

The jesuit legacy in india

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The Jesuit Legacy in India Abstract: The Jesuits arrived in India in 1542 A. D. to carry out Christ's command to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28: 19). Over the last 500 years, they have woven themselves into the very fabric of India with deep psychological, theological and sociological connotations. This article tells that story; highlights some noteworthy Jesuit influences on Modern India, particularly in the fields of education, medicine, social service and leadership training amongst the youth; and, draws leadership lessons from these Jesuit achievements.

The Jesuits demonstrated servant leadership, transformational leadership, and transactional leadership qualities. Without the Jesuits, the article concludes, India would be a different country. The Jesuit Legacy in India Ad majorem Dei gloriam. For the greater glory of God. That's the motto of a religious order of men called the Society of Jesus that has quietly influenced India, and provided understated leadership to the world's largest democracy in many positive ways deserving of recognition.

The influence of the Jesuits in India extends beyond just the spread of Christianity, weaving intricate psychological, theological and sociological patterns into the very fabric of modern Indian society. Professor George Menachery - appointed by Pope Benedict XVI as member of the Pontifical Equestrian Order of St. Gregory the Great in early 2008, and editor of the St. Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India and the Indian Church History Classics - writes in Volume III of the former publication: the "factor which has won the Society a lasting place in the minds of the people and in the history of the nation is the large number of spheres which it has penetrated and permeated," and goes on to list religion, spirituality, politics, education, <https://assignbuster.com/the-jesuit-legacy-in-india/>

science, technology, meteorology, diplomacy, indology, culture, history, geography, language, literature, art, architecture, sports, medicine, healthcare, social reforms, leadership formation, tribal and aboriginal movements, and nation-building as some of the contributions of the Jesuits to modern India. **Brief History** The organization was founded in 1534 by St. Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556), and received papal authorization in 1540 under Pope Paul III. Amongst the original six members was St. Francis Xavier, who was an ardent missionary with the passion to take Christ's message to the East. He arrived in India in 1542, almost fifteen centuries after St. Thomas the Apostle had brought Christianity to India.

With the arrival of Xavier, began a saga of leadership by the Society of Jesus in India that continues to this day, almost 500 years later. **Pre-British India** The expanding influence on the Jesuits on 17th century pre-British India has been well documented by historians, among them Ellison Banks Findly, who writes in *Nur Jahan, Empress of Mughal India* (Oxford University Press) that Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1569-1627) granted the Jesuits many privileges, and spent "every night for one year... in hearing disputation" amongst Christian and other theologians, and that his "most active interest in Christian doctrine was in the debates held at his court between the Jesuit fathers and the Muslim mullas. In fact, the Jesuit Mission of the Great Moghul was started at the request of Emperor Akbar, with Father Rudolph Acquaviva, the future Martyr, as its first Superior.

The Jesuit Mission in Madura in the south was also begun at the request of the Hindu viceroy (nayakka) established in Madura, and later supported by Zulfikar Ali Khan (1690-1703), the first Nawab of the Carnatic. The Madura

Mission counted among its members the celebrated Father Robert de Nobili, as well as Saint John de Britto. British India With the onset of British rule over India that effectively began in 1757 after the Battle of Plassey, the Jesuits found greater favor with the erstwhile powers. They began exerting increasing influence not only on the Christians in India, but also on the society at large.

Even the Maharajas - whom the British allowed to reign as long as they paid their due taxes to the Crown - and their war councils and civil administrations, were positively influenced by the Jesuits, right from Goa to Cochin to Cape Comorin to Manapad to Mannar to Mylapore. Independent India By the time the British Empire was overthrown and independent India emerged in 1947, the Jesuits had entrenched themselves deeply into Indian society by way of leading and high-profile educational institutions, hospitals, charity organizations and other enterprises that became effective partners of the government in the young democracy in supporting growth.

Professor George Menachery writes in The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India (Vol. III 2010): " the ubiquitous nature of the Society has through its varied missions become one of the most powerful influences in Indian history. Today there is hardly any Catholic ecclesiastical division in India or any revenue district in the country for that matter which does not boast some Jesuit enterprise or other, be it a school or a college, a technical training institute or an engineering establishment, a printing press or an infirmary, a seminary or a social service centre. " Psychological Influence on India Discipline positively impacted the Indian psyche

The Jesuit movement gathered force right in the middle of the Catholic revival called the Counter-Reformation that began with the Council of Trent (1545-1563) as a response to the Protestant Reformation, and ended with the Thirty Years' War in 1648. Pope Paul III (1534-1549) led the Council of Trent, and tasked the attending cardinals with institutional reform to impact ecclesiastical (or structural) reconfiguration, religious orders, spiritual movements and political dimensions of the Catholic Church. New religious orders - such as the Jesuits, Capuchins, Ursulines, Theatines, Discalced Carmelites, and the Barnabites - were a fundamental part of this movement, and Jesuits in particular, greatly bolstered rural parishes, enhanced popular piety, succeeded in constraining corruption within the church, and played an exemplary role in overall Catholic renewal.

These activities extended well into India. The Jesuit charter established by St. Ignatius Loyola was dictatorial and military-like (possibly emanating from the fact that Ignatius was a soldier before he became a priest); and, this iron discipline, rigid training and resolute character of the Jesuits created a deep psychological impact on the Indian psyche. Rev. Fr. Jerome Francis, a current Jesuit missionary in the Calcutta Province, opines that this perception of extreme discipline sat well with the general Indian populace and the rulers, and consequently boded well for the next phase of Jesuit growth in the country. Helped prevent Mysticism amongst Indian Christians

An example of rigid and inflexible discipline can be discerned in regulations such as Rule-13 of the Jesuit Charter that said: " I will believe that the white that I see is black if the hierarchical Church so defines it" (Jesuit Political Thought: The Society of Jesus and the State by Harro Hopfl, Cambridge

University Press, 2004). Ursula King writes in *Christian Mystics: The Spiritual Heart of the Christian Tradition* (Simon & Schuster, 1998) that such rigid principles helped prevent the spread of mysticism amongst Christians in India, even while mysticism ran high in parts of Europe during the Catholic revival, with leaders like Teresa of Avila (1515-82) and John of the Cross (1542-91). The spread of mysticism made the institutional Church especially nervous because, carried to its logical conclusion, mysticism negates the need for priesthood and the sacraments.

Since one of the central tenets of Hinduism is a formless God ("Thou art formless; thy only form is our knowledge of thee" - Upanishads), Christians exposed to Hindu thought were especially prone to mysticism, as has been proven over and over again by later-day Christian mystics like Father Bede Griffiths (1906-1993) and Henry le Saux (1910-1973). Closer psychological integration with Hindu society The Jesuits also introduced to India the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius, which were endorsed by Pope Paul III in 1548, and exemplified the Society of Jesus in the way these exercises helped the Jesuits understand human relationship with God, and live a life of commitment to Christ. The Exercises were a set of meditations, prayers and mental exercises designed to be carried out typically over a four week period, aimed at helping individuals discern Jesus in their lives and commit to a life of service to Christ.

This rigid Jesuit tradition has been compared with devotionalism, and provided close parallels to Hindu ritualistic traditions, and helped psychologically in the closer integration of the Jesuits into Hindu society. Theological Influence Setting up of Seminaries Jesuits believed in

establishing seminaries for the proper training of priests in the spiritual life and the theological traditions of the Church. Consequently, they set up several seminaries in India to dispense theological knowledge. Styled after the successful seminary of the Malankara Orthodox Church that was founded by St. Thomas, the Apostle in A. D. 52, and the Rachol Seminary founded in 1521 by the Church of Goa, the earliest Jesuit seminary was the St.

Joseph's Inter-diocesan Seminary, Mangalore established in 1763; followed by St. Joseph's Seminary started in West Bengal in 1879; and, the Society of the Missionaries of St. Francis Xavier founded in 1887 in Pilar. Today there are at least 22 Jesuit seminaries, many of them degree granting institutions authorized by the Vatican and the government of India. The foremost example of Jesuit theological excellence is the Vidyajyoti College of Theology in Delhi that currently enrolls hundreds of students coming from some 70 religious congregations, dioceses, secular institutes and lay associations from every part of India and abroad. Setting up of Churches

One of the earliest Jesuit churches was established by St. Francis Xavier himself in Tuticorin. Originally called the Jesuit Church of Saint Paul, its status was raised to that of a Basilica by Pope Paul II to mark its 400th anniversary, and is now known as the Basilica of Our Lady of the Snows, Tuticorin. St. Paul's Church in Diu on the west coast of India dates back to 1610. In all, there are over 110 Jesuit Churches in India, and these churches have always integrated well with Indian society in general, and with people from other faiths, in particular. To cite one example of this integration: During midnight mass on Christmas Eve in St.

Paul's Cathedral in Calcutta, the rush of Hindus is so heavy that the Church installs a loudspeaker system in the large gardens surrounding the Church, so that hundreds of Hindus who could not gain entry into the Cathedral, can sit and listen to the rituals. Evangelism Jesus commanded his eleven disciples to: "... go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. " - Matthew 28: 19, 20 NIV. The Jesuits had evangelism as one of their stated goals, and their efforts first spread Christianity along the western " Konkan" coast of India. The Jesuits then spread both southwards (towards Madura) and northwards (towards Agra), continually converting Hindus and Muslims to Christianity. Rev. H. Hosten, S. J. writes in Jesuit Missionaries in Northern India and Inscriptions on their Tombs (1580-1803): " Under (Mughal Emperor) Jahangir... several Mohamedan Princes were baptized", among them " Currown, another of Jahangir's sons, and other of his friends (to make his way easier to the Crown) prevailed with Jahangir that his kinsmen Shaw Selym's Brother's Sons might be Christened; which accordingly was done in Agra... that year they also baptized another Grandson of Akbar's. " Until the Protestant Missionaries came to India in the 18th century, the Jesuits were the prime force of evangelism in India. Typical and often quoted, but not unique, proactive initiative to reach out to the Indian masses is practiced today by the Indian Theological Seminary (ITS).

Founded by the Jesuits, ITS is now an interdenominational seminary located in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, with Gilgal Gospel Mission as its missionary training

arm. The Gilgal Gospel Mission trains men and women, and sends them out into the world at large in pairs, into Hindu villages, with a view to them establishing friendship in the villages, and starting, first, Sunday Schools and, later, Churches. ITS prepares three types of Church planters (a) bare foot evangelists (C. Th), (b) Bachelor of Theology (B. Th), and (c) Master of Divinity (M. Div). Graduates who prepare at ITS fulfill its mission of "Preaching Christ and Planting Churches" in every village, town and city.

Many return to their homes in the various parts of India to continue teaching, preaching, and planting churches. Today, Christianity is India's third-largest religion, with approximately 24 million followers, constituting 2.3% of India's population. The popularization of Annual Retreats amongst Priests and the Populace As noted earlier, the Jesuits avidly pursued the implementation of the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius that were a set of meditations, prayers and mental exercises designed to be practiced in the form of a four week meditative retreat from normal life. The basic purpose of these retreats was to mediate the human-God relationship; and, periodically re-examine and re-validate the nuances of that relationship.

Such annual retreats became popular in India not only amongst the Jesuit priests, but even amongst priests from other faiths. The concept of retreats spread to the corporate world too, and Sunanda Dutta-Ray writing in The Statesman dated January 26, 2006, mention three instances where Chief Executive Officers of large Indian corporations - all Jesuit alumni - instituted the concept of a 3-day annual retreat modeled after their experience in school. Sociological Influence The largest visible Jesuit influence on India has

been the wide and deep sociological impact - in terms of the development of the Indian people and societies - that is discernible everywhere.

Jesuit Education With over 30 excellent high schools, over 10 high profile colleges for higher education, and innumerable elementary schools and vocational training centers all over India, Jesuit education is much sought after in the country. The foremost examples of Jesuit higher education are the Vellore Medical College and Hospital, one of India's foremost teaching hospitals, Xavier Labor Relations Institute, one of India's foremost business schools. Even St. Xavier's College in Calcutta has produced many industry leaders, the foremost amongst them is Lakshmi Mittal, whose company - ArcelorMittal - is today the world's largest steel producer.

Loyola College in Chennai has similarly produced many leaders for the country, even a President (Ramaswamy Venkataraman) and a world chess champion (Viswanathan Anand). Most of these educational institutions date back to the earlier part of the 20th century, if not earlier still, and played a vigorous role in nation-building when India became independent. Former President of India, Abdul Kalam, lauded the Jesuits' role in India education, while opening the 6th global meet of Jesuit institutions in Calcutta: "" Jesuit institutions have a big role in the spread of modern education in the country. Being a Jesuit alumnus myself, I'm aware of the great contribution of Jesuit education not only in India but around the world" (as reported by Kritivas Mukherjee for Indo-Asian News Service).

Not content to be restricted to India alone, Jesuits from Calcutta recently gave education in Afghanistan a boost, when two of them - Maria Joseph and Sahaya Jude - recently travelled to the war-torn country and started training

students and teachers (as reported in the The Telegraph, Jan 4, 2010). It should be mentioned in passing that all Jesuit education in India is completely secular. Catholic students are given additional training in Catechism, but students of other faiths are usually treated to a secular Moral Science lecture, or - at most - a watered down Bible History. Jesuit Social Work Jesuits have deeply been involved in social work and social reform.

Whole books can be written on this subject alone, because these engagements have been - and continue to be - so numerous and so vigorous. Caritas India has been at the forefront of traditional social work, as the front organization for Catholic Charities, with thousands of people and hundreds of project sites pning all across the country. It is only one of the more visible ones; in general, almost every Jesuit organization practices social work in its immediate vicinity, and engages the students of all its nationwide institutions in social activities. For instance, the Vidyajyoti College of Theology in Delhi has very active prison ministry, hospital ministry, slum ministry, tribal ministry, neighborhood ministry, and even a railway platform ministry.

Many Jesuits ventured out into the villages and made a mark with their social activism. Just one such example is Father Michael Anthony Windey (1921-2009), founder of the VillageReconstructionOrganization (VRO), who joined the Jesuits in 1938, traveled to India in 1946 and was ordained a priest in 1950. When he passed away in Belgium in 2009 while under treatment for cancer, he was mourned by the Church, social workers and villagers in India, because he had dedicated his life to using Gandhian methods to revolutionize village life in India. Said Father A. X. J. Bosco, a former head of

the Jesuits? Andhra Pradesh province who has worked as VRO? operational director: " Father Windey was never bothered about the religion of the person he helped. While selecting villages, he always chose to help the poorest village. " Social Activism The involvement of the Jesuits extended to social activism, sometimes of a kind even questioned by the Vatican. Rone Tempest, staff writer, reported in the L. A. Times, Jan 21, 1986, on the Pope's visit to India: " Significantly, the Pope will not visit the northern Bihar Muzafapur area, where radical Catholic priests have recently organized Hindu serfs against powerful landlords, some of whom even maintain their own armies for private wars against their foes and bands of roving bandits, or dacoits.

Similarly, when he visits the Catholic stronghold state of Kerala in southern India, he has no plans to visit areas in which radical priests and nuns, India's version of South America's " liberation theologians," have organized sailboat fishermen, mostly Hindus and Muslims, against the motorized fishing trawler industry. " Leadership Training Service (LTS) LTS - short for Leadership Training Service - is a unique contribution by the Jesuits to Indian society. Initiated by five students of the Goethals Memorial School in Kurseong, West Bengal in 1959, Fr. Robert Wirth of St. Xavier's School, Sahibganj, Bihar, was selected to lead the movement in 1970. Fr. Wirth did just that for the next 21 years from the LTS headquarter in Calcutta, and spread the movement to Jesuit educational institutes in 24 States. The LTS motto is: " For God and Country", and resonated strongly with a developing India.

The LTS vision involves the four-fold objectives of: (a) Personality Development; (b) Leadership Skills; (c) Social Awareness; and,

Social Responsibility that leads to social development. The movement articulates this as “ a journey from ‘ I Consciousness’ (initiated through Personality development and mastering leadership skills) to ‘ We Consciousness’ (achieved through inculcating social awareness and exercising social responsibility that leads to social development)” (as stated on its website: www.LTSworld.com). The LTS celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 2009, and brought Fr. Robert Wirth - who collaborated in the writing of this paper - all the way from Malta to the LTS headquarters in Calcutta.

Today there are reportedly over 15, 000 LTSers working towards India’s progress. Leadership Lessons from the Jesuits Consistent and long-term success is never a result of accident or luck. The Jesuits have demonstrated strong leadership qualities throughout their 500 year history in India. Servant Leadership The Jesuits, through their disciplined and exemplary behavior, became role models for the Indian populace who observed them, interacted with them, and learned from them. Influencing through exemplary behavior is a fundamental tenet of servant leadership. The Jesuits also extensively and deeply served the people whose lives they touched, through social work, educational institutions, hospitals and other missions.

This service was, and continues to be, in the best tradition of servitude demonstrated by Christ. Transformation Leadership Mark Pousson, Program Director for Service Learning at The Reinert Center for Teaching Excellence at the St. Louis University writes in The Notebook, a publication of the Reinert Center: “ Historically, the Jesuits espouse the power of transformation through conversation,” (Vol 11, Issue 4), and goes on to say that Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order, readily engaged people

in conversation about God and spirituality. It is from his value of transformation through experiences that Saint Ignatius companions infused transformation in what is known as the Jesuit tradition of education.

Jesuits heavily utilized this power of transformation through pedagogy and education in India, and - as earlier stated in this article - has left an indelible mark on the Indian education landscape. The Jesuits also practiced transformational leadership by inspiring Indians to strive for something better than they were used to, to push the limit, and to aim for excellence. Evidence of this is plentiful, but particular note may be taken of the Jesuit's LTS (Leadership Training Service) initiative described earlier, which was a totally new concept in India when it was started in 1959, and continues to inspire and build the current generation of young leaders in the 21st century. In fact, the LTS movement resonates strongly with one of the fundamentals goal of transformation leadership: the make leaders out of followers.

The Annual Retreats that the Jesuits taught the Indians and popularized amongst people of faith as well as the corporate world, was another instance where people were inspired and motivated to implement and practice innovative leadership solutions for everyday problems. Transactional Leadership Transactional leadership was commonly practiced by the Jesuits. A very common example was the exchange of better medical care for conversion to Christianity. It was a subtle but effective message. When the Jesuits set up modern medical care facilities in rural India - especially in the Tribal areas where people were not even Hindus, but practiced some form of pantheism - it is widely believed that it was not so much the preaching as

the access to modern medical care that converted lots of tribal people to Christianity. Social Learning Theory

Jesuit social activism, social work and its military-like discipline - all widely admired by the Hindus of India - triggered the positive effects of the Social Learning Theory, which argues that people learn best through a 3-step emulation process defined as: (a) observation, (b) imitation, and (c) modeling. When people like behavior they would like to emulate, they are motivated to do so on their own without having to be compelled in some covert or overt manner to oblige. Social Learning Theory, therefore, has feeds into the Servant Leadership theory, because servant leaders aim to influence followers through exemplary action and self-motivated emulation. The Jesuits in India put both servant leadership and social learning theories to good use. Epilogue In closing, a short acknowledgment says it all: Without the Jesuits, India would be a different country.