

CHAPTER.3

THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE MALANKARA ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH

3.1 Introduction

While discussing the contributions of Kerala Christians one cannot ignore the historical evolution of the Church and its social interaction in the land where it was flourished. The early Christians of Malabar¹ were known as ‘Marthoma Nazranikal’ or ‘St. Thomas Christians.’² During the colonial period, they were to establish their identity and came to be called "Syrians"³ This appellation was popularized subsequently by the British⁴. The *Marthoma Nazranis* are believed to be the descendants of the Syrian migrants, native converts and Jewish Diaspora in Kerala. When Buddhism was eclipsed in the wake of Hindu revivalism, its followers were also amalgamated with the Christian population, as evidenced from the survival of a few Buddhist customs in Christian culture. By around 16th century Kerala Christian community came to be known as

1 Rajan Gurukkal & M.R. Raghava Varier (Gen.Editors), *Cultural History of Kerala, Vol.1.*, Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p. 270.

2 L.K. Anantha Krishna Ayyar, *The Anthropology of the Syrian Christians*, Ernakulam, 1926, p.1. However, we could not trace these epithets beyond 12th century A.D.

3 Perhaps for the first time, the title may have used by a Dutch writer Moens, in the 18th C. See V. Titus Varghese & P.P. Philip, *Glimpses of The History of The Christian Churches in India*, Madras, 1983, p.1⁷; This was to distinguish between the Syrian and Latin Tradition. East Syriac, the language the Middle East was familiar^{to} Kerala due to her overseas commercial enterprises. See: K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *History of the Kingdom of Cochin*, Vol, II, p. 452; L.W .Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, Cambridge, 1956; Michael Geddes, *The History of the Church of Malabar*, London, 1694.

4 The British historians and officials always referred to the Malabar Christians as Syrian Christians. e.g. Travelogues of both Buchanans.

*Malankara Nazranikal or Nazrani Mapillas*⁵. Even today, they are particular to use this name⁶.

This community is now divided into various denominations on account of jurisdiction, dogma and traditions. It is true that the various churches in Kerala share the common tradition of the St. Thomas mission. The Indian Orthodox Church which is officially known as the 'Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church'⁷ is a prominent group among them. This Christian community remained undivided till the coming of the Europeans. The Malankara Church was ecclesiastically affiliated with the East Syrian Church of Persia,⁸ which absorbed Nestorian⁹ theology in the 5th century. Mingana assumes that Indian Church had strong ecclesiastical connections with the East Syrian Church. He quotes two Syriac documents. The first is a Syriac translation of the Pauline Epistles of about AD 425. In colophon of the commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,

⁵ Archshishop Meneziz quotes the names of two lay leaders at Kaduthuruty, from whom he received some favours, Their Names were Itimato Mapula, and Itimane Mapula, obviously Ittimathu Mappila and Ittimani Mappila respectively; cited in Michael Geddes, *op.cit.*, p.80.

Also see L.K. Anantha Krishna Ayyar, *op.cit.*, p.1. See also Z.M.Paret, *Malankara Nazranikal 'Padaviyum Jatyacharangalum'*(Mal), Kottayam, 1966, P.178; F. Wrede, Esq, "Account of the St. Thome' Christians on the Coast of Malabar" in *Asiatic Researches and Transactions*, Vol. VII., London 1807, p.327; The Rev W.H. Foy B.A. ed.' *Buchanan's Christian Researches in India*, London, 1836.

⁶ For e.g.: Kandathil Verghese Mappila, Mammen Mappila etc.

⁷ The term '*Maliankara*' or '*Malankara*' is used being the region where its founder, the Apostle Thomas, according to tradition, said to have landed. It is same as Malabar. *Mala* means 'hill' in Dravidian and *bar* means 'land' in Arabic. Malabar is the name given by the Arabs to this land. '*Orthodox*' is a Greek compound word denotes right belief or true faith. '*Syrian*' for its liturgical language to contrast Latin of the Roman Church.

⁸ Some authors suggest that the '*Knai Thoman Migration*' point to the inauguration of Persian contact of the Malankara Church.

⁹ The Universal Church declared Nestorius as a heretic in 431 A.D. at the council of Ephesus held under Cyril of Alexandria. The Persian Church as it was outside the Roman empire, officially accepted this faith in the 5th century. See: Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios ed., *The Malankara Orthodox Church Encyclopedia*, Orthodox Seminary, Kottayam, 1993, pP. 440-441.

Isho'dad writes as follows: "This Epistle has been translated from Greek into Syriac by Mar Komai, with the help of Daniel, the priest, the Indian..."¹⁰

The second document according to him is an act of Ma'na, bishop of Rewardashir, of about AD 470, who wrote: "...in Persian (i.e. *Pahlawi*) religious discourses, canticles, and hymns, and translated from Greek in to Syriac the works of Diodore and Theodore of Mopsuestia, and sent them all to India, and he dispatched to the Islands of the sea (= Bahrain), and to India, all the books he had translated..."¹¹

One can assume safely that, there was a Christian church in Kerala and Kalliyana in the sixth century A.D., it was ecclesiastically affiliated with the East Syrian Church¹², and the liturgical language of these Christians at the beginning of the sixth century was Syriac and not any of the Indian languages. Even if these conclusions are accepted, it does not prove that the 'India'¹³ mentioned in early documents from West Asia, includes a part of South India.

By 16th century the Malankara Church as whole was brought under the Roman Catholic faith with the successful efforts of Archbishop Alexis de Menezis in the synod of Diamper.¹⁴ With the decline of Portuguese sway over Kerala by the middle of 17th century, the Church declared freedom from the Portuguese with the oath of Coonan

¹⁰ A. Mingana, *The Early Spread of Christianity in India*, Manchester, 1926, pp. 27, 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Hambye, who gave an authentic adaptation from French to English for the work of Tisserent, has put considerable efforts to bring out the Chaldean connections of the Thomas Christians. See: H C Perumalil and E R Hambye, eds., *Christianity in India: A History in Ecumenical Perspective*, Alleppey, 1972.

¹³ 'India' in the beginning of Christian era is the area where river Indus flows.

¹⁴ The Synod was convened by Archbishop Alexis de Menezis in 1599 A.D.

Cross in 1653¹⁵. Even though a major section of the believers rejoined the Roman Catholic Church in due course¹⁶, a considerable size of believers remained loyal to the Archdeacon, their leader, and the Malankara Church¹⁷. They, even after a number of challenges and ecclesiastical confrontations, survived to rebuild the Malankara Church of Kerala with ecclesiastical autocephaly.¹⁸ At present the name of the church appears in official documents as Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church¹⁹ under the Catholicate of the East²⁰. *The Catholicos*, the head of the Church now resides at Devalokam, Kottayam, Kerala, India. The present Catholicos is His Holiness Baselios Mar Thoma Paulose II.

15 Semavoon Mar Dionysius, *The Kandanad Grandhavari*, Kunnamkulam, 2008, pp. 34. Also see: C.V. Cherian, *A History of Christianity in Kerala from the Mission of St Thomas to the arrival of Vasco da Gama. AD 52-1498*, Kottayam, 1973, pp. 198-199.

16 *Ibid.*, p. 199; also see Bernard Thomma, *Mar Thoma Christianikal* (first published in 1916), Kottayam, reprint 1992, pp. 561-66.

17 C.V. Cherian, *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

19 The Constitution of the Malankara Church has been officially introduced in the Malankara Association held on 26-12-1934. Even though the name was used informally by the church in the beginning of twentieth century, it was officially put in to effect since the date. The declaration of the constitution is as follows: 1 The Malankara Church is a division of the Orthodox Syrian Church. The Primate of the Orthodox Syrian Church is the Patriarch of Antioch. 2 The Malankara Church was founded by St. Thomas the Apostle and is included in the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East and the Primate of the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East is the Catholicos. 3 The ancient and the real name of the Malankara Church is the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church although it is also called 'The Jacobite Church', for the same reason for which the Orthodox Syrian Church has been also called so. See: *The Constitution Of The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*, (Hither to The Constitution), Kottayam, 1934. Declaration, Article 1-3, p.1; The missionary activities of a prelate with the name Jacob *Burdano* in the 6th century safeguarded the faith of the West Syrian or Antiochaen Church. The Church since then came to be known as Jacobite Church. In 1665 the Malankara Church had come in to contact with the West Syrian Church through Mar Gregorios Abdul Jaleel. He is believed to be a prelate of the Antiochaen Church or the Jacobite Church. Only because of this connection of the Malankara Church, immediately after the Coonan Cross oath, caused the new name *Jacobites*.

20 C.V. Cherian, *Ibid.*

The title *Mar Thoma*²¹ appears formally with the name of every Catholicos²² in order to signify the apostolic succession and continuity.²³ The Church is variously and popularly referred to as '*Malankara Sabha*' in the vernacular and is fully self-governed by its own local heads²⁴ and is deeply rooted in the socio- cultural soil of India.

As result the origin of St. Thomas Christians of Kerala has been a subject of controversy among historians,²⁵ owing to the near absence of documentary evidence for the first few centuries. Though there are no references to the evangelization of St. Thomas in Malankara for the first ten centuries of Christian era, there is a living community of Christians in Kerala who avouch their succession from St. Thomas, the apostle.

3.2. Source Materials

²¹ Meaning: St. Thomas

²² Ref: ecclesiastical letters of the Catholicos begins with the titular word Mar Thoma. For e.g. Letter no.1/75, 1/91, 1/2003, 1/2010, File 1, office copy of the ecclesiastical letters of the Catholicos, Catholicate Aramana, Kottayam.

²³ Although, both the Apostolic origin and the title Mar Thoma has been challenged by some historians, The Church officially accepted these and the the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India has consented the both in 1958 and 1995. See. The Hon'ble Supreme Court Verdict 1958, 1995.

²⁴ The Bishops of the Malankara Church from 17th century onwards with the consecration of Mar Thoma I in 1653, were natives.

²⁵ Certain scholars have questioned the ancient and widely accepted tradition that St. Thomas was the founder of the Malabar Church. Historians like Fischer, Dr. Buchanan, Dr. Kerr, Bishop Heber. Archdeacon Robinson, Howard. Collins and White House have vehemently support the St. Thomas tradition. Colonel Yule who translated "Marco Polo" and Alex Dorsie who examined Portuguese records, have historically justified this tradition. But people like Lacrosse and Hough have rejected this tradition for want of contemporary historical records for the tradition. A number of scholars like La Croze, T.K.Joseph, G. M. Rae, K.J. John etc., have questioned this tradition. They also argue that in any document of the Malankara Christians there is no reference to St. Thomas before 12th century. The main argument that they have raised in this connection is that the India mentions related to St. Thomas in fact are mentions about the north western regions of India (Indus region) and not the southern part of India, as there is no historical evidence for the evangelization of Mar Thoma, the apostle in Malankara.

Although the scarcity of authentic contemporary records for the study of the origin of the Malankara Church is a reality, the available later source materials can be classified into:

a) Works of Tradition consisted of the *Veeradiyan pattukal*,²⁶ *Thoma Parvam*²⁷ or *Rambaan Pattu*, *Pallippattu* and the *Margam Kali Songs*.²⁸ b) Foreign Accounts like that of *Acta Thoma*²⁹, religious literature of the Universal Church, liturgical texts of the Church, travelogues³⁰ etc. c) Copper plates³¹ and inscriptions³². d) Colonial documents

26 The “*Veeradian pattukal*” of 17th or 18th centuries, are popular melodies of oral traditions, sung by Hindus on special occasions. They extol the preaching of Thomas in Kerala and the special privileges granted later by Kings.

27 This oral tradition prevailed among the Malankara Christians was abbreviated into the present form of the *Rambaan Pattu* in 17th century by one Maliekkal Thomas Ramban. Mathias Mundadan gives an abstract of the legend. See: A. Mathias Mundadan, *Sixteenth Century Traditions of St Thomas Christians*, Bangalore, 1970, pp 61-63. Fr. Barnard Alanchery first published this song in 1916. T. K. Joseph did not believe in the *Thoma Parvam Rambaan Pattu* because of its very late entry in to the history, apart from its unrealistic content. He found no trace of *Rambaan Pattu* or any mention about such a song before AD 1892. Leslie Brown also is not confident about this ballad. For more reference see: Fr. Bernard Alanchery, *Marthoma Christianikal*, Second Edition, Kottayam, 1992. pp 60-81; T. K. Joseph, *Pracheena Indiyale Krishnumatha Pracharanam*, Thiruvalla, 1950, pp 61-63; Leslie Brown, *The Indian Christians of St. Thomas*, Madras, 1980, pp 49-50.

28 The Malayalam popular songs of antiquity, known as *Thoma parvam* (17th century) and *Margam Kali Pattu*, describe the advent of St. Thomas in Kerala, his apostolate here and his martyrdom near a temple of the goddess Kali at Mylapore, on the third of July, 72.

29 *The Acts of Judas Thomas* is an apocryphal work known as *The Acta Thoma* (180-230 A.D.) The authorship of this work is attributed to Baradesanes, a Syrian Bishop and a native of Eddesa c.220 A.D. The Syriac manuscript, in its complete form is preserved in the British Museum. There are other texts in Greek, Latin, Armenian, and Ethiopic of later origin. Even though an apocryphal work, its antiquity is not doubted. See: A.F.J. Klijn, ed., *The Acts of Thomas*, Leiden, E.J.Bill, 1961.

30 That of Cosmas, Ma Huan, Marco Polo, Ibn Batuta etc.,

31 *Tharissa Palli Cheppedu* (849. A.D.), *Iravi Korthan Cheppedu* (11th century), *Arthat Cheppedu* (1806 A.D.), *Kandanad Padiyola* (1809 A.D.) etc.

32 *Thelakkad* Inscription, Granite Crosses etc.

like reports³³, surveys, letters, administrative and missionary records etc. e) Grandhavaris³⁴, resolutions of the ecclesiastical meetings³⁵. f) Historical writings of the foreign authors³⁶ g) Indigenous historical books.

3.3 Traditions

There are chiefly three traditions regarding the origin of Christianity in Kerala. 1) The St. Thomas Tradition- that St. Thomas, the apostle, introduced Christianity to Kerala. 2) The Migration Theory- that the Kerala Christians are the descendents of the immigrants from other parts of India and West Asia. 3) The later Evangelization- that the church is an offspring of later evangelization of some missionaries.

³³ Francis Buchanan's *Memoirs*, Claudius Buchanan, *s Christian Researches in Asia*, Ward and Conner *Survey Report* etc.

³⁴ Niranam *Grandhavari* (18th century), Kandanad *Grandhavari* (19th century) etc.

³⁵ Mulanthuruthy *padiyola* (1876 A.D.), Kottayam *Padiyola* etc.

³⁶ Antonio De Gouvea, *Jornada do Arcebispo de Goa Dom Frey Aleixo de Meneses*, Coimbra, 1606; Vincenzo Maria (1672), a Carmelite missionary from Europe, speaks in detail about the Thomas Christians and their customs and manners. See Vincenzo Maria, II, *Viaggio alle Indie Orientali* Roma, 1672; Francisco de Souza S J wrote his *Oriente Conquistado*, mainly based on the views of Gouvea, see Souza, Francisco de, *Oriente Conquistado a Jesu Chris to pelos Padres da Companhia de Jesus da Provincia de Goa*, 2 Vols, Lisbon, 1790. The general books on the Thomas Christians including that of Francis Buchanan, Dr., *A Journey from Madras through the Countries of Mysore, Canara and Malabar*, London, 1807; Claudius Buchanan, *Christian Researches in Asia*, London, 1812; James Hough, *A history of Christianity in India: From the commencement of the Christian era*. 2 Vols, London, 1839; G.B. Howard, *The Christians of St. Thomas and their liturgies*, London, 1864; Thomas Whitehouse, *Lingering of lights in a dark land, being researches into the past history and the present condition of the Syrian Church of Malabar*, London, 1873., etc.

3.3.1. The St. Thomas tradition³⁷. The Malankara Christians traditionally believe that their form of Christianity is Apostolic and derived from Apostle Thomas³⁸.

They assert that their Christian faith is distinctive and independent of the forms established by St. Peter and St. Paul in the West. Christianity developed in India as an indigenous religion. Under the fostering care of the local chieftains and with the friendship and tolerance of the indigenous people,³⁹ it developed as an essentially Indian religion in all respects except in matters of faith and forms of worship.

According to this oral tradition, St. Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ founded the church in Kerala. Legend has it that he landed at Maliankara near Kodungallur in A.D. 52, preached the word of God, founded seven churches and gave priestly ordination to four families. He was martyred at Mylapore near Madras in A.D. 72 and was buried there.⁴⁰ There are several versions for this legend with slight differences in some details. However, the basic structure remains the same in all.⁴¹ This tradition along with many other legends is found in ancient Christian songs originated in the 16th or 17th centuries.⁴²

37 Regarding the tradition there are five versions. (a) The general tradition which holds the belief that St Thomas preached and suffered martyrdom in India, (Kerala Christians as the offspring of St. Thomas Mission) (b) The view that St Thomas may have come to north India (now Pakistan) (Associated with a North Indian King Gudnapher and his conversion to Christianity.) but not to south India. (c) The opinion that the apostle visited both the north and the south India. (d) The theory concerning the term Greater India. (e) The view that St Thomas did not come to India at all.

38 See: *The Constitution, op.cit.*, Declaration, Article 1-3, p.1.

39 The granting of privileges, and the benevolent attitude of the Kerala rulers in permitting a religion from Palestine, testifies the reality. For more details see: S. Radhakrishnan, *East and West in Religion*, New Delhi, 1950, p.27.

40 Z.M.Paret, *Malankara Nazranikal*, Vol.1, Kottayam, 1965, pp. 172-175.

41 Hermann Gundert, *Keralolppathiyum Mattum*, Kottayam, D. C. Books, 1992, P 337.

42 See: footnote nos. 26,27,28.

The *Acta Thoma* or The Acts of St. Thomas is the first written document about the St. Thomas mission, written in the second century, in Syriac. Its author, Bardaisan of Edessa (AD 154 - 222), narrates the details of the missionary journey of St. Thomas to the country of King Gondaphoros, from the beginning of his travel until his martyrdom." This book was so popular then, hence, it was translated into several languages, including Greek, in the second and third centuries.⁴³

This book was considered as fiction by historians till the nineteenth century discovery of the authenticity of King Gondaphoros of Afghanistan,⁴⁴ a character mentioned in *Acta Thoma*- It is further deduced that his period was around AD 46, probably up to AD 60. This period tallies with the legends about St. Thomas.

Mackenzie observes: "The truth of this tradition has been doubted by recent writers who suggest that some other man named Thomas in later centuries founded this church or suggest that the name India at that date was applied to the country on the west of the river Indus and not to the peninsula which now bears the name. The arguments put forward by these writers seem hardly sufficient to explain away all the passages which speak of St. Thomas in India and these writers do not give due weight to the antiquity and to the strength of this venerable tradition which is held so tenaciously by all the Syrian Christians."⁴⁵

43 A.F.J. Klijn, ed., *The Acts of Thomas*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1961; Mathews Kathanar, Valiya Parettu, *Marthoma Sreehayude Nadapadikal*, Malayalam translation of *Acta Thoma*, Kottayam, 1937.

44 Rev. Dr. Koodapuzha and Rev. Dr. John Panicker, ed., *op.cit.*, Pp. 1⁹⁶.

45 G.T. Mackenzie, "History of Christianity in Travancore" in V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Trivandrum, 1906, p.2.

LaCroze in A.D. 1723 first challenged this legend. Some historians like Sir. William Hunter, Dr. K.J. John, James Hough etc. have also rejected the possibility of the visit of St. Thomas to South India for lack of any authentic contemporary evidence.

After examining the various random references Bishop L.W. Brown concludes: “We cannot prove that the Apostle worked in South India any more than we can disprove that fact; but the presence of Christians of undoubtedly ancient origin holding firmly to the tradition, the proof of the very considerable commercial contact between the Western World and the Malabar coast in the first century of our era, and the probable presence of Jewish colonies at the same time, may for some incline the balance of belief that the truth of the tradition is a reasonable possibility. The evidence we have cannot do more than this.”⁴⁶

3.3.2. The Migration Theory- that the Kerala Christians are descendents of the immigrants from other parts of India or from abroad.

There are several views about the migration of Christians to Kerala from different places and at different periods. They are important to note since they were also vital in the formation of the Christian identity and culture. The migrations of Christians to Kerala are an accepted fact even if the argument that these migrants constituted the entire Christian community is under challenge. First among them are the migrations from West Asia.

Knai Thomman, who traditionally believed to be migrated from Persia c.345 A.D. with around 300 to 400 Christian Families to Malabar Coast is a strong tradition, prevailed in Kerala at least from the colonial period. According to the local tradition, the

46 L.W. Brown, *op.cit.*, p.27.

leader of the migration from the Middle East was known as *Knai Thomman*.⁴⁷ which means Thomas the merchant⁴⁸. He was also known as Thomas Cana or Thomas *Cananeo*. The local legend regarding this migration is recorded in a letter, written in Syriac by Mathai Kathanar to C. Schaaf in AD 1726.⁴⁹ According to the description, the migration took place after a vision in the night of the bishop of Edessa regarding the desperate state of the Kerala Christians due the lack of priests. The Catholicos of the East hearing about that vision sent Thomas a merchant, to enquire about the situation. Upon his report: by order of the Catholicos, that after a very short time the merchant Thomas left his country accompanied by the very bishop who saw the vision, and by priests and deacons, by men, women, and children too from Jerusalem, Baghdad and Nineveh. They went on board a ship and came to Malabar, and reached Maliankara in the year three forty fifth of our Lord.⁵⁰

Though the immigrants and their descendants⁵¹ claimed that they came to India to help the dying Indian church, this claim was disputed. Most of the scholars now assert that they came to escape the terrible persecution of Muslims.⁵² They considered themselves superior to the native Christians and prohibited close contact and

47 The person in discussion is referred in different forms such as Thomas Cana. Thomas Cananeo. Thomas of Jerusalem, etc. The oldest local form *Knai Thomman* is followed in this study. The date of this migration is disputed. Since the copper plate grant is associated with the Perumal's rule, the migration may have taken place in a later century. The tradition says that it was in 345 A.D. see *Ibid.*, p.49, also see Julius Richter, D.D., *op.cit.*, p.30.

48 For the details see: Z. M. Paret, *Malankara Nazranikal* Vol. II, Kottayam, 1965, pp 1-38 ; A. Mingana, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-5

49 *Ibid.*, p. 49.

50 A. Mingana, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-5; this is a later account. No early narrative available. More over the date of this immigration is disputed.

51 The Southists or *the Knanaya* Community of Kerala, being the descendents of *Knai Thoma* places such a claim.

52 C. James Robertson, *History of the Christian Church*, London, 1875, p.414.

intermarriage with the Malankara Christians.⁵³ The *Southists* or the descendents of *Knai Thoma* still keep their racial purity and remain as a separate Christian group in Kerala.⁵⁴ They are also called the *Knanaya* Syrians. The claim of *Knai Thoma* and his descendents is that, the aim of the immigration was to help the dying Indian church. If it is true, what prompted them to lead a life set apart from the Kerala society? They even kept aloof from the native Christian Community.

Even in the present century, their descendents are not willing to have religious interaction with other Christians. If they were missionaries to help the Malankara Church, they would have close contact with the native Christians. There is no such reference in the known ecclesiastical history. Secondly, the immigrants reached here with a number of women and children. This itself shows the circumstance that forced them to take refuge in the Malabar coast. If they were missionaries to help the Indian Church, they would have reached India with some missionaries, not with women and children. The above mentioned possibilities and the reality of persecution that occurred during the period, point out that, the group lead by *Knai Thoma* reached India as immigrants to escape the 'Great Slaughter' of the period. *Knai Thomman Copper Plate*⁵⁵ is associated with the visit of those immigrants.

Migrants from Coromandal coast and other part of India:

There took place a migration of Christians from Mylapore to Kerala. Regarding the migration there is another story associated with the Thiruvamkodu, a

53 A.Mingana, *op.cit.*, p.49.

54 *Ibid*, K. P. Padmanabha Menon, *Kochi Rajya Charitram, Vol. I*, Cochin, 1914, p. 436.

55 The original plate has been lost. But an English translation is preserved in the Vatican Museum. See M. K. Kuriakose (ed.), *History of Christianity in India, Source Materials*, Bangalore, 1982, pp.6,7; As referred by Gouvea, Thomas Cana copper plates was in the hands of Mar Jacob. This refers about the rights granted to *Knai Thoma* and his family by the then ruler. See, Mundadan, n. 27, pp.170-73.

small group of *Vellala* Christians reached Kerala with a view to escape persecution. The Thiruvamkodu church, situated in Kanyakumari district of Tamilnadu, is now a part of the Malankara Orthodox Church, a very few descendants of *Tharissaykkal* are still there.⁵⁶ Leslie Brown observes about them in the twentieth century as follows: “Faithful *Dhairiyaykal* were distinguished from all other Christians in language, in many cultural practices, and in dress until two generations ago. The men used to retain the *Kutumi* or single lock of hair on the crown of the head, and sacred thread was put on the mail babies after baptism. The women wore the *pandiyada* and the other Hindu ornaments. They have now assimilated themselves to the Jacobite community and intermarried with them”⁵⁷

The *Tharissaykkal* of Thiruvamkodu migrated to the northern Kerala Christian settlements like Kollam, Mavalikkara and Kayarnkulam etc. in later centuries. Even today, some families of these places claim their Thiruvamkodu origin. However, they lost all uniqueness by entering into the Nazrani mainstream and Hindu landscape of Kerala. Some of them identify themselves with *Manigramakkar* and they have almost merged with the Nair community of the region.

The Kerala Christian community honoured and absorbed migrations several times in the first millennium. Some authors suggest that the whole Christians are of the result of migration from abroad or from other parts of India. *Niranam Grandhavari* mentions one of them as: - "There is an argument that St. Thomas did not come to Malayalam but he came only up to Nagapattanam and some believers from there came and

⁵⁶ In 1984 there was a *Tharissaykkal* or *Dhairiyaykal* family in the parish.

⁵⁷ L.W. Brown, *op.cit.*, p.79.

established *Maargam* in Malayalam.....”⁵⁸ However the historic presence of a Christian community in Malabar is reflected only in the 6th century. But at the same time, a strong tradition penetrates through the living community of Christians of Malabar to claim its antiquity.

3.3.3. The later Evangelization- that the church is an offspring of later evangelization of some missionaries.⁵⁹

Concerning the third opinion about the origin of Kerala Christians – the later evangelization theory, T.K. Joseph suggests the origin from the Bardesanite ⁶⁰ missionaries. Some others speak about Manicheans of the third century AD.⁶¹ However, P. Cherian argues that if the Manicheans ever preached here, it was the proof of the existence of a Christian community then.⁶² William Logan doubts the origin of Nazranis from the third century Gnostics, especially the ones called Orphites.⁶³ C. M. Agur abbreviated the arguments of the writers discrediting St. Thomas tradition and concludes thus: "...it becomes evident that the St. Thomas' story must be received with great caution..."⁶⁴

3.4. An authentic and undisputed record about the presence of a Church in Malabar (6th Century)

⁵⁸ M. Kurian Thomas, ed., *Niranam Grandhavari*, Kottayam, 2002, P. 160.

⁵⁹ The author of the *Niranam Grandhavari* was aware about such an argument. See: Kurian Thomas, (ed.), *Ibid.*.

⁶⁰ *Bardesianism* was a heresy developed by Bardesan at Edessa around AD 200. See: T.K. Joseph, *Pracheena...*, *op. cit.*, pp 33-39, 72-73

⁶¹ C.M. Agur, *Church History of Travancore*, Madras, 1903, *op. cit.*, pp 10-11.

⁶² P. Cherian, *The Malabar Syrians and Church Missionary Society*, Kottayam, 1935, p. 40.

⁶³ William Logan, *Matabar Manuel*, Calicut, 1997, pp 214-15

⁶⁴ C.M. Agur, *op. cit.*, pp 6-7.

Historically the most trustworthy information regarding ancient Christianity in Malabar is a reference to it in a sixth century work, *Topographia Christiana*⁶⁵. Its author Cosmas, called *Indicopleustus* or Indian voyager, visited South India about the year 522 A. D. and he testifies that he saw in ‘Male where pepper grows’ a Christian community. The words ‘Male where pepper grows’ must most clearly refer to the Malabar Coast (Malankara), and there is unanimous agreement among historical scholars to that effect.

Cosmas *Indicopleustes* was a rich Alexandrian merchant who sailed in his own vessels and visited many countries around the Indian Ocean. He took a keen interest in gathering all information about the Christians of the countries he visited. In his Travelogue, *Universal Christian Topography* he observes:

“We have found the Church not destroyed, but very widely diffused and the whole world filled with the doctrine of Christ, which is being day by day propagated and the gospel preached over the whole earth. This I have seen with my own eyes, in many places, and I have heard narrated by others, I, as witness of the truth, relate. In the island of Taprobane in farther India, where the Indian Sea is, there is a Church of Christians with clergy and a body of believers. In that country called Male [Malabar], where pepper grows, there is also a church and at another place called Kalliana there is more over a bishop who is appointed from Persia”.⁶⁶

This provides valuable evidence of the existence of an organized Church in the coastal Western India early in the sixth Century. What Cosmos saw and witnessed during his travel between 520-25 A.D was such a living Christian community; again what the Portuguese missionaries saw in the 16th cent, was also the same. The decrees of the

65 E. O. Winstedt, *The Christian Topography Of Cosmas Indicopleustes*, Cambridge, 1909.

66 Cosmas Indicopleustes, *The Christian Topography*, trans. & ed., Mc Crindle, London, 1897, P.178; see also M.K. Kuriakose, ed., *op. cit.*, p.8; E. O. Winstedt, *op.cit.*

Synod of Diamper 1599 are clear evidence to the fact that the faith, liturgy, disciplines and Episcopal administration were from the East Syrian Church⁶⁷

3.5. Inscriptions and Monuments

There are a few historical monuments that bear witness to the presence of Christians in Kerala. Four copper plates,⁶⁸ and four carved granite crosses have been discovered from different parts of Kerala. Those crosses are of almost same design, a cross standing on a pedestal surmounted by a descending dove, the whole enclosed in a circle containing some inscriptions in *Pahlavi* language. On paleographical ground, the crosses are dated to eighth to ninth centuries.⁶⁹ As the history of the pre colonial Church is common and same, the various Christian denominations of modern Kerala share a common heritage and legacy. But the political and missionary interaction of the Europeans with the Church paved the way for the emergence of diverse Christian denominations with distinct cultural ethos.

3.6. History of Divisions

The history of the Church especially that of Kerala Church, hitherto is interwoven with the history of the foreign missions to India. As a result of various missions, the Malankara Christians are now divided to many denominations. Such as:

1. The Roman Catholic Churches.

a. The Syro – Malabar Church

67 Xavier Koodapuzha and John Panicker(ed.) *op. cit.*, p. 222.

68 The Knai Thomman *Cheppedu*, Tharissappalli *Cheppedu*, Iravikorthan *Cheppedu*, Arthat *Cheppedu*.

69 C.V. Cherian, *op. cit.*, p. 120; see also Joseph Cheeran, P.C. Mathew Pulikkottil & K.V. Mammen, *Indian Orthodox Church, History and Culture*, Kottayam, 2002, pp. 106-107.

b. The Syro – Malankara Church

c. The Latin Catholic Church

2. The Orthodox Churches.

a. The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church

b. The Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church

c. The Malabar Independent Syrian Church

3. **Knanaya Syrians.** (Both in the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches)

4. **The Reformed Churches.** (Mar Thoma Syrian Church, St. Thomas Evangelical Church and other Protestant Churches)

It is evident that the undivided Kerala Christian community remained almost as a single body till the coming of the Portuguese. During this period they maintained ecclesiastical connections with the East Syrian Church. The temporal and ecclesiastical administration was carried on by the headman whom they called ‘*Jatikku Karthavyan*’⁷⁰ and the indebtedness that they had with the Persian prelates, was only in the spiritual realm. Moreover they depended upon the Persian bishops only for the succession in the priestly order. Ferdinand Paz in 1557 A.D wrote that a bishop who was among the Christians of Kerala was of the Nestorian faith, though he found nothing of heresy among those Christians. “..... I found them firm in the mystery of the most Holy Trinity and in that of the incarnation as well as that of the most Holy Sacrament of the altar.....”⁷¹

⁷⁰ However it is not clear that since when the title become popular. See V.C. Samuel, *Sabha Valarunnu* (Mal), Kottayam, 1984, p. 120.

⁷¹ Quoted in: Placid, *op. cit.*, p.111.

The Syrian Christians received almost all prelates from East Syria with the same hospitality that they showed towards the Portuguese. But their hospitality and reverence were exploited by some of them, including the Portuguese. This interaction of the future missions, though resulted in ecclesiastical divisions, positively contributed to the transformation of the Society. The remaining part of the Church history is closely associated with the European missions. In other words, the ecclesiastical history of the Kerala Christians, since the coming of the Portuguese, itself would explain the origin and growth of the various Christian denominations in Kerala.

3.7. Mission

The word ‘mission’ is a common term used even in the secular realm. It means ‘to send’ with a clear purpose. To Christians, the word ‘mission’ got an accumulated derived meaning as partaking in the ‘Mission Dei’ - Mission of God. Mission belongs to God the Father and which was manifested in sending His only begotten son to the World with a clear purpose. The missionary activities could be interpreted and evaluated in this perspective. Jesus told his disciples “I send you as my father had sent me.”⁷² This explicitly indicates that, mission is to continue the works of Jesus. The proclamation of the Kingdom of God lies at the very heart of the church’s vocation in the world. Thus mission belongs to the very nature of the church. As explained: the whole Church with the whole gospel to the whole person in the whole world is the ecumenical understanding of mission.⁷³

Kerala has been a land in which people and diverse ethnic groups who followed different religions and lived according to their cultural values and social patterns have coexisted peacefully. Each group had its own identity and respect to the other regardless

72 St. John, 20:21, in *The Holy Bible*, Bangalore, 1910.

73 Ion Bria, *Go Forth In Peace*, Geneva, 1986, p.2.

of its size, strength, potential and possibility to exercise power. It is true that some of the Western missionaries had antagonized the natives with their policy of conversion; it was not the general policy of all the missionaries. Many of them had worked hard for uplifting the society. Religion was not a barrier or a symbol of discrimination for their social life. But the coming of the Europeans changed the situation.

3.8. History of Mission

What is church, and what is its mission? This question can be answered from the view of an outsider or an insider. An outsider view, a sociological one, would describe church as an institution or as a voluntary organization of Christian believers. This approach will certainly yield valuable information about the churches today. But regarding an insider, the question can be answered from a different view point, which is theological.

The St. Thomas Christians, for centuries were a worshipping community which almost ignored the last commission of Jesus. Hence, unlike the early world Christianity, there is no evidence for the missionary activities of the early church in Kerala. It was the reason why the natives considered them as a separate caste of traders within them and consequently maintained cordial relations.

Although in church identity they were a part of the East Syrian Church they had adapted certain customs and practices of the country in which they lived so that they could not be easily differentiated from the non-Christian communities.⁷⁴ They had a sound social position and were respected both by their rulers and non-Christian neighbours. As mentioned earlier, Christians are the people who had direct interaction with the native society for centuries. This social interaction and cultural intermingling of

⁷⁴ Xavier Koodapuzha and John Panicker, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 234.

the Christians with the natives prepared a fertile soil for the missionary activities of the Church militant from Portugal and Europe.

3.9. Pre- Portuguese Roman Catholic Mission

John of Monte Carveno, a Franciscan monk who afterwards became Archbishop of Cambalek in China, is considered as the pioneer Roman Catholic missionary to evangelize in south India. He was sent out by Pope Nicholas IV as a missionary to China and accompanied by a Dominican Nicholas Pistoia. They set out in 1291 with the title of Papal Legate.⁷⁵ As testified by Monte Carvino, on their way to China they halted in Quilon for a while. It was at Mylapore that they landed, and they remained in South India for thirteen months. John went about the country preaching the gospel of Christ among the Nestorians he found here. He was impressed by the simplicity and hospitality of the Christians as well as the security and peace reigning in the country.⁷⁶ Even though there is no mention of the exact place where they stayed, from his own accounts we can decipher that the place where they stayed was Mylapore. From there he went to visit the Christians of Quilon. He says:

“I remained in the country of India where stands the Church of St. Thomas the Apostle, for thirteen months and in that region baptized in different places about one hundred persons”⁷⁷

Monte Carveno mission was followed by a Dominican friar of Sultanieh Jordan Catalani.⁷⁸ It has been pointed out by some writers that Friar Jordan arrived in India,

75 George Moraes, *A History of Christianity in India*, Bombay, 1964, p.8⁵.

76 Henry Yule, *Cathy and the Way Thither*, Vol.I, 1866, p. 215, also see George Moraes, *Ibid.*, pp. 8⁷ - 8⁸.

77 Machenzie, *History of Christianity in Travancore*, *o^p.cit.*, p 146.

78 George Woodcock, *Kerala: a portrait of the Malabar Coast*, London, 1967, p. 119.

founded several houses of his order in this country and converted many Nestorians to the Roman Catholic faith.⁷⁹ It has also been pointed out by other historians that Friar Jordan came to Quilon also, and that he established a community of Latin rite.⁸⁰ According to these historians the Friar met with opposition to his Missionary activities at Quilon, but the opposition he encountered was not from the local people, but from Arab Traders.⁸¹

It seems that the Thomas Christians came in contact with Western Christianity for the first time and their general idea about the Christians of Europe was vague and quite imperfect. It was the arrival of the Portuguese that brought the Christians to a better knowledge of European Christendom and a vital contact with it.⁸²

As far as the origin of the Catholic tradition in India is concerned, these Pre-Portuguese missions are of great significance. But those missionaries were not the products of European Renaissance; hence their mission was of limited aims. Moreover the purpose of their mission was different from that of the Portuguese missionaries.

3.10. The Portuguese Mission

A new era of Church militant was inaugurated with the coming of the Portuguese in India. The Portuguese had brought missionaries in large numbers and they engaged in propagating the faith and establishing the Church. In Europe the Protestant movement or the so called Reformation, followed by the Renaissance, shook the very foundation of the Roman Catholic Church. Almost half of the Western Christianity joined the Protestant faith. To make good of the quantitative loss, that caused during this period, Portugal, the

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ K.J. John, *The Road to Diamper*, Cochin, 1999, pp. 64-66.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.101.

⁸² Mundadan, n. 27, p.29.

stronghold of Catholic faith now decided to spread Christianity in the ‘*Two third World*’⁸³ composed of the Afro - Asian countries. They got the Royal as well as the Papal support to conduct a hazardous journey to the Eastern countries, especially to Indies. Thus the Portuguese brought missionary personals to India along with their expedition, even though a number of factors attracted them to India, the most significant element was, of course, the religious and trade aspirations.

In 1498 Vasco Da Gama, Captain of the Portuguese expedition, landed at Panthalayini Kollam near Calicut.⁸⁴ It was an event of great significance in secular history also. As the Zamorin the ruler of Calicut did not give the Portuguese a warm welcome, because of the existing age long commercial alliance with the Arabs,⁸⁵ they went to Cochin where the Raja , who was a rival of the Zamorin, received him gladly and entered into an alliance. On his second visit to Cochin in 1502 Gama came in contact with the local St. Thomas Christians. He received a deputation of the local Christians led by their *Jathikku Karthavyan*⁸⁶ Archdeacon Jacob, who welcomed him and solicited the protection of the Portuguese King against their rivals, especially the Arabs who molested them. They handed over to him a scepter and rod, which they preserved through generations as a monument of their royal dynasty.⁸⁷ Together with it, they brought to him a letter from their lord Bishop of all that part of the country with a population of 30,000 adults. They told the Portuguese that they were very much content and happy at the arrival of the Portuguese in India and that their lord sent allegiance to the king of

83 The so called ‘Third World’ practically covers Two third of the World population. Hence can be called ‘*Two third World*’

84 E.G. Ravenstein, *A Journal of the First Voyage, of Vasco da Gama*,(reprint), New Delhi, 1995, p. 48.

85 K.V. Krishna Ayyar, *The Zamorins of Calicut*, Calicut, 1999, p.133.

86 V.C.Samuel, *Sabha Valarunnu*, *op.cit.*, p.90.

87 A.Mingana, *op. cit.*, pp.36 - 41. See also G.T. Mackenzie, “History of Christianity in Travancore” *op.cit.*, p. 147.

Portugal whom they accepted as their king and to whom they were presenting their rod of justice.⁸⁸ Though they promised protectorate to the St. Thomas Christians, in due course it led to serious consequences. The Portuguese obtained settlements on the West Coast early in the Sixteenth Century, and proceeded to follow their usual policy of Christianization of the Indian people under their immediate influence.

As seen earlier, even though there are references about the pre- Portuguese mission in Kerala coast, it had no continuity and couldn't make any lasting impact upon the Christians of Malabar. The following remarks of the native Christians are self explanatory.

“When the Portuguese arrived, they were agreeably surprised to find upwards of a hundred Christian churches on the coast of Malabar. But when they became acquainted with the purity and simplicity of their worship they were offended. “These churches,” said the Portuguese, “belong to the pope.”—“ Who is the pope?” said the natives; “we never heard of him.” The European priests were yet more alarmed when they found that these Hindoo (sic) Christians maintained the order and discipline of a regular church under Episcopal jurisdiction”⁸⁹

F. Wrede in 1807, also had mentioned the following regarding this. “these Christians, acknowledged, instead of the Pope, the Patriarch of that sect.”⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Thome Lopez, *Navigazione Verso L' India Orientali scritta Per Thome Lopez Portuguese* (c. 1503) f. 151 v-52; also see A.M, Mundadan, *St. Thomas Christians 1498 – 1552*, Bangalore, 1967, p. 62.

⁸⁹ John Warner Barber, *op. cit.*, pp.287, 288., see also Buchanan, *In Asia: With notices of the translation of the Scriptures into the Oriental Languages*, London , 1811, p. 88,89.

⁹⁰ F. Wrede, Esq, “Account of the ‘St. Thome' Christians on the Coast of Malabar” in *Asiatic Researches and Transactions*, Vol. VII., London 1807, p.327., see also Duarte Barbosa, *A Description of the coasts of east Africa and Malabar in the beginning of sixteenth century*, (composed in probably 1514-15), London, 1865, p162.

Francis Xavier⁹¹ was the pioneer Portuguese missionary in Kerala, who worked among the coastal people. His missionary activities were confined to the coastal regions of south India and most of his converts belonged to the fisher folk community. He converted thousands of natives, especially from the suffering oppressed classes to the Roman Catholic faith. Following Francis Xavier a number of missionaries of the Jesuit order reached India and carried on the mission.⁹² They established schools, hospitals, seminaries to train spiritual leaders and movements to support the poor people.

3.11. Malankara Christians and the Portuguese

At the time of the Portuguese advent, in the 16th century, the ecclesiastical and temporal administration of the Malankara Church was practically vested with the Archdeacon,⁹³ who paid certain remuneration to the East Syrian bishops for their services⁹⁴. Malankara Christians were in friendly terms with the Portuguese in the beginning, but when the Portuguese missionaries insisted upon them to follow the Latin usages and tried to magnify the so-called errors in their Syriac texts, the Malankara Christians were not happy⁹⁵. Because of these vexations, many left Cranganore and Quilon⁹⁶. The Malankara Christians continued their relations with the East Syrian Church and bishops did come to Malankara in spite of all the vigilance of the Portuguese

91 H.J.Colridge, *Life of St.Francis Xavier*, Vol.II, London, 1872.

92 As a part of Counter Reformation in Europe.

93 The earliest document that throws light on the office of the archdeacon is the letter of Patriarch Timothy I (780-823 AD). See E R Hambye SJ, *Some Eastern Evidences concerning Early and Medieval Christianity in India*, Alleppey, 1970. P.56.

94 J. Thaliath, *The Synod of Diamper, Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 152, Rome, 1958, p 2; The Archdeacon of these Christians was known as 'The Archdeacon of the whole Hendo (India) and of the confines'; Xavier Koodapuzha, *Faith and Communion of the Indian Church of St Thomas Christians*. Kottayam, 1982, p 31.

95 J. Thaliath, *Ibid.*, p.1; Mundadan, n. 27, pp. 62-66.

96 Placid Podipara, *The Rise and Decline of the Indian Church of St Thomas*, Kottayam, 1979. p.38.

authorities⁹⁷. The Portuguese tried their best to keep off the Chaldean bishops from the Malankara Christians. They sent Mar Joseph, the Chaldean bishop of the Malankara Christians to the inquisitors of Lisbon in 1561 AD, accusing him of heresy⁹⁸. By 1568, Mar Abraham who had escaped from the Portuguese custody got back to Malabar with the full approval of the Catholic Patriarch of Chaldea⁹⁹. Angamali, an interior locality, was chosen as his head quarters residence. His relations with the Portuguese Jesuit missionaries were not always friendly.¹⁰⁰ When Fr Francis Roz, was commissioned by the Provincial Synod of Goa in 1585 to scrutinize the books of the Malankara Christians in order to purge them of errors, Mar Abraham and his Christians were very much displeased¹⁰¹.

3.12. The Synod of Diamper

Rome had commissioned Dom Alexis de Menezis, Archbishop of Goa, to enquire into the complaints against Mar Abraham; he soon fell sick and finally died in 1597¹⁰². Archdeacon George of the Cross assumed the charge of the Malankara Church. Archbishop Menezis visited Malabar Church and ordained many to priesthood and made all arrangements to convoke a Synod, in spite of severe opposition from the Archdeacon.¹⁰³ The Synod was held in the church of Diamper (Udayamperur) during

97 *Ibid.*

98 E. Tisserant, *Eastern Christianity in India: A History of the Syro-Malabar Church from Earliest Time to the Present Day* (Authorised adaptation from the French by E R Hambye, SJ), Bombay, 1957. p. 1.

99 Joseph Wicki, ed., *Documenta Indica*, 13 Vols, Rome, 1948-75.

100 A M Mundadan, *History of St Thomas Christianity in India to the Present Day*, Vol.1, Bangalore, 1984. p 49.

101 J. Thaliath, *op.cit.*, pp. 14-18.

102 *Ibid*; Placid Podipara, *The Thomas Christians*. London, 1970. Pp. 132-133.

103 *Ibid.*

June 20-26, 1599¹⁰⁴. At the Synod, the Malankara Christians were directed to condemn the Patriarch of Babylon¹⁰⁵ as a heretic and to swear that these Christians would not accept any bishop except the one immediately appointed by Rome. It ratified and consolidated the Romanizing efforts of the Portuguese and had severed all the connections of the Indian Church with the East Syrian Church¹⁰⁶. With this event the Malabar Church became Roman Catholic and came under the jurisdiction of Roman Pontiff.

After the Synod, bishops under the 'Padroado' jurisdiction were appointed to rule the Thomas Christians. Francis Roz, a Spaniard, was appointed their bishop from 1600 to 1624, and he was assisted by Archdeacon George of the Cross. The See of Cranganore was established on December 3, 1603 in place of Angamali and Roz was given the *Pallium* on January 26, 1609¹⁰⁷. Roz took keen interest in latinising the Qurbana (Holy Mass) and other rituals. Stephen de Britto (1624-1641 AD) succeeded Archbishop Roz and during his time also the foreign missionaries continued their zealous Latinization and Catholicization of the Thomas Christian religious practices¹⁰⁸.

3.13. The Revolt of 1653

¹⁰⁴ A.M Mundadan, *n.97*, p.49.

¹⁰⁵ The Patriarch and the Chaldean Church as a whole were under the Nestorian heresy and knowingly or unknowingly the Malankara Christians were under these East Syrian prelates for centuries.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* Thaliath considers the Synod invalid on the grounds that it was convoked without authority, conducted against the sacred canons, and was never approved by Rome. Archbishop Raol Nicolau Gonsalves, Patriarch of East Indies pointed out that, Dr. K.J. John defends that the decrees and canons passed by the synod were framed in such a way that they aims as understanding the fundamental teaching of the Catholic faith and morals as a follow up of the Council of Trent. See Pius Melekandathil, ed., *Jornada Of Dom Alexis De Menezes: A Portuguese Account of the Sixteenth Century Malabar*, Kochi, 2003, p.XII.

¹⁰⁷ Placid Podipara, *op.cit.*, p. 148.

¹⁰⁸ La Croze, *Histoire du Christianisme des Indes*, La Haye, 1728, PP 70-71.

In 1641, Francis Garzia (1641- 1659 AD) succeeded Britto as the Archbishop of Cranganore. In 1652 AD, one Ahathalla who claimed to be the 'Patriarch of All India and China' came to Mylapore. The suspicious Portuguese deported him to Goa *via* Cochin.¹⁰⁹ The Portuguese captain of the ship denied the Archdeacon of the Thomas Christians a meeting with Ahathalla at Cochin Port. Thereafter, tension mounted and this led to the *Coonan* Cross Oath. A group led by the Archdeacon, who stood for the administrative autonomy of the Indian Church despite of serious turbulence were determined to keep to the independence of the Malankara Church. In the dramatic act of holding on to the long rope tied to the stone cross in Mattanchery¹¹⁰ near Cochin, thousands of Malankara Christians took the solemn pledge that they would never be under the Paulists¹¹¹. Archdeacon Thomas was consecrated as bishop by twelve Malankara priests imposing their hands on him, and assumed the title Mar Thoma I.¹¹² They also read out a letter, which they claimed to be that of Ahathalla,¹¹³ empowering them to consecrate the Archdeacon.¹¹⁴

109 Placid Podipara, *op.cit.*, p. 151.

110 Semavoon Mar Dionysius, *The Kandanad Grandhavari*, *op.cit.*, Pp. 34,35

111 ' Paulists' as the Jesuits were known in Kerala. see G.T. Mackenzie, "History of Christianity in Travancore" in *The Travancore State Manual*, V. Nagam Aiya, Trivandrum, 1906, pp.184-185. Paulists means Jesuits.

112 Placid Podipara, *op.cit.*, p. 153; C. P Mathew and M. M Thomas, *The Indian Churches of St Thomas*. Delhi, 1967, P. 37.

113 Mar Aithalah (Ahattalla), an Eastern prelate who claimed to be the Patriarch of India, arrived in Mylapore in 2nd August in 1652. While there he established contacts with Syrian Christians from Kerala who were, at that time, under Roman Catholic (Portuguese) jurisdiction. The letter mentioned here was written to Archdeacon Thomas Paliveetil, the leader of the Syrian Christians, who were attempting their traditional relationship with West Asia. The Latin text of this letter is preserved in the Propaganda Archives in Rome. *Scriptures Referite. originali*, Vol. 232. fo.2,1. The English translation is given by E.RHambye, in a foot note to his article, ' An Eastern Prelate in India, Mar Aithalaha, 1652-53' *Indian Church History Review* , Vol. II, No.1, (June 1968) p.2

114 E Tisserant, *op.cit.*,p. 80. But the same author also states that the said letter was forged.

This zealous pledge and pulling pressure made the cross bent. Hence the event came to be known as the *Coonan Cross Oath* or bent cross oath.¹¹⁵ This historical oath of the Syrian Christians took place on 3rd January, 1653. As written by A Syrian priest named Abraham in 1821 about the event reads as follows.

“In that very night the Franks tied a large stone round the neck of the blessed Patriarch, and threw him into the depth of the sea. The moment the blessed Patriarch died, the pagan king also died. After these events all the Syrian parties assembled in the church of Mattancheri, and each one of them swore in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, that they will have no more love for, nor union and communion with, the Franks, and they established Archdeacon Thomas the head of all the churches of the Syrians, in accordance with the order of our Father the Patriarch Ignatius, After this, in the year 1660, Bishop Joseph came to Malabar, but we did not follow him. A short time after this bishop Joseph called a priest named Alexander, from the family of Bishop Thomas, and by fraud and deceit he persuaded him to receive Episcopal ordination; this divided the Syrians of Malabar into two camps.”¹¹⁶

The revolt of 1653 split the Thomas Christians into two. The Thomas Christians under Mar Thoma I deserve special mention since this revolt was perhaps one among the first socio-religious upheavals against the Portuguese ecclesiastical colonialism.

The Thomas Christians who were in communion with Rome always desired to have their own bishops. In order to satisfy them, Rome sent Carmelite priests working

115 C.V. Cheriyan, *Orthodox Christianity in India, A History of the Malankara Orthodox Church AD 52-2002*, Kottayam, 2003, p.198-99.

116 A Syrian priest named Abraham, was writing to W. H. Mill. Cited in A. Mingana, *op.cit.*, pp. 50-53. This is a translation from the original Syriac.

under the *Propaganda Fide*. In 1661, Joseph Sebastiani was appointed Vicar Apostolic of Malabar and Administrator of the Thomas Christians¹¹⁷.

While some historians try to depict the rebellion as an anti Jesuit movement, others maintain that the revolt was against the Papal authority. However G.T. Mackenzie, says that of the whole number of Syrian Christians computed to amount to two hundred thousand, only four hundred remained under the Archbishop Garcia.¹¹⁸

Although almost all of the Nazarani parishes then existing took part in the Coonen Cross, a large number of them were gradually lured away from their position of resistance back to the 'old loyalty' or '*Pazhaya Coor*' (i.e. 53 Years of complete subjugation to Portuguese and Roman Catholic rule) by the concerted efforts of Carmelite missionaries sent by Rome. People who returned to the pre-Portuguese and pre-Roman Catholic tradition were called '*Puthen Coor*'¹¹⁹ (new loyalty). probably because they established their loyalty to West Syrian (Jacobite) Church of West Asia and abandoned their old East Syrian connections.¹²⁰

3.14. Revival of the Malankara Church under Native Bishops

As mentioned earlier, Archdeacon Thomas was consecrated the head of all the churches of the Malankara Christians.¹²¹ The very title of Mar Thoma they chose for their

¹¹⁷ Placid Podipara, *op.cit.*, p.154.

¹¹⁸ M.K.Kuriakose, *op.cit.*, p. 108.

¹¹⁹ They were also known as Jacobites, as they joined the Antiochean faith.

¹²⁰ The oath of *Coonan* Cross held at Mattancherry can be considered as a historic, recorded, resistance made by the native Christians against the westernization. *Pazhayakoottukar*/ old division (Roman Catholics) are the people who continued with the use of Chaldean structure of liturgy. *Puthankoottukar* - new division (Jacobites) are the people who left the Chaldean structure and accepted Antiochean methods.

¹²¹ A. Mingana, *op.cit.*, p.53.

new spiritual and temporal head, was ample evidence for the real conviction and feelings of the Malankara Christians traditional identity.

By this time both the Portuguese and the Jesuits lost their control over the Malankara Christians who were loyal to Mar Thoma I. The hold of the Jesuit missionaries slowly weakened as the *Padroado* rule was objected by the Dutch. On the request of the Syrian Catholics, Rome commissioned the Carmalites to look after the Malankara Church and settle the disputes in 1657. In 1661 The Portuguese fort at Quilon was captured by the Dutch and shortly afterwards the forts at Cochin and Cannanore. The capture of fort Angelo at Cannanore by the Dutch in 1663 marked the end of Portuguese experiment in Kerala.

The Oath of Coonan Cross was a popular movement. There are two reasons for this unilateral success of the Syrians. First of all the Political change; by this time the Portuguese power began to eclipse, and the Dutch began to capture many of the Portuguese possessions. The Protestant Dutch also asked all the Portuguese and Italian Catholic clergies to leave Cochin. Secondly, by this time the Portuguese had annoyed the natives (both the Christians and the non Christians) with their religious policies. More over the Syrian leader Archdeacon Thomas was very powerful and having the capacity to consolidate the Syrians with his diplomacy. All these turned the course favourable for the Syrians for a short period. After the 1653 revolt, for the first time a native Christian

was raised to the high office of a bishop¹²². In 1665,¹²³ Abdul Jaleel Mar Gregorios¹²⁴, the bishop of Jerusalem reached Malankara on the request of Mar Thoma I. This was in response to the entreaties of Itty Thommen *Kathanar*, Counselor of Mar Thoma I. When the bishop reached Malankara in 1665 the Syrian Christians received him warmly. He validated the consecration of Mar Thoma I. But there is no evidence for the consecration of Marthoma I as bishop, by Mar Gregorios. The two bishops together lead the Church in harmony.

3.15. Towards West Syrian or Antiochean Faith and Liturgy

After the Coonan Cross oath, Archdeacon Thomas was recognized as the leader of the St. Thomas Christians. He was consecrated as bishop by twelve priests as

122 Why there was no quest for a native bishop during the East Syrian domination in Malabar is a reasonable question to be answered. First of all the Malankara Christians never felt a necessity of a bishop, since there were bishops from Persia, to deal with the spiritual need of the community. Secondly, in spite of the presence of a foreign prelate, they always enjoyed autonomy of the Church in the temporal matters under the Archdeacon and the Malankara Churches were governed independently by the *edavaka yogam* comprised of priests and elders of each parish. During the East Syrian domination, the foreign prelates never interfered the administration of the Church and parishes. But the Roman Catholic contact, especially the closing down of ports towards the East Syrian prelates and the Ahathallah incident along with the unavailability of bishops prompted the Malankara Christians to consecrate a bishop of their own.

123 Semavoon Mar Dionysius, *op.cit.*, p. 35. The act of consecrating Mar Thoma I by 12 priests is a question of dispute. Historians have opinion that Mar Gregorios who reached in 1665 might have re- consecrated or reconfirmed this disputed consecration. But there are historians who believe that the Church was following the Alexandrian pattern or the instruction given by Mar Ahathallah. See: *The Malankara Orthodox Church Encyclopedia, op.cit.*, P. 673.

124 The 'Susthathikon' or the certificate of consecration of Abdul Jaleel Mar Gregorios has been discovered from the Thozhiyur Archives by Fr. Dr. Joseph Cheeran, Pazhanji, Thrissur, which is available with him for reference. A copy of the same is cited in; Joseph Cheeran, *Indian Orthodox Church*, Thekkumkara, Thrissur, 1993, pp.84-85. There were three records which were found to have been Mar Gregorios's. 1. The above mentioned 'Susthathikkon' written in Arabic Garsuni. 2. The 'Qurbaaa Thaksa' that was brought by Mar Abdul Jaleel. 3. The handwritten copy of a lengthy order that was written by him (in Chaldean Syriac).

Marthoma I, as was directed by Ahathullah,¹²⁵ the so called Patriarch of Antioch, whom the Portuguese authority, believed to be drowned in the Cochin Lake. He was later reconsecrated by Abdul Jaleel Mar Gregorios of Jerusalem who came to Malabar in 1665. Mar Gregorios worked tirelessly to renew Malankara Church in West Syrian Jacobite faith. He sent letters to all Churches in 1668 exhorting the people not to get caught in the web spun by Roman missionaries and explaining the difference between their faith and the Roman faith.¹²⁶ Roman missionaries and Nestorian bishops who had led the people for years had spread their faith in the Church. Mar Gregorios went back to their old practice of priests being allowed to marry. His rule lasted only for a short time; he died in April 1671. His body is interred in the church at North Parur.¹²⁷ Mar Thoma I died in 1670, and was buried in the Angamali Church.

125 The English translation of this letter is given by E.RHambye, in a foot note to his article, ' An Eastern Prelate in India, Mar Aithalaha, 1652-53' *Indian Church History Review* , Vol. II, No.1, (June 1968) p.2; also see E Tisserant, *op.cit.*,p. 80

126 The 'Letter of Exhortation' of Abdul Jaleel Mar Gregorios has been discovered. A copy of the same is cited in; Joseph Cheeran, *op.cit.*,(n.123), pp. 84-85.

127 Bishop Abdul Jaleel was buried in the chancel of the church. As a Bishop who came from abroad destroyed this tomb in the chancel, his mortal remains were taken out of the chancel and buried again just outside it, towards the north, and the new tomb that was then built there, is what is seen now.

He was followed by Marthoma II, III, IV and V.¹²⁸ All of them were related to Mar Thoma I and to one another.¹²⁹ The acceptance of Mar Gregorios affected a change from East Syrian¹³⁰ to West Syrian¹³¹ faith¹³² and liturgy in the Malankara Church.

Mar Dionysius I¹³³ was succeeded by his nephew Mar Thoma VII in 1796. It was he, who deposited the *Vattippanam*,¹³⁴ a sum deposited with the English East India Company for the benefit of the Jacobite Church, which later became a bone of contention among the Jacobites. Mar Thoma VIII and IX followed him in 1809 and 1815 respectively. All the prelates from Mar Thoma I- IX were belonged to the Pakalomattom family either by birth or by adoption.

During this period the Church enjoyed full autonomy in spiritual and temporal matters. However a few more bishops from abroad reached Kerala during this time.¹³⁵

128 Marthoma II died in 1686 and buried at Niranam Church; Marthoma III died in 1688 and buried at Kadambanad Church, Marthoma IV died in 1728 and buried at Kandanad Church. Mar Thoma V died in 1765 and buried at Niranam Church. See Samuel Chandanappilly, *Malankara Orthodox Church Directory*, Kottayam, 1998, p.181.

129 Semavoon Mar Deevanasios, *op.cit.*,p. 34ff.

130 Till the synod of Diamper in 1599, the Malankara Christians were under the East Syrian Church; hence followed the East Syrian liturgy.

131 Or Antiochean. During the pre- Diamper period the Malankara Christians used Eastern Syriac for their liturgy. With the arrival of Mar Gregorios of Jerusalem in 1665, they become acquainted with the Western Syriac and began to use Western Syriac as their liturgical language.

132 The Godhead and manhood of Christ united without confusion and separation to form the one incarnated nature of Logos. Jesus Christ was always perfect God and perfect Man. The union was inseparable and subsequently a mystery. This faith was that of the Alexandrian Theological School and accepted by the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Both the Antiochean and the Malankara Churches, being part of the Oriental Orthodox Church, followed this faith and still continues. See A.K. Cheriyan, ed., *Fathers Faith of Our Fathers: Holy Faith*, Kottayam, 2006, pp. 21, 88 .

133 Formerly he was known as Mar Thoma VI.

134 '*Vattippanam*' literally meant a deposit with an anticipation of annual income as interest or *Vatti*. A lump sum amount (3000 *Poovarahan*) was deposited in the British East India Company on 8% interest by Marthoma VII in 1808.

135 Semavoon Mar Deevanasios, *op.cit.*,p. 35ff.

Many of them were directly or indirectly had connections with the Antiochean See.¹³⁶ This was the reason why the Western Syriac¹³⁷ had become the liturgical language of the Church. Those bishops who reached Kerala prior to Antiochean Patriarch Peter III¹³⁸ had worked sincerely for the benefit of the Malankara Church without any anticipation. Paulinus of St Bartholomaeo, who was among the Malankara Christians during 1775-1789, reports that there were 84 Catholic and 32 Jacobite parishes in Kerala.¹³⁹

3.16. Thozhiyur Church- 1772

By this time the Malankara Church had established rapport with the Antiochean prelates. Mar Thoma VI came to power in 1765. He was later reconsecrated with the name Mar Dionysius¹⁴⁰ in 1770 by Yuhanon Mar Gregorios.¹⁴¹ It is believed that, he also consecrated Kattumangattu Mar Koorilos¹⁴² who was in no terms with Mar Dionysius I, had to be in exile in a place called Anjoor or Thozhiyur, belonged Malabar, a District of Madras Presidency, where he formed an independent church known as Malabar Independent Syrian Church or Thozhiyur Church.

3.17. Contact with the Anglican Missionaries

136 Philip Kuruvilla, *Identity and Integration of the Orthodox Church in India*, Delhi, 2000, p.33.

137 *Ibid.*, p.34.

138 Patriarch Peter III was the first Antiochean Patriarch to visit India in 1875.

139 Fr. Paulino a.S. Bartholomaeo, *India Orientalis Christina*, trans., Fr. John Pallath, O.C.D., *Paurasthya Bharathathile Christu Matham*, Kalamassery, 1988, pp. 280-282.

140 At the time of his consecration he was known as Mar Dionysius. When Pulikkottil Ittoop Ramban took the name Mar Dionysius II, after his consecration in 1815, the former came to be called Mar Dionysius I.

141 Mar Gregorios, who reached Malankara along with Sakralla Mar Baselios in 1751.

142 M. Kurian Thomas, ed., *Niranam Grandhavari*, *op.cit.*, p.91. also see K.C. Verghese, *The Malabar Independent Syrian Church*, Kunnankulam, 1945. p. 8; Joseph Cheeran (n. 123), *op.cit.*, p.54.

In 1806, after Tippu's invasion, during the reign of Mar Thoma VI, two Anglican clergymen, namely, Dr. Kerr, the senior chaplain of Madras and Dr. Claudius Buchanan, the principal of Calcutta Fort William College, visited Malabar, especially the Syrian churches. In his travelogue Buchanan mentioned this visit. He wrote about the fallen glory of the Church.

"...But at the same time, I perceived, all around, symptoms of poverty and political depression. In the Churches, and in the people, there was the air of fallen greatness."¹⁴³

Buchanan received a copy of the Syriac Bible from Mar Thoma VI, which was later on translated into Malayalam by Pulikkottil Joseph *Ramban*¹⁴⁴, and got it printed in 1811. This translation known as 'Ramban Bible,'¹⁴⁵ is the first known Malayalam translation of The Bible in Kerala. With this event copies of Malayalam Bible and its messages were circulated in Malabar.

Mar Thoma VI was succeeded by Mar Thoma VII, VIII and IX. But those Prelates were not acceptable to the Syrians, because they were only adopted members to the Pakalomattom family and moreover their consecration as bishops were believed to be invalid due to the laying off of hands were either conducted in secret or while the predecessor in a weary sinking stage. It was during this time the Anglican missionaries made their appearance in Kerala. The concessions that were granted in the Charter

143 Claudius Buchanan, *op.cit.*, London, 1812, p.117.

144 T.V. Thomas 'The Historical Background of the Malayalam Bible', in *Church Weekly*, ed., M. Kurian, Aluva, May 29, 1983.

145 Joseph Cheeran, *Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius-I*, Thrissur, 1992, p.80.

Renewal Act of 1813¹⁴⁶ and the leadership of Col. Munroe, the then British Resident, opened doors for the Protestant Mission in Kerala.

3.18. The Protestant Mission in Kerala

One of the major convictions of the Protestantism was its missionary zeal.¹⁴⁷ The Pietistic Movement of the 18th century in Europe gave a vigorous push to evangelization. Though the English and the Dutch had appointed Chaplains to look after the religious needs of their own men living in the different settlements, they did not permit them to engage in any missionary works. Thus the early Protestant religious personals were not missionaries but chaplains of their respective churches. However it is true that the Protestant churches in India are the result of the missionary works by different Protestant missionary societies during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Colonialism made it possible to reach out places far and wide all over the world. From the last decade of the eighteenth century several missionary societies have been founded in Europe and America. The prominent of them were the Baptist Missionary Society founded in 1792, the London Missionary Society founded in 1795, the Church Missionary Society founded in 1799, the American Board of Commissioners founded in 1810, the Western Missionary Society founded in 1813 and the Basel Evangelical Missionary Society founded in 1815. Later the Salvation Army and different Lutheran Churches also formed missionary wings of their Churches and began to send missionaries to India. The Church Missionary Society began its works through the Chaplains of the East India Company from 1813 onwards. It also began to send missionaries to different parts of India.

146 The English East India Company had to renew its Charter for every 20 years. In 1813 the charter had been renewed with the provision of permitting missionaries on a experimental basis and the same was consented in 1833 charter renewal. See C.J. Grimes, *Towards an Indian Church*, London, 1946, pp. 224- 29.

147 There are mainly three Christian denominations in the world, the Roman Catholics, the Orthodox, and the Protestants. Their major focus was on charity, worship, and mission respectively.

The English East India Company, established in 1600 A.D, by this time set up its sway over Kerala. After the Treaty of Srirangapattanam (1792)¹⁴⁸, the whole of Malabar came under the English. In 1795 both Cochin and Travancore became subsidiary ally of the British and received Residents from abroad. Thus by the beginning of nineteenth century, the whole of Kerala directly or indirectly came under the British rule. In spite of all these favourable conditions, the Company remained adamant towards missionary activities. In 1793, at the time of Charter discussions, when Wilberforce placed a proposal to make education and religious improvement a responsibility of the Company in India, it was disregarded by the majority. They rejected the proposal mainly because of the reverses that caused at the Portuguese period, due to their religious policies. But in 1813, when the Charter was renewed,¹⁴⁹ the missionaries succeeded in getting the consent of the Company to begin missionary activities in India. Though the Company was not to assume direct responsibility for missionary work, it was now directed, to allow missionaries sent by other British agencies to work in its Indian territories.¹⁵⁰ Further in 1833, the Charter of Renewal decided to start official mission in India for the social transformation of the concerned.

3.19. Church Missionary Society

As far as the history of the Malankara Church is concerned the activities of the Church Missionary Society also paved the way for another split in the Church. In 1806 Claudius Buchanan, an Anglican priest was commissioned by the British Governor General, to conduct researches in to the life of the ancient Church of St. Thomas in India.

148 The English signed this treaty with Tippu Sulthan at Srirangapattanam following his defeat.

149 C.J. Grimes, *op.cit*, pp. 224-29.

150 With the provisions of the Charter, the Christian missionaries of England were permitted to come freely and settle in the country. See, G.S.Chahbra, *Advanced Study in The History of Modern India*, New Delhi, 1985, p.7.

Buchanan visited many of the important parishes¹⁵¹ and consulted with the religious leaders of the Church. Mar Thoma VI was the bishop of the Syrians. Buchanan had a personal interview with the bishop. The Bishop presented him an old manuscript copy of a Syriac Bible.¹⁵²

It was Col. John Munroe, the British Resident, who prepared the fertile soil for an organized mission in central Travancore. The C.M.S. mission came to India in 1813.¹⁵³ The mission was organized under the Anglican Church of England. The first C M S missionary to Travancore was Thomas Norton, who came to Alappuzha in 1816. Benjamin Bailey, Henry Backer, and Joseph Fenn were among the famous missionaries of the CMS.

In 1815 Pulikkottil Ittoop Ramban, founder of the Kottayam seminary, has managed to get consecrate as Mar Dionysius II at the hands of Kidangan Mar Philexinos of Thozhiyur. Mar Philexinos again consecrated the vicar general of Mar Dionysius II as Mar Dionysius III in 1817.¹⁵⁴ It was during the reign of Mar Dionysius III, the Anglican Missionaries started their influence in the Malankara Church. In 1825 Mar Dionysius IV was also consecrated by the same Thozhiyur bishop. At this time the Anglican influence grew much stronger and finally by 1836 with the Mavelikkara synod, the Jacobites and Anglican cooperation came to an end. This resulted in a division among the ordinary people and quite a good number of Jacobites became Anglicans. Mar Dionysius IV officially acknowledged the authority of the Patriarch of Antioch partially for withstanding this erosion in to the Anglican Church.

151 Claudius Buchanan, *op.cit.*, p.115.

152 *Ibid.*

153 M.A. Sherring, *A History of Protestant Mission In India*, London, 1884. p.126.

154 Semavoon Mar Deevanasios, *op.cit.*,p. 47-48.

The collaboration of the Syrians with the CMS missionaries, though ended in a division in the Church and the formation of a Reformed Church with the name the Marthoma Syrian Church, paved the way for a number of positive contributions in the realm of social and religious. First of all, it caused the founding of a seminary for the training of the Syrian priests. Secondly it brought forward a Syrian prelate with extraordinary caliber to the Syrian leadership in the person of Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius. And thirdly it paved the way for the founding of many Schools, and printing Presses for the cultural renovation of the society. A detailed account of the same is to be explored in the next chapter.

In 1815 the Orthodox Seminary was founded by Joseph Mar Dionysius with the help of Col. Munroe and the Anglican missionaries.¹⁵⁵ But in due course the missionary cooperation took a bad turn when the missionaries, who were permitted to teach in the Seminary, tried to infiltrate Protestant teachings in to the Church.

3.20. The Marthoma Syrian Church- 1889

The Syrians were now doubtful of the 'help' provided by the missionaries. In 1836 the relationship went out of the rail. The Anglican bishop Wilson openly attempted to inflict the Protestant faith in the church by pressurizing the Church to accept his proposals. More over the British colonial political control created a favourable atmosphere for him. However the Syrian Metropolitan summoned a synod at Mavelikkara in 1836.¹⁵⁶ The Synod completely rejected the Wilsonian proposals and decided to cut off the CMS connections. But as usual a section of the Syrians joined with

155 Old Seminary at Kottayam was the first Non-Catholic Theological Seminary in Kerala. See R.N. Yesudas, *British Policy in Travancore, 1805- 1859*, Trivandrum, 1977, p 88.

156 V. Titus Varghese & P.P. Philip., *op.cit.*, p.67.

the Anglicans. This group was later nursed by Abraham *malpan*,¹⁵⁷ a senior priest of the Malankara Church, and the result was the birth of a Reformed Church.

The above mentioned group of Jacobites, who were attracted to the Anglican faith, were desirous of reforming the Church and got one deacon consecrated by the Patriarch as Mathews Mar Athanasius.¹⁵⁸ He tried to replace Mar Dionysius IV. But the later informed Antioch about the reformist tendency of the former and got the assistance of Yuyakim Mar Koorilos, an Antiochean bishop. But the real battle had started during the reign of Mar Dionysius V, who was consecrated by the Patriarch himself.

The consecration of Mathews Mar Athanasius was an historical blunder committed by the patriarch, because Deacon Mathews was exploiting the Patriarchal authority, to be used, against the Church dogma. In 1852, Mathews Mar Athanasius got the Royal Proclamation of Travancore in favour of him with the help of the missionaries. The official church, now convinced of the need of a bishop, sent Pulikkottil Joseph Kathanar to the Patriarch, with official recommendations. He consecrated the Kathanar as Joseph Mar Dionysius in 1865.¹⁵⁹ The new bishop reached Malankara and led the movement for the restoration of church dogma. Repeated attempts of Mar Dionysius failed, since Mar Athanasius had the backing of the British and that of the Royal Proclamation. Meanwhile Mathews Mar Athanasius strengthened his position by consecrating Thomas Mar Athanasius in 1868 to succeed him.

Realizing this fact, Mar Dionysius invited the Syrian Patriarch himself to Malankara. In 1875 Patriarch Mar Peter III¹⁶⁰ reached Malankara and influenced the

¹⁵⁷ Means teacher or scholar

¹⁵⁸ It is a traditional belief that Deacon Mathew was consecrated as a bishop without receiving ordination as a Priest. If it was so, it was non canonical.

¹⁵⁹ V.C. Samuel, *Adhunika Bharata Sabha* (Mal), Kottayam, 1987, p.57.

¹⁶⁰ Including St.Peter, the Apostle, he was Peter IV.

Royal authority to get the Royal Proclamation of Mar Athanasius withdrawn.¹⁶¹ Joseph Mar Dionysius succeeded in his mission.

The Patriarch held the famous Synod of Mulanthuruthy in 1876, and entrusted Mar Dionysius V to wage the legal battle. Finally Mar Dionysius came victorious in 1889 with the Royal Court verdict. Now the followers of Thomas Mar Athanasius formed an independent Church, assuming the name Marthomites or Marthoma Syrian Church.

3.21. The Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church

But, seeing the 'fertile soil' (i.e., the Malankara Church), as usual, he also tried to bring the Church under the Antiochean See, both spiritually and temporally. In spite of the intrigues of the Patriarch, Mar Dionysius with great diplomacy safe guarded the autonomy of the Malankara Church. The Patriarch, who stayed in Malankara for almost a year, had attempted three things to bring Malankara under his sway.

First of all he summoned a Synod at Mulanthuruthy in 1876 to resolve the acceptance of the Antiochean supremacy.¹⁶² Secondly, with a view to weaken the position of the Malankara Metropolitan, he divided the Church in to seven dioceses and consecrated six more bishops to form a council of bishops under his direct control. Thirdly, he demanded each parish to give a registered document accepting his supremacy. However the church stood firmly under Mar Dionysius and could overcome the intrigues that inflicted by the Patriarch. But the unity did not last long. A small group supported Antiochean See and the Patriarch continued his efforts through them. With this Mar Dionysius had to fight against two groups, the reformed faction lead by Mathews

161 M.O. John, *The Thomas Christians in India*, Ernakulam, 1987. p.37.

162 V.C. Samuel, *n.160, op.cit.*, p. 58.

Athanasius, who consecrated his relative Thomas as his successor, and the Antiochean group.

The former issue ended with the success in the Royal Court. But the later issue continued for more than a century of litigation and to a certain extent ended in success with the Hon'ble Supreme Court Verdicts of 1958, 1995 and 2002.¹⁶³ With the decision of the court the group, supported the Antiochean Patriarch, left the Malankara Church to form the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in 2002.¹⁶⁴

3.22. The Establishment of Catholicate- 1912

The Catholicate of the East is considered as the symbol of Church autonomy and freedom. The Church was always independent and autonomous. The *Jatikku Karthavyan* or the Archdeacon was the head of the temporal powers. But till the coming of the Portuguese the Persian Prelates exercised spiritual authority with the consent of the Archdeacon. When the Antiochaen prelates began to visit Malankara frequently, they always tried in vain to bring the Church under their ecclesiastical supervision. The successors of the Mar Thoma Metropolitans were come to be known as Malankara Metropolitans. When Marthoma VI was reaffirmed by the Antiochaen prelate, he was given the title Mar Dionysius I.¹⁶⁵ This succession was continued up to Mar Dionysius VI.¹⁶⁶ Both Marthomas and Dionysiuses were in charge of the temporal administration of

¹⁶³ Order of the Hon'ble Supre Court of India, dated 12th July, 2002 (on Appeal No. 8185/2001), New Delhi, 2002; also see C.V. Cheriyan *op.cit*, pp. 477-78.

¹⁶⁴ *The costituution of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church*, Udayagiri, 2002.

¹⁶⁵ M. Kurian Thomas, ed., *Niranam Grandhavari*, *op.cit.*, p.91.

¹⁶⁶ Mar Dionysius VI was consecrated by the Antiochean Patriarch in 1908. He was also known as Vattasseril Geevarghese Mar Dionysius. In 1911 the Patriarch Abdulla excommunicated him on the charge of his unwillingness to conclude an agreement to transfer his temporal powers on the Malankara Church officially to the Patriarch. In spite of the excommunication order issued by the Patriarch, Mar Dionysius VI stood firmly and won the support of the majority of the Church members. A minority supported the Patriarch and even

the Church. As an integral part of the universal Orthodox Church tradition, the Malankara Church now decided to consecrate a Catholicos, with a view to declare the autocephalous nature of the Church.¹⁶⁷ The later history of the Malankara Church is an account of its struggle to free itself from the Antiochean interlude that led to the establishment of a Catholicate.

Though the Royal proclamation of Mar Athanasius had withdrawn, Joseph Mar Dionysius had to struggle like anything for the redemption of the Church properties. He filed a case in the Alappuzha District court in 1879.¹⁶⁸ This litigation, known as 'Seminary Case', was decided in favour of Joseph Mar Dionysius. An appeal preferred in the High Court by the Reformists was dismissed. However they moved an appeal in the Maharaja's Court. The majority of the judges of the Royal court said that the Patriarch never had any temporal authority in Malankara, and Mar Dionysius is the rightful heir to the See of Malankara. With this decree¹⁶⁹ Mar Dionysius was declared the Malankara Metropolitan and the custodian of the Church properties. This event, as mentioned earlier, paved the way for a division in the Church ended in the formation of The Marthoma Syrian Church in 1889.

now continuing.

¹⁶⁷ Ecclesiastical order of Abded Messiah Patriarch of Antioch, issued to the Malankara Church from the Parumala Seminary on 19-02-1913, immediately after the installation of the Catholicos for the Malankara Church, vividly state this autocephalus nature of the Catholicate. It reads: "The Catholicos, aided by the metropolitans, will ordain bishops, in accordance with the canons of our Holy Fathers and consecrate Holy *Mooron* (Chrism). In your metropolitans is vested the sanction and authority to install a Catholicos, when a Catholicos dies. No one can resist you in the exercise of this right and, do all things properly and in conformity with precedents with the advice of the committee (the elected Managing Committee), presided over by the Metropolitan of Malankara." (At the time Mar Dionysius VI).. See C.V. Cheriyan, *op.cit.*, p. 464.

¹⁶⁸ See Joseph Cheeran, P.C. Mathew Pulikkottil & K.V. Mammen, *op.cit.*, p.732.

¹⁶⁹ Travancore Royal Court Proclamation of 1889.

After Mar Dionysius V,¹⁷⁰ Geevarghese Mar Dionysius (Mar Dionysius VI) succeeded him. During his reign, in 1912 Catholicate was re established in Malankara.¹⁷¹ The senior Bishop was consecrated as the Catholicos with the title Mar Baselios, and Mar Dionysius VI continued as the Malankara Metropolitan.

3.23. The Syro -Malankara Church- 1930

A rift in the Malankara Orthodox Church occurred in 1930 when one of her bishops left the mother church and joined with the Roman Catholic community.¹⁷² P.T. Geevarghese, who was an excellent orator and organizer, was commissioned by the Church to organize monasteries and other charitable works. He was a strong supporter of the then Malankara metropolitan Vattasseril Mar Dionysius. His patriotic struggle for the defense of autonomy of the Church is mention worthy. Mar Dionysius had complete confidence in him. With the help of Mar Dionysius and generous contributions from the Church and believers, he founded “The Order of the Imitation of Christ”¹⁷³ with a male and female branch. Their head quarter was at Perunadu, Ranni. Later on it came to be known as *Bethany Asram*. He also built a number of Churches, called *Bethany Churches* for the spiritual revival of the Orthodox Church. In 1925 Fr. P.T. Geevarghese was consecrated as a bishop of the Orthodox Church with the name Mar Ivanios.¹⁷⁴ By this

170 Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius II

171 V. Titus Varghese & P.P. Philip., *op.cit.*, p. 42

172 M.O. John, *op.cit.*, p. 58.

173 *Ibid.*, p.55; see also V. Titus Varghese & P.P. Philip., *op.cit.*, p. 1¹¹. see also *The Malankara Orthodox Church Encyclopedia, op.cit.*, P. 121.

174 M.O. John, *op.cit.*, p.55.

time the disputes between the two groups¹⁷⁵ of the Church became worse. Now Mar Ivanios was attracted to the organizational strength and unity of the Roman Catholic Church and proposed a union with them. But the Church vigorously rejected the proposal without any consideration. Mar Ivanios went ahead with his plan and after much discussions and delegations he along with his Assistant Bishop Mar Theopholos, and a few priests and followers joined the Roman Catholic ecclesiastical jurisdiction to form the Syro Malankara Catholic Church. This community did not merge with the older Syrian Catholics, but was organized as a separate Rite. He had taken with him all the possible properties of the church and many schools owned by the Church. But the paradox is that, his union was to avoid litigations in the Church, but this event caused fresh litigation for the restoration of the church property.

3.24. The Costitution of the Malankara Church- 1934

A constitution was drafted for the Malankara Church in 1934. The Church Parliament, Malankara Syrian Christian Association passed the Constitution and till date it is in effect. It is a democratic constitution, upholds representative characteristics. In 1934 Mar Dionysius VI died and the office of the Malankara Metropolitan was merged with that of the Catholicos.¹⁷⁶ Since then the twin offices were merged in one Person. The Dionysius line came to an end and the new lineage of Mar Baselios continues.

¹⁷⁵ The group remained loyal to the Malankara Church and another group under Mar Ivanios for reunion with the Roman Catholic Church.

¹⁷⁶ There emerged two offices of ecclesiastical powers in the Malankara Church, after the establishment of the Catholicate in 1912. The Catholicos of the East (The spiritual head as the president of the Episcopal synod) and the Malankara Metropolitan (Successor of the Archdeacon and later of the Mar Thoma *Metrans* with temporal administrative authority). Mar Dionysius VI, the then Malankara Metropolitan died in 1934. Since then the office was assumed by the then Catholicos Mar Baselios Geevarghese II. Thus the both offices were merged into a single head. See C.V. Cheriyan, *op.cit.*, p.363.

At present the Church is known as ‘*The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church*’ with a total strength of two million members. The ecclesiastical headquarter is at Devalokom, Kottayam. The Church is divided into thirty dioceses, each headed by a Metropolitan. As a part of the Oriental Orthodox Church,¹⁷⁷ it has a significant role in the World Council of Churches. The Church with its eminent and well trained leadership and indigenous structure plays an important role in the Socio- political life of Kerala. A detailed account of the same is to be explored in the next chapters.

However the history of Malankara Church is a story of continuous struggle for autonomy and native Orthodox identity. Their contact with other Churches and missions always ended in a split or division in the Malankara Church. But all the interactions were beneficial to the Church in one way or another.

3.25. Identity of the Malankara Church

3.25.1. The Fundamental Faith of the Malankara Church

According to the Constitution of the Malankara Church “All men and women who have received Holy Baptism and believe in the divinity of the Holy Trinity, the incarnation of the Son, the procedure of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Church and the application of the Nicene Creed there-in-all, the divine inspiration of the Holy Traditions, the mediation of the Mother of God and the Saints, the commemoration of the departed ones, the administration of the seven sacraments and the Canonical observances like fasting etc and have accepted the obligation to observe them, will be members of this church.”¹⁷⁸

177 A group of the Orthodox Churches stood against the council of Chalcedon (451. A.D.). See *The Malankara Orthodox Church Encyclopedia*, *o^p.cit.* p.178.

178 For a full text of the Church Constitution see Appendix- I of this dissertation.

The sum total of the fundamental faith of the present Malankara Church is manifested in the decisions of the three ecumenical councils of the universal Church. They are The Council of Nicea (325 AD), the Council of Constantinople (381 AD) and the Council of Ephesus(431 AD) It is based on a harmonious understanding of the Bible, the Liturgy, Patristics and the traditions of the Church as shown in the lives and works of the Fathers of the Church. Starting with the Apostles of Christ and their direct disciples like Ignatius of Antioch, Clement of Rome and Polycarp of Smyrna, the fathers who articulated the Orthodox faith include other pre-Nicene Fathers of the second and third centuries like Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus of Lyons. The Fathers of the three Ecumenical Councils, as well as the Fathers who lived and taught during the period 300-450, even if they were not present at these Councils, are among the interpreters of the Orthodox faith. They include St. Athanasius of Alexandria (ca. 296-373), St. Basil (330-379), St. Gregorios Nazianzen (329-389), St. Gregorios of Nyssa (330-395), St. John Chrysostom (d.407) and St. Cyril of Alexandria (d. 444). Mention must be made of St. Alexander of Alexandria, St. Didymus the Blind, St. Theophilos of Alexandria, St. Eustathius of Antioch, St. Eusebius of Caesarea, St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. Dioscoros of Alexandria among the fathers of the period 325-451.¹⁷⁹ They were followed by St. Jacob of Serug (d. 521), St. Philexinos of Mabbug (d. 523) and St. Severus of Antioch (d.538).¹⁸⁰ Many of these names are commemorated in the intercessory prayers (Diptychs) of the Eucharistic Liturgy, the last of them, remembered in the fifth Diptych, is St. Jacob of Edessa (d.708). Of the Fathers of the Church who contributed to the formation of the Orthodox Faith, the great ascetic tradition of the monastic fathers like St. Antony, St. Pachamios, St. Makarios, St. Simeon the Stylite, and St. Ephrem must be emphasized. The articles of the faith, based on the conclusions

¹⁷⁹ Order of Holy Qurbana of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Kottayam, 2010, p. 187.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

of the three great councils of the early church, are contained in the Orthodox Creed, an essential part of the daily prayers of the faithful.

3.25.2. The Creed of the Orthodox Church

We believe in One True God, The Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in the One Lord Jesus Christ, the Only begotten Son of God; begotten of Father before all worlds, Light of Light; very God of very God: begotten, not made; being of the same substance with the Father; and by whom all things were made; Who for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Holy Virgin Mary, Mother of God, and became man; and was crucified for us in the days of Pontius Pilate; and suffered, and died, and was buried; And the third day rose again according to His will; and ascended into heaven, and sat on the right hand of the Father; and shall come again in His great glory to judge both the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And in the one living Holy Spirit, the life giving Lord of all, who proceeds from the Father¹⁸¹; and who with Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets and the Apostles.

And in the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church; and we acknowledge one baptism of the remission of sins; and look for the resurrection of the dead; and the new life in the world to come. Amen.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ In this portion of the Creed, the Roman Catholics added the *pholioqe* (and from the Son) clause. To them the Holy Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son.

¹⁸² This Creed is generally known as the 'Niceno- Constantinopolitan Creed'. The initial part was prepared in the council of Nicea in 325 A.D. and the later part in the council of Constantinople (the present Istanbul) in 381 A.D. The Creed is common to all member Churches of the Oriental family, comprised of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church,

3.25.3. Liturgy

The liturgy of St. James is the official *Anaphura* of the Church.¹⁸³ There are about 70 other liturgical orders written by various Church Fathers in different centuries, in the model of the *Anaphura* of St. James. There are other Feast days related to the life of Jesus Christ. Holy Mass on Sundays and Feast days are obligatory. Easter and Ephiphany are the most important days to be observed accordingly.

There are Fast days related to the important Church festivals. Observance of five important lents¹⁸⁴ along with Wednesday and Friday are obligatory fast days.

3.25.4. Sacraments

There are seven Sacraments that are to be initiated by a member of the Church. They are Baptism, Holy *Mooron* (Chrism), Confession, Holy *Qurbana* (Mass), Marriage, Ordination, Anointment of the Sick. Among these seven sacraments, Baptism, Holy *Mooron*, Confession, Holy *Qurbana* are obligatory. The other three are optional.

3.25.5. Ceremonial Customs

There are ceremonial customs related to the social life and religious life of the Malankara Christians. Customs related to birth, marriage, death are the manifestation of their deep-rooted attachment towards the society in which they live.

Antiochean Syrian Orthodox Church, Alexandrian Orthodox Church, Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Coptic Orthodox Church, Eritrian Orthodox Church.

¹⁸³ 'Anaphura of St. James', *Order of the Holy Liturgy*, Pampakuda, 1916. There are many other texts of *anaphuras* written by the later Church fathers in the same pattern and order. For e.g. Anaphura of Mar Dionysius, Mar Mathai, Mar Ksesthos etc.

¹⁸⁴ 1. The *Ninve Lent* of three days, 2. great lent of 50 days in connection with Easter, 3. lent of the Apostles for 13 days, 4. lent of Ascension for 15 days, in connection of the Ascension of Mary, the Mother of God, and 5. the 25 days Lent in connection with the birth of Christ-Christmas.

Many of these traditional customs are common to the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar, and The Malankara Church being a part of the same shares this common legacy.

3.26. Conclusion

At present almost all Christian denominations are enriched with the Malankara Christian population. In spite of the ecclesiastical and doctrinal differences, each sect has their own contributions and impactful interactions in the Kerala society. The missionary activities along with the foreign ecclesiastical contacts had also influenced the Kerala society in various ways. But the cultural intermingling and social symbiosis of the period under consideration paved the way for a socio- cultural awakening of the Kerala society. Moreover the period of the missionary contact and the social transformation of the society is inter related. These reciprocal relations of ‘challenge and response’ are to be explored further. In short this research work is to put forward an unexplored aspect of modern Kerala with special emphasis on the distinct contributions of the Malankara Church to the socio- economic and cultural field of modern Kerala.

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