A CONCENTRATION ON THE IN-CULTIVATION OF CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

Nagalingam Perla
Research Scholar
Department of History
Niilm University, Kaithal, Haryana.
n8096076910@gmail.com

Dr. Jogendra Singh
Assistant Professor
Department of History
Niilm University, Kaithal, Haryana.

Abstract

This essay focuses on the idea of materiality or material culture, including vernacular architecture, religious artifacts, religious performances, and displays used in religious rituals, as well as their symbolic significance and how materiality plays a crucial role in the process of assimilating Christianity in India. These religious cultural "things" are more than just ornaments that are preserved for the sake of tradition; rather, they are viewed as both a practical means of expressing one's religious convictions and as a tangible example of a culture's attempt to accept a different religion. The dialectic between subjectivity and objectivity in the construction of the meanings and significances of things is intended to be shown through the connection of objects to value systems, cosmologies, beliefs, and emotions, and more generally to personal and societal identities. The discussion then shifts to the way that objects and their meanings change in relation to performative context and temporal concerns (Tilley 2006: 4-5). The 'things' that are inherent to Indian religion and religious practice, most particularly Hinduism, become the actual manifestation of the Christian idea, making them highly efficient tools for inculturation.

Keywords:- Materiality, material culture, things, inculturation, Christian Ashrams

Introduction

The term "culture" often conjures up images of the past. When a city is referred to be a city of culture, images of its historic buildings, artwork, etc. come to mind rather than its industrial advancements or social customs. The way we feel and think, love and worship must be seen as part of our culture (Gnanapragasam 1988).

According to Clifford Geertz, "culture" refers to "a historically transmitted pattern of meanings, embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions, expressed in symbolic forms by which human beings communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitude toward life" (Gnanapragasam 1988).

Let's notice the differences between the related words enculturation, acculturation, transculturation, and inculturation to help make this description more understandable. Enculturation is the lifelong process by which a person integrates into his or her own culture. Humans require instruction in practically every area of life since, in contrast to animals, they are helpless from the moment of birth for a lengthy period of time. Enculturation is the term for this "learning experience, which distinguishes humans from other creatures and through which, initially and later in life, they achieve competence in their culture." (Gnanapragasam 1988).

Acculturation is the term used to describe the occurrence brought on by interaction between two cultures or between an individual and a culture other than his own. It shows how both have an impact on one another and how responses may benefit or harm a culture. For instance, if a new burial custom is introduced from one society to another, it may benefit certain skilled craftspeople or hurt some religious experts (Gnanapragasam 1988).

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104

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Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices

Without the parent culture being impacted by other cultures, transculturation is the transmission of characteristics, meanings, and values from one single culture to practically all others (Marcello 1982).

The dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a specific culture is known as inculturation. It is the implantation of the Christian life into a cultural setting where it flourishes and yields new treasures. It is more than merely a plan of action, a change in the flow of time, or an effort at propaganda. It is not a linguistic translation or the adoption of a few gestures or symbols that will lead to a Christian community that has a thin coating of folklore but is fundamentally foreign to its own culture. As a result of true inculturation, the Christian experience will manifest itself via the local culture in its own ways and serve as a catalyst for innovation, action, and new works (Gnanapragasam 1988). Alternative terms for the same process are indigenization and contextualization.

The Incarnation - the Perfect Inculturation

The 'incarnation' is God being assimilated into humanity.   Christ Jesus, while he existed in the form of God, "did not regard equality with God as something to be grasped, but emptied himself, being born in the likeness of men, that he might be born in the form of a servant". As a result, Jesus assimilated himself into the human form. The main driving force behind and ideal model for inculturation is the incarnation of the son. The manifestation of the everlasting word illustrates the main concept and paradigm of inculturation. In the case of Jesus and man, sin is the sole distinction.

Inculturation in the Church's Tradition

To bring together God's dispersed children, according to the head of the church, Jesus died. According to Saldanha, "the motive and model for inculturation may be traced back to the very origin of the church; the redemptive incarnation of the eternal word" (Saldanha 1987). Thus, it is clear that inculturation is the foundation of the church. The apostles and the other disciples carried on this tradition. According to Saldanha (1987: 17), the religion was practiced in a variety of cultural contexts across the globe, including Palestinian, Aramaic, Diaspora, and Hellenistic.

i).   The Transition from Jewish to Hellenistic Christianity

Judaism already had its own religious, cultural, social, and political systems before Christianity was formed. The first Christians were Jewish people who, in essence, attended synagogues and underwent circumcision procedures. However, Christianity was intended for more people than only Jews. As a result, Christianity transitioned from Jewish to Hellenistic. Paul, the first agent of inculturation, was the main proponent of this change, leading to the infamous Jerusalem council in 50 AD (Acts 15), which marked a paradigm shift in Christianity. In a debate between Peter and Paul, Paul prevails and plays a key role in transforming Christianity's image among Jews. Three disciples of Christ were initially referred to as Christians at Antioch (Acts 10, Cornelius' story).

ii).   Inculturation and Evangelization

Evangelization and inculturation are mostly connected. Evangelization is the process of taking the gospel to every corner of the globe. Inculturation, according to Rayan, is "An insertion of the faith into the life stream of peoples and the expressions of the faith-life in terms of concrete historical existence, as well as the insertion of people's life into the faith at levels deeper than any of its particular expressions" (Peter 1980: 12). This demonstrates that

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105

in today's society, evangelism should be done via inculturation. When something is filtered via their culture, people grasp it better. Therefore, the people's cultural idiom must be used to proclaim the gospel (Kavunkal & Hrangkhuma 1994).

Karl Rahner, a renowned theologian, asserts that "the actual concrete activity of the church in its relations with the world outside of Europe was in fact the activity of an export firm which exported a European religion as a commodity it did not really want to change but sent throughout the considered superior" (Rahner 1977).

iii).   Role of Bible Translations

Liturgical practices and Bible translations have a significant role in evangelization, which results in inculturation. The Sacred Scriptures are the primary means through which the Gospel of Christ is transmitted today. In the context of people's everyday lives, the Bible must be shared. The liturgy draws people in to the church. However, it must be more relevant to the people's daily lives and the local culture. Let's examine the role that the Bible translation and the liturgy play in inculturation.

Bible translations were few in the early centuries. As a result, the people were unable to comprehend the true meaning of the gospel. Only the missionaries' words allowed them to understand the message. However, when more local translations of the Bible appeared throughout time, it became easier for common people to understand the true meaning of the Gospel. "There is also a wider translation of the message by expressing it in artistic, dramatic, liturgical, and above all, relational terms which are appropriate to convey the authentically indigenous, often through theologically tested use of the symbols and concepts of a particular community" (Komonchak 1994). The Bible was written in a specific location inside a specific cultural setting.

Models of Mission of the Catholic Church in Asia

Christian missions have always participated in what is now known as the inculturation or contextualization process. Some of the great figures in the church's history are those who have in some way taken seriously and treated with respect the context in which the gospel has been witnessed to and proclaimed: Peter and Paul, Justin Martyr, Origen, Benedict, Boniface, Leoba, Francis of Assisi, Clare, Ramon Lull, Matteo ricci, Bartolome de las Casas, Vincent Lebbe, Charles de Foucauld, Lesslie Newbigin, Mother Teresa, William J. Seymour. Gregory the Great advised Augustine of Canterbury in Britain in the sixth century not to completely destroy the local shrines but rather to adapt them for Christian worship; Cyril and Methodius preached the gospel in the Slavic language and invented an alphabet in order to translate the Scriptures; Martin Luther and the Reformers recognized the urgent need for accessible Scriptures in local languages at the beginning of the modern era. The so-called "tabula rasa approach" 2 is clearly visible throughout the history of the church, and there is little question that missionaries in the past also imposed European culture and denigrated indigenous culture (Bevans & Schroeder 2004).

Francis Xavier

Xavier made a point of highlighting the value of translation, which is already an adaptation, in the early years of his missionary work. According to Andrew Ross, "Xavier's insistence on the translation of prayers and hymns into the local languages broke with the situation hitherto of having, in practice, to accept Portuguese language and culture along with the faith.

Alessandro Valignano

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106

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Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices

The significance of translation, which is already an adaptation, in the early years of his missionary activity was something Xavier made a point of emphasizing throughout the course of the next twenty. As stated by Andrew Ross, "Xavier's insistence on the translation of prayers and hymns into the local languages broke with the situation hitherto of having, in practice, to accept Portuguese language and culture along with the faith" (Bevans & Schroeder 2004,). This would lead to the development of a missionary model based on the il modo soave. Beginning in Japan, he insisted on the necessity of preparing and accepting Japanese for the priesthood, translating the Bible, catechisms, and prayers into the local languages—a practice that had been started by Francis Xavier—as well as adjusting the mission's and the church's architectural, dietary, and social customs to fit local conditions.

He demanded that the Jesuit missionaries start by thoroughly researching the language, religion, culture, and politics of China rather than making hasty translation judgments. For instance, the Confucian tern for God was ultimately adopted. The Jesuit Society's guiding concept that "a Jesuit be open and responsive to the situation to which he was called" served as the foundation for Valignano's accommodating strategy, which helped to form the mission model of the Jesuits in China throughout the sixteenth century (Bevans & Schroeder 2004).

Matteo Ricci

Matteo Ricci, who would later emerge as the most well-known Jesuit missionary in China at this time, joined Ruggieri in 1583. When they first arrived in China, they assumed the garb and way of life of a Buddhist monk (bonze), since this appeared to be the most fitting way to express the holy nature of their 2 The missionaries adopted a tabula rasa philosophy, according to which people could only become Christians once their cultural and religious practices and beliefs had been obliterated, sometimes but not always violently.

Robert de Nobili

Robert de Nobili, an Italian Jesuit, came in Madurai, in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, in 1606. Francis Xavier had previously labored on the pearl-fishing coast, where Gonzalvo Fernandez was preaching alongside locals from that area. De Nobili observed that adopting the Portuguese way of life, eating meat, and other practices were associated with being a foreigner, which was connected with becoming a Christian. According to Fernandez Indian traditions were superstitions and as such, were in conflict with the gospel.

De Nobili held the view that being an Indian and being a Christian were not mutually exclusive and that he needed to integrate himself into Indian culture in the manner of Valignano and Ricci. Regarding the latter, he eventually gained proficiency in Sanskrit, the language of the holy Hindu literature, as well as the state and regional languages of Tamil and Telugu. He adopted the austere way of life of an Indian sannyasi (holy person), wearing in saffron robes, subsisting on alms, and dedicating his life to meditation and prayer. In the "true religion" (Christianity), he rose to prominence as a spiritual teacher.

De Nobili permitted Indian Christians to maintain their traditions and ways of dressing, such as the holy cotton thread and the tuft of hair, which he regarded cultural rather than religious. He also agreed with the rigid division and social inequality of the old caste system. As a result, he had to isolate himself from other castes and even other Europeans since he tended to socialize with Brahmins and higher castes more often. De Nobili, however, never lost sight of the lower castes, and he finally established two missionary organizations—the Pandaraswamis for the lower castes and the Brahmanasannyasis for the higher castes (Bevans

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107

AIJRRLSJM   VOLUME 7, ISSUE 11 (2022, NOV)   (ISSN-2455-6602)ONLINE

Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices

& Schroeder 2004:; Baierlein 1995:).

Christianity Comes to India

Christianity is the oldest of the faiths that were founded outside of India but eventually made it there. Tradition has it that St. Thomas the Apostle, acting on behalf of the Nestorian Church, introduced it to Kerala. Christians have been present in India from the sixth century, according to written evidence. Since their liturgy was initially conducted in Syria and they recognized the authority of the Syrian Patriarch of the East in Damascus (Syria), the Thomas Christians are also referred to as Syrian Christians in India. Only higher caste Hindus seem to have converted locally. The group has only ever existed in Kerala (Madan 2011).

Catholics and St. Thomas Christians (Syrian Orthodox) believe the apostle visited India around 52 AD. After hearing him preach, many individuals were converted. Then, Thomas made his way to the east coast where he delivered a sermon at Mylapore, a neighborhood of Madras (now Chennai). His message continued to be effective, which increased the animosity of orthodox Hindus. He was assaulted in 72 AD when he was sheltering in a cave on Little Mount. He was pursued from there three kilometers up the hill, today known as St. Thomas Mount. He was killed by a spear as he was kneeling in prayer.

Shantivanam – A Christian Ashram

The Need for Inculturation in India

If the Indian Church is ever to meet the demands of the Indian people, it must go through a profound restructuring. It has to rethink its organizational structure in terms of Indian culture rather than Greek culture, adapt it to Indian rather than Roman patterns, and rethink its organizational structure in terms of Indian culture rather than Greek culture. Even its Semitic roots can't escape unharmed. Islam and Judaism both use a Semitic language and conceptual framework, as does Christianity. It must learn to see this Semitic legacy with all of its distinctive virtues in the context of the Oriental tradition and absorb the lessons that Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism have to offer. The Church's'marriage' between East and West will only then occur, just as it does in the outside world (Griffiths 1982).

A place of Prayer

On March 21, 1950, the feast of St. Benedict, Shantivanam, the forest of Peace, was opened, "with the blessing and approval" of Bishop Mendonca of Trichy, who declared it to be "the beginning of a new era in the history of religious life in India." According to the ashram brochure, "the ashram is a community of spiritual searchers and the ashram is managed by a monastic community. It is devoted to the Benedictine tradition of contemplative living.

A Place of Meeting

The ashram aspires to be a gathering place for Christians, Hindus, and anybody else sincerely seeking God, regardless of religion or lack thereof. A guesthouse has been constructed specifically for this purpose, providing space for both men and women to retreat, reflect, and engage in religious debate and discussion. There is a decent library that is meant to be used as a study space. Along with works on the Bible, Christian philosophy, and theology, it also has a broad section on comparative religion and a collection of books that reflect Hinduism, Buddhism, and other faiths. We try to meet the demand for a spiritual center where individuals who are seeking God via various religious traditions may go and find a peaceful environment conducive to study and meditation by hosting a large number of tourists from all

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108

AIJRRLSJM   VOLUME 7, ISSUE 11 (2022, NOV)   (ISSN-2455-6602)ONLINE

Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices

over the globe and from various areas of India. Although there is no fee, visitors are welcome to give an offering to help defray their costs (Saccidananda Ashram 2011).

Prayer at Shantivanam

The monastic offices of Lauds, Sext, and Vespers correspond to the three common acts of devotion at Shantivanam, our Sandhya Vandana4. So, according to the Syrian Christian and Latin Benedictine traditions, they are mostly centered on hymns and Bible readings. However, readings from Hindu Scriptures and Sanskrit chanting always come before the Christian prayer.

Each of us lives and prays in a small thatched hut amidst the trees in Shantivanam, and we gather for prayer three times a day, not for the formal liturgical prayer as at Kurisumala, but for a more relaxed prayer that includes readings from the holy books of various religions as well as psalms and Bible passages. We read from the Vedas in the morning, the Koran and the Sikhs' Granth Sahib at noon, and the devotional poets of the evening, particularly those from Tamil Nadu and the great Tamil mystic Manikkavasagar. Thus, the issue of how the various faiths relate to one another is brought up in our daily prayers (Griffiths 1982).

The Controversy

The Rites Controversy and the Decline in Missionary Activity

The setting of the argument that would come to be known as the Rites Controversy was influenced by several causes in both Asia and Europe. The patronatus system was opposed to the SCPF (Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith), the Jesuits to the MEP, and the Portuguese to the French in terms of authority. Regarding the models of mission, the tabula rasa approach of many members of other missionary organizations was in conflict with the accommodational method, which was principally represented by the Jesuits. While the others believed that the Jesuits had "sold out" and compromised Christianity, the Jesuits believed that the others had little concern for non-Western cultures (Bevans & Schroeder 2004).

Il modus soave of Valignano, or accommodation, was the main mission strategy in Asia. William Burrows correctly advises that this model, which he refers to as a "Catholic inculturation paradigm," be added to the paradigms that David Bosch presents in his significant book Transforming Mission in this context. After the Rites Controversy, this perception of the missionary as guru, expert, and conversation partner would vanish (Bevans & Schroeder 2004).

'Responsible' role for Indian theologians discussed

A seven-day, closed-door colloquium with 28 bishops and 26 prominent theologians from India began in Bangalore on January 16, 2011, under the direction of Cardinal William Levada, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, and a Vatican delegation to discuss the place of Indian theologians in the context of global theology. The head of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India, Cardinal Oswald Gracias, said, "We are talking about the role of the Indian theologians as responsible theologians." The cardinal said that Donum Veritatis, a Vatican directive from 1990 on the function of theologians in the Church, serves as the foundation for the debate. He said that inculturation and pluralism were among the subjects they discussed. "Multicultural theologians have started to diminish Christianity as one of the many paths to God. Such a colloquium may develop into an alerting event in this setting (Website 2).

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109

AIJRRLSJM   VOLUME 7, ISSUE 11 (2022, NOV)   (ISSN-2455-6602)ONLINE

Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices

Some Critical Remarks:

As we'll see in a moment, both Catholics and Hindus have developed strong opinions about Catholic ashrams. The contention stems from the charge that the ashrams accept a religion that elevates the individual, declaring: "We are gods."

Promoters of the ashram movement use the denial of sin to support their assertions that "we are gods". Swami Vivekananda is quoted by Vandana Mataji as saying, "We are the greatest gods... The majority of Christians find it difficult to imagine man becoming God. Isn't the purpose of an ashram to help people become God by retiring into silence? ponders Vandana. Confirms Dear Sister Pascaline Coff OSB, "Bede frequently remarked 'the objective of an ashram is to discover the Self - and then you know God'... This is the ashram's true call.

As "This experience communicates with the famous utterance: "Aham Brahma Asmi," I am Brahman, I am God," Bro. Martin suggests reciting OM. You might declare, "My true self is God, or I am God." You might also announce "the second great declaration "Tattvamasi," which means "You are that" or "You are God," after being sufficiently enlightened, and come to the realization that "God and humans are ultimately one."The beliefs of the many faiths do not contain any ultimate truth.

Christian Ashrams – NEW AGE Movement: A Critique

The ashrams are connected to a network of New Age people and organizations in addition to one another. Ashramites and New Agers often mix on a personal level as well as an intellectual or scholarly one, as shown by Bede, Swami Sachidananda, Russill Paul, and others. Thus, as Le Saux, Painadath, and Vandana hoped, there is a "osmosis" occurring between Christianity and New Age and Eastern spirituality, leading to an intolerable syncretism (Prabhu 2005).

Conclusion

Whatever the case, inculturation is still a reality in Christian India. As the faithful attempt to live a Christian life within the framework of their cultural background, the church continues to flourish despite the feared "excesses" that ashrams, like the Shantivanam ashram, have gotten themselves into. The wearing of kavi saris during pilgrimages to Marian shrines instead of the traditional blue one advised by the local church leaders, the use of mangal sutra or thali instead of rings, the use of white veils with the traditional saris during wedding ceremonies, the absence of any festive celebrations during lent, and the use of white veils with the traditional saris are just a few examples of inculturation by the laity in India. These and other ashram rites are only a few examples of how religious materiality—the "things" of a given culture utilized in rituals—becomes the very embodiment of the faith of that culture and cannot ever be constrained by the rules of orthodoxy. Christianity has always been on the cutting edge of change, and that trend will continue. Because inculturation is the only way a religion can adapt to the expansion brought on by the Holy Spirit's never-ending activity, it will take place. The Indian Christian Church is genuinely alive in this sense because for the church to be a living church, it cannot cut itself off from the ongoing flow of faith.

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110

AIJRRLSJM   VOLUME 7, ISSUE 11 (2022, NOV)   (ISSN-2455-6602)ONLINE

Anveshana's International Journal of Research in Regional Studies, Law, Social Sciences, Journalism and Management Practices

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111