

# INDIAN CHURCH HISTORY



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**ALPHA INSTITUTE OF THEOLOGY AND SCIENCE**

Thalassery, Kerala, India - 670 101

Ph: 0490 2344727, 2343707

Web: [www.alphathalassery.org](http://www.alphathalassery.org), Email: [alphits@gmail.com](mailto:alphits@gmail.com)

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**Editorial Board:** Rev. Dr. Joseph Pamplany  
Rev. Dr. Thomas Kochukarottu  
Rev. Fr. Joseph Kakkaramattathil

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**Office Assistance:** Bro. Shanet Chiranackal  
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Mrs. Jeshitha Vijesh

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# Elements of the History of St. Thomas Christians

Contacts between Mediterranean world, Mesopotamia, Persia and India began before fourth millennium BC. During the third and second millennium BC Indus valley and Sumer had very flourishing civilizations. Ancient tablets discovered from Ur the home town of the ancestors of Abraham indicates the existence of trade between Sumer and Indus valley. The *Brahmi* script of India and Sumerian are related. Gradually Dravidians from the Indus Valley were pushed to the south and north India underwent Arianization. The contacts between Phoenicia and South India go back to second millennium BC. Jews came into contact with south India in the tenth century BC following the commercial enterprises of Solomon. They were following the footsteps of Phoenicians from the *Tsur* and Sidon. The king Hiram of *Tsur*, the contemporary of Solomon (972-932 BC) promoted international trade with South Indian Coast. Spices like pepper, ginger, precious gems, ivory, gold, peacocks, apes etc. were

exotic attractions from South India. According to *Koder*, the first Jewish colony of South India goes back to the days of King Solomon<sup>1</sup>. After Solomon, Jews underwent the exiles in Assyria in 734-732 BC and Babylonia in sixth and fifth centuries BC. Gradually the deported Jews began to engage in international commerce especially with South India. Ordinary Jews forgot Hebrew and became speakers of Aramaic, the language of international trade. Babylon of this period was the greatest international market of the world. It was dependent and related to South India by sea route which extended even up to southern China.

In the seventh century BC South India served as meeting point between traders from East and West. Teakwood, sandal, rice, and other articles mentioned above were fascinating items in this trade. Teakwood from South India had been excavated in the Moon temple of Ur. Palace of *Nebuchadenazzar* (604-562 BC) was decorated with Indian wood<sup>2</sup>. Babylonian captivity of the Jews was terminated by Persian emperor Cyrus in 539 BC. But many of the Jews interested in international commercial enterprises remained in Babylon. Some of them settled in Malabar Coast<sup>3</sup>. Jewish exiles of Assyria were scattered among many peoples and countries. Some of them got settled in different parts of India. These two groups of exilic Jews were Aramaic speakers. In the second and first centuries BC, another group of Jews migrated to South India. So we see a pre-exilic, exilic, and post-exilic Jewish emigration in South India.

The Roman army conquered Egypt in 30 BC and took over the control of international commerce through Egypt. 120 ships used to sail every year from Red sea to the Malabar Coast. Within 40 days the Monsoon winds brought them to the Coast. With the help of opposite Monsoons these ships used to return to Egypt in the same year. Emperors Augustus (27 BC-14 AD) and Tiberius (14-37 AD) promoted trade between Egypt and Malabar Coast. More than 500 coins of Augustus have been discovered in South India. The coins of Emperor Tiberius from South India number over 1000. These are clear indication of the flourishing trade in the first century BC and the first century AD. The Persian, Arab, and the Egyptian navigators already knew the course of Monsoon winds. These already-existing knowledge was “discovered” by the Greek *Hippalus*. Thus a long kept secret was divulged probably during the reign of Ptolemy *Euergetes* (146-116

BC). Later the so-called discovery of *Hippalus* was divulged to Romans in the first half of the first century AD. According to *Peutingner* tablets from the second century AD Egypt, there is a temple of Augustus at *Muziris* near modern *Kodungallur* region<sup>4</sup>. The new discoveries from the archaeological excavations of *Pattanam* (a part of ancient *Muziris*) in 2007 have necessitated the rewriting of the history of Malabar Coast<sup>5</sup>. Naturally many Aramaic speaking Jewish settlers and traders were in Malabar Coast during this period. Roman trade expansion accelerated the presence of Jewish settlers and traders. Their forefathers were already familiar with Aramaic even in the pre-exilic period as we hear from many Old Testament texts. Alexander’s invasion of India resulted in further cultural and commercial contacts. An offshoot of official Aramaic (circa. 700-300 BC) appeared as Biblical Aramaic (Gen. 31:47, Jer. 10:18, Dan. 2:4-7:28, Ezra 4:8-6:8, 7:12-26). Edicts of *Ashoka* (272-232 BC) have been discovered in middle Aramaic (circa. 300 BC onwards) from Afghanistan. Then we find late Aramaic from which Christian Aramaic or *Syriac*, *Targumic* Aramaic developed. Finally, modern Aramaic appeared by 14<sup>th</sup> century AD<sup>6</sup>.

The apostles of Jesus Christ were commanded to bring the message of the gospel to scattered Jews living in different parts of the world. The Apostle Thomas undertook his first mission throughout the Persian region (including North West India) where he found many Aramaic speaking Jewish communities. In AD 50 he undertook the second mission which was prompted by the Aramaic speaking Jewish settlements of South India. Jews of the Malabar Coast readily accepted the message of the gospel. It is surprising that the seven Christian communities established by him were in the vicinity of Jewish settlements. Most of the then Aramaic-speaking Jews became Christians. The arrival of Thomas on the Malabar Coast was guided by the Jewish merchant *Habban*. The apostle was received and recognized first by a Jewish flute girl in the *Chera* royal capital. All these we hear from the first Acts of Thomas composed in the late second or early third century. Song of *Ramban* (revised and simplified in the year 1601 AD) also supports this. It speaks of 40 families of Jews converted by Thomas in the royal capital. Similarly he might have converted other Jewish settlements of Malabar. In AD 70 the Roman army destroyed Jerusalem temple and the Jews were scattered. Some of them came to settle in the Malabar Coast. The

Bar *Cochba* war (AD 132-35) resulted in other series of Jewish emigration to South India. Gradually they all became St Thomas Christians. Meanwhile their language Aramaic evolved into Christian Aramaic or *Syriac*. So there was a Judeo-Christian and Aramaic connection and continuity between the Persian Church and the South Indian Church right from the very beginning. This is how Christian Aramaic or *Syriac* became the liturgical language of St Thomas Christians. It was not at all later import by anybody as it is propagated by some interested groups. There was a cordial relation between the St Thomas Christians and Jewish settlers until the European colonialists came to the scene. The *Pesaha* celebration, ablutions, purifications after death, *Aramaisms* of their *Syriac*, purification of mother and child after child birth, the beginning and end of the day in the typical Jewish fashion, all point towards the Judeo-Christian roots of the past. Old Testament names were very popular among the St Thomas Christians which annoyed Portuguese missionaries. There were no statues or even pictures in the Churches of St Thomas Christians which might be a latent Jewish heritage as well as East Syrian tradition. Christians of *Kaduthuruthy* closed their eyes in anger and anguish as they were shown a statue of Blessed Mary. They admit only the cross in their Churches<sup>7</sup>.

The relation between South Indian Church and Persian Church goes back to the days of Apostle Thomas. The Persian Church was the fruit of his first mission. His second mission resulted in the emergence of St Thomas Christians in South India. These two Churches were culturally and linguistically connected. These relations continued ever since. In the late third century Mar David of Basra came to South India to help the St Thomas Christians. During the persecutions of Christians in the Persian Empire many Christian communities immigrated to South India and merged with the St Thomas Christians. In the fifth and sixth centuries some Indian Christian students and scholars had been associated with the School of Edessa and *Nisibis*. The series of Persian Christian migrations took place between fourth and ninth centuries to Malabar because of Persian and Islamic persecutions. One of the latest of these groups became *Southists* because of the appearance of caste system which was unheard of among the St Thomas Christians. By seventh century hierarchical intervention of *Selucia-Ctesiphon* took over. Until then

South India had hierarchical relations with the Persia proper. By ninth century this takeover was complete. It was voluntary undertaking from the part of St Thomas Christians rather than an imposition by the Persians or East Syrians. The Church of St Thomas Christians was more congregational than Episcopal. The ruling authority was in the hands of *Palliyogam* presided by the Archdeacon and the Gate of all India. Bishop was only a spiritual and monastic head for them.<sup>8</sup>

All the manuscripts burned by Diamper indicate that the Church of St Thomas Christians was theologically, spiritually, liturgically, canonically an East Syrian Church. The famous library and Episcopal archives of *Angamaly* were systematically burned. *Menezes* visited and burned *Syriac* books in at least 59 Churches. After *Angamaly* library, the *Syriac* collections of *Cheppadu* and *Chengannur* which were also burned, were the most prominent ones. Individual collections of all parishes too underwent this or similar misfortune. Evidently this is the greatest tragedy of Saint Thomas Christians' spiritual heritage. One can compare it only to the destruction of the Alexandrian library by the Muslim conquerors in 641 AD. *Angamaly* collection built up over many centuries was the most important intellectual centre of Saint Thomas Christians who had a theological University there. We do not find practically any historical record or document concerning the pre-Portuguese history of Saint Thomas Christians. So we depend on the testimony of non-Indian authors to describe the situation of this apostolic Christian community.

### Select Patristic Testimonies

Herewith I give only a few sample opinions of some of the *Syriac*, Greek and Latin Fathers who speak of the mission of Apostle Thomas in India or an apostolic origin of Indian Christianity. An exhaustive patristic view on the issue is out of my scope.

#### 1. *Pantaenus*

There are two texts associated with this scholar of the second century Alexandria. Both of them adequately attest the existence of apostolic Christianity in India in the second century. Moreover they possess a gospel text written in the spoken language of Jews popularly called Hebrew, but in fact Aramaic. *Pantaenus* the head of the Alexandrian school is said to have visited South Indian Christians about the year 190 AD at the invitation by the Indians. He found

among them a gospel text which he brought back to Alexandria. Eusebius the Father of Church History writes in the fourth century “*Pantaenus* is said to have gone among the Indians, where as is reported, He found the gospel according to Matthew among some people there who had already acquired some knowledge of Christ before his arrival. For Bartholomew, one of the Apostles, had preached to them and had left them these writing of Matthew in the Hebrew (Aramaic) language, which they had preserved till then.” Biblical scholar Jerome writes, “*Pantaenus*, a Stoic philosopher, renowned as an outstanding scholar, was sent to India by Demetrius, the Bishop of Alexandria to preach Christ to the Brahmins and the philosophers of that nation. And he found there that Bartholomew, one of the twelve Apostles, had preached the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ according to the gospel of Matthew.”

## 2. Acts of Judas Thomas (early 3<sup>rd</sup> century)

This apocryphal work speaks of Thomas’ mission in North West India (including Parthia proper) and South India. Legends and traces of history are rolled together in this work. But the kernel of the mission stories originated in South India which was reported back to Edessa. The double mission of Thomas is made into a single Indian mission.

## 3. Origen (c. 185-254 AD)

“The holy Apostles and disciples of our Savior were scattered throughout the whole world, Thomas, as tradition relates, obtained by lot Parthia,…”<sup>9</sup> The first mission of Thomas is what is meant here. Parthia is North West India during that period. The Mauryan Empire of India comprised also Afghanistan and parts of Iran, which was later broken up as Indo-Parthian kingdoms. The Alexandrian tradition reported by Origen does not distinguish between the first (North West Indian) and second (South Indian) missions of Thomas.

## 4. The Doctrine of the Apostles (3<sup>rd</sup> cent)

This 3<sup>rd</sup> century Syriac apocryphal work writes: “India and all its own countries, and those bordering on it, even to the farthest sea, received the Apostle’s hand of Priesthood from Judas Thomas, who was Guide and Ruler in the church which he built and ministered there.”<sup>10</sup> This fact is confirmed by the oral traditions of India, especially those behind Ramban Song.

## 5. Clementine Recognitions (3<sup>rd</sup> cent)

This third century work speaks about the first or Parthian mission of Apostle Thomas. “As Thomas wrote to us, among the Parthians to whom he preached the Gospel, polygamy is disappearing” (evidently due to Christian influence).<sup>11</sup>

## 6. Ephrem (c.306-373)

He is the greatest of Syriac authors, poets and theologians. According to him India is the mission field of Thomas who died and was buried there. The relics of Thomas were brought to Edessa by a Christian merchant. Miracles take place in India where his tomb is, and at Edessa. In his Nisibian Hymns (written between the years 360-365) hymn number 42 Ephrem writes on this in great detail. The passages are too long to be quoted.

## 7. Gregory of Nazianzus (c.329-c.390)

This Greek Father writes about the apostles: “Were not the Apostles aliens among the many nations and countries entrusted to them?... What had Paul in common with the gentiles, Luke with Achaea, Andrew with Epirus, John with Ephesus, THOMAS WITH INDIA, Mark with Italy?”<sup>12</sup>

## 8. Cyrillona (late 4<sup>th</sup> cent)

This gifted Syriac poet speaks of the mission of Thomas in India: “Behold THOMAS TEACHES IN INDIA and Simon preaches in Rome”.<sup>13</sup>

## 9. Ambrose of Milan (c.335-397)

Ambrose the Latin Father mentions India as the field of Thomas: ‘As the Lord Jesus said to the Apostles, ‘Go and teach all nations,’ even the kingdoms closed by rugged mountains were open to them, AS INDIA TO THOMAS...’.<sup>14</sup>

## 10. John Chrysostom (347-407)

This Greek Father speaks about the apostolic origin of Indian Christianity: “(The Apostles) erected altars in the land of Romans, Persians, Scythians, Moors, and INDIANS”.<sup>15</sup> He alludes to the well-known tomb of Thomas (in India).



**11. Gaudentius of Brescia (+c.410)**

“It is said that John (the Baptist) finished his course in Sebaste, a town in the province of Palestine, THOMAS AMONG THE INDIANS, Andrew and Luke in the city of Patras in Achaea”<sup>16</sup> Sermo 17, PL 20, 963.

He had their relics deposited in one of his churches. He alludes to the martyrdom and burial of Thomas in India.

**12. Jerome (c.345-c.419)**

The scholarly Latin Father writes: “As it is handed down to us by tradition, apostle Thomas preached the Lord’s gospel to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Carmans, Hyrcanians, Bactrians and the Magians. HE SLEPT IN THE CITY OF CALAMINA, WHICH IS IN INDIA”.<sup>17</sup> Jerome continues: “(Jesus) was present in all the places WITH THOMAS IN INDIA, with Peter in Rome, with Paul in Illyria, with Titus in Crete, with Andrew in Achaea, with each apostle in each and every country”.<sup>18</sup>

**13. Paulinus of Nola (353-431)**

This Latin poet speaks about the mission of the apostles in various countries: “Thus he gave care of Patras to Andrew, To John that of Ephesus along with Europe and Asia, Their dire darkness to dispel with the brightest light, Parthia embraces Matthew, AS INDIA DOES THOMAS”,<sup>19</sup>

**14. Jacob of Sarug (451-521)**

This great Syriac poet-theologian describes the mission and martyrdom of Thomas in India in three long metrical homilies.<sup>20</sup> Living close to Edessa he had easy access to the Edessan traditions regarding Thomas.

**15. Gregory of Tours (538-594)**

“It is said in the history of his martyrdom, that the Apostle Thomas suffered martyrdom in India... His blessed body was taken out after a long time and transferred to a city called Edessa by the Syrians and was interred there. In that part of India where it first rested stands a monastery and a church of striking dimensions, well decorated and structured. Now, it is in this edifice that God shows a great miracle.

The fire kept burning there before the tomb of the Apostle shines without fail day and night by divine will, without anyone supplying oil or twig... This has been narrated to me by Theodore, who personally visited the place.”<sup>21</sup>

**16. Gregory the Great (c.540-604)**

Pope (590-604) and Latin theologian speaks of the Apostle Thomas; “At night, the Lord appeared to Thomas in a vision and told him: Don’t fear to go to India.”<sup>22</sup> In the second coming of Christ Peter will appear with converts from Judea, Paul with his Gentile converts, Andrew with Achaea, John with Asia, THOMAS WITH INDIA.<sup>23</sup>

**17. Isidore of Seville (560-636)**

Last of the Latin Fathers writes: “This Thomas preached to the Parthians, Medes, Persians, Hyrcanians, Bactrians, and to the INDIANS OF THE ORIENTAL REGION. He sealed his preaching by his passion. Transfixed with a lance, he died at Calamina, a city in India where he was buried with honour”.<sup>24</sup>

**The Syro-Malabar Church**

The name Syro-Malabar is a misnomer invented and given by Rome in 1887 when the oriental catholic St Thomas Christians were separated from Latin or Roman Catholics of India. The term Syro stands for Syriac or Christian Aramaic the liturgical language of the community until 1968. The appendage Malabar is only the Syriac rendering of Malankara the traditional name of the Church. Ever since the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 St Thomas Christians were unofficially and informally leaning towards communion with Rome, though with some reluctance and resistance when they realized the loss of Syriac heritage. Since this is a debated issue among various groups I do not discuss it here. But officially imposed communion began with Diamper in 1599 and this lasted until Koonan Cross Oath in 1653.

Following the Oath we find two groups (Pazhayakur in communion with Rome and Puthenkur in communion with Antioch), but both groups following the same latinizations of Diamper. Antiochean traditions and West Syriac were introduced very gradually among the Puthenkur.

In this short essay it is impossible to give the details about the emergence of the present Syro Malabar Church which got liberated from the interim jurisdiction of Portuguese Padroado and Propaganda

of Rome. But more can be learned from the chronicle given below. 400 years of struggle for identity, native bishops, Syriac liturgical spirituality and local Indian traditions, should be seen behind. By 1896 the period of alienation and foreign rule is over, but at a great cost and as result of many struggles for native rule. But what we find at the end is an oriental and Indian Church Latinized to the very core. Instead of liturgical spirituality, a group of Latin and Occidental devotions like rosary, veneration of statues, various novenas, way of the cross, adoration of Eucharist took over and the latter serve to nourish the spiritual needs of Catholic Nazranis. So there is an ongoing inner tension to recover, restore, renew from within. At present it has a hybrid nature because of Western influence. But who can forget the tremendous spiritual and material progress of Syro-Malabar Church ever since 1896? Who can also neglect the fact that some seventy five percent of the Roman or Latin Catholic missionary personnel in India even today comes from the Syro-Malabar Church? Who can overlook the original apostolic credentials of this Indian Church with Syriac spiritual heritage?

### 16<sup>th</sup> Century

In the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century cordial relations between Portuguese missionaries and Thomas Christians existed to some extent. But already we find elements of friction because of the Latinizing efforts of many missionaries. It is clear that during this period the communion with Roman Catholic Church was introduced without much opposition from the part of Nazranis. Many of the East Syrian bishops were influenced and forced to do this. But surprise and fascination gave way to anxiety and worry during the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century as Latinization began to destroy the East Syriac traditions. In 1552 a group of East Syrians of Mesopotamia established communion with Rome under Mar Sulaqa. Since then East Syrian bishops belonging to both groups seem to have come to Malabar Coast and Nazranis were ready to accept any East Syrian bishop without prejudice to their communion. Gradually we find highhanded Latinization and open resistance. The climax of this we see in the so-called Diamper Synod (1599) which was illicit and invalid from the viewpoint of Nazranis.

### 17<sup>th</sup> Century

Latinizing policies of Jesuit Bishops who took over the Church of St Thomas Christians ended up in a tragic split within the community.

Bishops Francis Roz (1599-1624), Stephen Brito (1624-1641) and Francis Garcia (1641-1659) were responsible for this predicament. The role of the *Arkadiacon* was belittled and neglected. The once All India jurisdiction of an Apostolic and Catholic Church was reduced to a small corner. East Syriac connections were declared heretical by the European missionaries. This eventually led to the Koonan cross oath of 1653 at Mattancherry. Koonan cross oath is interpreted as declaration of independence from colonizing intruders. It was not a rebellion against Rome, but against the Jesuits. That is why most of the Nazranis came again under Rome through Carmelites sent by Propaganda. The Carmelites came as a commission for reconciliation in 1655. But Sebastiani their leader came back as bishop of *Pazhayakur* (Old party) in 1661. When the Dutch captured Kochi in 1662 Sebastiani was forced to consecrate Parambil Chandy, the native leader of the Pazhayakur. Unfortunately after him no native was given episcopal consecration and Pazhayakur fell prey to double jurisdiction under Padroado and Propaganda. Pazhayakur under Rome became more and more latinized, whereas Puthenkur (New party) underwent Antiochianization (Jacobitism) and a gradual polarization. Puthenkur began to accept West Syrian liturgy after 1665, at first with resistance. This transition of Puthenkur from East Syriac to West Syriac tradition is very gradual.

### 18<sup>th</sup> Century

Troubles for Nazranis began to abound under the Carmelites and Propaganda. A series of reunion efforts between Puthenkur and Pazhayakur were thwarted by Carmelite missionaries. In 1778 the Pazhayakur sent Kariyattil Yausep Malpan and Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar to Lisbon and Rome for reunion of Puthenkur. Their miseries, adventures and achievements are recorded in *Varthamanapusthakam* written in 1786. Kariyattil was consecrated as archbishop in 1783. But he expired in Goa under dubious circumstances and foul play. To pacify the anger of Nazranis, Paremmakkal was tolerated as Administrator. These two heroic and saintly sons of Pazhayakur wrote a glorious chapter towards reunion and identity of the Church. A noble layman Thachil Mathu Tharakan did his best for Nazrani reunion. Though reunion took place in 1799 it fell apart due to the apathy and intrigues.



**19<sup>th</sup> Century**

After the rule of Paremmakkal the Pahayakur fell between Padroado and Propaganda. When Padroado was abolished in 1838 they all came under Propaganda. But the fire of self-rule fanned by Varthamanapusthakam did not die out. Two heroic leaders of Nazranis were Kudakkachira Anthony Kathanar and Nidhirikal Mani Kathanar of legendary fame. Arrival of two Chaldean bishops Rokos (1861-1862) and Mellus (1874-1882) created a furore and Padroado got restored in 1864. Repeated petitions centred around Mananam resulted in ousting the so-called Seven Dolours (Ezhu Vyakulangal). All these brought about a kind of end to Carmelite rule over Nazranis in 1887 and finally by 1896.

**Traditions Raditions Immemotial****Concept of the Church**

St Thomas Christians held on to original, primitive, apostolic teachings of the pre-Nicene period. Church is the worshipping community keeping the Way of Jesus brought to India by Apostle Thomas. Church is called "*Palli*", a Buddhist term for believing community. For St Thomas Christians Church is not at all a building or place of worship; instead it is an assembly of people. When they say St Thomas established seven Churches in Malabar Coast they do not primarily mean that he built seven buildings as places of worship; rather they intend that he gathered seven communities who were to come together to a spot symbolized by *Sliva*. The term *Sliva* in Syriac means the CRUCIFIED ONE. Victory of the Crucified one became symbol of Christianity everywhere. In the second and third century Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles erection of a Cross by the Apostle missionary is a common item. Naturally St Thomas too erected Seven Crosses so that community could come together to it for worship. Later on the worshipping assembly (*Palli* or Church) itself got identified with the place or building. Buddhism and Jainism were the most popular religions of South India when Thomas came here. Sometimes we find the appellation of Buddha for Christ and St Thomas; also Mar Thoma Nazranis were termed Buddhists. These we find in the post-Sankara period. Until the Southists got separated from the Northists, sometime between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> century the Christian community was only one. The Northists joined the St Thomas Christians and the latter

too began to be called Northists because of polarization of some bitter division within one and the same community. The caste system developed by the time of Sankaracharya influenced this separation. Those who broke the rule went out as outcastes.

***Margam***

Those who became the followers of the Way (*Margam*) of Jesus Christ through the Way (*Margam*) of St Thomas the Apostle (Mar Thoma Shliha) used to say to their children: "We are the children of St Thomas the Apostle" (*Njangal mar thoma shlihayude makkal aakunnu*). Traditionally they were called Mar Thoma Nazranis. The name Nazranis is a very popular name for those who follow Jesus the Nazarene. In the pre-sixth century Syriac literature we find it, for example in the writings of Ephrem (c.306-373). It stood for Christians with a Judeo-Aramaic background. With the arrival of Islam on the scene it became rather derogatory in the Mesopotamian milieu. But the term remained very popular and acceptable in India. It is the European travellers who came across these Malankara Mar Thoma Nazranis, who began to call them St Thomas Christians of Malabar. With the arrival of European Latin missionaries the term Syrian Christians came to everyday use to distinguish the Nazranis from Latin Christians.

**Administration**

The Church or *Palli* was ruled by *Palliyogam*, a democratic group of elders on the local, regional and national level. It was a decision making body of elders presided over by the eldest priest. On the national level it was called Malankara Yogam which was presided over by the Arkadiacon of All India who enjoyed the status of a Christian prince and ruler. His voice was final for the Christians. The bishop remained a pastoral and spiritual head who usually left the administration of the Church to the Arkadiacon and *Palliyogam*. Church was more congregational than Episcopal. Bishops came from Persia and Mesopotamia and they did not interfere in the day to day worldly administration of the Church. Local leaders were efficient and happy to play such a role. All important matters of individual members, priests and community were discussed and decided by *Palliyogam*. Some European travellers describe this system as "a Christian Republic". It was local apostolic tradition that grew up into the rule of *Palliyogam*.

Participation and co-operation of the laity was paramount in *Palliyogam*. But during the Latinization period (1498-1896) this self-governing system got very weakened and redundant among Catholic groups. Among non-catholic groups it became a platform of battle between laity and clergy. At present the *Palliyogam* of the Syro-Malabar Church is an advisory rather than a decision making body. The role of the Arkadiacon has disappeared among the Catholic and non-Catholic groups.

Priests were ordained for a community with the written permission of *Palliyogam*. The community gave financial contributions and gifts to support their clergy. Though most of the clergy were married some priests remained celibate monks who were respected as Rambans and Malpans. The wedge between laity and clergy was unheard of; in and through *Palliyogam* they were equal partners. Future priests were trained in the pastoral and liturgical context of important parishes by select Malpans. Kammiz was the clerical dress worn only on official and liturgical occasions. Otherwise the married priests dressed like the laity and lived in their own families. But celibate Rambans and Malpans used to put on black dress. Usually priests earned their living by personal labour like the laity though they received contributions from the community they served. Celibacy and seminary system were introduced only in the 16<sup>th</sup> century by European missionaries.

### Agape

Local native customs and cultural elements were harmoniously blended together with Christian faith. Agape of Apostolic times is kept up even today to some extent. Different food items (eg. Food *nerchas* like *razakanji*, *thamuku*, *kozhukkatta*, *kallappam*, *neyyappam*, *unniyappam*, *aval*, *kanji*, *rice*, *pachor*, *puzhuku*, etc.), were offered and distributed in the Church. All are eager to participate in this kind of sacred meal in or around the Church in connection with worship. Both rich and poor, young and old offer and share this *nercha* agape. One tenth (*passaram*) of wealth was offered to the common needs of the Church. *Muthiyutt* and *Kal kazhukiyutt* were also widely practised at homes. In *Muthiyutt* a little boy, an old lady and an old man (representing child Jesus, Mary and Joseph) were given a sumptuous meal. *Kal kazhukiyutt* involves feeding twelve boys and a priest (representing the twelve Apostles and Jesus). In some villages we observe these even today.

### Fasting

On fasting days of Lent and advent Nazranis used to take only a single meal after the evening prayers. All those who were staying near the Church came for evening and morning prayers. Some came even for the midnight prayers. Those who were far away made these three prayers at home. Even children were woken up for midnight prayers. Many pious Nazranis ate only a few pieces of “*indari*” and “*kozhukatta*” from Maundy Thursday (Pesaha) until the following Saturday evening. Many kept silent vigil during these days. Even children were to keep silence; if at all they speak only in a very small voice. Some used to sit in the Church ( *bhajanamirickal*) on these days and other important days of fasting. There were some who did not eat anything for Three Days Lent. Fasting and abstinence on Fridays and Wednesdays (as prescribed in the first century work Didache) were a common apostolic practise among Nazranis. 50 Days Fast of Lent, 25 Days Fast of Advent, 50 Days Fast of the Apostles, 15 Days Fast, Fast of 12 Fridays after Christmas, 3 Days Fast of Ninevites, 8 Days Fast, Fast of the Virgins, Fast of Elijah, Fast of Transfiguration and other vigil fasts are an indication towards the intense ascetic orientation of Nazranis. Once we avoid overlapping days, the total fasting days come 225 per year! Fasting meant total abstinence from meat, fish, egg, milk and milk products, alcohol, sexual life, smoking, chewing betel, etc.<sup>25</sup>

### Pilgrimages

Nazranis were fond of making pilgrimages to places associated with Apostle Thomas’ mission work in South India. Mylapur being the spot of his martyrdom and tomb was one of the most prominent locations. St Thomas Christians from the Malabar Coast used to walk all the way to pray there. Usually it took twenty five days for pilgrimage to Mylapur. They went for this only after at least 21 days of spiritual preparations, fasting, abstinence, etc. All the seven Churches started by Thomas were also favourite places for pilgrimage. On Dukrana (July 3<sup>rd</sup>), many used to visit Paravur Church for participating in the *Chatham* of Apostle Thomas. It seems that Paravur inherited this legacy after 1341. In the past all the churches and even families used to conduct the *Chatham* of Thomas for those unable to go to Paravur.

Another regular pilgrimage to Paravur was on November 21<sup>st</sup>, the day on which Thomas landed at Maliamkara. Malayatur was another important pilgrim centre. Most of the ancient Churches were dedicated to St Mary and St Thomas. But Kuravilangad remained the most famous place because of the first Marian apparitions in history. Even today all the above mentioned pilgrim centres are very popular among Nazranis and members of other religions.

### ***Rakuli perunnal***

In the middle of the night of Denha (Epiphany) all St Thomas Christians used to take a public bath in nearby river or pond before entering the Church. This ritual bath is a reminder of the Baptism of Jesus in Jordan. On the same day at homes they celebrated “*pindikuthiperunnal*”. Oil lamps were arranged on the stem of plantain or banana trees and Nazranis went around it shouting repeatedly, EL PAYYA (meaning God is Light). In some places both these celebrations exist even today.

### **Pesaha Appam**

St Thomas Christians celebrate the Pesaha in a Christianized manner. On Maundy Thursday evening they “break the bread” and “drink milk”. This unleavened bread is called “*kurishappam*”. It is to be broken and distributed by the senior most male member of the family. Only Christians will be given a piece of this bread. So too they share a special thick drink made from coconut - milk. This bread and milk they make only for Pesaha. If a death has occurred in the family it will not make “*kurishappam*” that year. But relatives or neighbour bake two loaves of bread, one for itself and the extra one for this family.

### **Naming**

Most of the St Thomas Christian names were borrowed from Old Testament and New Testament. Names of early saints from the patristic period were also popular. The eldest boy is named after paternal grandfather; the eldest girl receives the name of paternal grandmother; the second boy and girl get the names of maternal grandfather and maternal grandmother respectively. Thus four names were always inherited in the family with great pride and joy. One could choose the name of the fifth child, though the choice was often that of an uncle, aunt, parent, etc. Thus we can say that most of the

names among St Thomas Christians are inherited from generation to generation. Even in modern times they rarely break this naming tradition. Often pet names are developed from baptismal names, but need not necessarily. All St Thomas Christians have their own family names which are always meaningful; this could be a historical, professional, geographical term which describes something about that family. These family names could be changed by emigration or some other reason. Nowadays these family or house names are termed as surnames because of European influence.

### **Burial**

All Nazranis were dressed white. This is only a symbol of the white garment of baptism. Even at funeral the dead is wrapped in white clothes. The crown of baptism, crown of marriage and crown of life (at funeral) are other meaningful symbols of religious identity. Nazranis like all other oriental Christians used to pray facing the east. It was a reminder of Paradise, Christ’s second coming and the morning of resurrection. At death bed a dying person’s head is to face east and the bed is arranged accordingly. Laity is buried with their head westwards so that their face ever ready to look at resurrection. But the clergy is buried just the opposite way as they are to come with Christ to welcome or judge their flock.

Nazranis dwelling far away from the Church used to bury their dead near their house. They used to erect a burial stone with oil lamps. Every evening they used to pour oil and light these lamps. Occasionally priests used to visit and pray at these private family tombs. This was known as ‘*kuzhimaada sewa*’ (service of the tomb). Those who lived closer to the Church buried their dead in the south, west and north sides of its courtyard, but never at the east side. Cemetery burial is a Portuguese introduction. Many private family tombs marked by tomb stones and lamps could easily be seen even in the twentieth century near Kuravilangad area. Recent cultivation of rubber plantations have destroyed practically most of them. Neither the political nor ecclesiastical authorities took any care in preserving these religious and historical monuments of St Thomas Christians. Most of them were pre-Portuguese.

No food is prepared or eaten in the house before the funeral. But children are fed by neighbours. A simple vegetarian meal called

'*pattinikanji*' is served after the funeral. All the close relatives take an ascetical vow for abstinence. They take only vegetarian meals until the death anniversary. This is very notable in the case of one or more adult sons (usually unmarried) of the deceased. He begins to grow beard for an year. He will not marry until the death anniversary. Eleven days after death there were special prayers at the tomb and a vegetarian meal at home. These were repeated at various intervals until death anniversary. Year after year the death anniversary was celebrated with special prayers, in the Church, at the tomb and home, culminated by '*aanduchatham*', a sumptuous meal. This meal starts with an antique custom. First of all two plantains are served to every participant. All eat them as the very first item. This symbolizes the fall of our first parents, Adam and Eve. They fell prey to death by plucking and eating the forbidden fruit. As the second item everyone is given three '*neyyappams*' or three '*unniyappams*' each. All eat these small delicious, sweet cake-like pieces of bread, symbolizing Eucharist, baptism, Christ and Trinity - life and resurrection. In this connection the Nazranis used to say: "That which came through eating of the fruit is gone by eating of the bread." (*Pazhathale wannathu appathale poyi*). After observing this unique and ancient custom St Thomas Christians proceed to the death anniversary meal. It is the privilege of married daughters of the family to bring '*neyyappams*' or '*unniyappams*' for this occasion.

### **Growth and Education**

Even before official baptism the new born is considered to be a member of the community by the very birth from Nazrani parents. Forty days after the birth of a boy (but eighty days for a girl) the mother will not go to the Church. Afterwards she goes to the Church with her child. Baptism was sometimes postponed for the sake of convenience. Soon after birth the name of Jesus Christ is whispered into the ear of the child. It is interesting to note that the name of Jesus Christ is whispered into the ear of any dying member of the Nazrani community. "*Isho Msihayku sthuthi ayirikkatte*" (Praise be to Jesus Christ) is the phrase with which the members greeted their parents, clergy, teachers, respectable elders, etc. With this greeting they used to kiss the hand as a sign of welcome and respect. Every day after family prayers children used to practise this ritual before parents and

elder members present there. The greeting was accepted by the recipients with a reply "*Eppozhum stuthi ayirikkatte*" (Praise be forever).

The newborn baby is fed with a few drops of honey mixed with milk, gold powder and a herb *vayampu*. In the 11<sup>th</sup> month after birth the parents bring the child to '*chorutt*' or first feeding with sweet rice. The priest feeds the child with a little sweet rice three times. Some years later the child undergoes "*Ezhuthinu iruthu*" (sitting for writing/learning). The child is seated in the lap of a teacher who, reciting some prayers, makes the child to write the letters of the alphabet. There begins a lifelong relationship between the child as disciple and the teacher as guide. On all important occasions the disciple is visited and blessed by the teacher. The disciple gives presents to his teacher on every such occasion. On the day before marriage this was very common sight in the past. The students used to treat their teachers like their parents with great respect.

### **Marriage**

Marriages were well planned and arranged between two families according to their social, economic, cultural, educational, political status. Individuals were less important than the family and community. Betrothal was in the family; but the crowning took place in the Church. The elaborate rituals and functions in the houses of both bride and bridegroom are worth exploring and this we have to skip here. In one word they imply the socio-cultural status of St Thomas Christians in the past. Many native customs were adopted after Christianizing them. "*Thalikettu*" is a typical example. A golden leaf (in shape of '*aalila*') containing a cross made of twenty one gold globes is the '*thali*' of Nazrani bride. Three or seven threads are taken from '*manthrakodi*' (bridal vestment) in order to form one thread to tie the '*thali*' around the neck of the bride. As long as the married woman is alive she will not part with the '*thali*'. When she dies it is deposited in the coffer of the Church; often the portion with twenty one crosses is broken for this offering in the Church. The thread and the '*kozha*' (hole or handle) are buried with her. This symbolizes the sacredness and indissolubility of Nazrani marriage. Divorce and adultery were unheard of among traditional St Thomas Christians. So too the evils like murder, alcoholism, theft, etc. were frowned upon.



**Chronicle: Early Period**

AD 50 November St Thomas the Apostle lands at Maliamkara near Kodungalloor the Chera royal capital. He converts a few and after a week goes to Chola Kingdom and China.

AD 51 November St Thomas arrives again at Maliamkara.

AD 52 Conversions and establishment of Church (= a fully fledged ecclesial unit with liturgical leaders) at the Chera royal city of Maliamkara. He starts such Churches or communities at Kollam, Thrikpaleswaram, Chayal, Niranam, Kokamangalam, Kottakayal, Palur. Thrikpaleswaram was shifted to Niranam because of adversities.

AD 59 St Thomas goes to Mylapur and Chola Kingdom, conversions and establishment of Church.

AD 62 St Thomas returns to Malankara coast via Malayatur where he establishes 'the half Church' (a small Christian community dependant on the Church of Maliamkara).

AD 69 St Thomas goes to Pandi and other kingdoms

AD 72 July 3 St Thomas martyred at Mylapur.

AD 50-100: Thomas stories and legends develop in South India. The most famous develop orally in the so called Seven and half Churches. Christian persecutions result in emigrations to Angamaly, Pallipuram, Kaduthuruthy and Kuravilangad. Marian apparitions at Kuravilangad.

AD 100-180 South Indian Thomas stories reach Persia, Mesopotamia and especially Edessa.

AD 190 *Pantaenus* visits South India at the invitation of Christians there.

200-250 Relics of Thomas arrives in Edessa from Mylapur. A revised version of the Acts of Judas Thomas written in Syriac.

295 Mar David of Basra leaves for South India.

325 Council of Nicaea

363-365 Mar Aprem describes the powerful relics of Thomas in Edessa brought from India by a Christian merchant.

381 Council of Constantinople

440 Daniel the Indian scholar helps the translation works at the School of Edessa.

470 Mar Ma'na of Riwardashir sends liturgical and hymn books in Persian and Syriac to India.

500-1000 Crosses of Mylapur, Kodungallur (two crosses now at Kottayam Valiyapally), Kaduthuruthy (two crosses), Alangad, Muttuchira, Kothanallur and Kadamattam, and Goa. Two similar crosses are from Anuradhapura (Sri Lanka) and Singanfou (China). To call them 'Persian Crosses' would be a misnomer. Excavations will result in the discovery of similar crosses from Malabar.

522 Cosmas Indicopleustes visits the Indian and East Syrian Christians here.

660 East Syrian Patriarch Isho Yahb III rebukes Mar Simeon of Riwardashir for neglect of sending bishops to India.

760 Church of India reconstituted under the Metropolitan and Gate of All India.

813 Arrival of Persian bishops Mar Sapor and Mar Proth at Kollam.

1002 Oldest Syriac inscription so far discovered, at the step of the altar at the old Cathedral of Palai.

1291 John Monte Corvino visits India.

1295 Marco Polo visits Malabar and Mylapur.

1301 Fourteen year old Deacon Scaria son of Yawsep son of Scaria writes Vat Syr 22 at the Church of Mar Kuriakose at Kodungallur. It is an East Syriac lectionary on Pauline letters. Metropolitan Mar Yakob sits on "The Throne St Thomas" and Yahb Allaha III is the Patriarch. This is the oldest surviving Syriac manuscript of Indian origin.

1321 Four Franciscans martyred at Thane near Mumbai.

1321 Dominican Jordanus Catalani visits India.

1329 Pope John XXII sends bishop Jordanus Catalani to Kollam.

1341 Ancient city of Kodungallur (Muchiri) disappears in natural calamity.

1350 Papal Nuncio John Maringoly visits Kollam.

1425 Nicolo Conti visits the East Syriac Christians at Mylapur.

1496 East Syrian bishops Mar Thoma and Mar Yohannan arrive from Mesopotamia.

**Period of Latinization**

1498 Vasco de Gama lands at Kozhikod (Calicut).

1502 Joseph the Indian priest visits Portugal and Rome.

1503 Kochi under Portuguese rule.

1504 East Syrian bishops Mar Thoma, Mar Yahb Alaha, Mar Denha and Mar Yakob arrive in Malabar.

1504 Kodungallur captured by the Portuguese. Syrian Christians begin to leave Kodungallur. 1510 Portuguese Franciscans arrive in India.

1540 Franciscans start a seminary at Kodungallur.

1541 Jesuits start St Paul's seminary at Goa.

1542 Francis Xavier and Jesuits in Malabar.

1547 St Thomas Cross discovered at Mylapur.

1552 Hierarchy in Goa.

1558 Chaldean bishops Mar Abraham and Mar Joseph in Malabar. 1565 Angamaly Archdiocese.

1577 Vypinkotta Seminary.

1597 Death of Mar Abraham the last Chaldean Metropolitan of India.

1599 Udayamperur (Diamper) Synod. Latin rule forced upon St Thomas



Christians. Forceful latinizations go on.

1601 All India jurisdiction of St Thomas Christians restricted to Malabar. Jesuit Francis Roz appointed for St Thomas Christians.

1609 Kodungallur becomes diocese instead of Angamaly.

1624 Dominican Seminary at Kaduthuruthy.

### Period of Divisions

1653 January 3 Koonan Cross Oath at Mattancherry. A few months later 12 priests place their hands on Mar Thoma Arkadiakon and declare him Metropolitan.

1661 Mar Sebastiani arrives as Vicar Apostolic. Already the St Thomas Christians are divided into two factions (Puthenkur and Pazhayakur). Pazhayakur became Syro-Malabar Church and Chaldean Syrian Church of Trichur. Puthenkur developed into Independent Syrian Church of Thozhiyur (1772), Yakobaya Church (1665-1876), Mar Thoma Syrian Church (1876), Malankara Orthodox Church (1912) and Malankara Catholic Church (1930/32).

1663 The Dutch overthrow the Portuguese in Kochi.

1663 Palliveetil Mar Chandy consecrated as the first native Vicar Apostolic since Sebastiani had to quit India.

1665 Mar Grigorios of Jerusalem arrives. In history he is the first ever West Syrian or Antiochean bishop to come to India. He is the starting point of Antiochean and Yakobaya connection in India.

1687 Death of Palliveetil Mar Chandy.

1701 Chaldean bishop Mar Simeon reaches Malabar and consecrates Angelo Francis.

1705 Mar Gabriel arrives.

1735 Death and burial of Mar Gabriel at Kottayam Cheriya pally.

1752 Devasahayam Pillai martyred.

1778 Kariyattil Yawsep Malpan and Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar travel to Lisbon and Rome to reunite the St Thomas Christians into one fold.

1783 Yawsep Kariyattil from Alangad consecrated Metropolitan of Kodungallur.

1786 Mar Kariyattil "martyred" at Goa.

1786 Paremmakkal becomes the Administrator of Kodungallur.

1786 Angamaly Padiyola.

1799 Demise of Administrator Mar Thomas Paremmakkal at Ramapuram.

1814 Demise of Thachil Mathu Tharakan

1857 Kudakkachira Anthony Kathanar died at Baghdad.

1861 Chaldean bishop Mar Thoma Rokos arrived. In 1862 he is forced to return.

1862 Anthony Thondanat approached the Chaldean Patriarch to be

consecrated but got rejected. Then he was consecrated as Mar Abdisho at Kurdistan by Patriarch Mar Ruwel Shimon.

1866 Puthenpally Seminary.

1874 'Seven Dolours' expelled from TOCD.

1874-82 Chaldean bishop Mar Eliah Mellus in Trichur. He was forced to return in 1882. But Mar Abdisho took charge of the community under Mellus.

1876 Apostolic Visitor Leo Meureen arrives.

1885 Apostolic Delegate Anthony Aliyardi arrives.

1886 Latin hierarchy of Varapuzha.

### Syro-Malabar Church

1887 Vicariates of Kottayam and Trichur. Two Latin and non-Indian bishops were entrusted with the so-called Syro-Malabar Church.

1896 Vicariates of Ernakulam, Kottayam (Changanachery) and Trichur with native bishops.

1900 Nov 16 Mar Abdisho died in Trichur.

1904 June 20 Demise of Nidhirikal Mani Kathanar

1908 Feb 27 East Syrian Mar Abimalek Timotheos reached Trichur and re-introduced East Syriac traditions though the community was called CHALDEAN SYRIANS.

1911 Vicariate of Kottayam for the Southists.

1923 Syro-Malabar hierarchy.

1930 Reunion of Mar Ivanios and followers result in the creation of SYRO-MALANKARA CHURCH in 1932.

1932 Puthenpally Seminary shifted to Mangalapuzha.

1946 Death of St Alphonsa at Bharananganam.

1950 Dioceses of Changanacherry and Palai.

1953 Cardinal Tisserant's visit.

1953 Thalasserry diocese.

1954-1959 CMI priests work in Ambikapur mission, but after a few years ousted because of their being Syro-Malabar.

1955 Syro-Malabar jurisdiction extended beyond Pampa and Bharathapuzha because of Tisserant and Fr.Placid.

1956 Changanacherry Archdiocese.

1957 Kothamangalam diocese.

1961 Relics of Mar Kariyattil brought from Goa to Alangad. 1962 Chanda mission to CMI priests.

1962 Vadavathur Seminary.

1962 Restoration of Syro-Malabar Qurbana.

1968 Exarchates of Chanda, Ujjain, Satna and Sagar.

1972 Exarchates of Bijnor and Jagdalpur.

- 1973 Diocese of Mananthavady.  
 1974 Diocese of Palakkad.  
 1977 Diocese of Kanjirappally.  
 1978 Diocese of Iringalakuda.  
 1983 Diocese of Rajkot.  
 1984 Diocese of Gorakpur.  
 1986 Renewed Syro-Malabar Qurbana.  
 1986 Diocese of Thamarasserry.  
 1988 Diocese of Kalyan.  
 1993 Syro-Malabar Church becomes Major Archiepiscopal. Mar Anthony Padiyara becomes the Major Archbishop and Mar Abraham Kattumana, the Pontifical Delegate.  
 1995 Trichur and Thalasserry Archdioceses.  
 1996 Diocese of Thakkala.  
 1997 Mar Varkey Vithayathil becomes Apostolic Administrator, later the Major Archbishop. 1999 Diocese of Adilabad.  
 1999 Diocese of Belthangadi.  
 2001 Syro-Malabar Diocese of Chicago.  
 2003 Diocese of Idukki.  
 2007 Diocese of Bhadravathy.  
 2008 Canonization of St Alphonsa.  
 2010 Diocese of Mandya.  
 2010 Diocese of Ramanathapuram.  
 2011 Mar George Alencherry elected as the Major Archbishop.

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### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> S. S. Koder, Kerala and her Jews, (Ernakulam 1965), p.2; IKg 9:26-28, 10:22.
- <sup>2</sup> J. Kennedy "Early commerce of Babylon and India", JRAS, 1898.
- <sup>3</sup> S. S. Koder, op.cit, p.4.
- <sup>4</sup> G. F. Hourani, Arab sea fairing in the Indian ocean in ancient and medieval times, (Beirut 1963), pp. 24ff. H. G. Rawlingson, Intercourse between and the western world, (Cambridge 1916), pp. 121.
- <sup>5</sup> The Hindu, December 9, 2009, pp. 18, May 16, 2010 pp. 24, March 14, 2011, pp.18, October 26, 2011, pp.8.
- <sup>6</sup> "Aramaic", Encyclopaedia Judaica, 2nd ed., vol. 2, 342-353.
- <sup>7</sup> P. Malekandathil, ed., Jornada of Dom De Menezes (Kochi 2003), pp.237, 190, 244, 245.
- <sup>8</sup> For further details see my article "Judeo-Christian and Patristic roots of St. Thomas Christians" in Mar Thoma Margam, ed. A Mekkattukunnel, (Vadavathoor 2012), pp. 71-72.
- <sup>9</sup> K.Lake, Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History III, I (London 1959), I, p.191.
- <sup>10</sup> W.Cureton, Ancient Syriac Documents (London 1864, repr. Amsterdam 1967), p.33.
- <sup>11</sup> PGI, 1415.
- <sup>12</sup> Oratio 33, Contra Arianos 11, PG 36, 228.
- <sup>13</sup> C. Vona, I Carmi di Cirillona (Rome 1963), p.151.
- <sup>14</sup> Ennaratio in Ps 45, PL 14, 1143.
- <sup>15</sup> Quod Christus sit Deus 6; cf. Homily 4, NPNF XI, p. 29.
- <sup>17</sup> De Vitis Apostolorum 5, PL 23, 721B.
- <sup>18</sup> Epist.59 Ad Marcellam, CSEL 54, 546.
- <sup>19</sup> CSEL30, 1894, carmen 19.
- <sup>20</sup> W.Strothmann, Jakob von Sarug: Drei Gedichte ueber den Apostel Thomas in Indien (Wiesbaden 1976).
- <sup>21</sup> Miraculorum libri.I. De gloria martyrum , I, 507-508. PL 71, 733.
- <sup>22</sup> Liber Responsorialis, PL 78, 819C.
- <sup>23</sup> Homil.in Evang.1,17,17.
- <sup>24</sup> De ortu et obitu patrum, 74, 132, PL 83, 152C.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf.J. Aerthayil, The Spiritual Heritage of the St Thomas Christians (Bangalore 1982, repr.2001).

## Chapter 2

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### The Saint Thomas Christians in India (52 to 1687 AD)

In the picture above: One of the most impressive granite crosses of Kerala, which stands in front of the Syro-Malabar Catholic church of Angamaly (by now the ancient church has been demolished). These granite crosses normally stood, as they now partly stand, in front of the Western entrance to the church. Although they are undatable, many of them, such as this one, may have been erected in the pre-Portuguese period. On this picture one may clearly see the most important symbolic representations of the Saint Thomas Christians: in the middle, the “Saint Thomas Cross,” the shape of which goes back to reliquary crosses said to have been carved by Saint Thomas himself; underneath, an angel in worship; the wings of the cross end in lotus buds.

#### 1. On the St Thomas Christians

The Saint Thomas Christians refer to themselves in this way because their tradition holds that their ancestors, who all came from the high castes of Hindu society,

were converted by the Apostle Saint Thomas, who landed in India in the year 52 AD. At present there is no way to scientifically prove or disprove this tradition. One thing is certain: ever since the discovery of the monsoon winds in 45 AD by Hippalos, an Alexandrian ship-captain, the land and sea routes were open from the Mediterranean via the Persian Gulf to India, and there were indeed intense contacts between these areas. One after the other, Roman coins of the first century AD are being unearthed in southern India.

Be that as it may, the tradition of Christ’s Apostle doing missionary work in India is the principal formative element of the identity of a large and flourishing (at present seven million-strong) community. At a certain stage of its history, this community entered into intense contacts with the Syrian Christian world. Tradition also tells us that this happened in 345 AD, when Thomas of Kana, a rich Syrian merchant from Persia, also landed in Cranganore, accompanied by seventy families. Their descendants, the endogamous Knanaya community, boast of having preserved pure Syrian blood. Thomas of Kana and the bishops who accompanied him established a permanent contact with the Syrian Church. So, if we are to believe tradition, ever since Thomas of Kana the Malabar Church, consisting of an Indian and a Syrian component, has ecclesiastically and culturally belonged to the Syrian Christian world. Thus the St Thomas Christians constitute an unique community, whose native tongue is Malayalam, whose everyday culture and customs are typically Indian and whose language of worship and of high culture has been Syriac for many centuries.

In fact, for this high-caste Indian Christian community Syriac had the same social function as Sanskrit had for the neighbouring Hindu high-caste society.

#### 2. Traditions about St Thomas the Apostle

According to tradition, Christianity in Kerala was founded by Saint Thomas the Apostle, who landed on the Malabar Coast, at Maliankara near Cranganore (Kodungallur), in 52 AD. Why precisely in 52 is difficult to say, but this date is firmly held in the present tradition of the St Thomas Christians. For how long the date has been established is an interesting question in itself. The modern Malayalam ballad Thomas Ramban Pattu (“The Song of the Lord

Thomas”), which gives absolutely precise data about the details of the Apostle’s activity, dates his arrival to 50 AD, in the month of Dhanu (December), and his death in Mylapore (Mailapuram) to 72 AD, on the 3rd day of the month of Karkadakam (July), corresponding to the traditional memorial day of the Apostle in the Syrian Churches, at 4:50 p.m. However, this apparently reflects a later tradition. Recently we found an earlier tradition in a palm-leaf manuscript belonging to the collection of the Syro-Malabar Major Archbishop’s House in Ernakulam, which, among eighteen Malayalam apocrypha, also contains the Malayalam version of the Acts of Thomas. The seventeenth-century redactor’s note to this apocryphon dates the death of Saint Thomas to December 21 and says that on that very day the Apostle’s memorial day (Dukhrana) was universally celebrated in the Malankara Church.

On his arrival - so tradition holds - the Apostle converted several Brahmin families, from whom a good part of the present-day Nazranies descend, and founded seven churches: Maliankara (Kodungallur or Cranganore), Palayur, Kottakavu (North Parur), Kokamangalam (Pallipuram), Niranam, Chayal and Kollam (Quilon). There is a beautiful story vividly recounted among the local Christians and invoked in many books about the foundation of the Palayur church, not far from Cranganore where Saint Thomas is believed to have landed, and close to Guruvayur, the famous centre of Krishna worship. According to this tradition, the Apostle arrived there and found several nambudhiri (or namputhiri) Brahmins (that is, Kerala Brahmins) bathing in a tank and throwing up handfuls of water as an offering to their sun-god. He asked them whether they were able to throw the water up so that it could stay suspended in the air without falling back down, as a proof that their god had accepted it. The Brahmins replied this was impossible; the Apostle performed a miracle and the water remained in the air, proving that Christ had accepted the offering. This convinced the Brahmins, who accepted baptism from the Apostle in the same tank. Their temple was transformed into a Christian church, while those who stuck to their Hindu faith fled from the place. They cursed the land and called it Chapakatt (Chowghat in the Anglicised version, now Chavakkad), “the Cursed Forest.”

Some sixteenth-century Portuguese sources, partly edited but for the most part unedited, studied by the very learned Fr. Mathias

Mundadan, the doyen of Indian Church history, speak about converted kings, from whom another name of the community, Tarijanel, which tradition interprets as “sons of kings,” derives. Later the Apostle went to the eastern Coromandel Coast, where he also converted people, and finally died on the Little Mount in Mylapore, nowadays a suburb of Chennai (Madras). There are several versions of the details of the Apostle’s death, the most fantastic of which states that one day a hunter out hunting peacocks saw a group of them seated on a flat stone. He shot an arrow at the leader of the group, which was transformed into a man and fell down dead. This was the Apostle. Other accounts, emphasising the point that Saint Thomas died a martyr’s death, speak about furious Brahmins who pierced the Apostle with a lance, either when he was praying in rapture in a cave or when he destroyed, by means of his cross, a temple dedicated to the goddess Kali. His tomb is venerated in Mylapore up to the present day, and pilgrimage to the tomb has always been an important element in the religious life of the St Thomas Christian community.

The tradition that locates the Apostle’s activity in two places, Kerala on the western and Coromandel on the eastern coast of southern India, corresponds to the historical existence of two communities. However, some calamities have destroyed the eastern community, which at some time (differently specified in the different sources) had to migrate westward and to unite with the one in Kerala. A version of the tradition transmitted by Francisco Roz, the first Latin bishop (residing in Angamaly) of the St Thomas Christians, does not know about the preaching of the Apostle on the Malabar Coast, but holds that all the St Thomas Christians emigrated there from the east. An interesting element of the local traditions is that - at least in Portuguese times - the same stories were told on the western and on the eastern coast, but connected to different localities. At present there is no autochthonous Christian community on the Coromandel Coast.

In Kerala almost every village has its local Saint Thomas tradition, full of miraculous elements. Just to collect them would be a very important task of anthropological research.

Most of the literature on the question treats the historicity of the Apostle’s presence and activities in India, trying to combine the different western and eastern testimonies with elements of local tradition and



archaeological findings. The general outcome of these investigations is that the question of the historicity of the tradition is unsolvable by means of the scholarly methods that we have at our disposal. The strongest argument in favour of the historicity remains nothing other than the tradition itself, an unanimous tradition held not only in India, but also in the whole Christian Orient. Here we also face something quite extraordinary, which deserves a different approach. In fact, the very existence of the traditions concerning the Apostle, divergent in their details but unanimous in their core message, and the role of these traditions shaping the self-identity of the community, is a matter of objective fact. Setting aside the question of how true historically the tradition is, we should recognise the St Thomas traditions as constituting an important, if not the most important, factor in the formation of the Nazranies' communal identity. The tradition of Saint Thomas preaching and converting in India and apparently converting nobody but members of the higher castes expresses both the Nazranies' embeddedness in the surrounding majority Hindu society and their separation. It explains why they find themselves integrated into the Indian culture, speaking the same language - Malayalam - as their neighbours. But it also explains why they are separate, professing a different faith, Christianity. It also explains their ambiguous but traditionally well-established position in the society. Being Christians, they believe in the absolute truth and the sole saving power of their religion. At the same time, they live in a society that has been able to accept them as one among its organic strata, while also accepting Christ and the saints as belonging to the community of the many divinities legitimately worshipped by the different segments of the Hindu society. It considered the Christians as one element belonging to the same society, and permitted them to practise their professions (mainly trade and agriculture and, to a lesser extent, military service), which were highly regarded by others. The Hindus also venerated the Christian holy places, and they still hold the priests of the St Thomas Christians in high esteem, considering them as holy men. This might not have always been the case, and the remembrances in the tradition about earlier persecutions may point to less tolerant periods and neighbourhoods. All this and much more is admirably expressed in the founding traditions of the community, connected to Saint Thomas.

### **3. Traditions of Thomas of Kana and the Earliest Syrian Connections**

The identity of the St Thomas Christians is not exhausted by their being Indian and Christian. They are also Syrian. As Placid Podipara says in an emblematic writing of his, "they are Hindu or Indian in culture, Christian in religion and Syro-Oriental in worship." How they came under Syrian influence is again told by stories preserved by the oral tradition. This speaks about the arrival of another Thomas, Thomas of Kana (Knayi Thomman in Malayalam), a rich Syrian merchant from Persia according to one version, but a Christian Jew originating from Kana in Palestine, a relative of Jesus himself, according to others. The Kerala tradition, which connects its events to absolutely precise dates, knows that this happened in 345 AD. Normally this date is taken for granted both in oral conversation and in writing. However, the early Portuguese witnesses give a wide range of datings. According to some, this Thomas of Kana came even earlier, so that he could still meet a servant of Saint Thomas, while others hold that he came later, namely in 752 AD, some 700 years after the Apostle. The date 345 seems to come from or at least to be documented by a Syriac text written by a certain Father Matthew, in Malabar, in 1730. With Thomas came seventy or seventy-two families (this number representing the totality of a people, as in the case of the translators of the Septuagint or in that of the greater circle of the apostles). It is said that Thomas found the St Thomas Christians in great spiritual need, and so he reorganised them and put them under the jurisdiction of the Persian Church. In this way the jurisdictional link of the Malabar Coast with the Syrian Churches would originate from this time.

An important element of the tradition is the famous copper plates that Thomas of Kana is said to have received from the King of Malabar, the Cheruman Perumal. In Kerala in the Middle Ages royal charters on privileges were written on copper plates, generally in Grandha or Vattezhuttu (literally, "round script") characters. Communities belonging to different religions possess their own copper plates - so also the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims. At present some of the Christian copper plates are kept at some important ecclesiastical centres, such as the Metropolitanate of the Mar Thoma Church in Tiruvalla and the Syrian Orthodox Catholicosate in Kottayam. The copper plates are not shown to visitors. Several



mutually contradictory decipherings of them have been published. In Portuguese times there seem to have existed the very copper plates that were claimed to contain the privileges that the Cheruman Perumal king gave to Thomas of Kana. In the middle of the sixteenth century the Portuguese acquired them, but by the end of the same century they were lost. According to a tradition noted by the Portuguese, these plates briefly related the story of Thomas of Kana arriving in Cranganore and receiving royal privileges from the king. These privileges were the following: he gave his own name, Coquaragon, to Thomas, and he also gave him the “City of the Great Idol,” Magoderpattanam or Mahadevarpatnam, and a great forest for possession forever, then seven kinds of musical instruments and together with them all honours for the Christians to speak and behave as kings do, so that their brides may whistle during their wedding ceremony, just as the women of the kingly families do, to spread carpets on the grounds, to wear sandals, and to ride elephants. Besides this he gave Thomas and his people the right to five different taxes that they could collect.

Be that as it may, these traditions are also important formative elements of the Kerala Christians’ identity and have an explicative value for their social reality. In fact, it is these traditions that explain not only the Syrian affiliation, but also a division between the Indian Christians, that is, the division between two endogamous groups, the “Southists” (thekkumbhagar) and the “Northists” (vadakkumbhagar). Both groups claim legitimate descent from Thomas of Kana and the families that accompanied him, but only the Southists say that they have conserved pure Syrian blood. The names are believed to come from the fact that once the two groups inhabited respectively the northern and the southern part of the Christian quarter of Cranganore.

Thus, it is to the time of Thomas of Kana that the tight jurisdictional and cultural relationship between the Church of Malabar and the Persian Church is traced back. According to some historians, this relationship meant purely and simply an allegiance to the Church of the East; according to others, the Malabar Christians were under the impression that the whole Orient belonged to the Patriarchate of Antioch, so that the Catholicos of Seleucia-Ctesiphon would be a representative of the Patriarch of Antioch. This debate is theoretically

unsolvable, but concrete research into the extant documents will surely decide about the merits of each opinion.

#### **4. Church Governance before the Portuguese Period**

According to the traditional structure, the Indian diocese of the Church of the East was governed by a Metropolitan sent by the Catholicos Patriarch, from Seleucia-Ctesiphon. At the same time, on the local level, in India Church affairs were governed by the Malabar yogam, that is, Assembly. There was also an indigenous head of the Church of Malabar, called in Malayalam Jatikku Karthavian, which, according to Jacob Kollaparambil, means “the head of the caste,” that is, the head of the St Thomas Christians, but also the “Archdeacon of All India.” Apparently, in his person an indigenous function, characteristic of the St Thomas Christian community, was combined with an existing function of the Church of the East. According to the canons of the latter Church, the Archdeacon is the highest priestly rank: he is the head of all the clerics belonging to a bishopric; he is responsible for the whole worship of the cathedral church and represents the will of the bishop in his absence. One clearly understands how the appointment of an indigenous Archdeacon of All India served the needs of the ecclesiastical organisation of the Church of the East. While the Catholicos Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon reserved for himself the right to send his own prelates originating from Iraq to the Indian diocese, the continuous governance of his Indian flock was secured by the indigenous Archdeacon serving as the head of all the priests in Malabar and representing the bishop’s will.

However, from the local point of view, the rank of the Archdeacon was more important than this; not only was he the most important priest of the community, but he also fulfilled the role of an Ethnarch. He was “the prince and head of the Christians of Saint Thomas” and had such titles as “Archdeacon and Gate of All India, Governor of India.” The origin and the meaning of the term “Gate” is mysterious. One might suppose that it is a Christological title: “I am the Gate of the sheep” (Jn 10:7). While originally the Archdeacon in the Church of the East was elected by the bishop according to merit, the office of the Archdeacon of India seems to have been hereditary. It was the privilege of the Pakalomattam family, at least from the sixteenth century onwards. Indeed, we know about a number of Pakalomattam

Archdeacons, beginning with 1502, when Metropolitan John of India appointed George Pakalomattam. The name of the family varies, and the family seems to be identical with the Parambil family, translated into Portuguese as De Campo. The Archdeacon had all the attributes of a secular leader and was normally escorted by a number, sometimes several thousands, of soldiers. It is important to note that while there could be several bishops appointed for the Malabar Diocese, there was always only one Archdeacon, a custom contrary to the canons of the Church of the East. This situation is best explained by the fact that from the point of view of the East Syrian Church structure the Archdeacon was an ecclesiastical function, but from that of the St Thomas Christian community it was also a socio-political, princely function, representing the unity of the Christian nation, or caste(s), of Hendo (India).

### 5. The Early Portuguese Period

For any element whatsoever, such as the ones mentioned before, of the history of the St Thomas Christian community before the arrival of the Portuguese colonisers, one has barely any sources other than local traditions and traditions. Documented history seems to begin with the arrival of the Portuguese. The European documentation beginning with this period already permits a fairly detailed picture of the social status, the life and the customs of the Christians whom they found upon their arrival in southern India, and in principle all the following, colonial, history of the community can be traced. However, here as well, although to a lesser extent, history is inextricably interwoven with oral tradition.

At the moment when the Portuguese arrived on the Malabar Coast, the Christian communities that they found there had had longstanding traditional links with the East Syrian Christians in Mesopotamia. During the subsequent period, in 1552, a split occurred within the Church of the East. Part of it joined Rome, so that besides the “Nestorian” Catholicosate of the East another, “Chaldaean,” Patriarchate was founded, headed by the Patriarch Mar John Sulaqa (1553-1555), claiming to be the rightful heir to the East Syrian tradition. It is very difficult to see the precise influence of this schism on the Church of Malabar. Apparently, both parties sent bishops to India. Over against earlier, somewhat romantic views, which took it for granted that there

was a continuous line of Chaldaean bishops, without any Nestorian interference, by now it has become clear that the real situation was the following. The last pre-schism East Syrian Metropolitan, Mar Jacob (1504-1552), died just when the schism occurred. Apparently the first among the two Patriarchs to send a prelate to India was the Nestorian Catholicos, Simeon VII Denkha. The person whom he sent was Mar Abraham, who, later, was to be the last Syrian Metropolitan of Malabar, after having gone over to the Chaldaean side. When he arrived in Malabar is not known, but he must have been there already in 1556. Approximately at the same time, Abdisho IV (1555-1567), the successor of John Sulaqa (murdered in 1555), sent the brother of John, Mar Joseph, to Malabar as a Chaldaean bishop; although consecrated in 1555 or 1556, Mar Joseph could not reach India before the end of 1556, nor Malabar before 1558, when the Portuguese were finally alerted by the presence of Mar Abraham and allowed Mar Joseph, accompanied by another Chaldaean bishop, Mar Eliah, to - very briefly - occupy his see, before the Inquisition also sent him to Lisbon in 1562. In this way, nominally there were two rival Syrian Metropolitans in Kerala until 1558, when Mar Abraham was captured, forced to confess the Catholic faith in Cochin and sent back to Mesopotamia, to the Chaldaean Patriarch Abdisho, who (re-) consecrated him Metropolitan and sent him to Rome. There Mar Abraham was ordained Metropolitan a third time in 1565 by Pope Pius IV. The Pope wanted Mar Abraham to reign jointly with Mar Joseph, who in the meantime had returned to Malabar in 1564, only to be deported a second time in 1567 and die in Rome in 1569. From Rome, Mar Abraham returned to Mesopotamia and reached the Malabar Coast for the second time in 1568. Although he was once again detained in Goa, in 1570 he managed to escape, and governed the Malabar Christians until his death in 1597.

Taking into account the fact that Mar Abraham had gone over to the Chaldaeans, the Nestorian Catholicos Patriarch, Mar Eliah VIII (1576-1591), sent another bishop, Mar Simeon, to Kerala. Mar Simeon probably arrived there in 1576. He stayed there until 1584, when he was captured and sent to Rome, where it was discovered that he was a Nestorian and, on account of this fact, his ordination as priest and bishop was declared invalid. He was confined to a Franciscan friary in Lisbon, where he died in 1599.

It is reported that before leaving Malabar, Mar Simeon appointed a priest as his “vicar general,” Jacob by name, who, according to the Portuguese testimonies, resisted all the Latin innovations introduced under Mar Abraham and was finally excommunicated by Archbishop Menezes of Goa before he died in 1596. However, as this priest is also called Archdeacon, I would suggest that his role should be reconsidered. The Chaldaean Archdeacon during the first part of the reign of Mar Abraham was George of Christ, who was on friendly terms with the Latin missionaries and was to be appointed the successor of Mar Abraham as Metropolitan of India. Thus he should have become, according to the plans of Mar Abraham, supported by the Jesuits, the first indigenous Chaldaean Metropolitan of the St Thomas Christians. However, the last letter of Mar Abraham, where he requests the Pope to confirm George’s ordination as Bishop of Palur and his coadjutor, is dated January 13, 1584, while from another letter of the same Mar Abraham we learn that the consecration of George failed because of the latter’s death. After this, we hear about an Archdeacon with Roman allegiance, perhaps John, the brother of George of Christ, appointed in 1591. As Archdeacon Jacob appears on the scene as a leader of the Church of Malabar in 1584, I would suggest that he was the one who inherited the office of the Archdeacon from George. Rather than being appointed by Mar Simeon, the Nestorian Metropolitan, he inherited the office by family right and sided with Mar Simeon against Mar Abraham, which resulted in a very tense situation. The Roman side seems to have tried to solve this problem by appointing a rival Archdeacon, the first one in 1591 and the second, George of the Cross, in 1593. In this way, although from 1552 rival Metropolitans sent by the two East Syrian Patriarchs contended for the allegiance of the St Thomas Christians, still, until 1656, the date of the consecration of Kunju Mathai (Matthew) as Archdeacon of the Latin allegiance against Mar Thoma, the former Archdeacon now in revolt, there was only a very brief period (between 1591 and 1596) when two rival Archdeacons contended against each other.

## **6. The Synod of Diamper and the Syrian Orthodox Mission in India**

Alexis de Menezes, Archbishop of Goa from 1595 until his death in 1617, together with his Jesuit advisers, decided to bring the Kerala Christians to obedience, an obedience that they conceived as complete conformity to the Roman or ‘Latin’ customs. This meant separating

the Nazranies not only from the Nestorian Catholicosate of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, but also from the Chaldaean Patriarchate of Babylon, and subjecting them directly to the Latin Archbishopric of Goa. The most important stage of their activity was the famous Synod of Diamper (Udayamperur) in 1599, when the local Christians’ customs were officially anathematised as heretical and their manuscripts were condemned to be either corrected or burnt. The oppressive rule of the Portuguesepadroado (‘patronage’) provoked a violent reaction on the part of the indigenous Christian community. This was the Kunan Kurishu Satyam (Bent Cross Oath) in Matancherry, Cochin, in 1653, when the rebels, headed by their Archdeacon, made a vow not to accept any allegiance unless to a Syrian Church. In the same year, Archdeacon Thomas was ordained, by the laying on of hands of twelve priests, as the first indigenous Metropolitan of Kerala, under the name Mar Thoma I. Later, in 1665, on the arrival of Mor Grigorios Abd al-Jalil, a bishop sent by the Antiochian Syrian Orthodox Patriarch, this movement resulted in the Mar Thoma party’s joining the Antiochian Patriarchate and in the gradual introduction of the West Syrian liturgy, customs and script on the Malabar Coast.

## **7. The Background and the Aftermath of These Events**

During the entire period beginning with the intervention of Archbishop Menezes of Goa in the affairs of the Church of Malabar in 1598, up to the consecration of Archdeacon Thomas as Mar Thoma I in 1653 and his joining the Antiochian (Syrian Orthodox) Patriarchate in 1665, events were dominated by a constant tension between the Latin Archbishops designated by the Portuguese and the Archdeacons leading the St Thomas Christian community. In 1597, Mar Abraham, the last Chaldaean Metropolitan of India, died. Mar Abraham, although originally a Nestorian and accused by the Jesuit Francisco Roz of holding ‘Nestorian’ views, seems to have remained a faithful Chaldaean bishop, that is, in sincere community with Rome, as attested by his copy of the Nomocanon of Abdisho bar Brikha of Nisibis, which he carried to Malabar and which is still preserved in the Library of the Major Catholic Archbishop’s House in Ernakulam. Already the scribe who copied the Nomocanon for Mar Abraham included the Nicaeo-Constantinopolitan Creed in its Latin form, with the Filioque, and on the first folio of the book one can read an anathema by Mar Abraham on Nestorius.

Thus, if there was strife between the Portuguese missionaries and the indigenous Christians and their Iraqi prelates, it was not of a truly doctrinal, but of an ecclesiological and jurisdictional character. However, something else was also involved: the identity of the St Thomas Christians. In their striving to preserve their identity, after the death of Mar Abraham in 1597, the most important role was given to Archdeacon George of the Cross, appointed by Mar Abraham in 1593. Archbishop Alexis de Menezes, who was both an ambitious and indeed violent person and a very able Church politician, succeeded in bringing the Archdeacon to obedience and in abolishing the Chaldaean jurisdiction on the Malabar Coast. How perfectly he succeeded is another question, where legends once again begin to play their role. Be that as it may, under his immediate successors this apparent success proved to be more ephemeral and less complete than it appeared after the Synod of Diamper in 1599.

The strife between the Latin Archbishops and the Archdeacons – first George of the Cross and then his nephew, Thomas Parambil (de Campo) – continued and resulted in several revolts of the latter against the former, whenever the Archbishop tried to curtail the traditional rights of the Archdeacon. In this way George of the Cross revolted against Francisco Roz, Archbishop of Angamali (1601-1624), first in 1609, when the latter excommunicated him, and also in 1618. Although George had more friendly relations with Roz's successor, Stephen Britto (1624-1641), he also revolted against the latter in 1632. The rule of the next Archbishop, Francis Garcia (1641-1659), was again dominated by constant tension between him and the Archdeacon, Thomas Parambil, until the latter apparently decided definitively to break away from Roman jurisdiction. In 1648-1649 he sent a number of letters to several Oriental Patriarchs and thus to the Coptic Patriarch of Alexandria, to the Syrian Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch and most probably also to the Chaldaean Patriarch of Babylon, requesting them to send bishops to Malabar.

As an answer to these letters, a certain Mar A'tallah, a bishop who called himself Mor Ignatius, Patriarch of India and China, arrived in India, but the Portuguese detained him in Mylapore and the rumour spread that he had been drowned in the sea. His detention so enraged the Archdeacon and his party that they revolted against the Jesuits. On January 3, 1653, a mass of people gathered in Matancherry in

Cochin, and swore an oath not to obey the Franks, that is, the Portuguese, but only the Archdeacon, who on May 22 of the same year was ordained bishop, under the name Mar Thoma, twelve priests laying their hands on him. This was the famous Bent Cross Oath, during which almost the entire St Thomas Christian community seceded from Rome. From the history preceding this event, it is rather clear that this secession cannot be explained by its immediate pretext, that is, the detention of Mar A'tallah, but was the fulfilment of a long-nurtured wish of the Archdeacon, who could not accept his subjugation, and of the local Christians, who wanted to preserve their traditions and autonomy.

This event was followed by a rather troubled period, further complicated by the fact that the Dutch gradually conquered the Malabar Coast. In 1663 they conquered Cochin and expelled all the Portuguese and other European missionaries, with the exception of some Franciscans. At this moment the Apostolic Commissary, Bishop Joseph Sebastiani, had no other choice than to consecrate an indigenous prelate for the remaining party that did not obey Mar Thoma, the former Archdeacon and current bishop. For this purpose he could not but choose another member of the same Parambil family, considered as the leader of the community: Alexander de Campo, or Mar Chandy Parambil, who was the cousin of Mar Thoma and originally one of his main four helpers or advisers during the Bent Cross Oath. He made Mar Chandy Parambil a Vicar Apostolic and a titular bishop only, but Mar Chandy Parambil considered himself a Metropolitan and signed his documents as "Metropolitan of All India." Moreover, in 1678, he also appointed an Archdeacon, who happened to be his own nephew, Mathew Parambil (or De Campo). Thus, at this point, due to the binding force of the events and the strategic thought of Bishop Sebastiani, there were to be found two bishops of the St Thomas Christian community, who were close relatives of each other, both from the traditional leading family of the Nazarenes.



## Chapter 3

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### The Arrival of the Western Missionaries

The French or Catalan Dominican missionary Jordanus Catalani was the first European to start conversion in India. He arrived in Surat in 1320. After his ministry in Gujarat he reached Quilon in 1323. He not only revived Christianity but also brought thousands to the Christian fold. He brought a message of good will from the Pope to the local rulers. As the first bishop in India, he was also entrusted with the spiritual nourishment of the Christian community in Calicut, Mangalore, Thane and Broach (north of Thane).

In 1453, the fall of Constantinople, a bastion of Christianity in Asia Minor to Islamic Ottoman Empire; marked the end of the Eastern Roman Empire or Byzantine Empire, and severed European trade links by land with Asia. This massive blow to Christendom spurred the age of discovery as Europeans were seeking alternative routes east by sea along with the goal of forging alliances with pre-existing Christian nations.

Along with pioneer Portuguese long-distance maritime travellers that reached the Malabar Coast in the late 15th century, came Portuguese missionaries who made contact with the St Thomas Christians in Kerala, which at that time were following Eastern Christian practices and under the jurisdiction of Church of the East. The missionaries sought to introduce the Latin liturgical rites among them and unify East Syrian Christians in India under the Holy See.

In the 16th century, the proselytisation of Asia was linked to the Portuguese colonial policy. The Papal bull - *Romanus Pontifex* written on 8 January 1455 by Pope Nicholas V to King Afonso V of Portugal, confirmed to the Crown of Portugal dominion over all lands discovered or conquered during the age of discovery. Further, the patronage for the propagation of the Christian faith (see “Padroado”) in Asia was given to the Portuguese. The missionaries of the different orders (Franciscans, Dominicans, Jesuits, Augustinians, etc.) flocked out with the conquerors, and began at once to build churches along the coastal districts where the Portuguese power made itself felt.

The history of Portuguese missionaries in India starts with the neo-apostles who reached Kappad near Kozhikode on 20 May 1498 along with the Portuguese explorer Vasco da Gama who was seeking to form anti-Islamic alliances with pre-existing Christian nations. The lucrative spice trade was further temptation for the Portuguese crown. When he and the Portuguese missionaries arrived they found Christians in the country in Malabar known as St. Thomas Christians who belonged to the then largest Christian church within India. The Christians were friendly to Portuguese missionaries at first; there was an exchange of gifts between them, and these groups were delighted at their common faith.

Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great (r. 1556-1605) holds a religious assembly in the Ibadat Khana (House of Worship) in Fatehpur Sikri; the two men dressed in black are the Jesuit missionaries Rodolfo Acquaviva and Francisco Henriques. Illustration to the Akbarnama, miniature painting by Nar Singh, ca. 1605.

During the second expedition, the Portuguese fleet comprising 13 ships and 18 priests, under Captain Pedro Álvares Cabral, anchored at Cochin on 26 November 1500. Cabral soon won the goodwill of



the Raja of Cochin. He allowed four priests to do apostolic work among the early Christian communities scattered in and around Cochin. Thus Portuguese missionaries established Portuguese Mission in 1500. Dom Francisco de Almeida, the first Portuguese Viceroy got permission from the Kochi Raja to build two churches - namely Santa Cruz Basilica (1505) and St. Francis Church (1506) using stones and mortar, which was unheard of at that time, as the local prejudices were against such a structure for any purpose other than a royal palace or a temple.

In the beginning of the 16th century, the whole of the east was under the jurisdiction of the Archdiocese of Lisbon. On 12 June 1514, Cochin and Goa became two prominent mission stations under the newly created Diocese of Funchal in Madeira. In 1534, Pope Paul III by the Bull *Quequem Reputamus*, raised Funchal as an archdiocese and Goa as its suffragan, deputing the whole of India under the diocese of Goa. This created an episcopal see - suffragan to Funchal, with a jurisdiction extending potentially over all past and future conquests from the Cape of Good Hope to China.

After four decades of prosperous trading, the missionaries started the proselytisation around 1540 and during this period, foreign missionaries also made many new converts to Christianity. Early Roman Catholic missionaries, particularly the Portuguese, led by the Jesuit St Francis Xavier (1506-1552), expanded from their bases on the west coast making many converts. The Portuguese colonial government supported the mission and the baptised Christians were given incentives like rice donations, good positions in their colonies. Hence, these Christians were dubbed Rice Christians who even practised their old religion. At the same time many New Christians from Portugal migrated to India as a result of the inquisition in Portugal. Many of them were suspected of being Crypto-Jews, converted Jews who were secretly practising their old religion. Both were considered a threat to the solidarity of Christian belief. Saint Francis Xavier, in a 1545 letter to John III of Portugal, requested the Goan Inquisition, which is considered a blot on the history of Roman Catholic Christianity in India, both by Christians and non-Christians alike.

In 1557, Goa was made an independent archbishopric, and its first suffragan sees were erected at Cochin and Malacca. The whole of the East came under the jurisdiction of Goa and its boundaries extended to almost half of the world: from the Cape of Good Hope in South

Africa, to Burma, China and Japan in East Asia. In 1576 the suffragan See of Macao (China) was added; and in 1588, that of Funai in Japan.

The death of the last metropolitan bishop - Archdeacon Abraham of the Saint Thomas Christians, an ancient body formerly part of the Church of the East in 1597; gave the then Archbishop of Goa Menezes an opportunity to bring the native church under the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. He was able to secure the submission of Archdeacon George, the highest remaining representative of the native church hierarchy. Menezes convened the Synod of Diamper between 20 and 26 June 1599, which introduced a number of reforms to the church and brought it fully into the Latin Rite of the Catholic Church. Following the Synod, Menezes consecrated Francis Ros, S.J. as Archbishop of the Archdiocese of Angamalé for the Saint Thomas Christians; thus created another suffragan see to Archdiocese of Goa and Latinisation of St Thomas Christians started. The Saint Thomas Christians were pressured to acknowledge the authority of the Pope and most of them eventually accepted the Catholic faith, but a part of them switched to West Syrian Rite. Resentment of these measures led to some part of the community to join the Archdeacon, Thomas, in swearing never to submit to the Portuguese or to accept the Communion with Rome in the Coonan Cross Oath in 1653. Those who accepted the West Syrian theological and liturgical tradition of Mar Gregorios became known as Jacobites. The ones who continued with East Syrian and Latin theological and liturgical tradition and stayed faithful to the Synod of Diamper and the Roman Catholic Church came to be formally known as the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church from the second half of the 19th century onward.

The Diocese of Angamaly was transferred to Diocese of Cranganore in 1605; while, in 1606 a sixth suffragan see to Goa was established at San Thome, Mylapore, near the modern Madras, and the site of the National Shrine of St. Thomas Basilica. The suffragan sees added later to Goa. were the prelacy of Mozambique (1612) and in 1690 two other sees at Peking and Nanking in China.

Mangalore is another significant region on the west coast which has a huge Christian population. In 1321, the French Dominican friar Jordanus Catalani of Severac (in south-western France), who also worked in Quilon arrived in Bhatkal, a place near Mangalore and established a missionary station there. Many locals were converted

to Christianity by Jordanus. The Portuguese were however unable to establish their presence in Mangalore as a result of the conquests of the Vijayanagara ruler Krishnadevaraya and Abbakka Rani of Ullal, the Bednore Queen of Mangalore. Most of Mangalorean Catholics were not originally from Mangalore but are descendants of Goan Catholics who fled Goa during the Portuguese-Maratha Wars and the Goan Inquisition.

The origin of Christianity in North Konkan, was due to the proselytising activities of the Portuguese in the 16th century. The French Dominican friar Jordanus Catalani of Severac (in south-western France) started evangelising activities in Thana. On the occasion of *The Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria*, the Christians of North Konkan, in Maharashtra who were known as *Portuguese Christians* discarded that name and adopted the designation *East Indians*. Marathi Christians are Protestants and are therefore distinct from East Indian Christians who are predominately Roman Catholics and inhabitants of the North Konkan region. Marathi Christians can be found in the areas of Ahmednagar, Solapur, Pune and Aurangabad. They were converted through the efforts of the American Marathi Mission, The SPG Mission, and the Church Mission Society of Church of England in early 18th century. British Missionary William Carey was instrumental in translating the Bible into the Marathi language.

Missionary work progressed on a large scale and with great success along the western coasts, chiefly at Chaul, Bombay, Salsette, Bassein, Damao, and Diu; and on the eastern coasts at San Thome of Mylapore, and as far as Bengal etc. In the southern districts the Jesuit mission in Madura was the most famous. It extended to the Krishna river, with a number of outlying stations beyond it. The mission of Cochin, on the Malabar Coast, was also one of the most fruitful. Several missions were also established in the interior northwards, e.g., that of Agra and Lahore in 1570 and that of Tibet in 1624. Still, even with these efforts, the greater part even of the coast line was by no means fully worked, and many vast tracts of the interior northwards were practically untouched.

With the decline of the Portuguese power, other colonial powers – namely the Dutch and British and Christian organisations gained influence.

## Chapter 4

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### Synod of Diamper

Synod of Diamper was definitely a forceful illegal invasion of Portuguese Missionaries into the affairs of Saint Thomas Christians. The Arch Bishop of Goa had no jurisdiction over Saint Thomas Christians. Without any special mandate from the Roman Pontiff, he forcefully entered the Arch Diocese of Angamaly and convened the Diocesan Synod of Diamper and proclaimed that he reunited the saint Thomas Christians who were living outside the Roman Communion for thousand years, in a matter of few months by the efforts of the zealous Arch Bishop and his team of missionaries to triumph in Europe. (Jonas Thaliath, *The synod of Diamper, Orientalia Christiana Analecta 152 Rome 1958*, cited by Rev Dr Paul Pallathu, *Was Saith Thomas Christians nestorians ? Ephrem's theological Journal*, vol 5 March 2001, p 36)

It is clear that Saint Thomas Christians were not in explicit communion with the Church of Rome for centuries. But there are certain hints in the history about

some loose contacts and communion. Church of the East had several short lived communions and relations with the Church of Rome in the past before the formation of the Chaldean Patriarchate.

Pope Saint Gregory III (731-741) was a Chaldean from the province of Syria. (Guriel Elementa Linguae Chaldaicae, 168 cited by G T Mackenzie in foot note 116 based on the manuscript submitted by Nidheerickal Mani Kathanaar). Mar John, the Arch Bishop of the Syrians and afterwards Patriarch, went with his suffragans to Rome and received the pallium from Pope Callixtus II (AD 1119-1124) in the twelfth century. (Gesta Callixti, Papae. Vetera analecta Mabillonii 468 cited by G T Mackenzie foot note 116 based on the manuscript submitted by Nidheerickal Mani Kathanaar). In AD 1250, Iso yahb bar Malkon, Metropolitan of Nisbis, sent a profession of Catholic faith to Pope and made some minor changes in the Taksa that he used calling Mary, the 'Mother of Christ, who is our God' (History of Chaldean mass, Macomber, JAAS p76). When Pope Julius III, on April 6th, 1553 confirmed John Simon Sulaqa as Patriarch of the Chaldeans, confirmed that the discipline and liturgy of the Chaldeans had already been approved by his predecessors, Nicholas I (AD 858-867) and Leo X (AD 1513-1521) and Clement VII, (AD 1523-1534) This papal letter also mentions the former Patriarch Simon Mamma, of good memory as Patriarch of the Christians of Malabar. (GT MacKenzie, foot note 116)

There are reports in the history about reception of John Marignolli in AD 1346, letter of Pope Eugene IV to the Christian King of Malabar in AD 1439, as examples of contact with the Church of Rome. But after AD 1554, with the arrival of Mar Joseph, The Saint Thomas Christians became in Catholic Communion.

In AD 1551, under the leadership of Patriarch John Simon Sulaqa, a section of the Church of the East entered into full hierarchical communion with the Church of Rome. John Simon Sulaqa was consecrated and confirmed as the Catholic Patriarch of Mossul in Assyria and received pallium from Pope Julius III in AD 1553. In the Papal Bull, the Pope had confirmed his jurisdiction over Malabar Christians also.

(".. Postmodum vero ecclesia patriarchali de Muzal et insulae Tigris ac caeterarum civitatum et terratum orientalium eidem Patriarchae subjectarum, necnon monasteriorum ejusdem in Sui Massin et et

Calicuth ac tota India existentium eidem etiam Patriarchae subditorum dum vivert praesidebat...." S Giamil, Genuinae Relationes... 17-18, Subsidiium ad Bullarium Patronatus Portugalliae, 4 cited by Rev Dr Paul pallath, Were Saint Thomas Christians Nestorians ? Ephrem's Theological Journal, Vol 5 March 2001 No 1 p 42 foot note 24)

The Patriarchate was supported by a Papal Nuncio for the East, Bishop Ambrose Buttigeg, a Maltese Dominican and his companion Fr Antonius Sahara.

Patriarch Sulaqa was murdered in AD 1555 and Mar Abdisho was consecrated as the next Patriarch under the supervision of the Papal Nuncio, Bishop Ambrose Buttigeg. In 1562, Mar Abdisho received pallium from Pope Pius IV. The next Patriarch was Mar Yahballaha (AD 1567- 1579) and then Mar Simon Denha ( AD 1579-1600). Mar Simon Denha received pallium from Pope Gregory III (1572-1585). It was this Mar Simon Denha was the head of Saint Thomas Christians who was in explicit ecclesiastical and hierarchical communion with the Church of Rome was condemned by the Synod of Diamper!

Thus, the synod itself become an act of disobedience to the Roman Pontiff.

In AD 1555, Patriarch Mar Abdisho sent two Bishops to Malabar, Mar Joseph Sulaqa, the brother of Patriarch John Simon Sulaqa, as the Bishop for Saint Thomas Christians, Mar Elias, as the representative of the Chaldean Catholic Patriarchate along with the Papal Nuncio for the East Bishop Ambrosius Buttigeg, and his companion Fr Antonius Sahara. This four member team itself proves the authenticity of Mar Joseph and his hierarchical communion with the Roman Pontiff. (The two Chaldean Bishops were arrested and detained in the Franciscan monastery at Bassein near Bombay and Bishop Abrosius and Fr Sahara were allowed to come to Goa.)

In 1558, all were allowed to come to Malabar because of the arrival of Mar Abraham, another East Syrian Bishop but not of the Catholic communion. They used Mar Joseph to keep the Malabar Nasranis away from the Non catholic East Syriac Church. Mar Joseph converted Mar Abraham to Catholic communion, but the Portuguese deported him to Babylon. Mar Joseph was arrested again in 1562 and sent to Portugal and Rome where he was cleared from all accusations and was even nominated to be elevated as a Cardinal.

Due to the request of the Malabar Nasranis, the Patriarch Abdisho appointed Mar Abraham as the Bishop of Malabar and sent to Rome where he received pallium from Pope Pius IV in 1565. The Pope Pius IV gave him three letters, one for the Patriarch Abdisho and the others to the Arch Bishop of Goa and the Bishop of Cochin.

In these letters, the Pope confirms the jurisdiction of the Chaldean Patriarch over the Saint Thomas Christians and apologised for the inconveniences caused by the Portuguese Missionaries. The Pope also warns the Arch Bishop of Goa that it would be detrimental to the Pope himself and to the Apostolic See, if he would hinder the jurisdiction of the Patriarch and orders that his jurisdiction must remain untouched and intact. The Pope in his letter to the Patriarch permits to maintain 'your customs and rites', recognizing the ancient rite.

Thus, the Arch Bishop of Goa, who had no jurisdiction over the saint Thomas Christians, without any special mandate from the Roman Pontiff, forcefully entered the Arch Diocese of Angamali with the help of the non Christian Kings invalidly convoked the diocesan Synod of Diamper, under the threat of excommunication contrary to the norms of the canon law. (Rev. Dr. Paul Pallathu, The Synod of Diamper valid or invalid, cited in *Were Saint Thomas Christians Nestorians?* Ephrem's Theological Journal, Vol 5 March 2001 No 1, p 54-55) The word excommunication is also to be noted carefully. If saint Thomas Christians were not in communion with the Catholic Church, how can the Arch Bishop Goa excommunicate them? They would not have afraid of excommunication and the threat of excommunication would not have any use.

What was the aim of the synod ?

### **Latinisation**

It was not for correcting the doctrines of saint Thomas Christians. The above mentioned letters categorically confirms that the rite and rituals of Saint Thomas Christians were accepted by the Roman Pontiff. If for argument sake, if we take that there were several books found in the community which contains errors, the synod would have only made actions to correct them. Instead, it was a strategical approach to make changes to the rite and customs to conform the saint Thomas Christians to latin rite to effect suppression of law of Thomas- and to introduce Latin Rite among saint Thomas Christians.

See below a few of the synodal decrees which explicitly order conformity to Latin rite.

'admit and receive all the customs rites and ceremonies received and approved in the Roman Church' Session II decree I. Images painted after 'our manner' are to be placed in all churches... session III decree I Ch IX. The Syriac lectionary is to be replaced by The Vulgar latin edition made use by Holy Mother Church-Session III decree II. prohibition of the east Syrian baptismal formula and prescribed that which is followed by the Roman Church- session IV decree I. baptismal water shall be blessed by the Holy chrism according to the Roman ceremonial-session IV decree XIX. separated confirmation from baptism in harmony with the roman tradition-session IV confirmation. Forty changes in the eucharistic liturgy to conform with the latin rite- words of consecration was added to the Liturgy of Addai and mari, creed was modified, introduction of extreme unction, abolished optional celibacy to obligatory celibacy to the priests, latin vestments, the synod being desirous that the church of the serra should in all things be conformable to the latin customs, or Holy Mother Church of Rome....' session VIII decree XXXVII.

From these, we can understand that the real aim was not the correction of errors but to eradicate and exteminate the east Syriac rite and Law of Thomas to replace it with latin Rite.

2 To suppress the Jurisdiction of the Chaldean Patriarch and to bring the Saint Thomas Christians under the Portuguese Padruado and patronage of the King of Portugal to control the Saint Thomas Christian community and thereby to control the spice trade.

There are several reports in the history that the Portuguese needed help from Saint Thomas Christians to beat the Arab merchants. In 1920s, the Portuguese sought help from Mar Jacob Abuna to persuade Saint Thomas Christians to trade their pepper to them. (Antonio da Silva Rego, *Documenta cao para a Historia das Missoes do padruado Portugues do oriente*, vol II Lisbon, 1948 p 357 cited by Pius malekkandathil *Jornada of Alexis De Menesis: A Portuguese account of the Sixteenth Century Malabar*, pXXIX)

Now, it is obvious that it was not to convert the Saint Thomas Christians to Catholicism, but to Latinise them, and to subjugate them under the Portuguese padruado. It was a cultural invasion to change



their religious rite and rituals to control the community on the religious perspective and politically also for the colonial interests of the Portuguese.

### **Padroado-Propaganda Schism**

The Padroado-Propaganda Schism was an ecclesiastical conflict that pitted Catholics against each other, sometimes leading to physical violence, insults and mutual excommunications, but most usually subsisting in a long, sullen mutual co-existence in hostility.

The Padroado originated when the Portuguese Kings took the initiative to explore the coasts of Africa, pushing further and further seeking a way to the East to challenge the Muslim dominance of world trade and politics and to open new trade routes and to win new converts to the Catholic faith. Moved by their zeal, successive Popes granted wide ranging favors and authorities to the Kings, even allegedly irrevocable powers, to establish and patronize Churches and Bishoprics in the lands the Portuguese opened up in the East.

The Padroado or Padroado Real has its foundation in Canon Law that recognized the right of laymen to establish and patronize churches and missions, as a means to supplement the efforts of the Papacy, the Church and the religious orders; these laypersons were recognized as Patrons and possessed certain rights and privileges over the churches and missions they established, financed and patronized.

However, as the Portuguese power waned in the face of the Dutch Wars against Spain and Portugal, followed by the growth of the English Empire, the Popes found that large tracts of land and Christian peoples were alienated from the authority of bishops and priests working under authority of the Portuguese King-Patron of the Missions, and, seeking to provide for them and their spiritual needs, and in response to the devious overtures from Dutch, English etc. Protestant rulers asking for clerics not under the authority of the King of Portugal, set up the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith or Propaganda Fide, or Propaganda in short. Propaganda ordained priests and consecrated bishops for these lands and sent them in to administer the sacraments and exercise ecclesiastical jurisdiction. However, the King-Patrons resented these infusions of Propaganda clerics as intrusions and as unauthorized, incapable of possessing and exercising jurisdiction, and therefore incapable of validly conferring the sacraments.

The Patron-Kings contended that Popes had irrevocably bestowed upon them the authority of being Royal Patrons over these Churches and ecclesiastical communities they established, and the question was and is yet not definitively addressed or resolved, being yet a question open to debate and discussion. Popes who pushed Propaganda clerics into these territories either overtly or tacitly claimed that there were not and could not have been any such “irrevocable” bestowal of authority and patronal power on the Kings of Portugal, and actively acted, with progressively increasing vehemence to disregard and ignore these claims of Patronal power and authority as being invalid.

As a result, the Christians of these lands became split into two camps - those upholding the authority and right of the King-Patron and his Catholic Clerics, who recognized the Pope in Rome as the final and supreme leader and authority of the Catholic Church worldwide, and those who submitted to the authority of the bishops and priests sent by the Propaganda under the direct orders and authority of the Pope.

To sustain themselves, Propaganda clerics turned increasingly uncritically pro-English, pro-British, adulating the Protestant Kings of England, then of the United Kingdom of Great Britain as their protectors and patrons, and insulting and derogating Portugal and the Kings of Portugal as backward and unenlightened.

The situation was complicated when Portugal rebelled and seceded from Spain under the Braganças who were largely propped up by the Protestant British, and who were increasingly influenced by Protestant, anticlerical and “Enlightenment” ideas, culminating in an open schism and break between the brothers Peter and Michael for the Kingship of Portugal, a Civil War, and the defeat and exile of the Ultramontanist Catholic King Michael by Peter supported by British arms and military officers. With that, both parties, Padroado and Propaganda, came to be indirectly controlled and manipulated by the Protestant British, even as they continued to fight among themselves, and keep up the party spirit among the laity, pitting Padroado laymen against Propaganda loyalists and vice versa.

## Chapter 5

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### The Coonan Cross Oath (January 3, 1653)

As we are gearing into the year 2013 and in the wake of the recent developments with the circular dated 12/20/2012 from Bishop Angadiath, the struggle and challenges faced by the North American Knanaya Catholic faithful to maintain and keep our unique identity and heritage is in peril. On January 3rd 2013 we celebrate the 360th anniversary of Koonan Kurishu Satyam, a courageous act of our forefathers 'The St. Thomas Christians' 360 years ago against the inquisitions, impositions and intolerance's abhorrently practiced by the hierarchy at the time. A brief narration of the events and fond remembrance may revive the spirit of freedom underlying in each one of us within the Knanaya Catholic Community in North America. The timing is pure coincidental, but the need to stand up against any unacceptable decrees and yokes of slavery that are being put forth to abolish the Knanaya heritage and traditions by any hierarchy is a call of duty to every Knanya individual.

#### The Coonan Cross Oath: Background

The Saint Thomas Christians who lived in India from AD 52 and the Knanaya community who said to have arrived the Malabar coast in the year AD 345 remained in communion with the Church of the East until their encounter with the Portuguese in 1599.

With the establishment of Portuguese power in parts of India and the Portuguese colonization of India using Goa as its headquarters, they brought Roman Catholic priests headed by an Arch Bishop to take over the religious supremacy, clergy of that empire, in particular members of the Society of Jesus (Jesuits), attempted to Latinise the Indian Christians

The Portuguese started a Latin Rite diocese in Goa (1534) and another at Cochin (1558), and sought to bring the Thomas Christians under the jurisdiction of the Portuguese *padroado* and into the Latin Rite of the Catholics. Those days, the Malankara Nazrani Christians were well established and was following the Marthoma tradition of India. The Portuguese tried to lure the Nazrani's with both money and positions to come under the reign of the Roman Catholic Church. They mercilessly murdered or exiled some of the Persian Bishops, and stopped the arrival of new Bishops to the Indian region. A series of synods, including the 1585 Synod of Goa, were held, which introduced Latinized elements to the local liturgy. Arch Bishop of Goa, Alexio Da Menezes tried to influence and force the Malankara Church head Arch-Deacon Geevarghese of Pakalomattom family to bring the Malankara Church under the control of the Roman Catholic Church. All the Malankara church representatives including Arch-Deacon Geevarughese unanimously refused to do so. Arch Bishop Menezes used his influence with the Raja (King) of Cochin and summoned a meeting of all the representatives of the Church at Udayamperur. The King threatened that absentees to the meeting would end up having their properties confiscated. Thus the historically significant Udayamperur Synod took place on 20th June 1599 led by Bishop Menezes, the Portuguese governor, higher Government officials, and armed Portuguese soldiers with the full support of the Raja of Cochin. Arch Deacon Geevarghese along with 133 priests 10 deacons and 660 laymen attended. The meeting enforced decrees to accept the faith and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church and the authority of the Pope. The Malankara Nazrani Syrian Christians signed the decrees, as they were afraid of the Portuguese opposition and their

own King. They accepted the Roman authority with dissent. The St. Thomas Christian's east Syrian traditions and liturgy was then replaced by Latin Liturgy and traditions of the Roman Catholic Church. The Synod of Diamper, (Udayamperur) finally brought the Saint Thomas Christians fully under the authority of the Latin Archdiocese of Goa.

The acts of Archbishop Menezes were undoubtedly high-handed, arbitrary and arrogant. The independence of the ancient Church of Malankara was crudely crushed. But in the long history of the Church, the Papal yoke was only momentary; for the feelings of resentment and the desire to regain independence among the St. Thomas Christians which were very real, could not be contained for long. The pent-up sentiments were given vent in 1653. They had all along continued their efforts to get a Metropolitan from the Eastern Church for their rescue. The Portuguese who were masters of the sea in those days, many a time intercepted their letters of appeal for Syrian prelates and there were occasions when attempts of Middle Eastern clergy to come to Malankara were physically thwarted. This fact is explicit in Cardinal Tisserant's own words. The local defectors in the Roman Catholic Seminaries were advised to be "on their guard against the arrival of a bishop sent by the Catholicos of Seleucia. For in spite of the watch set up by the Portuguese at Ormuz and Goa, such an event always remained a possibility". However, Metropolitan Mar Ahatalla from Syria is said to have landed at Surat in 1652 and thence came to Mylapore, where he was arrested by the Jesuits on August 3, 1652. While at Mylapore, Mar Ahatalla met two Syrian Christian deacons, viz: Chengannur Itty and Kuravilangad Kizhakkedath Kurien from Malankara who were on a pilgrimage to the tomb of St. Thomas and sent a letter through them to the Church of Malankara saying: "At Calamini, I have been taken prisoner by those whose profession is persecution. Soon they will make me leave for Cochin and then for Goa. Arm up some of your people to save me".

In the same letter, Mar Ahatalla is also said to have appointed Archdeacon Thomas as the head of the Malankara Church. As feared, the Metropolitan was taken on board a Portuguese ship at Madras bound for Goa. En route, it touched Cochin.. The Syrian Christians heard of the arrival of the ship at Cochin. They marched 25,000 strong to the harbor demanding the immediate release of their Metropolitan. The Portuguese, however, rushed the Prelate to Goa, under cover of darkness, without acceding to their demand. "In order to prevent any

attack on the town, they spread the less palatable story that the unfortunate prelate had been accidentally drowned... (In the meantime, Ahatalla was condemned as a heretic by the Inquisition of Goa and died at the stake in 1654) The summary disposal of Mar Ahatalla, however, shocked the Christian community and their wounded feelings effervesced into a mass upsurge which heralded the breaking off from the Papal yoke.

### Oath

The incident of Mar Ahatalla presented an occasion for the St. Thomas Christians to retaliate. When they came to know that Mar Ahatalla was drowned, they could not tolerate the imperious Portuguese and their arbitrary actions.

On January 3, 1653 under the leadership of Archeadeacon Thomas and Anjilimoottil Itty Thomman Kathanar (a Knanaya Priest from Kallissery) a multitude of about 25,000 Nasrani Christians assembled at the Church of Our Lady in Mattanchery near Cochin. The Priests leaders and the people gathered near a big granite cross in the church grounds, since all the people could not touch the cross simultaneously, they all held onto ropes that were tied to the cross in all directions. They then took the historical oath to break free from the clutches of the Roman supremacy and follow only the Malankara Nazrani traditions

It is said that because of the weight the Cross bent a little and hence it is known as Oath of the bent cross or the Coonan Cross Oath (*Koonan Kurishu Satyam*). According to tradition, out of a population of 200,000 St. Thomas Christians, only 400 remained loyal to the Roman Arch bishop Garcia. The event in 1653 broke the fifty four year old yoke of Roman supremacy imposed at the Udayamperur Synod of 1599.

This historic event and its 360th anniversary is demanding us the knanaya Catholic faithful living in USA to speak up against the injustice. Our heritage, values and traditions are compromised. A few lost sheep, some wolfs disguised as sheeps and a couple of power hungry shepherds are leading us into the valley of the shadow of death. If we are brave enough as our forefathers to stand up with dignity, the true God will walk with us and will divide the waters, so that we can cross through this hostile sea of persecution.

## Chapter 6

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### Historical Divisions of Mar Thoma Nasranis

The Saint Thomas Christians of India, known as Mar Thoma Nasranis, simply Nasranis or Syrian Christians, are an ethnic Christian community that traces its origin to Apostolic times. Tradition says that the ancestors of Nasranis were baptised by Saint Thomas the Apostle, one of the disciples of our Lord Isho Mishiha (Jesus Christ). The language used in the liturgy by these Christians was East Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic – the language of our Lord. Since there were trade links between Malabar (South-West Coast of India) and Kingdoms of Middle East, Greek, Persian and Roman Empires, it was not difficult for Saint Thomas the Apostle to travel to Malabar in the first century. There are numerous evidences to show that there was active and continuous trade between the aforementioned Kingdoms even several centuries before Christ. Since Aramaic was the lingua franca of trade in Asia until the eighth century, it is plausible that there were Aramaic-speaking communities in Malabar in the first century. It

is natural that St Thomas used Aramaic and it eventually became the liturgical language of Mar Thoma Nasranis.

Until the aftermath of Coonan Cross oath in 1653 AD, the Thomas Christians were united under a community head called Arkadiyokkan (Archdeacon or Jaathikku Karthavan) - “the head of the caste,” bearing the title “Archdeacon and Gate of All India”. The Archdeacon held all characteristics of a King or a modern secular leader. He was normally escorted by a group of Nasrani soldiers. By sending bishops (Methran) spiritual guidance was given by the Catholicos-Patriarch of Seleucia-Ctesiphon-the Church of the East (CoE). Though there were occasions when more than one bishop from CoE was present in Malabar at the same time, there was only one Arkkadiyokkan-the head of the Church-made decisions for temporal matters of the Church. Bishops from CoE had the role to give spiritual guidance and they never intervened in the financial and communal matters of Mar Thoma Nasranis. Thus the Church in Malabar was united under the leadership of Arkadiyokkan until the aftermath of Coonan cross oath.

When traders from Portugal came from 1498 AD onwards, there were also Roman Catholic missionaries accompanying them. Relation between Mar Thoma Nasranis and Portuguese in the early years (until AD 1550s) of their visits were friendly since the Portuguese had to depend on the Nasranis for reasons of trade and military help. Gradually the power and influence of Portugal increased in India and they demanded power on the churches of Mar Thoma Nasranis, thinking that they could gain control on the spice trade. Portuguese managed to get support of the King of Kochi as well, a Kingdom that had supported them for several centuries. As a result Portuguese missionaries held a meeting in 1599 AD, which they call “Udayamperoor Sunhados”. The so-called Sunhados declared the authority of Portuguese over the Church of Saint Thomas Christians and appointed a Bishop of Portuguese origin to govern the Malabar Church. Thus the Portuguese colonised the Church of Malabar that has apostolic origin. Fearing the cruel inquisition chambers and lack of support from even local Kings, our ancestors failed to respond to the Portuguese threat. The unfortunate divisions and decay of the Saint Thomas Christians began from this point onwards. Since then it was unfortunate events and further divisions among the Saint Thomas Christians.

Fifty years after the so-called Sunhados of Udayamperoor, through the Coonan Cross oath, Nasranis revolted against the Portuguese in



1653 AD. This is an important event in the history of Nasranis. However, the events after the revolt were not positive; Nasranis split into two factions and in the later centuries into many more denominations. At present they are divided into seven denominations. A pictorial representation of these divisions is given above.

On June 20, 1599, for commandeering obedience to the supreme Bishop of Rome, the Portuguese Archbishop Menezes of Goa summoned a synod at Udayamperoor. They sought the help from the Rajah of Kochi (Cochin). The Rajah of Kochi and local Hindu Chieftains threatened those who refused to attend the Sunhados, as commanded by the Portuguese. The Rajah had even declared that all assets of Mar Thoma Nazrani Churches that stay away from the Sunhados would be forfeited. The delegates (153 priests and 660 faithful), headed by Archdeacon Giwargis d'Sleeva (George of the cross), who attended the Sunhados were forced to accept the decrees read out by the Archbishop Menezes as the military of Portuguese and Kochi Rajah surrounded the Church. Thus Mar Thoma Nasranis were subjugated under the Roman Catholic hierarchy of Goa. A Church that had origins from Saint Thomas the Apostle with unrestricted jurisdiction became a mere suffragan under the Latin archdiocese of Goa.

### **The so-called Udayamperoor Sunhados**

Under the disguise of subjecting the Nasrani Church to the Pope of Rome, what Dom Menezes actually did was to subject the Mar Thoma Nasranis to the authority and jurisdiction of Goa. He tactfully endeavoured to eliminate Bishops sent by the CoE Patriarch of Babylon who gave spiritual guidance to the Nasranis. To achieve this, a false impression that the CoE Patriarch was Nestorian and therefore, a "heretic" and "opposed to Rome". This impression was inculcated in the minds of the Nasranis. Dom Menezes was successful in this deceitful.

Here we should remember the division of the Church of East (CoE) and the creation of the Chaldean Catholic Patriarchate of Babylon. Due to difference in opinion about the hereditary succession of Patriarchal position in the CoE, Monk Yohannan Sulaqa in 1552 AD, went to Rome to be consecrated and installed Patriarch. Pope Julius III installed him as Patriarch in 1553 AD. His successors till the end of the sixteenth century were 'Abdiso' (1555-1571), 'Aithalla' (1578-

1580), and 'Denha Simon' (1581-1600). Abdiso visited Rome and obtained confirmation and the Pallium. Aithalla owing to old age could neither visit Rome, nor did he get confirmation from Rome before his death. Denha Simon got confirmation and the Pallium from Rome. It was this Patriarch who was in open communion with Rome that was condemned by Dom Menezes as a oeheretica in the Udayamperoor Sunhados. Since the arrival of Mar Yousef Sulaqa, the brother of Yohannan Sulaqa, in Malabar in 1555 AD as a prelate, the Malabar Church became in direct communion with the Church of Rome.

It is also worth mentioning few more facts about the relation that the CoE and the Mar Thoma Nasranis had with the Latin Catholic Church of Rome. Because the Church of the East was located inside the Persian Empire and further East, it had the independence to ordain bishops without informing any of the other Christian Patriarchates, all of whom were located inside the Roman Empire. This privilege was in existence by the time of the Council of Nicea in 325 AD. In 410 AD the bishop of Seleucia-Ctesiphon took the title of Catholicos-Patriarch and became the Head CoE.

However there were many dialogues between the Church of the East and that of Rome (in AD 1247 by Patriarch Sabrisho V and by Mar Jaballaha III in 1288). A Moreover during the time of crusades, many cultural exchanges happened. Rabban Sauma and Monk Markose went to Rome and celebrated the East Syriac Qurbana there and made a deposition to the Pope "With the pardon of my faults and sins which I have received thee, O Father, I desire of thy fatherliness, O' Holy Father that I may receive communion from thy hands, so that I may have complete forgiveness."

Pope Julius III said that the discipline and liturgy of the Chaldeans had already been approved by his predecessors, Nicholas I (858-867), Leo X (1513-1521) and Clement VII (1523-1534) at the time of confirming of Yohannan Sulaqa as Chaldean Patriarch in 1553 AD. The same letter also mentions the former Patriarch, Simon Mama, of good memory, as Patriarch of the Christians in Malabar.

Moreover, at least a faction of CoE had communication with and sometimes even influences from, the Latin Church. For example, the Mysteries of ancient Church of the East are unique. It presents an alternative list of sacraments with distinct theology, which exist alongside the sacramental theologies of Greek and Latin Churches.

Later in fourteenth century, one can see a list of seven Mysteries. This is due to the interaction of Church of East with Latin Church through missionaries. The Dominican missionary Rocoldo de Monte preached in the Churches of Baghdad in 1290 AD.

From the documentary evidences, one cannot say that Mar Thoma Nasranis had ever rejected the Primacy of the Pope. Some authors consider it as an advantage to portray that Nasranis were part of the Catholic Church since beginning of Christianity. There is no clear evidence to show the relation between the see of Rome and the Church of Nasranis prior to the arrival of Mar Joseph Sulaqa in Malabar. Nevertheless one can definitely say that Nasranis were subjects of Pope at the time of the Sunhados since it was after more than 40 years of Catholic communion!! Considering these, we can conclude that the Sunhados was conducted not to correct the schism of Mar Thoma Nasranis, but to gain control of their Church and thereby monopolise the trade and power in Indian territories.

#### **Coonan cross Oath and aftermath events**

The frustration of the St. Thomas Christians reached its zenith in 1653 with the 'Coonan cross oath'. The Coonan Cross Oath was the revolt by Nasranis against the Portuguese as a result of the dominance that they have exerted on the Church of Nasranis since the so-called Synod of Udaymperoor in 1599. It took place on 3 January 1653 at Mattancherry in Cochin. At the time of Coonan cross oath, only 400 out of 3,00,000 Saint Thomas Christians stood with the Portuguese missionaries (Jesuits). Result of the Coonan Cross oath was that an Independent Church under the leadership of the Arkkadiyokan was formed.

Twelve Kathanaars of Nasranis consecrated Arkkadiyokan as a Metropolitan at Edappalli on 22 May 1653. Kalliseril Anjilimoottil Itty Thomman Kathanaar, Kaduthuruthy Kadavil Chandy Kathanaar, Angamaly Vengoor Giwargis Kathanaar and Kuravilangad Palliveettil Parampil Chandy Kathanaar were appointed as his advisors.

After the oath the Portuguese missionaries attempted for reconciliation with Nasranis. They failed as the Archdeacon and other leaders were not interested in any type of negotiations. Therefore the Portuguese missionaries informed Rome the issue. Rome sent Carmelite Missionaries under the leadership of Fr Joseph Maria in AD 1657, and Fr Vincent of Hyacinth in AD 1658 for reconciliation

with Mar Thoma Nasranis. The Portuguese missionaries succeeded in convincing a group of Nasranis, including Palliveettil Chandy Kathanaar and Kadavil Chandy Kathanaar that the consecration of Arkkadiyokan as metropolitan was not legitimate. When the illegitimacy of the consecration of Arkkadiyaokkan gained publicity, the Arkkadiyaokkan started losing his followers. Carmelite delegate Joseph Maria returned to Rome and got consecration from Pope as the Bishop of Mar Thoma Nasranis as Joseph Sebastiani 1659. A Sebastiani was able to win 40 churches within a year. By 1663, another 44 Churches came under the obedience of Rome and only 32 remained with the Arkkadiyaokkan.

In 1663, the Dutch defeated the Portuguese and declared that, all Portuguese missionaries had to leave Malabar. For this reason Sebastiani who was leading the negotiations, had to leave Malabar immediately. Before leaving he consecrated Palliveettil Chandy Kathanaar as the Bishop of Saint Thomas Christians and Vicar Apostolic of the Archdiocese of Angamali on 1 February 1663. The community was thus divided into two factions: one, under the leadership of Palliveettil Chandy Methraan, with a legitimate Bishopric consecration and the other under the leadership of Arkkadiyaokkan or Mar Thoma I, without a legitimate Bishopric consecration. These two groups later became to be known as Pazhayakoor (old alliance, those who continued the alliance with Rome) and Puthenkoor (new alliance, those who rejected the authority of Rome). Illegitimate Bishopric consecration of Mar Thoma I made it easy for Palliveettil Chandy Methraan to win more people to his side.

#### **Pazhayakoor faction**

Knowingly or unknowingly Carmelites succeeded in dividing the community. Also they won in removing the historical title of *Arkkadiyokan* from Pazhayakoor faction-the group that continued their alliance with Rome. They appointed a bishop for Pazhayakoor, who traditionally for Nasranis was taking care of spiritual matters only. Some argue that it was only Portuguese who gave a native bishop for the Nasrani community. However, there are several circumstantial evidences from the early centuries to prove that there were native bishops for Mar Thoma Nasranis. Moreover it was not due to their generosity, but due to the political situation that the Portuguese allowed to consecrate an indigenous Bishop for Pazhayakoor.

It was only due to the political situation that the Pazhayakoor faction got a native bishop Palliveettil Chandy Methraan. Otherwise Sebastini would have continued in his position. It is interesting to note that Rome tactfully did not continue the indigenous bishopric of Malabar after the death of Palliveettil Chandy Methraan in 1687 AD. If they were sincere, we would have seen more indigenous bishops immediately after the death of Palliveettil Chandy Methraan. The Church had to wait until 1896 AD to get their first indigenous bishop, although the original see of the Church (Angamaly) was suppressed to wipe out any trace of an independent Church with unrestricted jurisdiction.

The Pazhayakoor faction was never happy with the ecclesial support they received from the Latin delegates who continued imposing more Latin traditions that were foreign to the Malabar Christians. Also, there were instances of European Latin missionaries ill-treatment on Nasrani priests and laymen. One such priest, Ikkako Kathanar of Edappally was kidnapped and brutally murdered by the Carmelites at Varappuzha. Four priests including Kariyattil and Paremmakkil Kathanaars undertook a dangerous trip to Rome after assembly of Nasranis at Angamaly. Although Kariyattil was appointed as the archbishop of Malabar, he failed to reach Kodungallur. He had died in the custody of Portuguese in Goa. It is alleged that he was assassinated. Rome or Latin delegates in India never bothered to replace the position of Mar Kariyattil. Kariyattil was also authorised to oversee the reunion of Puthenloor. The Latins sabotaged all re-union efforts.

If the line of Palliveettil Chandy Methraan was continued immediately afterwards, or Kariyattil had an immediate successor after his death, the alliance of Pazhayakoor faction with Rome would have been meaningful and the reunion with Puthenloor faction would have become a reality.

In accordance with the Angamaly Padiyola, later centuries also Pazhayakoor faction sent petitions in large volumes to the Chaldean Patriarch. In response to some attempts, two bishops sent by the Chaldean Patriarch Joseph VI Audo, Mar Thomas Rocos (in 1862 AD) and Mar Mellus (in 1874 AD), reached Malabar. Both bishops managed to get support from the faithful as they were eagerly waiting for prelates who followed their rite. However their arrival resulted in a division within Pazhayakoor faction.

Father Chavara Kuriakose, being a saintly person fell into the trap of the Latin prelates. Thus Mar Thoma Nasranis lost another

opportunity to re-unite themselves to the Catholic Patriarch of CoE. Mar Rocos tried to win Father Chavara over, and offered him Bishop's position, but Father Chavara humbly refused the offer. On September 5, 1861, as a reply to Father Chavara's petition to Rome, a letter was received saying that Mar Rocos came to Malabar without the permission from Rome. Later, Patriarch Joseph VI Audo himself requested Mar Rocos to return back to Mesopotamia.

However pro-Rocos Pazhayakoor faction was not ready to return back to Latin delegates after Rocos went back. They sent a priest named Anthony Thondanat to the Chaldean Patriarch to consecrate him as a metropolitan. The Latin authorities in Mosul did not permit the Patriarch to consecrate a bishop for India. Eventually, the Assyrian Patriarch (non-Catholic faction of CoE) Mar Ruwel Shimun consecrated Mar Abdisho Thondanat Metropolitan in 1862 (the non-Catholic Patriarch) and this was the beginning of the Chaldean Syrian Church of the East (also known as Surais of Trichur).

During Mellusian schism, Rome sent a messenger to Malabar and followed by that, the Chaldean Patriarch had to call Mar Mellus back. Mellus, returned only by 1882 AD, but by the time of his return, he managed to get support from a sizeable number of Nasranis. When the news of Papal intervention spread in Malabar, a significant number of faithful returned back to being under the Latin delegates. The work of Mar Mellus enabled Mar Abdisho Thondanat to begin functioning as Metropolitan of India. In 1904 AD, they have received a confirmation from the Assyrian Church of East that their Episcopal ministration would be uninterrupted.

Eventually the Pazhayakoor faction received an indigenous bishop, but they did not continue the leadership of Archdeacon at any time in their history as a separate group. Moreover, in the later centuries their importance had again reduced to the status of a saffragan group under in the Bishopric of Varappuzha. The Carmelites who were in charge of the Church continued the process of Latinising. It was only in the late 19th century that Rome realised its mistake that they had latinised the Eastern churches (another example, Chaldean Church of Iraq) that accepted the alliance of Pope. It was late, because many of the native traditions and practices were wiped off by then. In 1887, Pope named the Church as "Syro-Malabar Church" and two independent vicariates (Kottayam and Thrissur) were formed. Prior

to this they did not forget to suppress traditional see of Nasranis in Angamaly. Also, in 1886 AD, they created a new symbolic position called Patriarch of East Indies in Goa.

From the chart it can be seen that Syro-Malabar Church and Chaldean Syrian Church of the East have derived from the Pazhayakoor faction. Syro-Malabar Church is in full communion with the Rome. It is one of the 22 sui iuris Oriental Churches with its own particular characteristics in terms of worship, spirituality, theology and disciplinary laws. The head of the Syro-Malabar Church is the Major Archbishop. The Chaldean Syrian Church of the East is a metropolitan see of the Assyrian Church of the East. Its head is a metropolitan residing in Thrissur.

### **Puthenkoor Faction**

From the chart given above, it can be seen that the Puthenkoor faction is divided into five Churches: The Jacobite Syrian Christian Church, Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, and Malabar Independent Syrian Church. Brief histories of undivided Puthenkoor faction and these Churches are given below.

After the united Malabar Church under Arkkadiyokkan got divided into the Puthenkoor and Pazhayakoor factions, former faction anxiously looked for getting the patronage of an Oriental Church. Their leader, Mar Thoma I who was consecrated by 12 priests immediately after the Coonan cross oath, contacted other oriental churches. In 1665 AD, Mor Gregorios, reached Malabar with the help of Dutch navigators. The Puthenkoor faction enthusiastically welcomed him, although he was following a rite that was foreign to Nasranis. Initially liturgy of Puthenkoor faction was not different from that of Pazhayakoor faction, i.e., East Syriac. A Later, the Dutch brought 3 Jacobite bishops from the Middle East and they introduced the West Syriac (part of Antiochene liturgy). West Syriac liturgy was introduced, but the writing system continued as East Syriac. Even after the introduction of West Syriac, East Syrian liturgy was not continued to be in use. By the fourth quarter of 19th century, Puthenkoor faction adopted West Syriac language and liturgical traditions. Thus, although through a gradual process, a new liturgical tradition has been introduced among Nasranis. This made it even more challenging for a re-union of the Nasrani Churches under a single head.

In 1772 AD, Mar Thoma VI had received ordination from the Jacobite Bishop, Mar Gregorios who visited Malabar. He accepted the new title Mar Dionysius. It is not clear why Mar Thoma VI received ordination again from Mar Gregorios as he received all holy orders (from first tonsure to Episcopal ordination), for the second time. Some claim that the predecessors of Mar Thoma VI might not have been really ordained. Therefore, the Episcopal ordination of the Mar Thoma I and his five successors is still in question since it is not clear whether Mor Gregorios had ordained Mar Thoma I.

### **First Split within Puthenkoor faction: Formation of Malabar Independent Mar Thoma Church**

As mentioned above Mar Thoma VI had received ordination from the Jacobite Bishop, Mar Gregorios who visited Malabar. Due to private reasons, Mar Gregorios executed a second Episcopal ordination in secret in the Mulanthuruthy Church, elevating Rabban Kattumangatt Kurien as Mar Koorilos. The ordination took place without the consent or knowledge of other Bishops. However, strict interpretation of canon law indicates that the ordination was valid.

Mar Gregorios died in 1773 AD leaving all his assets to Mar Koorilos. Mar Koorilos was recognised by the Rajah of Cochin and he claimed jurisdiction of churches near Cochin area. Mar Dionysius found Mar Koorilos as a threat to the existence of his position. He approached the British Government for help and with the help of the Kochi Rajah Mar Diosynius jailed Mar Koorilos. Mar Koorilos succeeded in escaping from prison and withdrew from the area that was under control of the Rajah of Cochin. He established himself in Thozhiyoor, a small village under the control of Zamorin at the time. His Church later came to be known as Thozhiyoor Mar Thoma Church or Malabar Independent Syrian Church. The liturgical traditions followed by this Church are of West Syrian.

### **Second Split with Puthenkoor faction: Formation of Mar Thoma Syrian Church**

In the later half of Eighteenth century, the British gained the control on parts of Malabar Coast. During this period, they gave an Anglican stamp to the Puthenkoor faction. Followed by the visit of Claudius Buchanan, they succeeded to win about 40 of the 150 priests from the Puthenkoor faction and encouraged them to get married. In 1836



AD, the Anglican Bishop Wilson of Calcutta visited Malabar and proposed a number of reformatory actions to be taken by the Anglican sympathisers. To neutralise this, Mar Dionysius IV called for a synod at Mavelikara. At this synod, it was acknowledged that the Jacobite Church had jurisdiction over Malabar Church. Those who opposed the decisions of synod left the Church and joined the Anglicans. But this group itself was later divided. A group continued to stay with Anglicans while the other decided to stay with Puthenloor faction, but did not rejoin the mainstream. The leadership of latter group sponsored Deacon Mathew from among its followers and sent him to the Jacobite Patriarch who ordained him priest and then bishop. He returned back in 1843 AD to Malabar as Mathew Mar Athanasius and declared himself as the head of the Church.

Mar Dionysius had to defend his position. He publicly accused Mar Mathew Athanasius with embracing Anglicanism. On hearing this, the Patriarch sent Euyakim Mar Koorilos Metropolitan for in the role of trouble-shooter. Accepting the proposal of Mar Koorilos, Mar Dionysius resigned from his office. But this did not end the rivalry between the groups. Each groups competed for winning more adherents. Mathew Mar Athanasius passed on his Episcopal ordination to his nephew and he accepted the title Thomas Mar Athanasius. Meanwhile, Mar Koorilos sent one of his loyal priests to the Patriarch and got him ordained as Mar Dionysius V. In 1875 AD, Patriarch Peter III Ignatius visited Malabar. He realised that the popularity of his followers were decreasing because of Mathew Mar Athanasius. He excommunicated Mar Mathew Athanasius and Thomas Mar Athanasius. Soon, Mathew Mar Athanasius died and his successor Thomas Mar Athanasius challenged the power of Patriarch in the civil court. The court was in favour of the excommunication and from thereon, the followers of Thomas Mar Athanasius styled themselves as reformed Jacobites or reformed Orthodox. They came to be known as Mar Thomites. At present Mar Thoma Syrian Church is a Church that is in communion with the Church of South India, the Church of North India, the Anglican Church and the Thozhiyoor Mar Thoma Church.

### **The Jacobite Syrian Christian Church and Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church**

The mainstream Puthenloor faction currently operates as two independent Churches: Jacobite Syrian Christian Church and

Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. The dispute between them is still going on and therefore a short description their historical events are treated under the same heading as given below.

In 1906 AD, a Jacobite Synod or the Government of Turkey dismissed Patriarch Abdel-Messih and installed Abdalla in his place. In 1909, Patriarch Abdalla visited Malabar and claimed his power on the temporalities of the Church as well. However, Mar Dionysius VI challenged the claim of the patriarch. As a result, the Patriarch excommunicated Mar Dionysius VI and nominated Mar Kurilos as his successor. The excommunicated group of Mar Dionysius VI invited Patriarch Abdel-Messih to Malabar. Upon his arrival, he created bishops and elevated the most senior among them, Paulose Mar Ivanios, as the Catholicos of the East. He also authorised his supporters from Malabar to ordain Catholicos whenever the office fell vacant. This in effect, allowed the relocation of the post of a Patriarch to Malabar.

Meanwhile in 1930 AD, a group of Puthenloor members submitted themselves to Rome under the leadership of Mar Ivanios. The effort for reunification started with the consent of his fellow bishops, but in the end he was left alone with his suffragan Mar Theophilos.

The group that recognised the power of Patriarch is popularly known as 'Bava Kakshi' or 'Patriarch party'. The group that attribute the power of patriarch on only spiritual matters only is known as Bishop Party or Methraan Kakshi. Since early twentieth century, the two groups are fighting each other in Indian civil courts. Both groups won and lost alternatively. Several attempts for settling the issues between the groups occurred, but none was successful. In 1959, Supreme Court of India legitimised into Bishop party. This verdict enabled both groups to come to reconciliation. In 1974, Bishop party stayed away from a Synod held in Damascus. The synod decided to terminate the position of Catholicos and other heads. However it was difficult to implement the decisions of the synod in the far away land Kerala, an alternative arrangement was made. The patriarch party also was granted a position of Catholicos. Since then, both groups operate separately.

### **Syro-Malankara Catholic Church**

Syro-Malankara Church was derived from Puthenloor faction and therefore its history until its foundation is the same as that of Jacobite

Syrian Church. Separate history of this Church starts with the reunion of a group of Puthankoor to the Pazhayakoor through their communion with Catholic Church. Since the separation of Malabar Church in 1663, there were several attempts for reunification. However, none were fruitful and in 1930 AD, a group of Puthenkeor members submitted themselves to Rome under the leadership of Mar Ivanios. The effort for reunification started with the consent of his fellow bishops, but in the end he was left alone with his suffragan Mar Theophilos. In 1932, a new hierarchical setup was designated as Syro-Malankara Church. The Church continued their West Syrian liturgical tradition that they received during their communion with Jacobite Church. The Syro-Malankara Church also constitutes those priests and laity who joined the Catholic Church along with the leadership of Paulos Mar Philexenos III (the head of Malabar Independent Syrian Church of the time) in 1977 AD.

#### **Nasranis of Other Denominations**

It should be mentioned also here that a number of Nasranis are part of Latin Catholic Church, Church of South India and numerous Pentecostal movements. Some Syro-Malabar churches were taken over by the Latin dioceses since the arrival of Portuguese. Arthumkal, Koonamavu etc. are few examples. Church of South India has a diocese that is exclusive for Nasranis and they are in full communion with Mar Thoma Syrian Church. During the past few decades a number of Pentecostal movements have gained significant growth in Kerala, particularly in the Northern districts. This is partly due to the fights within the Churches.

#### **Summary and Conclusions**

The attempts of the Latin missionaries to dominate and latinise the Apostolic Nasrani community of Malabar eventually resulted in numerous divisions and gradual decay of the Nasrani's ancient way of life and their liturgical practices (East Syriac rite).

The Syro-Malabar Church is the largest denomination of the Nasrani community. This Church is struggling against Latinisation while desperately clinging on to whatever is remaining of the ancient East Syriac rite that was once common to all Mar Thoma Nasranis. They did not continue the historical position of Arkadiyokkan, the title that once reflected their pride and independence of Nasranis.

The Syro-Malabar Church is in communion with the Latin Church of Rome. The Latin hierarchy prevents the Church from establishing new dioceses or even provide pastoral care to its migrants outside the proper territory which is mostly limited to Kerala. This is the fate of a Church with Apostolic origins and whose Metropolitans and Archdeacons once had the Titles of 'Director of the See of Saint Thomas' and 'Archdeacon of All India' respectively!

The Puthenkeor faction of the Nasranis, eventually gave up their ancient East Syriac rite and adopted the West Syrian (Antiochian) rite of the Jacobites. The Jacobites were brought into the scene by the Dutch and after re-union attempts with the Pazhayakoor faction failed, the Puthenkeor eventually accepted the new rite. The historical title Arkkadiyokkan was renamed into the "Throne of Mar Thoma", the metropolitan of the Church, although its traditional meaning has diluted. This title "Mar Thoma" at present is followed by Mar Thoma Syrian Church and Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.

Tensions grew within the Jacobite community over the level of authority of the Jacobite Patriarch into the matters of their Church in India. This led to further divisions in the Jacobite community and today two major factions are literally fighting on the streets to gain control of each other's property.

Whatever the reasons for divisions, it caused the degradation of Mar Thoma Nasranis. Most of the divisions were due to power struggles among the leaders. The laymen of ancient Nasranis had significant role in Church-related matters. At present, Syro-Malabar Church members are not aware about their own rich traditions and struggles of ancestors to preserve their identity. The leaders of various factions and denominations are responsible for the ignorance of their people and do not take up attempts for unity of the Nasrani Churches seriously. We, the members of the Syro-Malabar Church have the most ancient practices and faithful liturgy of Mar Thoma Sleeha. Therefore it is our collective responsibility to preserve our unique identity. Let us work and pray for the unity of Nasranis.

## Chapter 7

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### Syro-Malankara Catholic Church

The Syro-Malankara church counts about 500,000 members, the vast majority of whom live in India, especially in the southern state of Kerala. Like other Syrian Christians in India, members of the Syro-Malankara church proudly trace their origin to Saint Thomas the Apostle, who is said to have built seven churches in India beginning in 52 AD and to have been martyred near Chennai. Mar (Bishop) Ivanios led five members of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, one group of heirs to the Thomas Christian legacy, to join into communion with Rome in 1930. In 1932, the Syro-Malankara church was officially established by Pope Pius XI, under the leadership of Mar Ivanios.

The adjective “Syro” in Syro-Malankara, like the broader term “Syrian Christian,” refers not to Syrian ethnicity in India, but to the liturgical rite that the Christians celebrate. As K.C. Zachariah observes, “most

of the present-day Syrian Christians are descendants of converts from among Hindus. There may be some faint traces of Syrian blood in a few Syrian Christian families, but the vast majority of the community today belongs to one or other of an Indian race, Dravidian or Aryan. In language, dress and other customs, they do not differ from their Hindu counterparts.”

Syro-Malankara liturgy is referred to as the Holy Qurbano, and the liturgy defines the church’s identity. By the church’s own description, “The whole life of piety of the oriental faithful is centered on their liturgy. They do not have very many pious exercises as the Christians of the Western Church. Their life of prayer is lived in and through the liturgical celebrations.”

#### Historical Overview of the Church

The Church of St Thomas in India got rooted in the socio-cultural milieu of India and developed her own ecclesial, liturgical, spiritual and administrative traditions. This was in communion with the Universal Church through her ecclesial communion with the Churches of the Middle East. Besides the Metropolitan of all India, there was also a leader of the St Thomas Christians, a priest with the title “Archdeacon of all India” who played a vital role in the day-to-day administration of the Church. This Apostolic Church was in Catholic Communion from the very early centuries. It came in contact with the Syro-Chaldean Church of the Middle East and consequently adopted the East Syrian Liturgy. In the sixteenth century, this Apostolic Church came into direct relationship with the Western Church through the Portuguese missionaries. The Portuguese extended the Padroado agreement in their evangelization programme over India and wanted to bring the Indian Church of the St Thomas Christians under this jurisdiction. The Church in India which was rooted in the socio-cultural environment and which enjoyed autonomy in internal administration in communion with the Universal Church resisted the unwanted intervention of the Portuguese who brought with them the Western ecclesiastical traditions. The Portuguese missionaries, ignorant of the Oriental traditions of the Indian Church, had the conviction that anything different from the Western Church was schism and heresy. Hence they wanted to latinize the Syrian Christians of India. In 1599 Archbishop Alexis Menezis convoked a Synod of

Diamper (Udayamperoor) and imposed Latin practices and ritual traditions on the Apostolic Church of India. This was a blow to the identity of the Indian Church. However, the relation continued till the beginning of the second half of the seventeenth century. The Church of St Thomas Christians could not withstand any more the denial of her autonomy. The initial resistance slowly gave way to discontentment, which ended up with the revolt in 1653 known as the Koonan Cross Oath. Thus, the one Church of the St Thomas Christians was split into two. A large majority of the broken-away-group hesitated to sever ties with Rome and they remained in communion with Rome, but, under the Latin Hierarchy. This group came to be called the Pazhayakûttukar, while the other was known as Puthenkûttukar. The latter group made several attempts for reunion with Rome safeguarding their autonomy and patrimony. Failing to re-establish communion with Rome, they happened to come in communion with the Jacobite Syrian Church of Antioch. These developments were not acts against the Apostolic See of Rome but against the Portuguese missionaries and their policy of latinization. Even after the communion with the Jacobite See of Antioch, the Malankara Prelates Mar Thomas I (+1670), Mar Thomas II (+1686), Mar Thomas III (+1688), Mar Thomas IV (+1728), Mar Thomas V (+1765), Mar Thomas VI (+1808) and Mar Thomas VII (+1815) one after the other had attempted reunion with the Holy See, but all ended up in failure.

The Puthenkur community came under the influence of the British missionaries in the 19th century. From 1815 till 1836, the year of the Synod of Mavelikara, the British missionaries propagated Protestant ideology among the Puthenkûttukar. This paved the way to the formation of the Mar Thoma Church under the leadership of Palakunnath Abraham Malpan and Mar Athanasios, who was consecrated Bishop by the Patriarch of Antioch. In order to outdo the reformists Mar Divannasios approached the Patriarch of Antioch. Patriarch Peter III arrived in Malankara and in the Synod of Mulanthuruthy (1876) the Malankara Church had to accept the authority of the Patriarch of Antioch over this Church. Since then, the Malankara Church had contended that the Patriarch's authority was only in spiritual matters. It was in this contentious context that Patriarch Mar Abdulla who came to Malankara, excommunicated Vattasseril Mar Divannasios in the year 1911. In this turbulent situation Fr P.T.

Geevarghese (later Archbishop Mar Ivanios) played a vital role in reinstating the position of the excommunicated Metropolitan and in regaining the self-governance of the Malankara Church. To ward off the undue interference of Patriarch Abdulla in the administration of the temporalities of the Church, Fr P.T. Geevarghese with the blessing of Vattasseril Mar Divannasios contacted Abded M'siha, the Patriarch of Antioch from whom Mar Abdulla usurped the Patriarchal See of Antioch, and invited him to visit Malankara and to establish a Catholicate here. Accordingly, Patriarch Abded M'siha came to Malankara in 1912 and established the Malankara Catholicate. Thus the Malankara Church in India became an autonomous Church under its head the Catholicos. Moran Mor Baselios Paulos I (1912-1913), the first Catholicos, was called to eternal rest after a short period of five months on 13 May 1913.

After the demise of Catholicos Baselios Paulos I, the See remained vacant until 1925. That was a period of litigations in the Malankara Church and also a period of spiritual renewal. The litigation for Vattippanam (a fixed deposit of money in the name of the Church) and its after-effects in the community was at its zenith. Fr P.T. Geevarghese who loved his Church was moved by the Spirit of God. He realised that only a spiritual awakening of the Church would give a lasting solution to the problems of the Church. He himself took to sanyâsa (Religious Life) and founded the Order of the Imitation of Christ also called Bethany Ashram in the year 1919. The first Ashram was erected at Mundanmala of Ranni Perunad in Kerala. In 1925 he founded the community of the Sanyasins, the Sisters of the Imitation of Christ also called Bethany Madhom. From these two religious communities winds of spiritual fervour and renaissance blew across Malankara. By a decision of the Episcopal Synod, on 30 April 1925 Moran Mor Baselios Geevarghese I was installed as Catholicos. On the following day, the Catholicos consecrated Fr P. T. Geevarghese with the name Geevarghese Mar Ivanios as the Bishop of Bethany.

### **Malankara Reunion Movement**

On 1 November 1926, the Episcopal Synod held at Parumala near Tiruvalla, Kerala, decided to open negotiations again with Rome for



communion with the Catholic Church in order to establish peace in Malankara. The Synod authorised Mar Ivanios, the Bishop of Bethany, to make necessary correspondence with Rome regarding communion. He earnestly followed up the mandate of the Synod.

The Second Catholicos expired on 17 December 1928. Moran Mor Baselios Geevarghese II succeeded the late Catholicos. On the day following his installation, he consecrated Mar Theophilos of Bethany and Mar Gregorios of Pampady as Bishops. In the meantime, the civil court's decision on the litigation for Vattipanam was declared in favour of the Malankara Orthodox Church. This was a civil legal backing up for the Malankara Orthodox Church and consequently it stepped out from the endeavours of communion with Rome.

After prolonged negotiations, the plenary session of the Sacred Congregation for the Oriental Churches, which met on 4 July 1930, took the final decision on the issue of the communion of the Malankara Church. But only Mar Ivanios the Metropolitan of Bethany and his suffragan Jacob Mar Theophilos stood by the early decision of the Synod. Mar Ivanios and Mar Theophilos along with Rev. Fr John Kuzhinapurath OIC, Deacon Alexander OIC and Mr Chacko Kilileth made their profession of faith before Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger OCD of the Diocese of Quilon and entered into full communion with the Catholic Church on 20 September 1930.

### **Metropolitan Archbishop Geevarghese Mar Ivanios (1930-1953)**

His Holiness Pope Pius XI made an interim canonical provision for the administration of the reunited faithful through the papal document *Magnum Nobis* dated 11 February 1932. As the Reunion Movement gained momentum, Archbishop Mar Ivanios made three personal visits to Holy Father Pope Pius XI on 26 April, 2 May and 11 May 1932. The Holy Father vested Mar Ivanios with sacred pallium on 2 May 1932.

Pope Pius XI through the Apostolic Constitution *Christo Pastorum Principi* of 11 June 1932, established the Syro-Malankara Hierarchy for the reunited community and erected the Archieparchy of Trivandrum with the Eparchy of Tiruvalla as its suffragan. Thus, the

Malankara Church re-entered into the hierarchical communion with the Catholic Church. The Syro-Malankara Catholic Hierarchy came into existence through the inauguration of the Metropolitan Eparchy of Trivandrum on 11 May 1933 and His Grace Mar Ivanios was enthroned as its first Metropolitan- Archbishop. His Grace Mar Augustine Kandathil, the Archbishop of Ernakulam, His Excellency Bishop Aloysius Maria Benziger OCD, the Bishop of Quilon, His Grace Mar James Kalassery, the Archbishop of Changanassery, His Excellency Mar Alexander Choolaparambil, the Bishop of Kottayam and His Excellency Jacob Mar Theophilos were present on the occasion. The Eparchy of Tiruvalla was inaugurated on 6 November 1933 and Most Rev. Jacob Mar Theophilos was enthroned as its first Bishop.

The reunion of Archbishop Mar Ivanios with the Catholic Church was a historical event in the universal Church, which inspired many of the Malankarites including the Bishops of the Orthodox Church. On 29 November 1937, Most Rev. Joseph Mar Severios, Metropolitan of Niranam of the Malankara Orthodox Church reunited with the Catholic Church. Later, Most Rev. Thomas Mar Dioscoros, the Metropolitan of the Knanaya Jacobite Church, reunited with the Catholic Church on 12 November 1939.

In God's providence, the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church engaged in her double mission of communion of the Malankara Orthodox Church and evangelisation. The Church began to increase in number. With the blessing of Archbishop Mar Ivanios, Rt. Rev. Msgr Joseph Kuzhinjalil founded the missionary congregation of the Daughters of Mary in 1938 at Marthandom in Kanyakumari District. Through the great zeal of these missionaries, the mission of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church spread to the southern regions of Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

On 21 February 1943 Bishop Thomas Mar Dioscoros passed away and was buried at St. Mary's Malankara Catholic Church, Thirumoolapuram (Tiruvalla) where he had been residing. Mar Ivanios worked relentlessly for the building up of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church. Through his travels abroad (Rome and other European countries, America and Australia) he spread the message of ecclesial communion and the awareness of the mission of the

Syro-Malankara Catholic Church in the Universal Church. After a period of 22 years of strenuous hectic task of organizing and administering the Syro- Malankara Catholic Church he fell ill for more than a year. Nevertheless, His Grace consecrated Benedict Mar Gregorios as his Auxiliary on 29 January 1953. Archbishop Mar Ivanios passed away on 15 July 1953 and was entombed at St Mary's Cathedral, Trivandrum.

The Eparchy of Tiruvalla was also making strides in its growth and development under the leadership of Jacob Mar Theophilos and Joseph Mar Severios. Mar Severios was the administrator of the Eparchy until 1950 due to the ill-health of Mar Theophilos. On 5 May 1950 he was appointed as the Bishop of Tiruvalla. He was also invested with the title 'Archbishop' by the Holy See. He was called to eternal rest on 18 January 1955.

#### **Metropolitan Archbishop Benedict Mar Gregorios (1953-1994)**

Most Rev. Benedict Mar Gregorios was enthroned as the Metropolitan- Archbishop of Trivandrum and the Head of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church on 27 January 1955. Under the spiritual renewal, the pastoral guidance and the social commitment of Archbishop Benedict Mar Gregorios, the Church began to flourish in its various dimensions. A significant development of this period is the organization of the Syro- Malankara Catholic Faithful in India, outside the canonical territorial boundaries of the Church. From being organized as Malankara Catholic Associations, the communities of our faithful living in the Metropolitan cities of India came to be erected as personal parish communities. St Mary's Malankara Major Seminary was inaugurated at Pattom on 29 June 1983 with Philosophy course and afterwards it was shifted to the new building at Nalanchira, Trivandrum, which was blessed on 25 May 1989.

His Grace the Metropolitan-Archbishop Mar Gregorios was called to eternal rest on 10 October 1994 after an eventful service of 41 years and was entombed on 12th October at the side of his great predecessor at St.Mary's Cathedral, Pattom. It is to be specially mentioned that His Grace Mar Gregorios participated in all sessions of the Second Vatican Council and the subsequent Synod of Bishops in Rome. He served as President of the Catholic Bishops' Conference of India in 1988-1989.

#### **Major Archbishop - Catholicos Moran Mor Cyril Baselios (1995-2007)**

His Holiness Pope John Paul II appointed Most Rev. Cyril Mar Baselios, as the successor of His Grace Benedict Mar Gregorios in November 1994. On 10 February 2005, a day engraved in golden letters in the history of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church, His Holiness Pope John Paul II raised this Church to the status of a Major Archiepiscopal Church and appointed the then Metropolitan Archbishop as Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church through the Papal Bull *Ab ipso Sancto Thoma* On Thursday, 18 January 2007, His Beatitude Moran Mor Cyril Baselios, the first Major Archbishop-Catholicos of the Syro- Malankara Catholic Church slept in the Lord.

#### **Major Archbishop-Catholicos Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis (2007)**

The Holy Episcopal Synod of the Malankara catholic Church elected His Grace Most Rev. Dr Isaac Mar Cleemis, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Tiruvalla as the new Major Archbishop-Catholicos of the Syro Malankara Catholic Church and the Major Archbishop of Trivandrum. His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI confirmed the election on 9 Archbishop-Catholicos of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church and the Major Archbishop of Trivandrum on 5 March 2007 at St Mary's Cathedral, Pattom. His installation service was officiated by Most Rev. Geevarghese Mar Divannasios, the Synodal Administrator of the Church. Moran Mor Baselios Cleemis Catholicos, the Major Archbishop of Trivandrum, was appointed Cardinal by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI on 24 October 2012 and create him the new Cardinal of the Universal Church in the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church in the Consistory held on 24 November 2012. His Beatitude Moran Mor Baselios Cardinal Cleemis is the first Cardinal of the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church and the youngest of the universal Church.

## Chapter 8

### The Southists (Knanaya)

A merchant or Bishop named Thomas of Cana (also known as Knanaya Thommen or Thomas of Knanaya this being a recent addition) is connected with the history of the community of St. Thomas Christians. The details about this merchant or bishop are shrouded in mystery and there is no agreement on the year/period of his arrival, or from where he arrived, or on what grounds or whether he was a Bishop or merchant.

There exist a division among the Christians in Malabar as Northists (Vadakkumbhagar) and Southists (Thekkumbhagar). The Northists (Vadakkumbhagar) are known as Christians of Saint Thomas. The latter, ie, the Southists (Thekkumbhagar) are today known with the name “Knanaya”. This division as it seems, has started very late after many centuries after the arrival of Thomas of Cana in 9th century. The earliest Portuguese accounts are silent about such a division and we get some information only by the end of sixteenth

century. All of the early Portuguese accounts mentions that there exist Christian community before the arrival of Thomas of Cana in Malabar.

This chapter examines 1) Arrival of Thomas of Cana (Bishop Thomas of Cana ?), 2) About the name , 3) About the year of Arrival,4) Southist Version of the tradition, 5) Tekkumbhagar (Southist)/ Knanaya 6) Bishop Thomas of Cana,7) About the Northists and Southists division, 8)About the Churches at Cranganore 9) Summary

#### 1. Arrival of Thomas of Cana (Bishop Thomas of Cana ?)

Scholars like Dr. Mingana has been very critical on the legendary nature Kerala Christianity assigns to Thomas of Cana since eighteenth century. There is a tendency especially among Southists to exaggerate the events associated and contributions of Thomas of Cana. There is no general agreement concerning the traditions associated with the arrival of Thomas of Cana. Some assign him as a merchant, and others assign him as a Bishop ordained by Patriarch Timothy 1 in 9th century. Scholars such as J S. Assemani (1728), Lequien (1740), S. Giamil (1902), A Mingana (1926), Tisserant (1957), Hambye etc dates the arrival of Bishop Thomas of Cana in 9th century. According to many scholars Thomas of Jerusalem, a merchant and the Bishop Thomas of Cana are two persons who arrived in Malabar at different times in history.

##### a) Portuguese references about Thomas of Cana

Some reference about Thomas of Cana, can also be seen in sixteenth century Portuguese writings of Penteado (1518), Dionysio (1578), Correa (1564), Antonio Monserrate (1579), Antonio de Gouvea (1604), Chaldean Bishop Mar Jacob Abuna (1533) and on the report of the Bishop Francis Roz in 1604

Testimony	Year	Gist of the Report
Penteado	1518	Armenian merchant. Quarrel between two sons of the merchant.
Mar Jacob Abuna	1533	Merchant died at Cranganore

Correa	1564	Adds the Merchant met and stayed with a Servant of Apostle Thomas at Cranganore before buying his own land
Dionysio	1578	Merchant, Thomas, married a woman of Cranganore. United Christians who are already there and those he converted
Monserrate	1579	Thomas of Cana found Christians in Quilon and Cranganore, who descended from the disciples of the Apostle Saint Thomas and he united them
Bishop Francis Roz	1604	Thomas had a wife and a concubine. King gave him land

**1. Penteado ( 1518)**

The earliest reference is from a Portuguese report written by Penteado in 1518 .He narrates the origins of the Christians of St. Thomas both in Quilon and Cranganore to the king of Portugal. The first origins are from the Apostle Thomas. For the period after St. Thomas, as far as Cranganore is concerned, there came an Armenian merchant advanced in age. Since he had no hope of returning home, he bought an unoccupied land with all its income from the King of the place. He got the property rights both of land and water within the bounds of this land. According to the testimony there was evidence for this at that time. He had two sons. His elder son inherited the income of the land which the merchant bequeathed to the church, at the time of his death. The second son was made a judge over his slaves whom the father had bought, freed and converted. Between these Sons there arose disputes. Each gathered a faction around him. The elder son was defeated in a faction fight. He called in the Jews to help him. The Jews expelled from their land not only those Christians under the second son, against whom they were called in, but also the other Christians who had solicited their help. According to him, in 1518, these Jews are the masters

over that land. They serve the king of Cochin while to the Christians are reserved merely the honor and the title.

**2. Bishop Mar Jacob Abuna**

Chaldean Bishop Mar Jacob Abuna in 1533 makes references about a merchant. He writes that, a merchant from the country of Canane came to Mylapore on pilgrimage. After finding that all the houses there are in ruins, and being convinced that nothing could be done to restore them, he passed over to Cranganore. In Cranganore, he bought some land and built on it a church which was there at the time Abuna gave his testimony. The merchant died while living there and was buried in it.

**3. Correa (1564)**

Correa (1564), follows Abuna’s version but adds that the Armenian merchant met in Cranganore a servant of the Apostle Thomas. The merchant lodged with him before buying his own plot of ground.

**4. Dionysio (1578)**

Dionysio (1578) puts the arrival of Thomas of Cana after that of Mar Sabrisho and Mar Piruz. He is described as a native of Babylon and a merchant. He embarked at Cranganore and began to trade. Being rich and influential, he made friends with the King of the place. The King gave him a plot of land of about 500 square yards to erect a church in honor of St. Thomas. He united all the Christians who were already there, and those whom he himself had made Christians (converted). He obtained many donations from the King for the church. According to this from that time onwards Christianity prospered. The merchant, Thomas, married a woman of that place, and became the peer of the Nairs, the aristocracy of the land, and a warlike people. Only the Nairs served the king because all other castes were low castes when compared with the Nairs. If a low-caste man happened to touch a Nair, the Nair would bathe to remove the pollution of the touch. They live on allowances from the kings. The Christians were the equals of the Nairs in status, and they too live on allowances made to them by the Kings. It would be 752 years since this Thomas came from Babylon. All this is known from an inscription on sheets of iron. Then the author adds that only this was known with certainty about the origins of these Christians from the information gathered



from books and from tradition handed down by old people and by catanars (Kathanars), i.e., their priests.

**5. Monserrate (1579)**

Monserrate (1579) says when Thomas of Cana came, he found Christians in Quilon and Cranganore. They have descended from the disciples of the Aposlte Saint Thomas. These Christians were nominal and they married with Nairs. They just had crosses and Christian names. Thomas of Cana made them a united community and took care to preserve their superiority of caste.

**6. Francis Roz’s (1603/04- From (British Library MS Add-9853)**

Bishop Francis Roz’s main information is derived from the interpretation of the Copper plates said to be of Thomas of Cana (the interpretation of that time ?). It says during the time of last Xeram Perumal, Thomas Cananeo came from Babylon. He gave the King a good sum of money. He bought the whole of shrubland and founded on it the Church of Saint Thomas and the bazaar. Howerever, already many years before the Church was built, there was in that place Patanam a Church and a large village of the Christians.

In this Report on the Serra, Bishop Roz also gives an account of the translation of the Olla which the said Xeram Perumal gave to Thomas Cananeo. According to him (interpretation of the olla ?) , the Xeram (Xoran) Perumal reigning at the time of Mercury of February, on the 7th day of March before the full moon, the same king residing in Carnelur (?), there arrived in a ship Thomas of Cana, a chief man, determined to see the surroundings of the East. The king being informed of it, went out to meet him. Thomas disembarked and stood before the king who spoke to him friendly and imposed on him the surname of Coquarangon Cananeo, after the king’s own name.

Thomas accepted this honor and went to settle down himself in his place. The king gave him for ever the town of Magoder Patanam. Afterwards the king assigned to the new-corner a place covered with brushwood marking its boundaries and asked him to build a town there. Thomas wanted the place for himself and the king granted it to him. Thomas built there a church and his own house; the corner stone of both were laid by the king himself. The whole place was converted into a town which was given by the king to Thomas as an inheritance.

On an oportune day the church was inaugurated and the said Thomas entered the church and made his prayers.

Sometime after, Thomas went to the king and offered him presents and formally asked the king to give him and to his descendants the said land. The king accordingly measured 264 eils with an elephant and gave it to Thomas and his descendants, together with 62 houses which they had built in that place, with gardens and trees, with the circuits and ways and boundaries and the interior pathways. Roz continues to describe the privileges and rights the king gave him.

Bishop Roz also says, “he could find the name of Thomas of Cananeo, among the names of the saints whom the decon names in the Mass, attributing to him that he gave a large sum of money to the King of Malavar to buy that ground of Cranganor”.

Further Bishop Francis Roz opinionated that , he consider “it to be fable what these Christians narrate, namely that the said Thomas had a wife and a concubine from whom are descended the two kinds of Christians living in this Malavar”.

Regarding the lineage Bishop Francis Roz says, these Christians are descending from Thomas of Cana on the father’s side. Their mother was a Malabar heathen who got herself baptized later.

**2. About the Name**

Reported by	Year	Name
Penteado	1518	Armenian merchant
Mar Jacob Abuna	1533	From the country of Canane
Correa	1564	Thome Cana
Dionysio	1578	Quinai Thorné
Monserrate	1579	Mar Thomé
Bishop Francis Roz	1604	Thome Cananeo

Penteado (1518) merely calls him an Armenian merchant without giving his name. Mar Jacob Abuna (1533) mentions from the country of Canane. Correa (1564) call him as Thomé of Canane. Dionysio (1578) call him as Quinai Thorné.He was mentioned as Mar Thomé by Monserrate (1579) and Gouvea (1604) and as Thome Cananeo by Roz (1604).

The Malayalam form is generally Canai Thomman and is better expressed by Dionysio than others. Mar Thom  is from the Syriac.

**3. About the year of Arrival**

The earliest available report seems to be of Dionysio. Dionysio (1578) gives the arrival of Thomas of Cana after Mar Sabrisho and Mar Piruz ie, after 9th century. Gouvea (1604) also dates the arrival in 9th century. The Dutch writer Visscher (1743) also gives the date as 745 AD. Hugh gives the date as 780 AD. Assemani in 900 AD. Paolo gives the arrival as 825 AD. Some of the 16th century records doesn't mention the dates.

Reported by	Year	Year of arrival
Dionysio	1578	After the 9 <sup>th</sup> Century
Gouvea	1604	9 <sup>th</sup> Century
Visscher	1743	745 AD
Hugh		780 AD
Assemani		900 AD
Paolo		825 AD
Local document	18 <sup>th</sup> Century	345 AD (also according to current Southist tradition)

The Southists (Thekkumbhagar- Knanaya) tradition gives the year as 345 AD. This is based on an eighteenth century document.

**4. Southist Version of the Tradition**

The tradition current among the Southists (known today with the recently coined term Knanayas), is that about the year 345 AD, 72 families came to Malabar Coast along with a Bishop under the leadership of Cnai (Knanaya) Thomman. This was based on the divine intervention of Catholicos of East to send Thomas, a merchant of Jerusalem for the service of Christians of Malabar as they were deprived of priests and partly reverted to idolatry. King Cheraman Perumal honored them with many titles and privileges which were recorded in some Copper plates.

This version is generally based on a record written in Malayalam and Syriac about 1770, and secured through the care of Gavril

(Gabriel), a Syriac Orthodox (Jacobite) bishop. The document is now preserved in the University library of Leyden. The contents of this document are not historically reliable.<sup>2</sup>

In 1939, Joseph Chazhikaden (a member of Southist Community) promulgated a bold Southist legend. He published a Malayalam book "Tekkumbhagasamudayam Charitram" [History of the Southist Community]. The English version of the book had the title, "The Syrian Colonisation of Malabar". The English title is not an exact rendering of the Malayalam title of the original book. This book is a rambling collection of the noble origins and tradition of the Southists. A major section is devoted to a remarkably extended division narrative between the Northist (Christians of Saint Thomas) and Southist (Thekkumbhagar). Chazhikaden's Southists are unique from the most ancient time and their uniqueness is not Christian but Jewish.

**5. Tekkumbahagar ( Southists) / Knanaya**

There are no evidences that Christians in Kerala were known in different distinguish names prior Sixteenth century.

The Malayalam name used to distinguish this division is "Tekkumbhagar". The English equivalent is "Southist". They are commonly known as Tekkumbhagar.

The Joseph Chazhikaden book (1939) is titled as "Tekkumbhagasamudayam Charitram" [History of the Southist Community]. The book of Dr. Jacob Kollaparampil (1992) is also titled as "The Babylonian origin of the Southists".

In late 1980's some Malankra Syriac Orthodox (Jacobite) Southist has started using the name "Knanaya". In less than a decade, the new name Knanaya mostly replaced the old Tekkumbhagar (Southist) among both the Malankara Orthodox Church (Jacobite) and Syro Malabar Church (Catholic) Southists.

The other name commonly used are "Charam Kettikal" (ash- tiers). This name has its origin from an old custom practiced by members of this community in carrying a little ash in the corner of the sari or dhoti (mundu). They were also known as "Anchara Pallikar" in 17th/18th centuries, meaning owners of five and half churches.

## 6. Bishop Thomas of Cana

Regarding this Thomas of Cana, some of the historians say he was not a merchant but a Bishop sent by the Patriarch Timothy I in 9th century.

J S. Assemani, who came across the story, makes reference to the arrival in India of Bishop Thomas Cana, about A.D. 825. He believes that his 'wives' were the two cities of Cranganore and Angamale where he had jurisdiction.

Furthermore, S. Giamil when studying the Leyden text and Assernani's explanation logically concluded that there were two missions: first came the merchant, Thomas of Jerusalem, accompanied by Joseph, the anonymous Metropolitan of Edessa. Then there arrived, in A.D. 800, Bishop Thomas Cana.

A. Mingana while analyzing the Lyden text which mentions the arrival of Thomas of Cana in 345 AD writes, "if this Thomas is an historical personage, he is different from Thomas Cana, another problematical Bishop of Malabar, in about 823 AD. The scene of this merchant Thomas is placed according to Malabar tradition in 345 AD. In this year the Catholics of East was Barba- Shemin, the nephew of the great Simon bar Sabba (Bedjan- "Acta Martyrum" ii, 296-303, Assemani-"Acta Mart,i,111-117, Sozomen -Hist. Eccl,ii,14etc) and was in prison from February 345 to 9 January 346, in which he suffered martyrdom. After him, the See was vacant for twenty years. Before the time Catholics was Shahdost, who was himself martyred in 342 and after him the See had become vacant for two years ( Amr-"De Pant" p-12, Mari-" De Pat",pp 16-18, Bedjan, ibd,ii, 276-280 etc).

In their short time of office, during the persecution of Sapor, not one of the above Catholics whose time was mostly spent in prison could have possibly attended to the business of a merchant Thomas from Jerusalem. The whole story is absolutely unhistorical.

I believe that this very late Malabar Syrian tradition might have made a stupid chronological mistake of about four centuries and a half : but then this unhistorical Thomas was a simple merchant and not a bishop, while the possibly historical Thomas Cana was a bishop. No one can fathom the depth of stupidity to which a late and worthless tradition may lead a critic"

According to A. Mingana, the Bishop Thomas of Cana lived between 795-824 AD. His seat seems to have been a town in the coast of Malabar. There is hardly any reasonable doubt that if this Bishop Thomas has any historical personality at all, he is to be counted among the monks whom the Patriarch Timothy I selected, as the historian Thomas of Marga inform us, ordained bishops and sent to all the countries of the East.

So according to him, even if there is some historical background for the mission attributed to A.D. 345, it must be distinguished from the coming of Bishop Thomas Cana.

Cardinal Tisserant also mentions that there arrived Persian immigrants with Bishop Thomas about 774 or 795. There is a possibility of identifying Bishop Thomas with a certain monk, Thomas who was ordained as a missionary prelate by Timothy I E R Hambye writes, the first group of Christian immigrants reached about 774/795 AD. It was led by a Bishop called Thomas, perhaps the monk Thomas consecrated by Catholicos Timothy I.

## 7. About Northist and Southist Division

There exist a division among the Christians in Malabar as Northists (Vadakkumbhagar) and Southists (Thekkumbhagar). This division as it seems has started very late after the arrival of Thomas of Cana in 9th century. Most of the early Portuguese accounts doesn't mention about any division among the Christians in Kerala. There is much controversy among the St. Thomas Christians themselves, in assigning the cause for the division as questions of prestige, nobility and caste are involved in the matter. These groups are known in Malayalam as Thekkumbhagar (Southists) and Vadakkumbhagar (Northists).

It is Bishop Francis Roz in the "Report on the Serra (1603/1604)", British Library MS Add-9853 gives some information about the quarrels. It appears that this separation in 1603 led to the building of separate churches. This was also limited in Cranganore.

The Southists generally claim that they are the descendants of Thomas Cana and of others who came with him from abroad and have kept their blood pure without intermingling with the natives. In 1939, Chazhikaden has taken it to another level claiming that the Southist are Jewish Christians. The Northist, ie Christians of Saint

Thomas, according to them whether they lived in Malabar before or after the arrival of Thomas Cana, had mixed with the natives

The Northist version for the cause of the division is given in an old manuscript called Sloane MS, 2743 at the British Museum. The substance of the Northist version is that the Southists are descendants of those in Malabar (Cranganore) consequent to the arrival of Thomas Cana, who entered into marriage relations with the children of a native woman. This native woman was of the Mainatoo caste (Washer Women) who was a servant of Thomas of Cana. Other stories trace the origins of the Southists to a dobi, a washerwoman, whom Thomas of Cana took as concubine.

These arguments revolve on the legitimate and illegitimate children of Thomas of Cana. Traditions associated with Thomas of Cana was a shared tradition among the Christians in Kerala. These arguments might have been invented to express the odium and hatred each community bore against the other.

The Southist claims and charges are expressed in the book of Joseph Chazhikadan, “Tekkumbhagasamudayam Charitram” - History of the Southists - (in Malayalam) published in 1940. They have been disputed from the Northist side by Joseph Kurmanakan in the book, “The Southists and Northists” published in 1941. The latest is “The Babylonian origin of the Southists” published in 1992 by Dr. Jacob Kollapampil. This is an extension of Chazhikadan theme, where Kollapampil has refuted some of the charges and expanded on the latest noble Jewish Christian claims of the Southist.

**a) Portuguese References about the Northist-Southist division**

Reported by	Year	Gist of the Report
Penteado	1518	Quarrel between the two Sons of Armenian Merchant and the consequences of the quarrel.
Mar Jacob Abuna	1533	No mention of any division among the Christians in Malabar.
Barros	1553	No mention of any division among the Christians in Malabar.

Correa	1564	No mention of any division among the Christians in Malabar.
Goes	1566	No mention of any division among the Christians in Malabar.
Dionysio	1578	No mention of any division among the Christians in Malabar.
Monserate	1578	First clear report on division. Two wife of Thomas of Cana.
Gouvea	1604	Christians of Cana are the Christians with Thomas of Cana lineage. The division was not known among the Christians of Travancore and Todamala
Bishop Francis Roz	1604	One group were the descendants of Thomas of Cana and the other, the descendants of those Christians who lived there before the arrival of Thomas of Cana. Those descending from Thomas of Cana are on the father’s side (for the mother was a Malabar woman convert).
Bishop Francis Roz	1604	Gives reasons for the quarrels and what lead to the formation of separate churches at Carturte (Kaduthuruthy) and Cotete (Kottayam) for Thekumbhagar.
Bishop Francis Roz	1604	In 1603, quarrels at Udiamper (Udaymperoor), and Candanate. Christians of St. Thomas descending from Thomas Cana are few. They are in Udiamper (Udaymperoor) and in the big church of Carturte (Kaduthuruthy) and the big Church of Cotete (Kottayam) and in Turigure. (Torure)



**1. Penteado (1518)**

From the early Portuguese documents, Penteado in 1518 seems to assign the origin of the division when he speaks of the quarrel between the two Sons of Thomas of Cana and the consequences of the quarrel.

**2. No mention of any division**

Barros (1553-63), Goes (1566), both of who have recorded the origin and history of the Christians, have nothing to say about this division or of quarrels. Correa (1564) and Bishop Mar Jacob Abuna (1533) who knew the tradition of the arrival of Thomas of Cana also do not mention about the divisions. Even Dionysios (1578) who is well informed of the traditions of the Christians does not talk about the division.

**3. Monserrate (1579)**

Monserrate (1579) seems to be the first to give a clear and detailed account of this division. Thomas of Cana had two wives, one noble woman, and the other a slave though belonging to a good caste, (for it was the Custom of the nobles, to sell away those children born on inauspicious days). The proof of this is: besides the tradition of the ancestry there is among the Christians a strong feeling about birth and caste, those descending from the slave being considered lower. And that both the wives were noble, at least Nair women, is proved by this custom existing in Malabar, that there is no pollution between the Christians of St. Thomas and the Nairs, nor penalty of death, if there is marriage or friendship, all of which arise, according to the custom of the country, for castes higher or lower than these two. What is more likely is that the Christian community originated from both, that is from the glorious Apostle St. Thomas and Thomas of Cana; and also from many Nairs who were daily converted to Christianity. They are a Christianity of 72,000 souls and they are reduced to these two clans by the lie of the land and not because they were descended from those women but because some lived on the southern and the others on the northern bank.

Thus Monserrate gives first the local tradition about the division, and then he gives his own opinion. He says that the division was topographical. However, he does not deny that there might have been the other cause also. It is not clear from the text whether he intends

to state, as his opinion, that the one group had its origin from the Apostle and the other from Thomas of Cana. It is difficult to interpret his views in that light when he says that most likely the Christians had their origin from both the Apostle Thomas and Thomas of Cana.

**4. Gouvea (1604)**

Gouvea (1604), while mentioning this division inform as that the division was not known among the Christians of Travancore and Todamala. According to him the Christians of Cana are the christians with Thomas of Cana lineage.

**5. Bishop Francis Roz (1603)**

Bishop Francis Roz (1603) who strongly defends the importance of the Christians existing in Malabar before the arrival of Thomas of Cana. He says that one group were the descendants of Thomas of Cana and the other, the descendants of those Christians who lived there before the arrival of Thomas of Cana. The descendants of Thomas of Cana always kept themselves without mixing with other Christians. There were two lineages among the Christians of Malabar and according to him, one descending from Thomas of Cana on the father's side (for the mother was a Malabar woman convert); The other on the father's as well as mother's side, descending from the Christians of St. Thomas.

Thus according to Bishop Roz only the latter group (obviously the Northists) are to be called the Christians of St. Thomas. These Christians were more careful than the others (Southists) to increase the membership of the church and hence received into their community many pagans whom they baptized.

Bishop Roz also indicates the cause of the antagonism between the two groups. Some of the people who had served the sons of Cana had some time or other gone over to the other Christians (Northists) and received their protection (probably he means to say also that they became Christians). Hence the other party (sons of Thomas Cana), began to antagonize them (though they were rich and honorable), calling them their slaves. This gave rise to much discord between these two groups and there were many quarrels in olden times. It was owing to this that in Carturte (Kaduthuruthy) and Cotete

(Kottayam) it was found necessary to build separate churches for the one and the other and each party keeping aloof from other.

In the year 1603 (according to him last year- this manuscript is written in 1603 and 1604) there had arisen among those of Udiampar (Udaymperoor), and Candanate a big quarrel each one defending their own party. Bishop Francis Roz observes: It was a strange thing to see the aversion which one party had for the other, without being able to forget the old things and the fables, which they hold in this matter. The Christians of St. Thomas (here so he calls them also) descending from Thomas Cana are few. They are in Udiampar (Udaymperoor) and in the big church of Carturte (Kaduthuruthy) and the big Church of Cotete (Kottayam) and in Turigure. (Torure ?)

### **b) Modern history of Thekkumbhagar**

With the Coonan Cross Oath (1653) and subsequent happening the Christians of Saint Thomas were divided in two groups as Catholics and Jacobites. It is not very clear if there were any exclusive Southist churches during the Syond of Dimaper (1599). After the Coonan Cross Oath (1653), some of the Portuguese records indicate that one or two Southist Churches (Churches where they have the control in 17th century) reconciled with Arch Bishop Gracia before his death.

### **Among the Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church ( Jacobite)**

One of the four councilors of Archdeacon Thomas was a Southist priest Anjilimootil Ittithomman of Kallicherry. The Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church (Jacobites in India) were governed by the successors of Mar Thomas I after the ordination of Archdeacon Thomas. Mar Thomas I was followed by Mar Thomas II, Mar Thomas III, Mar Thomas IV, Mar Thomas V and all related to Mar Thomas I and to one another. They also received Bishops from Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch. There was no division or separate hierarchy based on the segregation as Southist and Northist. The Malankra Syriac Orthodox Church (Jacobite) saw divisions in 1774 and 1887 but the Southist were not party in this.

### **Creation of an “exclusive” diocese for Southist among Jacobites**

After the incidents which lead to the formation of Malankara Mar Thoma Church (1877), the Syriac Orthodox (Jacobite) Patriarch of

Antioch Abdalla wanted to gain complete authority over Malankara Church. Mar Dionysios, the Metropolitan was a very able man. The Synod of Malankara Church did not want to give more authority than spiritual power to the Jacobite Patriarch. The Syriac Orthodox (Jacobite) Patriarch was incensed. To take control over the Church and to get more people to his side, he consecrated two bishops. One of them was a Southist named Severios who was a close aide of Mar Dionysios, the Metropolitan of the Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church.

By this the Patriarch did gain support of one prominent advisor of Mar Dionysios but he gave official recognition to a division among Syrians as Northist and Southist. Hence in 1910, a Southist diocese was officially formed and recognized in Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church (Jacobite).

What Leslie Brown says in ‘The Indian Christians of Saint Thomas’ is that by this the Syriac Orthodox (Jacobite) Patriarch of Antioch gave recognition to a division among the Syrians which Menezes had tried to heal.

This diocese in Chingavanam was formed with 9 parishes in 1910 and now it has over 60 Churches under the diocese.

### **2) Among the Syro Malabar Church (Catholics)**

The Catholic Syrians were ruled by Mar Parampil Chandy (Alexander de Campo). In succeeding century they were under two administration, the Propaganda and the Padrado. All the Christians were together in these administrations as well as during the time of Mar Cariattil Thomas (Prelate 1782-1786), Paremmakal Thomas Kathanar. There were no separate hierarchy or administration system based on the division as Southist and Northist.

### **Creation of an “exclusive” Vicariate and then diocese for Southists among Catholics**

In 1878, Rome decided on placing the Syrian Christians under separate administration, appointing two vicars Apostolic of the Latin Rite to govern them. One of those latin rite Bishops, Charles Lavinge, the Bishop of Vicariate of Kottayam (Changanacherry) left behind the same legacy like his predecessors. For the first time in history, he appointed a separate Vicar General for Southist in January 1890. The Northist - Southist divide which was till then sociological in character

got ecclesiastical dimensions among Catholics. In 1896 Mathew Makil was appointed as the Vicar Apostolate of the then Kottayam (Changanacherry) Vicariate of Syro Malabar Church. As a priest he was an advocate for foreign rule among the Saint Thomas Christians. He has submitted petitions that the Southist among the Saint Thomas Christians wish to be under foreign rule.

His appointment created tensions and rift among the people. He has to fled to a Southist church in Kottayam to escape public anger. Based on the reports of missionaries, Rome created an exclusive Vicariate for Southist in 1911 at Kottayam with 12 parishes or churches under the Vicariate in Syro Malabar Church. Mathew Makil was appointed as the Bishop of Kottayam Vicariate in 1911.

This “exclusive” Vicariate was made a diocese in 1923 and as an Arch diocese in 2005. There are at present over 126 parishes under the Kottayam exclusive Southist diocese in Syro Malabar Church.

## 8. About the Churches at Cranganore

It is difficult to make out from these Portuguese accounts on where exactly the first church of the community stood in Cranganore. The old wooden buildings are said to last for four hundred years.

According to Bishop Francis Roz (1604), based on a Chaldean book he has read there were three Churches in Cranganore. One dedicated to the Apostle Thomas, another one to Saint Kuriakose and a third one dedicated to Our Lady.

According to Couto, the Apostle landed in Magadover Patanam near Parur and he speaks of a Church left by the Apostle himself there. Bishop Francis Roz also talks about the Parur and says that the present church at Cranganore during the Portuguese time was built by Thomas of Cana. According to Joao Carcere, at the time of his writing (1529), the Church which stood in Cranganore had been there from the time of the Aposlte and the pagans willingly or not, paid their respects and offerings to it. Some others such as Abuna, Dionysio, Monserrate mentions that the church at Cranganore was built by Thomas of Cana.

There is no general agreement about the tradition associated with Thomas of Cana. According to many authorities as explained above, there are two missions partially or fully associated with this

tradition, first about the merchant, Thomas of Jerusalem, and then the arrival of Bishop Thomas Cana in 9<sup>th</sup> century.

Thomas of Cana, was a shared tradition among both the Northist and Southist, each one claiming part of the tradition. The early Portuguese records does not mention about any division as Northist and Southist or any families immigration as contained in Southist tradition while referring to the merchant or bishop Thomas. There are also no references about Jewish Christians origins of Southist. In fact, the early 16th Century documents mentions that this merchant or bishop won many converts in Malabar. According to the modern Kerala historians, the Cheraman Perumal’s came to Kerala history scene only after 8<sup>th</sup> century. It is very unlikely that such a thing happened in 4th century. The Copper plate is also not extant and it has been accused of a forgery by various parties.

The period of arrival of Bishop Thomas of Cana is 9<sup>th</sup> century as the records about the early tradition indicates. It also seems that the segregation of community as Northist and Southist happened after the arrival of Portuguese. This gradually lead to the formation of separate parishes or churches for the Thekkumbhagar. It seems that Bishop Franics Roz in the Report of Serra of 1604 is mentioning about this segregation while referring to the quarrels of Christians at Udiamper (Udaymperoor), and Candanate in 1603 and about the churches which came in Southist control at Carturte (Kaduthuruthy) and Cotete (Kottayam) (year not mentioned for the Churches at Kaduthuruthy and Kottayam).

Until the first decade of 20th Century this division as Southist (Thekkumbhagar) and Northist (Christians of Saint Thomas) was of sociological character. The ecclesiastical recognition of this division happened only in 1910 among the Malankara Syriac Orthodox (Jacobites) and in 1911 among the Syro Malabar Church (Catholics). That was an unfortunate turn of history. The ecclesiastical recognition and decision was influenced by political factors of the first decade of 20th century among Jacobites and Catholics than historical considerations. The only major unification effort between the Southist and Northist happened during the time of Nidhiry Mani Kathanar in the Catholics section.

## Chapter 9

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### Non-Catholic Eastern Churches in India

A protest took place in 1653 with the Coonan Cross Oath. Under the leadership of Archdeacon Thomas, the Thomas Christians publicly took an oath that they would not obey the Jesuit bishops.

#### 1. Chaldean Syrian Church

Rome sent Carmelites in two groups from the Propagation of the Faith to Malabar headed by Fr. Sebastiani and Fr. Hyacinth. Fr. Sebastiani arrived first in 1655. He began to deal directly with the Archdeacon, Mar Thoma I. Fr. Sebastiani gained the support of many, especially with the support of Parambil Mar Chandy, Alexandar Kadavil and the Vicar of Muttam. These were the three councilors of Mar Thoma I, who were reconciled with Gracia (SJ) before the arrival of Sebastaini, according to Jesuit reports.

Between 1661 and 1662, out of the 116 churches, the Carmelites reclaimed eighty-four churches, leaving Archdeacon Mar Thomas I with thirty-two churches.

The eighty-four churches and their congregations were the body from which the Syro Malabar Church has descended. The other thirty-two churches and their congregations represented the nucleus from which the Syriac Orthodox (Jacobites & Orthodox), Thozhiyur, Mar Thoma (Reformed Syrians), Syro Malankara Catholics have originated.

In 1665 Mar Gregorios, a Bishop sent by the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch, arrived in India. The dissident group under the leadership of the Archdeacon welcomed him. Though most of the St. Thomas Christians gradually relented in their strong opposition to the Western control, the arrival of the Bishop Mar Gregory of the Syriac Orthodox Church in 1665 marked the beginning of a formal schism among the St. Thomas Christians. Those who accepted the West Syrian theological and liturgical tradition of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch of Mar Gregory became known as the Jacobite, The Syrian Catholics remained in communion with Rome and later came to be known as the Syro Malabar Church.

In response these pleas, the Chaldean Patriarch Joseph Audo sent a request to Pope Pius IX for the Syro-Malabar Catholics to be placed under his authority. Without waiting for a reply, he dispatched Elias Mellus, Bishop of 'Aqra, to India in 1874. Mellus had substantial success convincing Syro-Malabar Catholics in Thrissur to recognize him as their bishop. By 1877, almost 24,000 followers had joined his group, based in Our Lady of Dolours Church (now Mart Mariam Cathedral) in the parish of Thrissur. In response the Pope dispatched Latin Catholic leaders to rein in Mellus, who was sent back to Mesopotamia in 1882. By then, however, he had established the infrastructure for an independent church.

Many of Mellus' followers returned to the Syro-Malabar Catholic Church. About 8,000, however, maintained their demand for autonomy, and took their requests for an independent bishop to non-Catholic churches. In 1904 they made one such request to the Archbishop of Canterbury, but were declined. They subsequently made an equivalent request to Shimun XXI Benyamin, Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East in Qochanis who consented, dispatching Bishop Abimelek to serve as their metropolitan bishop. Abimelek soon introduced Nestorian dogma and East Syrian liturgy to the Thrissur church. These reforms caused even more followers to break away and rejoin the Syro-Malabar Church, but the Assyrian-oriented Thrissur church survived.



In 1964, during the reign of Assyrian Patriarch Shimun XXIII Eshai, a dispute over hereditary succession and church calendars caused the Metropolitan of the Church of the East in India to break away from the Assyrian Church of the East reestablishing full independence.

However, in 1995, Eshai's successor, Mar Dinkha IV was able to heal the rift, and the Chaldean Syrian Church returned to his jurisdiction. The Chaldean Syrian Church in India now constitutes one of the four Archbishopsrics of the Assyrian Church of the East. Its followers number around 15,000. The present Metropolitan, Mar Aprem Mooken (ordained in 1968), is headquartered in Thrissur City and is a noted author. His seat is the Marth Mariam Valiyapalli.

## 2. Jacobite Syrian Christian Church

The Church is sometimes referred to as the "Patriarchal faction" or "Bava faction", because of the disputes with the Methran Faction. In 2000, a Holy Synod ruled that the name of the church in English should be the "Syriac Orthodox Church". It had been, and often still is today, called the "Syrian Orthodox Church". The church in India uses the term "Jacobite" or 'Bava Faction' as a way to distinguish themselves from the other group known as Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church (Indian Orthodox Church) or *Methran Faction*.

Syriac liturgical calendar is used to mark the observations of fasting and prayer and the preparation for the Eucharist. However, the Malayalam Calendar is used to make the more recent religious events such establishment dates of churches, houses and gravestones. This practice is increasingly superseded by the standard Western Gregorian calendar. The Malayalam numbering of calendar years is 825 years less than the standard. Under the leadership of Archdeacon Thomas, the Thomas Christians publicly took an oath that they would not obey the Jesuit bishops (in 1653, the Coonan Cross Oath).

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- Catholicose in India

1. Baselios Augen I (before 1975) - (Catholicos of United Malankara Church. After schism, Baselios Augen I continued as Catholicos of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church in 1975).

2. Baselios Paulose II (1975-1996)

Vacant from 1996 to 2002

3. Baselios Thomas I (2002-present)

## 3. Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

The *Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*, also known as the *Indian Orthodox Church*, is an autocephalous Oriental Orthodox church centred in the Indian state of Kerala. It is one of the churches of India's Saint Thomas Christian community, which has origins in the evangelical activity of Thomas the Apostle in the 1st century. The church is locally headed by the autonomous Catholicos; Baselios Mar Thoma Paulose II became Catholicos of the East and the Malankara Metropolitan on 1 November 2010. It is also known as Methran Kakshi.

In 1795 the British captured Malabar, Kerala. In 1806 Claudius Buchanan, an Anglican priest, visited the ancient Church of St. Thomas in India. In March 1815 Malankara Church opened a Seminary at Kottayam, and in the next year Anglican missionaries arrived to join it. However, in 1835 the missionaries began to impose Protestant doctrines on the seminarians. As a result the Malankara church discontinued their association with the Anglicans.

The London Missionary Service was active in India. Bishop Norton inaugurated the first Anglican Church in Kerala at Thalavady in the house of one Itty Matthan Panickar. This church was later known as Christian Missionary Service and after Indian Independence it became the Church of South India. Lore says that Bishop Norton was tutored in Malayalam by Itty Matthan Panickar. Later the same person tutored Bishop Benjamin Bailey in Sanskrit & Malayalam, and was presented the chair on which the Bishop sat as a gift. Later in the 19th century, exposure to the doctrines of the Church of England inspired a reform movement led by Abraham Malpan. This led to the formation of the Mar Thoma Church.

This eventually gave rise to the division of the community into three bodies.

- A group of people of the Malankara Church opted to join with the missionaries and be absorbed into the Anglican Church, and they became CSI (Church of South India) by the union of many churches.
- One of them set out to bring about major reforms in the liturgy and practices of the Church, including independence from foreign control. After a final litigation outcome in 1889 which was not in their favour, they formed what later became known as the Mar Thoma Church.
- A large majority of the community continued in the Malankara Orthodox Church without accepting the reforms.

From 1817 to 1825 to Mar Dionysius III (Mar Thoma XI) was Malankara Metropolitan. In 1825 to 1855 Philipose Mar Dionisius 4th [Cheppad Mar Dionisius] led the Malankara Church.

In 1912, the Catholicos of the East was re-established in India. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church wanted to retain its autocephalous nature. It appealed to the deposed Syriac Orthodox

Patriarch of Antioch, Mor Ignatius Abdul Masih II. He ordained Murimattathil Paulose Mar Ivanios as Baselios Paulose I, as [Catholicos of the East] on the Apostolic throne of St. Thomas. The ceremony was held at St. Mary's Church, Niranam on 15 September 1912. The church in 20th century became the biggest faction to be fully eligible for Marthoma heritage. The claims are based on two grounds. First, the Supreme Head of the church is St. Thomas and the second; the church has no dependence on or is under any foreign churches outside India.

The history immigrant community of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church of the East in the U.S.A. begins approximately in the mid-20th century. During this period a number of priests and laity came to the U.S.A. for higher studies and training. Mathews Mar Coorilos Metropolitan (later Moran Mar Baselius Mar Thoma Mathews II) stayed at the General Theological Seminary in 1963 and returned to India in 1964. Mar Coorilos celebrated Holy Qurbana occasionally during his stay here. Fr. K.M. Simon looked after the Church service after Mar Coorilos left for India. This service was ecumenical in nature; Malayalees of any denomination participated.

In 1965 the United States legislature passed a bill which cleared the way for thousands of professionally qualified individuals to immigrate to the USA. Many Malankara Orthodox Christians came to the United States during this time. In 1968 Fr. G. John (John Geevarghese), an Ecumenical Fellow at Union Theological Seminary in New York City, started celebrating the Holy Qurbana every Sunday in the Seminary chapel, thus organizing the first congregation on America soil. After 1970 the Malankara Orthodox Church gradually spread to many major US cities, with increasing numbers of clergy and laity. In 1976 the Holy Synod decided to establish more dioceses in various parts of the world. At this time the numerous churches in America were placed under the authority of the Metropolitan of the Bombay Diocese, Thomas Mar Makarios. In 14 July 1979, Mar Makarios was given authority over the new American Diocese under the authority of the Catholicos of the East, Baselius Mar Thoma Mathews I. In 1991, Mathews Mar Barnabas took charge of the Diocese. In 2002 Zacharias Mar Nicholovos joined the Diocese. In 2009 the 'American Diocese' was split into the Northeast American

Diocese and the Southwest American Diocese. As of 2013, the Northeast American Diocese had more than fifty parishes, and more than forty priests, 14 deacons and seminarians.

#### 4. Malabar Independent Syrian Church

The Malabar Independent Syrian Church, also known as the Thozhiyur Sabah (Church), is a Christian church centred in Kerala, India. It is one of the churches of the Saint Thomas Christian community, which traces its origins to the evangelical activity of Thomas the Apostle in the 1st century.

Considered part of the Syriac Orthodox Group of churches in India, the church split from the main body of India's Malankara Church in 1772. The church obtained its current name after a court verdict in 1862; although the church is independent under the Malankara umbrella, the church faith and traditions are strictly Oriental Orthodox, adhering to the West Syrian Rite and consistently using western Syriac and Malayalam during the Holy Qurbana (Qurbano Qadisho).

Today the church remains small, with about 35,000 members, and maintains good relations with the other Malankara churches. The members of the Church are known as Nazaranis or Marthoma Suriyani Nazarani.

The Saint Thomas Christians trace their origins to Thomas the Apostle, who according to tradition proselytized in India in the 1st century. By the 7th century they were part of the Church of the East, centred in Persia. The entire community remained united until the 17th century, when disputes with the Portuguese *padroado* in India led to the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653 and the division of the Saint Thomas Christians into Catholic and independent branches. The independent branch, known as the Malankara Church, forged a relationship with the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch.

However, relations between the Syriac Orthodox hierarchy and the native clergy were sometimes strained. In 1772 Bishop Mar Gregorios, a representative of the Syriac Orthodox hierarchy from the Middle East, had grown dissatisfied with how the Metropolitan Mar Dionysius I had treated him. Against Dionysius' wishes, Gregorios consecrated as bishop a leading dissenter, the monk Kattumangatt Kurien, in a secret but canonically legitimate ceremony. The new

bishop took the name Mar Cyril (Koorilos), and he was designated Gregorios' sole heir.

Cyril claimed authority over the parishes of Cochin, and initially received the support of the Raja of Cochin. However, Dionysus saw him as a threat to his power, and in 1774 he appealed to the Raja and to the British authorities in India to suppress the rival bishop. Cyril left for Thozhiyur, outside their jurisdiction, and established what would become an independent church. This was the first of several churches to split off from the Malankara Church.

Cyril's church was always small, but maintained stability by attracting devoted priests and emphasizing regularity in the ecclesiastical order. In 1794 Cyril consecrated his brother Geevarghese as bishop; Geevarghese succeeded Cyril as Mar Cyril II in 1802, and the succession has proceeded unbroken since. As a result of an 1862 court case, the Madras High Court confirmed the Thozhiyur church was independent Malankara church, and it has subsequently been known as the Malabar Independent Syrian Church.

#### 5. Mar Thoma Syrian Church

The Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar (or the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, Malayalam: *Malankara Mar Thoma Suryani Sabha*), also known as the Mar Thoma Church, is a Christian denomination that has a very different identity to other churches in India. Most Christian churches around the world are divided into Western or Eastern traditions. Eastern churches are again divided into many traditions, one of which is Syriac tradition. Syriac tradition comprises West Syrian Rite and East Syrian Rite. The Mar Thoma Syrian Church adheres to the West Syrian Rite tradition and bases its teachings in accordance with Biblical teachings. It is one of the Saint Thomas Christian churches tracing its origins to the evangelistic activity of Thomas the Apostle in the 1st century.

The Mar Thoma Church defines itself as "Apostolic in origin, Universal in nature, Biblical in faith, Evangelical in principle, Ecumenical in outlook, Oriental in worship, Democratic in function, Episcopal in character" and is a Reformed church.

Until the beginning of 20th century Marthomites lived in a few districts of central Travancore and Kunnankulam in Kerala. Since that

time it has spread with the 20th century Indian diaspora to North America, Europe, the Middle East, Malaysia, Singapore, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand, and currently has around one million members worldwide. Their mother tongue is Malayalam, the language of Kerala. The members of the Church are known as Nazaranis or Marthoma Suriyani Nazarani.

### ***Marthoma Metropolitanans***

- Mar Thoma I (1653–1670)
- Mar Thoma II (1670–1686)
- Mar Thoma III (1686–1688)
- Mar Thoma IV (1688–1728)
- Mar Thoma V (1728–1765)
- Mar Thoma VI (1765–1808)
- Mar Thoma VII (1808–1809)
- Mar Thoma VIII (1809–1816)
- Mar Thoma IX (1816–1817)
- Mar Thoma X (1816–1816), Pulikottil Mar Dionysius
- Mar Thoma XI (1817–1825), Punnathra Geevargis Mar Dionysius.
- Mar Thoma XII (1825–1852), Cheppattu Philipose Mar Dionysius.
- Mar Thoma XIII (1852–1877), Mathews Mar Athanasius Metropolitan
- Mar Thoma XIV (1877–1893), Thomas Mar Athanasius Metropolitan
- Mar Thoma XV (1893–1910), Titus I Mar Thoma Metropolitan
- Mar Thoma XVI (1910–1944), Titus II Mar Thoma Metropolitan
- Mar Thoma XVII (1944–1947), Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan
- Mar Thoma XVIII (1947–1976), Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan
- Mar Thoma XIX (1976–1999), Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan
- Mar Thoma XX (1999–2007), Philipose Mar Chrysostem Mar Thoma Metropolitan
- Mar Thoma XXI (2007 – ), Joseph Mar Thoma Metropolitan

## **6. St. Thomas Evangelical Church**

St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India (STECI) is an Evangelical, Episcopal denomination based in Kerala, India. It derives from a schism in the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church in 1961, and traces its ancestry before then back almost 2,000 years. STECI holds that the Bible is the inspired, inerrant and infallible Word of God. Adherents believe that all that is necessary for salvation and living in righteousness is given in the Bible. The church is engaged in active Evangelism. The headquarters of this church is at Tiruvalla, a town in the state of Kerala which is the part of South India. St. Thomas Evangelical Church is one of several groups of Saint Thomas Christians tracing their origins to St. Thomas the Apostle who, according to tradition, came to India in AD 52. While STECI is considered to be an episcopal church, it is the same time deeply influenced by Evangelicalism. Early leaders include Bishop Dr KN Oommen, Bishop P John Varghese, Rev P C Zachariah, Rev Dr T C George, K.N. Daniel was the prominent evangelical leader.

Rev P I Mathai (Plavunkal Achen), Rev KO John, Rev CM Varghese, Rev P.T. Chandapillai, Rev P.T.Thomas, Mr.N.I Thomas Neduvelil Ranny, Rev K.C Paily had helped the church to focus on the mission.

Up to 1961, the church's history is deeply connected to the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church, which evolved from South Indian Christianity's contact with evangelical British missionaries during the British colonial times. The missionaries facilitated the translation of the Bible into Malayalam in 1811. This was the first vernacular Bible in Kerala. Further changes introduced by the missionaries led to a schism within the Thomas Christian and the formation of the Mar Thoma Church.

Internal struggles between progressive and traditionalist groups led to a further schism. The St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India was formally inaugurated on January 26, 1961. Over thirty thousand people drawn from all the different Christian denominations gathered together at Bishop Abraham Nagar at Thiruvalla, in Kerala to form the new denomination.



## Chapter 10

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### Various Christians Missions in India

**B**y the year 1540 the Portuguese had established themselves firmly on the west coast with their main mission centre at Goa and stations at Cranganore (Kodungallur) and Cochin. The Indian Christians continued as before and their relations with the Portuguese were still friendly. Under Portuguese influence there had been many conversions to Christianity resulting in the creation of an Indo-Portuguese Christian community though of rather unsatisfactory quality. It was at this stage that the King of Portugal, always solicitous for the progress of Christian faith in his rapidly expanding dominions, appealed to the Pope and the newly formed Society of Jesus for missionaries to go to India. The first man to be chosen was Francis Xavier (1506-1552). Francis Xavier was educated in Paris where he had come under the influence of Ignatius Loyola. In 1541 he set out for India with the object of reclaiming for Christ the 'heathen' population

of the areas under Portuguese influence<sup>1</sup>, or in other words 'conquer the East for Christianity'. Thus began the Jesuit mission in India, which really changed the cartography of Christianity in Asia.

Francis Xavier is justifiably called the pioneer of missions in Asia, of which India had a share. He towers above all those who followed him by his sympathy for the poor and the lowly, by his energy and spirit, by his utter fearlessness in the face of dangers and his supreme faith in his mission. His consuming desire was to spread the message of Christ far and wide. He was dogmatic and intolerant, but it was the outcome of his blind faith. By starting various schools at important places, Xavier contributed also to the spread of education in India. The fact that he showed special concern for the sick and the poor, particularly the fisher folk, increased his popularity. His spirit has been an inspiration for generations of Christian workers in India. However, his main drawback, as it must be admitted, was that he knew very little about the genius and wealth of the Indian culture and religions. Actually his contacts with India were only through the coastal regions of the south-west and south-east and with the less or least educated people. Firth is right when he wrote: "He had been criticized for hasty and superficial methods never stopping to learn a language or really get to know the culture of a people"<sup>2</sup>.

#### Robert De Nobili and the Madurai mission

The Jesuit mission that St. Francis Xavier established in India took up with enthusiasm the work of conversion. But progress was slow till Robert de Nobili a brilliantly gifted, highly educated, and zealous man came to be in charge of the mission in Madurai in Tamil Nadu. De Nobili a man of remarkable insight who came with desire to convert as many Hindus as possible to Christianity, after a short experience of life in Madurai, reached the conclusion that Christianity would have little success in India if it kept to its western grab and refused to understand the mind and thought of the people of the country. The problem before him was to make Christianity acceptable to Hindus without being imposed on them. He received the answer from St. Paul who said that while preaching one has to get naturalised in the culture of the community for whom the message is meant. De Nobili obtained the approval of the Jesuit mission to undertake a serious study of Hinduism and Madurai was specially suited for this purpose. Closely following the social habits of Brahmins, Nobili was able to obtain assistance from learned pundits in his study of Hindu religious

thought. He hoped to win people of the higher castes by leaving the whole caste system untouched. After years of arduous work, in the course of which he acquired a fair mastery of Sanskrit, he met in argument the learned Brahmins of Madurai, in religious discussion. These were according to the ancient "In 1 Corin. Chapt. 9: 20 St. Paul says that: To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews; to those under the law I became as one under the law- though not been myself under the law, that I might win those under the law.

Well-established practice of *sastrathavada*, debates on religious topics before a learned audience. There he tried to uphold Christian doctrines in terms of *Upanishadice* thought. He is said to have gained the respect of even the orthodox Brahmins of the court. But, as Richter says, Nobili's system stood in sharp contrast to that of Xavier, which had prevailed hitherto, to the ordinary rule and practice of every monastic order in India<sup>3</sup>.

But the other mission groups could not appreciate Nobili's attempt to present Christianity in a Hindu garb. Rome forced Nobili to abandon his methods and forbade him to baptize. He was accused of corrupting Christianity by admitting Hindu practices into it. Intolerance of things Indian became henceforth the characteristic feature of missionary zeal in India. Any compromise with Hindu life or religion was forbidden for example, the eating of beef was held to be necessary as it would put the convert altogether out of the pale of Hinduism<sup>4</sup>.

### **The Mogul Mission**

To acquaint himself better with Christianity Emperor Akbar invited scholarly Christian missionaries to his court. They were well received and they held several discussions with the Emperor. From those discussions it became apparent that Akbar was bent on developing and propagating his own religion, *Din Illahi* that would combine according to his opinion the best elements of all different religions. The Jesuits did not wish to have any part in it and showed the same spirit of intolerance. Panikkar, in fact sums up the attitude of Jesuit missionaries when he wrote: "Their intolerance of other religions and their arrogant attitude towards the exponents of other faiths were unwelcome also to the Emperor. So the missionaries had to leave the capital greatly disappointed"<sup>5</sup>.

### **Portuguese Missions: An Assessment**

From the very beginning Christianity had grown up in Indian soil as a naturalised religion and was accepted as one among the Indian

religions. The Christians were respected and honoured by the rulers, leaders, and higher castes. The Rajas and the Emperors conferred upon them royal privileges and grants to be enjoyed forever. In martial, commercial and cultural achievements the Christians also made their contribution. Most of the foreign missionaries of sixteenth and seventeenth centuries particularly the Portuguese who imposed latinization on the Indian Christians, were to a large extent ignorant or ill informed of the social life and customs of India, and consequently failed to appreciate them. Indian Christians looked for an alternative structure to the Roman Catholic one, which had been imposed on them at the Synod of Diamper. The Coonen Cross Revolt in 1653 at Mattanchery near Kochi marked the final outbreak and split the Christian community into two groups.<sup>6</sup> One remained in communion with the Pope and the other took an oath known as Coonen Cross Oath and decided to sever all communion with the Rome and keep its identity and autonomy.

The Christian missions did not make much inroads into the world of the caste Hindus or Muslims in the sixteenth century. There was hardly any creative encounter between Christianity and Indian culture. The missionary efforts of the Portuguese were mainly confined to small pockets in India where they held political power. Christianity spread mainly among the employees of the Portuguese and the depressed classes. Consequently caste Hindus developed the notion that Christianity was the religion of the depressed classes. Disappointingly the converts' understanding of Christian faith was shallow, their moral and ethical character frivolous and their life-style uninspiring that they provided no impetus for the surrounding non-Christians to rethink their way of life. Christianity and their missions were interpreted as means for the extension of western political control and aggressive imperialism. Many right thinking Indians had expressed their amazement at this dubious association. The words of Jawaharlal Nehru are illustrative: "The gospel of Jesus, the gentle but relentless rebel against untruth and injustice, could so easily be made a tool of imperialism, capitalism and political domination"<sup>7</sup>.

Although Portuguese missionaries had been pioneers of missionary work and services during sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, their mission was aggressive and not in the way mission was envisaged by Jesus Christ. Their interest in missionary and ecclesiastical progress began to die down the moment the temporal power of the Portuguese

began to decay. The Dutch and the British who came after the Portuguese were interested solely in trade. Moreover they were Protestants and had no sympathy with the activities of the catholic orders. So the first phase of evangelization came to a close in India by the middle of the seventeenth century with the decline of the political power of the Portuguese in the subcontinent.

### **The Protestant Missions**

It is true to that the Protestant missions in the nineteenth century like the Roman Catholic mission in the sixteenth century largely followed the colonial flag. Colonialism and Christian mission went hand-in-hand since the arrival of the Portuguese in India. The extent and the nature of the relationship between the missions and colonialism varied from one colonial power to another. Nevertheless, there was an alliance and for many in India during this period Christianity was a western religion and a means used by the western powers to establish their political control. And missionary enterprise was interwoven with commerce and cultural imperialism. The attitude and feelings of the educated Indians towards Christian missions are reflected in the following statement of the great social reformer Raja Ram Mohun Roy: "In Bengal, where the English are rulers, and where the mere name of English man is sufficient to frighten people, an encroachment upon the rights of her poor, timid and humble inhabitants and upon their religion, can not be viewed in the eyes of God or the public as a justifiable act"<sup>8</sup>.

Chakkaria a Tamil Christian convert and a prominent lawyer was voicing the attitude of Hindus when he asked; why should the Hindus who yielded in politics and commerce allow the sanctity of their souls to be violated by the intrusion of a foreign religious denomination<sup>9</sup>?

Most of the missionaries and some historians of eighteenth and nineteenth century missions believed that British rule in India was an opportunity provided by God to lift India from ignorance about God and superstitions. In European mission histories, the colonized were termed as 'barbarous', 'savages', 'pagan' and 'superstitious'. Hence the mission goal was not only Christianising heathens, but also civilizing them under superior European culture and evangelical spirituality. Further the missionary work in eighteenth-nineteenth century India was grounded in the binary distinctions of European and Indian, white and brown, civilized and primitive and Christian and pagan. This binary

division gave the colonizers grounds for justifying the European project of colonization of India and proselytizing of the Indians. William Wilberforce, leader of Evangelical group in the House of Commons said in 1793 that the Indian natives were idolatrous and superstitious with a "feeble knowledge of God". The people themselves were barbarous and low measured in the scale of European civilization. The natives must be taught a better religion at a time and in a manner that will not inspire them with passion for political change<sup>10</sup>. Hence the British, the patrons of the Christianising scheme, had a simple goal of raising the people to a higher and superior culture. It was the hope of the colonizers that if the higher classes in the Hindu social order were converted it would eventually lead to the dissolution of Hindu culture.

### **The First Protestant Mission**

The first Protestant mission to India came from Denmark. King Frederick IV was an ardent follower of the Lutheran teachings. He believed that it is one of the duties devolving upon monarchs to make provision for Christianising their non-Christian subjects. A mission was founded in the Danish settlement of Tranquebar in South India. The first Protestant missionaries to arrive on Indian soil were two German missionaries Ziegenbalg and Plutschau sent by the King. They landed on July 9<sup>th</sup> 1706 in Tranquebar a Danish trade post. Julius Richter says that this marked the birthday of Protestant missions in India<sup>11</sup>. Since the Danish trade post never crossed boundary of Tamil kingdom, their missionary work was confined mainly to Tamil Nadu region. The Protestant missionary work gained momentum only after the arrival and the expansion of Anglican power.

### **The British Period**

The British Government had three roles in India, first that of a trader, second that of ruler and then that of a Christian propagandist. British rulers held and professed Christianity. Consequently British rule was equated with Christian domination. In the early years of its rule the Company had taken a position of neutrality with regard to the religious and social affairs of its subject. The East India Company decided not to interfere with the traditional cultures of the people by supporting missionary work. The company's policy was non-interference in Indian education but favouring traditional Hindu or oriental learning. The non-interference probably based was on the

fear that missionaries through English education expecting to aid conversions might offend the Hindu subjects of the company and create unrest<sup>12</sup>. This policy of non-interference with the customs and traditions of the natives and lack of support for missionary work were reviewed after the Company Charter was reviewed in 1813. Finally in 1833, the policy of the company was changed under pressure from the Evangelicals in England. This marked the first decisive step of missionary work in India. A spokesman of the Evangelicals declared: "The true cure of darkness is the introduction of light. The Hindus err because they were ignorant and their errors have never fairly been laid before them. The communication of our light and knowledge to them would prove the best remedy for their disorders"<sup>13</sup>.

The Charter of 1833 approved the permanent presence of missionaries in India and made provision for Anglican hierarchy at Calcutta. With the expansion of the British Empire missionaries began to arrive and Christianity began to spread by establishing dioceses at Madras and Bombay. Ever since there existed a renewed cooperation between the missionaries and the colonial power in helping one another in their missions<sup>14</sup>.

By the end of the eighteenth century a new wave of the spirit of evangelization permeated Protestant Churches. In 1792 the English Baptists organised the first Anglican mission Baptist Missionary Society.

Later Protestant missionary operations were undertaken on a large scale by LMS and CMS. Alongside the older societies there have come into the field a bewildering number of missionary organisations. The characteristic feature of nineteenth century missions was the enthusiasm for the multiplication of missionary efforts. The priority of the colonial missions was conversion. Conversion of individual souls was considered the sole end of mission. To a European missionary non-Christian religions and Eastern cultures were non-slavific and that Christianity alone would redeem them. The British rule had provided favourable atmosphere and necessary infrastructure for the missions to work even in the remotest mountain villages without confronting much opposition. Julius Richter says that, it would be hard to find any land possessing so great an attraction for the missionary societies<sup>15</sup>. The mood of mission societies and missionaries were summarized in the following words: "The content of their (missionaries) hope was not merely a conglomerate of individual conversions but a comprehensive revolution in heathen Society in which every aspect

of that society would be praised from the grip of satanic domination and submitted to the liberating lordship of Christ"<sup>16</sup>.

After the Charter of 1833 was renewed, missionaries were allowed freely to come to India. Missionary teams became powerful and their style of work changed. By this time a new set of missionaries rooted in 'the iconoclastic zeal of extreme Protestantism'<sup>17</sup> began to arrive. These missionaries, soon through letters, reports and stories, created a very distorted image about the people and culture in India. They were imbued with the western 'imperial sentiments' and the sense of cultural superiority and agreed with Charles Grant, the spokesman of the Evangelicals in England, that it was not any inborn weakness that made Hindu degenerate but the nature of their religion. For the evangelicals India was in darkness and would need the light present in the western world. Claudius Buchanan another spokesman of the evangelicals who had been a missionary in India said: "The missionaries asserted that since God laid upon Britain the solemn duty of evangelizing India, the Government should not hesitate to throw its weight into the struggle. They demanded above all open Government patronage of Christian education and vigorous warfare upon the abuses associated with Hindu religion"<sup>18</sup>.

The Evangelicals and other mission societies made a combined attempt to change the policy of the British Government and demanded the introduction of legal and social reforms in India. It was thus that William Bentick in March 1835 issued his resolution intended mainly to promote European literature and science and utilize funds mainly for English education<sup>19</sup>. The study of Indian literature and oriental works was admitted to be of little intrinsic value and the opinion was that these literatures inculcate the most serious errors on the subjects. Also the customs and traditions and the religious beliefs of the subject people were considered by the missionary educators and their societies in England as a sign of depravity and futility. The remedy was the introduction of English education<sup>20</sup>.

Alexander Duff, Scottish missionary and leading educator whose ideas can be considered representative of the majority of missionaries in the nineteenth century, thought that though Hindu philosophical discourse contained lofty terms in its religious vocabulary what they conveyed were only vain, foolish and wicked conceptions. According to Duff, Hinduism spread like a dark universe where all life dies and



death lives<sup>21</sup>. The Christian task for him was to do everything possible to demolish such a gigantic fabric of idolatry and superstition. Needless to say, such an attitude prevented any positive encounter between Christianity and Indian culture. Duff, Buchanan, Trevelyan, Macaulay and others had great influence on the missionary thinking. The missionaries and civil servants who came to India were so prejudiced that they did not see anything good in India society.

The missionaries and their societies subscribed to the view that civilizing the Indian people would prepare the primitive religious people to embrace Christianity. Nineteenth century Protestant missiology could be understood against the background of Christianisation and civilizing as two sides of the same coin. Missions were unwilling to understand the complexities of Indian cultural variants. Deeply entrenched in them was a sense of superiority of European civilization and that coloured their approach to people of other cultures and religious faiths<sup>22</sup>. The missions and colonial administrators asserted that Hinduism would die away soon and the whole nation could be civilized and Christianised. English education was a means towards this goal. That is to facilitate change from exterior to interior, from trade to religion, a cultural revolution for the betterment of the natives by disseminating knowledge of Christianity and make them loyal to the British<sup>23</sup>. The comment of Arthur Mayhew is worth mentioning: "The evangelical supporters of Anglican mission were far more interested in the dissemination of the Bible and baptismal statistics than in any measure for the general enlightenment of India"<sup>24</sup>. The primary interest of the Raj was to keep control over India. The dominant interest of missions was to work for the conversion of Indians to Christianity. But in the colonial situation they found themselves in need of one another and so mutual support was but natural.

Although the missionaries worked hard and suffered a lot for bringing education and awareness of social justice to the people living in the rural areas of India, as they were associated with the colonial-imperial powers, the significance of their selfless service was either overlooked or misunderstood.

The response this approach evoked need to be looked into detail. The fourth chapter is an attempt to do this. If Indians really lived under the influence of the pagan religion and were uncivilised, they

would have whole-heartedly welcomed the missionary enterprise. But they did not. The natives were not unresponsive to the civilising project. How they reacted needs to be examined in detail and the next chapter intends to do it in some detail.

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> K.M. Panikkar, *India Through Ages* (New Delhi: Discovery Publishing House, 1988) 225-226.
- <sup>2</sup> C.B. Firth, *op.cit.* : 67.
- <sup>3</sup> Julius Richter, *op.cit.* : 63.
- <sup>4</sup> K. M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance op.cit.*: 281.
- <sup>5</sup> K.M. Panikkar, *Asia and Western Dominance op.cit.*: 281.
- <sup>6</sup> Paulos Mar Gregorios, *The Indian Orthodox Church"An Overview* (Kottayam: Sophia Publications, 1982) 53.
- <sup>7</sup> Dick Kooiman, *op.cit.* : 26.
- <sup>8</sup> T.V. Philip, "Christianity in India during Western Colonisation: Conflict, Reconciliation or Adjustment", *ICHR Vol.XXI, No. 1 June (1987): 16*.
- <sup>9</sup> Quoted in Jacob S. Dharmaraj, *Colonialism and Christian Mission: Post Colonial Reflections* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 1993) 13.
- <sup>10</sup> Arthur Mayhew, *Christianity and the Government of India* (Delhi: Gian Publishing House, 1988) 27.
- <sup>11</sup> Julius Richter, *op. cit.*: 103.
- <sup>12</sup> S. Immanuel David, "Save the Heathens from themselves" *The Evolution of the educational policy of the East India Company till 1854, ICHR Vol. XVIII, No. 1 June (1984): 19-29*.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>14</sup> Jacob S. Dharmaraj, *op. cit.*: 19.
- <sup>15</sup> Julius Richter, *op. cit.*: 221.
- <sup>16</sup> Jacob S. Dharmaraj, *op. cit.*: 58.
- <sup>17</sup> C.P. Mathew and M.M.Thomas, *op.cit.* : 48.
- <sup>18</sup> T.C.Joseph, "The Myth of the Colonial Connection", *The Sunday Statesman* September 20, 1987: 4.
- <sup>19</sup> S.Immanuel David, *op.cit.* : 27.
- <sup>20</sup> Stephen Neill, *Builders of the Indian Church* (Kottayam: CMS press, 1940) 106-123.
- <sup>21</sup> T.V.Philip, *op.cit.* : 20.
- <sup>22</sup> Poikail John George, "Racist Assumptions of 19th Century Missionary Movement", *IRM Vol.LIX, No.235 July (1970): 271-283*.
- <sup>23</sup> Jacob S. Dharmaraj, "A Brief Review of Alexander Duff, English Education and Colonial Connections in 19th Century India", *ICHR Vol.XXV, No.2 December (1991): 82-83*.
- <sup>24</sup> Arthur Mayhew, *op. cit.*: 163.

and discriminated against. Furthermore, all religions other than Hinduism are minorities.

What does this mean for the Christian Dalit? First of all, this depends on where one lives. In the north of India there are very few caste Christians; roughly seventy percent of the Church members are Dalit. Consequently, the Christian Dalits in this part of India do not suffer as much discrimination as the Christian Dalits in the areas where there are more high castes, like the south, where many of the atrocities against Dalits are committed. Second, this means that a Christian Dalit is not only discriminated against because he is a Dalit, but also because he is a Christian.

### **The Daily Reality of Being a Christian Dalit**

All of the sources studied for this research seem to agree on the point that the Christian Dalits still suffer on a daily basis. In this way they are not any different from other Dalits. John Webster writes in his book 'Religion and Dalit Liberation': "Although they form a majority of the Christian Community, they have been an oppressed majority." Farther onward he adds: "Like other Dalits, Christian Dalits live in a caste-based society and their conversion has not been able to change that fact." This last thought is shared by the bulk of the authors investigating the lives of the Christian Dalits. The reason that one will not lose his Dalit-status when converting to Christianity, is well formulated by M.R. Arulraja in his book 'Jesus the Dalit': "Those who commit atrocities against Dalits do not differentiate between Christian Dalits and non-Christian Dalits. For an Indian, a Dalit is a Dalit, whether Christian or not." So, being a Christian or becoming a Christian doesn't change the status of a Dalit, let alone will it change his life in terms of his well-being: for an Indian he is still a Dalit. Earlier on I mentioned that the number of Christian Dalits is an estimated seventy, some would even say eighty or ninety, percent of the total number of Christians. Together with the fact that in India Christianity is seen as an foreign, western religion and converting to it is almost seen as betrayal, this has some serious consequences for the daily life of the Christian Dalits: the suppression intensifies. This is illustrated by the Orissa violence, in December 2008. While these events testify about extreme violence towards Christian Dalits, the suppression also becomes visible in other forms, namely, in the ways they are discriminated against.

## **Chapter 11**

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### **Indian Christian Dalits**

**I**n the following subchapter I will shortly examine the features of the Christian Dalits. First, their number is explained and then, a picture is drawn of the daily reality of the Christian Dalits.

#### **Their Number**

The difficulty of determining the number of Christian Dalits does not mean that people have not given it a try. The most prevailing view is that Dalits constitute around seventy percent of the Christians, which is, although a minority, a 24-million-strong community in India. The number of Dalits of all religions lies around the 200 million. Most people in India are of the Hindu religion; they seem to cover eighty percent of the population. In a country that has one billion inhabitants, this means there are approximately 800 million Hindus. Overall, these figures should tell us that 200 million people in India are still downtrodden

The Discrimination of Christian Dalits The ways in which the Christian Dalits are discriminated against are very widespread and complex. For now, this means that in order to understand it, we have to categorise the discrimination. I have chosen the following categories, 1. discrimination by fellow Indians, 2. discrimination by the state, 3. discrimination in the Church, 4. discrimination of Christian Dalit women. These subjects are in my opinion the most important to understand the life of a Dalit who is also a Christian. This also follows from the insights of James Massey, himself a Christian Dalit and a prominent in this area of research. He states that the Christian Dalits suffer threefold discrimination: “one at the hands of members of the Indian society in general; two, from the government of India...; and three from Christians of upper caste/class background”.

With this selection I do not cover all forms of discrimination, for the reason that some forms, I would even say most, apply to all Dalits, whether Christian or not. And because in this research the focus lies on the specific features of the Christian Dalits.

### **Discrimination by Fellow Indians**

In this part we take a look at why Christian Dalits are unique in terms of the discrimination they have to face. Are they treated differently from other Dalits? For a large part they are mistreated the same as other Dalits in the sense that they too are Dalits. And, as was said earlier, for an Indian, a Dalit is a Dalit. But there is more to it than that. It seems that Christian Dalits are treated even worse than Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist Dalits. In the first place, in the eyes of the Indians, Christian Dalits made the ‘mistake’ of embracing the Christian faith, in addition to their ‘crime’ of being born in an untouchable caste. The consequence of this is that Christian Dalits are in fact twice discriminated: as Dalits and as Christians. This becomes clear in the atrocities they have to face as Dalits but also as Christians. For a great part this has to do with the resentment Indians feel for Christianity as a ‘western religion’. Godwin Shiri also noticed this in his case study among the Christian Dalits in the South of India: “It was reported that some of the most common rebukes which they suffer include: ‘Why do you come here for help? You go to your Padri!’ and ‘You better go to England or America for help!’ Apparently these rebukes/insults make no secret of the non-Dalits’ disapproval

of the Madigas’ conversion to Christianity! It was observed that while non-Dalits generally treat all ‘untouchables’ with contempt, they treat converted Dalits with greater contempt.

In addition to this, Christians have a particular place in the Indian society, in the sense that those who know that you are a Christian, would take it for granted that you are a Dalit and treat you as one. This becomes clear in the following story, told in the photo book ‘Dalit Lives’ of Paul van der Stap and Elisa Veini, about Sudhakar David, NCDHR associate in Hyderabad.

### **Discrimination by the State**

The National Commission of Scheduled Caste states that untouchability is only prevalent within the Hindu fold, and accordingly there is no untouchability in Christianity. To even state this is discriminatory, knowing what we know now. Moreover, these words have some serious consequences for the daily lives of Christian Dalits and their future perspectives. The main issue here is that Christian Dalits are excluded from the Reservation System. This system is fixed by Indian law and is a form of affirmative action whereby a percentage of seats in the public sector are reserved for the Scheduled Castes, namely, the Dalits. But, only for the Hindu, Sikh or Buddhist Dalits - Muslims and Christians are denied those benefits, as a result of a presidential order in 1950. They don’t get the Scheduled Caste status, whereas under Article 17 of the Constitution it is clearly stated that no one is allowed to motivate untouchability. The Indian People’s Tribunal on Untouchability writes the following about this in its publication ‘untouchability on trial’: “So in that case, under the SC/ST Act, the hierarchy of the religions should be prosecuted. But the National Commission of Scheduled Castes tells that it is only the Hindu religion that motivates untouchability. Isn’t this a paradox?” By denying the Muslim and Christian Dalits those benefits, the state is violating its own laws that are meant to safeguard the equality of all people, irrespective of caste and creed distinctions. But that’s not all. Shiri Godwin found out that Christian Dalits not only get this treatment when they plead for Scheduled Castes benefits, but also when they make a request for ordinary state benefits, meant for Other Backward Classes and for economic weaker sections. In this way the state does not only discriminate on the basis of religion and thus a denial of

religious liberty, but they also punish those Dalits who have had the courage to exercise their religious liberty and convert to Christianity or Islam. Not surprisingly many Christian Dalits conceal and deny that they are Christian, in order to get the benefits of reservation. This was also confirmed by the interview I had with CARDS: “In our education we don’t say that we are Christians, because then you don’t get a scholarship. That’s why in school we say we are from the Scheduled Caste. Like that we are getting a scholarship for our study.”

The implications of the earlier mentioned presidential order reaches farther than the deprivation of Christian Dalits from the reservations. It also negates them the protection to which they are entitled when they would belong to the Scheduled Castes. Hence, they cannot claim protection under the Untouchability Offences Act of 1979 or the Civil Rights Act of 1955 or the Prevention of Atrocities Act of 1989. So, if Christian Dalits are assaulted, they cannot call upon any provision of the Constitution or Act.

Finally, there is one other way in which the state discriminates the Christian Dalits, namely, through India’s seven state-level Freedom of Religion Acts, also known as the ‘anticonversion laws’. According to the CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide) briefing of 2008 on religiously-motivated violence and discrimination against Christians in India, these acts ‘pose a threat to freedom of religion through their restriction of religious conversions and their damaging normative effect on religious minorities.’ In addition, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, states in her 2008 report on her mission to India that these laws raise serious human rights concerns. She is concerned that these laws are being used to belittle Christians and Muslims. All in all, despite the official abolition of discrimination based on caste and religion through laws, the discrimination still continues and even more so for the Christian Dalits. Instead of trying to end this, the government is making it worse.

Discrimination in the Church in India Earlier on we established that despite conversion to Christianity, Dalits remain Dalits. Shockingly, this is also the case in the Churches in India. This means that the Dalits who turn to a religion that should give them freedom, don’t get any freedom. This part will discuss how this works and how the caste

system still plays an important role in the Churches, even though it has lost its divine sanction.

First, the question has to be answered of how it is even possible that there is discrimination in the Churches. It started with the early missionaries: they were not able to put an end to the caste system in the Churches; instead they maintained the status quo. That is why Ambedkar, undoubtedly the most important person for the Dalits, criticised the Christian missionaries ‘who took so much pain to denounce idol worship’ but did little to unseat the idol of caste. And when time elapses, it gets more and more difficult to do something about it. So today, Churches have a hard time fighting it. Moreover, there are still many people who don’t want to change the situation, mainly because they still believe in their hearts that Dalits should be downtrodden, and they just want to keep the power in their own hands.

### **Problems of the Church in India**

The Church’s biggest problem is their unwillingness to meet the needs of the Christian Dalits. There are some who acknowledge the plight of the Dalits and who want to do something about it, but as a whole, the Church is incapable of doing just that. This was also acknowledged at the conference on justice for Dalits in Bangkok, this March: “We were reminded in challenging and sometimes emotional terms of the continuing prevalence of caste in the Church and the silence of the Church in addressing caste both inside and outside the Church.”

The reason for this is something which was also mentioned in the previous chapter, namely, that the governing of the Church is in the hands of the upper castes. So, although the Indian Church is a Church of the Dalits, it projects an ‘elitist’ image. This has some serious consequences for the Church in India and the Christian Dalits in particular.

First of all, despite many promises, their situation is not getting better because they are with the Christian community: “When we converted, the Church had promised us equality and promised to protect our interests and undertake measures for us. But what we got is more discrimination.” This is for example seen in the Christian educational institutions, which are almost inaccessible for Christian



Dalits. And then it is just a matter of time that Christian Dalits begin to doubt their conversion: they have lost any right to reservation and they realise that they are not getting anything from the Church. This disappointment can then eventually lead to Dalits reconvert to Hinduism, as was seen for example in Chennai, where last April about thousand Christian Dalits reconverted to Hinduism. At this moment, the leadership and the management of the Church in India is not joining the Dalits in their fight for freedom.

### **What Should be the Role of the Indian Church?**

The majority of the authors share the conviction that the Church should be more holistic. At the moment, the Church is far from that, while Dalits seem to really need this. They want for example education, economic assistance and pastoral care, things the Church is not offering. But, according to James Massey, that's not all: "A radical change, a genuine paradigm shift in mission outlook, is needed in order to become an authentic, prophetic Church, truly committed to Jesus crucified and to the mission he entrusted to it in India." He then gives a few suggestions about what the role of the Church should be in the Dalit issue. First, he suggest an incarnation model, summarized in John 1: 1-14 and Luke 2: 1-7. This model is about God who, as a human being, became a Dalit, the poorest of the poor. Through this he showed his complete solidarity with the Dalits and so, the Church must follow him in this. Second, the Church should look more closely at their doctrine. Third, the Church should redefine its concept of mission, in the sense that it must be more holistic in nature. Last: "The Church in India should know that millions of Dalits in general, and about 1.5 million Dalit Christians, are still waiting to receive the whole of salvation, because so far they have only been offered the half of salvation which speaks of 'saving their souls'." This last suggestion has a lot to do with the Church identifying itself with the Dalits, something that is also mentioned a lot in the literature.

### **Dalit Theology**

When doing research on Christian Dalits, it is impossible to escape the phenomenon of 'Dalit theology'. This form of theology is up and rising in India, because it serves the Christian Dalits with an alternative for the traditional theology. Moreover, it is a key to their liberation.

May be one of its most important features is that it is a theology by Dalits. It sounds obvious, but it shapes the entire theology. It announces a break with the traditional Indian theology. What follows is a kind of methodological exclusion, in which Felix Wilfred sees a tension: "...it has to keep both the methodological exclusion and theological inclusion of all others without which it may not qualify itself as a Christian theology." With being a theology by and for Dalits, it also concentrates on the lives of Dalits. This means that its most important aim is to liberate the Dalits. Without this, Dalit theology would make no sense at all. In his book 'Dalit Christians of Andhra', Rajpramukh formulates it like this: "Its concern is not mainly what would happen to the soul after the death, but what happens to the human beings to have their human dignity and honour as anybody else." Likewise, Dalit theology is a movement 'from below': it is 'interested in the horizontal relations rather than vertical revelation', which is eminent in the traditional 'from above' theology. In this way it is also a social movement.

According to James Massey three elements play an important role in Dalit theology: 'the aspiration of Dalits for fuller liberation, the recognition that God is on the side of the Dalits and the conviction that Christ is the model for the struggle, a struggle which continues today through the Holy Spirit.' Solidarity is also a very important feature of Dalit theology. James Massey recognises a two-sided solidarity: first, in history God has shown his own solidarity with human beings, second, being in solidarity with Dalits of other faiths and ideologies. But this solidarity can also be seen in another role of Dalit theology, namely, creating awareness among non-Dalits of Dalit suffering and pain. Furthermore, solidarity plays a role in the person of Jesus. His life and suffering was not on behalf of the victims, but in solidarity with the victims.

Last, in his book 'Downtrodden' James Massey distinguishes five elements of the role of Dalit theology:

- ❖ It must address the Dalits themselves about their state and their dawning consciousness of themselves: heighten understanding and raising awareness;
- ❖ It must also address non-Dalits: make others aware;
- ❖ Raising the consciousness of the Christian community as a whole: Dalit theology must challenge the Church to change;

- ❖ It must enable ordinary Christians to take an active role in the struggle of the Dalits;
- ❖ It must create the possibility of fuller liberation or salvation, based on the Christevent of redemption.

### **Liberation Strategies**

Because mission departments and organisations in the West are often very much involved in justice issues, it is important for them to know what justice means in a particular area and for a specific group of people. For Dalits justice means liberation - that is the goal of their struggle. But to know this, is not enough. The issue is so complex that finding liberation seems almost impossible. But in the literature several strategies are given. For organisations involved in mission from the West into India, and also Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan, this is very useful information, since they can incorporate this in their programmes. Furthermore, it is an important subject for Dalit theologians, since freedom is what they are after. According to James Massey, Dalits need to pass four stages before they can achieve full liberation:

1. Establish a common identity;
2. Become conscious of their state;
3. Be in solidarity;
4. Enter into the process of liberation

But since this is a little vague, let us look at more concrete suggestions of how to attain liberation. The first person to look at then, is Ambedkar. In almost all the interviews I had with people from India, elements of Ambedkar's thought were present. Through this report several elements of Ambedkar's thought on the liberation of the Dalits have been mentioned. First, there was the idea of converting to another religion as a means of fighting the caste system. Second, one of the most important lessons of Ambedkar passed by: 'educate, agitate and organise'. The first one, educate, was mentioned as a liberation strategy by almost all the Indian participants of the interviews. It seems to be that education is really one of the most important themes in the struggle against the caste system. The reason for this is quite simple, as I mentioned before in chapter one: the caste system is in the minds of the people. So, perhaps one of the most

important areas to address is the Dalit psyche. A third important strategy of Ambedkar, not mentioned before, is promoting inter-marriage. Together with inter-dining, it is still a big taboo in India even to such an extent that horrible revenge practices can be the result. It was only recently that eight family members were brutally murdered because their 21-year old relative secretly married a girl from a higher caste. Even among Christians it is very uncommon to socialise or even marry someone from a different caste. Many Dalit leaders believe that braking down the barriers of 'eating and mating' would destroy the dynamic of purity and pollution and consequently the very basis of caste. In his book 'Religion and Dalit Liberation', John Webster describes four strategies for freedom:

1. Acquisition of political power;
2. Economic independence;
3. Internal social reform;
4. Religious change.

These strategies are based on what the modern Dalit movement did, and still does, to fight the caste discrimination. In addition to the strategies for liberation, there is another thing mission organisations and departments both from the West, and from within India itself, can do to participate in the struggle of the Dalits: it is important that any organisation supporting development in India, asks itself how its programmes are challenging casteism. Maybe the discrimination is not that visible for an outsider, but that does not mean that it isn't there and that it isn't a big problem. In this regard, the Indian government should also be challenged, for the fact that they deny the problem. Pressure from outside can do a lot, so organisations should also focus on persuading and even shaming the government.

## Chapter 12

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### Indian Church: Chances and Challenges

India is at the same time an officially secular society and one of the most religious - indeed, most publicly religious - places on earth. Hinduism has made the most profound religious imprint on Indian society and is treated as the de facto official religion, but India is tremendously pluralistic, and there are significant numbers of Muslims in India, even after partition. In contrast to many western countries that privatize and interiorize religion in order to cope with religious pluralism, radically pluralistic India puts religion in all forms very much in public view, in vivid color for all to see.

Catholicism in India is characterized by intense devotional practice that draws from Hindu, Syrian, colonial Portuguese and contemporary Catholic practices. The connections between Indian Catholicism and the rest of Indian culture are often on display, and at times the boundaries between these practices can seem thin, but as David Mosse observes, in the practices

of ordinary Catholics, “Christianity [is] not merely a ‘thin veil’ over an underlying autochthonous South Indian ‘folk religion.’” It has its own independent and synthetic identity.<sup>1</sup>

India, in its cities at least, is a powerhouse in technological and computing fields, but at the same time, Indian religion is not similarly rationalized or abstracted. For Catholics as much as Hindus, religious power is taken to be very present and touchable in material realities like statues, water, oil, and candles. Miracles and divine intervention are taken to be commonplace in Indian society. Devotion is extremely important to Indian Catholics, as for other Indians, often taking the form of public offerings for supplication or thanksgiving. Roadside shrines are omnipresent in areas with any Christian population, and devotions there play an especially important role in Indian Catholicism. Whereas European devotions often focused on the combination of ritual prayers with action, what one scholar notes about a site in Chennai seems to be true elsewhere in India: “for the majority of these Indian pilgrims, what matters most is not a fixed formula of verbal petitioning as in much European popular devotion, but the completion of some concrete ritual action.”<sup>2</sup>

The flip side of that strong belief in miracles is a complementary, sometimes pernicious sense of the capriciousness of life. When asked about government and society, people speak of a sense of their own smallness below a big system beyond their control.<sup>3</sup>

Parts of this site are based on interviews with Indian Catholics in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala in January 2013.

This may be a reason why, as some Indian Catholics noted in interviews, Indian Catholics are much more likely to emphasize charity for the poor, rather than to advocate for social justice. Indians also complained that bribery is too often necessary to make anything happen.<sup>4</sup> Those who bribe can get away with much, and power is rarely if ever accountable. Several Indians interviewed for this project suggested that religion in India often reflects that reality, such that it can too often be a matter of offering a bribe to a deity in exchange for some hoped-for action.

The 24 million Christians in India total just 2.3% of the population, and are primarily concentrated in the south, notably in states like Goa, which is 26% Christian; Kerala, which is 18.6% Christian; and Tamil

Nadu, which is 6% Christian.<sup>5</sup> In Southern India, the Christian population is stable since the 1960s, with relatively few conversions. In the Northeast tribal areas and states, there are also significant numbers of Christians, and the numbers there are growing. The vast majority of the populations of the Northeast states of Meghalaya, Mizoram, and Nagaland are Christian. Today about half of Indian Christians live outside the historic southern Indian centers of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> “Catholics form the largest Christian group in India, nearly half the Christian population. Another 40 percent are Protestants, while 7 percent are Orthodox Christians and 6 percent belong to Indigenous sects.”<sup>7</sup>

Though Catholicism is very much a minority religion, it is quite visible in many cities. Catholic schools, hospitals, and colleges are widely revered in India, sought after by Hindus, Muslims and Christians alike. “Christian communities run 20 percent of the private educational institutions and more than 30 percent of the private medical services in the country.”<sup>8</sup> A visitor driving around parts of Bengaluru, on seeing so many signs for Catholic schools and institutions, might mistakenly conclude that the city had a large Catholic population. Indian Catholicism is highly clericalized, with a large and influential population of priests, sisters and brothers who run these Catholic institutions. Sisters are almost always seen in habit, though priests may or may not be seen in clerics or soutane.

There have been significant political efforts by Hindu nationalists to marginalize Catholicism as “foreign.”<sup>9</sup> David Mosse, “A Return Visit to Alapuram: Religion and Caste in the 2000s” in *The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India*.

(Berkeley: University of California, 2012), 233-36. ; Mathew N.

Schmalz, “The Indian Church: Catholicism and Indian Nationhood.” in *The Catholic Church and the Nation-State: Comparative Perspectives*,

ed. Paul C. Manuel, Lawrence C. Reardon, and Clyde Wilcox. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 2006), 209-25.

In parts of the south, though, Catholicism is more a part of the social, religious and political order. Catholicism’s ancient history in South India is relied upon to cement that claim.

Indian Christians commonly trace their origins to the Apostle Thomas, who is said to have arrived in India in 52 AD, to have built seven churches in southern India, and to have been martyred in India in 72 AD. Waves of European missionaries, beginning under Portuguese rule in the 16th century, shaped the dynamics of Indian Catholicism today. Portuguese Catholicism particularly shaped Catholic life in Goa, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and parts of Karnataka. A number of Protestant churches evangelized under the British rule, and Pentecostalist Christianity has made its presence felt in recent years, though not to the extent it has in many other countries.

Indian Catholics belong to three churches within the Catholic Church. Latin rite Catholics (so named because they use the Roman rite and governance, not for any use of Latin today) trace their origins to the missionary work of St. Francis Xavier from 1542-45. Two “oriental” Catholic churches - the Syro-Malabar and the Syro-Malankara - trace their origins to the travels of the Apostle Thomas.<sup>10</sup> Each of these churches has its own hierarchy, in overlapping jurisdictions, under the authority of the pope. Catholics in any of these rites may receive communion in each other’s liturgies, though people tend to stay in the rite they were born into.

### Flourishing Catholicism and Its Challenges

Though Catholics represent only 1.6 percent of the population, India is so big that this works out to a sizeable Catholic community of 17.6 million. The Church is divided into three rites: Syro-Malabar, Syro-Malankara, and the Latin rite. The Syro-Malabar rite has an estimated four million adherents, the Syro-Malankara about 500,000, and the rest belong to the Latin Rite. Local tradition credits the apostle Thomas with the introduction of Christianity, and believers who trace their ancestry to him are known as “Thomas Christians.” Missionary efforts in the South, centered on Kerala and Goa, followed the Portuguese conquest of Goa in 1510.

In many ways, Indian Catholicism is thriving. The Church is growing at a rate ahead of overall population growth, and by 2050 there could be almost 30 million Catholics. (That would put India well ahead of the Catholic population of Germany, for example, and bring it close to Poland.). Outside its traditional base in the south, Catholicism is also expanding in the northeast. In the state of Arunachal Pradesh



on the eastern border with China, where Catholicism arrived barely 25 years ago, there are today 180,000 Catholics out of a total population of 800,000. Catholicism enjoys wide respect for its network of schools, hospitals and social service centers. When Mother Teresa died in 1997, the Indian government afforded her a state funeral, only the second private citizen after Mahatmas Gandhi to receive the honor. Her casket was borne by the same military carriage which carried Gandhi's remains in 1948.

### Specific Realities in Indian Catholic Church

#### 1. Three Challenges

As the 21st century dawns, Indian Catholicism also faces three major challenges.

- ❖ First, India has acquired a reputation for some of the most adventurous theology in Catholicism today, especially in "religious pluralism." Thinkers such as Michael Amaladoss, Felix Wilfred, Raimon Panikkar, Aloysius Pieris and Jacques Dupuis, all of whom are either Indian or influenced by India, have been controversial to the traditional minded Christians because of the various ways in which they try to give positive theological value to non-Christian religions. That is a logical development given India's religious diversity, but it has raised alarms in quarters of the Church identified with evangelical Catholicism. Catholic leaders will want to encourage theological exploration that can open up dialogue, but without transgressing doctrinal limits.
- ❖ Second, a noteworthy point about Catholic demography in India is the disproportionate share of Dalits, or untouchables. Estimates are that somewhere between 60 and 75 percent of Indian Catholics are Dalits, who often see Christianity as a means of protesting the caste system and of affiliating with a social network to buffer its effects. Beginning in the 1970s, the Catholic Church took up the Dalit cause in Indian society. Recently, India's Catholic leaders have backed efforts to repeal laws that provide protection to Hindu Dalits but not those of other religious backgrounds.

Yet some critics say the Church itself has a mixed record. Archbishop Marampudi Joji of Hyderabad, the first Dalit archbishop, said in a 2005 interview that "discrimination against Dalits has no

official sanction in the Church, but it is very much practiced." He told a story about a meeting between Catholic leaders and the former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in the 1970s. When the bishops complained about the treatment of Dalits, according to Archbishop Joji, Gandhi shot back: "First do justice to the Dalits within your Church, and then come back to me and make your representation on their behalf. I shall do my best for you then." As of 2000, just six of the 156 Catholic bishops in India were Dalits, and out of 12,500 Catholic priests, only about 600 were Dalits. Sensitivity to caste distinctions in the Church still runs strong. When Joji was appointed to an archdiocese where Dalits are not a majority, outgoing Archbishop Samineni Arulappa of Hyderabad complained, "Rome is being taken for a ride. Rome does not know the ground realities."

- ❖ Third is the rise of aggressive Hindu nationalism. Radical Hindu movements often claim that Christians engage in duplicitous missionary practices in an effort to "Christianize" India. Though by most accounts the Hindu nationalists represent a tiny fraction of the population, they have the capacity to create tremendous grief. Organized radical groups today sometimes move into Christian villages, preaching a gospel of Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism, and urge people to take part in "reconversion" ceremonies. These groups also routinely stage counter-festivals during Christmas celebrations.

#### 2. Charismatic Catholicism

Charismatic Catholicism has become highly visible in south India over the last decades. Church leaders argue that it has kept a large number of Catholics within the church who might otherwise have fled the Catholic Church for one of the small Evangelical churches that have sprouted up in the area.

Charismatic Catholicism though is characterized by its strong appeal to emotion and personal witness, the emphasis on the bible, and worship that includes traditional and Charismatic gestures like waving of hands and intense prayer have contributed positively to the growth of Catholicism in India. The healing ministry of Catholic Charismatics prepares the platform for new evangelisation. Though Charismatic Catholicism in India draws in many ways from American Pentecostalist

religion, but is not simply a copy of it. Almost all the traditional faith practices of the Indian Catholics are incorporated by the Indian Charismatics. In the ways that Indians have woven together traditional European, Pentecostalist, and elements of Indian religiosity, the charismatic Catholics have developed something quite particular to India. Whereas the bishops in some countries have tried to hold back the charismatic movement or held it at a distance, charismatic Catholics in India say they have been embraced by the bishops, and that this connection has kept many Catholics, especially middle class Catholics, from going over to Pentecostal churches.

### 3. Migration and Immigration

Almost all Catholics in India are natives, and India has its own native clergy in abundance, so Indian Catholics do not have significant foreign born communities to integrate. At the same time, mobility within India, and migration out of India, is having some effect on Catholicism in many parts of the country, mostly among the upper and middle classes, who are most connected into the world abroad. Family structures seem resistant to evolving norms abroad, but Indians are aware of different values from other parts of the world, even as they prefer to choose their own path. The biggest changes come when family members move abroad temporarily for work opportunities.

In Kerala, out-migration plays a significant role in the lives of Catholics. Families commonly have at least one family member living abroad for employment purposes, particularly in the Gulf States, but also in Europe, other parts of India, and other parts of the world. Kerala is the best educated state in India, and through Catholic schools, Keralite Catholics have a strong start on English, nursing, and other skills that serve them well in the global marketplace. Even middle-class families have their feet in several worlds, quite literally. Clergy and religious communities from Kerala are also migrating at a rapid pace, being sent as missionaries to serve in parishes and Catholics around the world, often, but not exclusively, in service to Indian migrant communities.

### Art, Architecture and Demographics of Indian Christians

There are a large number of items of artistic and architectural significance in the religious and domestic life of Indian Christians. Altars, statues, pulpits, crosses, bells and belfries of churches along

with other household items are among the many things that form part of the sacred art of the Indian Christians. Church art and architecture of Kerala from the beginning of Christian presence in the region have been greatly influenced by those of other nations and religions as they have been influenced by Kerala's wealth of artistic and architectural traditions.

Christian art and architecture in Kerala in pre-European periods has not only developed from contact with the countries that had trading posts there but also from indigenous forms and techniques of art and architecture. The advent of the Portuguese, the Dutch, the French, and the English has had a great deal of influence on the art and architecture of the church in Kerala. The description of the visits of a Portuguese Archbishop Dom Menezes to various churches before the arrival of western powers in India throws some light on the structures and arrangements of the churches before western elements and types were introduced into Kerala. There were three striking objects of significance in front of the typical Malabar churches, either inside the courtyard or just outside it:

The ornate monumentality of the European churches was introduced to India when parts of Malabar Coast came under the jurisdiction of the Portuguese in the 16th century. They introduced the Romano-Portuguese style, which was assimilated with such artistic and structural finesse by the artists of Kerala, that it created some of the finest pieces of artistry. This laid the foundations for Indian Baroque. After the arrival of Vasco da Gama and more especially after the commencement of Portuguese rule in India, distinct patterns of Christian art developed within the areas of Portuguese influence, mostly along the coasts of the peninsula. The Portuguese were great builders and promoted architecture more than any other form of fine art. St. Francis Church, Kochi is the first European place of worship in India and incidentally also the place where Vasco da Gama was first buried. The Christian art of Goa reached its climax in church building.

Indian Christian art and architecture during the British Raj has expanded into several different styles as a result of extensive church building in different parts of the country. The style that was most patronised is generally referred to as the British Regency style which

included Neo-Gothic and Gothic Revival architecture. Most Protestant cathedrals and churches in India conform to this style. St. Paul's Cathedral, Kolkata is a typical example of the Gothic Revival style. St. Mary's church, Chennai, the first Anglican Church built east of the Suez is one of the first examples of British colonial architecture in India. French and Danish influences on Christian art and architecture in India can be seen in their respective colonies. Today one can see a harmonious blending of the East and the West in the Christian art and architecture of India.

### **Culture**

While Christians in India do not share one common culture, their cultures for the most part tend to be a blend of Indian, Syrian and European cultures. It differs from one region to another depending on several factors such as the prevailing rite and tradition and the extent of time for which Christianity has existed in those regions. The ancient Saint Thomas Christians of Kerala have a distinctively different culture when compared to Christians in other parts of the country. Historical ties with the Assyrian Church and assimilation of Indian traditions have contributed to the development of a unique culture among these traditional Syrian Christians or Nasranis of Kerala. The use of ornamental umbrellas for Christian religious festivities illustrates an example of the indigenous character of Kerala's Syriac Christianity. Goa was colonised by the Portuguese in the 16th century AD; as a result of which Goan Christians have adopted a more western culture. The dance, song and cuisine of Goa have been greatly influenced by the Portuguese. Contemporary Goan Christian culture can be best described as an increasingly anglicized Indo-Latin culture. Mangalorean Catholics are descended mainly from the Goan Catholic settlers, who had migrated to South Canara from Goa, a state north of Canara, between 1560 and 1763 during the Goa Inquisition and the Portuguese-Maratha wars. After migration to Mangalore, they adopted the local Mangalorean culture, but retained many of their Goan customs and traditions. Christianity in other parts of India spread under the colonial regimes of the Dutch, Danish, French and most importantly the English from the early 17th century to the time of the Indian Independence in 1947. Christian culture in these colonial territories has been influenced by the religion and culture of their respective rulers.

Contemporary Latin Christian culture in India draws greatly from the Anglican culture as a result of the influence of the erstwhile British Raj. The Anglican Book of Common Prayer is a widely used supplement for worship in the two major Protestant denominations: Church of South India and Church of North India. Today Christians are considered to be one of the most progressive communities in India. Urban Christians are to a greater extent influenced by European traditions which is considered an advantage in the business environment of urban India; this is given as an explanation for the large number of Christian professionals in India's corporate sector. The Christian church runs thousands of educational institutions which have contributed to the strengthening of Christian culture in India.

Religion plays a significant role in the daily life of Indian Christians. India ranks 15 among countries with highest church attendance. Religious processions and carnivals are often celebrated by Catholics. Cities with significant Christian populations celebrate patron saint days. As in other parts of the world, Christmas is the most important festival for Indian Christians. Anglo-Indian Christmas balls held in most major cities form a distinctive part of Indian Christian culture. Good Friday is a national holiday. All Souls Day is another Christian holiday that is observed by most Christians in India. Most Protestant churches celebrate harvest festivals, usually in late October or early November. Christian weddings in India conform to the traditional white wedding. However it is not uncommon for Christian brides particularly in the south to wear a traditional white wedding sari instead of a gown. The vast majority of Protestant women and to lesser extent Catholic women in India does not wear the bindi (red dot on the forehead) and can therefore be easily distinguished from their Hindu counterparts.

### **Demographics**

The 2001 census of India recorded 24,080,016 Christians in the country, most of them belonging to the Latin Rite and represented 2.34 per cent of the population. A 2005 report by the Catholic Church said that 17,300,000 baptized Catholics lived in the country, although it could not put a figure on how many of those were practicing. 310,000 were members of the Syro-Malankara Church and 3,000,000 of the Syro-Malabar Church. In January 1993, the Syro-Malabar Church

and in February 2005, the Syro-Malankara Church were raised to the status of major archiepiscopal churches by Pope John Paul II. The Syro-Malabar Church is the second largest among the twenty two Eastern Catholic Churches who accept the Pope as the visible head of the whole church.

The Oriental Orthodox churches in India include the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church with 2,500,000 members, the Jacobite Syrian Christian Church with 1,200,000 members, Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church with 900,000 members and Malabar Independent Syrian Church with 10,000 members.

Most Protestant denominations are represented in India, as a result of missionary activities throughout the country, such as the American Missionary Association, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel Mission, the Church Mission Society of the Church of England and many other missions from Europe, America and Australia. With approximately 4 million members, the largest Protestant denomination in the country is the Church of South India, which is a union of Presbyterian, Reformed, Congregational, Methodist, and Anglican congregations. It is also one of four united churches in the Anglican Communion. A similar Church of North India has 1.25 million members. These churches are in full communion with the Anglican Communion. In 1961, the evangelical wing of the church split from the Mar Thoma Church and formed the St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India which has 35,000 members. There are about 1,267,786 Lutherans, 648,000 Methodists, 2,392,694 Baptists, and 823,456 Presbyterians in India.

The Open Brethren movement is also significantly represented in India. The main Brethren grouping is known as the Indian Brethren (with a following estimated at somewhere between 449,550 and 1,000,000), of which the Kerala Brethren are a significant subset. The closely related Assemblies Jehovah Shammah has around 310,000 adults and children in fellowship as of 2010. They are often considered part of the wider Brethren movement, although they were founded by an indigenous evangelist and developed independently of the older Indian Brethren movement, which originated from missionary endeavours.

Pentecostalism is also a rapidly growing movement in India. The major Pentecostal churches in India are the Assemblies of God, The Pentecostal Mission, the New Apostolic Church with 1,448,209 members, the Indian Pentecostal Church of God with 900,000 members (throughout India and ten other countries), the New Life Fellowship Association with 480,000 members, the Manna Full Gospel Churches with 275,000 members, and the Evangelical Church of India with 250,000 members.

<b>Christian Denominations in India</b>		
<b>Church Name</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Orientation</b>
Roman Catholic Church	11,800,000	Latin Rite, Catholic
Syro-Malabar Catholic Church	3,300,000	East Syrian Rite, Catholic
Syro-Malankara Catholic Church	310,000	West Syrian Rite, Catholic
Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church Combined	4,700,000	West Syrian Rite, Oriental Orthodox
Kanaya	300,000	West Syrian Rite and East Syrian Rite, Oriental Orthodox and Catholic
Malabar Independent Syrian Church	10,000	West Syrian Rite, Oriental Orthodox, Independent
Chaldean Syrian Church, or church of the east (old christian in india)	35,000	East Syrian, Church of the East
Malankara Mar Thomas Syrian Church	900,000	West Syrian Rite, Oriental Independent and Reformed
St. Thomas Evangelical Church	35,000	Episcopalian Protestant
Church of South India	5,000,000	Episcopalian Protestant (United and uniting)
Church of North India	1,250,000	Episcopalian Protestant (United and uniting)
Methodist Church in India	648,000	Protestan
Baptist	2,991,276	Protestant (List of Baptist denominations in India)
Assemblies Jehovah Shammah	310,000	Protestant (Plymouth Brethren)
Lutheran	1,267,786	Protestant
Indian Brethren	449,550to 1,000,000	Protestant (Plymouth Brethren)



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Presbyterian Church of India	1,206,737	Protestant (Reformed)	
Reformed Presbyterian Church in North East India	15,000	Protestant (Reformed)	
Reformed Presbyterian Church of India	10,000	Protestant (Reformed)	
Evangelical Church Oreintation of Maraland	30,000	Protestant (Reformed)	
Congregational Church in India	5,500	Protestant (Reformed)	
Hindustani Covenant Church	16,600	Protestant	
Worldside Faith Missions	12,000	Protestant	
Evangelical Church	250,000	Protestant	
New Apostolic Church	1,448,209	Protestant	
India Pentecostal Church of God	600,000	Protestant	
Pentecostal Maranatha Gospel Church		Protestant	
New Life Fellowship Association	480,000	Protestant	
Sharon Fellowship Church	50,000	Protestant	
Manna Full Gospel Churches	275000	Protestant	
Philadelphia Fellowship Church	200000	Protestant	
Seventh-day Adventist Church	1560000	Protestant/Restorationism	
Unitarian Unit of Northeast India	10000	Unitarian	
Jehovah's Witness	42566	Restorationism	
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints	1289	Latter Day Saints	
Gift of God Ministrises	1,000	Born Again Believers	
Christian Revivl Church	21,447	Charismatic, Pentecostal and Holistic Evangelical Movement	
<b>State Populations States with percentage of Christians as per 2011census</b>			
India	1,210,854,977	2.30	27,819,588
Nagaland	19,78,502	87.93	1,739,651
Mizoram	1,097,206	87.16	956,331
Meghalaya	2,966,889	74.59	2,213,027
Manipur	2855,794	41.29	1,179,043
Arunachal Pradesh	1,383,727	30.26	418,732
Goa	1,458,545	25.10	366,130
Andaman and Nicobar			

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Islands	380,581	20.28	80,984
Kerala	33,406,061	18.38	6,141,269
Sikkim	610,577	9.91	60,522
Puducherry	1,247,953	6.29	78,550
Tamil Nadu	72,147,030	6.12	4,418,331
Tripura	3,673,917	4.35	159,882
Jharkhand	32,988,134	4.30	1,418,,608
Assam	31,205,576	3.74	1,165,867
Odisha	41,974,218	2.77	1,161,708
Chattisgarh	25,545,198	1.92	490,542
Karnataka	61,095,297	1.87	1,142,647
Andhra Pradesh	84,580,777	1.34	1,129,784
Punjab	27,743,338	1.26	348,230
Maharashtra	112,374,333	0.96	1,080,073
West Bengal	91,276,115	0.72	658,618
Gujarat	60,439,692	0.52	316,178
Uttar Pradesh	199,812,341	0.18	356,448
Bihar	104,099,452	0.12	129,247
Jammu And Kashmir	in Garhi Christian Fellowship Circa 2,500 in.		

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> R. L. Stirrat, "Conclusion" in *Power and Religiosity in a Post-colonial Setting: Sinhala Catholics in Contemporary Sri Lanka*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1992), 196. As cited in David Mosse. "Introduction" in *The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India*. (Berkeley: University of California, 2012), 16.
- <sup>2</sup> Patricia Raeann Johnston, "The Church on Armenian Street: Capuchin Friars, The British East India Company, and the Second Church of Colonial Madras" (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 2015), 104.
- <sup>3</sup> Parts of this site are based on interviews with Indian Catholics in Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala in January 2013.
- <sup>4</sup> Comments based on interviews in Southern India in January 2013. For one effort to fight back against the culture of bribery, see [ipaidabribe.com](http://ipaidabribe.com) (link is external).
- <sup>5</sup> 2011 Census of India.

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- <sup>6</sup> K. C. Zachariah, *Syrian Christians of Kerala: Demographic and Socio-Economic Transition in the Twentieth Century*. (India: Hyderabad Orient Longman Private Limited, 2006), 113-130.
- <sup>7</sup> Rowena Robinson, "Introduction: From Periphery to Center" in *Christians of India*. (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2003), 28.
- <sup>8</sup> K. C. Zachariah, *Syrian Christians of Kerala: Demographic and Socio-Economic Transition in the Twentieth Century*. (India: Hyderabad Orient Longman Private Limited, 2006), 108.
- <sup>9</sup> David Mosse, "A Return Visit to Alapuram: Religion and Caste in the 2000s" in *The Saint in the Banyan Tree: Christianity and Caste Society in India*. (Berkeley: University of California, 2012), 233-36. ; Mathew N. Schmalz, "The Indian Church: Catholicism and Indian Nationhood." in *The Catholic Church and the Nation-State: Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Paul C. Manuel, Lawrence C. Reardon, and Clyde Wilcox. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown UP, 2006), 209-25.
- <sup>10</sup> There are also numerous Syriac Orthodox, Jacobite, and Protestant Christians, descendants of the same tradition from the Apostle Thomas, who have not joined the Catholic Church.