Chapter V

Church in the life of the People

I

There are about two million Orthodox Syrian Christians in the world, living mainly in the Middle East and India. Of all Orthodox Syrian Churches the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church which has flourished in Kerala is numerically the largest. The Orthodox Syrian Churches all over the world use the same liturgical language, namely, Syriac, and broadly share common religious faith and observations.

As remarked by Fr. Kadevil Paul the philosophy of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church has oriental flavour. Its Jewish background is noticeable in many beliefs and rites. The people are proud that their religion has a philosophy which has remained unmodified since the Apostolic times. This, no doubt, makes it less self-critical and more non-progressive than the Roman Catholic and Protestant philosophies of religion.

The Orthodox Syrian Christians in Kerala also harbour many customs and beliefs of the land in which they have lived and of the group(s) which provided a substantial proportion of the converts and/or which influenced them. The sacraments and festivals, as also their social institutions demonstrate this blending.

The Orthodox Syrian Christians in Kerala believe in corporate worship as well as in individual private prayers. They give importance to symbols and signs. For them respect, veneration, and worship are different degrees of the same sentiment. The people respect elders, and show reverence to the pictures of Jesus Christ,
Holy Cross, and the saints. The church, the Bible, the tombs, the mortal remains of saints, and the cross are considered to be holy and they venerate and 'lave such holy things. Loving before images or idols, even of Christ, is considered to be wrong, because they worship only God. In all their prayers and sorrows they face the last, because they believe that Christ will come from the last.

In some churches of the orthodox Syrian Christians departed saints are recognized as mediators. In all places prayers for the departed relatives and friends are performed with great faith by the people. The departed saints and faithful believers who are relatives and friends are considered to be present at the holy Eucharist celebrations. It is believed that the relics and mortal remains of saints work wonders, healing the sick and dis-rolling evil spirits.

In the orthodox Syrian Christian Church fasting and meditation are much more important than in all other Christian denominations in Persia. There is a strong belief that fast or Lent began in the world with the divine command to "One and live in the garden of Eden (Genesis, 2:15-17); as the two failed to observe what was told to them, the children of Adam in all generations have to fast. Lent is observed by partial fasting and by a change of diet particularly by abstaining from non-vegetarian foods. Abstaining from worldly pleasures is strongly associated with the Lent. The Church has accepted six Lents. Furthermore, the practice of observing Lent two days in a week was there among the Jews at the time of Jesus and still continues in the Orthodox Syrian Church by the priests, especially the celibate priests and high priests. These days of Lent are Wednesday which is in remembrance of the trial
and judgement of Jesus, and Friday which is in remembrance of His death on the Cross.

The Church authorities believe that Lent is meant for subjugating the desires of the flesh and for quickening the soul to divine matters. It is an arm against Satan. Since the love of the stomach is the cause of many evils, Lent helps to get over those evils.

The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church recognizes all the seven holy Sacraments. They are: Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Holy Communion, Marriage, Ordination, and Anointment of the sick. Of these marriage and priesthood are optional while the other five are obligatory. Marriage too is culturally very desirable and hence is one of the most important Sacraments. The funeral rites also require the participation of the church functionaries. Baptism, marriage, and death are also social occasions involving active participation of relatives and friends.

The church provides an association based on religious affiliation. For all practical purposes the church at Manarcaudu along with its functionaries represents to the people their faith. This chapter gives a brief history of the church at Manarcaudu, describes its organization and activities both regular as well as those connected with festivals, touches upon the religious and philanthropic activities in the village, and gives a brief account of the Sacraments. The broad aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the close relationship between the church and the people as such and to understand the role of the church in maintaining the distinctive culture of the Orthodox Syrian Christians.
II

The church in Manarcadu came into existence in the sixteenth century, in order to cater to the needs of the Syrian Christian population which migrated to this area mainly from the northern side. The fact that the history of this church is entwined with the history/migrations and settling of the Syrian Christians in this area.

As stated in Chapter II, at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese, i.e., towards the close of the fifteenth century the land of Kerala was divided into numerous chieftdoms. Thekkumkur was one such chieftdom in the kingdom of Travancore. It extended from Aramula (in the present district of Alleppy) in the south, to Kanakkari (in the present district of Kottayam) in the north, with capitals in Kottayam and Changanassery. The site of Manarcadu was contained towards the middle of this old chieftdom. Manarcadu and other places in the same region such as Thiruvenchoor, Parampuzha, and Nattassery were being ruled by the Idathil branch of the Thekkumkur Royal House. Towards the north of this chieftdom stood the chieftdom of Vadakkumkur via which the Syrian Christians came and settled in Manarcadu and the neighbouring areas.

The old city of Crangannore was a centre of trade and commerce where Syrian Christians were settled in large numbers. Due to communal fights over trade monopoly, Crangannore was destroyed and Syrian Christians were scattered over the neighbouring areas. Most of the Syrian Christian families migrated towards
the southern areas on the banks of the river Meenachil, and settled in Kaduthurithi, Kothamangalam, and many other places which were situated under Vadakkumkur chiefdom. Being traders and warriors they were favoured by the rulers with land. They took to agriculture and trade and constructed churches in these places. The majority of the Christian population in these areas is now Syrian Catholic.

In A.D. 1525, there ensued a quarrel between the ruler of Kaduthurithi in Vadakkumkur chiefdom and the Syrian Christians resulting in the persecution of the latter. Many of them migrated towards the southern Thekkumkur chiefdom and settled in Manarcadu and neighbouring areas. The Thekkumkur Raja was at enmity with the Vadakkumkur Raja and so welcomed these Christians who were experts in war and trade. He gave them land free of tax, and some were even allowed to stay in the royal palace as bodyguards to the king.

In A.D. 1550, one Cheriyan Mathew, a priest and his people who were migrants to Kottayam were given by the rulers a plot of land for the construction of a church. This was the first church in Thekkumkur chiefdom and the Syrian Christians from other parts of the chiefdom used to come there for worship. Gradually it proved inadequate to cater to the needs of the people who were spreading out. The story associated with the establishment of the church at Manarcadu is indicative of this.

Two brothers from Kothamangalam in the chiefdom of Vadakkumkur came to the Raja of Thekkumkur and on pleasing him
were given authority to rule over a few places south of Manarcadu. One such place was Meenadam and one of the two brothers Padathamappilla (meaning a Christian living on the land near the paddy field) settled there. On one Sunday he made arrangements for a religious feast. The priest was to come from the church at Kottayam (about 15 kms. away) which was the only church in the neighbourhood. After waiting in vain for the priest the guests were served food in the evening. Padathamappilla did not take any food and tired and worried prayed for a long time before going to bed. He dreamt of a white cow with a newly born calf/in a wild area which was standing surrounded on the north and east with paddy fields as in Manarcadu. This dream repeated itself three times; and there was a divine order to build a church in the place where the cow was standing. Next morning Padathamappilla went in search of the place, and soon located it. To his surprise there stood a white cow with a calf. He then felt that he was seeing Virgin Mother with the child Jesus and decided to build a church there in the name of Virgin Mother. The local Syrian Christians strongly believe in this tradition. In Athbutha Saudham meaning 'wonderful palace' published by the church in 1967 (pp. 5-6) also contains this tradition and cites evidence from a manuscript Vattakunnel family history, and an article Rahasyapedakam written by E.M. Philip in 1902.

There were many practical difficulties in building a church there. Before the coming of the Christians Manarcadu and
the neighbouring areas were inhabited by Hindus, and it is said that in Manarcadu within one sq. mile there were about a dozen temples. The land was a serpent-grove, full of Banyan trees and wild plants and containing stones erected with engravings of snakes on them. Obviously it was a place of worship for the Hindus and hence the Idathil ruler did not view with favour the idea of constructing a church there. So Padathamappilla approached the Raja of Thekkumkur at Kottayam. The Raja ordinarily did not interfere with the powers of Idathil House but in this case he gave the land free of cost and Padathamappilla with other Christians in the area built the first church. With the available historical evidence the church authorities say that this happened during A.D. 1560-65.

The Idathil ruler was greatly annoyed at the construction of the church in Manarcadu but since he wanted to avoid a fight with the Raja of Thekkumkur he did not destroy the church directly. Instead, he encouraged the Hindus of the area who collected during temple festivals to destroy the church. Thus, it has been believed, the church was destroyed and rebuilt many times. Padathamappilla then approached one Elimbilakattu Panikkar who had enough influence on Idathil House as the teacher of war techniques to its members and succeeded in winning over the friendship of the ruling House for the Christians. The two swords kept in the church are believed/have been given/to by Elimbilakattu Panikkar to protect the church.
By this time a few distinguished Syrian Christian families of body-guards in the royal palace had migrated from the chiefdom of Vadakkumkur and obtained permission of the Raja of Thekkumkur to build a church at Thiruvenchoor where they had settled. Padathamappilla approached these Syrian Christian families in Thiruvenchoor and requested for their help to rebuild the church in Manaracadu. It is said that it was with the building material which had been got ready for building the church at Thiruvenchoor, that the Manaracadu church was reconstructed. The period of rebuilding is calculated to be between A.D. 1585 to A.D. 1590 (Athbutha Saudham, 1967 : p. 17).

The two big ponds outside the church yard are believed to be those attached to the temples which were present in the area. Now both the ponds have been redone to serve as bathing places; the western pond is used by males and the northern pond by females. The water in these ponds is believed to be holy and people take it in bottles to use it for curing diseases.

In the front yard of the church there is a huge Cross made of stone. Even though there is no historical record about its erection the following legend is prevalent among the people. Because of its size and weight the Cross could not be made to stand erect. So some people went to Puthupally, a nearby place to get the elephant owned by a Hindu family for helping in the erection of the Cross. The owner of the elephant, however, rejected their request saying that the elephant was under medical treatment. The people returned greatly disappointed, but when
they reached the church they were surprised to see that the huge Cross stood erected in the proper place and that the same elephant was kneeling down before the Cross.

As mentioned in Chapter III, the conflict in Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church between the Patriarch of Antioch and the Catholicose of Malankara, led to civil suits which lasted for about a century. During this period the Manarcadu church, along with the churches in some other places remained closed for many years. The people felt the need for a church and in 1881 a new church was built on the opposite side of the old church. This is smaller than the first one and is, therefore, called Manarcadu Cheriya Palli (small church). The graveyard of the parish is situated by its side.

III

Although much bigger than an ordinary church, in its architectural style the church at Manarcadu is a good representative of the traditional churches of the Orthodox Syrian Christians in Kerala. The new extension in the form of a front verandah built with cement and concrete and the decorations of modern style in it have not affected the basic appearance of the church.

The church is about 200 feet long east-west and 35 feet wide. It is located in a spacious walled compound. The walls of the
church are about two feet thick and have three different levels of height. The front portion which faces the west is an open verandah with a concrete roof. Higher than this stands the main body of the church. It has a tiled roof and wooden ceiling. Beyond this up to the back wall is the highest portion which also has a tiled roof and a wooden ceiling. Besides the huge main entrance, there are eight doors which open into the church, two on the two sides of the main entrance, and three each in the left and the right walls of the hall. The building is well ventilated. All these doors and windows have wooden frames.

The church can be divided into three distinct parts; the main hall (Nave), the Chancel (Amikal), and the sanctuary opstaining the alter. The hall can accommodate about a thousand people. It has seven pairs of stone pillars supporting the roof. An approximately three feet high railing made of concrete and with an opening in the centre separates the hall from the Chancel. The floor of the chancel is about one foot higher than that of the hall and a step leads to it. This is a holy place much used by the priests during the church service and administration of Sacrament. Beyond the chancel, five steps above is the sanctuary where the altar is located. A 25 feet high and 15 feet wide arch stands in between the chancel and this platform-like space. This part of the church is known as Madhva, after the Syriac word Madbaha which means sanctuary. The sanctuary is screened off from the main hall of the
church by a curtain with the sign of a Cross in the middle, hung on a rod running across the arch which can be drawn by a cord.

In the centre of the sanctuary close to the wall is the altar. It is about eight feet long, four feet wide, and four feet high, and has a roof. It consists of four steps and on each step there is a Cross with candles on both sides. The highest step has a golden Cross, while each of the lower steps has a silver Cross. The lowest step is broader and has a stand with the Bible on it. Two similar smaller structures are located on the sides of the chancel to accommodate three priests at a time on special occasions. Behind the main altar there is some space which is used as a passage.

The floor of the main hall is covered with coir matting. On its right hand side and more towards the chancel stands the baptismal tub which is a stone basin of one foot diameter fitted on a four-feet high stone pillar. In the middle of the hall there is a huge lamp of the same type as is found in Hindu temples hanging from the roof and sustained by iron chains. The lamp has two tiers of graded circular trays or reservoirs. Each tray holds coconut oil and along its circumference there are tiny niches in which wicks are arranged and lit. This lamp is always kept burning as it is regarded as the symbolic representation of Jesus Christ, "the light of the World".
In the hall near the chancel there is a huge iron box with a slit opening on the top for putting in the Merocha (offertories). When the box is full the money is taken out through the side opening which is ordinarily locked. Near the box is a table with some copies of the Bible and prayer books and a note book in which the people can write the names of persons in whose name a holy Qurbana has to be performed. A smaller box fitted to one of the pillars of the church hall is meant for putting in the fee for the holy Qurbana.

The chancel is also covered with coir matting. In the middle of the chancel stands a table with a small wooden cross and some copies of the Bible and books dealing with the holy Qurbana to be used by the priest. There are also some chairs near the railing for being used during the holy service by an aged priest or a Metropolitan. In the roof of the front verandah a huge iron bell is hung with a rope pulling which the bell is made to ring at certain occasions.

The Parish has got a two storeyed building towards the south-east corner of the church compound. The office of the Parish is located in the main room on the ground floor. The rooms in the front are used for storing the offerings in kind received during the church festivals. On the upper storey there are guest rooms which are used by visiting priests or a Metropolitan and also by people coming from outside. Some rooms are used as class rooms for the Sunday school. On the
north of the church, near the compound wall there is a six-storeyed tower, with a Cross on the top and a huge iron bell hanging in the top floor. Towards the northwestern boundary of the church compound there is another building which has some rooms, a hall, and a kitchen. To the west of this building there is a new building with a big hall for holding some of the Sunday school classes and the Parish meetings. All these places come alive during the Lent days.

People belonging to any religious group can enter the church. Before entering the church the footwear are to be taken off and the women and girls have to cover their heads with the end of their Kavni (half-saree) or saree. Little girls use a square cloth for this purpose. Facing the altar the left half of the hall is for males and the right half for females. Only those who are ordained or those who have got special permission can enter the altar. The chancel is entered into by ordinary people to receive the holy Qurbana, the kiss of peace, and to kiss the Cross. The priest and his assistants stand there for prayers before the holy Qurbana starts or at other times.

The Manaroadu Idavaka owns and manages a nursery school, a high school in which courses are offered from standards one to ten, a teachers' training school and a hospital. As mentioned in Chapter IV, the hospital and high school are adjacent to the church compound while the nursery and training schools are a little away from it. All these institutions
are named after St. Mary.

The building of the nursery school is a small one, that of the training school is a single-storied one which is perhaps the oldest, and the main buildings of the high school and the hospital are multistoried and built in modern fashion.

The strength of the nursery school is 50, while that of the high school it is more than one thousand; and of the training school has only 120 students. There are 250 beds in the hospital which is well-equipped with modern laboratories and operation theatre. It also offers a diploma course in nursing. Adjacent to the hospital compound, there are residential quarters for the doctors.

Most of the persons employed in these institutions are members of the Manaradu Idavaka. But there are also a few Hindus and some Orthodox Syrian Christians from the neighbouring areas. The student population is composed of both Hindus and Christians. In point of fact a larger number of boys and girls of the village attend the church school.

These institutions are managed through committees whose membership is drawn exclusively among the parishioners.

In addition to these, the church has built a waiting shed in front of the church gate. In 1972, the church renewed an elongated building near the gate which is now rented to shopkeepers. The church gate has also been rebuilt in the shape of an arch.
THE CHURCH COMPLEX

- CEMETERY
- HIGH SCHOOL
- CHURCH BUILDINGS
- TOWER
- NURSERY SCHOOL
- TRAINING SCHOOL
- M.T. ROAD
- M.A. ROAD
- WOODS
- STONE CROSS
- KIRKEMAILDORE

M.C.I. 4
The church is open on all days. Outsiders who are just passing through or who come with the specific purpose of making or fulfilling a vow may visit the church on weekdays. The office of the church is open for the whole day. Out of the five priests of this church at least one can always be found in the office where the trustee and the secretary do their work.

Since Sunday is the most important day from religious point of view it is crowded with kinds of activities on the part of the church functionaries as also on the part of the people. A three hour service is held in the morning. In the afternoon the classes for the Sunday school and the parishioners' prayer meetings are held. Outsiders prefer to visit the church on a Sunday unless they can manage a visit during Lent.

Some of the regular religious and philanthropic activities are held on Saturdays. These include: meetings of Youth League and Women's Association and visits to the hospital. Saturday is also the confession day.

The Sunday Service

The holy service known as holy Qurbana among the Orthodox Syrian Christians is held on all Sundays in the morning, generally from 7.30 to 10.30. It is conducted by one of the five priests; other priests who are present assist him. As mentioned earlier
the priest is always assisted by the Kappiar and some boys of the Parish. Although the language of liturgy is Syriac, many prayers, hymns, and the Bible used are in Malayalam. During the course of the Service the people also have to say a few words in Syriac.

The use of incense forms an important part of all church rituals. It is put in the censer containing burning charcoal and the Kappiar swings it at solemn occasions of the service. During the Service the curtain screening the sanctuary is drawn aside at specified times.

The main components of the Service are:

a. reading some specific passage from the Bible by the priest,

b. blessing the Bread and Wine,

c. giving the 'kiss of peace' to the people present,

d. kissing the Cross, and

e. putting Nercha in cash on a plate kept on the table in the chancel.

The most holy part of the Service is blessing the Bread and the Wine which takes place in the latter half of the Service. As the curtain is drawn aside for this rite, all the people present in the church turn their attention to the priest; those who have been sitting on the floor stand up, those who have been sitting outside the hall get in, the children keep quiet, and the women and girls arrange the head coverings properly. The priest also emphasizes the holiness and solemnity of the rite.
The priest requires a number of assistants for this rite, one to hold the hand bell and ring it at the proper time, two to hold the jingling hand fans, and one or two to stand with the candle. Saying the relevant prayers, the priest raises with both his hands the cup containing Bread and then the cup containing Wine. As he raises these cups all the bells in the church are made to ring, and the people make a sign of Cross.

With the two cups in his hands the priest steps down and comes to the front of the altar where the Kappiar swings the censer with incense burning to and fro. After praying for some time, the priest puts back the cups on the altar.

The 'kiss of peace' known as Kaisthuthi is the next important part of the service. When the curtain is drawn aside the priest after kissing the altar, steps down and turns towards the hall. The Kappiar approaches the priest with the incense pot and the censer. When the priest has put a spoonful of incense in the censer the Kappiar hands over the pot to one of the assistants and kisses the right palm of the priest, the Cope, and both the sides of the altar. Then the covers the sides of the priest's clasped hands with his own hands and moves his hands in the manner which suggests that he is receiving some things. Now he is ready to transmit the 'kiss of peace' to others. The same actions signifying transmission are repeated in the church. First the assistants come forward one by one and receive the 'kiss of peace' from the Kappiar who then comes out
towards the railing of the Chancel to give the 'kiss of peace' to the people. One or two boys and one or two girls come forward and receive it from the Kappiar, and from them it is passed on to the people one by one, the males receiving from the males and the females receiving from the females. Each person kisses his/her own hands after passing the kiss to another person.

After the service, the priest makes a speech referring to the passage read from the Bible emphasizing the ethics and morals contained in the religion. Important announcements like marriage, notices, orders from the Metropolitan or Catholicos, notices for Idavaka meeting, so on, are made after the speech.

When the announcements are over the priest comes out into the Chancel and stands there holding a small wooden Cross in his right hand. The people approach him one by one and kiss the Cross. At this time they also put some Narcha in cash on the plate kept on the table. The males do this first, the older people following the younger ones. On Sundays all Idavaka members are expected to go to the church. What is tried to be accomplished, however, is that at least one person from each household should be present. The congregation provides a meeting place for friends and relatives. Notes are exchanged and much of the local news is conveyed.

Other Activities:

Every Sunday afternoon there is a prayer meeting in one
of the Parishioners' households in each ward of the village. The member households take turns in undertaking the responsibility of the prayer meeting. A priest is not necessary for these meetings, but if he comes he presides. Usually it is attended by middle aged and old people, especially men. Passages from the Bible are read. Some men make speeches quoting verses from the Bible, and all present pray and chant hymns. At the end, coffee and snacks are served by the host. Attendance at these meetings varies greatly, depending to some extent on the status of the household which is playing the host.

The women of the Parish have an association known as Martha Mariyam Samajam (St. Mary's Women's Association). They assemble in the church on Saturday afternoon and perform prayers, chant hymns, read the Bible and so on. One of the women of the Association or the priest may make a speech quoting Biblical versions. They also visit the patients lying in the nearby hospital and pray for them and make donations in cash or in kind for the poor and the needy.

Youth League is an association of the young men of the Parish. On Saturday evening they meet in the church and pray and chant hymns. Passages from the Bible are read; according to the programme fixed earlier speeches also may be delivered. There is singing also. The members disperse after fixing the next week's programme.

The Sunday school has mixed classes which are held from
2.00 p.m. to 4.00 p.m. in the hall fixed for it. Parents are keen to send their school going children to Sunday school in order to help them imbibe the cardinal principles of their religion before they grow into adults. The contents of teaching include the history of the church, the Bible, prayers and the hymns. There are two terminal exams and an annual examination in every class; after passing the topmost, namely, the seventh class, the student receives a certificate. The teachers in the Sunday school are young people of the Parish who do the job voluntarily and in an honorary capacity. Even the headmaster is not a salaried employee.

The annual meeting of the above mentioned associations is held during the eight days lent in the church compound.

Nercha:

As mentioned in the beginning of Chapter IV, the church at Manarcadu is the most important pilgrim centre of the Orthodox Syrian Christians in Kerala. The Nercha (offertories) received by this church is the highest among all the churches in Kerala. People from different parts of Kerala including Hindus come to this church to pray and give the Nercha and to receive the blessings of God Almighty, especially through the mediation of the Holy Mary in whose name the church was built.

When a vow is made in order to fulfil a wish, the act of fulfilling such a vow is known as Nercha which is a voluntary offering to the church or to anyone in the name of God. The
Nercha may be given in advance in anticipation of a favour or on the completion of a wish.

Nercha has many forms. It may be in kind or in cash, in the form of particular acts such as in the form of observing the Lent, by abstaining from worldly pleasures, in the form of particular acts like undergoing physical torture, or in the form of philanthropic activities. Nercha can be discussed under the following four heads: ordinary, that is given on specific occasions, annual, and occasional.

a. Ordinary Nercha:

One may make a vow (Veruka) at any time and give the Nercha on any day in the church. It may be in kind or in cash. If in kind the most common offerings are candles and coconut oil; but other things which are useful in the church like coloured flag, decorated umbrella, silver or golden cross or fan, bulb, electric candles, and such other things may also be given. The Nercha may also consist of small cattle, fowl, milk, eggs or any agricultural produce. In addition to these or along with these cash may also be given as Nercha which is put in the box kept in the church or in the Kurisummed. Members of the Idavaka and some others may give donations to the church by way of Nercha. The money is given in the office of the church and the name and address of the donor is later published in the annual Idavaka Report.

The Nercha in cash given for conducting a holy Qurbana
is known as fee for the purpose and is paid in the church office or is put in the special boxes kept in the church or the office. The name of the person in whose name the holy Qurbana is to be conducted is written down in the notebook kept for it, and during the holy Qurbana, the priest remembers these names. These names may belong to dead as well as living persons. The minimum fee acceptable to the church for holy Qurbana is 0.50 np.

The ordinary Nercha in kind is given mostly by people belonging to the Idavaka; those coming from outside the Parish prefer to give cash.

b. Special occasions and Nercha given on particular days:

This is given during Sunday service or on festival days. Besides cash and the items in kind mentioned earlier, it also includes rice or a kind of bread which are distributed among the people present. Other than the Nercha in kind or cash there are also certain acts which people offer to do during the festival days. They include crawling or rolling for a specific number of times around the church building or around the big stone Cross kept in the front yard of the church. By way of Nercha coins may be given to all beggars sitting on the sides of the roads which lead to the church. An important type of Nercha is to observe eight days lent by praying and meditation, by fasting till the morning service is over, and by abstaining from all worldly pleasures of life. A fourth type of Nercha consists in offering
in the church figures of human body or part(s) of it made of aluminium, copper, silver, or gold.

c. Annual Vercha:

This is known as the festival of the first produce. As the main harvest season in Kerala is during August-September this festival is held on one of the Sundays during this period. All member households of the Parish give to the church a portion of every agricultural item grown on his land. In this they try to select the best in each item for offering. Some may also give cattle, fowl, milk, eggs, and such other things. People start bringing these offerings a few days before the Sunday fixed for holding the festival. After the holy Qurbana all these items are sold in public auction; and are bought generally without much calculations regarding their market value because the money has to go to the church. The auction continues for the whole day and many people including non-Christians even from the neighbouring areas come to participate in it. Hotel and shop owners and traders of the neighbouring areas also participate in auction and items received in large quantities are bought by them.

d. Occasional Vercha:

This consists in acts such as "keeping an infant as a slave" and conducting Baptism of children in this church. It is believed that if a child is handed over to the church, the Virgin Mother will look after it all through its life. Many
mothers make a vow to this effect either before the birth of a child or later especially when it faces some danger to its life. The child is given to the priest who takes it towards the altar. A male child is taken inside the altar and is made to touch the central portion. A female child is taken only upto the steps leading to the altar and is made to touch the wall of the arch at the entrance of the altar. The child is then given back to the parents and is brought up by them as any other child. On this occasion some money is also given as Nercha.

The same faith in the powers of the Virgin Mother is responsible for parents from other parishes bringing their infant children to this church for Baptism. This is also a kind of Nercha. It is usual for people to perform both these types of occasional Nercha during the Lent.

A childless couple may make a vow that if a son is born he will be made a priest. Sometimes if there are more than one son, one of the sons is promised for priesthood by way of Nercha. Only in rare cases does such a promise remain unfulfilled.

Festivals:

Besides conducting Sunday service, the Parish church is active on the days of festivals. The most important of such festivals are Christmas, Great Lent, especially the Passover Week, and the Right day's Lent, upto the feast of St. Mary's birth. There are three more Lents of fifteen, thirteen and
three days; but they are of relatively minor importance. There is a prayer in the church on these days.

The Christmas Service is held after the midnight of 24th December, from 2.30 a.m. to 6.30 a.m. It has some special features. For instance, before holy Qurbana all those present put incense into the fire lit by the priest in a Cross shaped pit filled with dried palm leaves and circumambulate the church building. It symbolizes the event in which the three wisemen who went to see the infant Jesus and presented him gifts of gold, incense, and myrrh or aromatic oil.

During the Great Lent which consists of fifty days including the Easter day, a series of prayers and services are conducted in the church. The most important of these, is the one held in the last week of the Lent, viz., the Passover Week. Special significance is attached to the Sunday preceding Easter as the day on which Jesus Christ was taken in procession on a colt with the proclamation "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest" (Luke, 19:38). The priest, his assistants, and the people go out in a procession round the church with blessed palm leaves in their hands chanting hymns and uttering "Peace in heaven and glory in the highest" (Ibid.19.38).

Wednesday of Easter week is the day of confessions. On the following day known as Maundy Thursday the last supper of Jesus Christ is remembered. A large number of people receive the holy Communion on this day.
The Good Friday of the western churches is called Dukha Velliasha or Friday of Sorrow in the Orthodox Syrian Church. On this day the whole drama of Christ's trial, crucifixion, and burial is symbolically enacted by the priest and his assistants, in a very solemn and moving atmosphere. This service is not missed by even slightly religious minded people. Many old people weep during the solemn prayers. This is the lengthiest Service of the year starting around 7.30 a.m. and ending by 3.30 p.m. The people participate in it from the very beginning without taking any food. At the end of the service they are served with Kanji and a simple curry. On the following Saturday which is known as Dukha Saniascha i.e. Saturday of sorrow, there is a morning prayer in the church. On these two days people are expected to be in a sorrowful mood. They abstain from luxuries and non-vegetarian food and stay at home.

Easter Sunday is a day of Joy and the holy Qurbana is conducted to commemorate Christ's Resurrection.

The festival of Lent from the first to eighth September in commemoration of the birth of Holy Mary is the most important festival in this Parish, as the church was built in the name of Holy Mary. People come from all over Kerala for Vercha which has been described earlier. Many people stay during these eight days in the church chanting hymns and saying special prayers. On all these eight days the holy Qurbana is conducted in the morning and there are special services in the evening. On the sixth day, after the holy Qurbana a portrait of Virgin Mary kept under lock for the whole year is exposed. The believing crowd rushes to see
the portrait. Some peculiar reactions are also observable: some people shout, some fall down and cry, and still others run out of the church. Such reactions are generally associated by the people with the converts from the scheduled castes like the Pulayas and the Parayas. There is a general belief on seeing St. Mary, the spirits possessing persons leave them.

On the seventh day in the evening, a procession goes to the Kurizummoode in the Manarcaud Junction. The priests and the assistants are at the head of the procession and behind them walk men followed by women chanting hymns and saying prayers. Coloured umbrellas and flags, and the gold and silver Crosses are taken out for this procession. The gates of the parishioners' houses along the side of the road are decorated and illuminated. When the procession reaches the Kurizummoode, the priest and the assistants enter the room of the Kurizummoode, perform a prayer, and go round it once. After the prayer all return in a procession to the Church from where the congregation disperses.

On the morning of the eighth day the holy Qurbana and special prayers in the memory of Holy Mary are performed; by 11.30 a.m. the service is over and is followed by Nercha. The Nercha consists of round unleavened bread made of rice given by all parish households and by many others attending the festival. It is then distributed among all who have assembled.

The preparations for the celebration of the Lent festival start by the middle of August. In the church yard on the north and south of the church Pandals are erected. Outside the church
yard, towards the main road and on the school ground, temporary sheds are erected by traders for putting up a variety of shops. The church receives rent from these traders. There are coffee and tea shops, restaurants, shops selling furniture and all types of household utensils, and numerous small shops selling items like bangles, ribbons, combs, mirrors, candles, Bibles, and other religious books dealing with prayers and hymns, and portraits of Jesus Christ, Holy Mary, and some late Metropolitans who are held in high esteem.

The ground in front of the hospital is used as a parking place for vehicles. During the festival period many private buses are operated to facilitate people's coming to the church. The entire area of the church, the school, and the hospital is crowded with the people. In the church office there are separate counters for receiving Nercha in cash and kind. Important announcements for the public are made through a microphone from one of the rooms near the office.

Belief in the efficacy of Nercha at this church built in the name of St. Mary and special celebrations of the Lent have created an unusual pattern of visiting and social relationships with relatives among the Orthodox Syrian Christians of Manarcadu. Most of the houses, particularly those closer to the church, have guests during the September Lent, and every once in a while relatives may drop in with the specific purpose of visiting the church.
Baptism:

Baptism is the first and primary sacrament. No one is allowed to accept other sacraments before receiving Baptism. It effects the admission of the individual to the community of the faithful, to be worthy of the gift of the holy spirit, to inherit sonship of God and be saved from sins inherited or committed. When the baptized happens to fall into sins Baptism is not repeated, but he is to confess and get absolution. Baptism is considered to be a second birth, a birth in Jesus Christ.

A baby born to Christian parents is not considered a Christian by virtue of birth; only after Baptism does it become a Christian. If it dies unbaptized, it is not buried in the church cemetery and no death ritual is observed for it. There is no definite rule as to how many days should pass after the birth of the child in order to be baptized. Baptism can be performed from about the fourteenth day and is generally expected to be over by the fourteenth month.

The ceremony of Baptism is usually held in the church, but in case of emergency, a child of an adult may be baptized at home also. The need for adult Baptism comes only when a non-Christian is converted to Christian faith. If an Orthodox
Syrian Christian becomes a non-Christian or joins any other Christian denomination and later returns to the original faith he is not rebaptized. In the case of an infant who is baptized the God-father or the God-mother confesses the faith on behalf of the baby at the time of Baptism holding the hand of the baby. But in the case of grown ups, the aspirants to baptize themselves confess the faith. First the person being baptized turns westward and denies Satan and his forces and then he turns eastward and confesses Jesus and the faith. While denying Satan, the God-father looking westward with the baby, hold its left hand with his left hand, and while confessing Jesus and the faith he holds the right hand of the baby with his own right hand looking eastward. The west and left hand are associated with Satan whereas the east and right hand are always associated with goodness.

Baptism is meant for cleaning the flesh and soul from sins, inherited or committed. In the case of the infant, there is only inherited sin. The grown up has to confess his sins before receiving baptism according to the religious faith. The holy Spirit descended on Jesus, like a dove at His Baptism and it is believed that this happens invisibly to all who are duly baptized in the church. Before the person to be baptized is taken to the baptismal tub, the priest blows his breath on his face in Cross form three times, symbolising the gift of the holy spirit.
The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church does not allow Baptism by total immersion as is prevalent among some protestants in Kerala. The priest pours specially sanctified water over the head of the person to be baptized. When Christians from other denominations join the Orthodox Church they are not rebaptized except for those who have been baptized by total immersion.

Confirmation:

As in other Eastern Orthodox Syrian Churches, in Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church also the sacrament of Confirmation is administered immediately after Baptism. The holy Mooron or the oil used for Confirmation, is consecrated generally by the Catholicose only, but in rare cases of emergency a Metropolitan may also do it.

For the anointment, the priest takes holy oil first on the thumb of his right hand and makes a sign of Cross on the forehead of the baptized three times, and then the holy oil is smeared all over the body.

The baptismal tub symbolizes the tomb of Jesus Christ and the water into which the holy oil is dripped is the womb from which are born the children of immortality. Drops of holy oil poured into the baptismal water are believed to be powerful to produce new life. The spiritual birth which takes place is a rebirth. Pouring water over the baptized three times in the name of the Father, the Son, and the holy Ghost signifies the
three days during which Jesus Christ remained in the tomb and the coming forth of the baptized from the tomb signifies resurrection.

Confession:

As for all other sacraments, a priest is essential to conduct Confession also. During Confession the priest dressed in black sits on a mat spread on the floor of the church close to the altar and the persons who are to confess come by turn and kneel down in front of him. Unlike the Catholics, it is not necessary for an Orthodox Syrian Christian to speak out his sins to the priest. The essence of Confession is repentance and seeking God's forgiveness. The children are helped to imbibe the spirit of Confession in the Sunday School and through priestly sermons. Since auricular Confession is not essential, there is no insistence on privacy. People stand around watching or waiting for their turn. The priest prays silently touching the forehead of the persons with his right thumb and makes the sign of Cross three times. He then advises the confessor to follow the Ten Commandments. He also tells him about the importance of observing Lent, participating in family prayers, reading Bible, and going to the church regularly. If the confessor is a person who is to marry, the priest's advice includes a few points relevant to ideal married life. This takes about five minutes and in the end the priest again prays and makes the sign of Cross three times on the forehead of the person. The confessor is asked to pray kneeling down three times.
After Confession a person has to abstain from worldly pleasures till he receives holy Qurbana. Ordinarily Confession is held on the evening prior to the morning of Sunday Service in which case a confessor has to take only vegetarian food in the evening and has to go without any beverage or breakfast in the morning.

Periodical Confession followed by the receiving of holy Communion is considered a sign of being a true Christian. But, by and large, the Orthodox Syrian Christians do not undertake Confession for its own sake. It is common for old and middle aged people to go in for Confession prior to receiving holy Communion during the Lent days. During the Passover week Wednesday is the day of Confession followed by the administering of holy Qurbana on Thursday. Since Confession has to precede before the administering of any sacrament, it is often said in jest that Confession is essential only three times during an individual's life time, namely, prior to Baptism, marriage, and anointment of the sick before death. This fits in well with the general attitude and behaviour of the young even in a place like Manarcadu whose church is famous all over Kerala.

Holy Eucharist:

It is also known as holy Communion and the Orthodox Syrian Christians of Kerala use the word holy Qurbana meaning the Eucharistic Sacrifice. The Eucharist is instituted to commemorate the Last Supper of Jesus Christ. In the Last Supper, Jesus
Christ, taking Bread and Wine told the disciples that it is His Body and Blood (Math.26. 26-28). It is believed that Consecrated Bread and Wine are mystically the Body and Blood of Christ. The Orthodox Syrian Christians make fresh Bread every time and would not keep it ready-made for use as and when needed.

First holy Communion is administered immediately after Baptism and Confirmation. It is received after every Confession. Holy Communion is essential for every other sacrament. In the case of Marriage and Ordination it is received before whereas in other sacraments it is received afterwards.

Towards the close of the holy Qurbana, the person who is to receive the holy Communion comes to the chancel. The priest has in his hands tiny pieces of consecrated Bread while the Kappiar holds a small jug with holy Water. Both of them stand on the last step of the sanctuary. As the person comes forwards the priest puts a piece of Bread into his mouth. This has to be swallowed without chewing. The Kappiar then pours some Consecrated water into his mouth. While this is going on hymns are being chanted by the priest and his assistants.

Marriage:

The Bible does not say that all men must marry. But in order to avoid fornication every man and woman is allowed to have his/her own spouse (Corinthians, 7.2). Celibacy cannot be acceptable for all; it is for those who are selected by God as priests (Mathew, 19.10-11). Among the people celibacy is almost synonymous with
priest hood. In the Orthodox Syrian Church there is no nunhood as in the Catholic Church.

For the Orthodox Syrian Christians marriage is an important sacrament. It is irrevocable. The sacredness and unbreakability of marriage, written in the Bible, is emphasized by the priest during the marriage ceremony. The well-known words of the priest, "what God has joined together should not be disjointed by human being" (Mark, 10.9, and Matthew, 19.5) are to be understood in their true meaning in the Orthodox Syrian Christian Church.

Before conducting marriage, the church ensures that information about the proposed union gets properly circulated so that if there is any irregularity it may be made known. Prior to the performance of wedding the marriage notice is announced to the congregation on three consecutive Sundays.

Sunday and Monday are the only days on which a wedding is performed. Both morning and afternoon are considered suitable for a wedding. If it is to be conducted on a Monday there is a special prayer in the church in the morning.

The bridegroom and the bride accompanied by their respective relatives and friends arrive at the church a little before the time fixed for the wedding. Before starting for the church, at both the houses a prayer is held, led by a priest or by an elderly person.

The bridegroom and the bride enter the church through the front door. The bridal pair stand in the chancel, the bride to
the right of the bridegroom. The groom's real or classificatory sister's husband stands behind the bridegroom as his 'friend' (Thozhan). Behind the bride is her father's sister, or brother's wife as her 'friend' (Thozhi).

The whole wedding ceremony in the church including the prayer takes about one hour. Among the Syrian Catholics the wedding ceremony takes place along with the holy Mass, but in the Orthodox Syrian Church it is held separately and there is a special marriage prayer to accompany the wedding ceremony.

The important rites in the church include, in that order, blessing the chains¹, rings, Minnu (a small leaf-shaped locket of gold bearing the sign of a Cross)², and Mantrakodi (wedding sari) by the priest, putting the chains and rings on the bridal pair, putting the Minnu on the bride by the groom, putting the Mantrakodi on the head of the bride by the groom, and joining the right hands of the bride and the groom together by the priest.

Traditionally both the bride and the groom have to be in white clothes, but now it is only the bridegroom who wears white. Colours like violet, blue, green, and cream are now used for the wedding sari. The Minnu hangs from a thread which has been prepared by

¹. This type of chain is found as a family possession in rich Orthodox Syrian Christian households. It is worn only at the time of wedding and is borrowed by those who need it.

². The Hindu women of Kerala also use the Minnu, but it is larger in size, has the shape of a banyan leaf, and, of course, has no Cross on it.
twisting together seven threads taken out from the Mantrakodi.

These two things along with two long chains with a big Cross hanging from each, and two rings are kept on the table in front of the bridal couple. The priest blesses them by raising them together in both hands with a prayer. After blessing he keeps them back on the table. He then lifts one chain, touches it to the groom's forehead and puts it on the bridegroom. In the same manner the other chain is put on the bride. This is followed by the putting of rings which is also done by the priest.

One by one the priest hands over the Minnu and the Mantrakodi to the bridegroom who ties the Minnu around the neck of the bride and puts the Mantrakodi on her head. After this the priest joins together the right hands of the bridegroom and the bride with the following words in Malayalam: "Since this moment these two have become husband and wife in the presence of God. As they are joined together by God no man shall separate them, because, that which is tied on the earth is tied in the heaven also. So a man shall leave his parents and be made one with his wife; and the two shall become one flesh. The wife is the crown of the husband. She should obey and love him. So also he should love her as his own body. Even if he is hungry and naked, she should not be left so. Like the birds of the sky and the sand on the sea-shore let them multiply and lead a happy long life worshipping and praising God." These utterances of the priest contain the oaths and promises along with the duties of the bride and the bridegroom towards each other. In the Orthodox
Syrian Church is not necessary for the two to make explicit promises.

After the principal ceremony of the bridegroom tying the Minnu around the neck of the bride, the groom's sister comes forward and stands as the bride's friend (Thoshi). At the end of the ceremony, the bride and the bridegroom offer some money as Mercha.

Before coming out of the church the bridal pairs sign in the marriage register. The bride signs her maiden name for the last time.

Ordination:

Ordination is conducted by a Metropolitan or the Catholicose. This usually takes place in the church attached to the Theological Seminary or with the office of the Catholicose; but Ordination for deaconhood and priesthood can take place in a parish church also. Close relatives and friends of the person are invited by his family on this occasion. Ordination is held on a Sunday after the Service or in the afternoon. Ordination to deaconhood is a much simpler affair. Before being ordained as priest the person goes through tonsure at the hands of one of the assistants of the priest. The Metropolitan who is specially invited for Ordination keeps his hand on the head of the person(s) and prays. At one Service a number of young men who have qualified themselves for deaconhood may be ordained. Since priesthood requires higher qualifications sometimes Ordination may be held only for one person. These events do not attract unusual attendance at the church, but Consecration attracts large gatherings of believing Orthodox Syrian Christians.
Anointment of the sick:

This is known as Thilabishekam which means washing with oil when a person is nearing death the priest is called for. Efforts are always made that the sacrament is administered when the sick person is in a conscious state; so that confession, prayer, and receiving of holy Communion are undertaken properly. A specially sanctified oil is used for anointment. The oil is always available in the church. There are two separate services for the Anointment of the sick, a brief one for ordinary people and a lengthy one for the priests, the Metropolitans, and prominent laymen.

The priest anoints the sick person on the forehead, eye-lids, ears, nostrils, tongue, lips, chest, arms, knees, and feet. Then he takes some oil on his right thumb and makes the sign of the Cross with it at the above mentioned parts of the body, praying that the patient may be pardoned the sins he or she has committed with the respective parts.

Anointment of the sick is the last sacrament, but the concern of the church for the individual does not end with it. The treatment and disposal of the dead are religious as well as social matters.

As soon as possible the dead body is washed, dressed in clean clothes, and perfumed. It is then made to lie in a coffin. A mat or a cot is used for keeping the coffin on. Four candles are kept burning at its four corners and at the head of the coffin a big Cross is kept. The coffin is placed with feet of the dead body towards the east and head towards the west to ensure that the dead body is facing the east.
Sitting around the dead body people pray and chant hymns. On information the priest, the Kappiar, and the watchman of the church come with the prayer book and the censer. A prayer is held. In the case of reputed persons, the priest generally delivers a speech praising the good deeds of the deceased and consoling the people.

The coffin is carried to the church cemetery in a procession, amidst chanting of hymns and led by the priest. In Manarcudu the small church close to the cemetery is used for funeral prayers. The dead body is kept in the church hall for a while and the priest performs a prayer. Then it is taken to the cemetery where a grave has already been dug. The coffin is closed and lowered into the grave. While putting the first handful of soil over the coffin, the priest chooses the most appropriate words: "You are joining the soil of which you are made".

For seven days close relatives of the deceased go to the cemetery, keep flowers at the grave and pray. On the following Sunday the priest and the Kappiar along with the relatives of the deceased go to pray at the grave. On fortieth day again a prayer is held at the grave, and if the deceased was an adult the priest and other church functionaries along with close relatives and friends are treated to a vegetarian meal at his/her house. In well-to-do homes the number of people asked to come to the prayer and this meal may be fairly large.

At the annual death anniversary also the priest along with the Kappiar is called to pray at the grave.
During a feast a special separate seat is arranged for the priest. The food items are served first to the priest and then to others. Both before and after the meal the priest says prayers and only then would the people start eating or leaving their seats as the case may be.

On the occasion of blessing the house, which is known as Pura Vastholi or Pura Rudasa, the priest and the Kappiar have important roles to perform. The priest performs special prayers and makes sign of Cross on the doors of each room with a brush made of banana leaves and water. The Kappiar moves with him spreading the aroma of incense all over. A feast is arranged in which the priest and his assistants participate.
The altar — in the old Eastern style (see p. 149)

The Kurizumud in the Manarcadu Junction (see p. 119)
The bell-tower in the church yard— an addition (see p.151)

The baptismal tub.
The priest (centre) assisted by a high priest (in black gown) and deacons and Kappiyar during the Palm Sunday service (see p. 163)

A section of the congregation, listenersly listening to the Bible during the Sunday service.
Parishioners after the service - a general occasion for personal get-together.

People come from even distant places (vehicles in photograph).
The Priest returns from the altar after the child (boy) is made to kiss on the altar.
Confession of children — touching on the head.

Confession of adult.

Waiting to receive the holy Communion.