

# THE FORMATION OF KUZHITHURAI DIOCESE – A STUDY

**T. KALA RANI,**

Reg. No : 10575

Research Scholar,

Nesamony Memorial Christian College,

Marthandam.

**Dr.N.Austin John Manohar** M.A.,M.Ed.,,Ph.D.

Assistant professor

Post Graduate & Research Department of History

Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam

Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli

## ABSTRACT:

Kottar was a very famous business centre in Travancore and Kottar Church had become a program centre of Centre of St. Francis Xavier the erection of the Diocese was named as Diocese of Kottor. All of them are poor and hard working. The rest of the interior areas are occupied by the other communities. The major communities among them are Nadars. The District of Kanyakumari which comprises the Diocese of Kottar, is the southernmost tip of India. The town Nagercoil is the capital of this Civil District. The Kottar Diocese spreads over a long stretch from Aralvaimozhi on the north Kanyakumari in the South.

**Key words:** Kuzhithurai, Diocese, Kanyakumari, Nagercoil, District, Kottar, Travancore

## Introduction

As years passed on the Diocese grow fast most of the growth being among the interior communities. As per the 1991 survey the total populations of the District of Kanyakumari which more or less overlaps the ecclesiastical territory of the Kottor Diocese, is over 18,00,000/- (Eighteen Lkhs) of this large community the catholic population is 4,18,000/- (Four Lakhs Eighteen Thousand). The rest are Hindus and Muslims and unristians of other denominations. Among the catholics whose number 4,18,000 is increased as 4,80,000 in 2011. The proportion of the various entire groups is as following (1) Nadars - 70 per cent. (2) Mukkuvas and Paravas 27 per cent and (3) others – 3 percent in 1941 at the region of the second Bishop T.R. Agnisamy the Six District Churches wee reorganized as four vicariates Namely Kottar, Colachel, Mulagumoodu, Thiruvithapuram.

The successive bishops M. Arokiasamy, Leon Tharmaraj and Peter Remigius promoted many more mission centres as parishes. The parish expansion has almost developed in interior areas.

The Nadar community has a rich tradition of peaceful co-existence and comradeship with the various minor communities, such as Muslims, Vellalas, Nairs, Dobbis, Kerala Muthalies, Chattrars, Dalits and host of others.

It was decided that the existing Two Vicariates of Thiruthuvapuram and Mulagumoodu would form the new Diocese of Kuzhithurai. The vibrant Catholic community of the proposed Diocese of Kuzhithurai cherishes its unique history. To realize this vision, the Diocese of Kuzhithurai will deepen the principles of Catholic Christian faith, identify the poor by scientific analysis and will always uphold their priority in dialogue with all faiths and in the spirit of Christian unity collaborating with all the movements and establishments who have the values of the Reign of God. The vision mission statement was discussed in all grass-root levels like the Anbiyanal and other organizations. The works of bifurcation committee and the people are emphasized on faith perspective since 2007, Bishop Peter Remigius concentrated more on establishing churches than bifurcation. Bishop Peter Remigius supporters that was the 'end church history' movement and the wait for the Golden Age began. Bishop Peter Remigius looked like a leader at the receiving end impatience born out of unmet expectations. In the post even years (2007 – 2014) there had been eight diocesan wide agitations or strikes against the diocesan policies. The division of the Diocese on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2014 Tamilnadu appointing 63 years old salesian priest, Fr. Jerome Dhas Varuvel as its first Bishop. The new Diocese has been created with territories taken from the Diocese of Kottar, making it a suffrage of Madurai. Archdiocese Kuzhithurai Diocese has over 264000 Catholics in 100 parishes and 123 mission stations spread across an area of 915 sqkm. They are served by 131 priests, 269 Religious men and women and 20 lay catechists. The cathedral of the new Diocese will be the church of the most Holy Trinity at Thiruthuvapuram. It is in Kuzhithurai Municipality in Kanyakumari District in the Indian State of Tamilnadu. It is the administrative Headquarters of Vilavancode Taluk. The Bishop elect was consecrated on 24<sup>th</sup> February 2015 and he took the canonical possession of the Diocese on the same day. It is the half mark of the new Diocese Kuzhithurai.

### **History of Kuzhithurai Diocese:**

On 26<sup>th</sup> May 1930 the Diocese of Kottar was erected carving out the Southern most Taluks of Vilavancode, Kalkulam, Thovalai and Agasteeswaram from the Diocese of Quilon. All those four Taluks were formed into one Diocese as they were Tamil. Speaking still they are all these four taluks constitute the Civil District of Kanyakumari. Kottar was very famous business centre in Travancore and Kottar Church had become a pilgrim centre of St. Francis Xavier the erection of the Diocese was named as Diocese of Kottar.

On 26 May 1930 the Diocese of Kottar was erected out the southernmost taluks of Vilavancode Kalkula, Tjovalai and Agasteeswaram from the Diocese of Quilon. All those four taluks were formed into one diocese as they were Tamil – speaking, still they are. All these four taluks constitute the civil District of Kanyakumari. The number of Catholics in the newly erected Diocese was 96916. There were 25 parishes and 31 priests, and there were 129 churches and chapels in six District churches namely Vancode, Mulagomoodu, Colachel, Cape Comorin and Kottar. Among them the interior areas like Mulagomoodu, Karenkadu and Vancode were well developed mission centres. There were also 125 mission centres situated in the interior areas. Kottar was a very famous business centre in Travancore and Kottar Church had become a pilgrim centre of St. Francis Xavier, the erection of the Diocese was named as Diocese of Kottar. From the beginning there is a clear - cut demarcation of the landscape into two belts. Most of the Catholic Christians are living on the Travancore Coast. They were fisherfolk, the *Mukkuvas*. Here and there *Paravas* could also be found. All of them are poor and hardworking. The rest of the interior areas are occupied by the other communities. The major community among them are *Nadars*.

The District of Kanyakumari, which comprises the Diocese of Kottar, is the southern most tip of India. It is a beautiful land with the sea on one side and the hills on the other, most of the land lying in between being carpeted by green fields. The town Nagercoil is the capital of this civil District. The Diocese spreads over a long stretch from Aralvoimozhi on the eastern side to Kaliyakkavilai on the western side, and from Cheruvallloor in the North to Kanyakumari in the South.

As years passed on, the Diocese grew fast, most of the growth being among the interior communities. As per the 1991 survey, the total population of the District of Kanyakumari which more or less overlaps the ecclesiastical territory of the Kottar Diocese, is over 18,00,000 (eighteen lakhs) of this large community, the Catholic populations is 4,18,000 (Four lakhs eighteen thousand). The rest are Hindus and Muslims and Christians of other denominations. Among the Catholics whose number 4,18,000, is increased as 4,80,000 in 2011. The proportion of the various ethnic groups is as follows: 1) Nadars – 70 per cent, 2) Mukkuvas and Paravas – 27 percent and 3) Others – 3 percent. In 1941 at reigon of the second Bishop T.R. Agnisamy the Six District Churches were reorganized as four Vicariates namely Kottar, Colachel, Mulagomoodu and Thiruthuvapuram. The successive bishops M. Arockiasamy, Leon Tharmaraj and Peter Remigius promoted many more mission centers as parishes. The parish expansion has almost developed in the interior areas.

The Nadar community has a rich tradition of peaceful co-existence and comradeship with the various minor communities, such as Muslims, Vellalas, Nairs, Dobbies, Kerala Muthalies, Chettiars, Dalits and a host of others.

A realistic look, based on careful reading of the signs of the times, will suggest the division of the Diocese of Kottar into two, one for the coastal communities and one for the communities in the interior. They decided to form a Nadar Diocese with Nagercoil as the headquarters. In 1967 quite a few representations have been made to the Holy See, to the Pro – Nuncio at New Delhi and to the Local Ordinary of Kottar, Presenting the situation available in the Diocese and requesting bifurcation of the Diocese into two. They received full support from the Catholic Nadar society. Recommendation was made to divide the Diocese into two on the basis of ethnicity. It was decided that the existing two vicariates of Thirithuvapuram and Mulagumoodu would form the new Diocese of Kuzhithurai. The vibrant Catholic community of the proposed Diocese of Kuzhithurai cherishes its unique history. On 02 July 1992 the proposal was entrusted to the local priests and the first Coordinator of the proposed Diocese of Kuzhithurai was Rev.Fr.E.John Kulandai, former Vicar General of Kottar Diocese during 2000 – 2005.

The first Co-ordination of Commissions of the proposed Diocese of Kuzhithurai was held on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2004 at Thedal Building, Kuzhithurai, presided by Fr. E. John Kulandai, then Vicar General of the Diocese. The Commission Secretaries of the proposed Diocese, Representatives of Bifurcation Committee and Diocesan Co – ordinator participated in the meeting. The meeting started with a prayer by Fr.S. Mariadhasan, Secretary to Commission for Ecumenism. Fr. Francis Xavier, the Coordinator, welcomed all the participants.

By the direction of Bishop Leon A. Tharmaraj, the Co-ordination Commissions for Thirithuvapuram and Mulagumoodu Vicariates conducted the first Annual Colloquium, at the Kottar Animation Centre, Bishops House, from 26 January to 28 January 2006. There was 113 participants who took active part in all the sessions and discussions.

The Vision and Mission statement was prepared for the “Would be Diocese of Kuzhithurai”. The sessions were marked by erudite and enlightening talks by Dr.John Joseph, Fr.X.D.Selvaraj, Fr.V. Raphael, Fr.D.Alphonse, Mr. S.Eugene and Mr.M.Pancras.

“Vision Mission Statement for the Future Diocese of Kuzhithurai”. The vision Statement : Rooted in the experience of Jesus, sensitive to the signs of times in the world of today, especially in Vilavancode and Kalkulam Taluks of Kanyakumari District, the Diocese of Kuzhithurai will serve as an instrument of the Reign of God, in establishing an egalitarian and fraternal society on the earth, by the work of evangelization to bring life in its fullness to all the people, collaborating with all persons of good will.

To realize this vision, the Diocese of Kuzhithurai will deepen the principles of Catholic Christian faith, identify the poor by scientific analysis, and will always uphold their priority, in dialogue with all faiths and in the priority, in dialogue with all faiths and in the spirit of Christian unity, collaborating with all the movements and establishments who have the values of the Reign of God.

The Vision Mission Statement was discussed in all grass - root levels like the Anbiyangal and other organizations. The works of bifurcation committee and people are emphasized faith perspective.

Mr. A.Gabriel Nadar, Ex.MLA, Fr.M.Susai Micheal, Fr.M. Gnappagasam, Bishop Leon A. Tharmaraj, Fr.A.Joseph Raj, Fr.M.X.Rajamony, Fr.V.Robert, Fr.S.Jesu Rethnam, Fr.V.Maria alphonse, Mr.S.Justin Thurairaj, Mr.T.Sundararaj, Mr.J.Varghese, Mrs. Alphonsal and Mr.J.Celestin were popularly known as bifurcation activists who carried out the task of bifurcation.

Since 2007, Bishop Peter Remigious concentrated more on establishing churches than bifurcation. The proposed Diocesan Survey undertaken by the KIDSS in 2001 is an attempt, ambitious as well as farseeing. The analysis, and the recommendations suggested, it was hoped, will give a new vision of the constraints the proposed Diocese and has the new challenges the Diocese has to face. Many efforts are made regarding the bifurcation of Kottar Diocese. It makes always tension between the Church Hierarchy and the Bifurcation Committee. The authorities are not ready to avoid politicking by conflict groups till the date of bifurcation.

Bishop Peter Remigious Sappales, that was the 'and church history' innoverant and the wait for the 'Uidden Age' began Bishop Peter Remigious looked like a leader at the receiving and of impatience born out of unmet expectations. The two Vicariate, wanted the diocese to move

Faster on the bifurcation track. The bifurcation advise were increasingly restive and the priests were increasing disillusioned . The two Vicariate administration were dissatisfied and disenchanted were directly proportional to grandiose promise.

### **Bifurcation of the Diocese of Kottar:**

His Holiness Pope Francis on 22<sup>nd</sup> December 2014 erected the new Latin rite Diocese of Kuzhithurai in Kanyakumari District. Tamilnadu appointing 63 year old salesianriest Fr. Jerome Dhas Varuvel its first bishop. The new Diocese has been created with territories taken from the Diocese of Kottar, making it a suffragan of Madurai Archdiocese. Kuzhithurai Diocese has over 264,000 Catholics in 100 parishes and 123 mission stations spread across an area of 915 s.qkm. TRhey are served by 131 Priests, 269 Religious men and women and 20 Lay Catechists. The Cathedral of the new Diocese will be the Church of the Most Holy Trinity at Thirithuvapuram. It is in Kuzhithurai Municipality in Kanyakumari District in the Indian State of Tamilnadu. It is the administrative headquarters of Vilavancode Taluk.

## Conclusion

Kottar Diocese, one of the biggest Roman Catholic dioceses in India, has a glorious past from time immemorial. Politically, the area of the present Kottar Diocese was for a long time part of the ancient kingdom of Travancore, and later of the Indian Princely State of Travancore - Cochin, until the General Reorganization of Indian States in 1956 made it possible for her to be merged with Madras State which is presently known as Tamil Nadu. Linguistically, Tamil has always been the main language of the people with some admixture of Malayalam towards the north.

## End notes

1. Thekkedath, J., History of Christianity in India, vol.II, Bagalore, 1982, p.192.
2. Quinquennial Report: 1930-1935, Diocese of Kottar, Nagercoil.
3. Report of Christian Life Survey 1991, Bishop's House, Nagercoil, 1995, p.122.
4. Annual Report, Diocese of Kottar, Nagercoil. 201, KNL, March 2012, p.93.
5. Selvamony, V.M., Aspects of South Indian History: A Re-awakening, A commemoration- Volume in Honour of Dr.T.Sundaraj, Nagercoil, 2014, pp.165-166.
6. Personal Interview with Mr.S.Justin Thurairaj, president of the Bifurcation Committee, ages 55, Thuckalay, on 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2011.
7. Conclusions of Priests' Live-In, Diocese of Kottar, 1992, p.64.
8. Resolutions of the Council of Priests, Bishop's House, Nagercoil, 1992, p.4.
9. Kottar News Letter (KNL), August 2004, p.199.
10. Personal Interview with Fr.E.John Kulandai, aged 65, former VG, Diocese of Kottar, dated 17<sup>th</sup> March 2013.
11. KNL, March 2006, p.62.
12. KNL, March, 006, pp.61-62.
13. Within the tiny district of Kanyakumari, there are five dioceses having their jurisdiction. The diocese of Kottar has the vast majority of the population. The latin diocese of Trivandrum has a few coastal parishes and the diocese of Tutitcorin has one parish, Azhagappapuram. There are two dioceses belonging to the oriebtal churches, namely, the diocese of Marthandam and diocese of Thuckalay, which were formed in 1997.
14. Letter of A.Gabriel Nadar to Nadar Priests and Educated Nadar Catholics, dated 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1967.
15. Personal Interview with Fr.S.jesurethnam, aged 71, Parish priest of madathattuvilai, dated 21<sup>st</sup> June 2013.
16. Personal Interview with Mrs. Alphonsal, aged 60, DPC member, Women Commission, Thuckalay, 1 June 2013.
17. Bifurcation Notice, No. 25, dated 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2014.
18. Bifurcation File, No. 10, Mulagumoodu Vicariate office, Thuckalay, 2014.
19. Daily Thanthi, 1<sup>st</sup> April 2012, p.9.
20. Thina Malar, Nagercoil, 23<sup>rd</sup> Janury 2014, p.10.