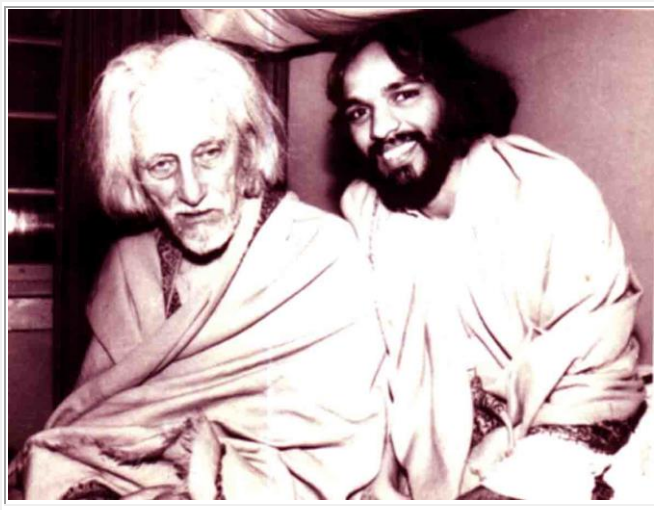


Gyan Ashram



Founding of the First Indian Catholic Ashram 1948

The inspiration of Mahatma Gandhiji (1869) at a Hindi Prachar meeting at Indore in 1935 in which Fr. G. Proksch was also a participant, triggered off the gigantic task which he accomplished for the Church in India during the following years. Inspire of adverse surroundings and circumstances. Fr. G. Prakash realized the need to establish an abode to proclaim the message of the gospel to

the Indian tradition. Christian ideals, to proclaim the message of the gospel to the Indian masses. Fr.G.Proksch wrote, "Today I met a man who is able to hypnotise, because he is the image of a man of God. His life bore the seal of the ancient Ashram ideal. He seems to move between Tapasya= self discipline his successful proclamation. With these two ideals of self-discipline and sacred meditation he established the "Gyan Prakash Ashram". Life in this "Ashram" meant a chaste community living a never failing warmth of understanding to all persons simple living with contemplating on the Sacred Scriptures culminating in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. The specific aim of this Ashram was the Proclamation of the Word in Indian art and form in a way that was true to Indian culture and understandable to Indian people. This was the Ad Gentes initiated as early as in the year 1935 by Fr. G. Proskch.

Guru Gyan Prakash as he was commonly known by his Indian name claimed that the gospel message in India would not make any impact on the Indian people as long as this message was imported from Europe. When he came to India in 1932 he had no Bhajans=Hymns or Kathas (=sacred narrations) to preach like the century old Gurus of India. This forced him to study Indian languages. Hindi and Sanskrit, the sacred literature of the Hindus, the Vedas Upanishads and Puranas. He learnt a number of different folk dances, folk songs and a series of ragas of Indian music along with different Indian instruments like the Veena (=Harp) and sitar, warod (=Flute). During a number of which he attended with Mahatma Gandhiji, he was able to discuss the thinking of Indian people and their culture.

This was again another missionary approach by Fr.G.Proksch. The establishment of an Indian form for the people in India and make available Catholic literature and material presented in Indian dance and music for the missionaries working in India. Fr.G.Proksch found little or no support in the early days; there were bishops and priests and even his own confreres who doubt his intentions and feared that he was turning Christianity into Hinduism; moreover this missionary method and idea did not conform to what other missionaries were busy with. Being convinced of this method, he finally got a temporary approval of his religious superiors and with the interest of an Indian priest Fr. Valerian Gracias, experimented in presenting Christian themes in Indian art and form.

The themes and context of the dances and dramas depicted the conflict between good and evil, light and darkness, life and death, a series of great. Hindu dramas like Ramlila and Mahabharata, besides these, there were Catholic themes focused on the unending love (=Anupam Prema) Christ the good shepherd (=Mesphal Bhagwan) the promise of the Messiah, his life on earth, his suffering and death on the cross, the triumph of the resurrection with the ascension to heaven as conquering death and darkness. One reads in history of his first public presentation to an audience of 30,000 people at the Marian Congress held in Bombay in December 1954, where he depicted the Marian Mystery in six scenes: paradise, the fall, the shout of lost humanity, the promise of Mary, the immaculate conception and the annunciation; thereafter in several other mission areas of India, where the Good Shepherd theme became very popular; several performances in Europe, and the presentation of a special ballet, performed by 300 dancers and 250 musicians and 1000 singers, prepared for the XXXVIII International Eucharistic Congress at Bombay, in the year 1964, which was attended by Pope Paul VI, presented to an audience of 60,000 people. It must be acknowledged that for the first time, Catholic hymns were sung in Hindi in the Churches of Bombay and elsewhere, many of whose words and melody are tracked back to Fr.G.Proksch. The most famous were the hymns Shri Jesu Bhagawan and Tera Nur Jagame Huwa Hai Fr.G.Proksch can rightly be called the greatest pioneer of our times.



The Gyan Ashram, Andheri, Bombay

George Proksch wanted to give mission work another dimension. His name is Gyan Prakash, Gyan meaning knowledge, knowledge of Christ and Prakash meaning light/revelation. Song and dance is his material, he tries to religiously educate the Indian people." This was a remark of an eminent guest at the Gyan Ashram after the performance of the Mesphal Bhagwan during the 38th International Eucharistic Congress. Fr. G. Proksch had already founded a Catholic Ashram and had given precedence for this kind of a missionary method in India. This ashram once thought of as a novelty in Catholic circles in India soon became a reality of great significance.

Life in this ashram equally called for tapasya penance a centre living, an option for simplicity in food clothing and demand a meaningful silence. The personal study and understanding of the Sacred Scriptures a swadhyaya, in Catholic missionary perspective this was the study of the Holy Bible. The sacrifice and offering to the Almighty upasna was the celebration of the Holy Eucharist Sewa Prem was expressed to all who entered the ashram with the motive to bring them closer to Jesus Christ. Besides this meaningful way of life another aim of the ashram was to train lay persons to proclaim the gospel message of salvation in Indian form for the people in India, and to make available Catholic literature and material presented in Indian dance and music for missionaries working in India.

To facilitate this work Fr. G. Proksch received an affiliation from the Lucknow University toward academic degrees in Indian music. The ashram was also seen as a learning centre which attracted non Catholic to learn Indian dance and music and these skills were used to present biblical themes. One reads in the history of the ashram that examinations were annually conducted by a professor from the Lucknow University Music College, and for the year 1968 there were more than 35 students.

The Ashram Way of Life



Life in an Ashram is no new way of spiritual asceticism in India. It was traditionally the place where a hermit lived where his disciples gathered around him. One reads in history that Indian sages pursued their spiritual search in this way for centuries in the past, and in recent times the classical example of Swamy Vivekanand may be cited in the non-Catholic Indian context, who after his concept of God and the ideal of Ramakrishna's work founded an order of monks. The monk who was previously known as Naren initiated 140 spiritual centres, where more than 600 members were obliged to religiously meditate, to study philosophy and serve humanity.

It must be admitted that the form of the ashram in India has undergone changes. As against the beginning when ascetics sanyasis renounced the world, went into the forest, lived in solitude and contemplation with the Almighty in prayer and penance, to today's ashrams which vary from single men living in caves or one room huts to others like the Ramakrishna Mission and the Divine Life Society, where the disciples undergo a formal religious training. Some centres, like the Belur Mutand Sivananda Ashram, have more than a hundred sanyasis living in a community. They run colleges, hospitals, and printing press and send their members even to Europe and America to propagate their ideology.

The quest for the Almighty has always been part of the Indian mind, even several centuries before St. Benedict wrote his rule describing the purpose of monastic life as being to seek God there were hundreds of ashrams throughout the length and breadth of India, where men and women lived in the greatest simplicity under obedience to their guru spiritual guide, and dedicated themselves totally to this yearning and longing for the Almighty. Their spiritual yearning drove them insatiably to plunge into the interior mystery and to seek the inaffable presence of the Almighty.

Life in an ashram demands tapasya penance, which is the basis for ascetic living, making a basic option for a simple way of life, in food and clothing, and maintaining a meaningful silence. It demands a personal study and understanding of the Holy Scriptures adhyaya to absorb its contents and make it one's own.

Present Activities of the Institute

Painting

Dance : Bharatnatyam, Odissi, Kathak

Music (vocal) : Carnatic Sangeet

Instrumentals : Harmonium, Casio and Guitar

Fitness Exercises : Yoga, Aerobics, Acting and Personality Development course.

Names and Year of SVD (Directors) worked / working

Fr. George Proksch	:1958 - 1984	Fr. Berly Pallan	2005
Fr. Francis Barboza	:1984 - 1997		
Fr. Bernard Rodrigues	:1997 - 1999		
Fr. Gilbert Carlo	:1999 - 2000		
Fr. Charles Vas	:2000 - 2005		

<http://www.oocities.org/svdinm//gyanlife.html>