CHAPTER-I

ADVENT OF CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

Christianity is spread all over India. But it was first introduced in the southern parts—especially in the territories now forming the state of Kerala—and as 31.60% of the total Christian population of India is in Kerala, it is proposed to deal with the advent of Christianity in Kerala in detail and to provide a bird's eye view of its development in other states.

The advent of Christianity in Kerala dates back to the first century. According to widespread tradition which is believed by most of its members, the church in India was originally established in the year 52 A.D., by the Apostle, St. Thomas, who landed at Malankara near Cranganore. 1 The veracity of this claim has been explored by many historians, both in India and abroad. According to L.K. Ananthakrishna Ayyar, all along the ages St. Thomas has been known as the Apostle of India, and the testimony of the Christian writers is worthy of consideration. In A.D. 190, the Great Gnostic Panthaenus, a Professor of Theology in the school of Alexandria, set sail from Bernice in the Red Sea and landed in one of the

1. C.A. Innes (Edited by F.B. Evans), Madras District Gazetteers Malabar. volume I (Superintendent, Govt. Press, Madras) 1951 (first published in 1908) at 195. It may be noted that in ancient times Cranganore was also known as Muziri and at present it is called Kodungalloor. It is a place near Cochin in Kerala.
Cochin Ports. There he found a colony of Christians in possession of the Aramaic version of the Gospel of St. Mathew, in Hebrew, which St. Bartholomew was supposed to have carried thither; and this is the earliest mention of the community now known as the Syrian Christians. One of the earliest and most notable witnesses is the Didascalia Apostolorum (Teaching of the Apostles), a book probably produced in Syria and dated about 250 A.D. It makes references to St. Thomas and his Indian connections. It appears from the writings of other eminent writers that the Indian Christians were represented by Johannes, the Metropolitan of Persia and the Great India, at the first Ecumenical Council held at Nice in 325 A.D, which was held by the order of the Emperor.

Ruffinus in 371 A.D. wrote that the bones of St. Thomas were brought from India to Edessa. In remembrance of this, a feast called Duhrana is celebrated by the Romo-Syrians and Jacobites of Malabar on the 3rd of July of every year as a day of obligation. Yet another source of information is the

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4. Supra n.2 at 7.
5. Edessa is the modern Urfa in Turkey. A few historians are of the opinion that "India" mentioned here could be Indo-Minor (Eastern Syria).
6. Supra n.2 at 6-7.
hymns of St. Ephraem (a hymn-writer of Syria) who spent the last ten years of his life at Edessa, which was one of the chief centres of Christianity and which claimed to be the resting place of the bones of St. Thomas brought from India by a Syrian merchant. An annual festival of St. Thomas in commemoration of this event was celebrated there on July 3rd every year and it is still celebrated in the Syrian Churches. 7

Another well-known Venetian traveller, Marco Polo, who visited South India in 1288 and 1292 mentions about the tomb of St. Thomas in South India. 8

Some believe that Christianity has a Jewish origin in India. According to this view Christianity would have come to India from Alexandria where Christians used to congregate like others for trade. The spread of Christianity in India at the early period might thus be traced with some probability 9 with the trade relations between India and Alexandria. The presence of Jewish Colonies on the Malabar Coast at the time might give credence to the belief that they might have been the first converts to Christianity. Further, the existence of a Jewish Colony (the Jewish Colony of Cochin on the West Coast of India) would very likely have attracted the Apostle who was himself of the stock of Abraham. Judging from these historical facts and from the traditions, it is not unlikely that the

7. Supra n.3 at 5.
8. Ibid at 4.
9. Supra n.2 at 8.
Apostle St. Thomas came to these parts to spread the Gospel among the Hindus of Kerala. Jesus and his disciples including St. Thomas were Jews and continued to be Jews until the Christian faith and church got established. St. Thomas might have had followers among the Jews of Kodungallur. The fact, however, that the Great Gnostic Pantaenus found a Hebrew copy of St. Mathew's Gospel here points to the probability of the first colony of Christians having been of Israelites, and not either Syrians or Persians. Even the Portuguese authorities in spite of their ruthless attempt to westernise the local 'Hindu-Christians', respected the Kerala Christian claim of apostolic origin. Portuguese historians, de Barros and de Couto, who made critical enquiries into the tradition, were satisfied about its credibility.

The Migrations

There are more authentic evidences of Indian Christians' connections with Christians of East Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia. The Syrian Church of Malabar has

10. Supra n.2 at 11-13. Also see infra chapter V n.6.
13. Supra n.11 at 49.
traditions of at least two considerable immigrations of influential people from those countries. It is believed that they settled down in India and did much to revive and strengthen the church here. The first of these immigrations is commonly ascribed to the year 345 A.D. and is said to have consisted of between three and four hundred families, men, women and children, including some clergy, under a leader called Thomas, who is variously known as Kanaye Thoma, Thomas of Cana, Thomas the Cananite, Thomas Cannaneo or Thomas of Jerusalem. The second immigration is dated 823 A.D., when a number of Christians from Persia, including two bishops, came to Quilon in Travancore and settled there, having obtained from the local ruler grants of land and various other privileges. According to A. Mingana, they built a church and erected a town in the District of Kullam, to which Syrian Bishops and Metropolitans used to come by order of the Catholicos. Contemporary evidence is available in the form of five copper plates recording various grants to the Christians. Three of these are at the Jacobite Seminary at Kottayam and the other two in the keeping of the Mar Thoma Church at Thiruvalla.  

14. Supra n.3 at 28.  
15. A. Mingana, "The Early Spread of Christianity in Asia and the Far East". (1925) Manchester University, at 45.  
16. Supra n.3 at 31.
Indeed both these settlers and those at Cranganore seem to have absorbed the Christian communities they found on the spot, so that later generations reckoned themselves as descendants of the Syrian Colonists and came to be known as Syrian Christians. There may well have been other occasions when Syrians or Persians came and settled in India, for the Syrians were great traders.  

Thus, two views with regard to the origin of Christianity in India are prevalent among scholars. One is based on the tradition of St. Thomas. The other is based on the theory of Christianity having been introduced into India by the East Syrian traders who came to Malabar coast during the early centuries. Those who subscribe to the first view do not however deny the mission of the East Syrian merchants strengthening an already existing community.

While the tradition of Apostolic origin of Christianity in India cannot be fully tested by the criteria of modern historical research, one tends to agree with the declaration made by Jawaharlal Nehru in the Lok Sabha on 3rd December, 1955 that Christianity was as old in India as the religion itself and that, as a religion, it found its roots in India even before it went to countries like England, Portugal and Spain. At any rate, it has been accepted by most historians

17. Ibid. at 31-32.
including Vincent Smith that Malabar tradition of the visit of St. Thomas is as nearly as history. The conclusion seems to be obvious that Christianity came to India in the first century A.D.

The Syrian Christians of the Malabar coast continued their links with Syria-Mesopotamia and accepted Bishops who were sent from Syria-Mesopotamia and their church remained an Eastern Church not owing allegiance to Rome and to the Pope. These Syrian Christians continued to maintain their customs and traditions as conversion to Christianity had not brought about any change in them except in the matter of faith. One historian says:

"They are Hindus by race and they speak Malayalam language which is spoken by their neighbours."  

In their physical appearance and many of their general characteristics, the Syrian Christians were very like the Nayars, but in some respects they differed from them.


According to another author there were several survivals of Hindu custom among the Syrian Christians, but with the spread of English education and increasing contact with European Christians they were gradually dying out. The Syrian Christians, before the sixteenth century, appear to have belonged to the village organisation of the Hindus and retained most of their manners and customs.

The Syrian Christians in former times were mostly merchants trading with foreign countries on a large scale. The rulers of the land conferred on them high privileges which were embodied in the two copper-plate charters, the date of the grant of one of which, according to Dr. Burnell's calculations, being 744 A.D. The second charter was granted in 824 A.D. These two charters throw a good deal of light on the social conditions of the Syrian Christians during the seventh and eighth centuries. The Christians like the Jews were assimilated into the main

22. Supra n. 2 at 132.
stream of Malayalis, and the position assigned to them and the Jews was that of practical equality with the Nairs of the six hundred of the nad in respect of the two characteristic functions and privileges of protectors and superiors for a share of the produce of their land in compensation for their services. The duties of the Jewish and Syrian communities were also to protect the town of Palliyar or the church people in union with the six hundred of the nad; and the church people had to render to them and the king trustworthy accounts of the shares of the produce of the land. In sum, the Syrian Christians were recognised among the 'noble races of Malabar'.

These Christians were directly under the King, and were not subject to local chiefs. They were given seats by the side of kings and their chief officers. Sitting on carpets, a privilege enjoyed by the ambassadors, was also conceded to them. The power exercised by them could be gauged from what has happened in Parur in the 16th century. According to L.K. Ananthakrishna Ayyar, in the 16th century when the Rajah of Parur wished to concede certain

24 See supra n.2 at 51-54.
privileges to the Nayars in his dominion, the Syrian Christians resented and immediately declared war against him if he persisted. Conscious of his inability to enforce his will, in opposition to theirs, he was obliged to leave the matters on their ancient footing. The immunities and honours above mentioned enhanced the dignity of their bishop very considerably.25

Another author says that the Syrian Christians of Kerala form the perfect example of thorough assimilation of a culture into another. Christian in essentials, they are cent per cent Indian in their way of life. With a Christian ancestry as old as that of Antioch and Rome, they have ever been loyal to the Christian ideals and proud of the Christian heritage. No less loyal to and proud of their motherland, have they proved themselves down the centuries. And still the ancient Kerala culture, has been this community's heirloom.26

At the arrival of the Portuguese in India, the Christians appeared as a fairly prosperous trading and

25. Ibid. at 55.
26. See supra n.11 at 47-48.
land owning community, reckoned by the Hindus as equivalent to one of their higher castes. Indeed they were influenced by some customs peculiar to Hindu culture such as untouchability. 27

Prior to the establishment of Courts, 28 it is said, the Government of the Syrian Christians both in temporal and spiritual matters devolved on the Bishop in whose diocese they belonged. 29 The Bishop was the judge in all civil and ecclesiastical causes within his diocese. The local Princes and judges had no concern with them except in criminal matters. 30 As such the Syrian Christians had a well settled position in this country. But their interaction with the Portuguese changed them in many ways.

Vasco da Gama reached India and landed near Calicut in 1498 A.D. 31 Trading stations were established along the West Coast, and the Portuguese influence steadily

27. See supra n.3 at 36.
29. See supra n.2 at 135.
30. E.M. Philip, "The Indian Church of St. Thomas", L.M. Press. (1950) Nagarcoil, at 421. Also see supra n.3 at 46.
grew. As they sought to establish a permanent position in Asia, to carry on their commercial activities without hindrance, they captured Goa and made it the centre of administration and the capital of all Portuguese settlements in Asia. Though they were friendly to the Syrian Christians at first, their attitude underwent a change later.\textsuperscript{32} They worked vigorously to win the Syrian Christians to the Roman Catholic communion to which they belonged. Despite their efforts they could not win over the Syrian Christians. This led the Portuguese to an open conflict with the Syrian Bishops, in which the Portuguese adopted the most odious and tyrannical measures. Mar Joseph, the Bishop of the Syrian Christians, was arrested, brought to Goa and from there deported by sea to Portugal on route to Rome. Meanwhile the Syrians in Malabar had sent word to Mesopotamia for another bishop, for no one expected Mar Joseph to return.

On representations made by the Syrian Christians, Mar Abraham, a genuine Nestorian from Mesopotamia, reached Malabar in

\input\textsuperscript{32}: See supra n.2 at 25.
disguise and began to function as their Bishop.\(^{33}\) Thereafter, Mar Joseph returned to Malebar with the approval of the Pope. Though the Portuguese had no trust in Mar Joseph, they were compelled to support him in the struggle for power and position between Mar Abraham and Mar Joseph. The Portuguese then arrested Mar Abraham and shipped him off for Europe on a voyage that was to prove adventurous. While the ship was at Mozambique, he escaped from the ship and from there he managed to make his way to Mesopotamia.\(^{34}\) There he was reconsecrated by the Chaldian Patriarch. He then went to Rome, and met Pope Pius IV, who consecrated him afresh as Archbishop of Angamali, the head quarters of the Syrian diocese (near Cranganore). Mar Abraham adopted this course of action apparently to get the support of the Pope against the Portuguese interference. He managed to reach Malabar and entered upon his office. According to Tisserant, Mar Joseph seemed to have been removed from office by this time.\(^{35}\) Mar Abraham seems to have made a genuine attempt to fulfill the role assigned to him as Bishop of an Eastern Church acknowledging the Pope. But he was

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33. See supra n.3 at 77.
34. Ibid. at 77.
entitled to retain the Syrians' customs. But the Portuguese had little sympathy; their aim was to bring the Malabar Syrians effectively under the padroado. 36

Mar Abraham attended the provincial Synod of Goa in 1585, and was obliged to assent to a series of Canons, some of which have been highly unwelcome to him. 37 On his return, he tried to assert his independence, but he died early in 1597. Upon his death, the (Portuguese) Arch Bishop of Goa, Alexis de Menezes, decided to take charge of the Syrian diocese. Though the Syrian Christians resisted, by employing all means that were mean he managed to bring the Syrians under his control using political influence, military force and money power. 38

The Synod of Diamper, 1599 A.D

Menezes prevailed upon the Rajah of Cochin, a minor ruler in whose territory Angamali lay to conduct a synod. He issued a circular dated 14th May 1599 and ordered the Archdeacon and all Syrian Priests to attend a Synod at Diamper (Udayamperur). Each local church was ordered to send four lay delegates fully empowered to act on its

36. See supra n.3 at 79.
37. Ibid. at 80.
38. Id. at 83.
behalf. The Synod began on 20th of June 1599 and continued for seven days upto 26th of June. It was in this Synod that the Syrian church accepted, under pressure, the rule of the Portuguese hierarchy and the doctrine and many of the customs of the Western Church. 39 It was thus by a calculated effort made by the Portuguese that the Indian Church came under the control of the Pope. The general result was that they found themselves not only subject to Pope, but cut off from their mother church to be conformed to the Roman Catholicism of Europe under the control of the Portuguese Bishops, and they were compelled to become part of the western church organisation. 40

The Synod of Diamper affected the life of the Syrian Christians in more than one way as it passed various decrees concerning both spiritual and temporal matters. The Syrian Christians were following the Hindu Law in matters of succession, before the Synod. Under this system, the males alone were considered heirs. The females whether married or single were excluded, even when the parents had no sons to succeed. Thus according to this system, the parents' 39. Ibid. at 92.

40. Id. at 92.
property passed over to the males in a very remote degree of consanguinity or even in the transverse line. As a result, the females perished miserably or were driven by indigence to prostitution. The Synod declared this mode of succession to be contrary to natural equity and wholly illicit and decreed that the property must be equally distributed among the sons and daughters. The Synod decreed that whoever refused to observe this law or to make restitution should be excommunicated beyond all hope of absolution, until he obeyed this decree and made restitution.\footnote{Julian Saldanha S.J, "Conversion and Indian Civil Law". (1981) Bangalore, at 108-109.} According to another decree, the married clergy were ordered to separate from their wives, or else give up their ministry.\footnote{See supra n.3 at 95.} By the orders of Alex-de-Menezes, the popular Nestorian books (kept in the Syrian Churches) were all destroyed.\footnote{See supra n.2 at 27 and 29.} Yet, it was not possible to get the Syrian Christians to observe the decrees of the Synod which pertained to their ancestral customs, especially in matters relating to succession. This is evident from the letters written by Francis Roz, the
first Latin Bishop of Syrian Christians, to his religious superior in Aquavia. 44 The ultimate consequence of the Synod arose from the destruction of the ancient documents of the church of Syrian Christians which now makes it impossible to write a complete history of the Syrian Christians. 45

While trying to take control over the Syrian Christians, the Portuguese, at the same time, embarked upon a vigorous attempt to convert as many local Hindus of the lower castes to Christianity as possible and their converts came to be known as the Latinites or the Catholics of the Latin rite. They also got some Syrian Christians into their fold. The new converts of the Latin rite as well as the Syrian Christians were then governed by the Jesuits who belonged to the Latin rite of the Portuguese.

The Coonen Cross Revolt of 1653 A.D

But the Jesuit supremacy became so intolerable to the Syrian Christians that they resolved to have a bishop of


45. See supra n.35 page XIII of Introduction. Also see supra n.3 at 95.
their own from the East and applied to Babylon, Alexandria, Antioch and other headquarters, as if these ecclesiastics possessed the same creed. A man named Ahatalla, otherwise known as Mar Ignatius, was accordingly sent by the Patriarch of Antioch but was on the way intercepted by the Portuguese who secured him at Goa and shipped him off to Europe. According to another account he was either drowned in the Cochin harbour or burned at the Inquisition at Goa. This cruel deed provoked a large body of Syrian Christians to meet in solemn conclave at the (coonen) Cross at Mattancherry in Cochin, and with one voice renounced their allegiance to the church of Rome. This incident took place on 3rd January, 1653 and it made an epoch in the history of the Syrian Church and led to a separation of the community into two parties, viz, the Pazzhayakuru (the Romo-Syrians) who adhered to the church of Rome according to the Synod of Diamper, and the Puthenkuru, (the Jacobite Syrians) who after the oath at the (coonen) Cross, got Mar Gregory from Antioch and acknowledged the spiritual supremacy thereof. Thereafter, the Jacobite Syrian Christians got split up into different groups in course of time.


47. See supra n.2 at 27-28.
THE VARIOUS DENOMINATIONS OF CHRISTIANS IN SOUTH INDIA

1. THE SYRIAN CATHOLICS (Romo-Syrians)

(i) Syro-Malabar Rite

They are the Romo-Syrians (Pazhayakuru) who form 62.90% of the total number of Catholics in Kerala. They are under the sacred congregation for the Oriental Churches (Rome) and are divided into two provinces (Arch Dioceses), viz, Ernakulam and Changanacherry. The dioceses under the Arch diocese of Ernakulam are Ernakulam, Trichur, Irinjalakuda, Tellicherry, Kothamangalam, Mananthavady and Palghat. The dioceses under the Arch dioceses of Changanacherry are, Changanacherry, Kottayam, Palai and Kajirappally. The diocese of Kottayam has a special jurisdiction over all the southists (Syrian Knanaya Catholics) and thus it remains an exclusive group.48

With the creation of a new Major Archepiscopate for the Syro-Malabar Church, it has attained the juridical status with its Synod to legislate and decide upon its legitimate prescriptions and customs. This follows from the

Apostolic Constitution, *Quae maiori*, dated 16th December, 1992. The Catholics of the Syro-Malabar Rite undertake missionary apostolate from 1962 onwards in Chanda, Ujjain, Satna, Sagar, Jagadalpur, Bijnor and Rajkot in North India. Their personal law is to be found in the "Code of Canons of the Eastern Churches" promulgated by the Pope in 1990 and in the Particular Laws framed thereunder. Of late this has been recognised as the Code of their personal law by the High Court of Kerala.

11) **The Syro-Malankara Rite**

They form 5.35% of the total number of Catholics in Kerala. They are a break-away group from the Jacobite Syrians (Puthenkuru) who thereafter accepted the Pope as the head of the church. This re-unification to the church of Rome took place in September, 1930. For the Syro-Malankara Church two ecclesiastical provinces were erected with Trivandrum as Metropolitan See and Tiruvalla as


suffragan. The Metropolitan See of Trivandrum consists of Trivandrum, Kottarakara, Adoor, Pathanamthitta, Mavelikara, Kayamkulam and Chengannoor. The eparchy of Tiruvalla comprises Tiruvalla, Niranam, Kottayam, Muvattupuzha and Kunnammulam. Those who are reunited to the Catholic Church from the southists, though belonging to the Syro-Malankara rite, are usually under the jurisdiction of the southist Chaldeo-Malabar Hierarchy of Kottayam to keep their identity. 51

II. The Jacobite (Jacobite Syrian Christians)

The term "Jacobite" is derived from the name of a bishop, Jacob Baradai (542-577 A.D) of Mesopotamia (Persia) who was an adherant to the theory of Monophysistism. In 1665 a Jacobite bishop, Gregorius of Jerusalem, came to Kerala accepting the invitation from the local people for a validly ordained bishop. Those who received "new faith" from Mar Gregorius began to be known as "Puthenkuru". This community has a long history of internal split and re-unions. Bishop Vattasseril Mar Dionysius was ordained Bishop and appointed the Jacobite Bishop in 1908 by Patriarch Abdulla of Antioch. But the Patriarch Abdulla's claim of complete jurisdiction over the Jacobite church including rights over the property of the Jacobite Church was not accepted by Mar Dionysius and other lay leaders of the church. In 1911, the Patriarch dismissed bishop

Mar Dionysius and bishop Mar Kurillos was appointed in his place. Thus two parties emerged in the Jacobite church, the bishop's party and the patriarch's party. This was followed by a series of litigations between the parties.\textsuperscript{52} In 1958, the Bishop's party got a favourable decision from the Supreme Court.\textsuperscript{53} Immediately thereafter, the two parties united at Kottayam in 1958. But soon thereafter, the Patriarch's party realised that their interests were at stake and again there was a split in between the parties, followed by a spate of litigations and they are still continuing. The Patriarch's party is now known as the Jacobite Church and the Bishop's party is known as the Malankara Orthodox Church.

The Malankara Orthodox Church is also known as the Metran's Party, Or Katholiko's Party. Today they have adopted the name 'Orthodox Church', with the assumption that it is the church that has preserved the true Christian faith. The struggle between Patriarch wing and the Bishop's wing took a new dimension in 1974 and it still continues.\textsuperscript{54} The dispute between the parties was adjudicated by the Hon'ble High Court of Kerala wherein Justice T. Chandrasekharan Menon held that the church in Malankara is not purely an episcopal church and


\textsuperscript{54} See supra n.51 at 50.
individual parish churches have independent status.\textsuperscript{55} This was taken up in appeal before a Division Bench of the High Court of Kerala which held:-

"Parish churches are not congregational or independent but are constituent units of the Malankara Church; they have fair degree of autonomy subject to the supervisory powers vesting in the Managing Committee of the Malankara Association, Catholicos and the Malankara Metropolitan as the case may be. Administration of the day to day affairs of Parish churches vests in Parish assembly and elected committees of the parishes".\textsuperscript{56}

The matter has now gone before the Hon'ble Supreme Court of India.\textsuperscript{57} Though the matter has not been finally decided yet, the two parties have formed themselves

\textsuperscript{55} Moran Mar Baselius Marthoma Mathews I. v. Most Rev. Paulose Mar Anthnasios, O.S.No.4 of 1979. (Also see 41 T.L.R 1; 45 T.L.R 116; 45 T.L.T 116; 13 T.L.R 101 for further details).


\textsuperscript{57} Civil Appeal No.4958 to 4960 of 1990 on the file of the Hon'ble Supreme Court is still pending.
into two different churches for all practical purposes viz,
(i) The Jacobite Church and,
(ii) The Malankara Orthodox Church.

III. THE MARTHOMITES

The origin of the Marthomites (the Marthoma Syrian Church) may be said to date from the ex-communication of Mar Mathew Athanasius in 1875. The Marthomites are 'Protestant' in doctrine, but of orientals or Jacobites in the externals. It adopted a largely democratic constitution for the church. They are mostly distributed in the districts of Quilon, Allepey and Kottayam. They are a break-away group from the Jacobite Syrian Christians. 58

IV. St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India

This church is an off-shoot from the Marthomites. There emerged two groups, Traditionalists and the Progressivists in the Mar Thoma Church. In the struggle for supremacy there were litigations and when the Progressivist group was defeated they decided to start a new church, and it was inaugurated at Thiruvalla. This church is affiliated to the International Council of Christian Churches. 59

58. See supra n.51 at 52-53. For further details see 23 T.L.R; 171; 26 T.L.R 148; 18 T.L.R 222; 20 T.L.R 131 and 23 T.C.R 171. The famous Maramon Convention is conducted by the Marthomites.

59. See supra n.51 at 59.
V. Thozhiyoor Sabha (Anjoor Sabha)

This is a section separated from the Jacobite Church. They follow the same beliefs and practices of the Jacobite Church. They are also known as "Malabar Swatantra Suri Cal Sabha" (Malabar Independent Syrian Church). The Jacobites tried to capture the church and property of the Thozhiyoor Sabha, but could not succeed in their attempt since the court verdict was in favour of the Thozhiyoor Church.\(^{60}\)

VI. The Nestorians

Nestorians are the followers of Nestorius who broke away from some of the traditional teachings of the Catholic Church.\(^{61}\) There is dispute about the time of the beginning of Nestorian Church in Kerala. In 1907, there were Nestorians in Trichur under the Nestorian Patriarch, who sent a Nestorian bishop. At the initial stage all the Christians of Trichur except four families followed the Nestorian faith. But later many of them were reunited to the Catholic Church reducing the Nestorian Community smaller in size.\(^{62}\)


62. See supra n.60 at 149-163.
VII. **Church of South India (C.S.I)**

The Church of South India was formed in 1947 out of the union of three Protestant Churches in South India, namely Anglican, London Mission and Wesleyan Methodist. The Anglicans had some followers from the Syrian Christians. The London Mission had followers most of whom were converts from the Nadar Community and the depressed classes. The community of C.S.I is divided into four districts for administration in Kerala: South Kerala, Madhya Kerala, East Kerala, and North Kerala. Each district is under a bishop.63

VIII. **The Latin Catholics**

The Catholics of the Latin Rite are later converts to Christianity when compared to the Syrian Christians. It is said that they are the descendants of the converts of St. Francis Xavier, Fr. Miguel Vaz and other Portuguese Missionaries after the year 1500 A.D.64 According to a report prepared by Msgr. Francis Xavier, Carmelite Vicar Apostolic of Malabar in 1832, the Latin Christians of Malabar were in three classes, firstly, those of mixed indigenous and European blood called Topass, Parenghi, Munnuttikkar; secondly, 

64. See supra n.2 at 253.
those of a caste called Mucua, including the caste of Anjuttikkar and the third group with Malabar blood who were not of Mucua lineage and their common name was Ezhunnuttikkar. Among them were persons originally from all castes from the highest Brahmin to the lowest exterior castes. Anthropologists have categorized the Latin Catholics into the following divisions:

a) Three Hundred, b) Five Hundred, c) Seven Hundred, d) Sixty-Four.

a) Three Hundred

The community of "Three Hundred" or "Munnuttikkar" are the Latins or 'Topasses' so named from the wearing of hats. The 'Topasses' are said to have sprung from the old Portuguese settlers and the low caste women of the soil. In other words, the Topass Christians were the sons of Indian mothers and fathers from diverse European nations.

b) The Five Hundred

The members of this community are known as 'Mukkuvans' or 'Kadakodies'. Their origin is attributed to

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65. See supra n.55 at 113.
67. See supra n.2 at 257.
68. See supra n.58 at 89 and 239.
the conversion of the multitude of fishermen who were 
baptised after the year 1532. The members of this community
in the extreme south are known as Paraver or Chavalakkar.
Subsequently they changed their caste name to Cochikkar
and during the first half of the 19th century into Anjuttikkar.69
They were under the protection of the Portuguese and the
Dutch.

c) Seven Hundred

The "Seven Hundred" or Ezhunnuttikkar were
also under the protection of the Portuguese and the Dutch.
They were trained in the art of war and it is said that there
were 700 soldiers under each commandant. It is also said that
in the Portuguese or Dutch Fort of Cochin, there were seven
hundred soldiers who were engaged as Watchmen. Dr. Day and
Vischer affirm that the community known as the "Seven Hundred"
is made up of the low caste converts from Izhuvans, Pulayans
and Parayans.70

d) Sixty-Four

The Arawatnalkar (the community of the sixty-four)
is said to have consisted originally of converted Brahmins
and Nayars.71

69. See supra n.2 at 255-256.
70. Ibid at 254-255.
71. Ibid. at 258.
The Five Hundred and the Seven Hundred now claim that their ancestors were Syrian Christians who after abandoning their rite of worship for some reason or other, joined the Portuguese missionaries and adopted their ritual. Each of these two communities asserts their superior social status over the other. Agriculture and trade are the chief occupations of the vast majority of the community of the seven hundred. The community of Five Hundred live mostly by fishing. The Topasses at present follow various trades. The aforesaid nicknames are now being disclaimed by the respective communities. The Latin Catholics are now found all over India spread in about eighty six Dioceses. They are mainly the converts from the local areas.

IX. The Brethren Church

The Church of Brethren was established in Kerala in 1895. Many conversions took place from among the Marthomites, and Kumbanadu near Thiruvalla was selected as the centre for their activities in Kerala. The Brethren movement, which emphasised the study of the Bible and right living, originated in Germany in 1708. It came to Kerala from England. They were more interested in getting followers.

72. Id. at 253.
73. See Id. at 273-275.
74. See supra n.58 at 55.
from the existing churches than in converting non-Christians.
It does not have bishops or priests but for practical
purposes, it has elders who conduct ceremonies like baptism
and marriage. It does not have church buildings, instead
it has assembly halls.\textsuperscript{75}

X. The Pentecostal Churches

The Pentecostal Church originated in the
United States of America.\textsuperscript{76} It came to Kerala through
Mr. Berg, a German Protestant Missionary, in 1909.\textsuperscript{77} It has
no bishops or priests and its congregations are placed under
pastors. It has no church building and their places of
worship are known as "faith homes". This sect is more keen
to win over members of existing churches than in converting
non-Christians. They believe in faith healing and avoid
medicine.\textsuperscript{78} Because of disagreement between the leaders, this
church was divided into different groups leading to the
evolution of many Pentecostal Churches.\textsuperscript{79}

XI. The Church of God

It is of American origin. It was Pastor
Cook who started its work in Kerala in 1913. The very name

\textsuperscript{75} See supra n.55 at 116.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. at 116.
\textsuperscript{77} See supra n.58 at 56.
\textsuperscript{78} See supra n.55 at 117.
\textsuperscript{79} See supra n.67 at 229.
implies a profession of faith in God as the only founder of the church and a protest against other "man-made" institutions. Any person who believes in Lord Jesus Christ can be a member of this church. In Chengannoor, Haripad, Poovathur, Cheppad, Pandalam, Pazhanji and Chalissery there are established houses for this church.

XII. The Salvation Army

It is a non-sectarian religious organisation founded in London by William Booth in 1865. They started their work in India by 1882. The church is founded on the pattern of the British Army, with uniforms, brass bands, titles, marching orders, furloughs and knee drills. It has no episcopacy or clergy, but it has officers with different ranks to supervise its work. Its places of worship are called 'halls' and there are no altars in them. They have done remarkable work with the depressed classes especially the Pulayas in the former Travancore and Cochin States. They co-operate with the Mar Thoma Church and the Church of South India in preaching the Gospel and in the work of Bible society and the Y.M.C.A.

80. See supra n.58 at 60.
81. See supra n.55 at 117.
82. See supra n.67 at 275-277.
83. See supra n.58 at 56.
84. See supra n.55 at 117-118.
XIII. The Seventh Day Adventist Church

This church was founded in America. Its head-quarters have been in Washington D.C., since 1903. The church government is based on democratic principles. Poona is the head-quarters of this congregation in India. In Kerala they started their work in 1915 and have now more than one hundred centres. The main centres of their activities are Trivandrum, Kottayam, Kottarakara and Pathanamthitta.

XIV. The Lutheran Church

The Lutheran Church in Kerala may be included in the presbyterian section of the Protestant Church. They claim to be the real descendants of Martin Luther, the German reformer, and believe that their church alone is true, outside of which there is no salvation. They started their work at Peroorkada near Trivandrum in 1911 and now they have spread to other localities in Kerala.

XV. Yuyomayam (Anchara Vedam)

It is a break away group from the Anglicans. There are also some Marthomites and Hindu

85. See supra n.51 at 56-57.
86. Ibid. at 63.
87. See supra n.55 at 118.
converts in this group. This church was founded by Justus Joseph (Vidwan Kutty). On his death in 1903, his son Jacobu Kutty became the leader of the church. There were different shades of opinion as to whether the members of the Yuyomayam sect were Christians. But the High Court of Kerala held that the members of Yuyomayam sect are Christians.

XVI. **Jehovah's Witnesses**

It is a movement started by Russel Charles Taze who travelled on preaching missions throughout the U.S.A and Europe. He denied the existence of hell and the doctrine of Trinity. Presently this sect operates from Brooklyn, Newyork. Its followers came to Mallappally, near Thiruvalla in 1925 and started their work. It has of late been held by the Courts that "Jehovah's witnesses" are not a denomination by itself within the meaning of Article 26 of the Constitution of India. They are only members of a corporate body. They basically subscribe to the fundamental notions of

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88. See supra n.58 at 59.
89. Achamma Thomas v. Aleyamma Thomas, 1968 K.L.T 48 (DB). Also see Travancore Christian Committee Report (1912) at 61. In this Report the Committee found that members of Yuyomayam sect denied that they were Christians. The above decision was rendered without reference to the Christian Committee Report.
90. See supra n.58 at 61-62.
Christianity. Jehovah's Witnesses therefore cannot be said to constitute a denomination different from the believers of Christian religion.\(^9\) In 1986, while considering the question whether Jehovah's Witnesses are Christians, the Court quoted with approval a decision of the Australian High Court\(^2\) and held that Jehovah's Witnesses are Christians.\(^3\)

XVII. The Cheramar Daiva Sabha

This church was established by Solomon Markose, a Christian convert from Pulaya community as he was very much disappointed by the treatment meted out to the converts from Pulaya community by the Syrian Christians in Kerala. Its aim was the social and spiritual upliftment of the Pulayas. He had some followers and his congregations are to be found at six places in central Travancore.\(^4\)

XVIII. Chaldean Syrians (Surayikal)

In 1874, the Chaldean Patriarch sent a bishop named Mellus, a Roman Catholic, to Malabar. He was


later suspended and ex-communicated by the Pope. He revolted and refused to obey the Pope. He retained a following at Trichur and elsewhere. In 1887 the Chaldean Patriarch made formal submission to Rome and recalled bishop Mellus from India. In 1887, before leaving India, bishop Mellus appointed Mar Abdeso and a Chorepiscopus in charge of the people who adhered to him. In 1889 bishop Mellus submitted himself to Rome, but Mar Abdeso was not reconciled and kept alive the independent Syro-Chaldean Church of Malabar. This church is also known as the Church of Trichur and its followers are also called Chaldean Syrians.

In addition to the aforementioned churches, there are other smaller churches in Kerala and new ones are taking birth as time passes on, but none of the newer Churches has made any impact either in the social, religious or legal circles.

The other South Indian States have also considerable Christian population. Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh, ——

95. See supra n.58 at 64.

Maharashtra, Karnataka, Goa, and Pondicherry together account for 41% of the total Christian population in India.\(^{97}\) They are mostly Latin Catholics and of different denominations of Protestant Christians. The Protestants have united and formed the church of South India (C.S.I) on 27th September, 1947.\(^{98}\)

**THE CHRISTIANS OF NORTH INDIA**

The consolidation of British rule in India paved the way for the Christian Missionaries to establish educational institutions in North India. As the great majority of the Britishers were not Catholics but Protestants, the missionaries who followed them also happened to be mostly Protestants. The Church of Scotland was followed by the Basel Mission and the American Presbyterian Mission. During the first war of Indian Independence in 1857, missionaries as well as other Europeans were attacked, and Indian Christians also suffered because of their connexion with Europeans.

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97. Kerala accounts for about 31.60% of the Christian population in India and the other South Indian States account for about 41%, thus Christians in South India represent about 73% of the total Christian population of India.

98. See supra n.63.
About twenty mission workers are known to have lost their lives in the War; many more must have lost their lives without any record. As a result of the War, the administration in India was brought directly under the British Government and this made a very favourable environment for Christian Missions to develop. The Methodist Episcopal Church of America, the University Missions, the English and Canadian Presbyterians, the Canadian Baptists, the society of St. John the Evangelist, etc. received new impetus to extend their work throughout the country. The Catholics were either under the Portuguese padroado or under the propaganda, under the Pope directly. Missionaries under both were at work in various parts of India and there were some conversions among the higher castes, but the great majority came from the Sudras and the depressed classes and from aboriginal tribes. In 1950, there was an agreement between Rome and Portugal, whereby Portugal renounced what remained of her padroado rights in dioceses within the Indian Union, and undertook to consider a revision of the boundaries of the arch-diocese of Goa accordingly. Thus, there are both Protestants and Catholics of the Latin Rite in

99. See supra n.3 at 181-189.
100. Ibid. at 190.
101. Id. at 223.
the northern and southern side of the Vindhyas. The Protestant churches in North India, later formed themselves into the Church of North India, in 1970. The constituents of the Church of North India are the United Church of Northern India, the (Anglican) Church of India, Pakistan, Burma, and Ceylon, the (British and Australian) Methodist Church and the Council of the Brethren and the Disciples of Christ. The only major faction that opted out of the unity move was the Methodist Church of Southern Asia. 102

There is a considerable number of Latin Catholics in Bombay, Pune, Raigarh, Ranchi, Sambalpur and other North Indian dioceses. In short, the North Indian Christians can be mainly grouped into two categories viz, Catholics of the Latin Rite and Protestants belonging to the Church of North India.

CHRISTIANS IN NORTH-EAST INDIA

There is considerable presence of Christians in the North-East India103 consisting of the States of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Tripura, Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. As per the Census Report 1971, these States have


about 12.55% of India's Christian population. Ethnically they represent an admixture of relatively pure strains of the Dravidian, Mongoloid and Aryan racial groups. The people of the plains are largely Hindus. Christians form only a small portion of the population in the plains. The hills surrounding the plains are inhabited by a number of tribes of the Indo-Mongoloid group. Their traditional culture is primitive. It is among these hillsmen that the Christian movement has taken roots.

A small Catholic settlement of refugee 'Portuguese' soldiers dating back to the early 18th century could be found at Bondashill in the Cachar District of Assam. They did not evangelise the local population and remained isolated and outside the mainstream of the Christian movement and they still remain so. Mission Stations were opened by the Protestant Missionaries especially after the British established their political power over Assam after the Anglo-Burman War (1824-1826). The efforts of Welsh Presbyterians led to a substantial number of conversions to Christianity and the Presbyterian Church had a large number of Christians converted.

104. See supra n.3 at 267.

105. Dr. O.L. Snaitang, "Christianity and Social Change in North-East India" (1993) Calcutta, at 43. The British claimed sovereignty over most of the North East after the War.
from Khasi tribe. The American Baptists could convert a good number of Garos, the second major tribe of Meghalaya and they are associated with the Garo Baptist Churches. The Garos have the largest number of Christians of any single tribe. The Baptists could effect conversion from the Ao tribe in Nagaland. The Anglicans mainly worked among the Cacharis. The Roman Catholics made their headquarters in Shillong. The Boros were evangelised by the Santal Mission of Bengal. The American Baptists began their work in Manipur and the Welsh Presbyterians and British Baptists in Mizoram. After the First World War, there was rapid growth of the Christian community in Meghalaya, Mizoram, Manipur and Nagaland.

After the failure of the Kuki Rebellion of 1917-19 in Manipur, the Kuki tribesmen in the interior areas turned to Christianity, but they preserved their lifestyle and culture and kept their identity in the midst of change.106 After the Second World War, the Roman Catholics took up their work in the Garo Hills, and there was rapid expansion for the Roman Catholic Church.107 Till independence, Roman Catholics had been permitted to work only in Meghalaya and Assam plains, and to a certain extent in Tripura. But in the post independence period such restrictions were removed and this led to a rapid growth of the Catholic Church.

106. See supra n.3 at 271.
107. See supra n.105 at 81.
In this area. The largest groups in the North Eastern area are the Presbyterian and Roman Catholic Churches, but there are a number of smaller groups that have also played a role in the changes that have taken place.\(^{108}\) The various Christian denominations in the North-Eastern States are the following:

1. **The Presbyterian Church of North-East India**

   The Welsh Missionaries (of Wales) entered the Khasi-Jaintia Hills on 22 June, 1841 and their efforts at evangelisation led to a few conversions to Christianity. But the spread of Christianity was mainly due to the work of Khasi-Jaintia Christians themselves rather than the activities or financial investment of missionaries.\(^{109}\) When it came to be organised into a local Church, it assumed the name of the Presbyterian Church of North East India. By 1989, the Presbyterian Church had more than 200 churches with a total membership of about 60,000 spread throughout the Jaintia area, and 84 churches with a membership of about 16,000 in the Cherrapunji-Shella area. In the entire North-East, at the turn of the century, there were only 282 local churches, while in 1988, the number increased to more than 800.\(^{110}\) The supreme legislative,

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108. See Ibid. at 6.
109. See Id. at 74.
110. See Id. at 98, 101 and 112.
administrative and executive body of the Presbyterian Church of North East India is its Synod since the re-organisation of the Church in 1953.111

2. The Catholic Church

Towards the end of 1891 the first Khasi convert to Catholicism was baptised. The German missionaries were deported when the First World War broke out and they were not permitted to return to work in India. The missionary work was first assigned to the Jesuits and then to the Salesians of Don Bosco (in 1921). By 1941, the membership of the Catholic Church increased to about 50,000. But when the Second World War broke out the work was not seriously affected as there were missionaries of other nationalities (other than German and Italian) to carry on in addition to Indian Salesians from South India. Following World War II and the attainment of independence by India, the growth of the Catholic Church throughout North East India got momentum. Though the Church was formerly under a single diocese centred in Shillong, it has now been re-organised into eight dioceses, with Shillong diocese elevated into the Archdiocese of Shillong-Guwahati in 1969. The eight dioceses are: Shillong (1934),

111. See Id. at 110-111.

3. The Anglican Church

This church did not undertake missionary work in the North-East. It looked after the needs of the British members of that Church. It received into its fold the Khasi-Jaintia who could not be married in the Presbyterian Church because of its adherence to the traditional customs of the community. This Church became a constituent of the Church of North India. The entire North East is covered by one diocese, with the Bishop residing at Shillong.

4. The Seventh Day Adventists

The Mission entered the North East region in the year 1933. It had about 1500 members in the Khasi-Jaintia hills by the end of 1989. Its main centres are Shillong and Thadlaskein.

112. See Id. at 78-81.
113. See supra n.96 at 541-545.
114. See supra n.105 at 82-83.
115. Ibid. at 83.
5. **The Church of God**

Khasi Christians who broke away from the Presbyterian Church due to ideological differences formed a new indigenous Church in 1902, called the Church of God. The growth of the Church was steady. By 1990, they established churches in 420 villages over the Khasi-Jaintia hills with a total membership of about 50,000.\footnote{116}

6. **Church of God-Ecclesia**

This is an offshoot of the Church of God. It was formed by the dissidents in 1940. While there are about 31 congregations in the Cherrapunji-Shella area in this Church with 4000 members by 1990, there has recently been a tendency for these churches to return to the mother church— the Church of God.\footnote{117}

7. **Christ National Church**

This church was established in 1924. It is a splinter group from the Presbyterian Church. They believe that marriage is not a mere civil contract but a divinely ordained religious institution concerning which the courts have no right to interfere. The Church gained some

\footnote{116}{Id. at 84-90.}
\footnote{117}{Id. at 90-91.}
ground in the East Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills. But its impact is minimal.118

8. The Assembly Church of Jesus Christ (Full Gospel)

This is yet another splinter group from the Presbyterian Church. It was formed in 1932. It strengthened its position by its association with similar organisations in the U.S.A. Its membership is reported to have been more than 6,500 in the entire Khasi-Jaintia Hills by 1990. They are also involved in missionary activities in other parts of India.119

9. All-One-in-Christ Fellowship

This Church was founded in 1955. Its impact is mainly confined to several villages in West Khasi hills and it has less than 4000 members in the whole area by 1990.120

10. The Unitarian Church

It is an indigenous Church having roots in the liberal Christian tradition. They wish to purify the traditional Khasi-religion rather than simply condemn it. With the support of foreign agencies, the Unitarian movement grew in the Khasi-Jaintia hills, but its influence on the

118. Id. at 92-93.
119. Id. at 93-95.
120. Id. at 95.
Khasi-Jaintia society is minimal.\textsuperscript{121}

Other missions like the Pentecostal Churches started by outside groups did not make any significant impact in the area.

Both the Catholics and the Protestants allowed the converts to retain the social elements of their customs such as the clan system, laws on inheritance, the land holding system, the status of women, marriage relations and village administration.\textsuperscript{122} The ancient stock of people even while embracing an alien faith resisted the attendant impositions and showed the will to retain their customs and traditions tenaciously and the Church has rightly conceded to it.

The origin of the various sects of Christians in different parts of India shows that it is not plausible to categorize the community into two factions, viz, Catholics and Protestants, as is generally done in Europe and elsewhere. This is because the Syrian Christians in Malabar formed a separate church that originated and maintained its identity outside the Roman Empire. Further,\textsuperscript{121, 122}

\textsuperscript{121} Id. at 95-97.
\textsuperscript{122} Id. at 127-129.
the converts to Christianity in various parts of India retained their customs and traditions, within the church. The Syrian Christians of Malabar mainly followed the customs and traditions of their Hindu neighbours. Therefore, the development of the church along with the Roman Empire is not a model applicable to India. The advent of the Portuguese, Dutch and the English could bring about certain western influence on the Malabar Church, but its adherence to customs and traditions having deep roots in the soil could not be changed. This is evident from the fall out of the Synod of Diamper (1599) and the Coonen Cross Revolt (1653). The latter dealt a severe blow to the efforts to westernise the Malabar Church.\textsuperscript{123}

However the advent of the Portuguese, the Dutch, the British etc. have had some impact and the latter half of the nineteenth century saw the Syrian Christians conceding to the demands of certain laws which had some impact on their marriage and divorce. This situation has paved the way for certain amount of confusion in the area of family law. This is the result of a lack of understanding of the historical background of the community. As history is the root of law and law its fruit, any law or legal system divorced from its history is most likely to fail as effective enforcement of law depends upon its being understood in proper perspectives for social acceptance.

\textsuperscript{123} See supra n.39-47 and the accompanying text.
The history of Christianity in India thus presents a peculiar picture. It could not hold on its own in spite of its organized nature. In relation to law also it cannot present a picture of unity. This is reflected in the definition of the term "Christian". The Courts in India have given a broad meaning to this term. According to judicial decisions baptism is not essential to be a Christian. Further, a person would continue to be a Christian even after excommunication, if he professes the Christian faith. In short:-

"Consensus of judicial opinion is that one who professes the Christian faith, is a Christian and that baptism or ex-communication, is not determinative".

This is also the tenor of the definitions given in the various statutes affecting Christians in India.


126. See supra n.50 at 59.

127. See section 3 of the Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872 and section 3 of the Cochin Christian Civil Marriage Act, 1920 and section 2(d) of the Indian Succession Act, 1925.
Also, the denominational differences have been recognised under the Indian Christian Marriage Act, 1872. This Act has made distinct provisions for solemnisation of marriages for different denominations of Christians in India, and even provides for recognition of Personal law of the parties to the marriage by enacting section 88. Thus, the denominational differences become relevant to-day for identification and application of the personal law of various denominations of Christians in India. Further, the evolution of the law of Christians has a direct bearing on the denominational differences among them. And this becomes evident when one examines the present laws relating to Christians in India.