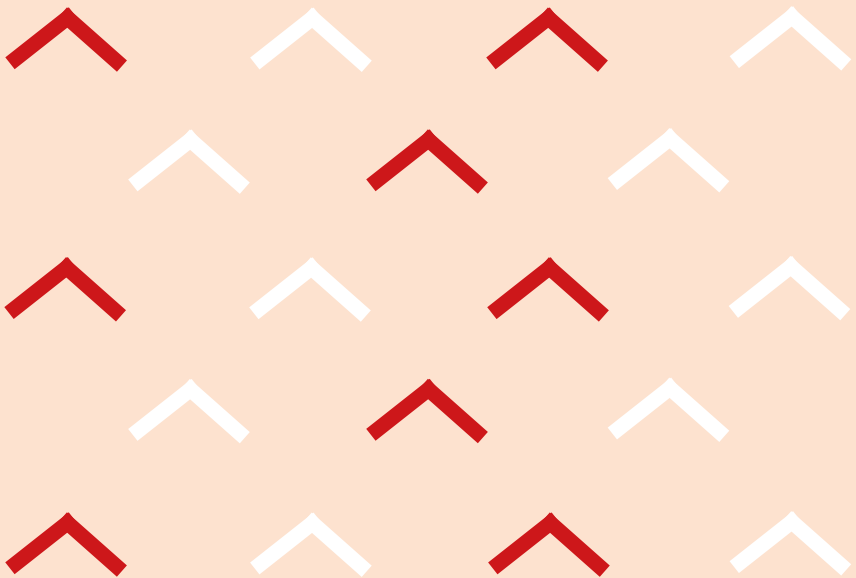# RE-EXAMINING CULTURAL ACCOMMODATION AND DIFFERENCE IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SOUTH INDIAN CATHOLICISM

CHANDRA MALLAMPALLI

RE-EXAMINING CULTURAL ACCOMMODATION AND DIFFERENCE IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SOUTH INDIAN CATHOLICISM

CHANDRA MALLAMPALLI

MIDS Working Paper No. 237

December 2019

*Re-examining Cultural Accommodation and Difference
in the Historiography of South Indian Catholicism*

by

Chandra Mallampalli (mallampa@westmont.edu)
Professor of History, Westmont College, Santa Barbara, and
Visiting Fellow, Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai

RE-EXAMINING CULTURAL ACCOMMODATION AND DIFFERENCE IN THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SOUTH INDIAN CATHOLICISM

CHANDRA MALLAMPALLI

Abstract

This essay explores the manner in which Catholicism adapted to South Indian society and shed its aura of foreignness. For the early Portuguese missionaries, cultural adaptation was not a priority and quite often was not desirable. Converts adopted Western clothes, surnames, and other cultural habits. But as Catholic congregations were established in regions farther removed from Goa, priests could not overcome natural tendencies of converts to observe local traditions. The Jesuits appear to have made a virtue out of a natural tendency toward cultural accommodation. Such accommodation is a distinctive feature of Indian Catholicism, but it is not the only development that needs to be accounted for. Against this heritage of accommodation, it is just as important to recognise and, if possible, explain the emergence of a distinctive Catholic identity. Just as accommodation is a fact of history, so are assertions of difference.

In its gripping account of the Jesuit mission to Japan during the seventeenth century, Shusako Endo's *Silence* explores issues of cultural and religious conversion. A crucial moment in the novel arises when young priest Sebastian Rodrigues encounters his former mentor, Christovao Ferreira. Ferreira had apostatised and become a translator of Western texts for the Japanese government. In his new role, Ferreira lectured his former apprentice about his misguided notions about Christian conversion among the Japanese peasantry. He likened Japan to a swampland in which the 'sapling of Christianity' is unable to take root (Endo 1980, 147).

Offended by this grim caricature, Rodrigues referred to the time when 'many Japanese vied with one another to receive baptism like the Jews who gathered at the Jordan' (Endo 1980, 147). Ferreira then presented the unthinkable to Rodrigues: that the peasant converts were not worshipping *Deus*, the God of Portuguese Christianity, but continued to worship Dianichi (the Great Sun) beneath the guise of a new religion. Even the renowned missionary Francis Xavier, he noted, had written about this error. Through Ferreira's eyes, Japanese culture had absorbed and domesticated Catholicism to such a degree that it ceased to be the same religion brought by the Jesuits. Rodrigues, however, insisted that the peasants had become his coreligionists.

The probing questions posed in *Silence* resonate with central themes in the historiography of South Indian Catholicism, particularly those relating to matters of cultural difference vs. accommodation. Not unlike Ferreira's description of Japan as a swampland, European Orientalists associated Hindu society with images of sponge-like absorption and honeycombing co-option (Inden 1986, xiii, 62, 85; Mohan 2018). In India, as in Japan, the Jesuit missionary enterprise sparked debates about the theological costs of blending in. In Japan, Ferreira maintained that the beliefs of Christian converts were indistinguishable from those of their pagan compatriots. In India, by contrast, the saplings did take root, and Catholicism became a part of what Susan Bayly (1989, 107) calls a 'shared landscape' in South India. What price, though, did Jesuit cultural policies exact from both Catholic teachings and the local society it sought to inhabit?

Jesuits are widely known for their legacy of cultural accommodation. This principle (known as *accommodatio*) encouraged missionaries to embrace non-religious aspects of a culture in order to more easily draw social elites to Christianity. Robert de Nobili, seventeenth-century missionary to the South Indian city of Madurai, assumed the attire of Brahmin pandits, wore their sacred thread, and smeared sandalwood paste on his forehead, like the Shaiva devotees he was attempting to convert. His methods sparked heated controversies about the parameters of Catholic orthodoxy and the legitimacy of 'going native'. Most notable is the Malabarian rites controversy, in which various Catholic orders debated the legitimacy of Jesuit practices of cultural accommodation.

Careful attention needs to be paid to the basis and rationale of Roman Catholic cultural accommodation. As tempting as it may be to attribute highly Indianised forms of Catholicism to the strategy developed by Nobili, other factors often played a more important role in contributing to them. South Indian kings had long extended their backing to Syrian Christian and Roman Catholic establishments just as they had patronised Hindu temples or Muslim shrines. Kingly patronage brought honour, status, and official recognition to a range of communities irrespective of religion. Such patronage arose independently from any missionary theories of cultural accommodation and was central to the incorporation of Catholics and Syrian Christians into South India's social fabric (Bayly 1989, 160, 323, 397). As much as any ideological commitment to accommodation, the rise and fall of political patrons shaped the cultural complexion of Indian Catholicism (Henn 2014, 13–18; Stewart and Shaw 1994).

Why then the emphasis on cultural accommodation? Part of this stems from an ideological preference among historians and anthropologists for mixture over difference. Scholars of Indian Islam and Christianity tend to portray religious hybridity, mixture, or syncretism (the terms are often used interchangeably) as authentically South Asian forms of religiosity (Nandy 1988; Bayly 1989; Pandey 1992). Moreover, it is believed that religious mixture provided the basis of coexistence, which was preferable to conflict. Assertions of religious difference in the name of orthodoxy or reformist activity occupy a more marginal place in South Asian history (Osella and Osella 2008, 317–19). They are portrayed as aspects of divisive workings of the foreign hand, the curse of colonial modernity, or as part of the less appealing stories of disruption or disintegration.

In an attempt to interrogate this binary, this paper begins by examining early Jesuit strategies of cultural accommodation vis-à-vis the work of missionaries, such as Francis Xavier, Robert de Nobili, and Constanzo Guiseppe Beschi. It then discusses processes of domain formation among Catholics in Bombay and in different parts of South India. In contrast to the emphasis on cultural blending or syncretism found in the work of Bayly, more recent studies describe tendencies of Catholics to form separate domains along lines of race, caste, jurisdiction, and belief (Agmon 2014a; Menezes 2014; Mendiratta 2017). This story

of boundary formation is just as much a part of the story of Indian Catholicism as cultural accommodation; and yet, complex and varying factors explain why Catholics have established strong communal boundaries in any given context. Discussions of accommodation and difference in Indian Catholicism, as with other religions, must grapple with matters of political patronage, global connections, proximity to centres of religious authority, and the impact of print media and literacy.

Spiritual vs. Colonial Enterprises

The Diocese of Goa, established by a papal bull in 1534, became the centre of Catholic missions to the East. Its vast domain extended from the Cape of Good Hope to China. Moreover, Goa became a centre for Portuguese ecclesiastical and political power in Asia. The pope extended *Padroado Real* (royal patronage) to Portuguese political authorities. This authorised the agents of the Portuguese Empire to build and staff churches and oversee missionary work in India—in essence, to extend Christendom to the East (Bugge 1994, 42). Because of their backing from the pope and the Crown, early Catholic missions at Goa were indelibly tied to Portuguese imperial and cultural power (Frykenberg 2008, 127).

The fusion of missions with Portuguese imperial power brought a more aggressive, colonial expression of Christianity to the shores of India. After 1540, the Portuguese actively privileged their own Latin form of Christianity over local religions and employed aggressive methods for converting the local population to Catholicism. During the sixteenth century, Portuguese kings in Lisbon formulated as many as six laws that explicitly sanctioned the destruction of Hindu temples in Goa (Henn 2014, 43). The Portuguese demolished Hindu temples in Goa, Bardes, and Salsette. They also appropriated lands devoted to Hindu temples and provided a variety of incentives—including provisions of rice (hence the label 'rice Christians')—for converting members of poor, lower classes to Catholicism (Pearson 1987, 116). Building upon centuries of antipathy between Christians and Muslims in the Iberian Peninsula, the Portuguese also confronted Muslims farther south along the Malabar Coast in order to advance their trading interests (Frykenberg 2008, 121–28). When Jesuits arrived in Goa

several decades after the Portuguese conquests, they became agents of a more imperialistic religiosity, which yielded a more pronounced sense of difference between Catholicism and local religion. It was only when priests launched missions that were farther away from Goa that they grew vulnerable to local forces that would shape their experience and those of their converts. It was nearly a century after they arrived in Goa that Jesuits embraced the controversial strategy of *accommodatio*. This brought them into conflict with other Catholic orders and the Vatican.

In 1542, Francis Xavier began his ten years of labour in India, which immersed him among the fishermen communities of the Malabar Coast. He spent his early months in Goa, during which time he became disillusioned by the immorality and greed of European settlers. He then accepted an invitation to work among the pearl fishers of Cape Comorin, some 560 miles to the south of Goa. His work among the lower-ranking Paravar castes of this region became the hallmark of his labours in India. To characterise his work among the Paravars as leaning more in the direction of accommodation or difference is no simple affair. On the one hand, Xavier was keen on teaching Paravars the creeds and confessions of the faith, and giving them a new Christian identity. On the other hand, aspects of local culture inevitably survived their conversion to Catholicism. When compared to later Jesuits, who were more influenced by Nobili's methods, Xavier may be viewed as a stronger advocate of Catholic difference.

The Paravars are one among several coastal fishermen communities who occupied lower caste status within South Indian society. They resided along the southernmost tip of the Coromandel Coast, a region known for its lucrative pearl-bearing oyster beds and conch shells. Their occupations as fishers and pearl divers were considered ritually polluting but made them useful to local kings who sought to benefit from the export of pearls, bangles, and other handicrafts. Following the pattern of South Indian kings, the Portuguese incorporated the Paravars into their domains by extending them protection in exchange for cooperation and loyalty. The conversion of the Paravars to Christianity was inseparable from this initial process of accommodation by way of political alliance building.

Conflict between the Portuguese and the seafaring Muslims provided the context for the earliest conversion of the Paravars to Christianity.

From 1527–1539, the Portuguese were embroiled in a maritime war with South Indian Muslim forces for control of the region's trading ports. The Muslims had formed an alliance with the Zamorin (the Hindu 'sea king') of Calicut. Amid this conflict, a delegation of seventy Paravars appealed to Portuguese officials for protection against their Muslim adversaries (Bayly 1989, 325). The Portuguese were eager to make clients of this skilled community of fishermen. Quite likely it was their interventions that had instigated the Paravars' rivalry with coastal Muslims in the first place. Authorities at Goa sent a group of clerics to the South who eventually baptised over 20,000 Paravars from roughly thirty villages of the fishery coast. These conversions, as Bayly observes, should be regarded as 'declarations of political alliance' more than religious conversions as these are conventionally understood (1989, 328).

Xavier's involvement with the Paravars began ten years later. His labours not only yielded new converts, but also consolidated a Christian identity among those who had already been baptised. He was keen on ensuring that the Paravars move beyond a merely nominal faith by learning the key Catholic creeds and confessions. This proved to be an arduous task. At Cape Comorin, his Portuguese colleague, Francis Mancias, accompanied him. With little or no knowledge of Tamil, but joined by several Tamil-speaking assistants, they attempted to impart Christian knowledge among the Paravars as they baptised them in huge numbers. They took a special interest in baptising infants and children, since they represented the future of the community (Coleridge 1872, 182–83, 187). Moving from village to village, they drilled children to recite from memory the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and the Apostles' Creed. As they baptised Paravars, members of other caste communities, including thousands of Mukkuvars from the western fishery coast, also sought baptism (Frykenberg 2008, 138). Xavier described linguistic and conceptual challenges faced by the Paravars as they entered the new faith:

> When I first came I asked them, if they knew anything about our Lord Jesus Christ? But when I came to the points of faith in detail and asked them what they thought of them, and what more they believed now than when they were Infidels, they only replied that they were Christians, but

> that as they are ignorant of Portuguese, they know nothing
> of the precepts and mysteries of our holy religion. We could
> not understand one another, as I spoke Castilian and they
> Malabar; so I picked out the most intelligent and well-read
> of them, and then sought out with the greatest diligence
> men who know both languages. (Coleridge 1872, 151)

In other instances, Xavier describes his efforts (and those of his assistants) to impart understanding about the sacraments, heaven, grace, and the death of Christ. Quite often, such endeavours were reduced to teaching them to make the sign of the cross and rote recitations in Tamil of prayers and creeds (Bayly 1989, 328). Despite the crude methods he had to employ, Xavier is said to have baptised or re-baptised as many as 15,000 Paravars during his time in South India (Bayly 1989, 328).

In order to steer converts into conformity with Christian precepts, Xavier employed caste notables among them. He charged these high-ranking intermediaries, known as *pattangatti*s, to punish drunkenness, idol worship, adultery, and other breaches of Christian norms. By empowering them in this manner, Xavier effectively reinforced a collective, caste identity among the Paravars. Just as other castes or birth groups (*jati*s) had distinguished themselves with distinctive morals and ritual practices, the Paravars were being fashioned into a distinctive group through the enforcement of Catholic dogma and morality. It was absorbed into their overall caste *dharma*, or sense of duty (Bayly 1989, 332).

Xavier's letters concerning his work among the Paravars illustrate, as historian Ines Zupanov observes, the tension between 'Portuguese "colonial" and Jesuit "spiritual" conversion enterprises in Asia' (2003, 109). From the Portuguese standpoint, the conversion of low-ranking fishermen to Catholicism formed an alliance that brought mutual benefits. Whether or not the Paravars were 'real' Christians was not as important as whether they bolstered the maritime trade of the *Estado da India* (Portuguese State of India). Jesuits were more concerned with questions of spiritual transformation. Were the conversions 'sincere' or were they attempts to upgrade their station in life by associating with *farangi*s (a term that could mean 'Franks', aliens, Westerners, or foreigners) and their material resources? Such questions would become particularly salient in the context of mass movements of conversion

during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; but Xavier's converts were perhaps the first to earn the label 'rice Christians'.

After being baptised, converts often adopted Portuguese names (or Tamil versions of Portuguese names) and Western clothes (Bayly 1989, 331). Indian converts along with mixed race offspring of Portuguese men and their concubines would eventually form what came to be known as the 'East Indian' community. Among them, converts were often portrayed as persons who aped foreigners. 'Eating meat, drinking liquor, and donning the Western dress' was a phrase often applied to them (Mallampalli 2011, 8, 36). And yet, a closer examination of their outlook reveals a combination of the old and the new, and not mere assimilation into Portuguese culture.

Despite the pervasive tendency to associate Paravar and Mukkuvar converts with *farangi* religion and culture, powerful undercurrents of local religiosity continued to shape their experience. The extent of their transformation as Christians was never easy to measure, especially as missionaries observed in converts enduring aspects of 'pagan' beliefs and caste consciousness. It was never entirely clear whether converts were en route to discarding their old selves and assimilating into Portuguese culture, worshipping Christ within the framework of their caste heritage, or, as the apostate priest of Endo's novel contended, worshipping old gods under the thin guise of the new religion.

These options raise important methodological questions, which lie at the intersection of theology and history. From the standpoint of orthodox monotheism, it is difficult to appreciate how converts to Islam or Christianity could continue to venerate local gods or goddesses or participate in other practices associated with their earlier way of life. Xavier and his assistants persistently confronted these tendencies among his Paravar converts. Some of them continued to visit local cult shrines. Others shared with non-Christian untouchables the worship of blood-taking goddesses (*amman*s), spiritual forces, and other deities Catholic priests had identified as 'demonic'. In one instance, this enraged Xavier to such a degree that he threatened to exile converted Paravar caste leaders (*pattangatti*s) for failing to eradicate such backsliding among the converts (Bayly 1989, 332). Clearly, Xavier saw their syncretic practices as an unacceptable deviation from orthodoxy, not as contextual Christianity.

The underlying basis for local forms of accommodation is not limited to the realm of 'religion' but also concerns matters political. South Indian religion was inextricably tied to notions of kingship, honour, and rituals of blood sacrifice associated with patron saints and warrior traditions (Henn 2014, 103–4). Huge temple complexes, such as those of Tirupati, Srirangam, Madurai, and Kanchi were centres of kingly power and wealth (Bayly 1989, 56–57). As kings attempted to consolidate their reign over a region, they often patronised its temples and patron deities. Gifts of land for the construction of temples and *maths* (schools for Hindu religious instruction) added legitimacy to their reign. The ritual services of Brahmin priests further enhanced the legitimacy of kings. As they subdued heads of little kingdoms (*samasthanam*s) and incorporated their domains, more powerful kings absorbed smaller communities and the religious institutions attached to them. Ever expanding networks of clientage reinforced the bonds between religion and statecraft (Kulke and Rothermund 2004, 127–41). They also enhanced the honour and status of those who served religious establishments.

When Islam and Catholicism were introduced in South India, they accommodated themselves to this system of patronage and cultural myth-making. Wandering religious world renouncers (sanyasis) of Brahminical Hinduism, Muslim fakirs (itinerant holy men who lent inspiration to Muslim soldiery), and Jesuit ascetics participated, as Bayly has noted, in a common religious landscape. Warrior cults centred upon Hindu saints (who served warrior kings) and local power divinities provided the cultural template for devotion to charismatic Sufi pirs and Catholic saints. These personalities often earned their reputations in service to their patron kings; they also acquired an independent charismatic authority. Their gravitas was tied to their reputations as healers, miracle workers, and performers of exorcisms. Indeed, Xavier and Saint Thomas became objects of devotion among those whose lives had already been shaped by a propensity to venerate charismatic holy men (Bayly 1989, 328–29).

After the Catholic Church canonised Xavier, Jesuit priests in India were able to portray him as a saint possessing supernatural powers who could intercede on behalf of devotees. Tombs of Catholic saints would become the focus of devotion among those seeking their powers, rain for crops, or fertility (Mosse 2012, 76–77; Henn 2014, 109–11). Legends

that circulated about Xavier bore a striking resemblance to stories of Hindu gurus and Muslim holy men, who embodied divine power. The Paravars venerated Saint Xavier for his capacity to heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out evil spirits. Aware of the popular appeal of charismatic cult figures, later Jesuits produced hagiographies, which cast renowned figures such as Saint Thomas and Xavier in the mould of popular South Indian cult legends. As Bayly observes, this pattern must not be seen as mere imitation of local cult myths, but as an intermingling of Catholic tradition and local devotional practices.

Accommodation on Trial

Decades before Robert de Nobili would deploy a formal strategy of cultural accommodation among Brahmins of Madurai, the Catholicism of Xavier's converts underwent its own process of localising transformation. It appears to have done so through a natural process—a cultural gravity of sort—that drew Catholicism into alignment with local beliefs and caste practices. What need was there for *accommodatio* as a mission strategy when this blending with local culture appears to have been an inevitable process?

Nobili was raised in an aristocratic family in Tuscany and became a Jesuit at the age of twenty. Upon arriving in India in 1605, he worked among Xavier's poor Christian fisherfolk of coastal Tamilnadu. One year later, he was transferred out of the territories under Portuguese control into a region within the independent Vijayanagara Empire of South India. From here, he launched his mission to the Brahmins of Madurai.

At Madurai, Nobili observed a Christian community consisting primarily of Portuguese military and commercial officials and Paravar converts. For Brahmins and other upper caste folk, Christians represented not only a 'polluted' community of meat eaters, but also a group of *farangi*s and local converts who had embraced their customs. The missionaries who had succeeded Xavier in Madurai appear to have fully reconciled themselves to being designated as *farangi*s. This is evident in the manner in which they approached prospective converts. They would ask them whether they wished to join the '*parangi kulam*' (kinship group of foreigners) (Neill 2004, 280). The perception of religious conversion as an event that incorporated Indians into a 'foreign

community' appears to have been central to the outlook of *Padroado* missionaries. It was an outlook for which Nobili had no patience at all.

Nobili's missionary project was centred on overcoming the sense of the foreignness of Christianity, especially among those who possessed a highly developed civilisational identity. Nobili did not employ scientific gadgetry in his evangelistic endeavours (as did Jesuits in China), but made every effort to assume the persona of a sanyasi in Madurai. The ritual and ascetic principles of a sanyasi represented the highest ideal of scriptural Hinduism and resonated with notions of self-denial within the Jesuit tradition. Embracing this persona gave Nobili the greatest likelihood of gaining an audience with, and ultimately converting, persons of rank and influence in Madurai.

A portrait of Nobili depicts him seated in the lotus position, wearing a robe of a Hindu guru, and instructing a Saiva Brahmin in a room opposite the Sri Meenakshi–Sundareswarar Temple. In contrast to Xavier, who knew little Tamil, Nobili devoted himself to learning spoken and written Tamil as well as Sanskrit, the language of classical Hindu texts and Brahminical knowledge. He mastered Tamil to such a degree that he was able to compose his own poems and theological treatises in the language. For his converts, he also formulated a Christian vocabulary that was drawn primarily from Sanskrit. Indeed, Nobili, along with those who upheld his methods, are widely credited for initiating the tradition of European orientalism (Bayly 1989, 389).

Nobili's missionary strategy was rooted in the distinction he drew between social and religious aspects of Brahminical culture. He considered the domain of the social as fertile terrain into which the truths of Christianity could be grafted. This is not unlike the way theologians of the early church had designated some aspects of culture as *adiaphora* (matters considered non-essential to faith). Since caste customs and related communal distinctions arose from this highly expansive social domain in India, Nobili had no qualms about adopting Brahmin dress, diet, language, and postures in his missionary labours.

Among the more controversial aspects of Nobili's legacy concerns his embrace of caste, in particular, his privileging of Brahmins. To reach them, he believed, he needed to become one of them. But how could he pass as anything other than a *farangi*? Nobili believed his own highborn status could actually work in his favour within South India's

hierarchical society. He claimed to have hailed from a line of aristocratic Kshatriyas (India's warrior caste) from Rome and come to Madurai as a seeker of spiritual knowledge. To overcome the perception of Christians as *farangi*s, Nobili presented himself as a high-caste person, who could mingle freely with Brahmins without polluting them in any way. He is reported to have declared, 'I am not a *parangi*. I was not born in the land of *parangi*s, nor was I ever connected with their race … I came from Rome, where my family hold the same rank as respectable rajas hold in this country' (Bayly 1989, 390).

This attempt by Nobili to become an insider, that too, among the highest-ranking members of Tamil society, came with a price. By gaining access to Brahminical society, he lent Christian legitimacy to their exclusionary practices. He observed a strict vegetarian diet along with other elements of a 'pure' Brahminical lifestyle, and resided in a Brahmin neighbourhood in Madurai. He urged other 'sanyasi' Jesuit missionaries to do the same. Such measures carried immediate social implications. When 'sanyasi' priests, as Nobili and others who embraced his methods were called, administered the sacraments or conducted services for Brahmins, they ensured that no members of 'polluting' castes were present. Only by doing so could Nobili ensure that his parishioners would not lose their rank by becoming Christian and receiving instruction from him.

Accommodation: Variations and Departures

During the early seventeenth century, unique political circumstances in South India complicated efforts of Madurai missionaries to employ their principle of cultural accommodation. Simply stated, there were some contexts in which Brahminical values were not the dominant ones. Nobili's exclusive focus on Brahmins catered to high-caste sensitivities but worked against the new values embodied by the Nayaka rulers of South India. The Nayakas hailed from the lower, Sudra caste and as such distinguished themselves by championing alternative cultural virtues. Former kings had extolled classical notions of kingship, which drew legitimacy from Brahminical notions of *dharma* (ritual purity and duty). This had reinforced king–temple relations and added weight to ritual services of Brahmins. Nayakas, by contrast, established strong links to

trade and espoused martial values of warrior elites. As traditional ties between the imperial court and the temple weakened under Nayaka kings, lower castes found more room to assert themselves.

The implications of Nayaka priorities were not as evident to Nobili as they were to one of his successors, Baltasar da Costa. After arriving on the Pearl Fishery Coast during the 1630s, this Portuguese Jesuit immersed himself initially in the community of converted Paravars. Costa was profoundly influenced by the principle of *accommodatio*; but instead of assuming the persona of a Brahmin sanyasi, he would eventually assume that of the *pantaram* (a Saiva priest to non-Brahmins) (Chakravarti 2014, 135). This form of accommodation addressed powerful cross-currents of cultural influence under Nayaka rule, in which low castes could acquire social clout through lucrative trade. During the 1630s, Brahmins of Madurai wielded enough ritual influence to make the sanyasi priests reluctant to associate with low-ranking Paraiyars. And yet, the loosening of traditional hierarchies and eagerness of low castes to embrace Catholicism warranted new forms of accommodation. By piercing his ears and wearing the robes and turban of a *pantaram* priest, Costa validated the principle of *accommodatio* but tailored it to the Nayaka ordering of society. His writings were sharply critical of Brahmins and revealed his grasp of the unique elevation of commercial groups and warrior elites within Nayaka society (Chakravarti 2014, 143–46).

Aside from being out of step with currents of Nayaka rule, Nobili and his methods elicited sharp opposition from other Catholics. For some, his accommodations to Indian society—seen as fundamentally religious and superstitious—amounted to an act of heresy. Among the most outspoken critics of Nobili was the Portuguese Jesuit Goncalo Fernandes (1541–1619). Unlike Nobili, who came from an aristocratic Italian background, Fernandes was an older Portuguese ex-soldier of 'dubious' education (Zupanov 1999, 44). Issues of class, nationality, and education profoundly shaped the sensibilities of each man and their respective approaches to Hindu society. A proud Portuguese, Fernandes was deeply committed to the methods and ideology of the Inquisition, which extolled a more combatant approach to other religions. Moreover, Fernandes had for at least a decade been primarily devoted to serving Paravar converts. Over time, Paravar Christians, under the tutelage of

missionaries, had developed their own sacred vocabulary by which they designated sacraments, rites, and saints. Fernandes decried the manner in which Nobili had dispensed with this vocabulary in an effort to be less *farangi* and more Brahmin. He regarded the methods of this younger, educated Italian to be an affront to the tireless labours of those who had preceded him.

Fernandes had no trouble self-identifying as a *farangi*. The designation appears to have reinforced a sense of difference, which he considered vital for nurturing a Christian identity among his converts. He criticised Nobili's efforts to shed his *farangi* identity. In his view, Nobili's immersion into the lifestyle of Brahmins nurtured among them a loyalty to Nobili's person as their guru, not to the universal church. Concerning matters pertaining to the church and its hierarchy, Nobili's Brahmins remained isolated and indifferent. Fernandes had concluded that Nobili 'behaved in everything as a man of another religion', 'of a different nation and of a royal race' (Zupanov 1999, 49). In his efforts to diminish the difference between Brahminical society and Christianity, Nobili had effectively dissociated himself and his converts from Christian society as he understood it. Instead, Nobili had immersed himself in the customs and traditions of Brahmins, which, Fernandes considered to be demonically inspired.

The dispute between Fernandes and Nobili eventually would be escalated to higher ranks of authority and vetted by clerics of different nationalities. The ordeal generated a series of documents concerning the theological integrity of Nobili's methods. By and large, the *Padroado* priests of Portuguese origin tended to be most critical of Nobili, whereas priests of Italian or other nationalities tended to support him. Disagreements also hinged on how priests interpreted India's caste hierarchy. 'Those who supported Nobili', Zupanov observes, 'stressed the "political" origins of the Indian signs of social distinctions and ranking, while those against Nobili, the "religious" origins' (1999, 58). Nobili's methods of cultural accommodation, his opponents charged, immersed him to such a degree in Brahminical society that he and his followers failed to locate themselves within the larger church or to honour its hierarchy.

In his written responses to these charges, Nobili contended that his accusers relied excessively on the perspectives of the 'Portuguese' priest, Fernandes, who, in his view, 'is not well-versed in Sacred Theology'

(Zupanov 1999, 66). Nobili also pointed to the well-developed methods of accommodation among his predecessors, most notably Matteo Ricci, the missionary to imperial China, and Alessandro Valignano, the head of the Jesuit mission to the East. Valignano had, according to Nobili, expressed a strong preference for non-Portuguese priests in the mission field because of their capacity to dispense with their national customs and 'become all to all', something that Portuguese priests found next to impossible to do (Zupanov 1999, 68).

The dispute over Nobili's mission strategy presents a captivating case study on the impact of social class and nationality upon one's opinions about cultural accommodation. Beyond that, the dispute overlooks more pervasive patterns of acculturation in Indian Catholicism, which have little to do with the minutia of Nobili's dress and approach to Brahminical customs. Rituals of Paravar Christianity enjoyed the full sanction of the *Padroado.* Among them is the annual festival of the Golden Car, in which thousands of devotees dragged a vehicle bearing an image of Virgin Mary through the streets of the coastal city of Tuticorin (Frykenberg 2008, 138). The festival resembles *rath yathras* (chariot processions) of Hindu communities. Nobili's methods do not explain the tendency in popular Catholicism to venerate charismatic Catholic leaders in a manner similar to the veneration of Sufi pirs or Hindu cult saints.

During the latter half of the seventeenth century, another Jesuit missionary, John de Britto (1647–1693), made significant numbers of converts among warrior pastoralist communities of Ramnad District, namely the Maravas and Agmudaiyars. As did Xavier, De Britto oversaw mass conversions among these influential groups, similar to those that had occurred in Japan among influential daimyo lineages (Bayly 1989, 398). De Britto's success as a missionary led to his elevation, like Xavier and Nobili before him, as a charismatic guru figure possessing supernatural powers. During his life, the Setupati (regional ruler) of Ramnad tortured and imprisoned him because of his alleged resistance to his rule. In 1693, De Britto was beheaded, with his body impaled on a stake. Thereafter, hagiographies about him celebrated him as a Jesuit martyr who upheld the highest ideals of the faith. At the same time, De Britto came to be venerated, as were other warrior gods of Ramnad, as a cult figure possessing great powers to fight demonic forces; only in De Britto's case, it was Marava

Christians who sought his intercessory powers by offering prayers at his forest shrine, located in Oriyur of Ramnad District (Mosse 2012, 36–37).

Another example of Catholic *accommodatio* is to be found in the life of the Italian Jesuit Constanzo Guiseppe Beschi (1680–1747). Like Nobili, Beschi assumed the persona of a local sage and became known for his extraordinary commitment to indigenous knowledge production. He is responsible for producing literary works in classical South Indian genre. He also published philosophical treatises, grammars, and dictionaries, and translated Tamil texts. In keeping with the Jesuit practice of engaging in disputations with adherents of other faiths, Beschi became renowned for his exchanges with Hindu scholars and sanyasis. As he moved from town to town, a highly ornate royal entourage accompanied him. This closely resembled the royal durbars (ceremonial processions or gatherings) of Hindu maharajas as they were carried by palanquin, dressed in their finest garments of silk and seated on tiger skins (Frykenberg 2008, 140). So taken by Beschi was Chanda Saheb, the Nawab (regional governor) of the Carnatic, that he bestowed upon Beschi a royal title, appointed him diwan (minister), and awarded him a tax-exempt land grant of four villages.

Catholics and Their Others

Despite a tendency to emphasise the accommodative impulses of Indian Catholicism, it is easy to overlook that clear boundaries emerged between Catholics and non-Catholics, as did fractures over race, caste, and jurisdiction within Catholic domains. Despite similarities between Catholic and Hindu devotional practices, there were clear differences that separated them. This makes applying the notion of 'syncretism' (the blending of religious traditions and objects of worship) to Catholic contexts of South India problematic. As David Mosse observes,

> Catholics may adopt 'Hindu' ritual and aesthetic forms (but not images) along with shared attitudes to sacred power; but elements from clearly distinct provenance are not mixed….Hindus readily incorporate elements of Catholic divinity into their practice, but Hindus worshipping at Catholic shrines (or visiting them for exorcism) do not

> try to give Christian saints Hindu identities or bring their
> own ritualists to mediate. (2012, 14)

Indeed, increasingly into the nineteenth century we find Catholic domains enjoying greater degrees of autonomy over their own affairs. This is accompanied by a greater inclination to differentiate their practices from those of 'pagan society' and to streamline them with global Catholicism.

The factors that influenced this process of differentiation varied. Among them, ironically, was the increasing resistance to conversion. In the absence of new conversions, a stronger Catholic identity appears to have solidified within Catholic enclaves. The arrival of British Protestant missionaries in the early nineteenth century also prompted Catholics to define their identity more sharply relative to Hindu society and Protestantism.

After the outbreak of the French Revolution, Jean Antoine Dubois (1765–1848), a French Catholic, arrived in the princely state of Mysore to build on the work of the Italian Jesuits. Over time, he became a staunch critic of their missionary practices. Initially, Dubois had worked with the Pondicherry Mission. Dubois went to Mysore after 1799, when the British defeated the army of its ruler, Tipu Sultan. It was in Mysore primarily that Dubois developed his views on Indian caste, the role of Brahmins, and the futility of attempting to convert Hindus. Dubois's anti-Brahminical discourse appears to have influenced similar critiques by Protestant missionaries.

In 1823, Dubois published a series of letters in which he criticised both Catholic and Protestant missionary approaches in India. In contrast to earlier Jesuit accommodations to Brahminical tradition, Dubois critiqued the ritual and philosophical powers of Brahmins. It was in their role as guardians of custom, embodied in the caste order, that Brahmins most impeded the spread of Christianity (Dubois 1906; Dirks 2001, 21). Dubois's narrative carried a somewhat paradoxical relationship to the Jesuit strategy of cultural accommodation. He credited, on the one hand, early Jesuit accommodation to local customs, but criticised, on the other, Brahmins for making such accommodation necessary. Brahmins had solidified custom by means of their knowledge, ritual authority over other castes, and access to state power.

Dubois's narrations of early Jesuit encounters initially conveyed sympathy for their methods, but progressed into a polemical assault on South Indians for being addicted to their own customs and impervious to foreign influence. The chief culprits behind this adherence to custom were Brahmins, whom he characterised as governed by rituals, constantly asserting their authority over other classes of Indians, and immune to outside influences (Dubois 1906, 100).

The impact of Brahminical authority and knowledge upon the spread of Christianity for Dubois was clear. Brahmins infected every layer of society with caste feeling and animosity, the antithesis of Christian love. Only those who thrived beyond the pale of Brahminical influence would consider becoming Christian. Hence, converts did not hail from the more 'respected' classes, but only from among those outcastes who had played the most servile and marginal roles in society (Dubois 1906, 69).

Dubois's focus on caste not only made him a critic of earlier Jesuit accommodations to caste but also placed him in an ambiguous relationship with Protestants. He claimed that Protestants, in their attempts to convert Hindus, enjoyed little success because of the simplicity of their worship. His words became a common way of distinguishing Catholic and Protestant ethos in India. Protestant worship, he charged, 'has no show, no pomp, no outward ceremonies capable of making a strong impression on the senses, [and because of this] it was of course disliked by a quite sensual people, and has never had any considerable success' (Dubois 1823, 18). By contrast, Catholic worship has 'processions, images, statues, *tirtan* or holy water, fasts, *titty*s or feasts, and prayers for the dead, invocation of saints, etc.' all of which bear resemblance to Hindu religious practices (Dubois 1823, 18). Here again, the cross-currents of Dubois's thinking becomes evident: He celebrated the appeal of Catholic worship among Hindus, while having decried the power of caste observances, which help explain the Catholic–Hindu affinity in the first place.

Priests vs. Catechists

Literature by and about Catholics tends to downplay the vital role played by Indian catechists as well as the tensions that arose between catechists and the *farangi* missionaries they served. Catechists were

the 'native' religious intermediaries who served foreign Jesuit priests in the mission field. Much of the day-to-day tasks of teaching, preaching, translation, baptising, and cultural mediation became the responsibility of the catechists, even more so than the more theologically-qualified priests whom they served. According to Jesuit historian Joseph Houpert, the Madurai mission consisted of nine Jesuit priests and twenty-five catechists in 1676, but in 1734, there were ten priests and one hundred catechists (cited in Agmon 2014a, 184). This drastic increase in the indigenous staffing of the mission is downplayed in the reports that priests sent to their European superiors. The heavy reliance of Jesuits on their Indian intermediaries, according to historian Danna Agmon (2014a, 182), was a source of subtle resentment, if not 'muted anger', among Jesuit priests. Priests faced a constant irony: Catechists made the difficult task of cross-cultural evangelism possible while at the same time contributing to their sense of vulnerability and resentment.

The conflicted relationship between Jesuit priests and their Indian catechists surfaced in the experience of Jean-Venant Bouchet, who worked among the Tamils of Madurai. Like other Jesuits at Madurai, Bouchet committed himself not only to making converts but also to producing knowledge about Indian society and religion. Bouchet, for instance, was convinced that Hindus, whom he referred to as 'Gentiles', actually derived their religion from Christianity and that principal Hindu deities derived their names from key personalities of the Bible (Subrahmanyam 2017, 127).

Apparently, Bouchet's devotion to such speculative theories blinded him to the rising hostility of his own catechists. A group of them reported Bouchet to the Nayaka prince of Madurai. They accused him of failing to pay tribute to the prince and of murdering a member of another order. They also stressed that Bouchet was a *farangi*; but when they so designated him before the prince, they meant it in the most demeaning and derogatory sense that could be applied to Europeans. They offered the prince a large sum of money if he would expel Bouchet and the other Jesuits from the region (Agmon 2014a, 189).

The motivations of the catechists for bringing these charges are not entirely clear. According to Agmon, it appears to relate to the fact that catechists tended to receive the brunt of hostility from non-Christians for their evangelistic work. Local enemies of the Jesuits had

on one occasion seized several of Bouchet's catechists and tortured them. Bouchet himself was not tortured, but on the contrary was able to ingratiate himself to local authorities. Amid rising hostility toward the missionary enterprise, Bouchet paid a personal visit to the prince and offered him and members of his court exotic European gifts. These included a large terrestrial globe, a smaller glass-cut one, and luxury gifts from China. The disparate treatment meted out to Bouchet and his catechists contributed to this particular catechist rebellion. The episode reveals tensions that lay beneath the surface of a mission so heavily reliant upon Indian staffing. Moreover, it reveals the persistent perils of being labelled *farangi*, despite the efforts of sanyasi Jesuits to shed this identity.

Disputes of Jurisdiction, Race, and Class

Jesuit practices of accommodation at Madurai represent one aspect of the story of Catholicism. Other key centres of Catholic power and influence included Pondicherry, a coastal French colony south of Madras, and Bombay, which fell under the Diocese of Goa. Within each of these venues, Catholics maintained unique ties to European imperial power and trade interests. Against such ties to Catholic empires, Pondicherry and Bombay became venues for competition between Catholic orders. They also became sites of jurisdictional controversies and those associated with race and caste. Their stories show that Indian Catholicism was anything but monolithic and that it often experienced turbulent relations with the local population.

During the eighteenth century, Pondicherry, a French colony, became a venue for disputes between Capuchins, Jesuits, and missionaries of the Missions Etrangeres de Paris (MEP; Society of Foreign Missions of Paris). Quite often, intra-Catholic rivalry in India enacted politics arising within European contexts. For instance, tensions between French Catholics and the Huguenots (Protestant/Calvinist minorities in France) in France played themselves out in India as Dutch traders competed with the Compagnie des Indes Orientales (French East India Company) for access to valuable trade ports in South India. Since 1674, when Pondicherry had come under French rule, the French made every effort to establish Pondicherry as a Catholic city, not unlike what the Portuguese had done at Goa (Grafe 1990, 49).

The French project of creating a strong Catholic domain in Pondicherry was riddled with problems. Catholic religious orders and societies competed for influence. Capuchins, an offshoot of the Franciscans, were the first order to arrive after Pondicherry became a French colony. After servicing Europeans and Indian converts in the colony for roughly twenty years, the Capuchins came to regard Pondicherry as a domain entrusted to their oversight (Agmon 2014b, 443). Jesuits arrived in Pondicherry in 1689, and in 1691 constructed their first church, Eglise Notre Dame de l'Immaculee Conception. A third religious body, the MEP, was a society of secular priests, not a religious order as such. They came under the authority of the Propaganda Fide, the missionary establishment commissioned directly by the pope (Bugge 1994, 51). With the backing of Rome and powerful French patrons, the MEP also came to Pondicherry with the intention of making converts and overseeing Catholic congregations (Grafe 1990, 35–39). These three groups adopted different attitudes toward local affairs in Pondicherry. The Jesuits, who had grown in influence in the courts of Europe, tended to adopt an aggressive posture toward Pondicherry's non-Christian residents. Keen on converting the local population to Catholicism, the Jesuits did not want to see in Pondicherry a platform for other religions to flourish. Capuchins and MEP missionaries, by contrast, tended to oppose the Jesuits. They sympathised with trader-officials and the concessions the latter wanted to extend to Hindu labourers (Agmon 2014b, 445). These divisions became most evident in conflicts concerning religious freedom for the local population.

Instituting Catholicism in Pondicherry involved the aesthetic shaping of the urban landscape along Catholic lines. This entailed the construction of ornate cathedrals, compounds for religious orders, and chapels that served the French military. By necessity, this also required that authorities curtail certain freedoms of Hindus. Catholic officials and missionaries contended constantly with the visible and highly public dimensions of Hindu religiosity (festivals, processions, temple construction, and music) and its claims to space. On one occasion, Jesuits pressured local officials to eliminate a popular temple near one of their compounds and a military fort. The French governor, Francois Martin, asked the Tamil worshippers to either tear down their own temple or leave town. The worshippers chose to 'call Martin's bluff',

assemble at the city gate, and threaten to leave the town (Agmon 2014b, 454). These labourers consisted of cotton weavers, land labourers, domestic servants, and wealthier merchants. They threatened to 'leave Pondicherry an empty town' and make it impossible for the French to benefit from trade in textiles and other commodities (Agmon 2014b, 437). They effectively forced Martin to revoke his demands and make concessions. The effectiveness of their protests exposed the inherent contradiction between the trading interests of the French and their ambitions to make Pondicherry Catholic. Such conflicts also show how Catholicism was far from being either a monolithic political force in India or a religion that invariably blended with local religions. On the contrary, Catholicism was always beset with sharp internal differences tied to its different orders and their complex ties to imperial power.

On the other side of peninsular India, the Catholic population of Bombay came to be splintered along lines of race, caste, and social class. As with the Catholics of Pondicherry, Bombay's Catholics enjoyed the backing of a powerful European state. During the 1700s, however, Portuguese influence on India's west coast declined and with it the capacity to secure Catholic institutions under the patronage of the *Padroado Real*. When the British East India Company became the dominant power in west India after the defeat of the Marathas (1818), Catholic congregations had to reconcile themselves to life under a Protestant power. Adding to their need for reorientation was the expanding scope of the Propaganda Fide, the papal missionary body that fell outside of Portuguese control. The British East India Company became increasingly determined to undermine *Padroado* control in Bombay and tended to favour Propaganda priests. Conflict between *Padroado* and Propaganda was accompanied by a fracturing of the Catholic population along lines of race and caste.

By the early eighteenth century, the Catholic population of Salsette Island (in the northern Bassein District of Bombay) numbered roughly 37,000 and contained some twenty-five parishes. This population resulted from a combination of Portuguese settlement and aggressive missionary activity by Jesuit and Franciscan orders. As had been done in Pondicherry, authorities restricted the religious freedom of Hindu and Muslim residents. The Bishop at Goa incited missionaries to destroy Hindu religious structures in Bassein. Entire villages, such as Bandra

and Trindade (known as Tirandz on British maps), came under Jesuit oversight (Mendiratta 2017, 210).

Despite these efforts to create a soundly Catholic domain in Bombay, the Catholic population fragmented along the lines of race and caste, and came to be divided as well by *Padroado* vs. Propaganda jurisdiction (Ballhatchet 1998). At the top of the social hierarchy were European-born Portuguese, known as *reinois*, and then the Indian-born persons of Portuguese descent, known as *casado*s or *descendente*s. This class resembled the Creoles of South America and Mexico. Beneath them were the Indian converts, who continued to retain their caste distinctions. Brahmin converts, for instance, resided in separate neighbourhoods from lower-ranking castes. These included the Kunbi cultivators and Koli fishermen. They also included salt-pan workers known as the Agri, and the Bhandari, who made a living extracting toddy, the intoxicating substance found in certain palm trees. The Portuguese labelled Indian converts collectively as '*naturais*' (Mendiratta 2017, 212–13). Alongside the Indian converts were persons of mixed racial descent. The term 'East Indians' was applied to them; the same designation could apply to Indian converts to Catholicism who adopted Portuguese names and assimilated into Portuguese society. Later on, the East Indian community would include the last remaining Portuguese families in Bombay island, who had been marginalised under British rule. They retained their prejudices, however, toward the *naturais*, who vastly outnumbered them. The segregation of *descendentes* and upper-caste Catholics from lower-ranking castes is part of the legacy of Portuguese, colonial Catholicism. Under British rule, this racial hierarchy would be configured in new ways.

The British East India Company tended to regard *Padroado* priests with great suspicion on account of their loyalty to Lisbon. Company administrators similarly distrusted persons of Portuguese ancestry and upper-caste, Indian Catholics who retained their allegiance to the Archdiocese of Goa. As they enacted measures to restrict the influence of *Padroado* priests to specific congregations in Bombay, the British, ironically, were aided by measures adopted by the Vatican. In 1839, a papal decree, *Multa Praeclare*, transferred the islands of Bombay and Salsette to the jurisdiction of the Propaganda Fide.

The dual role of the British and the Propaganda Fide in dismantling the *Padroado* establishment had ripple effects throughout Catholic communities of India. Churches and properties that were once under *Padroado* control appear to have been transferred overnight to the jurisdiction of the Vicars Apostolic (the appointed leaders of the Propaganda Fide in a given bishopric). These measures were met with fierce resistance by those committed to the vast network of Goan priests who had up to this time been officiating in various parts of South Asia. The transition to British rule and Propaganda oversight would entail the loss of jobs and ecclesiastical oversight once entrusted to *Padroado* priests, not to mention the huge loss of Portuguese prestige (Mendiratta 2017, 225). Heated disputes between rival priests and parishioners erupted throughout South Asia.

A similar case of jurisdictional conflict erupted in 1837 in the hinterland, garrison city of Bellary. That year, Bellary was transferred from the jurisdiction of Goa to that of the Vicar Apostolic of Madras. The Madras bishop appointed Patrick Doyle, an Irish Catholic priest, to oversee the chapel at the Bellary Fort. Shortly after Doyle's arrival, the newly-appointed archbishop at Goa tried to bring Bellary back under his jurisdiction by sending Fulgence Perozy (who had been the priest at Bellary since 1828) to the chapel. Doyle intervened by locking up the chapel to keep Perozy out. When the case went to court, Doyle successfully proved that the East India Company had given the site of the Fort chapel to the Catholics of Bellary, who had financed it with local resources (McGoldrick 1960, 207–8).

The Bellary case illustrates a preference on the part of the British to accommodate Irish Catholics over Portuguese ones, especially in connection to the servicing of Catholic members of the Indian army. In the princely state of Hyderabad, a dispute between *Padroado* and Propaganda factions erupted over possession of a chapel located on the grounds of a major military cantonment. Indian Catholics and Irish soldiers supported the *Padroado* and Propaganda respectively. Daniel Murphy, an Irish priest who serviced the large number of Irish troops at Secunderabad, allegedly incited members of his congregation to violence. On this particular occasion, the Company blamed Murphy for disrupting the peace and prohibited him from resuming his role at Secunderabad (Fraser 1885, 274–76).

Such instances of jurisdictional conflict represent the eclipsing of the Indo–Portuguese phase of Indian Catholicism and the transition to British rule. As Indian Catholics were weaned from Portuguese imperial patronage and cultural heritage, they faced new challenges under British rule. The British, after all, were Protestants. The advent of British rule compelled Catholics to differentiate themselves from Protestant society and thrive as a community that could not rely on the backing of the government. This defensive posture led to new ways of asserting boundaries within Catholic institutions and vis-à-vis Hindu society.

Conclusion

The central issue explored in this essay concerns the manner in which Catholicism adapted to South Indian society and shed its aura of foreignness. On the one hand, *Padroado* priests were not ashamed to welcome low-caste fishermen into their *parangi kulam*. For priests who maintained loyalty to Goa (the centre of Portuguese colonial power in India) conversions of low-ranking Paravars and Mukkuvars essentially drew converts into a Portuguese cultural domain. Converts adopted Western clothes, surnames, and other cultural habits. Cultural adaptation was not a priority and quite often was not desirable.

As Catholic congregations were established in regions farther removed from Goa, it became more difficult for priests to police what they considered to be cultural backsliding. They simply could not overcome natural tendencies of converts to observe local traditions, even when those traditions were intertwined with 'paganism'. Moreover, Catholics would welcome the patronage they received from South Indian kings and the accommodations to local culture that issued from this local support. In key respects, the Jesuits appear to have made a virtue out of what would be a natural tendency, in regions beyond the reach of Goa, toward cultural accommodation; only the Jesuits called it *accommodatio*. The actual impact of Nobili's mission strategy on Catholic accommodation to Indian society was limited to certain spheres of Jesuit experimentation with his methods. The larger observable patterns of Catholic accommodation have more to do with adaptations to local cult traditions. These adaptations are observable among Muslim communities as well.

   Such accommodation is a distinctive feature of Indian Catholicism, but it is not the only development that needs to be accounted for. Against this heritage of accommodation, it is just as important to recognise and, if possible, explain the emergence of a distinctive Catholic identity. Does the assertion of Catholic difference represent a reversal of Catholicism's localising tendencies? For Bayly, the choice for the historian is whether to privilege a textual ideal of religion over and against the indwelt, 'living system of worship' that absorbs characteristics of a given region. 'The eighteenth century Javanese rice-cultivator', she observes, 'with his reverence for the shrines and divinities of the Hindu–Buddhist sacred landscape was no less a true and pious Muslim than the most rigorous Arab Wahhabi' (Bayly 1989, 73). Here, Bayly walks a delicate balance between describing mixtures and accommodations on the ground and making pronouncements about what constitutes a 'true and pious Muslim'. Historians must navigate similar terrain between notions of orthodoxy in South Asian Catholicism and the local practices that so often pushed the limits of these notions. It is also important to recognise that accommodations to local culture are not necessarily instances of interreligious harmony. Quite often, surface-level resemblance of religious practice is accompanied by contestations of power, authority, doctrine, and sacred space (Stewart and Shaw 1994). If accommodation is a fact of history, so are assertions of difference.

References

Agmon, Danna. 2014a. 'Conflicts in the Context of Conversion: French Jesuits and Tamil Religious Intermediaries in Madurai, India.' In *Intercultural Encounter and the Jesuit Mission in South Asia 16th–18th Centuries*, edited by Anand Amaldass and Ines G. Zupanov, 179–98. Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation.

———. 2014b. 'Striking Pondichery: Religious Disputes and French Authority in an Indian Colony of the Ancien Regime.' *French Historical Studies* 37 (3): 437–67.

Ballhatchet, Kenneth. 1998. *Caste, Class and Catholicism in India, 1789-1914.* Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press.

Bayly, Susan. 1989. *Saints, Goddess, and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700–1900.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bugge, Henriette. 1994. *Mission and Tamil Society: Social and Religious Change in South India, 1840–1900*. Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press.

Chakravarti, Ananya. 2014. 'The Many Faces of Baltasar da Costa: *Imitatio* and *accommodatio* in the Seventeenth Century Madurai Mission.' *Etnografica* 18 (1): 135–58.

Coleridge, Henry James. 1872. *The Life and Letters of Francis Xavier, Vol.* I. London: Burns and Oates.

Dirks, Nicholas B. 2001. *Castes of Mind: Colonialism and the Making of Modern India.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Dubois, J.A. 1823. *Letters on the State of Christianity in India, in which the Conversion of the Hindus is Considered as Impracticable*. London: Longman.

———. 1906. *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Endo, Shusako. 1980. *Silence*. New York: Taplinger.

Fraser, Hastings. 1885. *Memoir and Correspondence of General James Stuart Fraser of the Madras Army*. London: Whiting and Co.

Frykenberg, Robert E. 2008. *Christianity in India: From Beginnings to Present.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Grafe, Hugald. 1990. *History of Christianity in India, Vol. IV, Part 2: Tamilnadu in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries.* Bangalore: Church History Association of India.

Henn, Alexander. 2014. *Hindu–Catholic Encounters in Goa: Religion, Colonialism, and Modernity.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Inden, Ronald. 1986. 'Orientalist Constructions of India.' *Modern Asian Studies* 20 (3): 401–46.

Kulke, Hermann, and Deitmar Rothermund. 2004. *A History of India, 4th Edition*. London: Routledge.

Mallampalli, Chandra. 2011. *Race, Religion and Law in Colonial India: Trials of an Interracial Family*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McGoldrick, Sylvester. 1960. *Bellary Mission*. New York: Franciscan Missionary Union.

Mendiratta, Sidh Daniel Losa. 2017. 'Framing Identity: Bombay's East Indian Community and its Indo-Portuguese Historical Background, 1737–1928.' *Anais de Historia de Alem-Mar*, 18:207–48.

Menezes, Duane Ryan. 2014. 'Identity, Agency and the Catholics of South Kanara, 1870–1950.' PhD diss., University of Cambridge.

Mohan, Jyoti. 2018. *Claiming India: French Scholars and the Preoccupation with India during the Nineteenth Century*. New Delhi: SAGE.

Mosse, David. 2012. *The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India*. Berkeley: University of California.

Nandy, Ashish. 1988. 'The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance.' *Alternatives,* XIII:177–94.

Neill, Stephen. 2004. *A History of Christianity in India: The Beginnings to A.D. 1707*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Osella, Filipo, and Caroline Osella. 2008. 'Islamism and Social Reform in Kerala, South India.' *Modern Asian Studies* 42 (2/3): 317–46.

Pandey, Gyanendra. 1992. *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Pearson, M. N. 1987. *The Portuguese in India.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Stewart, Charles, and Rosalind Shaw, eds. 1994. *Syncretism/Anti-syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis*. London: Routledge.

Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. 2017. *Europe's India: Words, People, Empires, 1500–1800*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Zupanov, Ines. 1999. *Disputed Mission: Jesuit Experiments and Brahmanical Knowledge in Seventeenth Century India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

———. 2003. 'Twisting a Pagan Tongue: Portuguese and Tamil in Sixteenth Century Jesuit Translations.' In *Conversion: Old Worlds and New*, edited by Kenneth Mills and Anthony Grafton, 109–39. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press.

Recent MIDS Working Papers
Full-text available for free download at **www.mids.ac.in**

231   Ananta Kumar Giri
With and Beyond Epistemologies from the South: Ontological Epistemology of Participation, Multi-topial Hermeneutics and the Contemporary Challenges of Planetary Realisations
09/2018

232   Ajit Menon and Nitin D. Rai
Making Nature Legible: The Social and Political Consequences of Economic Valuation of Tiger Reserves
01/2019

233   M. Vijayabaskar and P.K. Viswanathan
Emerging Vulnerabilities in India's Tea Plantation Economy: A Critical Engagement with Policy Response
04/2019

234   Rajiv Sethi and Rohini Somanathan
Meritocracy in the Face of Group Inequality
06/2019

235   K. Sivasubramaniyan
Water Management of Two Major System Tanks According to Mamulnamas
09/2019

236   Umanath Malaiarasan, K. Thomas Felix, and R. Paramasivam
Households' Energy Choice and Demand in Tamil Nadu
11/2019

Also available at www.mids.ac.in

A Magic System?
Print Publics, Consumption, and Advertising in Modern Tamilnadu

One of the most striking aspects of the proliferation of print in colonial India is the ubiquity of advertisements. But the history of advertising in India remains to be written. This paper is a preliminary attempt to trace the history of print advertising in colonial south India in the context of an emerging public sphere, a fast-expanding culture of print, and the advancement of reprographic and reproductive print technology—all these playing out in the context of a colonial economy and increasing consumption. From rudimentary handbills to the sophisticated colour advertisements of the 1940s, this paper provides an interesting account of the early history of print advertisement based on scattered and tantalising bits of information.

By A.R. Venkatachalapathy / Working Paper No. 230 / June 2018

Gender and Commodity Aesthetics in Tamilnadu, 1950–1970

Beyond use value and exchange value, commodities encapsulate semiotic values too. They function as markers of status, domesticity, social discipline, rebelliousness, and so on. These functions are contextual, contingent, and changing over time. In other words, commodities reinforce as well as reconstitute the social world and social values of individuals and communities. Advertisements which appeal to the multiple desires and fears of individuals and communities play a significant role in this process. This paper examines how advertisements for commodities of everyday use, such as cosmetics, food supplements, and gadgets, use images of men, women, and children to valorise and reconstitute forms of domesticity.

By S. Anandhi / Working Paper No. 221 / September 2015

Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS) was founded in 1971 by Malcolm S. Adiseshiah. It studies development problems of India, with a special focus on Tamil Nadu.

Since 1977, MIDS is a national institute sponsored jointly by the Indian Council of Social Science Research and the Government of Tamil Nadu.