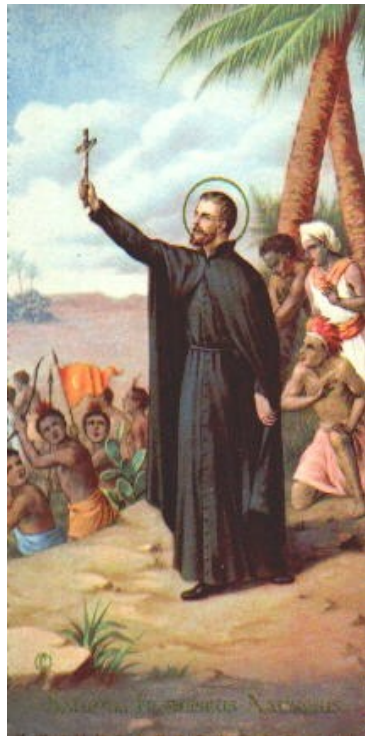


Francis Xavier SJ

The Man And His Mission

Sita Ram Goel



Voice of India
2/18 Ansari Road
New Delhi - 110002

St. Xavier's College And Its Namesake

St. Xavier's College at Calcutta is celebrating this year, 1985, the 125th anniversary of its foundation. It was entirely due to British patronage that it had become prominent to start with. A self-alienated section of India's upper class had preferred to send its scions to this institution. Later on, when this class came to power in progressive stages, St. Xavier's became its privileged alma mater. Small wonder that its old students should vie with each other in singing hallelujahs to its historical role.

The Society of Jesus which runs this college has utilised this year's celebrations for eliciting high encomiums for the services rendered by its protégé. Many dignitaries from several walks of life have paid their tributes to it in language which gentlemen generally lavish on such occasions.

One wonders, however, if anyone has cared to know or make known the life-story of the man whose name the college carries. Everyone seems to have assumed that Francis Xavier was a saint – a word which invokes instantaneous reverence in Indian hearts, associated as it is with names like Kabir and Guru Nanak, Namadev and Tukaram, Ravidas and Mirabai, Chaitanya and Tulsidas. It does not occur to an average Indian that the same word can have quite a different meaning in a different cultural milieu.

It would, therefore, be appropriate that some significant facts about Francis Xavier and his mission be presented to our people. These facts are found in his biographies published by the Church which he served so zealously to the end of his days. Let us remember that Xavier's is no ordinary name. He is held by the Roman Catholic Church as the Apostle of the Indies and the Patron Saint of the East. He is cited by all Christian writers as the model missionary. There are many institutions in different parts of India which take considerable pride in naming themselves after him.

Brief Biography

His full Spanish name was Francois de Jassu Y Xavier. He was born in 1505 in Navarre, a hilly tract of the Pyrennes. His father, Juan de Jassu, was in the employment of the King of Arragon. But he took his surname from his mother who was a heiress of the houses of Azpilqueta and Xavier. One of his sisters held a high post in the court of Queen Isabella of Castile.

Xavier went to Paris for his higher education. There he came under the influence of another illustrious Spaniard, Ignatius of Loyola, and was one of the six pioneers who founded the Society of Jesus on 15th August 1534. This new Catholic order consisted of men who were neither secular priests nor religious monastics. It was confirmed by Pope Paul III in 1540 and soon became the main missionary arm of the Roman Catholic Church after the commencement of the Counter Reformation.

King Joao III of Portugal was a great Catholic enthusiast and wanted to spread his faith in the East which had been mandated to his kingdom by Pope Alexander VI under the Padroado in 1493 CE. Portuguese pirates had made quite a headway in the Indian Ocean after Vasco da Gama sailed into Calicut in 1498. They had seized Goa in 1510 and made it the headquarters of their projected Christian empire in the East. In 1539 King Joao III requested the Pope to recommend some person of extraordinary devotion who could supervise and strengthen the mission. The Pope consulted Ignatius Loyola who forwarded the name of Xavier. He was appointed as the Royal Inspector of Missions with the right to correspond directly with the King. At the same time, the Pope made him an apostolic nuncio, which was a very high office normally bestowed upon the Pope's ambassadors to emperors.

Xavier left Lisbon on April 7, 1541 and landed in Goa on May 6, 1542. He was received very warmly by Alfonso de Sousa, the Portuguese governor, who fixed for him an annual salary of 4000

gold *fanams*. This was quite a sum in those days. But Xavier could not look kindly at the sort of life the Portuguese were leading in Goa. He had little hope that they would be useful for the spread of Christianity. During the few months he spent in Goa, he founded the College of St. Paul for training native missionaries. This step of his has been hailed as a stroke of genius by all historians of Christian expansion in the East. Xavier, they say, was the first to train native talent for planting Christianity in foreign lands. The Dutch, the French and the British who trained native mercenaries for conquering and consolidating their empires in the East came much later.

In October, 1542 Xavier landed on the Coromandel Coast where the Portuguese had established themselves between 1518 and 1530. Earlier, the Paravas engaged in pearl fishery had been enslaved by the Arab pirates who took away the best part of their earnings. The Portuguese had promised help to the Paravas if the latter agreed to get baptised. The Paravas had thought they were choosing the lesser evil when they formally embraced Christianity in 1534. Little did they know that they were choosing another set of pirates as their new masters. The Portuguese proved no better, if not worse, than the Arabs. They extracted heavier taxes from the poor fishermen. One of these taxes was 4000 gold *fanams* to be paid annually for the slippers of the Queen of Portugal. But Xavier paid no attention to their material plight. He was more concerned about their spiritual condition. He found that they were still making and worshipping the images of their old Gods and Goddesses. He had to exert himself considerably between 1542 and 1545 in order to “clean up” the Coromandel Coast.

Meanwhile, in 1544 he saw an opportunity for his mission in the quarrel between the princes of Travancore. Each faction was keen on securing Portuguese help in order to win. The Governor of Goa deputed Xavier to the court of the Tiruvadi Raja of Quilon. The Raja promised financial help and freedom to convert the fishermen along the Malabar Coast, provided the Portuguese sided with him. The

missionary made a deal and immediately moved to the coastal villages. Fishermen who refused to be baptised or apostatised at a later stage were told flatly that the Portuguese would prevent them from fishing and confiscate their boats. On his way back to Goa, he met Miguel Vaz, Vicar General of the Indies in Cochin.

Now Xavier could look farther afield. He had a large territory to cover in the East, inspecting missions and exploring effective methods of conversion. He landed in Malacca in September, 1545 and spent the next two years in neighbouring lands. It was during this journey that he ran into Anjiro (Yajiro), a Japanese who had committed murder in his native land and was living abroad as a fugitive from justice. Anjiro led Xavier to believe that the religion of Japan was very close to Christianity and that the Japanese people were ready to receive the Gospel. Xavier took Anjiro to Goa in 1548 and had him trained as a missionary. It was neither the first nor the last time that the Church was using a common criminal to carry out its errands. The history of the Church provides many such instances.

Xavier and Anjiro landed at the port of Kogoshima in Japan. Xavier had been authorised by the Pope to go there as the latter's apostolic nuncio. Japan at that time was divided among 250 local rulers over whom the Emperor at Miyako had little control. They had also heard about the rising Portuguese power and some of them were eager to secure foreign help in local feuds. One of them received Xavier very kindly and gave him freedom to preach. But Xavier discovered very soon that Anjiro had misled him. The mystic doctrine of Buddhism with which he was faced was very different from his own monotheistic theology. Moreover, the Buddhist monks were not so unorganised as to let their people fall an easy prey to an alien faith. In his desperation, he denounced the Buddha as a devil and told the people that their monstrous sin of Paganism put their souls in peril. The people did not relish his rhetoric and showed considerable resentment. Xavier did the best he knew under the circumstances. He went to Miyako to converse with and convert the Emperor as a first step to christianise the people. This had been the patent pattern

in Europe since the days of Constantine in the fourth century CE. A Christian king would marry his daughter to a promising Pagan king in the neighbourhood. She would help the missionaries to baptise him. He in turn would declare that in his domain Paganism was punishable with death. But unfortunately for Xavier, the Emperor of Japan was fully satisfied with his ancestral religion and refused to meet the missionary from a foreign land. Xavier came back to Goa in 1551 having wasted twenty-seven months in Japan. The few Japanese he had managed to convert went back to Buddhism soon after.

Xavier had heard a lot about China during his travels and decided to try his doctrine in that land. So he set out for China in 1552. But before he could reach the mainland, he died on a rock island off the Kwantung Coast on December 2nd that year. He had sent out a message to the Portuguese in the immediate neighbourhood to send a ship for his rescue. But no Portuguese thought of him so highly as to undertake the exertion. He gave up the ghost with only a Chinese servant to look after him.

It was only in February 1553 that at the behest of the higher authorities the Portuguese dug out his body. They brought it back to Goa on March 14, 1554. He was buried in the Church of St. Paul. Rome proclaimed him a saint in 1664. In 1664 his body was removed to the Church of Bom Jesus. In 1665, a special chapel was built inside the church. The church was itself raised to the status of a basilica minor by an apostolic decree in 1946. Dictionaries tell us that a basilica is a Roman Catholic church with honorific privileges.

His decaying body lies encased in a crystal glass coffin enclosed with a silver casket made by Goan artists. It is exposed for veneration at frequent intervals. The first exposition took place in 1782. Until 1952 the votaries could kiss the body and earn merit. The practice was then stopped. It was feared that the holy relic might fall apart at the touch of such tremendous devotion.

Destroyer Of Hindu Temples

Xavier was inspired by the iconoclastic zeal of the monotheistic creeds. He had inherited a long-established tradition of destroying non-Christian temples wherever the Christian Church had managed to come on top. The Christian monks living a life of piety and penance in well-endowed monasteries had been particularly fond of this pastime. Aided by frenzied mobs, the monks had destroyed thousands of non-Christian temples all over Europe, West Asia and North Africa as the faith spread in different directions and powerful kings became crusading converts. Records have survived about two Hindu temples in Taron on the Upper Euphrates being destroyed by St. Gregory in 304 CE. These temples had 18 to 22 feet high images of Gods. The images were smashed after the fierce resistance offered by the Hindu colony at Taron had been overcome (ref. Osmond de Beauvoir Priaux, *Indian Travels of Apollonius of Tyna and the Indian Embassies to Rome*, London, 1873). A similar destruction was witnessed in Central America as soon as the Spanish missionaries arrived on the scene.

Xavier lived up to this tradition of the Church on the Coromandel Coast. He discovered that, though baptised in 1534, the Parava fisherman could hardly be called Christians in practice. Some of them still made their living by making images of Hindu deities. All of them were worshipping these “evil spirits”. According to the *History of Christianity in India* published by the United Theological Seminary, Bangalore, in 1982: “When the boys informed him that someone had made an idol, he went with them and had it broken into a thousand pieces. In spite of all his advice someone persisted in making idols, he would have them punished by the *patangatis* (heads of Parava villages) or banished to another village. One day when he heard that idols had been worshipped in the house of a Christian, he ordered the hut to be burned down as a warning to others (ref. Volume 1).

Later on, he mounted the same iconoclastic campaign on the Malabar Coast. According to the same *History*, “When the whole village was baptised, Xavier would get them to pull down their village temple and break into small pieces the idols it contained.” He did this at a time the Tiruvadi Raja of Quilon had given him 2000 *fanams* to build churches. The poor fishermen were in no position to resist him because the Portuguese pirates were always at hand to assist the missionary.

Xavier took great delight in what he had done in Malabar. On February 8, 1545, he wrote to the Society of Jesus: “Following the baptisms, the new Christians return to their homes and come back with their wives and families to be in their turn prepared for baptism. After all had been baptised, I order that the temples of the false Gods be pulled down and idols broken. I know not how to describe in words the joy I feel before the spectacle of pulling down and destroying the idols by the very people who formerly worshipped them.”

One of Xavier's colleagues in this mission of christianising the Hindus was Miguel Vaz, the Vicar General of India appointed by Rome. In consultation with Xavier he wrote a long letter to the King of Portugal in November 1545. The letter outlined a forty-one point plan for spreading the “light of Christianity.” Point No. 3 reads as follows: “Since idolatry is so great an offence against God, as is manifest to all, it is just that your Majesty should not permit it within your territories and an order should be promulgated in Goa to the effect that in the whole island there should not be any temple public or secret; contravention thereof should entail grave penalties; that no official should make idols in any form, neither of stone, nor of wood, nor of copper, nor of any other metal; ... and that persons who are in charge of St. Paul's should have the power to search the houses of the Brahmins and other Hindus, in case there exists a presumption or suspicion of the existence of idols there (Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, Vol. 1).” On March 8, 1547 the King ordered his Viceroy at Goa that all Hindu temples should be

destroyed forthwith.

The Portuguese friars and priests had been destroying Hindu temples in Portugal's Indian possessions for quite some time past. *Cartas de Affonso de Albuquerque*, published from Lisbon in 1915 on the basis of old records, carries a report from Andre Corsali stationed at Cochin in 1515. He writes that an ancient and magnificent temple on the island of Divari had been demolished in 1515 and its sculptures defaced. In 1534 when Goa was made a bishopric many Hindu temples had been destroyed under the new policy described as Rigour of Mercy. A list of 156 temples which had been destroyed in Goa in 1541 is provided in *Tomba da Ilha des Goa e das Terras de Salcete e Bardes* by Francisco Pais published in 1952, again on the basis of old records. The Hindu leaders of Goa had passed a “voluntary resolution” that the income from lands assigned to these temples could be used for the maintenance of churches and missions. The arrival of a mighty missionary like Xavier gave an added impetus to the campaign.

What followed in Goa and other Portuguese possessions in India has been very well documented by Christian historians in India. According to the *History of Christianity in India*, Vol. 1, 280 Hindu temples were destroyed in Salsette and another 300 in Bardez. The count for temples destroyed in Bassein (Vasai), Bandra, Thana and Bombay are not available. Missionary records, however, refer to many famous Hindu temples being converted into churches at these places. A beautiful Hindu temple in the Elephanta Caves was turned into a chapel. Many temples were pulled or burned down on the islands of Seveon (Butcher's Island) and Neven (Hog Island). Even private temples in Hindu homes were prohibited and “transgressors” were severely punished.

The Hindus in these places tried to circumvent the “law” by taking away their images to places outside Portuguese territories or building temples of their Gods in neighbouring lands. The missionaries discovered this “Hindu trick” very soon. The Portuguese

authorities promulgated a law that Hindus found financing temples outside or going on pilgrimages to these temples were to be punished with heavy fines including confiscation of property.

Such were the first fruits of Xavier's mission in the East. The mission was by no means an individual enterprise. It represented the spirit which has moved the Christian Church at all stages of its history.

Advocate Of Forced Conversions

Use of force for “saving souls” has been the standard method employed by the Christian Church in many parts of the world whenever and wherever it enjoyed power. Force was replaced by fraud when the Church came to be discredited in the West. But that is another story. During the period when the Portuguese seized a number of places in India, the Church was all powerful. And Xavier was one of its mighty missionaries. He could not fall behind in employing this favourite method of his Holy Mother the Church.

In a letter dated 20th January 1548, Xavier wrote to another Jesuit, Fr. Simao Rodrigues, that, “According to my experience, the only effective way to spread religion in India is for the King to proclaim by means of an edict to all his officials in India that he shall put trust only in those who will exert themselves to extend the reign of religion by every means in their power. The King must definitely order them to exert themselves with zeal to multiply the number of Christians in Cape Comorin [Kanyakumari] in order to attract to the faith of Jesus Christ the island of Ceylon, and to muster all the pious people, be they members of our Society [the Jesuits] or other that may seem fit for propagating religion.... If the King publishes such an edict and treats severely those who disobey it, a great number of natives will embrace the faith of Jesus Christ; otherwise no success can be expected.”

Xavier followed it up with a direct letter to the King of Portugal. He

wrote: “Be pleased to order that, every time the Viceroy and the Government write, they set forth to you the present religious conditions giving the number of converts and their kind, the possibilities of converting more people and the means to be employed to do it. Be pleased to order that, regarding religion, only letters by those officials will be considered: that should in the country or province where they exercise authority no rise in the number of converts be evident under their administration, since it is evident that this number can at any time and in any country increase infinitely when the rulers are in favour of their conversion. Your Highness will hold them responsible and punish them, this being solemnly declared in the very chapters by which they are vested with authority. ... So long as the viceroys and governors of India do not under the influence of fear of losing their properties and their offices when not labouring for the conversion of a great number of infidels, your Majesty should not expect that a great fruits from the evangelical preachings in India, except that a great number come for baptism and that those already baptised make any religious progress.”

In another letter addressed to the Society of Jesus in Paris, he held the Brahmins to be the biggest hurdles in the way of Christianity. According to him, “There is in these parts among the pagans a class of men called Brahmins. They are as perverse and wicked a set as can anywhere be found, and to whom applies the psalm which says: 'From a unholy race, and wicked and crafty men, deliver me, Lord.' If it were not for the Brahmins, we should have all the heathens embracing our faith.”

His co-worker, Miguel Vaz, had already presented a forty-one point plan to the King of Portugal in November, 1545 for the forcible conversion of Hindus. Vaz had gone to Lisbon immediately after and returned to Goa in 1546. Neither he nor his mentor, Xavier, lived to see the implementation of policies prescribed by them. But the Portuguese authorities in India were empowered by successive Portuguese kings to pursue those policies with utmost rigour.

The story of how anti-Hindu laws were enacted in Portuguese territories over a period of time is long. In summary form, it consists of 1) banishing Brahmins on pain of being made prisoners on the galleys; 2) confiscating the properties of those Hindus who sent their families to neighbouring lands for fear of conversion; 3) prohibiting the performance of Hindu rites and ceremonies; 4) banning Hindu priests and preachers from doing their religious duties; 5) compelling Hindus to attend church services and listen to Christian doctrines; 6) depriving Hindus of their traditional rights and privileges in village communities; 7) forcing the baptism of Hindu orphans; and 8) ordering Hindus not to ride on horseback or in palanquins. The laws were so designed as to humiliate the Hindus in every conceivable manner.

Simultaneously, many privileges and protections were extended to persons who embraced Christianity. Converts were exempted from land-tax for a period of fifteen years. Slaves of infidels were set free as soon as they accepted baptism. The wives and daughters could inherit ancestral property provided they joined the Church. In case of a man who died without a male child, his property could be claimed by the nearest relative who became a convert. A wife who became a Christian could claim a part of her husband's estate during the latter's lifetime. Sons and daughters who became Christians in their father's lifetime could claim one third of his property. Of course, Christian converts were given top priority in public appointments. Offices held by Hindus were frequently taken away from them and given to Christian converts.

Instigator Of The Goa Inquisition

“Goa is sadly famous for its Inquisition, equally contrary to humanity and commerce. The Portuguese monks made us believe that the people worshipped the devil, and it is they who have served him.” – Voltaire

Soon after his arrival in India, Xavier had seen that Christianity sat very lightly on most of the converts. They had been baptised under

pressure. The Church was in a hurry. It had neither the time nor the inclination to use methods of peaceful persuasion. The neo-Christians who were mostly Hindus but also some Jews and Muslims were continuing with their earlier mores. Most of them were worshipping in the old ways in private.

Xavier knew that the Church had an effective method of bringing such people to book. He had a first hand knowledge of the Inquisition as it was functioning in Spain since 1481 and Portugal since 1536. Pope Sixtus had issued a bull on November 1, 1478, authorising the establishment of the Inquisition in Spain. It had started its operation on January 2, 1481. It had burned 2,300 persons and imposed various other penalties on 17,000 others in the very first year of its work. In 1483, the Pope appointed Thomas de Torquemada as Inquisitor General of Spain. During his regime, 8,800 persons were burned at the stake and 96,504 were punished in various other ways including long terms of imprisonment and confiscation of property. Another bull had been issued by another Pope on December 15, 1531 instituting the Inquisition in Portugal. It was also taking a heavy toll of lives and limbs of the “heretics”.

In a letter addressed to the king of Portugal on May 16, 1545, Xavier exhorted: “The second necessity for the Christians is that your Majesty establish the Holy Inquisition, because there are many who live according to the Jewish law, and according to the Mahomedan sect, without any fear of God or shame of the world. And since there are many spread all over the fortresses, there is the need of the Holy Inquisition and of many preachers. Your Majesty should provide such necessary things for your loyal and faithful subjects in India.” (Joseph Wicki, *Documenta Indica*, Vol. IV, Rome, 1956).

The Inquisition could not be established immediately in Goa due to difficulties between the Portuguese King and the Pope. But the Jesuits kept on pressing for it till it was instituted in 1560. Meanwhile, Joao de Barros, a younger contemporary of Xavier, had written a book, *Decades of Asia*, which was first published in 1552.

Regarding people of the East who had passed under Portuguese rule, he said: “But as regards Muslims and Heathens, who are outside the law of Jesus Christ, which is the true law that everyone has to keep under pain of damnation to eternal fire – if these are condemned in their souls, being the principal part of them, their bodies which are animated by those souls cannot plead the privileges of our laws, since the adherents of those creeds are not members of the evangelical congregation, even though they may be our neighbours as rational beings and though they may live to be converted to the true Faith.” (This passage can be found on page 100 of a book, *Joao de Barros: Portuguese Humanist and Historian of Asia*, written by C.R. Boxer and sponsored by the Xavier Centre of Historical Research, Goa. It has been published from New Delhi in 1981. It gives a clear conception of what a humanist means in Christian parlance and how a Christian historian is expected to process Asian history). The Inquisition in Goa was a logical corollary.

The Inquisition was housed in an old palace of the earlier Sultans of Goa. But its jurisdiction was spread all over Portuguese possessions in India and the East. Its ostensible purpose was to bring to book heretics and apostates from Christianity. But in effect its weight fell most heavily on the Hindu population. Most Hindus who had agreed to be baptised had done so out of fear. Refusal was likely to result in loss of life, property and honour. It was natural that privately they detested Christianity and did not adhere to its prescriptions. Most of them worshipped in their old way in secret. Quite a few of them got caught by the fathers of the various Christian orders who had flocked to every nook and corner of Portuguese territories and who spied on the enslaved population.

The Goa Inquisition functioned from 1560 to 1812 when it was wound up. Details of tortures it inflicted in its dungeons are available in the account of Dr. Charles Dellon, the French traveller who was its prisoner for three years from 1674 to 1677. His account has been supplemented by Dr. Claudius Buchanan's *Christian Research In India* published in 1812. He had an opportunity to visit

Goa in 1808 and himself saw the Great Hall of Inquisition, the procession of prisoners and the place where victims were burnt alive.

But the number of persons burnt, tortured and punished otherwise is not known. Keeping in view the number of victims of other Inquisitions, the number must have been quite large. No record has ever been published. In a letter dated December 20, 1812, the Viceroy of Goa wrote to the King of Portugal that, "The papers which comprised the archive of that tribunal were found to be a vast mass. I am informed that in them exist papers relating to all the suits tried by the Holy Office since its inception, and if they are not guarded with all care, therein would be found motives to defame, even falsely, all the families in the state and these would provide occasions to feed the enmities and intrigues which so abound in this country. ... As I am persuade that it is not expedient that they should be seen by any person it appears meet to me that it would be appropriate to burn them." (Antonio Baiao, *A Inquisicao de Goa*, Lisbon, 1945, Vol. 1). The Viceroy was directed not to burn the record and Fr. Tomas de Noronha was appointed to select some otherwise important materials from it. It is not known whether any selections were ever made and what finally happened to the record.

Society Of Jesus

Xavier was a leading light of the Society of Jesus which is credited with great achievements in India and elsewhere over the years. It would, therefore, be pertinent to know something about this organisation which continues to function in most parts of India at present. The fathers of this Roman Catholic order flaunt the letters SJ After their names and are known as Jesuits.

The Jesuits had not relished this name when it was first conferred on them by Etienne Pasquier, the famous French professor at the University of Paris. In his book, *Le Catechisme de Jesuites*, he had

written that, "I call them by the name of Jesuits, the members of the Society of Jesus, because the nefarious sentiments which animate them in their dealings with the world are unworthy of the holy name of Jesus." Another French philosopher, Pascal, had denounced them for their principle that the end justifies the means, their casuistry, their lust for wealth, their pretension to be the cultural leaders of Europe, their political activities aimed at world domination and their incurable fanaticism. The Jesuits had appealed to the Pope to condemn Pascal who had to shut his mouth as a consequence. But before he became silent he pronounced that, "What I said is condemned by Rome but what I have condemned is condemned by the human conscience." Of course, Pascal could not imagine that Christian conscience has never been the same as human conscience.

Since then many studies have appeared documenting the crimes committed by the Jesuits, including assassinations. It is small wonder that the *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary* defines the word Jesuit as "a crafty person; an intriguer; a prevaricator." In Peter Roget's *Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*, the synonyms for the word Jesuit are "deceiver, imposter, pretender, knave, liar, hypocrite, rogue, swindler, humbug, cheat, casuist, dishonest, seducer, addicted to sophistry."

The reputation of Jesuits everywhere had become so tarnished over the years that Pope Clement IV was forced to suppress the Society of Jesus in 1773. He died soon after. It was widely suspected that he was poisoned by the Jesuits. They continued to enjoy the protection of some powerful European potentates like Empress Catherine of Russia till they were revived in August, 1814 by Pope Pius VII in spite of Pope Clement's pronouncement that no succeeding pope would have the power to do so. The French Revolution, particularly the treatment meted out by Napoleon Bonaparte to two successive popes, had created a serious situation for the Catholic Church and it was thought that only a ruthless organisation like the Society of Jesus could rescue the Church.

Since then the Jesuits have never looked back. The Jesuit General in Rome has often been described as the Black Pope. Not only because he wears the black robes of his office but on account of the power he wields over the Catholic Church with the help of his order. Jesuit methods may have become sophisticated because no state in the world is now prepared to use its coercive power at their behest. But this sophistication means no more than that force has been replaced by fraud. For the rest, Jesuit methods still carry the stamp put upon them by their initial inventors among whom Francis Xavier was one of the foremost. Louis Vuillot who died in 1883 has summed up these methods in the following words: “When we Catholics are in a minority, we demand freedom in the name of *your* principles; when we Catholics are in the majority we deny freedom in the name of *our* principles.”

Conclusion

The hard facts stated above about one of the leading “saints” of the Christian Church can be checked by anybody in any library of Christian lore. Yet the Church has never disowned Francis Xavier nor denounced the heinous crimes which he inspired in this part of the world. On the contrary, the Church has held him in the highest regard and continued to dedicate to his name one Christian institution after another. This is because the Church knows no definition of saintliness other than service to the cause of spreading its tentacles. Scratch any Christian saint and you will find the same sort of man as Francis Xavier, masked under a variety of myths. Some of these saints did practice pieties like fasting, walking with bare feet, living on bread and water, flagellation, etc. But what all of them lacked was the spirit of humanism and universality which have been the hallmarks of saintliness in the Indian tradition. The Buddha had said that only the *prithaka-jana* (the unregenerate ones) praised him for his pieties and that the qualities which distinguished him as Buddha were *samadhi* (highest state of spiritual experience) and *prajna* (wisdom born of universality).

The fact that the Christian Church should hail as saints persons like Francis Xavier and employ an organisation like the Jesuits speaks volumes about the character of Christianity as a religion. India should stop being beguiled by the similarity of words like “saint” used in common by us as well as Christianity and delve a little deeper into the doctrine, organisation and history of the Church in order to find out the truth. – Sita Ram Goel, New Delhi, April 1985



Portuguese monks of the Inquisition torturing a backsliding convert in Goa