



PAINTINGS OF ST. ALOYSIUS CHAPEL  
— A NEW LIFE

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## PREFACE

The work of the restoration of the paintings inside the St. Aloysius Church, Mangalore is now over and the paintings have regained their lost glory. To us, who are with the Indian Conservation Institute of INTACH, it has been a most rewarding experience — technical as well as spiritual. When I first visited the St. Aloysius, I was wonder-struck by the beauty and the power of the paintings. By looking at them, and being with them, one got the feeling of supreme divine peace. For this reason alone, more than anything else, I decided to take up the task of restoration, challenging though it was.

The St. Aloysius College was set up in 1880 by some Jesuit priests who came to Mangalore in 1878. The Chapel is attached to the College and is dedicated to St. Aloysius Gonzaga, the Prince who renounced his Kingdom to serve religion and humanity. It was thought that the life of St. Aloysius Gonzaga was an example for the people and the students to follow and therefore, it was considered desirable to paint his life, and the life of Christ, on the walls of the Church and on the canvases which were fixed on the ceiling.

The task of painting the Chapel walls as well as the canvases, was entrusted to Bro. Antonio Moscheni who was born in a village called Stezzano near Bergamo in Italy on Jan 17, 1854. He arrived in Mangalore in 1899 and completed his work in 1901. It is amazing how such a vast area was painted in only two years.

Any work of art starts to get deteriorated quickly, immediately after its execution, and the paintings in the St. Aloysius Church were no exception. Just after 20 years of their being painted, there were reports of the deteriorating condition of the paintings. It seems that in 1930 itself, some restoration work was done inside the Church by some firm of painters who were engaged to repaint the pillars as well as the lower parts of the walls and several other areas.

The condition of the paintings became more alarming, and atleast for the last 30 years, there was a great concern about their deteriorating condition. Serious efforts were made by the Church authorities to conserve them by contacting several agencies, like the Archaeological Survey of India. Dr. B.B. Lal, then Chief Archaeological Chemist of the Archaeological Survey of India, visited the Church and submitted a report on their condition. However, for some reason or the other the actual task of restoration was not taken up by the Archaeological Survey of India.

Later, the Department of Archaeology and Museums of the Government of Kamataka was also contacted by the Church authorities and they also sent a team of archaeologists to have a look at the paintings and submit a report. Nothing much came out of that effort also.

Still later, contact was made by the Church authorities with the National Research Laboratory For Conservation of Cultural Property, when I was the Director of this Institution and a team of scientists was sent by me to Mangalore to prepare a report. However, before any further action could be taken, I retired from the NRLC and came to the Indian Conservation Institute.

At that moment, in 1990, Fr. Aveline D'Souza, the then Rector of the St. Aloysius Church, in his persuasive manner, prevailed upon me to visit Mangalore and help in the restoration of these beautiful paintings. My first visit to the Church was enough to convince me that these paintings were done with great faith, by a talented artist with full dedication. A decision was immediately taken by me to take up the work.

In this stupendous task, all help has been forthcoming from Fr. Aveline D'Souza, the Rector of the Church till 1992 and from Fr. Leo D'Souza who took over from Fr. Aveline in that year. Without their help and support this work would never have been completed.

All support and guidance has also been coming from the Members of the Trust of the Restoration Committee of the St. Aloysius Church paintings. I have never seen such a genuine love for works of art in the members of any other similar committee. My grateful thanks are due to all of them.

The decision to undertake this work was followed by a survey by Mr. Sukanta Basu, an expert of oil paintings and our Consultant at the Art Conservation Centre, Delhi to study the problems of the canvas paintings and prepare a proper action plan for their restoration.

The work plan for the oil paintings was thought of by Mr. Sukanta Basu, assisted by Mr. Sanjay Dhar, Sr. Conservator at that time and Mr. M.N. Manikandan. The preliminary work of putting up the scaffolding and preparing a stage for later implementation started on 1st November 1990. A scaffolding with the help of bamboos and planks tied with ropes in the traditional manner was set up to reach a height of 36 feet. The inaugural function to mark the beginning of the restoration work was held on the 27th November 1990 in the distinguished presence of Fr. Vicar General, Mr. K.P. Krishnan, Deputy Commissioner, Mangalore and Mr. Sadashiv Bhandari, Mayor, Mangalore City Corporation. It was a very exhilarating moment when the first canvas painting was brought down from

the ceiling for treatment on a specially designed table which was prepared after much thought and deliberation.

Simultaneously, after initial testing by Mr. Alok Kumar, Sr.Conservator, ICI, work also started for the conservation of frescoes.

The project has taken slightly more than 3 years and during this period several teams of Conservators have come to Mangalore and worked on the paintings. In the first year, the teams were coming both from ICI, Lucknow and our Delhi Centre, but later, on account of certain administrative difficulties, teams were coming only from the Lucknow Institute. Included in these teams were Mr. Sanjay Dhar, Mr. Shyama Prasad Dutta, Mr. Manikandan from the Art Conservation Centre, Delhi who worked during 1990-91 and Mr. Rajendra Prasad, Mr. Chandrasaha Bhat, Mr. Ashok Upadhyaya, Mr. Arvind Kumar, Mr. D.N. Srivastava, all from ICI, Lucknow who worked during the entire period for differing stretches of time. Photographic documentation was mostly done by the ICI Sr. Photographer, Mr. Ram Sagar Prasad and by Sr. Conservator, Mr. Ashok Upadhyaya. Graphic documentation was largely completed by Mr. Chandrasaha Bhat. The initial testing on the wall paintings was done by Mr. Alok Kumar. My grateful thanks are due to all of them for completing this task of restoration.

For this entire work, guidance and supervision of Mrs. Usha Agrawal, Director (Programs), ICI who helped me in preparing the first report and who visited Mangalore several times, was always available. My thanks are due to her also.

I have received help from Mrs. Mamta Misra in preparing the layout of the publication and from Mrs. Radhama D. and Ms. Neeta Pant for typing and other secretarial work. My thanks are due to them. I shall also like to thank the Anuj Printers who have printed this work in a record time.

I hope that these paintings will continue to live forever and will continue to enlighten the lives of thousands of students who pass out of the College and the members of the general public who visit the Church for peace and happiness. If that happens it would be our greatest reward.



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