UNIT 4 ASHRAM MOVEMENT

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4.0 OBJECTIVES
The origin of āshrams in India is traced back to the pre-Christian period. Christian Āshrams are of recent origin. Sometimes the motivations behind the establishment of Christian Āshrams were not understood and as a consequence misinterpreted. Our aim in this unit will be to

• have a clear idea of what āshrams mean
• to understand the convergences and divergences between āshrams of different religious traditions and Christian Āshrams.

Therefore to proceed in this regard it is necessary to discuss very briefly the origin of āshrams in India and the origin and development of Christian Āshrams.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The word āsrama is derived from the root śram, to exert oneself. It means a place where austerities are performed, a heritage. It may mean also the action of performing such austerities.

There were two currents of thought and life-styles, the brāhmaṇic and śramaṇic in ancient India long before they came to the surface and became remarkable to the eyes of outsiders like Megasthenes from Greece in the Fourth Century BCE. The brāhmaṇic tendency was Aryan, orthodox ritualistic and materialistic while the śramaṇic was unorthodox, non-ritualistic and spiritual.

It is probable that the śramaṇic tendency had its origin in the Indus valley civilization. The archaeological remains of the cities Harappa – Mohenjodaro show that they were cities, which flourished between 3000 and 2000 BCE and they were more advanced in culture than the Aryans. The people who lived in these cities were a settled down peaceful population. There are at least three seals depicting a God in yogic posture, padmāsana. They may be an indication of śramaṇic tendency prevalent in the Indus valley civilization. It is possible that when brāhmaṇic
ritualism began to dominate, the Aryans with a deep spiritual bent adopted or absorbed the śramanic tendency prevalent in Indus valley civilization.

It seems that āshrams originated in more than one way.

1. Deeply spiritual minded Aryans fed up with the ritualism and sacrifices of the brāhmaṇic period went into the forests to meditate on the symbolism of the sacrifices. Soon disciples gathered around them. It was at the origin of the Aranyakas and contributed to the origin of āshrams.

2. In the course of time, education had become the monopoly of Brahmins. In the beginning education was not obligatory for Brahmins. Later by the early upanisadic period, it was becoming obligatory. A Brahmin student had to spend at least 12 years with a Guru and study the Vedas. This period was one of strict discipline and the student had to practice chastity. Thus the time spent in education came to be called brahmacārya. When Vedic education was completed, the brahmacārinś students had several options. They could go home, get married and thus enter grhasthaṁ. Many opted for this. Or they could remain with the Guru for their whole life as naiṣṭikas leading a life of austerity. This also contributed to the origin of āshrams.

3. There were other students who retired to the forests to lead a life of austerities as vānaprasthas. Still others roamed about as parivrājakas, as those who left everything, sannyasins or bhikṣus, beggars. Soon disciples gathered around them and āshrams began to be formed. The following factors alarmed the leaders of the society: There was an exodus of intelligent and excellent youth from the society rejecting marriage and family life either to stay with the Guru or to retire to the forest and so forth as seen above to seek experience of brahman. So the leaders of the civil society divided the whole Aryan life into brahmacārya, grhasta, vānaprastha and sannyāsa, integrating various forms of life already in existence into one whole way of life. When Manu codified the laws, these stages became obligatory (Manu 6:37)

According to this system, every Arya had to be a brahmacārin in the house of a teacher, a grhasta, found a family beget children especially a male child to continue the family line and get them settled in life. When these family obligations were fulfilled, he had to become a vānaprastha. Retire into the forest to lead a life of austerities. Finally, he became a sannyāsin, parivrājaka or bhikṣu living without home, without anything, living on alms, free from all earthly ties, waiting for his release. All these various stages of life was integrated into an Aryans system of life style.

To understand what is expected of a Guru in an āshram, we must know also the prescriptions, which the code of Manu imposes on a sannyasin as a Guru is considered to be a sannyasin:

Departing from his house, taking with him pure implements, his water-pot and staff, keeping silence, unallured by desire of objects near him, let him enter into the fourth order [sannyāsa] (Manu 6:41)
The *sannyasin* has to be completely self-controlled and equanimous (Manu 6:48) His attention is turned to God alone:

*Delighted with meditating on the Supreme Spirit, sitting fixed in such meditation, without needing anything earthly, without one sensual desire, without any companions but his own soul let him live in this world seeking the bliss of the next* (Manu 6.49)

So total renunciation and deep experience of God is expected from a *sannyasin* and a *Guru*:

There are numerous Hindu Āshrams all over India.

### 4.2 Hindu Āshrams

Āshrams existed in India from Vedic times. They lost their prominence to some extent due to Muslim domination, followed by the British. With English education, scholarly studies on Hinduism by European and Indian scholars brought about an Indian renascence in the second half of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century. This renascence influenced also āshram movements.

Sri Rama Krishna Paramahamsa (1836-1886), a Hindu mystic entered into a variety of mystical experiences and taught the equality and complimentary nature of various religions. Soon disciples flocked around him and thus an āshram came into existence. But the one who founded a monastic community and gave a solid organization to it was Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902), a disciple of Rama Krishna.

**Rama Krishna Math**

Vivekananda established an āshram at Belur near Calcutta in 1899. There the friends and followers of Ramakrishna came together to lead a celibate, monastic life as a community. The conditions for admission to the math was that the candidate should be between the age of eighteen and twenty five, should have good health, good character, monastic temperament, ready to do any service and faith in Rama Krishna. They could be of any caste, creed or sect. After three years of probation, they are sent to study Hindu religion and philosophy for two years. Those who are found suitable are accepted as *brahmacārins* after taking 12 vows. After a training of nine years, those who are found fit are initiated into *sannyāsa*. They are given the ochre-coloured habit and a new name.

The āśhrmites follow the non-dualistic Vedanta philosophy of Sankara. Following Rama Krishna’s experience worship of a personal God is allowed.

**Gandhian Āshram**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, later Mahatma Gandhi gave a new orientation to āshram integrating both old and new elements. He took the vow of celibacy with the permission of his wife Kasturbai in 1906. He founded the Satyagraha Āshram on May 25, 1915 at Kochrab Ahmedabad. Sat means truth and Agraha means firmness. The members are to make constant effort towards the service of the country, not inconsistent with universal good. There were prayers in the morning and evening and spinning yarn during the day.

There were three categories of members in the āshram. They were: 1. Managers, who took the vows, 2. Candidates, who are to follow āshram observances 3. Students, boys and girls above four years. On reaching maturity after 10 years of education, they have the option to take the vows or leave.

Ramana Āshram, Tiruvannamalai
Ramana Maharsi (1879-1950) was born at Tirucculi near Madurai in Tamil Nadu. At the age of seventeen, he had a deep religious experience and began a life of contemplation and lived in a cave in Tiruvannamalai or Arunachala a sacred hill. Soon it became a place of pilgrimage and people of all sorts followed him.

He followed the advaitic tradition. To teach advaitic experience he proposed a simple method: who am I? and self enquiry. Irrespective of caste, creed or religion, all can follow this self-enquiry and reach advaitic experience. His approach was universal. God, the self and the world are indivisible. A person has to lead a life of tranquillity, non-violence and meditation to reach this experience.

Community life in the āshram is unrestricted. Each one is free to lead his or her life. Members were not obliged to attend the daily recitation of the Vedas. They met at meals if they wished so.

There are numerous Hindu Āshrams with lot of differences, yet following basically Indian tradition. Hindu Āshrams inspired Christian missionaries to think of founding āshrams.

Check Your Progress I
Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer
b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Trace the ways how the Ashrams in India originated.

2. Bring out some the characteristics of Gandhian Ashram.

4.3 CHRISTIAN ĀSHRAMS

There have been lot of misunderstandings and misrepresentations of Christian Āshram movement. There were also violent denunciations of the movement by authors like Sita Ram
Goel, however a minority. Even Christians were not able to understand the movement. It is not possible to enter into this controversy as it could require more than a volume to answer the objections and clear misunderstandings. Here an effort is made to present the Christian Āshram Movement in the proper light, at least for well meaning Christians and people of various faiths.

**Movements:**

A number of Christian beliefs and experiences contributed to the origin of Christian Āshram movement. In the first three centuries of Christianity, it was the experience of the Risen Christ, the witness of martyrs and the command of Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel to all the nations, which motivated Christian missionary activity. Later, salvation motive, that of saving souls inspired missionary enthusiasm. As the Church and theologians came to a better understanding and contact with other religions, salvation motive gave way to inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. In the meanwhile, hunger and poverty of the millions of people in developing countries, the oppression of the poor by the rich drew the attention of theologians. So liberation of the human person from all forms of slavery and oppression became an important motive for evangelization. The contact with the deep religious experience of Indian religious traditions, their spirit of renunciation attracted many of those who were interested in contemplation and mysticism. So sharing religious experience and inter-religious dialogue became part of evangelization. Āshrams were found most suitable for these purposes.

All these have been misunderstood and misinterpreted as a hidden agenda for making conversions. Some clarity as regards conversions is also necessary. There is a false assumption that Hinduism is not a missionary religion and so it is not engaged in making conversions. Jawaharlal Nehru in *The Discovery of India* has described the conquest, colonization and inculturation of South-East Asia by Hinduism. In modern times, there were and there are a succession of Hindu missionaries from Vivekananda to Radhakrishnan and to modern Gurus, God-men and God women making millions of converts to Hinduism all over the world. So religious traditions have to abandon prejudices and “holier than thou” attitudes, come together and agree on some basic principles.

One of such principle is that conversion is a fundamental right of the individual and no one has a right to prevent it. Forced conversion should never be made. As Keshub Chunder Sen said, none of these gigantic religions would cease to exist. They will not be able to swallow one another. Instead of engaging themselves in a game of blaming each other under various pretexts, let them be open and agree on some minimum principles and work together for the betterment of humanity. To achieve it āshrams can do significant service.

**First Attempt**

Robert De Nobili (1577-1656) was the first Christian missionary to make an attempt to establish a Christian Āshram in India. He was born in a noble family in Rome, became a Jesuit came to India to preach the Gospel. He found that missionaries were held in contempt due to their association with colonialists and practicing what appeared abominable to the Hindus like drinking, eating meat etc. Moreover, there was an unhealthy identification of Christianity with Portuguese culture, which was totally wrong. Christianity by its very nature is inter-cultural and transculteral. So De Nobili decided to adopt the life style of an Indian *Sannyasin*. He was
sincere. So he did not present himself as a brahmin, but Ksatria which was correct as he belonged to the Italian nobility.

Did De Nobili plan to start an āshram as such? It does not seem so. De Nobili’s āshram was a natural evolution. He became a sannyasin and adopted fully the life style of an Indian sannyasin like silence, vegetarian food, bath, etc. So the youth was attracted. Several became his disciples and thus an āshram way of life came into existence. With the suppression of the Society of Jesus, these types of āshram life cease to exist. Years later, a more systematic effort was made.

The Second Attempt
Brahmabandhab Upadhyaya (1861-1907) whose original name was Bhawani Charan Banerji was born in Khanyan a village about 30 miles north of Calcutta. He jointed the Brahma Samaj. In February 1891, he was baptized into the Anglican Church and in September of the same year he entered the Catholic Church and took the name Brahmabandhab. He wanted to start a Catholic Āshram.

In May 1898, Brahmabandhab wrote in his Journal Sophia:

“Monastic life is exceedingly congenial to the soil of India. In this age of materialism when contemplative life is despised India is still dotted with monasteries… considered from all points it is extremely desirable that steps be soon taken for the founding of a Matha (monastery) in India where Hindu Catholics may be trained to monastic life.”

Brahmabandhab envisaged two types of sannyasins; those who lead a life of contemplation in the monastery and itinerant ones who will preach the Gospel everywhere. They are to lead a very austere life. There should not be the least trace of Europeanism in their mode of life.

Mgr. Zalesrki, the Apostolic Delegate to India from 1892-1916 was opposed to this project. Mgr. Dalhoff sj, Archbishop of Bombay, who had consulted Zaleski was also opposed to it. Through Mgr. Charles Pelvat msfs, Bishop of Nagpur knew about this opposition, he allowed Brahmabandhab to open a Catholic Āshram close to Marble Rocks on the Narmada not far from Jabalpur. The āshram was opened in the beginning of 1899 with Brahmabandhab, Animananda from Sind, two Brahmin youth from Calcutta and another youth Shankerji from Tinneveli, Tamil Nadu following Indian āshramic tradition, they lived a very austere life, begged their food, cooked it by themselves and spent time in fasting and prayer. The caste distinctions were kept up.

Though begun well, the Apostolic Delegate Zaleski forced Bishop Pelvat to withdraw permission. The Bishop advised Upadhyaya to submit the proposals to Rome for approval. Brahmabanadhab decided to do so in person began his journey but he fell ill on reaching Bombay. On recovering he did not pursue the matter. Thus ended the second attempt to establish a Catholic Āshram.

The ecclesiastical opposition, the impulsiveness and unsteadiness of Upadhyaya caused its failure. On the positive side, the āshram had assimilated the simplicity and austerity of life with meditation and sacramental life. The maintaining of caste distinctions was certainly negative. It was contrary to Indian religious spirit as sannyasa transcends dharma. It was against Christian
spirit because Christianity promotes the equality of all human beings. All the same, this experiment was not in vain. For it inspired two European missionaries 50 years later to take up the challenge again to found an āshram which will integrate Indian āshramic spirituality.

The Third Attempt

The third attempt to establish a regular Catholic Āshram was undertaken by Abbe Monchanin (1895-1957) a French missionary, a man of vast culture who had a predilection for India and Fr. Henri Le Saux (1910-1973) a French Benedictine monk with a passionate interest in advaitic experience. They founded the Saccidananda Āshram in Shantivanam in Kulitalai, a village on the bank of the river Caveri not far from Tiruchirapalli. Monchanin took the name, Swami Parama arubí anandam and Le Saux, Abhishiktananda. Both felt that contemplation and its structured form monasticism were the best means of entering into dialogue with Hinduism and of manifesting the spiritual nature of the Catholic Church.

This effort also did not succeed due to the following reasons. The local clergy were not sympathetic to inculturation. There were no vocations. Monchanin passed away in Paris in 1957. Abhishiktananda was much concerned about integrating advatic experience into Christian life. So he left the āshram and became a hermit in Rishikesh. Thus ended the third attempt.

But their attempt was not fruitless. These failures paved the way for future successes. They had clearly laid down the basic principles, which govern a Christian Āshram. Abhishiktananda continued to encourage the founding of Christian Āshrams even coming out of his solitude occasionally for the same purpose.

Kurisumala Āshram

The idea of founding an āshram in Kurisumala was conceived at Shantivanam in 1955 by a Cistercian monk Fr. Francis Mathew (1912- ) as Belgian monk, later known as Francis Acharya and Fr. Bede Griffiths (1906- ) a Benedictine monk from England. The āshram takes its name from the place where it is established. After spending some time in Shantivanam, they established the Āshram in Kurisumala in 1958 under the Syro-Malankara diocese of Thiruvalla. Three currents of monastic thought and spirituality merge in Kurisumala. They are the Cistercian pattern of life, the Syrian liturgy and the monastic tradition of India. The dress, food and way of life are those of āshrams in India.

Saccidananda Āshram

We have seen that Saccidananda Āshram ceased to exist with the death of Monechanin and Abhishiktananda becoming a hermit. In 1968, Abhishiktananda handed over Saccidananda Āshram to Bede Griffiths who left Kurisumala and came down to Kulilalai to start the Āshram again. Under his guidance, Saccidananda Āshram became one of the leading Catholic Āshrams in India. The Āshram became a center of inter religious dialogue and a place where many came to seek guidance. These initiatives came from European missionaries. Soon Indians themselves came forward.
**Anjali Āshram**
Fr. D.S. Amalorpavadas (1932-1990) opened Anjali Āshram on August 15, 1979. It is a very systematically planned Āshram almost in every aspect from its layout to religious ideals and spirituality. The founder had an integral vision of an āshram. Anjali Āshram is to promote Indian Spirituality, contemplation, inter-religious dialogue, social service, liberation of the poor, ecumenism and multi-religious community.

**4.4 ĀSHRAMS AND CATHOLIC WOMEN RELIGIOUS**

The Catholic Women Religious of India have made a significant contribution to Āshram movement in India. Sister Sara Grant and Sister Vandana called Vandana Mataji both belonging to the congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and disciples of Abhishiktananda have contributed much to Āshram Movement. Both co-operated in the re-establishment of the Christa Prema Seva Āshram in Pune. Later Vandana Mataji started on her own Jeevan Dhara Āshram in Garkwal Hills, U.P. She wrote *Gurus, Āshrams and Christians* and edited *Christian Āshrams, A Movement with a Future?* Both Sisters were involved in promoting ecumenism; inter religious dialogue and Indian spirituality.

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**Check Your Progress II**

**Note:**

a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. What are the movements that gave rise to Christian Āshrams?

2. Examine the relationship between Christian Āshrams and women.

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**4.5 PROTESTANT ĀSHRAMS**

Although Catholics were the first to start āshrams, as seen earlier, the movement was stopped for more than 40 years after Brahmabandhab. In the meanwhile Protestants started a number of āshrams.

Christukula Āshram: Dr. S. Jesudasan and Dr. Ferrester Paton founded the christukula āshram in Tirupattur in Tamil Nadu in March 1921. The chief aim of the āshram was growth in spiritual life. After the death of Jesudasan, prayer and guidance of the Holy Spirit to enter the Kingdom of God became general to the training of members. The full-fledged members were called sevaks. To be a sevak, one had to make a novitiate of three years and to take temporary vows for
three years, which could be renewed. The daily programme consisted of prayer, meditation, work, study, recreation and village visit. Taking inspiration from this āshram, a number of protestant āshrams came into existence. By 1950, there were about 30 āshrams.

Christa Prema Seva Āshram (CPSA): Fr. Jack Winslow belonging to the Anglican Church founded CPSA in Shivajinagar, Pune in 1927. The āshram community consisted of three orders, first order of celibate men, Second order of celibate women and Third Order of married people. The āshramites sought to follow Christ as their Lord and Master in renunciation and sacrifice, in selfless service to people. Due to various reasons, this āshram was closed in 1962.

In 1972, the āshram was reopened again with an ecumenical community of women composed of Anglican Sisters of St. Mary the Virgin from Panch Howd and the Roman Catholic Sisters of the Sacred Heart of Jesus from Sophia College, Bombay. The CPSA belongs to the Church of North India (CNI). Sisters Sara Grant and Vandana of Sacred Heart Sisters did significant service in the re-establishment of this āshram as an ecumenical community.

So far, the origin and development of āshrams have been dealt with now we shall suggest some basic principles and characteristics that should animate āshrams in general and Indian Christian Āshrams.

4.6 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF AN ĀSHRAM

1. Every āshram adheres to its faith and religious tradition whether Hindu, Buddhist, Jain or Christian. They bear witness to their faith and religious traditions without fanaticism, without any forms of violence or intolerance.
2. Āshrams share their own experience of the Ultimate Reality, their spiritual experience in a spirit of peace and tranquility.
3. Āshrams are open to the teachings of various religious traditions; show respect to them even if they are contrary to their own belief systems.
4. Āshrams are places of prayer, meditation and worship as demanded by their own religious traditions.
5. Contemplation of Divine Realities and Mysteries holds the highest place in Āshrams
6. A spirit of complete silence is fostered in the āshram except in times of recreation. Silence is a symbol of the transcendence and immanence of the Absolute whose spirit pervades the āshram.
7. Āshrams remain open to the variety of religious experiences of various religious traditions and respect them.
8. Āshrams are to be places of inter-religious dialogue, peace and harmony. They foster inter-religious understanding and friendship.
9. Āshrams follow a life of simplicity and poverty. They bear witness to the spirit of renunciation, which animated the ancient sages of India.
10. They welcome all seekers of truth and offer them support and guidance in their search for truth.
11. In āshrams, there is no caste distinction. The equality of all humans are accepted. Theistic āshrams foster the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood and sisterhood of men and women.
12. Āshrams are centers of moral rectitude and integrity. They avoid entering into any form of politics as politics corrupt religious traditions.
13. Āshrams take an active interest in the social concerns of the people.

4.7 SOME FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CATHOLIC ĀŚHRAMS.

It is understood that the general principles enunciated for all āshrams apply equally to Catholic Āshrams.

1. A Catholic Āshram bears witness to the faith of the Catholic Church, promote respect and obedience to the hierarchy of the Church.
2. A Catholic Āshram confesses Christ as Lord and Saviour, God incarnate, and shares the experience of the Risen Christ.
3. While giving great importance to prayer, meditation and contemplation, they also follow the sacramental life of the Church.
4. The Holy Eucharist and Eucharistic worship and contemplation occupy a principal place in the āshram.
5. The āshram fosters Indian Spirituality and ways of worship. It assumes whatever may be directly assumed from Indian tradition like simplicity of life, poverty, and renunciation.
6. A Catholic Āshram remains open to all religious traditions, transcends all forms of caste and discrimination. Every one is welcomes as a brother or sister.
7. A Catholic Āshram is a place of inter-religious dialogue and harmony. Every religious tradition is respected.
8. Each āshram has a Guru whose authority is respected.
9. Members of the āshram form a single community of one heart and one mind, community that loves and cares for everyone, thus bearing witness to the love of Christ.
10. A catholic āshram is concerned about the poverty of the poor. They practice solidarity with the poor and support them in their struggle for liberation.
12. The Āshram remains open to all cultures and cultural differences.
13. A Catholic Āshram is to be a witness to the moral conscience of humanity, promoting life in all forms, opposing whatever degrades humanity and concerned about the well being of the whole creation.

Check Your Progress III

Note: a) Use the space provided for your answer

b) Check your answers with those provided at the end of the unit

1. Mention some of the characteristics of Āshrams in General

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4.8 LET US SUM UP

Traditionally, an ashram is a religious hermitage. Today the term *ashram* (Hindu or Christian) often denotes a locus of Indian cultural activity such as yoga, music study or religious instruction and meditation. The ashrams would usually be located in secluded natural surroundings conducive to spiritual instruction and meditation. The residents of an ashram regularly perform spiritual and physical exercises, such as the various forms of Yoga. These ashrams have always been a powerful symbol of unity, liberty, equality and fraternity throughout Indian history, and thus ashram movement transcends the barriers of caste, creed and religion.

4.9 KEY WORDS

**Asrama:** The word *āsrama* is derived from the root *śram*, to exert oneself. It means a place where austerities are performed, a heritage. It may mean also the action of performing such austerities.

**Padmasana:** God in yogic posture.

4.10 FURTHER READINGS AND REFERENCES


Haughton, G.C. *Manava Dharma Sastra or The Institutes of Manu.* Ed., P. Percival, New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 1982.


Check your progress I

It seems that āshrams originated in more than one way.

1. Deeply spiritual minded Aryans fed up with the ritualism and sacrifices of the brāhmaṇic period went into the forests to meditate on the symbolism of the sacrifices. Soon disciples gathered around them. It was at the origin of the Āraṇyakas and contributed to the origin of āshrams.

In the course of time, education had become the monopoly of Brahmins. In the beginning education was not obligatory for Brahmins. Later by the early upanisadic period, it was becoming obligatory. A Brahmin student had to spend at least 12 years with a Guru and study the Vedas. This period was one of strict discipline and the student had to practice chastity. Thus the time spent in education came to be called brahmacarya. When Vedic education was completed, the brahmācārins students had several options. They could go home, get married and thus enter gṛhasthāśrama. Many opted for this. Or they could remain with the Guru for their whole life as naisṭikas leading a life of austerity. This also contributed to the origin of āshrams.

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**Check your progress II**

1. A number of Christian beliefs and experiences contributed to the origin of Christian Āshram movement. In the first three centuries of Christianity, it was the experience of the Risen Christ, the witness of martyrs and the command of Jesus Christ to preach the Gospel to all the nations, which motivated Christian missionary activity. Later, salvation motive, that of saving souls inspired missionary enthusiasm. As the Church and theologians came to a better understanding and contact with other religions, salvation motive gave way to inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. In the meanwhile, hunger and poverty of the millions of people in developing countries, the oppression of the poor by the rich drew the attention of theologians. So liberation of the human person from all forms of slavery and oppression became an important motive for evangelization. The contact with the deep religious experience of Indian religious traditions, their spirit of renunciation attracted many of those who were interested in contemplation and mysticism. So sharing religious experience and inter-religious dialogue became part of evangelization. Āshrams were found most suitable for these purposes.

2. The Catholic Women Religious of India have made a significant contribution to Āshram movement in India. Sister Sara Grant and Sister Vandana called Vandana Maraji both belonging to the congregation of the Sacred Heart of Jesus and disciples of Abhishiktananda have contributed much to Āshram Movement. Both co-operated in the re-establishment of the Christa Prema Seva Āshram in Pune. Later Vandana Mataji started on her own Jeevan Dhara Āshram in Garkwal Hills, U.P. She wrote *Gurus, Āshrams and Christians* and edited *Christian Āshrams, A Movement with a Future?* Both Sisters were involved in promoting ecumenism; inter religious dialogue and Indian spirituality.

**Check your progress III**

1. Every āshram adheres to its faith and religious tradition whether Hindu, Buddhist, Jain or Christian. They bear witness to their faith and religious traditions without fanaticism, without any forms of violence or intolerance. Āshrams share their own experience of the Ultimate Reality, their spiritual experience in a spirit of peace and tranquility. Āshrams are open to the teachings of various religious traditions; show respect to them even if they are contrary to their own belief systems. Āshrams are places of prayer, meditation and worship as demanded by their own religious traditions. Contemplation of Divine Realities and Mysteries holds the highest place in Āshrams. A spirit of complete silence is fostered in the āshram except in times of recreation. Silence is a symbol of the transcendence and immanence of the Absolute whose spirit pervades the āshram. Āshrams remain open to the variety of religious experiences of various religious traditions and respect them.