

THE IMPACT OF INCULTURATION ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SOUTH INDIAN CHRISTIAN ART

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Abstract: Inculturation refers to the process by which a particular church expresses its faith and life in and through the local culture. This results in a mutual enrichment: on the one hand, the culture in question receives a new dynamism, and on the other, fresh ways of understanding and living the Christian faith are brought to the general awareness. The adaptation of Indian culture through Christian art has been the most spontaneous and vibrant channel for the permeation of the gospel in Indian culture. Christian faith has come to life in its art forms. Art helped to make Christ present to his people, through sacred images, paintings and architecture. Christian ideals become an Indian experience with new nuances. These were given expressions in the introduction of new inculturated ashrams in South India. Ashrams today proclaim the development of Christian art.

Keywords: inculturation, art, architecture, ashrams.

Introduction: Inculturation does not end with the emergence and founding of the local church; it constitutes the sap for its maturity and sustenance as well. To evolve a dynamic Christian life in a rapidly changing society inculturation needs to be progressive and continuous. Pedro Arrupe refers to this process as 're-inculturation of faith'. Today the Church seeks to be multi cultural and multi-racial in the present context of suspicion and harassment. This paper attempts to bring out the salient features the church adopted since the beginning of its birth in India to adopt and adapt some of the Indian art and architecture that paved the way for inculturation.

Indigenous Architectural Background: Various Indian art forms formed and continue to form the milieu for the development of Indian Christian art. The discussion on inculturation attempted by the early Syrian Church in Kerala regarding the background of Christianity divulges the community's splendid accomplishments and creative influence in art and architecture from the point of inculturation. The studies of Indian art have revealed that it has at its base an early Asiatic tradition from which it has evolved. Many of the constantly recurring motifs, ornaments and symbols of Indian art seem to have been drawn from a common patrimony which India shares with the Western Asiatic cultures. Early Christianity in India has derived many of its images, symbols and architectural styles from Indian art. Kerala's church art and architecture were the living monuments of this unity, harmony and peaceful co-existence between Hindus and Christians. There are a

few pre-Portuguese churches that bear testimony to the Hindu tradition of architecture in plan. Both the Syrian Church and the Hindu temple have three important divisions *mukhamandapa*, and *garbhagriha*. The roof of the *mukhamandapa*, is the lowest and then comes the roof of the *mandapa* and the highest is that of the *Garbhagriha* or sanctuary.

This arrangement also has a theological significance. *Mukhamandapa* is purely profane where there will be dance, *kathakali* and other entertainments, so that we could say that the carvings on it depict purely worldly life. The small *upamandapa* on the side of Chengannoor church has this type of carvings even today. Wild animals, hunting scenes and some curious human figures are also seen there. In the *sanctum sanctorum* there is nothing else but the *moorthy*-God alone is kept. It is precisely here that Christians have always kept a cross. There are normally two *Dwarapalakas* (door keepers) in the façade of the *mandapa* of Hindu temples. In a similar way outside the main old church unit at Chengannoor there are statues of Saints Peter and Paul, probably serving the purpose of the *Dwarapalakas* of Hindu temple concept.

The iconographic features of various crosses found in and outside the ancient churches in South India, especially in Kerala reveal how artistic genius can create an appropriate language of images to convey this Christian theological content. The artifacts found in the museum of Saint Thomas Cathedral, Mylapore, show the examples of Persian cross. These are called Persian crosses on account of the *Pahlvi* (royal

language of the Sassanian dynasty of Persia in 6th century A.D.) or old Persian inscription on the cross. Each of the four extremities of the carved cross bifurcates and curls round holding between the buds which protrudes forth. The junction of the four arms is also marked either by concentric circles or by a petal design. The tips of the two vertical arms of the cross appear to be two vertical points, the upper tip being "pecked" or "kissed" by a descending dove and the lower tip being embedded in a lotus flower signifying regeneration and new life. On the arch are small ball-like decorations and they bend down to the mouths of the two tailed creatures like *makaras*. The creatures are supported by two pillars rising from the base of the slab, on its border is the *Pahlvi* inscription.

Very clear evidences of pre-Portuguese art are seen in the style of baptismal font and the plinth of the monolithic stone cross kept outside the church. The baptismal font which is made of huge granite stone is normally exquisitely carved. The cosmic significance of the places of worship was emphasized by three striking objects in front of the typical Malabar churches, either inside the courtyard or just outside it: (1) the open-air granite (rock) cross which at present is called as Nazraney *Stambha*, (2) *Kodimaram (Dwajasthamba)* or Flag-staff made of Kerala's famed teak wood (e.g., at Parur), and often enclosed in copper hoses or *paras* (as at Changanassery, Pulinkunnu, or Chambakkulam), or made out of some other wood or other material, and (3) the rock *Deepasthamba* or lampstand. *Stambhas* or pillars of some type or other are to be found among the Buddhists, Jains, Hindus etc., in India. Such pillars and structures were part of the Christian heritage of Kerala much before the ascendancy of Vedic Hinduism. The achievement of the pre-sixteenth century religious art and symbolism is not spectacular, but it is their capacity to experience and express the Christian mystery and symbols drawn from their own culture. Thus they have laid the foundation for a sound tradition of religious art in India. During the missionary expansion in the colonial era, the church had largely forgotten that Christianity had begun as what Johann Baptist Metz, called a "multicultural experiment"

Inculturation: Inculturation is a word that is in vogue today in the church circles. Most of the people use it in the context of evangelization. Some use it to underline the need for building up local churches,

especially new ones. However, inculturation refers to the process by which a particular church expresses its faith and life in and through the local culture. This results in a mutual enrichment: on the one hand, the culture in question receives a new dynamism, and on the other, fresh ways of understanding and living the Christian faith are brought to the general awareness. The term "inculturation" has its roots in the missionary activity of the Catholic Church of the past half-century or so. To evolve a dynamic Christian life in a rapidly changing society, inculturation needs to be progressive and continuous. Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and a message in a concrete cultural area in such a way that this experience not only comes to express itself with elements proper to the culture in question (which would be only a superficial adaptation) but becomes an inspiring, normative, and unifying principle that transforms and re-creates the culture, giving rise to a "new creation."

These definitions insist that inculturation must go beyond mere external adaptations that may result in new outward expressions of faith. More significantly, it involves a "new creation," a new life-giving encounter between the Christian faith and the deeper levels of a culture. It is important to note that inculturation is specifically distinct from missionary adaptation.

A good example of inculturation is provided by the successive images of Jesus through the centuries, as the tradition of faith passed from Judaism into the Greco-Roman culture of the Mediterranean, then into the Christian Roman Empire, Byzantium, the Middle Ages of Western Europe, the Renaissance, Reformation and Counter-Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, the Romantic movement, the non-western experience of decolonization and liberation and so on.

Inculturation in the Indian Situation: Indian culture is more holistic in its approach both to the human person and to the society as a whole. Being a multi-religious society, it still has a useful social role for religious identity. The chequered history of inculturation during the course of the expansion of Christianity suggests that there could be vast possibilities for inculturation in India today. Inculturation affects all aspects of Christian life namely liturgy, art, architecture, theology, personal law, way of life, community structures etc. This is done with special reference to India. In the Indian

tradition, art is given an important role in religious experience. Vishvanatha affirms in *Sahitya Darpana*: "Aesthetic experience is pure, indescribable, and self manifested, compounded equally of joy and consciousness, free of admixture with any other perfection, the very twin brother of mystic experience, and the very life of it is supersensuous wonders." Such an affirmation of the identity of artistic and religious experience is based on Indian metaphysics.

Inculturation is a slow process, requiring patient listening, explaining and challenging. The tensions of the growth of an Indian Christian art have been most evident and alive in the field of image making in painting, sculpture and architecture. The symbol 'OM' was used as a symbol of the Trinity or of the Holy Spirit. The risen Christ was represented as a dancing figure and symbols like tree, water, light, mountains, were used. In the field of architecture, there have been a few examples of using Indian forms and motifs in constructing churches and ashrams. In recent years there has been a growing interest in dance as an art-form among Christians.

At the beginning of the 19th century there was a realization among the people that the overtones of the material world had overshadowed the significance of Indian spirituality, and its art and architecture. It was a felt need to go back to the roots and culture. Thus the ashram way of living came into existence, in order to revive lost traditions. Inculturation that is adapting oneself to the Indian way of life, simple life style in worship, art, architecture, yoga and meditation was attempted. Of course, considerable time was needed for this movement to gather momentum.

The influences of some missionaries in India, and conservatism were two factors that impeded this rapid progress within the Indian Church. The Catholic Church began initiating a powerful campaign for indigenization. Indeed, there had been for centuries, sporadic cases of indigenized Church art, engineered accidentally or occasionally by design; but a decisive change in this direction came about in India just before the Second World War. The Christian life, released from western forms, has to find self-expression. The ashram is one of such expressions and many are drawn to this fraternal living.

Conceptualization of Ashrams: The beginning of inculturation process has been traced to different

sources in Christian history. From the beginning of the 20th century, Indian Christians started thinking seriously about the imperative need of Indian-ness in architecture and worship and made many attempts to absorb Indian cultural elements. Inspiration was drawn from Indian traditions as depicted in ashrams, temples and symbols.

The task of inculturation, is not just related to as objects or artifacts and their superficial description. On the contrary, it demands some understanding of aesthetics, leading a higher evaluation of their usefulness and their inherent values besides implicit messages. Hence, it is not enough to focus upon the end product, the eternal manifestation, the form which inculturation takes. It is necessary that the relationship between form and content in art and architecture is expressed.

Christu Kula Ashram, Tirupattur: The architectural expression of the quest for an indigenous church in India began in the early twentieth century. Today there are more than hundreds of Christian ashrams, both Catholic and Protestant experimenting in community living, in rural service, in indigenous worship and in theological research. The use of indigenous styles of architecture was pioneered here. The Christian temple as it was called is remarkable and a daring experiment. Its worship is more natural and satisfying than that of the churches. The local people were more at home, because of its structure. The *Christu Kula Ashram* is dominated architecturally by its *Jabalayam* (house of prayer). The ashram has only one entrance gate with a *gopuram* which leads to the courtyard. The *gopuram* has pyramidal tower with *kutas* and *salas* around. Each storey has no other iconic representations which might be misunderstood. The East wall of the temple is solid while the other is open to the elements. Above the main sanctuary is a *gopuram* with detailed ornamental work with different motifs like trees and birds seated on them along with other architectural elements of *pada*. The summit of the *gopuram* has a cross instead of the original *stupi* of south Indian temples. The smaller *stupis* are on either side of the cross.

Many other details of the ashram are suggestive of the Indian atmosphere. The striking *gopuram* still stands as a concrete manifestation of the daring adventure of these great visionaries of the time. The efforts made in Tirupattur soon started spreading to other parts of India.

Saccidananda Ashram (Shantivanam), Kulithalai: Saccidananda ashram founded on March 21, 1950 also known as Santivanam is the first major Catholic ashram among the modern Christian ashrams. Today Santivanam is hailed as the motherhouse of the Catholic ashrams in India. The Saccidananda Ashram of the Holy Trinity took its roots at Thanneerpalli, near Kulithalai on the banks of the river Cauvery, about 30 kilometers from Tiruchirapalli.

It is the relentless pursuit of the Divine, and a deep yearning for a holistic integration of life, by the people, both as individuals and communities, that has given birth to this ashram. In *Shantivanam* the Swamis tried to conform themselves to the traditions of the Indian *Sannyasa*. Saccidananda ashram was a felt need of an inculturated structure, with an Indian theology, spirituality, way of liturgy and Indian symbolism in art forms. The seeds of the ashram were already found in *Christukula* ashram. Among the other pioneers were Jules Monchanin (1895-1957), a French missionary of the Diocese of Tiruchirapalli associated with the Indian name of *Swami Parama Arubi Anandam*, (bliss of the Supreme Spirit), and a Benedictine French monk, Dom Henri Le saux (1910-1973) who later took the Indian name of Swami Abhishiktananda (the bliss of Christ).

The structure of the ashram gives an impression of a *rishi's* house on the banks of the river in a forested area. By adopting Indian names and giving the ashram the name *Saccidananda*, a Hindu term for the Godhead used as a symbol of the three persons of the Trinity, in Christian tradition, they sought to identify themselves with the Hindu tradition. After the death of Swami *Abhishiktananda*, the ashram was taken over by a group of monks led by Bede Griffiths, an English Benedictine, who first came to *Kurisumala* Ashram in Kerala.

The art and architecture of the ashram is simple in style and it is surrounded by trees. The main temple of the ashram is built in the style of a South Indian temple. The very colours used for the sculptures reflect the style of South Indian Temple architecture. As one enters, the ashram, there is a small *gopuram* for the gateway on which is shown an image of the holy Trinity in the form of a '*trimurti*', the figure of the godhead. According to the Hindu tradition, *trimurti* represents the three aspects of the Godhead, Creator, Preserver and Destroyer of the universe. This illustrates the principle of inculturation.

The distance between the main gate and the *mandapam* or the outer space of the temple is very short and in the middle there is a cross-enclosed in a circle. The circle represents the cosmic mystery, the wheel of law (*dharma*) of Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The cross at the center of the circle signifies the cross of Christ, the center of the universe and the human existence. It is not placed on any high pedestal or pillar but placed on the ground reflecting the humility of Christ. At the center of the cross is the word *OM* of the Hindu tradition. This is indeed a fitting symbol of the Word of God.

The *mandapam* or the outer court of the temple is open without any walls and has been adapted to the Indian way of sitting on the floor. There is a cross where the congregation gathers for prayer. It has the words '*Saccidananda namah*' written on it in Sanskrit, that is to say 'worship to *Sacchidananda*,' *Saccidananda* is the name for the Godhead in the Hindu tradition as being, knowledge and bliss.

One of the striking aspects of the ashram structure is the temple or the *mandapam* built in rich symbolism in the typical South Indian *Shaivite* style, with the small, dark inner *sanctum* (*garbha-grha*, womb house). Around the sanctuary there are little oil *dipas* (lamps) in triangular niches on the wall. In the sanctuary there is a stone altar where the tabernacle with the word *OM* is engraved on it.

The mystery of the death and Resurrection is presented very symbolically with the representation of the *vimana* above the sanctuary. The symbol of new life and ascent into the heavenly realm. The art depicted on the *vimana* takes its inspiration from the temple architecture in placement of the sculptures and other elements which add to its aesthetic sense. All the figures are taken from the biblical point of view. At the base of the *vimana* are the figures of the four living creatures of the Apocalypse, the lion, the ox, the man and the eagle (Rev 4:7), that represent creation redeemed by Christ. Above them are four figures of saints, representing the redeemed humanity. Above this is found four figures of Christ in different postures seated on the royal throne-*simhasana* surrounded by angels.

The throne of God is always above those of Christ and the saints. This is represented by the dome covered with peacock feathers and again over this the lotus, symbol of purity supporting the '*kalsa*,' an ancient symbol of the four elements of nature, earth, water, air, and fire. All these symbolic features attract the

seekers of the Divine to experience him in a tangible way.

However the context of the ashram community is a transformational context. The worship and overall art offered at *Sacchinanda* ashram is the dialogue and encounter, which has gone through in the process of inculturation. It is also the contest, where the emergence of a new community is sought in accordance with the vision of the ashram community, to develop their own ideas as articulated by the founders of the ashram.

Anjali Ashram, Mysore: *Anjali* Ashram as a true ashram is like an embodiment of all the ideals of Indian spirituality and ashram traditions, in term of life-style. Situated at the foot of the *Chammundi* Hills, was started on the 15th August, 1979 by D.S. Amalorpavadas. The logo of *Anjali* Ashram holds rich elements of Indian spirituality, welcomes with *Anjali* (open hand with flowers) all visitors as *sadhakas* (seekers) and as messengers from the world.

The whole of the ashram and its surroundings consist of three main buildings: *Visva Gopuram* (Cosmic Cupola), *Satsang mantap* (community hall) and Central ashram. The central ashram is flanked by a series of ten cottages in a crescent, five on either side. The temple of *Saccidananda* is in the style of an Indian temple. The architecture of the *Anjali* Ashram is simple, modest, utilitarian and aesthetic at the same time. Each of the buildings carries an Indianized name, thus making it more adaptable to the surroundings and people who come there. Individuality of the buildings is seen in their shapes like, *Om*, Chinese *Yin Yang*, star-shaped sign and the deep spiritual concept behind each one of them.

At the entrance to the first building after the gate is *Visva gopuram* (cosmic cupola), an octagonal pavilion standing on eight pillars on a circular space (of 12' diameter) capped with a *kalasa* denoting the finishing point or the perfect completion of house or edifice. It serves as a symbol of the rhythm in nature and of our communion with the universe: cosmic harmony. Eight pillars signify the eight directions of the universe. There are arches, on all the sides with foliated curves or scallops an inspiration of Islamic architecture. The structure is surrounded by water and has four steps which lead to the platform. The '*Satsangh Mandapam's* (community hall) main function is the coming together or fellowship with all the peoples, universally. The *mandappam* has a

gopuram on the eastern side having seven layers, representing the cosmic mountain, the axis of the world and the symbol of union between God and humankind. On top of the *gopuram* there is a *dharma chakra* on all four sides. This *dharma chakra* symbolizes the flow of righteousness or reign of justice in the society. There is a lot of spirituality contained in the architecture, sculpture, grills, paintings, dance, music, and drama.

There are ten cottages around the main ashram, five on each side. Ten cottages mean *dasavatara*-ten *avatatars*, or incarnations according to Hindu Vaisnavite tradition. These cottages are of pyramid shape, with bricks without being cemented giving an earthy feeling. Each cottage is named separately. In relation to the art and architecture of the temple, in its organization of the shape and the space, the aim is both to make it look Indian and celebrate Indian Christian liturgy. The church edifice is octagonal in shape and rises in three different tiers of elevation. If the convergence of eight directions symbolizes universality, the three tier rise is meant to denote the three regions of '*bhu-bhuvah-svah*' (literally the earth, mid-region and the heavens) and the presence of the Divine. Over the third rise or the *svah*, is seen to rest a '*urnakumbha*' signifying 'fullness', on it is planted across to proclaim that the entire reality is now redeemed by the salvific action of Jesus Christ. In the choice of the shape of the cross, however, the preference has been given for an oriental rather than western or Latin type of cross. This denotes as well provokes the original native creativity which is more in line with inculturation. The colour has an important part to play, thus the lower portion painted in brown colour symbolizes the earth, the middle portion painted in yellow expresses the illumination that takes place within us, when the three *lokas* become one as a single splendor at the depth of the being.

The *mandir* is accessible from all four directions east, west, north and south proclaiming the universal welcome extended to one and all. Here the main entrance is however from within and is reached by traversing a low roofed passage that gives one entering the temple the impression as well as the experience of going within, of going inside that is to say, going within the cave. The arches of the entrance are in the form of scallops which is influenced by Islamic architecture.

The main purpose of this architectural design is specifically to evoke in the devotee an all important Indian conviction that the divine being is *antaratman* and is to be discovered not so much without as within. The same truth is driven home even more forcefully when entering the temple after making a traditional Indian *pradakshina*, leaving behind the outer veranda the main body of the temple. The temple is surrounded with water which expresses both the external and internal purifications insisted upon by all religions, especially by Hinduism.

Inside the *mandir*, the beams supporting the *vimana* are extended to form a wheel with spokes, representing the Buddhist wheel of righteousness. The altar is in the form of a lotus made of wood placed in the center on an elevated platform. The backdrop of the altar has one single petal behind and eleven niches in a triangular shape to place small *diyas* (lamps).

In a changing perspective the old views, are gradually dying out and new mission theologies are emerging in view of inculturation in the Church. *Anjali* Ashram is a real embodiment of inter-religious faith and artistic inculturation.

Snanika Arulapara Virakta Mutt, Deshnur, North Karnataka: In the 17th century some Jesuits tried to evangelize Brahmins in Madurai by adapting themselves to the *Sanyasi* way of life. The first one to take initiative in this mission was De Nobili, an Italian Jesuit. It was after India gained independence that A. Alvares a Jesuit also known as *Swami Animananda* had the inspiration to work with the Lingayat called *Veera-Shaiva* community of the villages near Deshnur. *Swami Animananda* who was working among the people in the villages of Santibastawad, Balakundri, Chechadi, and Madhanabhavi was attacked by the caste people (Lingayat) in a village called Inchal while celebrating the Mass. The villagers accused him of doing *pooja* (celebrating Mass) with boots and following a foreign language (Latin). This incident changed his whole life style. With the permission of superiors, he changed himself over to the Lingayat culture and customs by wearing robes of saffron colour, with a turban of the same colour, wore *rudraksha mala* with cross, wooden sandals and followed a strict vegetarian diet according to the custom of the Lingayat community. He wanted to present Christianity in the Indian way in tune with the culture of the people the *Veera-shaivites* of North Karnataka. He started living in a

Mutt, Kannada word for a monastery. *Mutts* are different from ashrams, where only *swami's* or *gurus* live. There is no community life nor do they invite people to come and stay permanently. The main task of the adaptation was to build a *Mutt* in Indian style to suit the locality.

At the beginning stage there were only two rooms. Later as they were accepted in the village the construction of the *Mutt* was undertaken. This was mainly the work of local masons. On 14th Jan, 1976, the *Mutt* was inaugurated and named *Snanika Arulapara Virakta Mutt*. It is also called locally as '*Gudi*'. The architecture of the *Mutt* is plain without any sculptural and decorative panels, as normally done in the classical Hindu temples. The inspiration is derived from the South Indian temple. The entrance has arch called '*Nagar khana*' or *Nagar Kolle* meaning drumming room. It has a room to keep the drum which is beaten during the festival time. Here the style is different from that of South Indian *gopuram*, it has three storeys and the bell is on the top. The distance of the *Nagar Khana* and the *Mutt* depends on the distance and size of the *Mutt*. The significance of this structure is to say that the inner place is a holy area and what is unholy should be left behind. The *Swamijis* living there don't wear sandals but walk bare footed as people come and prostrate at their feet to take their blessing. On special occasions people are given small saffron shawls as a symbol of sacredness.

The exterior wall railing of the *Mutt* has depictions of animal motifs like dove, birds, lion etc., to show the whole of creation around the structure. Motifs of leaves and flowers in relief work dominate on the borders. On the either side of the *Mutt* there are two elephants like *dwaraplalakas*. The two top corners of the *Mutt* has solid chains carved out of one stone, of which one end is inside the wall and the other protrudes outside to symbolize human life which hangs in the hands of God. On the outer walls, quotations from the Bible and other scriptures are inscribed in Kannada language around the niches where the sign of the cross is depicted.

The whole structure is like a *mandapam* with a pyramidal tower painted in white and crimson, topped with *kalasa* made of brass. Devotees entering inside the *Mutt* ring the bells which are hanging just near the main door. This feature is rare in the Christian Churches or even in the other examples that we have seen. The concept behind this ringing

the bell has an Indian thought and two reasons: to draw the attention of God towards the devotee, as God is in *dhyana*—this is the shortest form of worship and secondly ringing of the bell helps the devotee to concentrate with the echo of the sound.

The interior of the *Mutt* and the ceiling do not have any artistic works to offer to the viewers nor God, which cannot match with the Hindu tradition. Entering inside one can see the altar with religious articles as we find in the temples. To burn camphor there is a stone carved in the form of *naga* (snake). Behind the altar is the sanctuary or *garbha-griha* where the tabernacle is in the shape of *linga* (*veera shaiva*). All round the tabernacle, there is place to make the *pradakshana patha*. *Linga* is the symbol of union between God and man. Here the *Linga* form of tabernacle is adapted specially to be one with the *Lingayat* community where the *swamiji* lived. This was the radical step taken against the church authorities and the own congregation of the *swamijis*. The Tabernacle is kept on the lotus which is of white stone symbolizing purity. Inscription around the *Linga* is written in kannada and Sanskrit which reads “You are my beloved Son”. There are two angels holding the cross, on either side of the tabernacle hangs two brass *kutuvilakus*. Such experiments with Indian symbolism have not been always met with

success among the people, but here it was well accepted even though there were lots of objections in the beginning.

In the later stage, inculturation was accepted and appreciated among the local people. The *Swamijis* wearing saffron coloured robes has deep meaning in Indian spirituality. This is the greatest form of inculturation that can be witnessed in the Church of having the symbol of *Linga* for the tabernacle.

Conclusion: The Christian faith is incarnate in the art form of Indian religions. Myths and realities of different faiths, inclusive of Christianity, are woven into a single vision. The foregoing descriptions of some of the important Christian ashrams in South India richly illustrate the impact of inculturation on Christian art and architecture. Indian symbols take Christian meanings, and Christian ideals become an Indian experience with nuances. In ashrams can be seen the elements and insights of different traditions of art and religions harmoniously blending together into one whole. It is certainly a progressive step in the Church’s attempt to draw inspiration from the Indian culture. Absorbing the various cultural, architectural and artistic elements of India, the ashram proclaims the universality of Christian religion. Christian ashrams can create an inculturated monastic tradition in India.

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