

India- Holy See Relations

Diplomatic relations between India and the Holy See were established soon after India's independence in 1948. India's Ambassador in Berne, Switzerland, has traditionally been accredited to the Holy See which maintains a Nunciature (Embassy) in New Delhi, presently headed by a Nuncio (Ambassador).

India has the second largest Catholic population in Asia including those from Kerala dating from Apostolic times. A large number of Indians have joined various Roman Catholic Orders and many occupy high positions within the Catholic Church including those in Rome. India and Indians have a positive image in the world Catholic community.

The Holy See has always acknowledged the importance of India, both in global and Asian terms. There have been three Papal visits to India so far. The first Pope to visit India was Pope Paul IV, who visited Mumbai in 1964 to attend the International Eucharistic Congress. Pope John Paul II visited India in February 1986 during which he visited different parts of India, including Missionaries of Charity in Kolkata and met with the Indian leadership. He again visited India on a State Visit from 5-7 November, 1999. He met with the then President Shri K.R. Narayanan, Vice President and the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee. During the visit he presided over the concluding celebrations of the special assembly of Synod of Bishops of Asia and he signed and released the post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation. New Delhi was specially chosen by the Pope to hold this Special Concluding celebrations. The special assembly of Synod of Bishops of Asia was held at the Vatican from April 19 to May 14, 1998. H.H. Pope Francis (from Argentina) was elected as Supreme Pontiff on 13th March 2013.

Several Indian dignitaries have called on the Pope in the Vatican. These have included the Prime Minister late Smt. Indira Gandhi in 1981 during her visit to Italy and the EAM, Shri I.K. Gujral in September 1997. Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Prime Minister, called on the Pope in June 2000 during an official visit to Italy. Vice President Shri Bhairon Singh Shekhawat attended the ceremony on the demise of H.H. Pope John Paul-II in April, 2005. Shri Oscar Fernandes, Minister of State for Programme Implementation and Statistics attended the ceremony for installation of H.H. Pope Benedict XVI on 24 April, 2005. EAM, Smt. Sushma Swaraj called on HH Pope Francis during her visit to Vatican for Canonization Ceremony of Mother Teresa on 5 Sept. 2016 along with Smt. Harsimrat Kaur Badal, Hon'ble Minister for Food Processing Industries and Justice Kurian Joseph, Judge Supreme Court of India and discussed various facets of bilateral ties and means to strengthen them.

Shri Oscar Fernandes, Minister of State (IC) for Labour and Employment, accompanied by an official delegation, visited the Vatican on 10-13 October, 2008 to participate in the Canonization ceremony of Sister Alphonsa on 12 October, 2008. Sister Alphonsa (1910-1946) of Kerala had been earlier beatified in 1986 by the late Pope John Paul II on his visit to India. She was canonised at the Vatican as the country's first woman saint and as well as being the fully Indian saint-Gonsalo Garcia, declared a saint by the church in the 17th century, had a Portuguese mother - Sister Alphonsa is the first representative from the Kerala church to attain such and honour within the Catholic Church. Two more Indians - the Blessed Father Kuriakose Elias

Chavara and Blessed Sister Euphrasia - were canonized by Pope Francis on 23 November 2014 at St Peter's Square in the Vatican.

An Indian delegation led by Prof. K.V. Thomas, Minister of State for Food and Public Distribution visited Vatican from February 17-19, 2012 to participate in the Investiture Ceremony on the appointment of Archbishop George Alencherry of Syro-Malabar Church as the Cardinal at the Vatican.

A delegation led by Prof. P.J. Kurien, Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, visited the Vatican on 24 November 2012 to attend the Investiture Ceremony of Major Archbishop Mar Baselios Cleemis, Head of the Syro-Malankara Church as Cardinal at the Vatican.

India was represented by Prof. P.J. Kurien, Deputy Chairman of Rajya Sabha, at the installation of Pope Francis on 19th March 2013.

On April 27, 2014, a high level delegation led by Shri Oscar Fernandes, Minister of Road Transport & Highways, represented India at the Canonisation Ceremony of Late Pope John Paul II and Good Pope John (Pope John XXIII) at the Vatican. The delegation also included Shri K.V. Thomas, MoS for Food; and Justice Cyriac Joseph, Member of NHRC. They had an audience with HH Pope Francis at the end of ceremonies.

Shri P.J. Kurien led the Indian delegation, which included Ministers from the Kerala State Government, for the canonization of the two Indian Saints the Blessed Father Kuriakose Elias Chavara and Blessed Sister Euphrasia - on 23 November 2014 in the Vatican.

Mother Teresa

Pope John Paul II held the late Mother Teresa in great esteem. He visited Mother Teresa at Nirmal Hridaya Ashram, the home for the dying and the first opened by Mother in Kalighat, Calcutta on February 3, 1986 during his visit to India. Speaking of his visit, Mother Teresa called it "the happiest day of my life." People of all faiths lined the 10 km route from Dum Dum to the Nirmal Hridaya to welcome the head of the Catholic Church, waiting for a blessing from him. "For the people of Calcutta the visit showed that the Pope's first concern were the poor, the dying, the suffering. With this act of love, compassion and kindness, he won the hearts of the people. " The Pope had called it: a sacred place where "the mystery of human suffering encounters the mystery of faith and love."

After her passing away, the Pope fast-tracked the process of verification leading eventually to the beatification of the Mother, one of the fastest in history as a gesture of goodwill and recognition of the work she did in India. The Pope beatified Mother Teresa on 19th October, 2003 in the presence of an estimated gathering of over 325,000 people. Shri P.C. Thomas, MOS for Law & Justice, led a delegation to the Vatican on the occasion.

On March 15, 2016 His Holiness Pope Francis decreed that Mother Teresa be canonized – conferred Sainthood. Pope Francis canonized MOTHER Teresa in a mass at the Vatican on Sun, 4 Sep 2016. Hon'ble External Affairs Minister of India Smt. Sushma Swaraj led the 11-member official Indian delegation for the Canonization

Ceremony. Three state level delegations from West Bengal & Delhi led by Hon'ble Chief Ministers Ms. Mamata Banerjee and Shri Arvind Kejriwal and a Ministerial delegation from Kerala and a delegation from the Indian National Congress Party also attended the event. Pope Francis declared in front of several hundred thousands people that Mother Teresa be revered as a saint. Hundreds of Missionaries of Charity sisters attended the event, along with 13 heads of state and government. EAM called on HH Pope Francis. Mother Teresa's canonization is an important milestone for the Church and for Indo-Vatican relations, as well as for the community in India.

His Holiness Pope Francis

H.H. Pope Francis, the first Pope from a developing country (Argentina), has been acclaimed for bringing a breath of fresh air to the Papacy. He has placed special emphasis on addressing the issue of environmental degradation, equity and social justice and his Papacy has been widely welcomed around the world. His Encyclical Letter, *Laudato Si'*, on 'Care for our Common Home', has gone into great and rigorous scientific detail into the ills of over consumption and the economic system that are placing an unsustainable burden on the earth's resources, and called for global action to address the causes.

Christianity in India.

Christianity is India's third-largest religion according to the census of 2011, with approximately 27.8 million followers, constituting 2.3 percent of India's population. Christian Population growth was at 15.5% (2001-2011). Christianity was introduced to India by Thomas the Apostle, who visited Muziris in Tamilakam in AD 52. Christians are in majority in 4 states Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Significant percentages of populations in Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Puducherry, Sikkim and Manipur. There are over 19.9 million Catholics in India, which represents around 1.55% of the total population and the Catholic church is the largest Christian church within India.

Useful Resources

http://www.va/phome_en.htm - Website of The Holy See

<http://www.vaticanstate.va/content/vaticanstate/en.html> - Website of Vatican City State

<http://www.holyseemission.org/> - The Permanent Observer Mission of the Holy See to the United Nations

<http://apostolicnunciatureindia.com/> - Apostolic Nunciature in India and Nepal

<http://www.indembassybern.ch/> - Embassy Website

<https://www.facebook.com/IndiainBerne/?ref=hl> - Embassy's Facebook page.

<https://twitter.com/indoswissvistas> - Embassy's Twitter Page

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