite, partly created by the Jesuits, succeeded in the next few decades in reformulating the Paravas' corporate identity, internal social relations and cultural meanings. While Xavier, besides cutting the figure of a father, also brought a gift of "miracles", Henrique Henriques, a Jesuit missionary who came to the Fishery Coast in 1549 and stayed on until he died in 1600, gave the gift of "Tamil Christian" speech and captured it in writing. Not only did he write the first Tamil grammar and dictionary for the missionaries' use, but also, helped by some learned interpreters, wrote and published pious books for the edification of the Tamil Christians. The Tamil written and printed word became conduit through which the Christian message poured into folk songs and was promptly appropriated by indigenous religious and esthetic imagination, facilitating the growth of the particular politico-ecclesiastical order of the Paravas. The re-orientation of communal life in and around churches, the growing popularity of Christian pilgrimage sites, lavish Christian festivals such as the *Corpus Christi* and the *Assumption*, became the hallmarks of Parava life. When, in 1582, Jesuits installed the statue of the Virgin Mary in the church in Tuticorin, the Paravas finally acquired their "mother". Henceforth, she was to nurture the Paravas' sense of corporate identity and enhance the role of the Parava elite, in particular that of the *jati talaivan*, who became a chief protector and donor of the church. When the office of the *jati talaivan* became hereditary, his lineage assumed the role of Parava "royalty". By the 18th century, the Parava community functioned as a South Indian "little kingdom". The Jesuits were gone and the Portuguese were replaced by the Dutch and later the British, but the structure of authority and solidarity remained firmly bound to Parava "Catholic" rituals, ceremonies and beliefs.

Jesuit Social and Religious Experiments: The Madurai and the Mughal Missions

In the 1590s, a Jesuit mission for the small Christian Parava trading community which had migrated inland was established in Madurai, the capital of the Nayaka's kingdom in the heart of Tamil country. With the arrival, in 1606, of Roberto Nobili (1577-1656), a young Italian aristocrat educated in Rome, the famous Indian "accommodationist" experiment of the Jesuitis came into existence, fashioned along the lines traced by Alessandro Valignano for the Japanese and by Matteo Ricci for the Chinese missions. The "new" Madurai mission established by Nobili was separated from the "old" church and residence in which an ex-soldier, Gonçalo Fernandes (1541-1619), continued to minister to the Parava Christians. At a safe distance from Goa, the "accommodationist" missions that existed in Tamilnadu until the middle of the 18th century happened to be by and large opposed to Portuguese colonial and ecclesiastical aspirations. For non-Portuguese Jesuit missionaries one thing was clear by the end of the 16th century - Christianization did not equal Portugalization (Županov, *Disputed Mission*).

Denounced as a convert to "Brahmanism" by Gonçalo Fernandes, Nobili had spent half a century refuting the accusations and defending the theory of *accommodatio* in his various letters and treatises. As a rule, the Jesuit adaptationist missions were elitist, if not aristocratic, projects. One of the reasons for this was that the missionaries recruited for these missions, which were often considered to be dangerous, were themselves of noble birth. Faced with a situation in which Christianity was perceived by the local non-Christian population as a "dirty", *Parangui* (i.e. foreigner, Portuguese, etc.), low-caste religious practice, Nobili reinvented and customized Christianity to fit in with Tamil ideas of personal holiness and social authority. He disassociated Christianity from the Portuguese and linked it with Brahmanical normative precepts. His first move was to sever all his ties with the "old" Madurai church - not permitting Paravas to attend his Mass, not communicating publicly with Fernandes, while at the same time eating, dressing and behaving like a Brahmin hermit. He maintained that if one were to inculcate Christianity to the most learned (Brahmans) and the most noble (kings), they themselves would then spearhead the religious transformation in a trickle-down movement of cultural change.

His next move was anthropological. Helped by his Brahman teachers and interpreters, he acquired mastery over Tamil, Sanskrit and Telugu and studied "religious" texts written in those languages. After acquiring indigenous "theological" knowledge, he endeavored to graft Christianity onto the local material through a series of allegories and metaphors and by playing on their mutual resemblances. In Nobili's view, Tamil society and culture, headed by the learned Brahmans, was comparable to the classical pre-Christian civilization with Jewish and Roman literati at its helm. He agreed with José d'Acosta's precept that the strategy of conversion appropriate for this kind of "advanced" culture was persuasion and logical argument. Coercion was to be employed for those illiterate, stateless "barbarians" who were on the lower level of development. The missionaries in the Madurai mission were, in any case, unable to use coercion, as their coreligionists did in such territories as Salsette, south of Goa. According to the typical accommodationist principle, a successful conversion would be to celebrate Christian Mass in the structure that from outside looked like a temple, or to call oneself a Christian while preserving the dress code and social customs of a Hindu. In a series of Latin treatises, Nobili concluded that, if in the early Christian centuries many "pagan" customs were allowed into both liturgical practice and Christian civilization, there was no reason to disallow certain Brahmanical customs, especially since they appeared to be indispensable for the conversion.

It was the distinction between religious and social customs and rites, still wrapped in adiaphoristic garb (i.e. the theory of "things indifferent") that enabled Nobili to prove his point. If all social customs were "indifferent", as the argument goes, then, in the case of conversion to Christianity, they need not be modified. Thus Nobili argued that ritual baths, the use of the sandal paste and marking the body with sacred ashes, the custom of wearing the sacred thread and similar "external" signs were purely social and were to be permitted to his Brahman converts. His arguments were, in fact, very persuasive to his contemporaries, especially the learned theologians in Europe and in Rome. In 1622, he won his case after a decade of disputes both with other Jesuits in India and with the Goan ecclesiastical clique. However, unwittingly, by inflating the social he almost effaced the religious. It was only

taking one step further, as the Enlightenment *philosophes* certainly did in the next century, to perceive Christianity itself as just another set of customary rules, rituals and beliefs, neither better nor worse than Hinduism, Islam, or any other religion. Nobili's approach, therefore, forged the instruments for opening the Pandora's box of both religious and cultural relativism which became the hallmark of modernity.

In his missionary field in Madurai, Nobili played a role of spiritual preceptor, *guru*, and miracle worker, of a Brahmin *sannyāsi* (i.e. renouncer, ascetic), a hybrid role based on both local and European ideas of holiness and religious competence. It is clear from his early missionary reports that most of his converts belonged to small groups of (1) disgruntled young Brahmins or other high-caste men facing financial and spiritual problems, (2) dethroned or contesting *palaiyakkarars* or military chiefs, and (3) more generally, various men and women facing social, psychological and biological life-cycle crises. These were all unstable conversion groups and in spite of their "promise" to influence their relatives and kinsmen backsliding and opposition from their families were a constant menace. Nevertheless, through his *sannyasi* missionary model, Nobili tried to position himself in a threshold space between the social and the divine, which he rightly identified as the central place for acquiring and establishing his own local "political" network. The problem was that in the fluid, segmentary political situation of early modern South India, leadership and "holiness" were up for grabs by numerous exalted spiritual gurus such as Nobili, inspired by a syncretic melange of Islam, popular Hinduism and Christianity. The ability to gather followers, directly connected with the ability to raise funds, perform miracles and distribute honors, produced patronage networks in which the leader himself, or rarely herself, becomes dispensable. A rival leader, often a disciple, might dethrone him with relative ease (Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings*).

By the 1630s, however, attempts to convert only Brahmins and other "high castes" were virtually given up, primarily for economic reasons. Henceforth, Nobili and his companions focused on those groups, mostly low-caste, that showed an eagerness to improve their ritual status through conversion and adherence to a spiritual leader. A new missionary

model was devised for this purpose - the *pandarasami*, an adapted imitation of a local non-Brahman ritual specialist. The same climate of religious pluralism that facilitated the establishment of the Jesuit missions worked to undermine their global conversion project. In other words, Christianity became a personalized religion depending directly on the religious preceptor or guru in question, such as Nobili, João de Britto, Francis Xavier, etc. According to the individual missionary's charisma, the network of followers either expanded or contracted. Upon the death of such a divine figure, his disciples often splintered away and established their own devotional, *bhakti*, sects, often independent from Jesuit missions.

When the Jesuits were expelled from India by the end of the 18th century, the Parava Catholic community continued to thrive, as did other scattered groups of Christians in the interior of Tamil country and on the Coromandel Coast which were attached to their "indigenized" Catholic worship, to their corporate ceremonies and rituals, to their churches, pilgrimage sites and their leaders. But the project as conceived by Nobili of global, hierarchical Christianization, encompassing all social layers, from the Brahmans at the top to the Paraiyars at the bottom, failed to materialize.

At the root of missionary success or failure to make conversions was their ability to find local and rooted symbolic expressions for the new religious sensibility and sociability. Those rituals and ceremonies that fostered community, kinship and the hierarchical organization of "honors" (*mariyatai*) served as vehicles for the implantation of Christianity. In a Durkheimian sense, only those communities of believers that found the way to worship themselves in Christian ritual adhered enthusiastically to a new religion.

Another equally elitist, but less accommodationist, mission was that at the Mughal court initiated in 1580. It continued with interruptions from 1580 until the suppression of the Society of Jesus at the end of the 18th century. The Portuguese *Estado da Índia* and the Mughal state in the hinterland came into closer contact through the latter's conquest of Gujarat; their complicated relationship, erupting at times into hostilities and violence (in 1613-15 and in 1632), did not preclude mutual curiosity and "cultural exchange", even if the results were not always satisfactory for both sides.

The Jesuit mission at the Mughal court solicited by Akbar (who reigned from 1556-1605) raised the hopes of a Christian "triumph" over Islam, only to be thwarted in the end. The costly, and from the Jesuit point of view, frustrating project gave rise in the course of time to an immense correspondence and literary production in European and Persian languages, as well as a series of paintings by Mughal painters inspired directly or indirectly by Christian art. Ultimately, Jesuit writing and publications and Mughal paintings remained the only tangible results of the whole endeavor, since the mission never succeeded in producing a convert community.

What the Jesuits who were sent on the first mission - Rodolfo Acquaviva, António de Monserrate and Francisco Henriques - did not know was that Akbar's dissatisfaction with the orthodox Sunni *ulema*, combined with his political efforts at centralization and his personal type of religious millenarians, had already brought to his court representatives of the major religious currents of the subcontinent: Brahmans, Jains, Shia Muslims, Persian Sufis, and Zoroastrians. His experiments with a "divine monotheism" (*tauhid ilahi*) or a "divine religion" (*din-i ilahi*) that would function as an umbrella for all the diverse, and often irreconcilable, religious experiences in his empire, and thus provide an ideological underpinning for the Mughal reign, led him to rather complicated syncretism. The result was a new Sunni orthodox reaction which worked at the same time to destabilize and delegitimize Akbar's divine and political pretensions.

When the Jesuits joined his "hall of adoration" - constructed near the mosque of Fatehpur Sikri - in order to debate the fine points of universal theology with other religious specialists, their task was quite difficult because of their ignorance of Persian and because as latecomers they were completely unaware of the rules and the goals of Akbar's religious pondering. From the early enthusiastic letters full of anticipation of Akbar's imminent conversion, it had become clear to the Jesuits by 1583 that he was too elusive, and too often on drugs, as they remarked, to "honestly change his heart".

The second Jesuit mission (1591-93) to the court of Akbar, this time in Lahore and headed by Duarte Leitão, was equally unsuccessful in producing the desired effect. It was the

third and the most ambitious Jesuit mission, at least in the beginning, carefully studied and prepared in Goa, that persisted in spite of unsurmountable difficulties. Linguistic expertise was once again brought to the forefront of the missionary effort. Thus, J eronimo Xavier, grand-nephew of the *Apostle of the Indies*, spent twenty years in the mission and even learnt Persian and "Hindustani", while waiting, as he said, "for the fish to bite". In the meantime, he composed texts and treatises in Spanish, such as *Fuente da Vida*, a theologico-philosophical dialogue, written in Lahore in 1590s, and then gradually translated them into Persian (Camps, *Jerome Xavier*). Just as Nobili thought that Sanskrit could become a new language of the Mass and Ricci felt the same for Mandarin, J eronimo Xavier extolled Persian as a refined language perfectly suitable to express Christian doctrine. As the hopes of converting either Akbar or Jahangir waned, and as Islam appeared, as always, completely impenetrable to Christian teaching, new strategies had to be devised. A contemporary Jesuit chronicle defines Muslims as being as "hard as diamonds to work upon" (Maclagan, *The Jesuits and the Great Mogul*, p. 284).

One of the solutions, mentioned in Jesuit letters from the first decade of the 17th century, was to widen the mission field in order to include the non-Muslim population, particularly women, who expressed themselves in local vernacular languages, in particular in what they identified as "the vulgar speech". This interest grew steadily and by the middle of the 17th century some Jesuit missionaries, such as Antonio Ceschi and Heinrich Roth, developed an interest in Hinduism and its "sacred" language, Sanskrit. The transliteration of the *Ave Maria* and *Pater Noster* into Sanskrit can still be seen in Athanasius Kircher's *China monumentis*, published in Amsterdam in 1667 (Kircher, *China monumentis*, p. 163).

An additional strategy employed in their "popular" mission field consisted in sumptuous celebrations of liturgical festivities with sermons in two or three languages (Portuguese, Persian, local vernacular), processions, and theater performances. Musical instruments - an organ was imported from Goa for the church in Agra -, illuminations, fireworks and flagellations were all geared to visually impress non-Christians. Jesuit sensorial and particularly visual approaches to proselytism and conversion reached an apogee with

post-Tridentine religious painting, sculpture and architecture. It was a happy coincidence, from the missionary point of view, that Akbar and Jahangir, known for their unorthodox Muslim practices, delighted in and patronized the visual arts. In the course of time, Mughal painters themselves started producing copies of the European imports and adopted certain western techniques and themes in their own works. At times of anti-Christian feelings, or when a Mughal sovereign wished to conciliate Muslim opinion, it was often the images that suffered the most. Thus the paintings from the Portuguese Hughli enclave, captured by Shah Jahan in 1632, were "insulted", hung on trees or cast into the Jamuna river. By that time, the Catholic visual influence of the Portuguese was losing ground, confronted with the new type of imagery which had been introduced by the British (Bayly, *Art on the Jesuit Mission*).

Conclusion

A brief survey of the main themes, events and general trends in the encounter between Catholicism and other religious traditions in India (16th-18th century) is necessarily incomplete, not only because of the lack of reliable data and because of the shifts and displacements in historians' perspectives and epistemological grids, but also because it continues to be a neglected field of serious research and study. Without historical compendia, such as those written by Jesuit missionaries themselves, among many others, which were based on first-hand experience and "archival" work, many of the documents concerning the period would have been lost for us due to shipwrecks, earthquakes and unwitting or deliberate destruction. At the same time, however, their own selection of what was important or insignificant, their personal judgements and hints, colored the opinions of historians who followed in their steps.

Hence, from the 17th century onwards, much of the traditional historiography on the spread of Catholicism in India followed two exclusive lines of interpretation, with barely disguised confessional, political, or national prejudices: either as a heroic drama of Christian victory over the forces of "heathenism" against all odds, or as a satire on the "dissembling"

and the greed and bigotry of Catholic missionaries and clergy. While Protestant historians, in particular, revelled in vilifying "Catholic perfidy", from John Lockman to J. W. Kaye and J. N. Farquhar, various religious orders also continued their mutual rivalries on the pages of their historical texts, from Domingo Navarette to Tessier de Quéralay and others. Recent historiography of the Catholic venture in India in the early modern period privileges "anthropological" approaches. Historians generally profess interest in "local", "indigenous" histories and forms of knowledge, as well as in "subaltern voices" and resistance to overt and hidden modes of political, social, or religious domination. Nevertheless, the personal, confessional and national agendas of the historians do re-emerge in a new, complicated way as moral or partisan political views.

In spite of the different interpretations, however, the period of Catholic expansion in India under the Portuguese *padroado* falls roughly into three phases, with a certain degree of shifting and overlapping of calendars for different mission territories. The first phase, from 1500 until 1530, was characterized by a weak missionary presence but strong regal messianism; the second, ending with the 16th century, was a period of intense Christianization when post-Tridentine culture spread from Goa to all other mission territories; and the third phase consisted of the consolidation of the "conquered" territories, spiritual and/or political, and the slow and difficult progress, if any, of missionary activities beyond the *Estado da Índia*. The third phase dragged on into the 18th century when new actors, both Catholic and Protestant, engaged in a series of disputes.

The legacy of the first two centuries of Catholic expansion and proselytism in India is manifold. In terms of social geography, indigenous Christian communities sprang up in different parts of India. Some of them have preserved and nurtured their Catholic identity until today. In general, the religious interaction produced various types of syncretism affecting both Catholic and Hindu religious practices. And finally, not least importantly, Catholic missions often served as cultural and social laboratories for testing and experimenting with ideas, theories and methods that were later to be appropriated and refined by the Enlightenment.

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