



HISTORY OF CHRISTIAN MONUMENTS IN TIRUCHIRAPPALLI, TAMIL NADU – AN OVERVIEW

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ABSTRACT :

The village of Avur under the Palayakar of Kadalur south of Tiruchirappalli had become by the end of the 17th century the headquarters of the Jesuit Mission. By 1700 there were in the Avur area more than 30,000 Catholics with 29 churches. One of the peak years seemed to have been 1709, when some 10,000 adults were baptized. Most of the Christians found in the Avur - Tiruchirappalli region were Dalits. The Church at Fort has had a historical importance for two hundred years. The fort contains the first English church built in Tiruchirappalli, Christ Church, and north of the Teppakulam, built by Schwartz in the year 1762 – 66 with funds subscribed by officers of the British garrison. The Jesuits fathers built many chapels and churches in the places where they worked. Many of these churches still exist and among them is the Church of Our Lady of Seven Dolours at Tiruchirappalli known among the people as Palayakovil. The St Mary's Cathedral was constructed in 1842 AD. It is the replica of the world famous St Mary's Church at Vatican. Bourbon ruler Louis XIV of France finds a place in these paintings and it is a centre of attraction.

KEYWORDS : Christian Monuments, Church, Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu.

INTRODUCTION

St. Thomas one of the disciples of Jesus Christ had proclaimed about Jesus Christ and made the people as believer of Christ. St. Francis Xavier SJ had enlightened Christianity in South India on the 16th Century. Goa and Cochin were the main place for Christian priests for their service. In Tamil Nadu Christians were working here and there. Then Chennai Mayilapore church was functioning priests of the Society of Jesus were working north and south of the Cauvery River. In AD 1895, Madurai province was started in Madurai as headquarter.

The religious service was high of the two sides of the river Cauvery in the period of Robert De Nobili. The king II Kumara Krishnappa, who ruled over Madurai, was friendly with priests and Christian. At the same time 'Chola' religion entered at Trichy, the condition was so critical. The king of Tanjore opposed Christians and captures priest as prisoner. In AD 1523, Thirumalai Nayakar who ruled Madurai and Tanjore Nayaker were against each other. When Thirumalai Nayaker came to Tiruchirappalli Robert De Nobili also came with the king, since he was with the king. That was a way for spreading Christianity to the north of the Cauvery.

CHRISTIANITY IN TIRUCHIRAPPALLI

The village of Avur under the Palayakar of Kadalur south of Tiruchirappalli had become by the end of the 17th century the headquarters of the Jesuit Mission. By 1700 there were in the Avur area more than 30,000 Catholics with 29 churches. One of the peak years seemed to have been 1709, when some 10,000 adults were baptised. Later on the annual average number was about 1,000. For instance in the 1714 there were in Tiruchirappalli region some 1, 500 baptisms. The relations between the new ruler, the Tondaiman, and the Christians were somewhat tense. Most of the Christians found in the Avur - Tiruchirappalli region

were Dalits. Their church at Tiruchirappalli was probably that of Dharmanathapuram, which was rebuilt in 1747. The importance of Avur was further enhanced as the rallying point and place of refuge for the persecuted Catholics of Thanjavur and Marava land in those days migrated with incredible readiness and even rapidity. In 1734 seven churches were destroyed during the conflict between Pudukkottai and Thanjavur. The new church still standing today as a monument of Indo Christian style was completed.

CHRIST CHURCH (SCHWARTZ)

The Church at Fort has had a historical importance for two hundred years. The construction of this church started in 1766 and was completed on 18th May 1766. Through this church, we are able to view the life of Arcot Nawab, East India Company, people, religion, and changes in society and changes in politics.

Schwartz who was a dedicated servant of God filled with missionary zeal came first to Tranquebar. From there he used to visit Tiruchirappalli and Thanjavur regularly to solemnize the Sunday services. Rev. Christian Fredrick Schwartz who built this church had served the people in many ways. From his biography we are able to know the government in Tiruchirappalli. During this period, Hyder Ali who ruled over Tiruchirappalli solved the problem of invasion (the servant of the Indian Church by Vimala Manavel) at Sri Rangam peacefully and helped the government at Tiruchirappalli in time. Schwartz has a great importance as he brought first church to Tiruchirappalli. During the initial stages, he started school for the poor and the illiterate. During 1763 there occurred a tragic fire accident, which brought into society innumerable orphans. For them he built school. This has now grown to get the name St. John's Vestry Anglo - Indian School.

A branch of this church is now known to be St. John's Church. In this church the mortals of employees of the East India Company have been buried. To build this church near fort, Tiruchirappalli. a place was given to Schwartz by Karnataka Nawab. Help has been given to all people in spreading Christianity and other service has been made to all the people from this Church.

The first church built in Tiruchirappalli, nearby north side of Teppakulam, built by Schwartz in the year 1762 – 66 with funds subscribed by officers of the British garrison. The missionary and Church builder Rev. Christian Fredrick Schwartz built this ancient and historically memorable Church in 1766. The Tablet on the eastern wall of the church reads as follows:

This church was dedicated to the glory of God under the name of Christ Church by the Rev. Christian Fredrick Schwartz on the 1st May 1766 the Nawab of Carnatic gave the land. The church occupies a unique place in the history of south India as the site for building the church was donated by the Nawab of Carnatic. And it stands as a symbol of

It belongs to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (SPG). This is the oldest church in the Diocese of Madras after St Mary's Church at Fort St George. The design of the church is very much like of St Mary's Church at St George Fort Madras, which was consecrated on the 28th October 1680. This building is 72 by 46 feet: it has a circular sanctuary at the east and 15 feet deep and 19 feet broad. There are two vestries each 12 by 8 feet at the west end, on each side of the tower. On the altar place, which is the paneling of the apse, there are printed gold letters of the creed, the Lord's prayer, the Ten Commandments, and some text of Schwartz himself.

SEVEN DOLOURS CHURCH

The Jesuits fathers built many chapels and churches in the places where they worked. Many of these churches still exist and among them is the Church of Our Lady of Seven Dolours at Tiruchirappalli known among the people as Palayakovil. The surrounding area of the church was obtained from Nawab Chanda Saheb, Commander of Arcot Nawab by Fr Beschi as a free gift of the Church. The proof of this historical gift has been kept in Tiruchirappalli Diocesan Office. From this document it is obvious that Fr Beschi was the one who played a vital role in building of this church.

ST MARY'S CATHEDRAL

It is situated in the Catholic Bishop's House at Melapudur, Tiruchirappalli. The St Mary's Cathedral was constructed in 1842 AD. It is the replica of the world famous St Mary's Church at Vatican. Bourbon ruler Louis XIV of France finds a place in these paintings and it is a centre of attraction. In the city of Tiruchirappalli St Mary's Cathedral occupies a unique place not only because it is one of the oldest churches in Tamil Nadu but also had been the Mother church of many dioceses that were to be carved out of its jurisdiction during the past 160 years of its service. The church was built by a Jesuit priest Fr. Louis Carnier, who came to Tiruchirappalli as a missionary to win souls for the kingdom of god. The church was built with thatched roofing; measuring 150 feet resembled a cross with pathways on either side. The length of one pathway 45 feet and the other measured 20 feet. The faithful attended mass under the shade of the thatched roof. In 1839 Fr Carnier started the construction of the church and dedicated to the Holy Mother. It was on 29th June 1841 the feast of the Apostles peter and Paul, Bishop Bernard Clement of Pondicherry, in a solemn ceremony dedicated the church, amidst the chanting of hymns, with band in attendance.

Bro.De. Noircourt did the paintings on the roof depicting the story of salvation and sacrifices of the holy men and women who laid down their lives for their faith between the years 1893 to 1898 and they continue to inspire many generations of men and women. In order to protect these priceless treasures, from rainwater seeping into them, tin - sheets were used to provide cover in 1902. Tiruchirappalli is the gateway to the south. St Mary's Cathedral was the ancient monument of Christian faith and Marian devotion, though many more churches have come up like our Lady of Rosary Church, Our Lady of Perpetual Help, Our Lady of Lourdes etc. This church is no more.

HOLY REDEEMER'S CHURCH

The Holy redeemer's Church which is to the eastern side of Palakarai main road, to the western side of Anandasamy temple, to the northern side of Uyyakondan River and to southern side of Mailam Chandai. The church was designed and constructed by Rev. Fr Pradley SJ of Calcutta mission. At that time, Rev- Bishop Alexis Canoz SJ ruled over the entire region and he blessed the inauguration on 9th February 1890 (?). This was constructed in 1881AD. The church contains 22 pillars, as 11 pillars in each side. These pillars bear nave and the aisles. The arrangement was done for providing more space for accommodating devotees in large scale. This church has been built with gothic style. The pillars are to support the main dome and side ones also. Formerly, the pillars were in granite and later mosaic was laid on the two sides of the main towers. They look elegant. The church appears like a cross. the octagonal tower stands gently and gloriously in the midst of the town. It attracts all the people. this is a church which has five entrances both in eastern and western side. The marvelous church has a beautiful tower of 128 feet high. The tower of the church presents a magnificent appearance. There are two bells in this church tower above the main entrance. These two bells had been bought from France. The Church is magnificent in art and architectural in gothic style. There are paintings of various types to inspire the devotees. The paintings are as follows. the Assumption of Our Lady, the Crucifix, the Conversion of Saul into Paul, and the Bishop distributing Holy Communion to boys, Mother Mary Crushing the feet of the serpent, and Jesus are also paintings in the side wing consisting of picture paintings depicting number of biblical themes. A Jesuit Fr Denurcour drew the paintings. It is he who painted in the walls of the cathedral Church. The church is also dedicated to Our Lady of Perpetual Hel Sagaya Matha.

This church is cross shaped with a length of 192 feet and a breadth of 55 feet. There are also two side wings. The central portion, where the sanctified altar is located is supported by massive pillars and inside the dome at the centre is painted with important themes of Christian History which were indeed very interesting and captivating. These pictures were about the incidents in the life of Jesus Christ and Mother Blessed Virgin Mary, and the incidents in the lives of the saints and of the Holy sacraments. The side altars also are beautiful with multifarious colours. But the picture about overpowering and massacre of the sea horse is the best among the pieces. This created awareness in the minds of the faithful about the teachings

and the importance of the Gospel. Rev. Fr Denurcour has beautifully done the painting showing Sr. Charles Boromeo giving the Holy Communion to St. Aloysius. He has included the pictures of his selected friends like Rt Rev. Canoz, Bishop and Rev. Fr. Meccatte.

OUR LADY OF LOURDES CHURCH

As a traveler reaches Tiruchirappalli, two important landmarks draw his attention, one the imposing Rock Fort, and the other, the equally hallowed Church of Our Lady of Lourdes's at the hub of the city. The eternal silence of 273 feet high Rock Fort 213 feet tall church steeple, share a harmonious relationship in extolling the values of life, and elevate the hearts and minds of devotees. This church is located near the Rock fort Teppakulam. Church of Our Lady of Lourdes is the replica of the Basilica of Lourdes, the world famous place of pilgrimage in southern France.

Our Lady of Lourdes's Church stands as a telling testimony to the missionary zeal of the Jesuits, and architectural marvel. The construction of the church began in 1890; the basement was mounting in 1896. It was only in 1903 the 205 feet high steeple and the mounting of the 73 Kg and eight foot high cross a top it was completed and blessed. It was Rev. Fr Leo Barbier, the then Rector of the St. Joseph's College, who was instrumental in the planning and completion of this landmark structure. Fr Celle overseeing the construction chose the Gothic style with pointed arches and lighter, higher roofs from the church.

Gothic architecture was the dominant expression of the Gothic Age. Emerging in the first half of the 12th century from Romanesque antecedents, Gothic architecture continued well into the 16th century in northern Europe, long after the other arts had embraced the Renaissance. Even though a huge number of secular monuments were constructed in the Gothic method, it was in the service of the church, the most productive builder of the middle Ages that the new architecture developed and attained its fullest realization.

The visual characters of Gothic architecture depend on a structural growth: the ribbed vault. Medieval churches had solid stone vaults (9th structure that supports the ceiling or roof). These were enormously deep structures and tended to thrust the walls outside, which could lead to the collapse of the building. The walls had to be heavy and thick enough to stand the mass of the stone vaults. Early in the twelfth century, masons developed the ribbed vault, which consists of lean arches of stone, running diagonally, transversely, and longitudinally.

The initial Gothic churches understood a wide variety of forms, the formation of a series of enormous cathedrals in northern France, starting in the second half of the twelfth Century, obtained full benefit of the new Gothic vault. The designers of the cathedrals illustrate that, since the external plunge of the vaults were intense in the little areas at the springing of the ribs and were also repelled downward by the keen arches, the force could be counteracted readily by narrow buttresses and by outer arches, called flying buttresses. As a result, the wide walls of Romanesque building could be mainly restoring by thinner walls along with glass windows, and the interiors could reach extraordinary heights. A rebellion in building methods thus occurred.

The church at the top rises to six feet about the nave. Statues of the sacred heart of Jesus, St Ignatius, St Francis Xavier, St Peter, and St Paul adorn the outside niche of the bell tower along with artistic petals like flowers and dolls in the shape of pet animals are in the six-sided tower.

The seven feet tall and a four feet broad church bell diameter was brought from France and perched at 98 feet on the tower sends out appeals to be hears from far inviting the attention of the devout. At the inner entrance of the church, there is the grotto of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on the right and grotto of Our Lady on the left. The interior of the church presents a resplendent sight with huge round pillars and statues of holy men blessing the faithful. the high walls are adorned with images of biblical events, Moses with his Ten Commandments, King Solomon, David with his string instrument, Christian Saints, Jesuits elders and some of the Pope. It is a remarkable feat of Indian craftsmanship and stained glass drawings. A great honour goes to Dhanam Savarimuthu, an illiterate Maistry, who constructed this great Gothic Church. In fact he was

the only person form among the laity to be bestowed with honour of having been interned in the seer vaults. After all the church was not built just for narrow ends but with an altruistic aim is the invocation of the main entrance of the Church proclaims: Immaculate heart of Mary Pray for India even before we got independence.

CONCLUSION

In fact he was the only person form among the laity to be bestowed with honour of having been interned in the seer vaults. After all the church was not built just for narrow ends but with an altruistic aim is the invocation of the main entrance of the Church proclaims: Immaculate heart of Mary Pray for India even before we got independence.

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