CHAPTER – II

SYRIAN CHRISTIANS IN KERALA: GROWTH OF THE FAITHFUL AND CHURCH
Origin of the Syrian Christians and St. Thomas

The Syrian Christian community, the seed of which was sown as early as the first century after Christ by St. Thomas, the Apostle, flourished in the Indian social milieu against several odds for centuries together keeping its individuality intact. It was closely connected with the Syrian Church or Chaldean Church as far as liturgy and liturgical language were concerned. But it grew up in Malabar, evincing the characteristic features of an Indian institution. A particular church of this name was not spared by the colonizers who went on trying to dominate it against constant resistance on the part of the local people and even against the recommendations of the Pope, the Supreme Pontiff. Some of the bishops, sent from the Catholic hierarchies in the Middle East for the Church in Malabar, were kept behind bars for their unwillingness to be subservient to the colonizing powers. But the unquenchable desire to remain independent could not be totally wiped out through the colonial domination that lasted for a couple of centuries.

The history of the past can be reconstructed from several sources, such as the existence of a particular Christian community, a living tradition, archaeological evidences, numismatic facts, parallel evidences corroborating a living tradition, and literary sources,
besides, of course, written histories. Fully conscious of the validity of the plurality of sources, Pope John Paul II, after his historic visit to various parts of India, wrote in the subsequent year:

Since very ancient times, a considerable community of Christians known as the St. Thomas Christians has existed in Southern India. Indeed there is a very strong tradition that St. Thomas himself visited and laboured in India, both in the extreme south and in what is known today as Madras-Mylapore area. There is even a tomb in Mylapore, which is venerated as his resting place. Later on at various times, the Church in India was strengthened by other groups of Christians from the Middle East who became assimilated into the Church already there.¹

According to the ancient tradition corroborated by the existence of a community called St. Thomas Christians, literary evidence of the last quarter of the second century and archaeological sources, St. Thomas, the Apostle preached the Gospel in India when the Parthian King Gunduphara, or Gundaphares ruled Afghanistan and Punjab in the first century A.D. The name of the ruler is historical and it has been found on coins and on an inscription in

¹ Acts of Judas Thomas originated in a milieu of Upper-Mesopotamia, perhaps in Edessa. It may be dated back either to the last quarter of the second century AD or to the first years of the third century.
Gandhara.\textsuperscript{2} The veeradian pattu, the song of Rabban Thomas and the Margamkali pattu point to the South Indian Apostolate of St.Thomas.\textsuperscript{3} It is argued by Eugene Cardinal Tisserant that Acts of Judas-Thomas written in Mesopotamia support the general conviction of the contemporaries in the second century in Mesopotamia that the Apostolate of St.Thomas was in South India. Similarly Eusebius writes about Alexandrine Pantenus who found Christians in India reading the Gospel of St.Mathew probably in Aramaic or Syriac at the end of the second century.\textsuperscript{4}

The Fathers of the Church like St. Ephrem, St.Gregory Nazianzus, St.Ambrose, Gaudentius, St.Jerome, Paulinus of Nola, Ecclesiastical calendars, and martyrologies relate St.Thomas with India.\textsuperscript{5} St.Ephrem (+373) testifies that the body of St.Thomas was shifted from India to Edessa. An ancient Syrian Calendar has reference to 3 July as the day on which a lance in India pierced through St.Thomas and that a certain merchant called Khaban took his body to Edessa. The Divine Office of the East Syrians influenced by the Acts of Judas Thomas often refers to India as the field of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{2} Eugene Cardinal Tisserant, Eastern Christianity in India, A History of the Syro-Malabar Church from the Earliest time to the present Day, Bombay: 1957, p.2-3.
\item \textsuperscript{3} Placide J. Podipara, The Thomas Christians , Bombay: St. Paul Publications, 1970, p. 18-19
\item \textsuperscript{4} Tisserant, op.cit, pp. 6-7.
\item \textsuperscript{5} Placid J.Podipara, op.cit, pp. 17-18.
\end{itemize}
activity of St. Thomas, who according to the same office, died in India. These East Syrians believed that the mortal remains of St. Thomas were taken from India to Edessa. Adai and Mari, who preached the Gospel to the East Syrians, were the disciples of St. Thomas and so they had great devotion to the Apostle. *Chronicum Edessenum* (XXXVII) makes mention of the solemn deposit of the relics of St. Thomas in the Church dedicated to the Apostle in Edessa in A.D. 393 or in 705 of the Greek Era.6

The fact that St. Thomas, the Apostle preached the Gospel and converted a number of Indians to Christianity is testified by several writers like Marco Polo, the Venetian who visited the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore in 1295. He speaks of the large number of pilgrims coming to the tomb at Mylapore.7 Similarly Blessed Odorick, the Italian Franciscan wrote in 1324 about the holy remains of St. Thomas, the Apostle in Malabar and of a Church of St. Thomas.8 Marignoli, the Papal delegate to China in 1394 refers to the Church of St. Thomas and the province of India.9 Nicolo Conti,

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6 Placid J.Podipara, op.cit, p.25.
9 Ibid, pp. 93-94.
an Italian merchant (1425-1430), makes mention of the ‘Malepor’
the tomb of St. Thomas and the church of St. Thomas.\(^\text{10}\)

The Portuguese, on their arrival, were informed of the tomb of
St. Thomas at Mylapore and they conducted serious researches about
St. Thomas and the tomb. They were convinced the St. Thomas
Apostolate in South India. They issued coins in the name of the
Apostle, built a ship to his name and held firm to the tradition.\(^\text{11}\)

The bricks of the tomb of St. Thomas at Mylapore measuring
15x8” and 2.9” thick are of the same period as those found in
Arikamedu in the vicinity of Pondicherry about 150 kilometers south
of Mylapore which flourished as a Roman settlement from the first
Century B.C to the third Century A.D. This archaeological evidence
about the tomb of St. Thomas, just as the tomb of St. Peter under the
St. Peter’s Baslica, is a solid proof for the origin of the St. Thomas
Christians and their connections with St. Thomas, the Apostle. There
are no rival traditions nor rival tomb nor rival St. Thomas Christians
in the world over.\(^\text{12}\)

\(^{10}\) ‘Proceeding onwards the said Nicolo arrived at a maritime city which is named Malepur,
situated in the Second Gulf beyond the Indus-Bay of Bengal. Here the body of Saint
Thomas lies honourably buried in a very large and beautiful Church’ R.H. Major, India in

\(^{11}\) K.S. Mathew, ‘The South Indian Apostolate of St. Thomas and the Portuguese in the

\(^{12}\) Placid J. Podipara, op.cit, p.28.
A few persecutions on the Coromandel Coast drove the Christians to Thiruvancode. The seduction attributed to a Hindu conjuror Manikavachakar made a number of Christians give up Christian faith and embrace Hinduism. Some of those who wanted to remain in the Christian faith fled to places like Quilon on the Malabar Coast. The Hindu revival movement coupled with Mohammedan inroads into the South also could be instrumental in destroying Christianity in the Coromandel region especially around San Thome-Mylapore. But the tomb continued to be there.

It is quite natural that the European missionaries who came to India to preach the Gospel of Christ and convert people to Christianity wanted to show that they got Christian faith earlier than the people of the country, which they were trying to convert. Consequently for a long time these missionaries and their converts were not willing to accept the evidences regarding the south Indian apostolate of St. Thomas. Now, on account of the availability of various sources confirming the fact of the origin of St. Thomas Christians especially in the light of the scientific studies conducted by A.E. Medlycott and a good number of others, the doubt about

13 Placid J. Podipara, op.cit, p.29.
the origin of the St. Thomas Christians is satisfactorily cleared. The Euro-centric considerations of the missionaries and their converts are now left without any support and they are bound to accept the historical facts. Even those who used to raise doubt whether India was known to outsiders in the early centuries of Christianity came to know about the contacts of Rome with India through West Asia even before the dawn of Christian era such as the commercial contacts with Korkai, Arikamedu, Dharnikotta, Nagarjunakonda, Cranganore, Broach and so on. Kaveri Poompattinam or Poompuhar had even a separate section of the town occupied by the foreigners.

Some of the important families in Kerala, such as Pakalomattam, Sankarapuri, Kalli, Kalikavu, Koyakkam, Madeipur, Muttodal, Nedumpally, Panakkamattam and Kottakkali were held in great esteem by the Syrian Christians, since priesthood and prelacy for several centuries were confined to these families. Some of these Syrian Christian families trace their origin to those converted by St. Thomas.

New groups of Christians that came to Kerala at different times after the arrival of St. Thomas were added to the members of the Syrian Christians. Approximately 400 Syrian migrants under Thomas of Cana, a merchant of Jerusalem, including bishops, priests
and deacons came to India in A.D 345.\textsuperscript{15} There were two more migrations of Christians from Syria in A.D. 825 under a certain bishop called Thomas Cana.\textsuperscript{16} And later fewer than two bishops, Mar Sabarisho and Mar Peroz, who settled down in Quilon confirming the local Christians in their faith.\textsuperscript{17} Thus the community of Syrian Christians that existed at the time of the arrival of the Portuguese consisted of the St. Thomas Christians.

They followed the East Syrian language and liturgy and so they were called otherwise Syro-Malabar Catholics who were liturgically connected with the East Syrian rite and had an independent existence in Kerala on account of the local traditions and practices kept intact by them. The Church is generally known as Syro-Malabar Church, distinguishing it from the Syro-Malankara church which follows West Syrian language and liturgy and came into existence from the section of the followers of those who were converted to Christianity by St.Thomas and who left the Syrian Catholic faith in 1653 after the oath of Koonankurisu. It could be defined as the “community of Christians in India some of whom trace back their origin in faith to St.Thomas, the apostle, and others


\textsuperscript{17} Eugene, Cardinal, Tisserant, \textit{op.cit}, p. 15.
to Thomas of Cana or to other Syrian Christian immigrants and who were once hierarchically connected with the Chaldean Church of Mesopotamia and Persia”. Hence the Syro-Malabar Church as it exists at present comprises two different sections known as the Nordhists and the Sudhists (Vadakkumbhagar and the Thekkumbhagar), the former claiming their ancestry to those brought to faith in Jesus Christ by St. Thomas, the Apostle in the first century after Christ and the latter to the migrants in the fourth century.

The Indian Christians of St. Thomas came into close association with Edessa in the Middle East, certainly before the end of the second century as is evident from the composition of the Acts of Thomas. The East Syrian rite had its origin in Edessa and developed in the Seleucian Church, together with the development of that Church. Seleucian Church had always the East Syrian liturgy and this was bequeathed to the Christians in India. The Syrian Christians of Kerala were connected with the Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, now represented by the Syrian Catholic Chaldean and the dissident Nestorian churches. The name Seleucia-Ctesiphon took its origin from the twin cities of Seleucia and Ctesiphon situated on

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18 Thomas Puthiakunnel, Syro-Malabar Clergy and their General Obligations, Ernakulam, 1964, p. 1
19 Eugene, Cardinal Tisserant, op.cit, p.10.
either side of river Tigris. This Church is also known by two other
to names, namely, the Church of the East and the Babylonian Church,
because it flourished in the Persian (Sassanian) empire.\(^{20}\) A certain
bishop, David was reported in Chronicle of Seert to be leaving the
See of Bassorah in A.D. 295 to take up missionary activities in
India.\(^{21}\)

The Syro-Malabar Church of the Syrian community in India
was directly under the jurisdiction of the Persian Ecclesiastical
Provinces. Therefore, we find a certain John ‘the Persian Bishop of
all Persia and greater India’ as a signatory of the decrees of the first
Ecumenical Council of Nicea.\(^{22}\) in A.D. 325. The Bishop of
Seleucia-Ctesiphon tried to bring the bishops of Persia under his
jurisdiction in the fourth century. With the approval of the Western
Fathers Seleucia was created as a Metropolitan See and all the
bishops who resisted the attempts of the bishop of Seleucia-
Ctesiphon submitted themselves to Mar Issac at the Synod he
convened in A.D. 410. He was thus recognized as the head of all the
bishops of the country. Mar Dadjesus proclaimed in A.D 424 at the
Synod his own independence from the Patriarch of Antioch. Thus the


II, col. 1086-1088.

\(^{22}\) Labbeus, \textit{Sacrosancta Concilia}, Tom III, 1728, Vol. 304, C.VIII.
Catholicos of Seleucia began to be called Patriarch.\(^{23}\) The Seleucian Church that had broken away from the Patriarch of Antioch favoured Nestorian views. But there were many bishops in Persia and Seleucia who depended on the Syrian Catholic Antiochian See. Even when the Seleucia Church brought the Church of Persia under its jurisdiction, the latter continued to exercise its right to send bishops to India. Cosmas Indecopleustes during his travels between 520 and 525 came across Christians in Socotra and in Ceylon who were under the Persian clergy. He also makes mention of Christians in Quilon and Male, the last being interpreted as Malabar Coast.\(^{24}\) Isho.Yahb, the Patriarch of Seleucia (650-660), in his correspondence with Simeon, the Metropolitan of Riwardashir in Persia made mention of his right.\(^{25}\) In the face of resistance from the Persian bishops, who used to send bishops to India, the Seleucian Patriarch Saliba-Za-Kha (714-728) raised the Church of India to the dignity of a Metropolitan See.

Patriarch Timothy I of Seleucia (780-823) speaks about many Persian monks who voyaged across the seas towards India and


China. Later he constituted the Church of India independent of the Metropolitan of Persia and gave it a metropolitan of its own. During this period the usage of the term 'Christians of St. Thomas' indicating the Christians of Malabar came into existence for the first time. The East Syrian patriarch of Mesopotamia used to send bishops regularly to Kerala. The Church of Malabar on account of which it had a separate identity and differed from the churches in Persia and Mesopotamia also practised christianized Hindu customs.

There is no evidence to show that the Bishops sent from Persia to India were from the Nestorian Church in Persia. It is possible that bishops were sent from the Syrian Catholic See of Antioch as well as Seleucia during the period from 800 to 1200. The Antiochian Church fell into the Greek Schism in the eleventh century and the Mongolians destroyed the Persian Church in the thirteenth century. Hence, from the thirteenth century Seleucia Church alone had the jurisdiction over the Church in India and especially Malabar.

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27 George Schurhammer, The Malabar Church and Rome during the early Portuguese period and before, Trichinopoly: 1934, pp. 29ff.
28 Ibid. pp. 29ff.
Patriarch Jaballa III of Seleucia (1281-1317) had an Indian Metropolitan under him.²⁹

Mar John made Cranganore the centre of his metropolitan See in 1129.³⁰ The dependence of the Church of Malabar on Seleucian Church for jurisdiction is clear from the Syriac manuscript written in 1301 at Cranganore by Mar Jacob, the Metropolitan Bishop of the See of Divus Thomas and all the Church of Christians in India. This manuscript is preserved in the Vatican Library. Mar Jabbalaha was the Patriarch of all the oriental churches when this manuscript was written.³¹

A letter written by the bishops of Malabar to the Patriarch of Baghdad in 1504 speaks of the consecration of two monks from the coenobium of St. Eugenius under the names of Mar Thomas and Mar John at the request made by three illustrious men from India who came to the Patriarch in 1490. This was done during the patriarchate of Mar Simon. After a year Mar Thomas went from India to the Patriarch and reported about the Malabar Christians and Mar John continued to be in Malabar. Mar Thomas came back to Malabar in 1503 along with three other bishops consecrated by Mar Elias, the


³⁰ Ibid, p.599

Patriarch of that time. These three bishops were Mar Jabbalaha, Mar Denha and Mar Jacob. Thus there were five bishops in Malabar in 1503. Of them Mar Jacob alone lived until 1552 looking after the administration of the Church in Malabar. St. Francis Xavier was a great friend and admirer of Mar Jacob and so he wrote to the king of Portugal about the way in which the bishop Mar Jacob was maltreated and misunderstood by the Portuguese in Malabar. The report of St. Francis Xavier is a clear indication that Mr. Jacob who followed the catholic faith in Malabar was true Christian.

This relation with the Church of Persia lasted till the end of the sixteenth century when the Syro-Malabar Church and the Syrian Christian community was brought under the Portuguese Padroado after Mar Abraham (1568-97).

The Portuguese, who were interested in firmly establishing their Padroado rights over the church of Malabar, found the presence of Chaldean bishops a great hindrance. So they took all measures not to allow any more Chaldean bishops to come to Malabar after the death of Mar Jacob. As a result, Mar Joseph, the brother of John Sulaka, the Chaldean Patriarch who made his profession of faith before Pope Julius III, was detained in Portuguese

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33 Thomas Puthiakunnel, op.cit, p.9
Bassein in 1556.\textsuperscript{34} This proves that the chief factor that played an important role in the conflict between the Portuguese and the Syro-Malabar Church was not concerned with matters of faith but with the eagerness to assert the rights of Padroado. One could recall the constant fights picked up by the Portugues with the Congregation of the Propagation of faith in a later period. The existence of two churches, one belonging to the Padroado and the other belonging to the Propaganda Fide, both of which were under the Latin Church, on the eastern coast of India can substantiate this view. Moreover, the lack of familiarity with a Church other than the Latin Church coupled with the inordinate passion to keep off the influence of Protestant Reformation striking root in Europe in the first half of the sixteenth century must also have prompted them to assume a hostile attitude towards the Syro-Malabar Church and its bishops who keep different traditions, customs and manners. The Portuguese claimed that they had jurisdiction over the Syro-Malabar Church and so they retained Mar Joseph and the two Dominicans for eighteen months in Bassein.

When the Portuguese found that Mar Joseph was properly trained in Latin practices, they sent him to Malabar. But on reaching

\textsuperscript{34} J.C. Panjikaran, The Syrian Church in Malabar, Trichinopoly: 1914, p.45.
Malabar he turned out to be totally against the Latinizing spirit of the Portuguese and refused to ordain clerics not instructed in Syriac language. On account of his opposition to the Latinization initiated by the Portuguese, he was accused of Nestorian tendencies. He went to Rome and Portugal in 1557 where he explained his position. His innocence was proved and he was proposed to be a Cardinal. This would not have been sensible if he had belonged to a heretic or schismatic Church. On the eve of his nomination; however, he died in 1569 in Rome.35

In the meantime, the Chaldean Patriarch sent Mar Abraham to Malabar. He too was detained by the Portuguese and was deported to Portugal. But he escaped from the Portuguese on reaching Mozambique and went to his Patriarch who sent him to Pope with letters of recommendation. The Pope sent him back to Malabar recommending him to the Portuguese. The Portuguese detained him in prison in Goa from where he escaped and reached Malabar. Mar Abraham was given the title of Angamalee by the East Syrian Patriarch at the recommendation of the Pope.36 The people of Malabar received him with great happiness.37 He was also called

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35 J.C. Panjikaran, op.cit, pp.58-60.
36 For the decree of the Patriarch, ref. Beltrami, op.cit, pp. 95-96.
‘The Gate of all India’ and the superior of all the bishops and Archbishops of his rite. Like his colleague Mar Joseph, he too was accused of heresy. By an Apostolic brief dated 27 December 1595 it was decided that the successor of Mar Abraham was to be nominated not by the East Syrian Patriarch, but by Rome directly. Mar Abraham continued to look after the Church in Malabar till his death in 1597. He was asked by the Pope to attend the third Provincial Council of Goa in 1585 and he had to sign a number of decrees of the former councils too.

Based on the Brief of 27 December 1595 and another of 21 January 1597, Dom Menezes, the Portuguese Latin Archbishop of Goa, entered Malabar and exercised jurisdiction over the Malabar Church. Intent on reducing the Syro-Malabar Church to the Portuguese Padroado jurisdiction, he convoked the synod of Diamper in 1599. Archdeacon George, administrator of Angamalee and of the St. Thomas Christians, opposed this move. But the St. Thomas Christians were threatened with excommunication and were asked to condemn their legitimate head, the Patriarch of Babylon. The liturgical books of the Syrians were burned. Thus the Syro-

38 Jonas, Thaliath, TOCD , op.cit, pp.138-142.

Malabar church was brought under the jurisdiction of the Portuguese Padroado. 40

The bishops of Syro-Malabar Church had their headquarters at Cranganore from the fourth to the sixteenth century and in the sixteenth century it was shifted to Angamalee. After the death of Mar Abraham the Syrian Bishop, the Syrians were for the three centuries entrusted to the care of the Latin Bishops. Till 1597 they had their bishops from the Middle East. The last of the bishops of this generation was Mar Abraham who died in 1597.

Roz S.J., a Latin priest was nominated as the successor of Mar Abraham on 5 November 1599 to the Bishopric of Angamalee which was reduced by Menezes to a mere Diocese on 20 December 1599 as suffragan to the Portuguese Latin Diocese of Goa. 41 Thus the primatial See of the St. Thomas Christians was reduced to the status of a suffragan of Goa. The Padroado rights of the Portuguese king were extended to Angamalee on 4 August 1600. Latinization of the liturgy was initiated. Many of the existing items of liturgy were substituted by Syriac translation of the Latin liturgy. In view of the requests of the people and of Bishop Roz, Archbishopric of

40 Goa was erected as an independent bishopric in 1534 and an Archbishopric in 1558. Cochin was constituted as a diocese in 1558. Both of these were under the Portuguese Padroado.
41 Ibid.
Angamalee was restored in 1608. But its title and headquarters were transferred to Cranganore. It remained under the Padroado though not as a suffragan of Goa. In 1610 when Roz was the Archbishop of Cranganore, ecclesiastical territory in India was divided among the Padrado prelates of Goa, Cranganore, Cochin and Mylapore and the people of Syro-Malabar Church were divided between Cranganore and Cochin.

Though the Syrian Christians of Malabar, being obedient to the Pope, accepted the Latin prelate as their ecclesiastical superior, they did not cease from demanding a bishop of their own. This eagerness prompted them to welcome a certain Ahattalla, an imposter as their bishop. As the Portuguese refused to release him at Cochin, the Syrian Christians of Malabar took an oath before the Coonan Cross at Mattancherry on 3 January 1653 refusing to obey the Portuguese Jesuits represented by the Archbishop Garcia SJ. Those who took this oath met at Alengadu and witnessed the consecration of a Pseudo-Bishop Thomas by twelve priests paving the way for a schism and the acceptance of Jacobitism with West Syrian liturgy.

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42 Mylapore was erected as a diocese in 1608.
43 Bernard, T.O.C.D, op.cit, p.61.
44 This separated section was in due course of time split into various denominations and a part of it came back to the Catholic faith and formed the Syro-Malankara Church in 1930. The Marthomite Church was formed from the Jacobites around 1875.
Subsequent to the revolt of 1653, the Latin Propaganda jurisdiction was also introduced into Malabar. The Syrian Catholics, who remained loyal to the catholic faith even after the revolt of 1653, were thus divided between the Propaganda and Padroado jurisdictions. The propaganda prelates were called Vicars Apostolic. From 1700 to 1787 all of them were foreign Latin Carmelites. Still the St.Thomas Christians continued to fight for their own independence from the Latin domination. There were some conflicts led by Bishop Gabriel in 1715, Bishop Pandari in 1799, and Bishop Roccos in 1861 and by Bishop Mellus in 1874. Pandari was a native of Malabar consecrated in Mesopotamia while the others were Mesopotamians. Those who followed Melius became Nestorians in 1908. Thus the Church in Malabar lost a number of Catholics to schismatic Church in its fight for the liberation from the Latin domination.

The Padroado jurisdiction over the Syro-Malabar Church was totally suppressed in 1886 and a ritual separation was made in the following year between the Syrian Catholics and the Latins. The members of the Syro-Malabar Church were put under two Latin Propaganda vicars apostolic who were not Carmelites as their predecessors. Thus in 1887 the vicariate apostolic of Kottayam and Trichur were created for the Syrian Catholics separating them from
the Archdiocese of Cranganore and the vicariate apostolic of Verapoly. Archdiocese of Cranganore was abolished in 1887. The craving for independence continued and in 1896 these vicariates were reorganized. Three Propaganda vicariates were constituted under Trichur, Ernakulam and Changanacherry with prelates from the St. Thomas Catholics. Rt. Rev. Aloysius Pazheparambil was appointed the first vicar apostolic of Ernakulam in 1896. The Vicariate apostolic of Kottayam, exclusively for the Sudhists, was established in 1911. Msgr. Pazheparambil was succeeded by Mar Augustine Kandathil in 1919. The Syrian Catholics in Kerala were brought from the Propaganda to the Sacred Oriental Congregation in 1917 and the Malabar hierarchy was restored in 1923 with Ernakulam as the Metropolis and Changanacherry, Kottayam and Trichur as suffragans. Mar Augustine Kandathil was appointed the first Archbishop. In 1923 itself Kottayam diocese was erected exclusively for Sudhists. The diocese of Changanacherry was bifurcated in 1950 and Palai was created. Tellicherry diocese was created in 1953 for those who migrated to the Malabar regions from Travancore. Changanacherry was raised to Archbishopric in 1956 with Palai and Kottayam as suffragans. The Diocese of Kothamangalam was erected in 1956 for the Syrian Catholics formerly under Ernakulam. The diocese of Tellicherry was bifurcated and a new diocese by name Manathawady was created in 1973 with Mar Jacob
Thoonkuzhy as its first bishop. Similarly Diocese of Trichur was divided and the diocese of Palghat was erected as a new diocese in 1974. The diocese of Kanjirapally took its origin from the Archdiocese of Changanacherry in 1977 with Mar Joseph Powathil as its first bishop. As the Trichur diocese was still bigger, it was divided once again and the diocese of Irinjalakkuda came into being in 1977 a number of members from the Syro-Malabar Church in Kerala are scattered in various parts of the subcontinent on account of the positions occupied by them in the Republic of India. They, in the so-called 'Diaspora' require pastoral care and that too within their own liturgy. Since the Universal Church is no more interested in the perpetuation of the colonial hegemony of the Latin Hierarchy and, on the contrary, is bound by the decision taken in the Councils and Synods, she makes provision for them. His Eminence Simon Cardinal Lourdusamy, the Prefect of the Oriental Congregation, declared in 1985 'Regarding the oriental faithful, especially in the 'Diaspora' this congregation has not ceased insisting that Latin Bishops observe carefully the norms contained in number 23 of the Conciliar decree “Christus Dominus” on the pastoral office of Bishops in the Church about the care of the faithful of different rites. Where there are faithful of other rites, the diocesan Bishop should provide for their spiritual needs, either through priests of parishes of the same rite, or through an Episcopal Vicar, given the necessary
faculties and if the case demands even endowed with an Episcopal character. Several Archbishops and Bishops who made necessary arrangements for fostering the patrimony of the oriental Church understand the tenor of this passage. The Holy See has already erected oriental territories for different Churches like the territory for the Ukrainians in Argentina, for Maronites and Ukrainians in Australia, for Maronites and Greek Melkite Catholics in Brazil, for Ukrainians, Maronites, Greek Melchite Catholics and, Slovaks in Canada, for Ukrainians and Maronites, Greek Melchite Catholics, Ruthenians, Rumanians and Chaldeans in the United States. Apostolic Exarchates are created in Rome for Armenians.

Pope John Paul II of happy memory constituted a Commission under the chairmanship of Cardinal Secretary of the State, composed of the Cardinal prefects of the two Roman Congregations directly concerned in this matter, the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio in India, Archbishops representing the three Rites in India and others. The Pope in view of the recommendations of this commission, wrote to the Bishops of India, 'In this process of evangelization, there always existed a general collaboration on the part of priests, religious and laity baptized in the Syro-Malabar

Church itself in certain areas of the north. This collaboration should not be forgotten, for it points to willingness, on the part of all concerned, to accept the age-old adage, *salus animarum suprema lex.*

The Pope added: Since the celebration of the Second Vatican Council, the Catholic Eastern Churches have manifested an ever greater desire to undertake, wherever possible, the pastoral care of the Eastern Rite faithful in accordance with their ecclesiastical traditions and heritage. In India this desire has intensified in recent years in the face the ever increasing phenomenon of the migration of Eastern Rite Catholics to areas covered by Latin Rite dioceses in the northern part of the country, such that at times they form a considerable number of faithful of these ecclesiastical territories, as for example in the areas of Bombay-Pune.

He notes: The Second Vatican Council, in speaking of the pastoral duties of the bishops, declared that where there are faithful of a different rite, the diocesan Bishop should provide for their spiritual needs, either through the priests or parishes of that rite, or

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46 Pope John Paul II, op.cit, P.230.
through Episcopal vicars endowed with the necessary faculties.\textsuperscript{48} The Successor of St. Peter writes to the Bishops of India further attention should be everywhere given to the preservation and growth of each individual Church. For this purpose, parishes and a special hierarchy should be established for each Church where the spiritual good of the faithful demands. All Eastern Rite members should know and be convinced that they can and should always preserve their lawful rites and their established ways of life.\textsuperscript{49} As there are many members of the Oriental Churches living among the members of Latin rite, the Pope clarifies the point that unity is not uniformity and that unity can be achieved even in diversity. He alludes to the Mystical Body of Christ and the different roles played by different parts in the body. 'This need to be faithful to the traditions and heritage of one's own Rite can in no way be considered as interfering with the task of the church to gather into one all the children of God who are scattered abroad' (St.John 11:52) or with the mission of the church to bring about the communion of all persons with the Redeemer. For as the same Decree rightly remarks: 'That Church, holy Catholic, which is the mystical body of Christ, is made up of the faithful who are organically united in the Holy Spirit

\textsuperscript{48} Biography, op.cit, P. 231.

\textsuperscript{49} Orientalium Ecclesianum 4 and 5 quoted by the Pope, Biography, P.231
through the same faith, the same sacraments and the same government and who, combining into various groups held together by a hierarchy, for separate Churches or Rites. Between these there flourishes such an admirable brotherhood that this variety within the church in no way harms her unity, but rather manifests it. For the integrity of our treatise it seems necessary to give a brief account of the history of the various denominations of Syrian Christians. They are now divided into several denominations, some even professing protestantianism. We shall proceed chronologically. The Knanaya Christians, the Orthodox Church in India, the Marthoma Church in India, the Mellusians and the St. Thomas Evanchalickal Church of India.

Knanaya Christians

In the year 345 A.D., one Knai Thomman, a rich international merchant, and 72 families from Cana (Middle East), belonging to East Syrian Church (Chaldean), immigrated to Malabar (presently Kerala) and established their colony. In the group there were also priests, deacons and their bishop. Knai Thomman and his people were welcomed by Cheraman Perumal, the Emperor, and were given

50 Biography, op. cit, P.232
permission to settle down in Kodungalloor. They built a town in Kodungalloor with a church and 72 houses. The natives called it *Mahadevar Pattanam* meaning "town of superiors". Later, Cheraman Perumal bestowed them with many princely privileges, and it was recorded on copper plates (*Knai Momman Cheppedu*) given to Knai Thomman. ⁵²

*Knanaya* Christians are the descendants of these Jewish Christian immigrants in Kerala. They were also called Southists (*Thekkumbhagar*) because they lived on the south side of Kodungalloor. The St. Thomas Christians (native Christians of Kerala) who lived on the north side of Kodungalloor were known as Northists (*Vadakkumbhagar*). Another tradition is that Knananites settled down on the south side of Periyar river while the native Christians lived on the north side of the river. It is also stated that Knananites were called Southists because they came from the Southern Kingdom of Judah.

*Knanaya* Christians are found not only among the Catholics but also among the Orthodox Christians of Kerala, because when a group of Thomas Christians joined Jacobitism, among them there were *Knanaya* Christians too. They observe many rituals and traditions which are very peculiar to their own community. Even

today, the Knanites continue to be an endogamous community. In order to keep the purity of their race and ethnicity, they do not marry any one from outside their community. They also keep away from evangelizing and converting others to Christianity. If anybody is converted to Christianity, such a person won't be accepted in the community. Though this sense of "purity" is a distorted one, and is against basic Christian principle, it is acknowledged by Name to establish a separate diocese (Kottayam) for the Knanaya Catholics. A Knanaya Catholic can marry a Knanaya Jacobite, but cannot marry another Catholic even though he/she belongs to the same rite! It seems that Knanities are more proud of being Jewish than being "Christian."

Split in the Syro-Malabar Church and the origin of other denominations

The Latinizing policy of the Portuguese in Malabar in the 17th" century found no bound, and continued with some cruel deeds which infuriated the Malabar Christians. Roz S.J., who was appointed as successor to Mar Abraham was a Latiniser. The Mass and the Ritual Portions of the Divine Office were all Latinized by him. The ancient Ritual was substituted by a translation of the Roman one with the peculiarities of the diocese of Braga, Portugal. In 1608 the archdeacon sent his complaints to the Papal Nuncio in
Lisbon, but got no reply. The archdeacon was even excommunicated, though absolved in 1615. Quarrels again broke out in 1618, since (it is said) the archdeacon was not made Administrator when Roz S.J. went to Goa. Roz S.J. even had recourse to arms in order to curb the activities of the archdeacon.

Since 1641, a regular fight ensued between the new archbishop Garcia S.J. and the new archdeacon Thomas. The archdeacon boasted that the archbishop could not do anything without his consent. Garcia S.J. had to yield to the archdeacon in many things, and it is said that the archdeacon had secret correspondence with the Nestorian, Coptic and other Patriarchs. But according to some he wrote only to the (Catholic) East Syrian (Chaldean) Patriarch.

In 1652 there arrived at Mylapore one Ahatallah who claimed to be the "Patriarch of All India and China, sent by the Pope". (It seems now an established fact that Ahatallah originally hailed from the Jacobite Church of Syria. Later he was converted to Catholicism. He came to India at the request of the Coptic patriarch while he was staying in Cairo. He seemed to have remained faithful in the Catholic allegiance till his death). The whole Christian community was roused, and insurrections took place everywhere. Fr. Mancel de Leira S.J, from Mylapore gave secret information to the Portuguese
authorities about the movements of Ahatallah. The Portuguese authorities without delay deported him to Goa via Cochin.

The archdeacon reached Cochin with a number of soldiers and demanded to see the "Patriarch" (Ahatallah) and to examine his credentials. He said he would not demand the Patriarch's release if the credentials were found false. The Portuguese agreed first, but soon they deported Ahatallah to Goa without showing him or his credentials to the archdeacon and to his followers. The behavior of Archbishop Gracia S.J. is said to have been haughty. The Portuguese contention was that no bishop could legitimately come to the Thomas Christians without the knowledge of the Portuguese Crown. They thought that Ahatallah was a 'Nestorian' or an East-Syrian intruder.\[^53\]

A false rumour was spread that Ahatallah was drowned by the Portuguese off the coast of Cochin. Then the archdeacon wrote to the Portuguese captain saying: "Moreover, Captain, we beg your honour that, for the love of God and the service of the Christian Community, you work hard to bring back the Patriarch". But it produced no result. Next, all who were present moved to Mattancherry near Cochin, tied a long rope, as tradition says, to the open air cross called the Coonan Cross, and holding the rope, swore they would

never be under the Paulists (i.e. the Jesuits). This took place on 3rd January, 1653.

The rift caused in the community by the forced removal of Ahataiiah from India, is to be understood in the light of the attachment the Indian Christians still cherished for the East-Syrian Church. The fact that the Thomas Christians always remained much attached to the bishops of their own Rite and merely tolerated the government of the Latin bishops is clear from the many petitions they sent to many authorities. The dream of the Christians, aroused by the arrival of Ahataiiah, to be once more an autonomous Church under a Syrian prelate was shattered. The oath and the tragic events that followed were expressions of their bitter disappointment. The "Coonan Cross" Oath, marked the final outbreak of the storm that had been gathering on the horizon for a century. The malcontents held a meeting at Edapally and then met at Alangat on May 22, 1653, swore on the Gospel that they would not obey Garcia S.J. Twelve priests imposed their hands on archdeacon Thomas calling him Archbishop Mar Thomas I. The assembled were made to believe that they were empowered to do this by the order of Ahataiiah whose letter (a falsification) was also read aloud. The Pseudo-Archbishop was given four councilors. One may ask here whether it was a real

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consecration or a mere installation that the twelve priests had intended in imposing their hands on the archdeacon. Any how, the archdeacon began to exercise powers of Episcopal order though he openly tried to obtain valid Episcopal consecration.

Italian Carmelites were sent to Malabar by Pope Alexander VII to reconcile the malcontents. Then the Pope appointed Fr. Sebastiani O.C.D. as Apostolic Administrator of Cranganore in 1659, and he was helped by an Indian priest, Chandy Parambil. In 1663 when Sebastiam had to leave India, Fr. Chandy Parambil (Alexander de Campo) was made the first Vicar Apostolic of Malabar under the Propaganda Jurisdiction. After the demise of Mar Alexander, no indigenous Syrian bishop was appointed to succeed him. The attempt of reconciliation was successful to a certain extent, and many including three councilors of the pseudo-archbishop, came back to the Catholic fold. However, the archdeacon (Mar Thomas I) and many of his followers were not happy to come back.

Antiochene Connection

In the year 1665 the Jacobite bishop Mar Gregorios of Jerusalem, arrived in Kerala. He infiltrated anti-Roman ideas and introduced Jacobatism (Monophysitism) among the followers of the Pseudo Archbishop Thomas I to bring them under the Jacobite
patriarch of Antioch. Their good faith was already shaken at the solemn excommunication served to the pseudo-archbishop by Sebastiani. This is how the revolt of 1653 turned out into a schism. It split the community vertically into two groups, one in communion with Rome and the other establishing a new allegiance, namely to the Jacobite Church of Antioch. Because of this new allegiance, the malcontents began to be called "Puthenkuttukar" (people of new allegiance).^{55}

The community under Thomas I began cultivating relations with Jacobite patriarch of Antioch. Ever since that time Jacobite bishops were sent to India from time to time by the patriarch. Thomas I was succeeded by Thomas II, Thomas III and so on until Thomas VI who succeeded Thomas V in 1765. At that time there were two Jacobite bishops in Kerala who became rivals. Ramban (an ecclesiastical dignitary) Kattumangatt assumed the name Cyril (Kurillos) and separated himself from the communion of Thomas VI. He headed a community at Thozhiyur or Anjoor in north, in British Malabar, This community came to be known as the "Independent Jacobite Church of Malabar". It was because of pressure, a second one had to be consecrated as Mar Thomas VI. After consecration he assumed the name Dionysius I. He attempted to go back to

^{55} Samuel, Mateer, The Land of Charity, London: Johnsnow and Co,1871, P. 23,
Catholicism, but when his demand to be recognized as a bishop was rejected by the Catholic authorities, he returned to Jacobitism.

**Split over Patriarchal Authority**

In 1909 Mar Ignatius Abdalla Satuff, Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch, visited Kerala and got involved (in a conflict with Mar Dionysius VI, the Jacobite Metropolitan of India. While patriarch insisted on comprehensive jurisdiction over the Malabar Church, Dionysius would allow him only the spiritual power to consecrate bishops and chrism (holy oil) for the Church. This conflict split the Church again into two: Dionysius and party against the patriarch (*Methran Kakshi*, ie., Bishop's Party), and the second group under Cyril, another Malabar.

Jacobite bishop, for the patriarch (*Bava Kakshi*, ie., Patriarch's Party). The Bishop's Party appealed to Abdul Masih, a deposed patriarch of Antioch. He came to Kerala and installed Dionysius as the "Catholicos of Malabar". The *Methran Kakshi* calls itself the "Syrian Orthodox Church of India". The Bava Kakshi calls itself the "Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church (of India)".  

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Mellusian Church

In 1861, the arrival of a Chaldean Catholic Bishop, Thomas Rokkos sent by the Chaldean patriarch created more problems among Catholics of the Thomas Christians. He was excommunicated on his arrival by the Vicar Apostolic of Varapuzha, and a schism followed. Another Chaldean Bishop, Elias Melus arrived in 1874 and he too met with the same fate. The followers of the schism Melus created are popularly known as the Surais who owe allegiance to the Syrian Nestorian patriarch. They are in and around Thrissur in Kerala.

Approximate number of the members of these Churches

Syrian Orthodox Church (*Mehran Kakshi*) - 1, 100,000
Jacobite Syrian Orthodox (*BavaKakshi*) - 1,000,000
Independent Jacobites (Thozhiyur) - 9,000
Church of the East (Nestorians/Surais) - 100,000


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The Mar Thoma Church in India

Towards the end of the 18th century and in the beginning of the Nineteenth century the Jacobite Church of Malabar (Malankara Church) was in utter confusion, and it was in a state of decline. Life within the State and the Church was grievously disturbed by varying factors such as political, social and theological issues. Lack of leadership qualities, absence of theological insights, poor knowledge of the Bible, loose moral life, enforced celibacy of the priests, unscriptural doctrines, etc., weakened the Church day by day. Besides, all sorts of superstitious beliefs that were rampant among the people caused a fatal break in their spiritual life. Consequence of all these was that the place and value of faith was taken over by unscrupulous observances of rituals and such other practices, there were divisions and fights for power and authority. It is at this opportune time the Anglican Church of England extended support.\(^{58}\)

The English displaced the Dutch from Cochin in 1795 and with the arrival of the English, the foreign domination of South India changed hands. The East India Company, under which the English operated in India, appointed a British Resident for Cochin and Travancore. The first two Residents, Colonel Macaulay and Colonel

John Monroe were men of strong Christian convictions and they were prepared to help the Syrian Christians. The Malankara Metropolitan Mar Dionysius I was deeply interested in instituting schools in the parishes. Towards the close of Mar Dionysius I, Dr. Claudius Buchanan, Principal of Fort William College, Calcutta visited Malabar in 1806-1807. He had received a special commission from Lord Wellesley, Governor General of India, to study and report on the Malankara Church. Later, Dr. Buchanan reported the needs of the Church to Lord Wellesley. On his return to England, Dr. Buchanan warmly advocated the cause of the Syrian Christians and as a result, the Church Missionary Society (CMS) under the patronage of the Church of England, provided the services of Rev. Thomas Norton, Rev. Benjamin Bailey, Rev. Joseph Fenn and Rev. Henry Baker.

The first Anglican mission (CMS) started to work in Kerala in 1816. A number of Jacobites came under their influence and reforms were introduced on Anglican lines. Leadership for this reform group was provided by Palakunnath Abraham Malpan and Kaithayil Gevarghese Malpan, the two professors of the Syrian Seminary at Kottayam.

The first synod of the Indian Jacobites was celebrated in 1836 and it decided to sever all ties with the Anglicans. But Abraham
Malpan and his party continued to carry on the reforms already started, for which they were excommunicated by Dionysius IV in 1837. There followed a period of confusion. Mathew Mar Athanasius, who had been consecrated bishop by the Jacobite patriarch in 1842/43, emerged as the leader of the reform group. The tussle continued for some time more, and in 1875 Mathew Mar Athanasius was deposed by Ignatius Mar Peter IV, patriarch of Antioch, who visited India that year. Consequent to this excommunication, Mar Athanasius and his followers were deprived of all the churches and properties. The Church plunged into a litigation known as the 'Seminary Case'. Finally, in 1889, with help of the CMS, they organized a new Church - the "Mar Thoma Church".

The Mar Thoma Church is an amicable blending of two characteristic traits, namely, the Orthodox Church features and reformation (Protestant) ideals, or in other words, blending of Eastern and Western forms. This nature of the Church points to its uniqueness when compared to other Churches. The supreme authority of the Church is the General Assembly which was consisted of the bishops, the clergy and elected representatives of the local parishes.
The conventions convened time and again enriched the spiritual life of the people. Of all the conventions the Maramon convention which began in 1896 ranks first with respect to the large number of people attending it every year. There are around half a million members in this Church.

**The St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India**

In 1961 some 18 Marthomite priests who were not on good terms with their church, imposed their hands on two other priests proclaiming them metropolitans or heads of a new Church called “The St. Thomas Evangelical Church of India”\(^{59}\). We have yet to see how this church developed. The Marthomite Church has withdrawn communion from it. The evangelical work the Marthomites do in Malabar and outside seems to have suggested the epithet “Evangelical” for the new church. The spirit of evangelization evinced by the Marthomites has induced the Jacobites also to conduct missions outside Malabar. Both have also “Missionary bishops”.

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The history and the present position of the Syrian Christian community in Kerala is thus, convincingly prove that their Church in Kerala was founded by the Apostle St.Thomas. A number of sources

\(^{59}\) Placide J.Podipara, *op.cit. p.229.*
like archaeological, numismatic, oral tradition, the writings of the Fathers of the Church, liturgical and above all the existence of the Syrian Catholic community by name St. Thomas point to the apostolic origin of the church in Malabar. When we try to take a look at the history of a community existing in the early centuries of the Christian era, we should be careful not to project our ideas about the setup of a community in our own times lest we should be blamed for anachronism in historical researches. We should try to understand the colonial mentality that cast its shadows even on ecclesiastical matters. The socio-political movement in the Coromandel regions did not permit Christianity to flourish in that region though the tomb of St. Thomas was located there. Similarly, the rise of Islam in West Asia must have seriously affected the growth of the Syro-Malabar Church closely connected with the Church of Persia. Those who look for close and constant contact with the Church in Rome have to understand the dynamics of the oriental church and also the problems in West Asia which did not permit such a close contact. The suppression of Syro-Malabar Church right from the sixteenth century by the colonial powers and the attitude of the ecclesiastical authorities not to permit the Syrian Catholics to extend their activities under the banner of the Syro-Malabar Church outside Kerala may explain why the Apostolic Church could not and did not develop. The sudden change of attitude on the part of the authorities
in the wake of decolonization and the new trends set by the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council, coupled with the appointment of an Indian Cardinal as the prefect of the Oriental Congregation as well as the visit of Pope John Paul II, gave a fillip to the growth of the Syro-Malabar Church. Just as the Republic of India continues to labour under the hangover of its colonial past, the Syro-Malabar Church also has to fight against a host of fissiparous tendencies. If the Church founded by the apostle could survive the ravages of colonial powers, it will continue to remain active and united amidst divisive forces at work. No body can underestimate the role played by the community of Syrian Christians in nation building in India.