



Percezione della figura di don Bosco all'esterno dell'Opera Salesiana

a cura di
Grazia Loparco e Stanisław Zimniak

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**PERCEZIONE DELLA FIGURA
DI DON BOSCO ALL'ESTERNO
DELL'OPERA SALESIANA
DAL 1879 AL 1965**

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THE PRESENCE OF DON BOSCO IN THE UNDIVIDED DIOCESE OF MANGALORE BEFORE THE ARRIVAL OF THE SALESIANS

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The term “undivided Diocese of Mangalore” refers to the Diocese of that name prior to its bifurcation which led to the erection of the Diocese of Udupi on 16 July 2012. The Diocese has had a long history dating back to 1674 when the Propaganda Fide, informed of the lack of pastoral care for the people of the region, declared it independent of the *padroado* jurisdiction of the Archbishop of Goa and erected the Apostolic Vicariate of Kanara. The first Apostolic Vicar was Thomas de Castro, a native of Goa but who had studied and been formed in Rome, as the first Apostolic Vicar. However, this arrangement was destined to be short-lived and by 1700 the region would revert to the jurisdiction of Goa¹. Given the ongoing conflict between the *propaganda* authorities of Verapoly and the *padroado* authorities of Goa, and the adverse consequences of the same on the life of the faithful, in 1840, the Mangalore Catholics sent a petition to the Holy See requesting it to establish an independent vicariate in Mangalore. The leaders of this delegation were Fr. Joachim Pius Noronha, a Mangalorean priest, and John Joseph Saldanha, a Mangalorean Catholic judge². Following up on these repeated and insistent requests, the Holy See erected Mangalore as pro-Vicariate Apostolic in 1845 and in 1853, Pope Pius IX declared it to be an independent Apostolic Vicariate. From 1845 to 1873 three Carmelite Vicars Apostolic governed Mangalore³. During this period, the Mangalore Catholics sent regular memorandums to the Holy See requesting it to send the Jesuits to Mangalore to start institutions for higher education, since students frequently had to go to Bombay or Madras – almost 1000kms away, to pursue higher education⁴. When the Carmelites left Mangalore in 1873, once again it fell into a situation of *sede vacante*. In fact, from 1873, when Bishop Marie

* Figlia di Maria Ausiliatrice dell’Ispettorata Bombay Santa Maria Mazzarello (INB – India).

¹ Cf *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, pp. 4-7.

² Cf *ibid.* p. 7; cf Kranti K. FARIAS, *The Christian impact in South Kanara*. Mumbai, Church History Association of India 1999, p. 92.

³ Cf *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, pp. 7, 17.

⁴ Cf “Indica” 25 (1988) 144.

Ephrem OCD died, till 1878, when the Vicariate was entrusted to the Italian Jesuits of the Province of Venice, Mangalore experienced an “unsettled condition which seriously hampered its spiritual and temporal well-being”⁵. In 1886, in the context of the establishment of the Catholic Hierarchy of India, Mangalore was made into an independent Diocese⁶.

As per the *Catholic Directory of India 2013*, the total geographic area of the region is 9804sq.kms and the Konkani-speaking Catholics number c.325,000 which is about 8.33% of the total population⁷.

The Diocese of Mangalore occupies a significant place in the ecclesiastical map of India. From its inception as an independent Diocese in 1886, it has given to the Indian and Universal Church more than 47 bishops and over 4,000 priests and religious men and women who are working through the length and breadth of India as well as in several countries around the world⁸. The Diocese itself has adopted mission territories like Bidar in north Karnataka and Same in Tanzania⁹. The Mangalorean Catholic Community has shown much leadership in nation-building providing quality leadership in religious, secular, political, corporate, cultural and social fields.

In this context, it is indeed pertinent to explore the interest Don Bosco evinced in sending his missionaries to Mangalore as early as 1876 while it was still a Vicariate Apostolic. His dream did not materialise in his lifetime and the Salesians set foot in Mangalore Diocese only as recently as 1997 although the FMA had reached there already in 1985. However, it is amazing to come across a number of institutions and organizations – both religious, educational and cultural – named after Don Bosco. In fact, Don Bosco was already well-known in Mangalore as the Saint of Youth, decades before the the Daughters of Mary Help of Christians or the Salesians set foot in the area.

This article initially presents Don Bosco’s keen interest in sending his Salesians as missionaries to Mangalore as it becomes clearer from an attentive reading of the *Biographical Memoirs* (BM). Although the project itself did not materialise, in hindsight it seems as if Don Bosco did succeed in coming into this Diocese and reaching out to a large number of young people. In fact, we shall see a cross section of institutions and organizations associated with Don Bosco which were started mostly by the local diocesan and/or religious clergy with the co-operation of lay faithful. This clearly is an indication of the impact of Don Bosco’s charism in Mangalore even before the arrival of his sons and daughters to the region.

⁵ *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, p. 8.

⁶ Cf *ibid.*

⁷ Cf *The Catholic Directory of India 2013*. Bangalore, Claretian Publications 2013, p. 1367, p. 2099; Cf DIOCESE OF MANGALORE, *Kurpechim Pavlam, Post Centenary Silver Jubilee (1886-2012)*. Mangalore, Codialbail Press 2012, p. 108.

⁸ Cf DIOCESE OF MANGALORE, *Kurpechim...*, pp. 92-102, 172.

⁹ Cf *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, p. 113; DIOCESE OF MANGALORE, *Kurpechim...*, pp. 117-122.

1. Don Bosco's interest in Mangalore as seen in the BM

When we go through the BM, it becomes clear that it is exactly during the period of *sede vacante* (1873 – 1878), that Pope Pius IX requested Don Bosco to send his Salesians to Mangalore. Don Bosco seriously considered the possibility of accepting such a proposal as may be seen from the following references in the BM.

Vol. XII of the BM, which deals with the year 1876, opens with Don Bosco's cherished desire of establishing mission stations in India and Australia. It reads:

“Undismayed by the difficulties of the English language, he felt that his sons could manage it through practice rather than theory. For a few months they were to master a vocabulary of common words; then they were to practice conversation in gradual steps; finally they were to perfect their pronunciation under a teacher”¹⁰.

He articulates his thoughts as follows:

“I foresee that soon we shall have language courses here at the Oratory for the missions. We could proceed this way: all those desiring to work in the foreign missions would add to their curriculum the study of the Spanish, French or English languages [...] Thus, I hope, we might achieve our goal with little trouble”¹¹.

In fact, the Don Bosco returns to the issue once again, at the annual meeting of the Rectors in February 1876, when he presented his Annual Report of the Congregation. In it he speaks of the first missionary expedition which had left on 14 November 1875. He spoke of the numerous requests coming from Australia, China and India to open new foundations¹².

In April-May 1876, Don Bosco came down to Rome and had three audiences (on 15 April, 3 May and 11 May)¹³ with Pope Pius IX who received him with much benevolence. The real purpose of this visit was to obtain privileges from the Holy See, which other Congregations enjoyed, and which would help the Salesians to be more effective in their ministry¹⁴. However, besides granting the said privileges Pius IX also asked Don Bosco to take up the missions in India, China and Australia. Don Bosco is so happy that the very next day of his first audience viz. on 16 April 1876 (Easter Sunday), he writes to Fr. Rua quoting the words of Pius IX: “But missionaries are also urgently needed in Australia, India and China, where many mission stations are about to close for lack of person-

¹⁰ Eugenio CERIA, *The Biographical Memoirs XII (1876)*. New Rochelle, New York, Salesiana Publishers 1980, p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹² Cf *ibid.*, p. 58.

¹³ Cf *ibid.*, pp. 136, 149.

¹⁴ Cf *ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

nel¹⁵. [...] Could you take over one or more missions in those lands?”¹⁶. Don Bosco responds: “If Your Holiness will bless our students and pray for us, we could hopefully accept some soon. Father Bologna, one of our priests, and several others, who already know French and Spanish fairly well, are now studying English”¹⁷.

After 10 days, Don Bosco, still in Rome, wrote to Fr. Cagliero, then in Argentina, telling him that the Holy Father had offered to the Salesians three apostolic vicariates in India, one in China, and one in Australia. Don Bosco wrote that he has accepted one of them in India and had requested at least eighteen months to prepare the required personnel. So he suggested to Fr. Cagliero to attend to the immediate needs of the missions in Argentina and then return to Europe to establish a house in Rome, and then make a trip to India¹⁸.

Don Bosco returned from Rome on 17 May and on that very evening, he gave a *Good Night* to his boys and shared with them the news about his audience with the Holy Father. Among other things, he told them that the Holy Father had offered him “a vicariate in India, where there are vast harvests to reap”¹⁹.

About two weeks later, during the above-mentioned conference that was held on June 4th, Don Bosco gave a few more details about this project. He told them that the Holy Father had offered the Salesians twelve apostolic vicariates in India which were about to fold up for lack of personnel. Each of them needed a bishop and priests. Since the Pope was insisting that he accept one such vicariate, Don Bosco, after seriously considering the request for a while says, “If such is your will, Holy Father, I accept it, but only after twenty months from the day I will receive all pertinent documents”²⁰.

Don Bosco then addresses his audience and tells them: “Those of you who wish to go to India have twenty months to get ready”. He clarified further saying, “but remember that this means twenty months from the delivery of the pertinent documents which won’t arrive until September. Thus we have two years to prepare ourselves”²¹.

In January 1877, Don Bosco once again had three papal audiences, on 9th, 11th and the 21st²², but we are not sure if there was any further discussions about

¹⁵ On 24 March 1876, the Vicariate of Mangalore was placed once again under Verapoly and Fr. Victor of St. Anthony was appointed Pro-administrator Apostolic Cf *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, p. 8. This situation seemed to be very much present to Pius IX when he insistently keeps asking Don Bosco to accept at least one of the Vicariates of India. As the conversation proceeds it becomes clearer that Pius IX was referring to Mangalore.

¹⁶ Cf BM XII 137.

¹⁷ Cf *ibid.*

¹⁸ Cf *ibid.*, pp. 147-148.

¹⁹ Cf *ibid.*, p. 156.

²⁰ Cf *ibid.*, p. 161.

²¹ Cf *ibid.*

²² Cf Eugenio CERIA, *The Biographical Memoirs XIII (1877)*. New Rochelle, New York, Salesiana Publishers 1983, p. 5.

the proposal regarding the missions of India. However, writing once more to Fr. Cagliero while still in Rome, he said: “Let us see what we can do about two requests I have received from the Holy Father”²³. He goes on to elaborate about the new vicariate apostolic in Patagonia and rather abruptly proposes to Fr. Cagliero that he ask Monsignor Ceccarelli to head it. Then rhetorically he asks:

“And what about Fr. Cagliero? We shall accept the vicariate apostolic of Mengador²⁴ in India, and Father Cagliero will be the vicar apostolic, Father Bologna the vicar general, and so on. According to Cardinal Franchi the vicariate numbers some three million souls. [...] We can easily train [...] ten priests and ten catechists for India. God will do the rest”²⁵.

During the Annual Conference held on 5 – 6 February 1877, Don Bosco reiterates the proposal saying: “We have started negotiations for houses in India and Australia, and I must start preparing personnel, but there is no rush for that”²⁶. Further, on 13 Feb. 1877, writing to Father Cagliero, he reminds him once again: “Try to put all your affairs in order, and when you feel that things can run smoothly by themselves, set a date for your return, not later than next August, and let me know”²⁷. Continuing the same letter, he says that if there is any formal requests for missionaries from Brazil or Paraguay, one should hold on till the year 1878. In the next para, he clarifies the reason: “The Holy Father has offered us an apostolic vicariate in India and another in Australia. For the moment, I have agreed to send some missionaries to Ceylon in 1878”²⁸.

However, by May 1877 there seemed to be a complete change of plans. Writing to Cagliero from Turin on 12 May 1877, among other things Don Bosco declares: “Since the number of houses is on the rise with a corresponding decrease in personnel, I shall shelve plans for Ceylon, Mangalore, Australia etc., until your return”²⁹.

Although Don Bosco makes a conditional statement *until your return*, the India project seemed to have been shelved for good at least as far as Don Bosco was concerned. It would take another 30 years for the Sons of Don Bosco to reach India. And finally when they did come in 1906, it would be neither Ceylon, nor Mangalore, but Thanjavur (Tanjore) in Tamilnadu³⁰.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁴ The footnote no. 26 BM XIII p. 19 corrects it saying, “Read Mangalore”, cf *ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

³⁰ The first Salesian presence in the Mangalore Diocese at Pavur is as recent as 1997, more than a hundred years later. Cf Mathew KAPPLIKUNNEL, *Their Life for Youth-History and Relevance of the Early Salesian Presence in India (Tanjore and Mylapore, 1906-1928)*. Bangalore, Kristu Jyoti Publications 1989 for a better understanding of the first Salesian presences in India.

2. Institutions and Organisations named after Don Bosco before the arrival of the Salesians

This part deals with the central theme of this research viz. mapping the different Institutions and organisations started in the name of Don Bosco in the undivided Diocese of Mangalore before the arrival of the FMA and SDB. The author personally visited these places and met the people who started or who are carrying on these works and gathered a lot of significant material that throws light on the beginnings of these activities. The entire research clearly brings to light the impact the figure and spirituality of Don Bosco has had outside the circle of the SDB and FMA Congregations.

2.1. *The Don Bosco Higher Primary School, Shirva, 1934*

As the history of Don Bosco Higher Primary School is intertwined with the history of Christianity in Shirva, I shall begin with a brief background history of the school.

2.1.1. The background history of Church Primary School Shirva 1898

The Don Bosco Higher Primary School, Shirva, was started as “Church Primary School” on 1 February 1898 with just four standards. It was founded by Fr. Nicholas Corneiro of the Upper Church of St. Francis Xavier and housed in the building situated to the south of the Church. It was to cater to the children of the surrounding villages³¹.

In 1910, Fr. Gregory I. G. D'Souza of the N.S. de Saude Church along with Fr. Casmir Fernandes of the Upper Church brought about the reconciliation between the two Churches (with one of them being *padroado* affiliated and the other affiliated to the *propaganda fide*) and formed themselves into a single parish. In order to make this union more effective the parishioners demolished both the existing churches and built a new one in 1915 dedicated to N.S. de Saude. It was located close to the then “Church Primary School”. Fr. Gregory I. G. D'Souza became the first parish priest of the unified Church and the new Correspondent of the school. He succeeded in raising the School to the level of higher primary school with eight standards. Thanks to his efforts, on 1 December 1919 the school got permanent recognition from the government of Madras³².

³¹ Cf Benedict TAURO, “*Don Bosco Hiriya Prathamika Shale Shirva*”, in *Don Bosco Higher Primary School Vidyasagara, Centenary Souvenir 1898-1998*. Shirva, 1998, pp. 37-41.

³² Cf Official website of Shirva Parish: http://www.ourladyofhealth.com/our_parish/our_history.htm, accessed on 30 July 2015.

2.1.2. The transformation of the Church Primary School, Shirva, into Don Bosco Higher Primary School in 1934

In 1932, Bishop Victor Fernandes of Mangalore founded the Catholic Board of Education and brought all the parish schools under its management. Fr. Reginald Pinto, who was the correspondent and parish priest of Shirva, handed over the management of the 3 parish schools (located in three different places) to the Catholic Board without consulting the parishioners. There was much resentment and anger among the people of Shirva because of a sense of betrayal by the Church authorities³³. It is in this context that in 1934 Fr. Hillary Gonsalves, referred to as *The architect of modern Shirva*, was brought in as parish priest to pacify the people. Fr. Hillary worked for four decades in Shirva and brought about a veritable transformation of the place. He was ably assisted by Fr. Valerian Colaco, the headmaster of the school. Both the parish and school records say that Fr. Valerian was an ardent devotee of Don Bosco and, therefore, in 1934 he changed the name of the school to Don Bosco Higher Primary School (DBHPS).

Two facts make us believe that this change of name was not a casual one: 1) Usually, most parish schools in Mangalore bear the patronal name of the Parish and the Shirva Parish has had a very historic and unique patron, the *Saude Mai*. 2). The year 1934 is very significant as it was the year of Don Bosco's canonisation. Hence it must be considered the conscious decision of the two priests to present the young people of Shirva with Don Bosco, a saint born and brought up in a rural context and struggled for his early education and with whom the young people of Shirva could easily identify themselves, as the patron. The school website in fact says that the period when Fr. Gonsalves was the correspondent and Fr. Valerian Colaco was the headmaster was the "Golden Age" of DBHPS. The school was appreciated by the Education Department and for the people it was a matter of prestige to get admission in the school³⁴. The school also has given a large number of priestly and religious vocations to the Church in India³⁵.

2.1.3. The Growth and Impact of Don Bosco Higher Primary School, Shirva

For many decades, DBHPS, Shirva, was the only school offering quality education to the children of a large number of surrounding villages. As such, it

³³ It is known as the *black spot* in the history of Shirva. After the Sunday Mass, the people forcefully locked the parish doors and appropriated its keys and tension prevailed for over two months. Cf Julian FERNANDES, "A Hundred Years of Blessings", in *Our Lady of Health Church, Shirva, Centenary Souvenir 1915-2015*. Visit also the Official website of Shirva Parish www.ourladyofhealth.com

³⁴ Cf *Don Bosco Higher Primary School, Vidyasagara, Centenary Souvenir 1898-1998...*, p. 38.

³⁵ Cf http://www.ourladyofhealth.com/our_institutions/Don_bosco_kannada_medium_hr_pri_school/history.htm

has been instrumental in holding aloft the torch of Christian education beyond the barriers of caste and creed. It has laid strong foundations offering a large number of students, the opportunity to come out of their narrow village surroundings and become leaders holding important posts both in the Church and in civil society as policy-makers³⁶. At the height of its growth, the school had nearly 1000 students on its rolls with 25 divisions and 27 teachers and known for its excellent standard in both curricular and co-curricular activities.

In order to continue further education, other Institutions were added to the campus: St. Mary's High School (Kannada medium) (1947), St. Mary's Pre-University College (1972), St. Mary's Degree College (1980), Don Bosco English Medium Higher Primary School (1983), Don Bosco Kindergarten School (1985), Don Bosco English Medium High School (1992) and St. Mary's Post-Graduation Centre (2009).

Although the focus of my study is only DBHPS (which was the first Don Bosco Institution in the Diocese), I also visited the other three Don Bosco Institutions in the campus. All the four DB institutions have their own school anthem referring to Don Bosco as their patron. A large statue of Don Bosco with two young people is located in a very prominent place in the campus. The feast of Don Bosco, is celebrated with much devotion and fanfare. The combined strength of the four Don Bosco institutions is about 1050 students of whom 511 are Catholics. The staff of all the four institutions are largely composed of catholic lay teachers, a good number of whom are also the past pupils of these same institutions. Thus, we can see that true to Don Bosco's educational goals DBHPS has indeed succeeded in forming its pupils into *good christians and honest citizens*.

Incidentally in 2007 the Parish invited the Salesians of the Konkan Province (INP) to begin a community in Shirva and gifted them a piece of land donated by one of its parishioners. The Centre is fittingly called Don Bosco Youth Centre and the SDB have begun a pre-aspirantate and a boarding to cater to local vocations. Regular youth camps and youth activities have already made them quite popular among the parishioners. The FMA who arrived in Shirva in 2013 have opened a boarding to facilitate the education of girls coming from the backward areas of North Karnataka and look after the Ladies' Hostel of the College³⁷.

³⁶ Among its many illustrious pupils we can count: Archbishop Alphonsus Mathias of Bangalore, Bishop Salvadore Lobo of Baruiapur, Bishop Isidore Fernandes of Allahabad, Bishop Anthony Fernandes of Bareilly, Fr. Julian Fernandes SJ, the principal of St. Aloysius College Mangalore and the provincial of Karnataka Jesuit province, Sr. Apoline Monis SCCG, the Provincial of the Sisters of Charity, Shri Sundara Hegde, the Deputy Central Intelligence officer, Mr. Wilfred Nazareth, the Electrical Engineer of Karnataka Government and a large number of well-known professors, doctors, engineers and social agents. The school has also given to the Church a good number of very promising priestly and religious vocations. Cf *Don Bosco Higher Primary School, Vidyasagara, Centenary Souvenir 1898-1998...*, pp. 16-43.

³⁷ Cf *Diocese of Udupi Directory 2015*. Udupi, Bishop's House, pp. 71, 90.

Therefore, one can say that Don Bosco arrived in Shirva more than 70 years before the SDB-s and the FMA-s and in a way prepared the ground for their arrival.

2.2. Don Bosco Aided Upper Primary School, Kayyar, 1935

From the Mangalore – Kasargod Highway about 9kms eastwards from Up-pala, a narrow, winding road skirting lush green villages of a hilly region leads to Kayyar. Even today, it takes a long and tedious journey to reach there. Around the majestic gothic style Church dedicated to Christ the King and the stately building of the Don Bosco Aided Upper Primary School one hardly notices a few houses. Today, the parish has about 248 families with 1214 Catholics³⁸. Indeed, it required far-sighted missionary creativity for someone to begin a Church and a school at this place. Fr. Luis Furtado, the founder of Christ the King Church and Don Bosco Elementary School was a person with the required qualities. The church was blessed in 1934 and the school begun on 12 September 1935. It was the policy of the then bishop, Victor Fernandes, that every Parish Church should start at least a primary school to cater to the education of the people. It would also become, however indirectly, a place of pre-evangelisation since students belonging to different castes and religions would be attending it. That seemed to have been the mission of the Don Bosco School.

The school started with 4 standards and 3 teachers having just 71 pupils on its roll. In 1958, it became an upper primary school adding 6th, 7th and 8th standards. Presently there are around 550 students and the work is in progress to raise the school to the level of a high school. The student population is composed of 70% Hindu, 15% Muslim and 15% Christian³⁹.

A statue of Don Bosco placed prominently on the school building dominates the place. The school anthem sung everyday by the pupils explicitly refers to Don Bosco's childhood in Becchi and his dream at the age of 9. The song presents Don Bosco as the father of the poor and orphan children and this helped to create bonds of empathy with the educator saint⁴⁰. The present Principal, Mr. Luis Monteiro, says that every Monday a prayer service is conducted in honour of Don Bosco, thus helping the pupils to imbibe his values and every year, the feast of Don Bosco is celebrated on 31st January with much enthusiasm.

However, there is the basic question: "Why was the school named after Don Bosco?" As we have already said with reference to Shirva, two reasons stand out: 1) the school was given the name of Don Bosco despite the fact that the newly erected Church was dedicated to Christ the King. 2) Don Bosco was canonised on 1 April 1934, just a year prior to the starting of the school. Although there

³⁸ Cf *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, p. 62.

³⁹ Cf Don Bosco Aided Upper Primary School, Kayyar, Vidyamrita – *Platinum Jubilee Souvenir 1935–2010*, Mangalore, 2010, pp. 27-30; 69-70.

⁴⁰ Cf *ibid.*, p. 6.

are no records that specify the reason, it seems obvious that the choice of the patron saint of the school was by no means a casual one. Perhaps the founders of the school perceived Don Bosco as an educator saint who would appeal to the rural and non-Catholic population of the surrounding villages. The school celebrated its Platinum Jubilee in 2010. In fact, the photographic documentation of the Platinum Jubilee, marked by a public function, clearly shows the goodwill enjoyed by the Christian community even among the people of other faiths, as many prominent non-Christian leaders presided over the function. Evidently, the Don Bosco School has done a lot of good work and has earned the respect of the Hindus and Muslims in the neighbourhood.

Presently, there is a Salesian Parish at Pavur about 17kms from Kayyar. The Salesians arrived in 1997 and their pioneering work among the socially backward Koraga Christian Community, is much appreciated. In fact, in 2005 they started the Don Bosco English Medium School affiliated to the CBSE Board. Though the school was started in Pavur, subsequently, in 2013, it has been shifted to Hosabettu, Manjeshwar, in order to reach out to a wider cross-section of the society. However, it is interesting that as in the case of Shirva, Don Bosco arrived in this region more than 60 years before the arrival of the Salesians⁴¹.

2.3. *St. John Bosco Church, Kelmbet, 1959*

Like Kayyar, Kelmbet too is located in a hilly region about 2.5kms inside from the main road. Currently, it belongs to the Udupi Diocese, the town being about 32kms away. The beginnings of this Church has an interesting story narrated by Fr. Fredrick Mascarenhas⁴² who was then a boy and part of the group.

Kelmbet was then a part of the Belman Parish which is about 8kms away. People had to walk the entire distance through fields and forest, crossing streams and rivers. One monsoon season in 1957, a group of 6-7 boys who set out to the Church for Sunday mass, got lost in the jungle. It rained non-stop the whole night and the boys did not return. The anxious parents were convinced that their children had been swept away in the swollen stream. Thankfully, the boys found their way and returned home the next morning. It was then that the people of Kelmbet insisted that a chapel be built in Kelmbet and they be given the facility of a Sunday Mass. The parish priest of Belman, Fr. Nicholas J. Pereira, responded positively to this petition of his flock. He presented their request to Bishop Basil S.T. Peres who had come on a pastoral visit

⁴¹ Cf *Diocese of Mangalore Directory 2014*, p. 91.

⁴² Much of the information regarding this parish is drawn from a personal interview of the Author with Fr. Fredrick Mascarenhas held on 20 July 2015. Presently, Fr. Fredrick is the parish priest of Our Lady of Dolores Church Udupi which is also the Bishop's House of the Udupi Diocese. There have been 9 priests and two religious sisters from his paternal grandfather's family.

from 8 – 10 January 1958. Seeing the spiritual needs of the people of Kelmbet who had to travel long distances on foot, the Bishop granted their request. It was decided that a chapel be built in honour of St. John Bosco in Kelmbet to meet the spiritual needs of the people⁴³. It was as if Don Bosco himself had come to the jungles in search of his lost boys to take care of them!

The D'Mello family of Kelmbet donated 6½ acres of land for the construction of the Church. Thanks to the hard work put in by Fr. Nicholas Pereira and his assistant Fr. Gregory D'Souza, within a year a chapel was built with the enthusiastic support of the people. Fr. Fredrick specifically mentions that both Fr. Nicholas and Fr. Gregory loved each other and worked together setting an example to their flock. The Vicar General, Msgr. A.V. D'Souza, blessed the chapel on 28 March 1959 dedicating it to St. John Bosco and on the following day, 29 March 1959, Easter Sunday, Fr. Nicholas Pereira offered the first mass. In 1961, a presbytery was constructed and on 1 May 1962, as per the decree of Bishop Raymond D'Mello, an independent Kelmbet Chapel was canonically erected, uniting the border areas of the parishes of Belman, Kirem and Paladka⁴⁴. In 1964, the chapel became a parish and on 11 April 1964, Fr. Gregory D'Souza, was appointed its first parish priest. Fr. Gregory D'Souza, with the generous support of the parishioners, built the present edifice of the Church which was inaugurated on 22 April 1970. People physically carried the water that was needed for construction from a pond in the gorge below.

2.3.1. The Role of Fr. Gregory D'Souza in the growth of St. John Bosco Parish, Kelmbet

Although geographically insignificant, vocations have flourished in Kelmbet and so far it has given over 32 priests and 22 sisters to the Church⁴⁵. Fr. Fredrick attributes this to the quality of spiritual enthusiasm infused by its first parish priest, Fr. Gregory D'Souza. Fr. Fredrick says that Fr. Gregory was not only a great devotee of St. John Bosco and nurtured this devotion in the parish, but in many ways, he also personified Don Bosco. He was dynamic and friendly, loved children, played with them and provided opportunities for their growth. He was generous and would share with them whatever little he had. He was kind and was always ready to help the poor. He was humane and gentle, yet firm on principles. Inspired by his very attractive persona, about 14 boys joined the priesthood during his period from 1964 to 1971.

⁴³ Cf *Decree of erection of Kelmbet Chapel issued by Rev. Bishop Raymond D'Mello on 21 April 1962*, in Parish Archives of Kelmbet.

⁴⁴ Cf *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Cf *St. John Bosco Church, Kelmbet, The Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1964-2014*. Kinnigoli, Sandesh Printers 2014.

Eventually, a life-size statue of Don Bosco was erected and the life of Don Bosco itself had a great influence on the people. The liturgy was well animated and people often would offer Thanksgiving Masses (with band) for favours received through the intercession of their patron, St. John Bosco. The parish feast was celebrated each year with much fervor and fanfare on the 3rd Wednesday of January⁴⁶.

Another witness, Mr. Alex J. D'Mello of Taccode corroborates: "Fr. Gregory D'Souza was a very talented priest. He was the Assistant to Fr. Nicholas Pereira of Belman. When the new church was built, Fr. Gregory was appointed as the first parish priest. During the takeover ceremony from Fr. Nicholas, Fr. Gregory could not contain his emotions and sobbed inconsolably. Before every mass for 15 minutes he taught us hymns, both Konkani and Latin. During his time he sorted out many family disputes as I vividly remember one case when a certain member of a family refused to pay the Church contribution. However, Fr. Gregory took it upon himself to help the affected family. As children we used to love him. I still cherish his smiles [...]. As I remember him even after 45 years let the future generations read and relish this comment attributed to his memory"⁴⁷.

2.3.2. The handing over of the Kelmbet parish to the Salesians

At the time of its Silver Jubilee in 1989 there were 140 families with 1300 Catholics. It was still a flourishing parish and the Silver Jubilee was celebrated with much solemnity. The Jubilee Anthem referred to Don Bosco as the patron of the parish and guide of the young. However, due to its remoteness, little by little, the younger families began moving out of Kelmbet in search of work and quality education for their children. In fact, presently Kelmbet has only 121 families with just 407 Catholics, most of whom are elderly⁴⁸. In the year 2000, Fr. Reginald Pinto, the last diocesan priest who served Kelmbet, received a visit from Fr. Charles Lobo sdb, who was one of his relatives and the provincial of the New Delhi (INN) province. Seeing the lonely life of a diocesan priest living in a remote area, he suggested that the parish be handed over to a Salesian community. Thus the negotiations began and in 2003 the St. John Bosco Parish, Kelmbet, was handed over to the Salesians of the Konkani (INP) Province of the Salesians⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ Most parishes in Mangalore have been assigned a particular Wednesday to celebrate their patronal feast. Kelmbet parish was assigned the 3rd Wednesday in January since the 4th Wednesday in January is assigned to Karkal-Attur which is a well-known pilgrimage centre.

⁴⁷ Cf <http://wikimapia.org/6864492/St-John-Bosco-Church-Kelmbet-Bola>, accessed on 31 July 2015.

⁴⁸ Cf *Diocese of Udupi, Directory 2015*, pp. 23-24.

⁴⁹ Cf *Sandesh*, in "The Golden Jubilee Souvenir", St. John Bosco Church Kelmbet 2014.

The Salesians of the Konkani province, since the time of their arrival, have undertaken a number of initiatives to revitalise the parish. Besides the regular youth activities and camps, they have started the “Don Bosco Boys’ Home”, to facilitate the education of boys from the remote areas. In 2014, they celebrated the golden jubilee of the parish with a large public function and to mark the occasion, they also started the Don Bosco English Medium High School⁵⁰.

Thus here too Don Bosco preceded the Salesians and prepared the way for their coming in his own inimitable way.

2.4. Konkani Natak Sabha and the Don Bosco Hall, Mangalore, 1943

The Konkani Natak Sabha, whose patron is Don Bosco, is the gift of a Jesuit priest with sensitivity towards youth and culture. It was Fr. George Albuquerque Pai SJ⁵¹, a professor of chemistry at St. Aloysius College, who on one Friday evening of March 1943 noticed a group of lively youngsters sitting on a hillock near Jeppu and having fun. He approached them, got into a conversation and proposed the idea of forming a Konkani dramatic society for the greater glory of God and for the service of people through the development of Konkani culture. The youngsters, although initially hesitant and skeptical, were soon won over to the cause and thus was born the *Konkani Natak Sabha* (KNS) or Konkani Dramatic Society. It was indeed a heaven-sent boon to the youngsters, wearied as they had been, by the travails of World War II and the turmoil of the Independence Movement that had gripped the nation.

As the Jesuit superiors of Fr. George did not give him permission to take up the responsibility of KNS, he approached the Capuchins of St. Ann’s Friary and within the same year of its inception the administration of KNS was handed over to the Capuchins. It was agreed that the Capuchins would be the ex-officio presidents of KNS and they continue to guide it even today. Among these Fr. Philip Neri, (OFM-Cap.) rendered his services for 26 years, and in its early years, he exercised a seminal role in shaping and developing KNS.

The explicit motto of KNS is: “*Through Theatre to Religion*” (*Natak Dwarin Dharmik Sadhan*). It was envisaged fundamentally as an apostolate of the stage aimed at bringing together the energies of young people for the enrichment of the Konkani culture and the fostering of individual talents. It also envisaged interpreting the social doctrines of the Church as well as topics related to faith and morals. It was proposed that every parish in the city start units comprising of active youngsters, not merely drama writers and actors. These members were

⁵⁰ Cf *Diocese of Udupi, Directory 2015*, pp. 24, 72.

⁵¹ Fr. George Albuquerque Pai was born in 1882, joined the Society of Jesus in 1906 and was ordained in Rome in 1918. Cf *Konkani Natak Sabha, Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1943-1968*. Mangalore 1968, p. 21. It could be that he had come to know of Don Bosco while he was studying in Rome.

expected to be present at a General Body Meeting to draft rules for the society. The objective of KNS was the uplifting of the mother-tongue, Konkani⁵², and the fostering of the cultural, social and moral accomplishment of the society in general⁵³. To facilitate such an objective, about 3 years later, on 11 December 1946, KNS was registered under the Registration of Societies Act 1860⁵⁴.

2.4.1. The development of Konkani Natak Sabha and the founding of the Don Bosco Hall

KNS staged its first drama, titled *Vignant Jeek* (Triumph in Trial), written by one of its members, Mr. M.P. D'Sa, to a packed audience on 19 September 1943 at the Academy Hall of St. Aloysius College. On popular demand it had to be staged twice more. Thus began the glorious innings of this Association that was destined to gift Mangalore and the Konkani world with hundreds of artists of national renown in the field of drama, music, singing, story-writing, public speaking and literature⁵⁵. There were social plays, historical plays, comedies and tragedies, besides the religious plays, bringing out the talents of the members and helping to form dramatists, composers and musicians.

It soon became apparent that KNS needed to have a place of its own to stage these dramas and conduct its various activities. Therefore on 31 March 1947 a piece of land was purchased at a cost of Rs.33,000 and on 19 September 1948 the foundation-stone for the Don Bosco Hall was laid. Now that things were taking shape for the first time KNS celebrated the feast of its patron, St. John Bosco, with due solemnity on 31 January 1949, imploring the "sportsman-saint" to help them in their endeavour. Fr. Philip Neri, the then president, often encouraged the members to trust in divine providence saying, as it had happened in the case of St. John Bosco, even impossible things could be realised⁵⁶. Thanks to much effort in fund-raising the building was completed and on 19 September 1951, the 8th anniversary of KNS, the majestic Don Bosco Hall was inaugurated by the District Collector, Sri A.R. Ranganathan. It was truly a glorious day for all those who loved art and culture in the city⁵⁷. With a seating capacity for 1000, it turned out to be a veritable boon to the city bringing together people from all strata of socie-

⁵² It is important to remember that at this point in time the Konkani language had no state sponsorship. The official language of the State was Kannada and the Hindus in Mangalore spoke Tulu. Children did not study Konkani in school and therefore, basically it is the Catholic Church that kept the language alive by its policy of using it as a means of communication since the Mangalorean Catholic community spoke this language.

⁵³ Cf *ibid.*, pp. xvii, 7.

⁵⁴ Cf *ibid.*, p. 45.

⁵⁵ Cf Konkani Natak Sabha, *Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1943-1993*, Mangalore 1993, pp. 19-21, 41-48.

⁵⁶ Cf Konkani Natak Sabha, *Silver Jubilee Souvenir 1943-1968...*, pp. 46-47.

⁵⁷ Cf *ibid.*, p. 49.

ty. In fact, the following are just two of the many letters of appreciation that KNS received which can give us an insight into the quality of service rendered by KNS.

Ex-Vicar Capitular, Msgr. William Lewis, wrote on 7 March 1965: “I had the pleasure of witnessing many a performance in the Don Bosco Hall under the patronage of the Konkani Natak Sabha. The Konkani Natak Sabha does serve the community by its educative and cultural dramas, with wholesome recreations and heart elevating musical entertainments. And this is the *need of the times to keep our youngsters away from the dangers that beset them*”⁵⁸.

The Archbishop of Calcutta, Msgr. Albert V. D’Souza, who was earlier the Vicar General of Mangalore, wrote on 16 March 1959: “The Konkani Natak Sabha with its Don Bosco Hall, is not merely a recreational centre as it would appear at first sight. It is an apostolate; not a purely religious one, but one that is bound to raise the moral and cultural tone of the citizens of Mangalore and its suburbs. It is open to the public of all castes and creeds. We have every reason to be grateful to the organisers of the Konkani Natak Sabha not only for having provided us with educative, elevating and wholesome recreation, but also for having placed at our disposal an up-to-date stage for performances and a spacious and well-furnished hall for social functions”⁵⁹.

2.4.2. The contribution of KNS to Konkani language and culture

Even prior to India’s independence, KNS ventured to place itself at the service of the Konkani language. It has contributed a lion’s share in developing Konkani drama, song and music. Its service was so significant that even the Vatican appreciated its efforts for the apostolate of the stage under the motto, “Through Theatre to Religion” and bestowed the *Bene Merenti* medals on 4 November 1956 on two of its senior-most members – Mr. M. P. D’Sa, the drama-writer and S.S. Rasquinha, the actor-artist. From 1964, KNS introduced singing competitions attracting a large number of competitors, children and adults, men and women. Thus, there arose musical families, outstanding singers and confident singing poets and composers. In addition, elocution, short-play, fancy dress, drawing and essay competitions have nurtured the talents and brought to the limelight many individuals in society. By the time it celebrated its Golden Jubilee it had given to the society innumerable artistes, script-writers, poets, composers and actors. The members and office-bearers of KNS worked selflessly for the language, drama, music and the Konkani society⁶⁰.

It is indeed a matter of pride that all this great achievement was done under the patronage of Don Bosco. In fact, the Don Bosco Play staged during the Golden Jubilee Year was a mega play of 3 hours’ duration, which the people enjoyed

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41. Italics mine.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁶⁰ Cf Konkani Natak Sabha, *Golden Jubilee Souvenir 1943-1993...*, pp. 29-31.

thoroughly. Thanks to KNS, the people of Mangalore perceive Don Bosco as the Saint of Youth who loved all that the young people loved. In fact, the work of KNS is very significant for the people of Mangalore who early on in their history have made a lot of sacrifice and fought many a battle to preserve their language and culture.

2.5. *Don Bosco Club and Don Bosco Hall, Udupi, 1958*

The Don Bosco Club, Udupi, was born from the heart of Fr. Sylvester D'Souza who was the assistant priest of Our Lady of Dolours Church Udupi. He received the whole-hearted support of Fr. Gaulbert Noronha, the parish priest. Fr. Sylvester was young and energetic; he exuded joy and optimism, and had uncanny ways of attracting young people to the faith⁶¹. It was his brainchild to found the club when he saw young people coming to the Church and lingering on to play volleyball or cricket. He believed that the formative years of a man's youth is the crucial period of his life. Hence, he named the club after St. John Bosco, the apostle of youth, with the intent to provide the right atmosphere and necessary guidance in shaping young minds⁶².

There was also something else happening in that small town, Udupi, a famous Hindu pilgrim centre and renowned for its vegetarian cuisine. With Manipal, a University township⁶³ coming up in 1953, Udupi began rapidly gaining prominence with an influx of young students from all over South India seeking admission in its colleges. In fact, thus writes Fr. Gaulbert in one of his fundraising appeals: "At this time, a well-equipped club where our young men could spend their spare time in reading, playing games or exchanging views is an absolute necessity. If our young boys could be induced to frequent the club and employ their leisure hours in improving their mind and body, it would keep them out of mischief, evil company and questionable past-time"⁶⁴.

⁶¹ "While I was still very young, I vividly remember Fr. Sylvester visiting our school in Alangar-Moodbidri. Children would swarm around him like bees on a honeycomb. He would begin by saying funny jokes and stories and then invariably switch to Catechism questions. He always had a pocket full of goodies to distribute like balloons, sweets or trinkets. He was nicknamed the "balloon father" and it was simply a feast just to be around him. In fact, years later when I came to know of Don Bosco, it seemed to me as if I had always known him" – *Author*.

⁶² Cf Sylvester D'SOUZA, *Foreword to the Souvenir*, in Don Bosco Club File, Church Archives of Our Lady of Dolours Church, Udupi. This dates back Don Bosco Club File, in all probability to 1963. No copy of the Souvenir is available.

⁶³ In June 1953 Dr. TMA Pai, founded the Kasturba Medical College, which grew up to be an International University Township under the aegis of Manipal Group of Educational Institutions. It began receiving students from all over India, and within a decade, it began attracting students coming from other Asian countries and later also from all parts of the world.

⁶⁴ Gaulbert NORONHA, *An Appeal for the Udupi Parish*. Hall, dated 1960 – in Don Bosco Club File, Archives of Our Lady of Dolours Church, Udupi.

Thus began the interesting story of Don Bosco Club Udupi, started in view of bringing together the boys and young men of the parish and providing them with wholesome recreation. It was inaugurated on 11 October 1958 and included both boys and young adults. St. John Bosco, the patron of youth, was to be the patron of the Club. The main objective of the Club was to unite the Catholics in undertaking religious and social projects.

The Club had a governing body of 15 members. The parish priest was the Director and the assistant parish priest, the President. Then there was the general secretary and a treasurer, 4 joint secretaries to head the areas of indoor and outdoor games, library and drama, and 7 members of the committee. The Executive Committee would meet once a month. In 1961, the club had 100 young adults and 25 adolescents. The membership of the club was open not just to the parishioners of the Udupi Church, but to all the parishes of the Udupi region. The idea was to make it into a model club like the one of Mangalore. Admission fee for the young adults was Rs.0.50 and for the adolescents was Rs.0.25. The annual subscription of Rs.1 was only for the older members⁶⁵.

The Club progressed fast and by 1961 there was a modest library with about 500 odd books in English, Konkani and Kannada besides a reading room with a list of 12 subscribed periodicals. Once a month the young and the old would gather together for a study circle discussing topics ranging from purely theological to questions of political and social interest. It was hoped that “interested boys could gain deeper insights into religion and morals and thus arm themselves effectively to combat the enemies who seek to destroy man’s faith in God”⁶⁶. Reporting about the functioning of the Study Circles in his Foreword to a Souvenir in 1963, Fr. Sylvester says, “Judging from the results we can proudly claim that our Study Circles have been a great success”⁶⁷. The Club would also animate many religious and social functions like the Catechetical Day, Mission Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, Christmas, Children’s Day, Workers’ Day, Pope’s Day, Parish feast, Club Day on January 31st, Independence Day, Republic Day and put up two or three dramas per year. Thus within 2½ years, the club had successfully organised more than 40 odd events⁶⁸.

2.5.1. The Don Bosco Hall, Udupi

In the joint letter of Frs. Gaulbert Noronha and Sylvester D’Souza, dated 15 July 1961, the plan for the building of the Don Bosco Hall was outlined. Its purpose would be to stage dramas and hold cultural activities, to screen educative and religious films, to conduct free medical camps and offer free legal aid to

⁶⁵ Cf Gaulbert NORONHA – Sylvester D’SOUZA, *Don Bosco Club Mahet Patr*, in Don Bosco Club File, Archives of Our Lady of Dolours Church, Udupi, p. 1.

⁶⁶ G. NORONHA, *An Appeal...*, p. 1.

⁶⁷ S. D’SOUZA, *Foreword to the Souvenir...*, p. 1.

⁶⁸ Cf G. NORONHA – S. D’SOUZA, *Don Bosco Club Mahet Patr...*, p. 1.

the needy and have a Catholic Information Centre “where our non-Catholic friends could obtain an insight into the Catholic faith and have their doubts cleared”⁶⁹. Similarly, plans were made to help needy students with boarding and lodging facilities and publish a newsletter to enhance communication and bonding with members who were working abroad⁷⁰.

Among the signatories besides the names of the two priests, there are also the names of the Executive committee members, among whom we notice the name of Oscar Fernandes⁷¹ as the Outdoor Sports Secretary.

The initial proposal was “to extend the [existing] stage to house the club and also provide accommodation to people during dramatic entertainments. It [was] estimated that the building extension and some new furniture would cost Rs.20,000/- and the amount [would] have to be collected only by donations”⁷². The permission to build a new hall was got in 1963.

The impact of this club on the youngsters could be gauged from the testimony of Shri Oscar Fernandes, presently a Member of Parliament.

“When you talk of a youth movement the first thought goes to Don Bosco. A popular youth Magazine of our times was Don Bosco and all of us used to subscribe to it. Don Bosco was known for his passion and love for youth. Naturally when we wanted to start a youth club the choice of the name was Don Bosco. The main task was to channelise the energy and activity towards building the society, the parish, the youth and the country. We started enrolling all the youth as members of the club. Come Christmas, we would be ready with musical instruments, go from house to house singing Christmas Carols, raising funds for the club and the Don Bosco Hall, Library, indoor games and church activity. Apart from supporting the church and youth activity, the Udupi Don Bosco Club turned into an ideal moulding-ground for the youth. I am proud, like many other youth, to be a product of Don Bosco”⁷³.

2.5.2. The Closure of the Club and the Hall

On 1 May 1968, Fr. Sylvester D'Souza who was the heart and soul of this club, was transferred to the newly built Christ Church at Manipal⁷⁴. The Club

⁶⁹ G. NORONHA, *An Appeal...*, p. 1.

⁷⁰ Cf G. NORONHA – S. D'SOUZA, *Don Bosco Club Mahet Patr...*, p. 1.

⁷¹ Shri Oscar Fernandes, currently a Member of Parliament, is a senior member of the Congress Party. He has represented the Udupi Constituency in the Parliament winning a record 5 times consecutively. He has also been a Rajya Sabha Member and was a Cabinet Minister for Youth and Sports affairs in the Rajiv Gandhi Cabinet, and later, Minister for Transport, Roads and Highways in the Manmohan Singh Government.

⁷² G. NORONHA, *An Appeal...*, p. 1.

⁷³ Testimony of Shri Oscar Fernandes given on 3 September 2015. It appears from the above testimony that the club was receiving a magazine called *Don Bosco*. Perhaps it was the *Don Bosco's Madonna* published by the Don Bosco's Shrine Bombay.

⁷⁴ While Fr. Sylvester was still the Asst. parish priest of Udupi, realising that the Catholic students coming to Manipal from different parts of India did not have the facility for Sunday

continued its activities along the already set guidelines, but it appears that it was missing the guidance of Fr. Sylvester. The minutes of the meeting of 31st March 1976 show that there was a unanimous suggestion to invite Fr. Sylvester to be part of the Executive Committee. The minutes of 14 April 1976 indicate that Fr. Sylvester did not respond to this invitation⁷⁵ and so there is one more suggestion to have him as a permanent invitee to the Executive Committee. Subsequent minutes do not indicate that Fr. Sylvester attended any of the Club meetings except the Silver Jubilee Celebrations on 1 January 1984. Soon afterwards, the Club ceased to exist and the name of Don Bosco Hall changed to Parish Hall.

Glancing through the minutes of the meetings from 1976 to 1984 one gets the impression that gradually, the Club was drifting away from its initial vision and focus. It began focusing on fund-raising activities to support its different programmes. Hence, the Don Bosco Hall began to be rented out for different social and commercial activities. Consequently, it appears that there were also proprietary issues between the parish and the Club regarding Don Bosco Hall. Besides, the older members were migrating to other cities in search of better employment prospects and the Club did not attract new membership like before. Perhaps all these above issues coupled with the lack of proper guidance unfortunately led to the closure of the flourishing Don Bosco Club and the Don Bosco Hall in Udupi⁷⁶.

2.6. *Don Bosco Club Puttur, 1967*

Situated some 60kms southeast of Mangalore in the foothills of the Western Ghats, in many ways, Puttur resembles Shirva. The imposing structure of the *Mai*

Mass nearby, met Dr. TMA Pai and organised regular Sunday Mass in English. Later on, he managed to buy a plot of land in Manipal and built the Christ Church, a hostel and a Youth Centre with Counselling facilities to meet the needs of the University students. He also organized the Mangalore Unit of the AICUF (All India Catholic Universities Federation) and invited Catholic University students from all over Mangalore to be its members, with the objective of developing Christian leadership. He has animated the YCS (Young Christian Students) and YCW (Young Christian Workers) units. At his death on 23 July 2008 a large number of people with great emotion acknowledged that they owe their leadership and organizational skills to the formation they received in the Don Bosco Club, at YCS, YCW and AICUF thanks to Fr. Sylvester D'Souza. They described him as an ever welcoming friend of children and youth, a beloved pastor kind-hearted to the poor, a man of dialogue between different faith communities and a passionate lover of nature. Cf www.christchurchmanipal.org; http://www.daijiworld.com/chan/ob_disp.asp?oid=2209; accessed on 15 August 2015. [http://www.daijiworld.com/news/news_disp.asp?n_id=49024&n_tit=Mangalore%3A+Fr+Sylvester+D%27Souza+\(80\)](http://www.daijiworld.com/news/news_disp.asp?n_id=49024&n_tit=Mangalore%3A+Fr+Sylvester+D%27Souza+(80)). Accessed on 15 August 2015.

⁷⁵ Between 1970 and 1978, Fr. Sylvester was completely engaged in building single-handedly the Youth Centre and Hostel facilities at Manipal. Cf www.christchurchmanipal.org; accessed on 15 August 2015.

⁷⁶ Cf Don Bosco Club Udupi, *Minutes of the Executive Committee Meetings from 1976-1984* (Manuscript), in Don Bosco Club File, The Archives of Our Lady of Dolours Church, Udupi.

De Deus Church (1830) dominates the landscape. In and around the Church campus are a host of educational Institutions⁷⁷, pivotal among them being St. Philomena's College that was started in 1958 by Fr. Anthony Patrao, often called *The Founder of Modern Puttur*. Fr. Patrao arrived in Puttur as the parish priest in 1939 and one by one began establishing educational institutions for girls and boys. Convinced that the young people of rural Puttur had equal rights to quality educational facilities, just like those brought up in the city of Mangalore, starting from the Primary to University degree level, he established eight educational institutions and a hospital. He was the parish priest of *Mai De Deus* Parish from 1939 to 1975, and it was during his time that *Don Bosco Club, Puttur* was born.

2.6.1. The Beginnings and the Vision of Don Bosco Club, Puttur

The vision of Don Bosco Club, Udupi, and the beneficial influence it had on the youngsters seem to have been the motivating factor in the starting of Don Bosco Club, Puttur. As in the case of Udupi, here too, it was a young assistant parish priest, Fr. Cyprian M. A. Lasrado, who took the initiative. He also had the whole-hearted support of Fr. Anthony Patrao, the parish priest. Thanks to St. Philomena's College and other educational institutions, Puttur at this time was a growing town bustling with youngsters coming from many distant villages and parishes. It was to serve the needs of these youngsters that Don Bosco Club, Puttur, was founded on 16 April 1967⁷⁸.

In a small room on the second floor of the old Church building, a group of 15 youngsters gathered under the leadership of Fr. Cyprian M. A. Lasrado, the assistant parish priest. They were full of wonder, expectations, energy and enthusiasm. Fr. Cyprian placed before the eager youngsters his dream of having a youth club that would enhance the social development of the youngsters by providing education, sports and healthy recreational facilities.

The idea was accepted enthusiastically and the Club was placed under the patronage of Don Bosco, with the motto: *Toil and Smile*.

2.6.2. The Structure and functioning of Don Bosco Club, Puttur

The Club was registered under the Registration of Societies Act on 7 September 1988 and has a Constitution of its own. As such its accounts are audited

⁷⁷ The following is the list of *Mai De Deus* church run Institutions: 1. Mai De Deus Higher Primary School 1939, 2. St. Victor Girls' High School 1942, 3. St. Victor English Medium School 1970, 4. St. Philomena High School 1949, 5. St. Philomena PU College, 6. St. Philomena College 1958, 7. St. Philomena College Centre for PG Studies 8. St. Philomena Boys' Hostel, 9. St. Philomena College Men's Hostel, 10. St. Philomena College Women's Hostel.

⁷⁸ Cf John CUTINHA, *Report of Don Bosco Club Puttur 1967-1977*, in *Don Bosco Club, Puttur, Souvenir Decennial Celebration*. Puttur, Santosh Printers 1977.

every year. It has a structure similar to the International Rotary Club or Lions' Club. It has a President, Secretary, Treasurer and 10% of its members form the Governing Body. Presently, the Club has 159 life-members and 20 ordinary members. It is open to members who are not necessarily parishioners of the *Mai De Deus* Parish or even those who move out of Puttur, but want to retain their membership. The meeting of the Governing Body is held once a month. The Club has an office and a meeting hall of its own. When the diocesan youth movement ICYM (Indian Catholic Youth Movement) began to organise the youth in different parishes, Don Bosco Club redefined its membership as open to those who want to serve the young post-ICYM, as the ICYM has the age-limit of 28 years. Thus Don Bosco Club, although initially started by young people for young people, transformed itself into an association that offers youth ministry through cultural activities. The Club has its own motto, logo and anthem all explicitly dedicated to Don Bosco. The Club Day is celebrated with much solemnity on 31st January⁷⁹.

Thus began the saga of a very vibrant club, which was to become an important reference-point in Puttur town, and today it is on the threshold of its Golden Jubilee celebrations that are due in 2017.

The impact of the good work done by this Club was such that two other neighbouring parishes invited it to help them start Don Bosco Clubs: the *Saib Salvador* Church, Agrar, about 35kms towards the north and the Sacred Heart Church, Ukkinadka, about 30kms towards west. The group at Agrar is still quite active, and affiliated to the ICYM, and the one of Ukkinadka, unfortunately, is closed down. In the words of Ms. Cecilia D'Souza, the Secretary of the Parish Council, "*Don Bosco Club has contributed in a big way to make Puttur a peaceful, joyful and love-filled town*"⁸⁰.

2.7. *Don Bosco Youth Association, Agrar, 1983*

Agrar, like Shirva, is one of the older parishes of Mangalore, and Christianity in Agrar goes back to the 17th century. The first Church, dedicated to *Saib Salvador*, was built in 1702. The parish was so large that in due course eight other churches were carved out of it. Agrar is situated in a hilly region on the banks of the river Netravati, about 35kms northeast of Mangalore. And just like its lush-green landscape, it has been also a flourishing nursery of vocations gifting the Church with 3 bishops, over 60 priests and 100 Religious women⁸¹.

⁷⁹ Cf *ibid.* Also Interview of the Author with Mr. Charles Furtado, Mr. Pravin Pinto and Mr. Royce Pinto on 22 July 2015.

⁸⁰ Cecilia D'SOUZA, *Don Bosco Club Puttur is 25 Now*, in DON BOSCO CLUB PUTTUR, *Silver Jubilee Souvenir*. Puttur, Thomson Printers 1992.

⁸¹ Cf John Cyril D'SOUZA, *Porzalchem Agrarchem Daiz*, in *Agrar Church, Tri-Centenary Souvenir*. Agrar 2002, pp. 33-35.

2.7.1. The beginnings of Don Bosco Youth Association, Agrar

The beginnings of the Youth Association in Agrar date back to 1967 when Fr. Casmir D'Sa began the Christian Youth Movement (CYM) on 22 January 1967. It functioned fairly well for nearly eight years helping out in parish activities, staging socially relevant dramas and offering voluntary service to the flood-victims when the Netravati overflowed in 1974. However, by 1976, it was closed down⁸².

Hence in 1980, the Parish Pastoral Council took the initiative to start another youth group. It was envisioned as a social and cultural group with four objectives:

- to reach out to the poor;
- to involve parishioners in parish activities;
- to nurture youth leadership;
- to live a life motivated by love, discipline and self-reliance⁸³.

It is in this context that the group came into contact with the Don Bosco Club, Puttur, and decided to model itself after it. The Rules and Regulations of Don Bosco Club, Puttur, were borrowed and studied. Accordingly, modelling itself on that of Puttur, Don Bosco Club, Agrar, was founded on 27 January 1983. It was decided, to attract young people, to provide good indoor and outdoor games facilities and a good library to enable the members to spend their leisure time in useful activities. For the first time an Education Fund was established so as to reach out to young people in need. Thus sports, education and social outreach to the poor seemed to be the focus of the group⁸⁴.

2.7.2. Programmes and Activities of Don Bosco Youth Association, Agrar

During the years immediate following the formation of the Don Bosco Club, a lot of importance was placed on sports activities. From 1985, the International Year of Youth, deanery level tournaments began to be organized. Constant encouragement and participation in these sports activities brought to the fore the immense talent of the youth and in later years five of them went on to play at the national and international levels.

Another area that was given prominence was the use of the stage: A number of socially relevant dramas in Konkani, Tulu and Kannada were enacted attracting people of all faiths. These dramas mobilised much energy and leadership

⁸² Cf ID., *Yuva Sakat, Amchem Don Bosco Yuva Sanchalan*, in *Agrar Church, Tri-Centenary Sourvenir*. Agrar 2002, pp. 174-175.

⁸³ Cf *ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

⁸⁴ Cf *ibid.*, p. 178.

among young people and offered healthy entertainment to the rural people. Especially, it fostered a commendable degree of community spirit among people of all faiths.

In the 1990s when the diocesan youth movement began organising young people in the parishes, Don Bosco Club, Agrar, became affiliated to ICYM, Mangalore. While accepting the norms and policies of ICYM, it still retained its name as Don Bosco Youth Association, Agrar. Now its focus became youth development with the motto: *Lead to Serve*. The number of its members fluctuate between 35 – 40. The ratio between working youth and students is 50:50.

When the Relic of Don Bosco was brought to Shirva, the youth from Agrar, had gone there, travelling about 60kms to venerate the saint and still treasure the experience. Speaking about the youth of Agrar, the parish priest Fr. Gregory D'Souza says:

“The youth of Agrar is sincere, hardworking and honest; they are focused on a goal and well-respected in the diocese. Thrice they have been declared as the best youth group in the diocese and quite a few of them have held top leadership positions even at the diocesan levels. Many of them occupy good positions in society even later on like judge, pilot etc”⁸⁵.

It is obvious that they have been well-groomed right from the beginning. An article in the parish magazine written on the occasion of the Tri-centenary celebration of the Parish concludes saying, “*It is a matter of pride for us that our youth are growing up to be promising future citizens and exemplary Christians*”⁸⁶. Well, there is every reason to believe that St. John Bosco too is equally pleased with this youth group.

Conclusion

Doing this research has indeed been a very moving experience. It stands witness to the relevance and attraction exerted by Don Bosco's charism and spirituality in different settings and different parts of the world. It is also moving to think that in desiring to send his Salesians to Mangalore, God led Don Bosco to remember these people, a tiny population in the huge Indian sub-continent. For reasons best known to God Himself, these plans did not materialise, but with the canonisation of Don Bosco, his spirit seemed to have hovered over this Diocese. Exactly from 1934 onwards, the year of Don Bosco's canonisation, we see a cross section of institutions and organisations – 5 schools, 1 Church, 5 youth clubs, 2 halls and 2 mega plays on the life of the Saint – all dedicated to

⁸⁵ Cf interview of the Author with the parish priest and the leaders of the youth group on 22 July 2015.

⁸⁶ Cf J. C. D'SOUZA, *Yuva Sakat...*, p. 179.

St. John Bosco, clearly perceived as the patron of youth, started in the Diocese largely by the local diocesan clergy together with the lay faithful. Most of these works reached the peak of their glory much before the coming of the Salesians to the Diocese.

It is pertinent to add that there seem to be a certain pattern in the way works associated with Don Bosco came into existence. In most of these cases, it was the result of the working in tandem of two priests: Frs. Hilary Gonsalves and Valerian Colaco in Shirva, Frs. Nicholas Pereira and Gregory D'Souza in Kelmbet, Frs. George Albuquerque Pai sj and Philip Neri OFM cap. in Mangalore, Frs. Gaulbert Noronha and Sylvester D'Souza in Udupi and Frs. Anthony Patrao and Cyprian Lasrado in Puttur. Interestingly in most of these cases it is the younger priest who was directly in contact with the youth who perceived a felt need and proposed it to the senior priest who gave his whole-hearted support and collaboration. The positive influence of priests like Frs. Philip Neri Cap., Gregory D'Souza and Sylvester D'Souza who imaged Don Bosco in their very persona was definitely a crucial factor in the flourishing of these works. This brings us to draw three important lessons viz. 1) Youth pastoral is always a community endeavour; 2) Often the younger members who are directly in touch with the young perceive the need better, but if the work has to have a lasting and far-reaching impact, it should be supported and guided by the senior members and should result in the formation of a team; 3) No technique or skill can substitute the primary calling to be images of Don Bosco in the carrying out of this mission.

Most of these Don Bosco works have flourished because they followed, perhaps intuitively, the axiom of Don Bosco, "Love what the young people love". In fact, KNS has articulated this very succinctly when it says, "Through Drama to Religion". Thus things which attract young people – drama, music, sports and cultural activities – become the means to draw them to their ultimate goal: God. Most of the Clubs integrate also two other dimensions: 1) the spiritual: through the study of Sacred Scripture, youth retreats, library and reading-room facilities; 2) the social: through outreach programmes towards those affected by disasters, networking with social agencies and honouring significant achievers in society. Thus they offered a holistic formation and have accomplished a yeoman service in preparing *good christians and honest citizens*.

The association of Don Bosco with the Konkani language and culture is indeed quite interesting. The Mangalorean Catholic Community has suffered much at the hands of the Portuguese owing to its allegiance to its language and culture. Hence Don Bosco's association with this language somehow allowed him to be perceived as "our Saint", thus facilitating the inculturation of his charism and spirituality.

It is indeed amazing to see Don Bosco's appeal even in the so-called non-Christian contexts. The type of works and cultural activities associated with him also reveal the image of Don Bosco not only as a Patron of youth, but also

as the *Saint of a secular spirituality* who can penetrate beyond any barrier and reach out even to those people who may possess no faith in God at all. From this we may also conclude that “Brand Don Bosco” has the appeal of presenting God in a very attractive and non-threatening manner. Perhaps, we need to present, enhance and discover new ways of strengthening the so-called *spirituality of the courtyard* of our beloved Father and Founder, reaching out to young people of different cultural backgrounds and religious contexts.

Indeed, Don Bosco has proved his own popular saying, “*It is enough that you are young, for me to love you!*” He in effect epitomises a truly “Catholic” or universal saint in the most eloquent manner possible.