CHAPTER.6
MALANKARA CHURCH AND
SOCIAL AWAKENING

6.1. Introduction

The dawn of social awakening in Kerala had been an outstanding phenomenon of the nineteenth century Kerala society. As observed earlier, several impactful interactions of the period under consideration, like missionary enterprises, educational institutions, religious associations, and the role of leaders, directly or indirectly made lasting repercussions on the social scenario of the state. These were gradual interactions and a systematic historical development can be seen in the social transformation regarding the role of Malankara Church.

This chapter focuses on the contributions and impact of the Malankara Church on the social life of modern Kerala.

6.2. The Malankara Church and its Mission

By the close of 18th century, the church acquired a distinct form under the Marthoma Metrans with a considerable number of churches. Even though the church had been a part and parcel of the Kerala society, it showed a positive attitude towards the progressive ideas of the revolutionary decisions of the synod of Diamper.

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1 The term Metran is usually used to denote Metropolitan. After the Oath of Coonan Cross the then Archdeacon was consecrated as Marthoma I by twelve priests in the second half of 17th century. The Malankara Church had been under those Metrans during the 18th century. The group led by Marthoma I, came to be known as Puthencoor (old loyalists) and in the course of time as Jacobites.

2 According to Paulinus, the group led by the Archdeacon possessed 32 churches by the end of 18th century. See Fr. Paulino a.S. Bartholomaeo, India Orientalis Christina, trans., Fr. John Pallath, O.C.D., Paurasthya Bharathathile Christu Matham, Kalamassery, 1988, pp. 280-282.

The Church took initiation to absorb the modern ideas of the Western Missionaries and their programmes to renovate the society. However they continued their struggle for ecclesiastical autonomy.

The 19th century Malankara Church interacted with the society in three different ways. 1. By accepting the virtues of Western Mission.

Both the Roman Catholic and Protestant Missionaries were active in Kerala in 19th century. The Roman Catholic missions had entered on the scene in 13th century itself and became a current by 16th century. As a result a majority of Syrians joined the Catholic fold by 17th century with the Synod of Diamper in 1599 A.D. The Protestant mission reached Kerala only in the 19th century. The Malankara Christians were the pioneers to take the positives of the both missions and tried to purify the Church from within. Thus by the second half of the 19th century she attained a systematic development in various fields. As far as the social transformation is concerned, this systematic growth and development of the Malankara Church, was really a fascinating force for the revolutionary changes in Kerala society.

2. By acting as a link between the missionaries and the natives.

In a caste ridden society it was difficult for the western missionaries to interact with the natives. Each caste had their own peculiarities and identity. More over they were particular to hold on their traditional social customs.

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4 The Portuguese advent marked the beginning of Roman Catholic mission.
In the early phase of the European missionary enterprise the local chieftains and rulers were doubtful of the intention of Christian missionaries on the one hand, and were reluctant towards changes on the other hand. However the native Christians gradually responded positively and opened doors towards progressive efforts of the missionaries. They not only reacted positively, but acted also as a link between the missionaries and the native Hindus and Muslims. This bilateral and reciprocal role of the Malankara Christians paved the way for remarkable social changes in Kerala.

In the Madras Church Missionary records of 1860, Joseph Peet mentions the possibility of the Syrian Christians to act as link between the elite class and the outcastes. In the absence of sufficient *Sudras* to help the Brahmins, the Christians were appointed by the Brahmins to assist them. Those Christians were permitted to settle down in the vicinity of their *Illams* and Temples.

3. with the efforts of the Church to propagate the message of social transformation.

The Church by this time started a central system of administration, making the Old Seminary its head quarters. It was also a place of learning even for women. Many books have been printed by the Church and some pioneer institutions and organizations

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7 The Portuguese Roman Catholic missionaries were the pioneer European Missionaries in Kerala. The Protestant Missionaries reached Kerala only after 1813. It was Col. Munroe, the British Resident of both Cochin and Travancore, who initiated the Protestant missionary endeavor in Kerala with the permission granted in the Charter Act of 1813 A.D. Eugene Stock, *op.cit.*, p. 103.
9 House of the Brahmins.
10 Ibid.
11 Since the formation of the Old Seminary at Kottayam in 1815 A.D.
were established. All these progressive efforts promoted social transformation of the society.

19th century was a period of great transition from medieval to modern; hence was a ‘New Era’ in the history of Kerala. The devoted life of missionaries and their fervent and sincere works resulted rapid and radical changes in the life and work of the people in Kerala.

To bring forth, the positive inductive forces behind social awakening and how deeper was the impact behind the social transformation of Kerala, it is necessary to have a brief examination of the social condition of Kerala prior to the colonial interaction. As mentioned earlier the Malankara Church, being a National Christian Church of Kerala, had played an important role in cultivating an attitude favourable for the missionary enterprises in Kerala. They were the pioneers among the natives to react positively towards the egalitarian attitude of the Missionaries, who arrived in Kerala as part of colonial expansion, and themselves became role models in practicing the Christian messages by 19th century. They also tried to bridge the caste ridden communities of Kerala with a view to equip them to receive the benefits of ‘Kerala Renaissance.’

6.2.1 One Tradition; Many Churches

As explained in the earlier chapter, till the advent of the Portuguese, the Malankara Christians were an autonomous body at least in the temporalities. It is true that certain foreign prelates had paid visits to Malabar and even established their spiritual

12 Institutions like Nuclear family system based on the Biblical Thiru Kudumpam or Holy Family in lieu of joint family system, Organizations like the Syrian Christian Association and Mahajana Sabha etc. were the pioneer systems, introduced by the Malankara Church, which happened to be the instruments for the Social transformation of 19th and 20th century Kerala Society.

13 Till the coming of the Portuguese they were hierarchically under the East Syrian Patriarch in spiritual matters.
supervision. But they never had claimed their temporal supremacy. In that respect one can say that the ancient Christian community in Kerala was one body, one family and one church until the arrival of the Portuguese in the 16th century, who came as traders and as missionaries of the Roman Church but soon became colonial and ecclesiastical overlords.

The condition of the Malankara Church prior to the Portuguese advent is disputed for the want of historical documents and evidences. As seen in the previous chapter, many documents were perished, disappeared, corrected or even destroyed during the colonial era. Even though there are certain reflections, incidental descriptions and references about the period. But as far as the social impact of the Malankara Christians on the Modern Kerala society is concerned, there are ample of evidences regarding their contributions and interactions.

After the oath of Coonan Cross in 1653, within a short span of time almost two third of the Syrians returned to the Roman Catholic faith. Only one third remained with the Archdeacon Thomas. The group led by the Archdeacon came to be called Puthencoor Christians and later in 1665 when Mar Gregorios Abdul Jaleel reached Kerala to confirm the consecration of Archdeacon as Metropolitan Marthoma I, they were known as Jacobite Christians. In the course of time a group under Kattumangattu

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., pp. 277-278.
18 It is believed that Mar Gregorios was sent from Antioch to confirm the consecration of Mar Thoma I. Since Mar Gregorios was a prelate from the Antiochean order, whom by the time were called Jacobites after the mission of Mar Jacob Burdanus, The Malankara Christians were also came to be called Jacobites. See Edavalikel Philipos, The Syrian Christians of Malabar, London, 1869, p. 11.
Mar Koorilos left the Malankara Church in 1772 to form the Thozhiyur Church\(^\text{19}\), another group under Thomas Mar Athanasius in 1889 left to form Marthoma Church\(^\text{20}\), and a group under Mar Ivanios in 1930 to form the Syro-Malankara Catholic Church\(^\text{21}\) and yet another group under Mar Thomas I in 2002 to form the Jacobite Syrian Church.\(^\text{22}\)

For years the Malankara Church was known as the Jacobites. But in 1912 the then Antiochean Canonical Patriarch Mar Abdul Messiah restored the Eastern Catholicate\(^\text{23}\) at Malankara, and declared the Church Autocephalus under the newly consecrated Catholicos of the Malankara Church. Subsequently the Church Constitution of 1934 officially declared the Church as ‘The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church’\(^\text{24}\)

The Church, as part of the Kerala Christians, has the common traditions to share. At the same time a Church with a national indigenous head and democratic set up, has impactful dealings with the society in which it exists.

First of all the investigation is about the common heritage of the Malankara Church in general and then the specific contributions of the Malankara Church in the modern centuries in particular. As seen many of the changes in the social life of the Church were the result of the Western colonial contact of the Europeans including the Portuguese.

### 6.3 Nineteenth Century Kerala


\(^{21}\) C.V. Cheriyan, *op.cit.*, pp. 354-55.

\(^{22}\) The supporters of the Antiochean Patriarch was polarized in the Malankara Church since 1911 itself and after a series of court litigation left the Church in 2002 to form a separate Church. *Ibid.*, pp.438-39.


Nineteenth Century Kerala presented a tragic scene of feudalism with all its weakness.\textsuperscript{25} The Social life of Kerala in the eighteenth century, including those of Syrian Christians, was marked by stagnation and dependence on the past. There was no uniformity of culture and social patterns all over the country. The religious condition was also deeply inclined with the social disparity and injustice. People were divided by religion, region, tribe, language and caste. The social life of the upper classes was different in many ways from the life of the lower classes. There were pronounced social disparities. The higher castes were over conscious of their own identity and superiority from the lower strata. The entire wealth of the country was concentrated in the hands of the \textit{Janmis} while the masses lacked the barest necessities of life. By the time the ancient concept of equality and fraternity had vanished so completely from the social scenario of Kerala.\textsuperscript{26} The different castes among the Hindus were jealous of their rights and each caste and every group was isolated within its own customs and social traditions. Any deviation from established laws and conventions resulted in excommunication. The people were so much absorbed in the celebration of marriages, feasts, festivals and other family ceremonies that they had no urge to create new social values.

A local historian assesses the Kerala culture of those times in the following words:

"... The fifty years from the latter half of the 19\textsuperscript{th} century to the birth of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century brought about the most wonderful and unbelievable kinds of changes in the land of Kerala. If we cross over to the other side of 1850, we will be reaching a primitive era

\textsuperscript{26} It is estimated that during \textit{pre brahminical} period the people enjoyed fraternity and equality to a certain extent. Since we don’t have sufficient historical evidences, scholars arrived at this conclusion by analyzing the life situations reflected in the \textit{Sangham} literature.
which may be called ancient or very ancient. In the same way, if we cross over to this side of 1900, we will reach a totally modern era” 27

6.3.1 The Static Society

As far as Kerala is concerned, the social structure, deeply rooted in the caste oriented hierarchical *Varna* social order, remained unchanged for centuries without any social mobility. Each *Varna* was eager to preserve its cultural and religious identity and endogamous existence. 28 Both the elite as well as the oppressed classes were reluctant towards any change thus kept aloof from all sorts of intermingling or interaction, because of the compartmentalized nature of the *Varnas* and rigid caste rules. The Varna groups remained adamant towards structural changes and believed in keeping their cultural and social identity without any confusion. As much as isolation they kept, the more they considered as dignity or *abijatya*.

The society with this type of social order that prevailed in Kerala for about a Millennium can be called a ‘Static Society’ as there was no visible social mobility. In a static society reforms or developments will be taken place practically very slowly and rarely. Under such situation no healthier competitions are essential or expected. What they possessed, they enjoyed generations to generations hereditarily. They were ignorant of reforms hence uplifting of a class or a tribe was not anticipated. The high castes were satisfied with their privileges and the lower castes were contempt with their lot. They were born into a system and the system taught them its norms. They couldn’t think of any alternatives.

6.3.2 System of social grading and religious grading

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The social system in the nineteenth century had two aspects. One aspect was a grading on the basis of official power and position. The second aspect was an ordering based on their position in the caste hierarchy.\textsuperscript{29} The first was a reflection of the political system then prevailed and the second comprised the castes and sub-castes among the Hindus and other influential communities like Christianity and Islam.

### 6.3.3 Caste System

The society of the pre-colonial Kerala was basically caste ridden. Occupational social groups of the pre-brahmanical Kerala society underwent great changes with the brahmin domination of the land. Instead of occupational group, \textit{Varna} model was introduced and the society came to be compartmentalized. However the fourfold \textit{Varna} system was unknown to Kerala before the advent of Brahmans.

Dr. S. Manickam, an expert in medieval and missionary history, defines caste in India as “….essentially a Hindu phenomenon and that it is sanctioned by the Hindu religion and blessed by the gods. It is hierarchically arranged in an ascending order of reverence and descending degree of contempt and as such each caste or sub-caste is either superior or inferior to one another.”\textsuperscript{30}

Some groups were classified as untouchables or \textit{Pariahs}, and the notion of pollution of contamination lies at the root of this distinction. After the emergence of \textit{jati} or caste due to \textit{Varnasankara} also structured social relations, so that one’s place in a caste – either high or low – was central to one’s social network; because, under the \textit{Varna} model, it was the caste that determined the status or position of an individual in the society.

\textsuperscript{29} Samuel Nellimukal, \textit{The Social Transformation of Kerala}, Kottayam, 2003, p.16.
Barbosa gives us a somewhat detailed account of the caste system prevailed during the sixteenth century. The missionary records also give us a detailed account of the same of a later period. To him the present inhabitants appear to be predominantly pre-brahminical. The Vetas, Parayas, Pulayas, Cherumars, the tribes etc. of a very low level of living may be considered the earliest inhabitants of the land. The Malabar Brahmins, who settled down at a later age, adopted many features of the aboriginal culture and also the language of the land. He classifies the people of Malabar into four main categories: the ruling class or kings, the higher castes, the low castes and the strangers or those who were without caste distinctions. The kings were, according to him, more or less of the same caste and their customs were very similar. The higher castes were the Brahmins, the Nairs, the Baibares (Vyaparis or merchants), Cuivem (kusava or the potter caste), the Mainatos (washermen of kings, Brahmins and Nairs), and the Calets (Chalians or weavers).

The so called caste system that emerged from the Varna model social system, as an all embracing social phenomenon preserved the Kerala society with its distinct features for centuries. It separated the human beings on the basis of their Varna origin which they inherited by birth, and deeply inclined in to the social order of the country. The identity of each caste with its rigidity and orthodoxy, preserved without blemish and each caste erected around them walls of separation and social identity. Conversion from

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32 The correspondence between the Missionary authorities and the Missionaries are kept in various Archives and Mission centres. Some of them were got published. For e.g. Church Missionary Proceedings 1814-1883, Church Missionary Intelligencer 1850-1860, Church Missionary Record, The Missionary Register 1824-1851, Madras Church Missionary Record 1834-1887 etc.; See P. Cheriyan, The Malabar Syrians and the Church Missionary Society 1816-1840, Kottayam, 1935.
33 Samuel Nellimukal, op.cit.,p.28.
34 Duarte Barbosa, op.cit., pp.30-33.
one caste to another was not possible in the Indian context generally and in the Kerala context particularly, and the only exception was excommunication due to pollution, exogamy and hypergamy. The word social equality was unknown to them. Each caste maintained its own style of dressing, culture, language, vocabulary, educational system, life style etc. Mutual interaction or symbiosis was impossible due to this peculiar type of living style. For centuries the high castes enjoyed special privileges and the lot of the lower castes was pathetic. It remained unchanged up to the the pre-modern period. As observed by scholars “The Brahmanical religion was the dominant ideology in the new social formation that sought deliverance from the heroic society of early Tamilakom in general and Kerala in particular.”  

6.3.4 Four Castes

There are four varnas in Hindu religion arranged in a hierarchy. The highest Varna is Brahman, and they are the priest caste of Hinduism. After them are the Kshatriya, who are the warrior groups. Below them are the Vaishya Varna, who are traders. The lowest stratum is formed by the Sudra Varna, who are the common peasants and workers. Outside the four varnas there are Chandalas, the casteless or the untouchables. The four varnas were not allowed to have any physical contact with the untouchables.

These varnas in the course of years intermingled and which resulted in the varnasankara and produced different mixed castes due to anuloma and pratiloma marriages. As a result of mixed varnas or varnasankara there emerged different jatis or castes. Each caste is divided into many sub-castes as a result of further varnasankara. But sometimes in English the term caste is used in both cases. But in the Kerala society it

37 Marriage with the same varna
38 Marriage with a different or inferior varna
is difficult to trace the strict form of *varna* system\(^{39}\). During the Brahminization processes, the immigrant Brahmins absorbed native ‘Nagar’ as Sudra Nairs and made them their subordinates.\(^{40}\) The ruling class was credited as ‘*Kshetriah*’ and the trading groups, especially the Jews, the Christians and the Muslims as ‘*Vaisyas*’\(^{41}\)

This caste ridden social structure of the pre colonial Kerala Society, and its forcible isolation from other groups closed doors towards any dynamic transformation of the society. Considering this adamant nature of isolation it is reasonable to call the society as a Static Society.

**6.4. Church Autonomy and its impact on the Kerala Society**

As mentioned earlier the Syrian Church from the very beginning had exercised complete freedom in the matter of temporal administration of the Church. In spite of the spiritual supervision of different eastern churches from abroad, the Church maintained its autonomy and self rule from the very formative years.\(^{42}\)

We can see this aspect of self rule and autonomy of the Malankara Church, in the patriotic struggle for freedom in a later period. No such ideas were present in any other ancient Churches of Malabar.

In the pre-colonial period the bishops of the Syrian Christians, by all probability, had been an East Syrian one. Their functions in the Malabar Church were purely liturgical and doctrinal than administrative.\(^{43}\) Hence the local administration of the church was carried out by a powerful figure called Archdeacon along with the council of

\(^{39}\) In the northern part of India we can see the all four *varnas*. But in Kerala only Brahmins and *Sudras* are seen as part of the caste hierarchy. See P.K. Balakrishnan, *op.cit.*, p. 316.


\(^{41}\) A caste which primarily involved in trade both inside and outside but no overseas trade. This Sanskrit word literally meant Trader. *Ibid*.


\(^{43}\) *Ibid*. 
elders. The autonomous status of the Indian Church stands out in clearer relief perhaps in the institution of the Indian archdeacon.

The earliest document that throws some light on the office of the ‘Archdeacon of All-India’ is a letter from Patriarch Timothy (AD 780-823). The Patriarch wrote to the archdeacon, the head of the faithful in India, about the right norms to be followed during the ordination of priests, bishops, metropolitans and patriarchs. The Archdeacon is generally believed to have been the national head of the community.

To maintain an overall supervision and centralized control over the church, while in the presence, and longer absence of the East Syrian bishops, this office always functioned in the Church. He was selected from among the local clergy and was known during the pre colonial period, as ‘Jathikkukarthavyan’ meant, one who is responsible leader of the jati or Syrian community in Malankara. Archdeacon being the head of the community held the charge of administration. The bishops always being a foreigner and stranger to the local customs and language the Archdeacon enjoyed supreme powers in ecclesiastical and civil matters of the community. He was also called as the ‘Archdeacon of all India.’

6.4.1 The historical development of the Church Autonomy

46 The term Archdeacon was a given name to the head of Christians in India by the Persians and later Portuguese. The original term is ‘Jathikku Karthavyan,’ which means, the leader of the community, where as archdeacon means the head of the ministers. The Archdeacons were always from the Pakalomattom family, which is traditionally believed as one of the four families to which St. Thomas imparted the priestly ordination.
The historical development of the Church Autonomy is associated with a number of progressive efforts on the part of the later patriotic prelates. Till the coming of the Portuguese the Church managed to maintain its self-rule in the presence of the East Syrian Bishops. During this period, the Church authority successfully proved the possibility of a community to preserve its freedom and autonomy even in the absence of an ecclesiastical authority. There are a number of incidents in which the Archdeacon proved his authority over the Malankara Church, both in the presence and absence of the foreign bishops.

Though the archdeaconate headed the central administration of the Church, the functioning of the local individual churches was discharged by the priests and their parish assemblies. This was in tune with the religious and social customs of the country as this can be found in the administration of local temples and its properties, which most probably was an heritage of the Christians of Kerala that received from the Buddhist temples and its assemblies.

It is evident that the effective government of the church in Malabar was in the hands of the Archdeacons. The title of the Archdeacon was ‘the Archdeacon of all India.’ According to the local tradition he was addressed as the Overlord of the Malankara Christian Community. There are a number of instances in which the Archdeacon functions as the leader and the representative of the Syrian Christians. In certain incidents he possessed both social and political powers. The Pakalomattom family, claim to have a number of Archdeacons in succession.

6.4.2. Administrative Structure of the Church

48 Jacob Kollaparambil, Ibid., p. 84.
50 C.V. Cheriyan, Orthodox Christianity in India, Kottayam, 2003, p.104.
51 The Pakalomattom family is traditionally believed to be the priestly family have been converted by St. Thomas, see Ibid.
Presently The Catholicos and the Malankara Metropolitan is the head of the Malankara Church. The geographical areas under him within Kerala and outside are divided into Dioceses. A Bishop is in charge of a Diocese. Under each Bishop there will be several Parishes. The Parishes are called *Edavakas*. A Priest is in charge of a parish. There were annual *Edavaka* meetings in which the trustees and secretaries and the members of the Managing Committee of the parishes are elected. The elected members from each parish attend and vote in the Association when they are held, which is the General Body of the Malankara Church. Major decisions affecting faith, order and discipline of the Church as a whole were taken by the Episcopal Synod Synods.

Constitutionally all the parishes are under the Malankara Metropolitan. Each vicar of the parish was directed to make a roll of all the inhabitants of his parish, so that he might be acquainted with their customs and ways of living, and might administer the sacraments to them and comfort them in their troubles and necessities, in order that the faithful might receive the sacrament from nobody else without his knowledge. The *Edavaka Pothuyogam* or the General Assembly of the male members, who attained the age of 21 is the democratic body of each *Edavaka*. This body which exercises considerable power in religious and social matters over the members of the congregation. They meet on all important occasions affecting the welfare of the church and the congregation. The Vicar trustee and the *Kaikkaran* Trustee are the custodians of the church property, and have to submit accounts of incomes and expenditures of the church to the *yogam* and finally to the Metropolitan for information.

The *Edavaka Pothuyogam* is convened by the vicar to discuss and decide all important matters both temporal and administrative, affecting the community welfare. Their decision is communicated to the *Metran* or bishop for necessary sanction and
approval. In some cases the Metran himself presides and has the matter decided in his presence.

Ibn-at-Tayib, the Persian traveler in his book, *The Law of Christians* reproduces a letter that Patriarch Timothy I wrote to the Indian Christians. The letter says that the Indian Christians had to consult not the king, but the Patriarch, regarding the election of the Metropolitan (who is elected by the people), and that only after getting approval from the Patriarch were they allowed to refer the matter to the king. 52

### 6.4.3 *Edavaka* Concept of the Malankara Church and its Autonomy

The entire spiritual and social life of the Kerala Christians is closely related with the parish or *Edavaka*. Etymologically the term *Edavaka*, is a compound word composed of two words ‘*Edam*’ and ‘*Vaka*’. ‘*Edam*’ as mentioned in Gundert’s dictionary has the meaning ‘*Desam*’ or place53 also and ‘*Vaka*’ means ‘belonged to’ or ‘in the possession of’. Thus ‘*Edavaka*’ meant the place that belonged to the particular Desam. *Edavaka Yogam, Edavaka Palli, Edavakakkar* etc are the most common terms associated with the term *Edavaka*.

The concept of *Edavaka* system among the Malankara Christians can be traced back to the medieval period. The narrations of Joseph the Indian may be the available pre Portuguese reference about the local administration of the Malankara Church. However the events leading to the summoning up of the synod of Diamper, there are ample of references about the Malankara *edavakas*, from where one can assume the system prevailed during the Portuguese period.


53 Herman Gundert, *Malayalam English Dictionary*, Mangalore, 1872, p.120.
The historical development of the institution ‘Parish’ or ‘Edavaka’ of the Malankara Church has a peculiar and unique history. It is deeply rooted in the cultural settings of Kerala. One cannot compare it with the historical development of the Western parish or Church. To the Western people the term parish is an institution merely associated with the religious or spiritual centre of worship.

It may be assumed that Christian community was there in Kerala prior to the coming of the Brahmins. There are dependable references to prove the presence of Christian community in Kerala before the Brahminical migration. The Brahminization process in Kerala was gradual but deeper and many of the positives of the existing communities were either absorbed or modified with a view to suite their culture and tradition. Even now the North Indian Brahmins do not consider the south Indian Brahmins, especially the Kerala Nambudiris, as pure as them. The reason behind is said to be syncretism or the absorption of various cultures from the indigenous people.

The social system of Kerala, to a certain extent, was greatly molded by the Brahmins after their emigration. This was mainly because of the dominated intellect and the procession of iron technology along with the technical knowhow of agriculture. As known, the entire early native settlers were either forcibly removed or converted as servants or ‘dasyus’, later absorbed as sudras in the varna structure. The only exception

54 The English equalant ‘Parish’ has a different cultural background; but the term ‘Edavaka’ is deeply rooted in the cultural setting of ancient Kerala. It, unlike the Parish, the abode of entire socio-cultural and spiritual activities of the community
57 The prominence that Brahmins received was only during the Age of the Perumals i.e. since 9th Century A.D onwards. See Rajan Gurukkal & M.R. Raghava Varier (Gen. Editors), Cultural History of Kerala, Vol.1.,Thiruvananthapuram, 1999, p. 270f., see also A Sreedhara Menon, A Survey of Kerala History, Chennai, 2005, p.106. According to Cosmas, in Malabar there were Christians even in the 6th century, prior to the Brahmin domination in Kerala. See E. O. Winstedt, The Christian Topography Of Cosmas Indicopleustes, Cambridge,1909, p.119,
58 William Logan, Manuual of the Malabar District, Madras, 1887, pp. 98, 186f.
was that of the Christians, Jews and the Muslims. The social system was mainly associated with the self sufficient *Nambudiri Gramam* comprised of the religious class, the ruling class, the business class, and the servant class. The *avarnas* had no position in the realm of social dignity or human rights.

There are ample of evidences to prove the *Brahminization* process like absorption, modification and identification. The existing caste system based on occupation was modified with a view to suite the changed situation and permitted to continue as caste system. But the Christian community, by the time had achieved a high status in the society due to the economic progress and disciplined religion oriented life.

The random references\(^59\), throw light on the presence of Christianity in India in the formative centuries of Christian era. As mentioned in the *Universal Christian Topography* by Cosmas (6th Century) it is clear that there was a Christian community in Malabar, where pepper grows.\(^60\)

However it is clear that the Kerala Church had not been a missionary church. The numerical growth of the believers was mainly because of the biological population growth. They established churches in various parts of Kerala and maintained friendly terms with the natives.\(^61\) The contact with the natives caused reciprocal benefits. Regarding the administration of the church, they maintained a system that is equivalent to the democratic settings of the *Nambudiri Urazhma*\(^62\)

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\(^59\) CV Cheriyan, *op.cit.*, pp.25, 28

\(^60\) E. O. Winstedt, *op.cit.*, p.119.

\(^61\) It is evident from the descriptions of Vasco Da Gama, that at the time of their advent, here there were many parishes of the Malankara Christians. The Malankara parishes were mostly in the interior Malabar (Serra). Hence the parish Schools were distributed in the state, especially in the interior country side. See. Paulino a.S. Bartholomaeo, *India Orientalis Christina*, trans., Fr. John Pallath, O.C.D., *Paurasthya Bharathathile Christu Matham*, Kalamassery, 1988; Pius Melekandathil, ed., *Jornada Of Dom Alexis De Menezes: A Portuguese Account of the Sixteenth Century Malabar*, Kochi, 2003.

\(^62\) Like the temple administration, the Christian Parishes also were administered by an elected body. Representatives from important families were entrusted the duty of administration under the vicar of the Church. Thus the office of ‘Urazhma’ was
Even though there are no reliable historical documents to prove the *edavaka* administration prior to the coming of the Portuguese in the 16th century, it may be reasonably assume that the *edavaka* administration of the present model may have started at least from 15th century or even prior to it. Since the bishops were foreigners, the administration of the Church was in the hands of local leaders known as archdeacons, who were the civil and temporal leaders of the community. The title of this officer was “the Archdeacon of All India.”

The parish councils had a very important role in the Kerala Church. The council of the local priests (*desthu pattakar*) and the adult laymen administered the temporalities of the parish and looked after the Christian life of the people. This council could even excommunicate public delinquents. The recommendation of the parish council in writing (*desakkuri*) was a condition for ordination to the priesthood. The executive of the parish council was the *Kariakkar* (Trustee) elected by the council. Very important matters relating to the community were considered and decided by the general council of the representatives of all the parishes. These councils were in full vigor until the end of the eighteenth century. The Malabar Church thus shows the clear picture of a ‘Christian Republic.’

6.4.4. Challenges to Autonomy

The history of the Malankara Church can be identified as a struggle for autonomy and indigenous rule at least from the advent of the Europeans. Earlier it was not a

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64 As far as the administration of the Church is concerned, the parishes were considered as autonomous units and the Archdeacon (now the Malankara Metropolitan) being the head of the community both temporal and to a certain extent spiritual, had only a supervisory power. However regarding the “faith, order, and discipline” he was the final word. See Paulino a.S. Bartholomaeo, Rome, 1796, Propaganda Archives Rome, (Congr. Part 1. Vol. 109) p.89. See also Jacob Kollaparambil, *Ibid.*
challenge to them because no one had claimed the administrative superiority over them. Regarding the autonomy, the Church leaders always tried to project this aspect of self government as a part of their vision.\textsuperscript{65} While presenting the ancient history of the church to the Europeans, the community always shared a uniform expectation of temporal indigenous rule. But at the same time there are some anachronic statements which cannot be considered as authentic.

As informed by Mar Thoma IV in his letter to Carolus Schaaf, the Dutch scholar of Leiden “The Franks by their craftiness and temporal power captured half of all the Churches. About half of the diocese of Cochi belongs to the Franks, but our church in Malabar is not counted in that diocese. Amen. What I have said above, I have said in very short terms, and it is not found in the Syriac language but only in our native Malayalam language…..”\textsuperscript{66}

This awareness always remained latent in the mind of the Church, and there was no challenge to it from any quarters before the arrival of the Portuguese Roman Catholics. It became eloquent and explicit beginning with the enactment of the disciplinary decrees of Synod of Diamper in the Malankara Church. The resistance, however, had been suppressed by iron hand of the colonial masters for more than half a century, but it exploded in the 1653 uprising of the Coonan Cross Oath.

\subsection*{6.5 Popular Movements against Ecclesiastical Colonialism}

There are four important incidents in the Malankara Church that manifested itself as anti colonial movements with a view to challenge foreign ecclesiastical domination.

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\textsuperscript{65} Joseph Cheeran, K.V. Mammen, and P.C. Mathew, \textit{The Indian Orthodox Church: History and Culture}, Manganam, 2002, p.156.

\textsuperscript{66} The letter is cited in: A. Mingana, \textit{The Early Spread of Christianity in India}, Manchester, 1926, pp. 48-50.
Even though those movements were aimed at the ecclesiastical colonialism, it made lasting impact on the Kerala society.

6.5.1. The Coonan Cross Oath, 1653.

Prof. M.G.S Narayanan, an eminent Historian, regarding the scope of the rebellion, remarked. “The Portuguese bishops and missionaries, actively supported by arms and men, emerged as winners for the time being, but protest and hatred were smouldering in the minds of the poor native Christians. After 53 years the disgruntled native Christians came together and gathered the courage to express their will in the form of an oath, known as the Oath of Bent Cross. This action of a segment of the native Christian community who risked everything including life and property to assert the independence of their ancestral faith had several dimensions and long term consequences not visualised by the people at that time, as in the case of the famous Magnacarta of England in the 13th Century. Religion cannot be isolated from politics or other aspects of life as some people believe as long as it is held with sincerity and passion. Several scholars have noticed the elements of patriotism, nationalism and anti-colonialism in the daring act of a group of unarmed men in the teeth of Portuguese opposition.”

The Coonan Cross Revolt, as described in the previous chapter, was a direct challenge, somewhat organized, towards the ecclesiastical domination of the Jesuits in Kerala. This was the declaration of independence of Malankara Christians from ecclesiastical colonialism of the Roman Church. Essentially this was the first organized self-affirmation of the loyalists of the Archdeacon against all forms of alien domination.

68 There is a different opinion among some Scholars that the Archdeacon was trying to fight monarchical episcopacy inaugurated by the Jesuits after the synod of Diampher, and to regain Pakalomattom supremacy. But the thing that is to be noted that, from the medieval centuries the Pakalomattom family had supremacy over the Malankara Church and it was not the Archdeacon but twelve priests as representatives of the Church consecrated the Archdeacon as bishop Mar Thoma with the decision of the Alangad Council. See K.J. John, *The Road to Diamper*, Cochin, 1999, p.191.
Regarding the nature of the rebellion, the Coonan Cross Revolt was a pioneer anti-colonial uprising towards a foreign ecclesiastical domination. It was a successful protest movement of the native Christians towards the colonial interests of the Europeans. This pioneer popular movement resulted in the success of an anti-colonial cause. As far as the political background of Kerala is concerned, it was not easy to dominate over the Portuguese European strategy. Even though the Portuguese were in a state of failing glory, the European’s improved strategy always proved superior to that of the Indians.

Spiritually and liturgically, the ancient Indian church in the medieval period, before the Portuguese era, had been under the influence of the East Syrian Church. Apparently, this cordial relationship fully respected the autocephaly of the Indian church and its particular and traditional cultural setting.

In spite of the administrative and political barriers, the Church maintained a uniform ecclesiastical administrative system. As mentioned earlier, the group led by the Archdeacon, who stood for the administrative autonomy of the Malankara Church despite of serious turbulence was determined to maintain the independence of the Church. Following the Ahathallah incident, the Syrian Christians stood firmly against the Catholic faith. In the dramatic act of holding on to the long rope tied to the stone cross in Mattanchery near Cochin, thousands of Malankara Christians took the solemn pledge that they would never go back under the Portuguese Jesuits. It is to be noted that

69 Some historians are of the opinion that the Angengo revolt of 1695 was the pioneer anti-colonial movement in Kerala. But here one can see the nature of an anti-colonial movement in the Coonan Cross revolt of 1653. Hence it can be considered as the pioneer anti-colonial popular struggle.

70 The whole of Kerala was divided into a number of Principalities; and there were 3 major Principalities, viz. Calicut, Cochin and Travancore. Those rulers possessed suzerainty over their own region and the Christian citizens were distributed all over the state under different rulers.

71 Mar Ahathallah, the so called Patriarch, who in disguise, reached Mailapore to help the Malankara Church. On the way to Cochin, it is believed that he was caught by the Portuguese and drowned in the Cochin lake. This event infuriated the Malankara Christians, and subsequently ended in the oath of Coonan Cross in 1653.
even the Indian National Congress dared to ask for complete independence only in the thirties of the last century. Essentially this Christian insurgency and assertion may be viewed as the first organized and successful self-affirmation of the Kerala Christian community against all forms of alien domination.

After the Bend-cross oath in 1653, the Church assembled at Aalangad on 22nd of May 1653, and raised their leader Archdeacon Thomas Parambil of Pakalomattom lineage, as the bishop and head of the Church with the title Mar Thoma I. According to Hough:

“At length, impatient at the Pope's delay to redress their grievances, or even to notice their remonstrance, they determined to submit no longer, and came to the resolution of renouncing the domination of the Roman prelate, and choosing an ecclesiastical ruler of their own. The person selected was their Archdeacon, Thomas, a near kinsman of the late Archdeacon, and his immediate successor. Him they now resolved to obey as their only superior, until they should obtain a Bishop of their Church. La Croze mentions here the consecration of this Archdeacon by twelve cattanars.”

A committee of four priests also was selected at the assembly to assist Mar Thoma I for the day-to-day affairs of the Church. This could be seen as one of the milestones in the history Indian Orthodoxy. The Church asserted its independence and exercised its power of autonomy when it elected someone among them as the head of the Church at the level of a Metropolitan. It was not only to protest any sort of colonization of the Church but a struggle for an autonomous National Church also.

6.5.2. The Arthat Padiyola of 1806.

Another move against ecclesiastical colonialism and towards an indigenous rule in the Malankara Church was the Arthat Padiyola of 1806. Nobody, who is interested in

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72 Coonan Cross oath of the Syrian Christians. See Appensix. VI-2
73 James Hough, op.cit., p.296.
the contribution of Kerala in the field of anti colonial struggle, can ignore the relevance of this historical document. It was an incident of great impact in the course of history of the Church that visualized its caliber. The ‘Arthat Padiyola’, of 1806 A.D was a self-declaration of the parishners of the Arthat Church, to keep the identity and autonomy of the Malankara Church. The document, though belongs to 19th century, reflects a democratic and representative point of view. The parishners met together and expressed their aspirations, resolved unanimously and signed a ‘Padiyola’ to present before the head of the Church and the representative of the king. Though ecclesiastical, the Padiyola has a secular paradigm also. The declaration was written in vattezhuthu on a ‘Cheppedu’ or Copper Plate. It has almost two inches breadth and sixteen inches of length. The original Plate was presented to the Malankara Metropolitan and a copy to the Royal Palace. The copy of the Copper plate was kept with Paliyath Achan, Minister of the Raja of Cochin. It was discovered and deciphered from the copy preserved in the

74 It is otherwise called Arthat Cheppedu. See Fr. Dr. Joseph Cheeran, Indian Orthodox Church History (A.D 52 – 2007), op.cit., p.177ff. also see Appendix. IV.3.

75 Arthat Cathedral Church, dedicated to St. Mary, The Mother of God, has a long and glorious tradition and history. The Christian Community associated with the Church is believed to be the most ancient Christian community in Malankara, even a little bit earlier than the Niranam Christian Congregation. The Church is situated on the way to Guruvayur, two kilometers away from Kunnamkulam, in the Thrissur district. Ecclesiastically, the Church is now under the Kunnamkulam Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church. It is one of the most prominent Churches and Thalappalli (the head Church) of all the churches in the diocese. The ancient name of Arthat was Chattukulangarai. Owing to the traditional sentiments towards the place there are seven churches of different denominations at Arthat itself within one square mile. This Church did not partake in the Synod of Diampher. When Tippu Sulthan turned against the prominent ancient Churches of Malabar, during the Mysorean interlude in the close of 18th century, he burnt the ancient Church at Arthat.

Francis Buchanan (1800 A.D), and Claudius Buchanan (1806 A.D), two Anglican Delegates who visited Kerala to enquire the position of the St. Thomas Christians had visited many important Churches of Kerala including that of Arthat. Claudius Buchanan had presented a big golden medal to that church in the name of all the churches in Malankara. On one side of that medal which was three times as big as an ordinary college medal, the baptism of Jesus in River Jordan was grandly engraved, and on the other side the figure of a baby prepared and being led for baptism. Before the establishment of the Old Seminary at Kottayam, The Arthat Church had been the head quarters of many Malankara Metropolitans. Both, Pulikkottil Joseph Dionysius I & II, were the vicars of this Church in the 18th and 19th centuries respectively.

76 Vattezhuthu was the early script used to write Malayalam. As this script was written with more cursive lines, it was known as vattezhuthu. Most of the palace documents and other important documents were written in vattezhuthu.
Paliyath library. The original Plate is now kept with Prof. V.M. Johnappa, the former Head of the English Department, Union Christian College, Aluva. A granite copy is exhibited on the outer sidewall of the Arthat St. Mary’s Church, the place where it was originally written. It reads:

“Hearing the heretical doctrines of the Romans, some of our parishners were happened to be attracted into the Roman faith. As a result the ancient Arthat Church and its campus caused to be apportioned by lot, amongst the believers (of both sides). It caused a division in the Church and subsequently, much miseries and confusion. To avoid such further interaction with heretical doctrines, our prelates and believers have to keep aloof from all sorts of customs, practices and doctrines of the foreign bishops either from Rome, Babylon, Antioch or any other foreign countries, and hold fast the ancient faith, traditions and practices of our Apostle St. Thomas. We on behalf of the parishners sign this document before the Arthat Church dedicated to St. Mary, the Mother of God”.


Till then, the major division in the church was due to the Roman ecclesiastical intervention. With the pledge of Coonan Cross in 1653 A.D., the group led by the Archdeacon renounced the Roman faith and ecclesiastical domination. But by 1806 the

77 The Copper plate is written in Malayalam Vattezhuthu. This is an independent translation by the researcher from the original text.
78 The term ‘Myca Vikari’ is used in the original Cheppedu.
Church dared to renounce the real, possible and potential threat to the true faith and autonomy of the Church from anywhere, whether from the Western Europe or from West or East Syria.\footnote{In the \textit{Arthat Padiyola}, the Archdeacon group, especially the members of the Arthat Church, who boycotted the Synod of Diampher, pledged to renounce Roman, Babylonian and Antiochean ecclesiastical authorities.}

With this \textit{Cheppedu}, the Church leaders with great farsightedness exhorted the prelates and people to boycott all sorts of foreign intervention and to continue with their traditional identity.

This indigenous movement was of great importance and probably an inspiration for the struggle for political freedom.\footnote{See the Passage on ‘The role of Malankara Christians in India’s Freedom Movement’ Chapter 6, of this Dissertation.} The anti colonial outlook, organized attempt of the peoples’ representatives and nationalist autonomy oriented perspective are the lasting impact of the \textit{Arthat Cheppedu}. The anti colonial spirit that manifested in the Arthat Parish Assembly and subsequent decision and declaration through the \textit{Cheppedu} has a far reaching influence on the society and even on the anti colonial struggle.

\textbf{6.5.3. The Catholicate - 1912, A Symbol of Freedom and Autocephaly}

The foundation of a Catholicate\footnote{Catholicate or Patriarchate (both are same. Only linguistic differences) is the symbol of spiritual autonomy of the ancient Churches all over the world. It has an ecclesiastical and historical background. With the establishment of this high office, the Church becomes spiritually self sufficient to consecrate bishops, to convene Episcopal synods and to preside over it, to consecrate Holy \textit{Mooron} or Holy Chrism. Even though the Church had been temporally free to carry on its authority, the Malankara Church till then had to depend upon foreign Prelates for these purposes. Now with the Catholicate, the Church became the custodian of both temporal and spiritual powers, which was essential for a national indigenous Church.} was a direct action of the Malankara Church for declaring the Church as an Autocephalous body. It was the culmination of the struggles conducted by the Church for it autonomy. The event of momentous importance in the history of the Malankara Church after the Coonan Cross Oath of 1653 was the instituting of the Catholicate in 1912. This was not a sudden happening, but the finale of a long process of awakening in the Malankara Church ever since the Portuguese occupation of
the Church. All the aspirations of the community to express its identity and spiritual freedom culminated in the Catholicate. One cannot ignore the historical aspects of such an institution nor can underestimate its actual missionary and canonical potential in India. A Christian Church like the Malankara Church with a profound awareness of its roots, freedom, and long heritage in India has all the authority to institute its own head and organize its own hierarchy like any other ancient apostolic church in the world.\footnote{Dr. K.M.George, ‘The Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church: Historical Self - Understanding and Identity. Some Ecumenical Considerations’ in \textit{Faith of Our Fathers: Holy Faith}, ed., A. K. Cherian, Kottayam, 2006, pp. 122-136.}

As stated in the Constitution “The throne of Catholicos was re-established in the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East which includes the Malankara Church in AD 1912 and this institution has been functioning ever since in the Orthodox Syrian Church of the East.”\footnote{The Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, Catholicate Office, Devalokom, Kottayam, 2002 Section 5 A, Article 99.}

Patriarch of Antioch Mar Abdul Messiah the immediate successor to Patriarch Peter III was succeeded the throne in 1895. By a state interference he had lost his position in Turkey and came to be replaced by Mar Abdulla. While Metropolitan Mar Dionysius VI, the Malankara Metropolitan, clashed with Mar Abdullah, the Canonical senior Patriarch Abdul Messiah, who was dethroned by the Sulthan of Turkey, offered to come to the assistance of the former. Thus in 1912 he came to Kerala to establish the Catholicate of the East in Malankara. A senior bishop of the Malankara Church, Mar Ivanios was installed as the first Catholicos in Malankara with the name Baselius Paulose I. The ceremony was held at St. Mary’s Church, Niranam on 15\textsuperscript{th} September 1912.

With the establishment of the Catholicate the Church once again proclaimed its indigenous authority and autonomy.

\textbf{6.5.4. The Constitution of 1934.}\footnote{See Appendix- 2}
The Constitution of 1934 of the Malankara Church is another milestone in the historical development and growth of the Church. As stated earlier the re-establishment of Catholicate in 1912 made the Church fully autonomous and by which the Church renounced the external intervention of any kind even in the spiritual matters. Since 1912 The Church with a national spiritual head and a Prelate with temporal authority over the parishes had become Autocephalous.

The Constitutional development of the Church has a long cherished history. From the available descriptions, during the pre-Portuguese period the parishes were autonomous and a centralized system of administration was lacking. However the Archdeacon, being the *Jatikkukarthavyan* had exercised temporal powers of administration over each parish. The synod of Diamper gives us an example for the prevailing administrative system of the pre-Portuguese Church of Malankara. Even though the Catholic form of synod was entirely different, This was due to the existing custom of the Malankara Christians. Eventually there developed a constitutional get-together of the parishes under the native bishops. In 1653 following the Coonan Cross revolt, the infuriated gathering elected Archdeacon Thomas to the high office of Metropolitan or bishop. In the post-Diamper period the Malankara Church officially

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85 Catholicos.
86 Malankara Metropolitan.
87 The Synod, as part of the Latinization of the Syrians, summoned by the Goan Archbishop Alexis de Menezis in 1599 A.D. at Udayamperur or Diampher near Cochin.
88 As per the Canonical law of the Roman Catholic Church, the decisions regarding faith, order and discipline were came under the purview of the council of prelates. But the Synod of Diampher was attended by the Archdeacon, priests and even lay people as official representatives and many of the resolutions were regarding faith, order and discipline.
89 A Meeting at Edappilly Church and The Synod at Alangad Church.
summoned a number of synods\(^{91}\) with the representation of the whole Malankara Christians.

After the establishment of the Catholicate in 1912, the Malankara Church appointed a committee for drafting a constitution for the Church. O.M. Cheriyaan, a prominent lay leader was the Convener of the Constituent Committee.\(^{92}\) He was assisted by certain lay leaders, priests and bishops. The Malankara Syrian Christian Association, the Church Parliament met at Kottayam M.D. Seminary on 26\(^{th}\) December, 1934, unanimously passed the Constitution.\(^{93}\) Since the date the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church is administered as per the constitution adopted in 1934.

As per the provision of the Constitution,\(^{94}\) the Malankara Syrian Christian Association,\(^{95}\) a fully representative body of the Church with elected members- priests and laymen from all the Parish Churches- is the most powerful democratic body of the Malankara Church. One priest and one to ten laymen depending on the number of members in each parish are members of the Association. There are about 1500 parishes under the Malankara Church. It is the Association which elects the Catholicos and the Malankara Metropolitan and also the Bishops and other important office bearers of the Church.\(^{96}\)

\(^{91}\) For example, the synod of Velianadu (1843), Parumala synod (1873), Mullanthuruthy Synod (1876) etc.

\(^{92}\) Malankara Orthodox Church Encyclopedia, op.cit., p. 839.

\(^{93}\) The Malankara Syrian Christian Association, the supreme body of the Church, approved this constitution on 26th Dec. 1934. Twice the constitution was amended, on 17th May, 1951 and 14th April, 1967, by the Malankara Association. The amended constitution was later approved by the Holy Episcopal Synod also and was promulgated by His Holiness Moran Mar Baselios Augen I, Catholicos of the East and Malankara Metropolitan per his Order No. 156/67 of 26th June, 1967.

\(^{94}\) The Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, op.cit., Section 4 A, Article 71.

\(^{95}\) The Malankara Syrian Christian Association was originally formed in the Parumala Association in 1872, and officially declared in the Mullanthuruthy Synod of 1876. Semavoon Mar Dionysius, The Kandanad Grandhavari, Kunnamkulam, 2008, pp. 192,611.

\(^{96}\) The Priest Trustee, Lay Trustee, the Metropolitan Trustee or the Malankara Metropolitan( usually the Catholicos), the Catholicos Designate, the Managing Committee, and the Constituent Committee if needed.
There is a Managing Committee for the Association with members from each Diocese elected by the Association. The Malankara Metropolitan is the President of the Managing Committee and the remaining Prelates having administrative charge are the Vice-Presidents.

The Association Managing Committee has a Working Committee with Malankara Metropolitan as the President. The Working Committee is also the Consultative Committee of the Malankara Metropolitan.

The Episcopal Synod has all the Prelates of the Malankara Church as members. Matters concerning Faith, Order and Discipline are under the authority of the Episcopal Synod. It is the Episcopal Synod which installs the Catholicos elected by the Association.

After the adoption of this constitution the then separate positions of the Malankara Metropolitan and the Catholicos held by two different incumbents were integrated in one incumbent of the apostolic seat of St. Thomas as both the temporal and spiritual head of the Malankara Church.

6.6. Social Life of Malankara Christians

It is a fact that, along with the existing caste ridden social system, the Pre-Portuguese Christians of Malankara had been identified with the then customs and practices of the Hindus. But the efforts of the Archbishop Menezis that is reflected in the Decrees of Synod of Diamper regarding the social life of the Christians had made considerable changes in their life. After the Oath of Coonan Cross, the Archdeacon group maintained this refined social life according to the Christian faith. In that sense

97 Till the adoption of the Constitution in 1934, the Catholicos or the Spiritual authority was H.H. Baselius Geevarghese II, and the Malankara Metropolitan was H.B. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius. Since 1934 H.H. Baselius Geevarghese II held the twin offices. The Present Authority is H.H, Baselios Paulose II.
one can say that the Malankara Christians were indebted to the Archbishop for this social transformation\textsuperscript{98}. What is to be specified in this interaction was that the Malankara Christians were prepared to be accustomed with the newly introduced ethical life through the missionaries and the society as a whole could be acquainted with the new social order suiting the Christian gospel. The social transformation was not all on a sudden; but slow and gradual. However the new system might have influenced the Kerala society, which has been reflected in the coming centuries.

The Malankara Christians lived in a 'private' world, which marked their community identity and 'public' world which related to the sociopolitical environment of Kerala. In a plural society, interaction and communication do not occur through the loss of identity, the relationship is symbiotic, with the operation of hierarchy, lending coherence to the differences\textsuperscript{99}. In this sense, caste organization is a good example of the culture of plurality. While studying the history of the Malankara Christians, it is observed that they had their 'private' world represented by the worship and faith influenced by the West Asian Churches and their 'public' life influenced by 'the socio-political environment of Kerala. Brown in his book entitled \textit{Indian Christians of St Thomas} looks at their history from a socio-religious angle.\textsuperscript{100} With a thorough study of the socio-religious life of the Malankara Christians, it can be assumed that although the worship of the Church and the theology expressed in its liturgical books remain entirely foreign, in social life and

\textsuperscript{98} Christian ethos and the gospel message in the light of new humanism began to percolate in the Malankara Christian community with the advent of Latin missionaries from the beginning of 16th century. The missionaries established Seminaries at Quilon, Cochin, Cranganore and Vaipicotta much before the Synod of Diamper. In these Seminaries or Colleges the candidates were mostly the children of Malankara Christians. At least a few of them were sent to Coimbra in Portugal and Rome for higher studies as recommended by Mar Abuna Jacob, the Metropolitan of the Malankara Christians. Mar Jacob himself accepted Roman Catholic faith as testified by Francis Xavier. The Synod of Diamper was the culmination of these things and made it systamaic. See. K.J. John, \textit{op.cit.}


\textsuperscript{100} L.W. Brown \textit{The Indian Christians of St.Thomas}. London, 1956.
customs the Church is completely Indian. The assimilation of the community to its environment is certainly one of the reasons for its survival through the centuries as has been understood by a scrutiny of their social life. The Malankara Christians lived in two 'worlds' at the same time, but with no consciousness of tension between them or of disharmony within themselves. These Christians had an intense pride of their etnicity and tradition, summed up in their claim to St Thomas as their apostle, which made them exclusive. On the other hand, the unit in Hindu society was the caste and the Christian desire to continue as a separate close community was to the non-Christians not only acceptable but inevitable. The two 'worlds' of cults and culture interpenetrated and influenced each other chiefly on socio-religious occasions such as marriage. The cults enabled the Thomas Christians to remain authentically Christian down the ages.

Through a thorough investigation of the socio-religious life of the Thomas Christians of Kerala, Brown has succeeded to a great extent in proving how the Thomas Christians fitted well into the social mosaic of Kerala. It is worthwhile to note that Brown has looked at the history of these Christians as an integral part of the socio-cultural history of the people of Kerala, and not as separate from it.

Mathias Mundadan has presented the harmonious picture of the social life and background of the St. Thomas Christians, in the early centuries before the advent of the Portuguese. According to him: “Even a superficial student of the history of the St. Thomas Christians wonders at the spontaneity with which the community adjusted itself to its milieu, at least as far as their social life was concerned”

The integrated life of the Hindu and Christian communities shows up better in relief against the Acts and Decrees of the Synod which went on to forbid to the St. Thomas Christians, social, ecclesiastical and religious privileges and practices they were

acquainted to. However in the later centuries those restrictions that had imposed upon the Christians made positive impact on them. We are able to get an idea about how the St. Thomas Christians lived and worshipped prior to A.D. 1599.103

The early converts to Christianity were from the Hindu groups. Even after conversion, they continued to follow their customs and traditions. The medieval local rulers did not permit them to convert from the avarna groups, as they were the source of income of the Varna groups104 and hence it was not possible for the early Christian community to convert the low castes to Christianity in the formative years of the religion.105 This may have been the reason behind the allegation that the Syrian Christians were reluctant to mission and conversion. Gouvea writes: “They used to observe the custom of other Mafabaris”106 (sic) of not touching the low castes, and if they happen to touch them they wash themselves, not because of the superstition of the gentiles who believe that, if they touch the low castes, they get polluted, as they say, which is the same as irregular, until they wash themselves; but because, as they live among Nairs, if they touch the low castes. Nairs will not be able to touch them, and thus they will lose the contact, the communication of life, the purchases and sales and the honours of the kings, because with the Christians the Nairs can communicate and deal, because both are of noble castes, and for the same reason with the Brahmins.107

The old Christian centers in other part of India, like Mylapore were perished. But the Syrians of Malabar survived, because they remained and organized themselves as one among the castes of Kerala and followed the strict rules of the caste system. The copper

103 Ibid.
106 Malabaris
plates give us the early records and reference about the social status of the Malankara Christian community.\textsuperscript{108}

6.6.1. Nazarani Mappilas.

St. Thomas Christians were addressed as \textit{Nazarani mappilas}.\textsuperscript{109} Their customs were very similar to those of the Hindus of Kerala. They enjoyed many privileges and honours some of which even the \textit{Nairs} were denied. We have testimony in the Portuguese writings about their social status. The Portuguese missionary Monserrate says:

“These people are of high rank and greatly reputed, well-formed and of good behaviour. The men are warriors; the women being honourable and rich, do the household works”. \textsuperscript{110}

Gouvea in his account on the 17\textsuperscript{th} century Christians testifies that they are fine gunmen and so well-trained in shooting that they rarely miss an aim. From their early age they are brought up gun-in-hand, and thus turn out splendid hunters. They all moved about with swords and shields and some with guns and lances, which they left at home only when going to church.\textsuperscript{111}

Even in the 20\textsuperscript{th} and the present centuries the title is common among the Malankara Christians. Some of the important persons of the Malayala Manorama Kandathil family bear the title \textit{Mappila} along with their name. Kandathil Varghese \textit{Mappila}, Mammen \textit{Mappila}, Cherian \textit{Mappila} etc. are the typical examples.

6.6.2. Service to the local rulers

\textsuperscript{108} \textit{Ibid.} pp.27,28,30,55,56,86,108.
\textsuperscript{110} A. M. Mundadan, \textit{n. 35, op.cit.} p. 121.; Cf. Z.M.Paret, \textit{op.cit.}, p.10.
\textsuperscript{111} Pius Melekandathil, ed., \textit{Jornada Of Dom Alexis De Menezes}, \textit{op.cit.} pp.118, 141, 250, 252.
The service that the Malankara Christians rendered to the local chieftains during warfare further enhanced their social status and privileges. They dealt with the chieftains directly and did not need any intermediary officers. They did not regard as binding on them any state law, which went against the privileges granted to them or the religious traditions they had fostered for a long period.\textsuperscript{112}

The moral character of this interesting people is attested by the joint reports of the Rev. Dr. Kerr, and the Rev. Dr. Buchanan in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century. “The character of these people,” says Dr. Kerr, “is marked by a striking superiority over the heathens in every moral excellence: and they are remarkable for their veracity, and plain dealing. They are extremely attentive to their religious duties, and abide by the decision of their priests and metropolitan in all cases; whether in spiritual, or in temporal affairs.”\textsuperscript{113}

The Malankara Christians practiced a number of \textit{Varna} rules and the caste Hindus considered the touch of a Syrian Christian would neutralize their polluted belongings. The chieftains of Kerala used to frequently invite the Syrian Christians to settle down near their residences in order to engage them as pollution neutralists As described in the Copper Plates, they from the medieval had enjoyed most of the privileges of royal families.\textsuperscript{114}

\subsection*{6.6.3. Social customs}

Since religion plays a key role in the social life and culture of the Malankara Christian community, the social life of Malankara Christians is important. Being a part of the Kerala society the Malankara Christians also has a role to play for the social transformation of the region. It is not so easy to separate or compartmentalize the life of

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\textsuperscript{112}Philip Kuruvila, \textit{Identity and Integration of the Orthodox Church in India}, Delhi, 2000, pp.24,25
\textsuperscript{113} Thomas Yeats, \textit{Indian Church History}, London, 1818, Pp.162,163.
\textsuperscript{114} The special privileges granted to the \textit{Kollam} Christians (\textit{Tharisappalli Copperplate} of 849 A.D.), even though only to the immigrants from Persia, in due course they became a part of the early Christians. It provided almost all royal privileges of the time.
\end{flushright}
a Church member as religious and social. The social life and culture of the community comprises of its various family and church ceremonies like family feasts, church feasts and other cultural celebrations. One could see a nice coming-together of many religious principles and ethical norms through different cultural programs like feasts and celebrations. There are many family feasts in connection with from birth to death, from season to season and also according to the liturgical calendar of the Church. A detailed description and analysis was done in the chapter related to the Socio-Cultural life of the Malankara Christians. One thing has to be mentioned here about the social life of the Malankara Christians in the post-Portuguese period is that, the Decrees of the Synod had made a great influence on the entire life of the Christians in the following centuries. The social interaction of the Christians with the secular society was reorganized with the changed situation followed by the missionary enterprises.

6.6.4. Three major Professions

The three chief professions in which the Malankara Christians engaged in were, agriculture, trade and military service. Just like the Nairs, their peers in the Kerala society, a number of Christians were warriors with medieval parlance.

Pepper growing was almost their sole monopoly. As far was trade is concerned, although at the time of the Portuguese arrival in this they were not so popular, they were proficient in this earlier. Brown's opinion in these aspects is remarkable and not improbable. Kerala chieftains always welcomed traders and bestowed upon them rights and privileges as there were no traders or Vaisyas in the Kerala society. With the arrival of the Persian Christians, when they assumed that function, particularly the overseas trades, contributed much for the economic progress of the chiefdoms. From this work they got royal protection. In the course of time due to their skill in this area they got

grant of lands, concessions, and social privileges. Thus becoming intermediaries in disposing of the goods and productions of the country, the Christians came to have the reputation as overseas traders. In this way they caused the flow in of a large sum of wealth to the rajas. Also in recognition of their skill as a guild and community the rajas conferred upon them titles like *Tarakan, Mappila, Mutalali, Chetti*, etc.\(^\text{116}\)

6.6.5. Religious Accord

As we know, the present communal issues are mainly because of the lack of mutual understanding and cooperation of the people. But the Malankara Christians as a part of the society were intermingled with the Kerala society till the European advent. This social interaction and mutual respect for the fellow beings caused a favourable atmosphere for religious accord and provisions for mutual growth. In the course of time, they got opportunity to identify with the local people and to attain the goodwill of the people. This reciprocal interaction and mutual understanding was the major element of the period under consideration. In short the Malankara Christians identified with the native people and their customs to a certain extent.

An Augustinian monk, Antonio Gouvea, wrote in 1606, that “…the dress (of the Christians) is the same as that of the Malabar people”\(^\text{117}\) and has noted that there was no distinction, either in their habits, or in their hair, or in anything else, between the Christians of Malankara, and the heathen Nairs. At baptism, Christians gave names which were common to both Hindus and Christians.\(^\text{118}\) They took part in all the local Hindu festivals like *Onam*, the joyous harvest festival etc. Hindu musicians played an important role in Christian religious festivals, and even during the Holy Eucharistic services while others participated by standing in the Church doorways, or by looking


through the windows.\textsuperscript{119} In some places, Hindu religious pilgrimages stopped for blessings at Churches. Susan Bayly notes that Nairs accepted Syrians as participants and donors in local temple rites the acknowledgement of the Syrians right to share Hindu ‘sacred space’ was expressed in some centres by the construction of Syrian Churches on sites virtually adjoining Hindu temples.\textsuperscript{120}

As part of their religious accord, the Malankara Christians, in all secular matters used the local calendar, but at the same time, for things ecclesiastical, they used the East Syrian Church calendar.\textsuperscript{121}

\textbf{6.6.6. Social Privileges}

There are certain concrete and material evidences to know more about the status and privileges of Malankara Christians. There are arguments regarding the grant of Copperplates of privileges that those privileges were granted to the immigrants alone. But the entire Christians, both the native converts and the immigrants were constituted the Kerala Christian community.

The existence and status of Malankara Christians are available from the Cheppedu or copper plate grants popularly known as the Syrian Christian Copper Plates.\textsuperscript{146} They are four in number namely \textit{Iravi Korthen Cheppedu}, Knai Thomman \textit{Cheppedu}, Tharissappally first \textit{Cheppedu} and Tharissappaily second \textit{Cheppedu}.

\textbf{6.6.6.1. Knai Thomman Copper Plate}

\textit{Knai Thomman} Copper Plate, traditionally believed to be granted to a Canaanite merchant with the name \textit{Knai Thomman} \textsuperscript{122}, who along with a group of people numbered around three or four hundred, migrated to Malabar, believed to be in the middle of

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{119} \textit{Ibid.}, p.142
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Susan Bayly, \textit{Saints, Goddesses and Kings}, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 250- 51; also see T.V. Philip, \textit{East of Euphrates}, New Delhi, 1998, p.133
  \item \textsuperscript{121} A.M. Mundadan, \textit{op.cit.}, pp. 157-159
  \item \textsuperscript{122} A.Mingana, \textit{op.cit.}, p.49
\end{itemize}
fourth century\textsuperscript{123}, to escape the persecution of Persian rulers\textsuperscript{124}, the grant mentions a number of privileges bestowed upon the merchants. It is reported that the then ruler of Malabar, \textit{Cheraman Perumal, Cocarangon} as he is called in the text of the \textit{Cheppedu}, bestowed on the colony of Christians, tax-free lands and a number of privileges affecting their social life. They and those who joined them were given the town of Mahadevar as a free gift. The content of the \textit{Cheppedu} is as follows: “May Cocarangon be prosperous, enjoy long life and live one hundred thousand years, servant of God, strong, true, just full of good works, reasonable, powerful, over the whole earth, happy, conquering, glorious, rightly prosperous in the ministry of God, in \textit{Malavar}, in the great city of the great idol. While he reigned at the time of Mercury of February, on the seventh day of the month of March, before the full moon, the same king, Cocarangon being in \textit{Carnelur}, there arrived in a ship Thomas Cananeo, a chief man, who had resolved to see the uttermost part of the East. And some men, seeing him as he arrived, went to inform the king. And the king himself came and saw and called the said chief man Thomas, and he disembarked and came before the king, who spoke graciously to him; and to honour him he gave him in surname his own name, calling him Cocarangon Cananeo. And he received this honour from the king and went to rest in his place.”\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{123} The tradition says that it was in 345 A.D. The date of this migration is disputed. The name associated with the Cheraman Perumal as the ruler who presented this grant is confusing. Since the Cheraman Perumals’ rule started in the 9th century, there is no historical support for this tradition of \textit{Knai Thomman} date. Further Kerala with a separate entity was realized only with the Perumals’ rule (800 -1124 A.D). In decade XII of \textit{Da Asia}, the Portuguese historian Diago de Couto wrote “the arrival of this man (Knai Thomman) was in about A.D. 811, as is found in the Chaldean books of these Christians.” see Couto, \textit{Da Asia}, decade XII, Book III, Ch.5, 285, Lisbon, 1888; J.S. Assemanus set the date of \textit{Knai Thomman} in the first half of the 9th century. See J.S. Assemanus, \textit{Bibliotheca Orientalia}..., III-2, 1919- 28, pp. 442- 44; James Hough, \textit{op.cit.}, p.97; A. Mingana, \textit{Ibid}; also see Julius Richter, D.D., \textit{A History of Missions in India}, Edinburg and London, 1908, p.30. 124 C. James Robertson, \textit{op.cit.}, p.414
According to tradition the copper plate on which the grants were inscribed was
with the Christians of Kerala till the arrival of the Portuguese, but was passed on later to
the Europeans at Cochin. The Portuguese Factor of Cochin engaged a Jew to have it
translated into Portuguese. Copies of the translation were made, but unfortunately they
were lost or misplaced. Bishop Medlycott, a former Vicar Apostolic of the Syrian
Catholics of Trichur, who collected materials in England in the first quarter of 20th
century for his work, *India and Apostle Thomas*, found in the British Museum library in
a MS. Volume dated 1604 a textual translation of the *Knai Thomman* plates, which was
published in *Catholic Encyclopedia*, New York. However this copy found in the British
Museum was along with MS of Jesuits prepared by Francisco Roz (Adde. MSS 9853, pp.
525-537). It is, therefore believed that the British copy of *Knai Thomman* plates was
preserved by Francisco Roz. The English translation of this document is published in
Kerala Society Papers by Rev. H. Hosten. Regarding the original and the other copies
nothing is known as to whether they are extant, or if they are, where can be found.

Historical scholars are of the opinion that the grant refers to the free gift of the of
*Mahadevarpattanam*, special privileges to Thomas and his progeny as well as to the
adherents of his faith.

Although the date of the *Cheppedu* is controversial among historians, all agree
that the grant was made to *Knai Thoma*. If the writing on the copper plate was in Syriac,
Tamil and Arabic126 the problem of the date is indeed serious. There are some other
grants equally or a little bit more significant in the social life of the early Christians.

6.6.6.2. *Tarisapally Copper Plates*- 849 A.D

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126 Islam emerged only in the 4th decade of the 7th century and Arabic came to be important
only after that time. Therefore, if the copper plate was produced in 345 AD, Arabic cannot be
there as one of the languages in which it was inscribed, suggesting that it was a post Islamic
document.
Another example of such a grant is the so-called *Tarisapally* (Quilon) copper plates. These plates have in them inscribed the grants and privileges given to the Quilon Church, sometime in the 9th century by Ayyan, the ruler of Quilon, in the fifth regnal year of Stanu Iravi, the Chera Chieftain. The Church situated, according to the record at Kurakeni Kollam on the sea shore. The date of this record is given in the beginning of the first grant, which alludes to a previous grant to the same institution. The Church was built by a certain Esho da Tapirayi and Maruvan Sabarisho, is described as the founder of the mercantile corporation of Kollam. The charter registers various rights, privileges and landed property within specific boundaries. The grant includes some native families also to serve the church and Persian merchants. The families thus handed over were toddy-tapers, washer-women, carpenters, agriculturists, and also oil-mongers, each providing their respective skilled labour to the needs of church.

Among the concessions, besides various tax-exemptions, the church was given the custodianship of weights and measures and permitted to collect a tax. There are mentions of 72 other privileges some of which are enumerated and others presumed. Such privileges were: day lamp, spreading cloth, palanquin, umbrella, northern drum, bugle, locked gate, arch, arch-decoration, use of elephants at time of marriage, feasts and festivals etc. The chief priest of the Church was accorded the same status as the military-political chiefs of the country. According to Elamkulam, Christians were treated as par with the Jains and Buddhists during the period of the *Tharissapally* Grant and it was on this basis that tax exemption and seventy two privileges were given to the Church as *viduperu*. The Christians had maintained honesty in trade, business etc. It was not possible to distinguish a person as Hindu or Christians in those times merely by his

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127 *Tharissa* in East Syriac and *Trisai* in Western Syriac means ‘straight’ or ‘right’ in Greek its equivalent is ‘ortho’. When this attribute is added with Shubaha, Shubaho, and Doxa respectively to read ‘*Tharissa Shubaha*’, ‘*Trisai Shubaho*’, and *Ortho Doxa* (*Orthodox*) meant Right belief or right faith. See. Dr. P.J. Thomas, *op.cit.*, p. 73
The Christian converts were most probably from the Nair community or from their descendants, and hence they continued to practice the native cultural ethos as before.\textsuperscript{129}

The plates also mention certain powers given to the Tharisa Church. If the church felt any grievance it could take the law into the hands and hold in abeyance the collection of duty and weighing fee until the grievance was redressed. Administration of justice within the community was with the \textit{Anjuvannam} and \textit{Manigramam}. The civil cases were decided by the \textit{Arunoottvar} of the settlement.

The Malankara Christians had supervision over some of the occupational groups who were placed under their protectorate.\textsuperscript{130} The king and his prime minister alone had authority over them. They kept their own body-guards and maintained armed forces. At all times, they have been foremost in the country, in agriculture, trade, industry and civil and military service.

The first set of these copper plates consists of three plates. Of these, one is under the custody of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and preserved at the headquarters of this Church at Kottayam and another is preserved at the headquarters of the Mar Thoma Church at Thiruvalla. The third plate is believed to have been lost. The second set has four plates, three of which are preserved at Kottayam by the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church and one by the Mar Thoma Church at Thiruvalla.\textsuperscript{131}

\textbf{6.6.6.3. Iravi Kortan Coper Plate}

\textsuperscript{129} C.V. Cheriyan \textit{op.cit.}, p. 86
\textsuperscript{130} See. Tharisapalli Copper Plate. Appendix- IV.
\textsuperscript{131} According to the Kollam Panchayath judgment of AD 1840, the official custodian of these copper plates is the Malankara Metropolitan. However, at present, two out of the remaining five plates are in the possession of Malankara Marthoma church. See Elamkulam Kunjan Pillai, \textit{op.cit}, pp.371- 375.
The *Iravi Korthan Cheppedu* or *Veera Raghava Pattayam* is also another valuable ancient document which is in the possession of the Malankara Orthodox Church. It is grant of concesion and privilages to to Iravi Korthan of *Mahatevarpattanam*. The copper plate was issued by Veera Raghava, a descendant of Veera Kerala likely to be the Chera King who died in 1028 A.D. With the grant Iravi Korthan was bestowed upon the title Manigramam. It was a trade guild of merchants. He was given the honour and privilege of the grand merchant of *Cheraman* world. He also was given monopoly of trade, ferry charges, along with privileges to enjoy like elite classes or even a little bit more. The grant was to him and for his successors.\(^\text{132}\)

But the Scholars do not agree as to the date of the grant. Nagam Ayya,\(^\text{133}\) K. N. Daniel,\(^\text{134}\) and Z. M. Paret\(^\text{135}\) are of the opinion that this *Cheppedu* was granted in AD 230, whereas T. K. Joseph\(^\text{136}\) and Elamkuiam Kunjan Pillai\(^\text{137}\) are strongly advocating for AD 1320. Sreedhara Menon suggests AD 1225.\(^\text{138}\) There are minor arguments for AD 680 and AD 775.\(^\text{139}\) All of them are primarily depending on the astrological calculation from the copper plate that is matching for all five years mentioned above.

The second dispute is about the religion of the receiver. Again, Nagam Ayya, Sreedhara Menon, K. N. Daniel and Z. M. Paret and most other authors consider the receiver, Iravi Korthen, a Christian whereas Elamkuiam Kunjan Pillai and K. M. Panikker try to prove Iravi Korthen a Hindu.\(^\text{140}\) Joseph Chazhikattu tries to establish him

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138 Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala Charitram, op.cit.*, pp. 95,156.  
However, he favours AD 230 as the period. Bernard Alancherry treats Iravi Korthen as the chief Kathanar and hence as a bishop. 142

Gouvea recorded the impact of those privileges as follows:

“….and because of those privileges and honours, these Christians are looked upon favourably by the gentile kings and considered to belong to the best and the oldest nobility of Malabar, giving to them even the first place therein, and more noble than the Nairs who are hidalgos (fidalgos or noblemen) and noblemen of their Kingdoms. For this reason any Christian who came from the other parts of the world for their business in Malabar, from Pectora of Persia, Armenia, Abexim (Abyssinia) and from other parts are always happy to contact them and live among them, finding their protection, brotherhood and communication, which among Christians, as servants of one Lord and heirs of one and the same Kingdom should always be there and is so much recommended to us by Christ, Our Lord in His Gospels.” 143

The copper plate grants definitely provided dignity and business prospects for the Malankara Christians. However, the donor of those grants was also benefited:

140 However, Elamkulam stated elsewhere that a name looked like Hindu alone did not prove the religion of the person as Hindu or Christian. See Elamkuiam Kunjan Pillai op.cit., p. 97.
“Christians attained higher position in war as well as in commerce. Their foreign connections supported them to advance in trade. Financial troubles were not rare for the kings, who were always in war or in war preparation. It was natural that they needed the cooperation of the Christians who were big merchants. Considering all these situations, there is no wonder if the King(s) had granted those privileges to their leaders just to please the Christians. It was just an act of the kings for the stability of their position and for the prosperity of the kingdom.”

Even though the dates and contents are not of unanimous opinion, it is generally agreed that those copper plate grants put Malankara Christians in a privileged circle of the Kerala society and insured their position as merchants. The net result of all these Cheppedus can be summarized as follows:

The Malankara Christians owned two trade zones with certain privileges, protection and tax exemptions at Mahodayapuram and Kollam in the pre modern period.

They became the masters of standard weights and measures; they became the official tax collectors of the respective regions and they got several social privileges that placed them at a respectable position in the society during the period.

The Christians of the time were engaged in three important occupations - agriculture military and trade, particularly the overseas trades. From these works they got royal protection from the local rajas. In the course of time due to their skill in this area they got grant of lands, concessions, social privileges which were recorded on these copper plates. Thus becoming intermediaries in disposing of the goods and productions of the country the Christians came to have the reputation caused the flow in of a large sum of wealth. This made them envious and influential group in the society.

All these confirm the fact that the Christian community\textsuperscript{146} possessed a distinguished social position in the society. Not only their trade and the social status which they acquired out of their trade skill were the main cause behind their great position in the society but also their ethnic identity\textsuperscript{147} with the Persian and their close association with Brahmans, Nairs and rulers – also was another reason behind their area of seclusion from the marginalized. Many of the customs and practices and feasts they followed and still follow to a larger extend, confirm their identity with the privileged minority.\textsuperscript{148}

The Syrian Christians up to the time of the Portuguese were governed by Archdeacon from Pakalomattam family who had vast powers to rule over them. In fact he had even soldiers under him trained by Panikers of Syrian Christian families. During a crisis he used to help the king by providing trained Syrian Chritians in Kalari fight.\textsuperscript{149} After the oath of the Coonan Cross in 1653 AD the Malankara Church was ruled by Mar Thomma I to IX mostly from Pakalomattam family.

6.6.6.4. Villarvattom Royal family of the Malankara Christians

One other interesting point connected with the early history of the Malankara Christians is, that they still cherish the tradition of having attained to the dignity of possessing a king of their own at Villarvattam near Chendamangalam near Cochin, and that at death of the last king, who migrated to Udayamperoor without issue, the kingdom lapsed to Cochin Royal Family. Ever since that time, the Christians of St. Thomas have

\textsuperscript{146} The immigrants, those who received privileges, increased in number as a result of bilateral relation with the natives. Buddhists also submerged in the Christian group in the wake of Hindu revival.

\textsuperscript{147} Mundadan, n. 35, \textit{op.cit.},p. 165 ff.

\textsuperscript{148} Placid J. Podipara, \textit{op.cit.},p. 34

been loyal subjects of the rulers of Cochin and Travancore. Who these rulers were and how long the kingdom lasted, it is not possible to trace.\textsuperscript{150}

Tradition records that the first king was named \textit{Baliartes} or \textit{Beliarte}. The ‘\textit{Paliyam Grandhavari}’ contains a reference about this dynasty as a branch of the \textit{Perumbadappu Swaroopam}.$^{151}$

It is believed that the Kings of the \textit{Villarvattom} Dynasty were in power from the ninth to the end of the fourteenth century.$^{152}$ In 1329, Pope John XXII appointed Jordan as Bishop of Quilon and sent through him a letter dated August 4, 1330, to the King of Malabar Christians.$^{153}$

The King of \textit{Villarvattam} as recorded by St. Antonius used to send to the Pope every year a present of pepper.$^{154}$ It may have been the fame of this Christian dynasty that caused Pope Eugene in 1439 to send envoys to this king with a letter, commences as follows:

“To my most beloved son in Christ, Thomas, the Illustrious Emperor of the Indians, health and the apostolic benediction; there often has reached us a constant rumour that your serenity and also all who are the subjects of your kingdom are true Christians”$^{155}$

It is believed that at the death of the last king without issue, the kingdom lapsed to the Cochin royal family. However the local Christians preserved the royal scepter, which was a red rod probably made of wood, tipped with silver, having three small bells at the upper end. The scepter was presented to Vasco da Gama when he came to Cochin.

\textsuperscript{152} Miline Rae, \textit{The Syrian Church in India}, London, 1892, p.198.
\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{154} H. Hosten, Antiquities from San Thome and Mylapore, Calcutta, 1936, p. 458.
for the first time and sought the protection of the Portuguese King. There has been no trace of this scepter since then. However even today the royal family of Paliyam at Chendamangalam palace, a lamp burning in the evenings at a place adjacent to the palace believed to be a spot, where one of the Villarvattam Rajah is buried.

6.6.6.5. Marriage as a spiritual tie and Sacrament

The sixteenth century documents confirm that marriage was a social function though it had some religious elements. But there is no evidence to assume the sacramental nature of marriage of the Malankara Christians till the synod of Diamper in 1599, as it was not alike with any western Christian matrimonial standards. By adding a role to the priest, some of the local customs were Christianized. According to Ananthakrishna Ayyar, this did not nullify the Christian validity of Nazrani marriages. He explains his argument based on the theory of Havelock Ellis. Considering the ancient origin and isolation from rest of the Christendom and the East Syrian approach towards matrimony along with the above mentioned development of Christian marriage, it is clear that the Malankara Christians had developed the local tradition of marriage with some East Syrian adaptations. However, it was generally monogamic with some exceptions, and 'united till death' essential according to Christian doctrines.

The statement of Joseph the Indian in 1490, as translated into various languages, about divorce of Malankara Christians as "Those who believe in Christ very seldom divorce, whether the marriage is good or bad, it is perennial up to the last

day,"¹⁵⁹ can be considered as a Portuguese opinion of a Malankara Christian. Even though the Malankara Christians obeyed the Christian doctrine of 'united till death', the sacramental aspect of their marriage is uncertain. According to Mundadan, "Matrimony was pre-eminently a social celebration and was conducted with many ceremonies."¹⁶⁰ Gouvea states that "There is much feasting at the wedding when they have certain privileges granted by old Malabar Rajahs, which are granted to nobody else."¹⁶¹ To Raulin, "They were permitted to wear gold tresses in the hair locks in marriage feasts, to ride on elephants and to decorate the floor with carpets"¹⁶² Bishop Francis Roz also asserts that some of the privileges which the Christians had obtained from the local kings were related to the marriage ceremonies. In accordance with these privileges, on the day of marriage, the bride and the bridegroom with crowns on their heads were carried on men's shoulders or on elephant's back, besides going through numerous other ceremonies.¹⁶³

Ferroli, states that "Marriage was monogamic and indissoluble; it was allowed to priest, deacons and widows. Usually the marriage was blessed by the Cassanars, and the tenth part of the dowry belonged to the church."¹⁶⁴ But with these statements of the later historians, one cannot explicitly conclude the sacramental nature marriage of the pre-Diamper Malankara Christians. Moreover Michael Geddes and Hough give us a different version regarding the demeanor of marriage.

¹⁶⁴ Ferroli, *The Jesuits in Malabar, Vol. II*, Bangalore, 1951, p. 177. It is to be noted that, the presence of the Portuguese missionaries may have influenced the Malankara Christians, even before the synod of Diampher, for they had started their works in Malabar in the beginning of 16th century itself.
Michael Geddes, who studied the social life of the Malankara Christians of pre-
Portuguese period, asserts that they never considered matrimony as a sacrament.\textsuperscript{165} The
synod of Diamper decree\textsuperscript{166} banned some of the evil practices that prevailed among the
Malankara Christians in connection with family life, like polygamy, child marriage,
concubine system etc. as part of their cultural renovation.

However, since the implementation of the \textit{Kandanad Padiyola} in 1809 A.D., the
Malankara Church began to consider marriage as a spiritual tie and a sacrament. This
idea was developed very slowly in the community. Dr. Kerr treats the Nazrani marriages
as non-sacramental in AD 1806\textsuperscript{167} Theoretically his argument is right since the East
Syrian tradition did not accept marriage as a sacrament and until the \textit{Kandanadu
Padiyola} of AD 1809, the West Syrian tradition, that considers marriage as a sacrament,
was not formally accepted.\textsuperscript{168} In reality, marriage was a religious affair for the Malankara
Christians in the eighteenth century\textsuperscript{169}. In the meantime, local rituals and social traditions
were most found attached to the ceremony of marriage. Ferroli gives a detailed account
of the marriage function of the Malankara Christians.\textsuperscript{170}

The Church for the first time makes some laws on standardizing certain rituals
related to marriage. It is reflected in the lengthy sixth canon of the \textit{Kandanadu Padiyola}
of A.D. 1809. The \textit{Padiyola} reads: “Girls must be married before the age of fourteen.

\textsuperscript{165} Michael Geddes, \textit{The History of the Church of Malabar}, London, 1694, p. 117. See also J.
Hough, \textit{op.cit}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{168} Pukidiyil Joseph Ittoop, \textit{Malayalathulla Suriyani Krishthanikalude Sabha Charithram},
Kottayam, 1869, pp. 155-57. Even though the \textit{Puthiacavu Padiyola} of 964 ME partially accepted
the West Syrian tradition, allowed to continue the old rite for marriage. See Kurian Thomas
Thomas, \textit{Niranam Grandhavari, op.cit.}, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{169} The fifth canon of the \textit{Kandanadu Padiyola} of 1809 A.D., regarding the seniority, while
more than one marriage takes place at a time establish that the marriages were taken place at
churches. See. Semavoon Mar Dionysius, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 44., also see, Pukidiyil Joseph Ittoop, \textit{op.cit.},
p. 154.
Bride and groom should come to the church on the previous Sunday of the marriage for confession and to test their knowledge in prayers. The Vilichollu must be done on the previous Sunday. In the southern part, one cross and three Mudaku for groom and Kathila, Thala, three lairs of Kasu, Ottezha, two neck Kontha and for bride and in the northern part, one cross and seven Mudaku for groom and Aranganam, Nettippattam and seven Uru gold for bride, should wear. On Sunday, after the marriage, banquet should be given for one time. And another one banquet for Kudivappu can be given. The marriage party should come to the church before the Holy Qurbana. It is not fair to argue for the position to stand for marriage when the ceremony begins after confession. To avoid this, the seniority should be fixed upon the age of the groom since there is no difference in the sacraments and in the Lord's concern. And the Kudivappu must be done before next Sunday.

The Kandanadu Padiyola gives the following information about the marriage:

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171 Banns; public notice announced in both the churches of the bride and groom regarding the marriage
172 A type of bangle
173 A type of eardrop
174 A type of neck chain
175 Literary it was the name of a coin used in Kerala. Here the mention is about an ornament made by gold coins.
176 A type of neck chain
177 The literary meaning is Rosary. Hear the mention is about neck chain in that fashion.
178 An ornament wearing at waist
179 An ornament wearing at forehead, is one among the 72 privileges
180 An old measurement
181 Kudivappu is a ceremony that acknowledging the newlywed as a family and making the bride as a member of groom's family.
182 Holy Mass
183 In the Malankara Christian concept, most respected person always stands at the extreme north in the church. While more than one marriage is performing together, attempts are made to stand at the north to show as the 'most respected and privileged'. Even today, it is solved by the norms fixed by Kandanadu Padiyola of AD 1809. See Semavoon Mar Dionysius, op.cit., p.44.
184 Kandanadu Padiyola, cited in Semavoon Mar Dionysius, op.cit., p. 44.
1. Marriage was administered on Sundays after the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

2. Confession was made by bride and groom on the previous Sunday prior to the marriage.

3. There were slight differences in the social customs of marriage in the north and in the south.\textsuperscript{185}

4. Public notice was announced regarding marriage in the edavaka, well in advance for information and cooperation.

5. Marriage was treated as a sacrament.

All these shows that the efforts to eliminate certain native social customs like kudiveppu and the dress code of the bride and groom etc. were failed and some of them were even continued in 19\textsuperscript{th} century also. However, the attempts to suppress them were continued in AD 1809.\textsuperscript{186}

As a missionary religion, Christianity was a movement that preached to the community. The ethical purity of the man-woman relationships as an important message of the Bible challenges society to adopt the sacred principle of single husband-wife relationships. The indirect influence of the Christian religion in these matters is undeniable against the background of the continued growth that the Kerala communities have had to this day. Of practices that ensure the respectability and the purity of familial relationships such as the setting up of the home centering around the man's family, religious rituals that make the social acceptance of the man-woman relationship obligatory, the presence of the clergy, the presence of the house of worship, the recording of the witness of those who act as witnesses, the ensuring of the presence of

\textsuperscript{185} Here north and south indicates the edavakas belonged to the northern part of Travancore, along with the whole of Cochin, and the southern part of Travancore respectively.

\textsuperscript{186} Francis Thonippara, Saint Thomas Christians of India, a Period of Struggle for Unity and Self-Rule (1775-1787), Bangalore, 1999, pp 179-80.
relatives and neighbours, interpretations of marriage which make the practice of divorce almost impossible, and the constitution of rules and regulations by which children inherit the address and rights of the father. As a result Marriage got both a sacramental and social realm of importance in the society. Even though it is true that the modern Indian concept of Marriage is moving towards this conceptual reality, the Christian impact as a pioneer ideology influenced the society centuries back. As explained in the *New Catholic Encyclopedia*:

“Marriage, as distinguished from the agreement to marry and from the act of becoming married, is the civil status of one man and one woman, legally united for life with the rights and duties which for the establishment of families and the multiplication and education of the species, are, from time to time or may thereafter be assigned by the law of matrimony”.\(^{187}\)

According to the Christian belief,

“the benefits of marriage are three principally; the first is the generation and education of children for the worship and service of the true God; the second is the fidelity which the married couple ought to keep to one another; and the third is the perpetuity of matrimony, which cannot he dissolved, signifies that inseparable conjunction and union between Christ and his church: and notwithstanding for the cause of fornication or adultery, it is lawful for the married couple to part as to cohabitation, yet it is not lawful to many with any other, because the bond of matrimony, being once lawfully tied, is perpetual, and cannot be dissolved by anything but the death of one of the parties”.\(^{188}\)

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A special marriage service was gradually developed in Church, and, in the course of time, it became an essential part of the marriage ceremony. The Biblical foundation\textsuperscript{189}, of course, was the doctrinal background of the marriage sacrament. Thus the ecclesiastical Marriage Service was originated and began to conduct in the Church as a holy sacrament and the priest being the elder, and the formal head of the community, began to officiate the ceremony.

To the Church, marriage is a contract, and is by its very nature, above human law. It was instituted by God, is subjected to the Divine Law, and cannot for that reason be rescinded. It is natural in purpose; but divine in origin.\textsuperscript{190} It is sacred and is conducted in the four walls of the church in front of the community of believers. This ceremonial performance made it an event of importance and seriousness.

\textbf{6.6.6.6. Monogamy}

The practice of faithful monogamy stipulates that a man can marry only one woman at any one time in his life. Even though the various forms of marriages have been practiced through the generations, monogamy has emerged to become law in some countries today, such that the legal registration of more than one wife becomes a violation. This is termed “should-be” or “must-be” monogamy.

As far as the Malankara Christians are concerned monogamy was common at least from the revolutionary synod of Diamper in 1599 A.D. Even though the statement of Joseph the Indian that Nazrani marriages are for life without divorce\textsuperscript{191} should be taken as an evidence for monogamy,\textsuperscript{192} there are several other documents, which reveal

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{189} \textit{The Holy Bible}, Genesis 2:24, Ephesians 5:31,32, Hebrews 13:4  \\
\textsuperscript{190} James Hough, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 631.  \\
\textsuperscript{191} Antony Vallavanthara, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 179.  \\
\textsuperscript{192} Goes also confirms the absence of divorce among Malankara Christians as " in the matter of matrimony, there could be among them, in no case, separation, except at the death of the man or wife; otherwise they have to live together for good or bad..." Quoted in A. M. Mundadan, \textit{Sixteenth Century Traditions of St Thomas Christians}, Bangalore, 1970, p.151.
\end{flushleft}
that at least a few Nazranis had practiced polygamy. The thirteenth decree about holy matrimony in the seventh session of the Synod of Diamper confirms the existence of polygamy. However, it did not confirm that they lived with more than one wife at a time. On the contrary, the eleventh decree states that the separation without a formal divorce was common among the Nazranis for several reasons including the non-payment of promised dowry.

Polygamy was common among the natives of Kerala for centuries. But in the course of time, in the post-Diamper period, with their contact with the native Christians gradually attracted the non Christians of Kerala at least from the first half of nineteenth century.

It is true that the Malankara Christians remarried with their usual ceremonies after the separation and lived a normal life. However, while considering the statement of Joseph the Indian as "Their wives, at the death of the husbands, go back to their paternal house taking the dowry with her. But, she cannot marry again for one year," it may be assumed that only death of the spouse was treated as proper separation. There was a report about the marriage of brothers to a single lady. In his letter dated January 9, AD 1604, Fr. Joao Maria Campori describes a case polyandry at Kolancherry. According to him "There were four St. Thomas Christians...There exists among them a beastly custom; only one of the brothers gets married, but the wife is common to all." All brothers taking a single wife were common among several castes in Kerala. According to Kanippayoor Sankaran Namboothirippadu, it even existed among Nampudiris, since

no other case except the above was reported during that period; it can be assumed that polyandry, perhaps the continuance of a local practice was at the vanishing point in the sixteenth century.\textsuperscript{199}

Christianity was propagated in the modern world as a religion that embraces high ethical and moral standard. And wherever the gospel is preached, the Christian concept of monogamy was portrayed as God’s only divine standard regarding human life. Moreover, almost all social scientists and social reformers claim sexual monogamy promotes security, intimacy, and stability in relationships.

As mentioned earlier, it was the native Christians, who came first under the direct influence of European missionaries and attracted with the biblical basis of morality, began to change their ethical and moral life according to the biblical messages. Through them the natives of Kerala slowly attracted to the gospel messages. Here also the native Christians acted the role of a link between the missionaries and the natives. The biblical messages were introduced to the Kerala society in their mother tongue in 1811 A.D with the translation of the four gospels into Malayalam\textsuperscript{200} from Syriac, the liturgical language of the Syrian Christians, by Pulikkottil Ittoop (Joseph) Ramban\textsuperscript{201} along with Kayamkulam Philipose Ramban and got it printed by Claudius Buchanan from Bombay Courier Press.

\textsuperscript{199} There is no mention about such a practice in the decrees of the Synod of Diampher.
\textsuperscript{200} Translation of individual Linguists began when Zeigen Balg announced his determination to translate the word of God into Tamil. He completed the New Testament in 1711, a more five years after his arrival. It was published in Tranqubar in 1714. A copy of this pioneer work is now in the Vatican Library. It consists of 496 pages and is dedicated to Frederick IV of Denmark. The dedication is signed by Barthlomeeo Zeigenbalg and his colleague Johnnes Earnestus Gruendler. It was reprinted at Tranqubar in 1755 in two volumes. Zeigenbalg began the translation of Old Testament in 1713. But he had reached only the book of Ruth at the time of his death in 1719. Benjamin Schultze, another colleague continued and took up the translation in 1723 and completed the Old Testament in 1728, publishing it in quarto volume. It was later on revised by Stephen Samuel a Tamil Christian and reprinted in 1868 by the SPCK press at Madras.
\textsuperscript{201} See ‘The Ramban Bible’– 4 Gospels \textit{op.cit.}, Bombay, 1811, otherwise called ‘Buchanan Bible’, the first Malayalam translation of four gospels, the first four books of the New Testament Bible. Printed from Bombay Courier Press, in 1811. See Charles Webb, \textit{op.cit.}, p.292
The pioneer attempt to render the Bible into Tamil was increased by the Dutch Government in Ceylon. The first step was taken in 1688 to have a New Testament translation evidently Philip Baldaeus, the Chaplane who accompanied the Dutch personnel of Maritime province of Ceylon. In the middle of 17th century was entrusted with this task. It was neither systematically nor fully. The attempt to translate the Old Testament was begun in 1694. But this two was abortive.

Rector Johnnes Phillipus Watzelius, assisted by Phillipus de Melho and Simon de Silva, two Tamil Christians continued the work started by Cramer. In 1748 the four Gospels and Acts were published. In 1755 the translation of the book of Psalms, was published. The principal translator was de Melho. The entire New Testament came out in 1759202 it contains a long preface both in Tamil and in Dutch. There it is said that the Governor had ordered the translation. He was giving a free copy to everyone. All the versions were printed in the press of the Dutch East India Company in Colombo. Today copies of all these publication are to be found in the Colombo Museum only203

Both Tamil and Malayalam translations of the Bible had helped the people to be acquainted with the Biblical message. The Baily translation of the whole Bible into Malayalam was published in 1829 A.D.204 A number of Bible translations into the vernacular languages were published in the nineteenth Century and the biblical messages were circulated and propagated all over the state. Bible, especially the New Testament, has a clear message on the issue of polyandry and polygamy also. It is considered as a great sin and an act of adultery.

6.6.6.7. Towards Nuclear Family System

203 Ibid., p. 42.
204 Baily Bible, or The Holy Bible published by the Bible Society of India, Bangalore, in numerous editions.
Joint family system was the common practice that existed in Kerala in the early period. After few years of the Christian involvements and influence of Christian principles, this type of family system was begun to break and the importance of holy secured wedded life was recognized in the society. Government rules and regulations were introduced regarding the marriage system. However the whole Tarward system was collapsed and there came up ‘Nuclear family system’ The Biblical concept of Holy Family or *thiru Kudumpam*\(^{205}\) of Jesus had made a strong impact on the community.

Much research has shown that the nuclear family - man and woman living together with their legal children (“siblings”), is more able to provide the emotional support that people need, and is able to help the children to find occupations in an industrial society.

This idea gradually changed the existing social system of joint family. With the emergence of nuclear families, there caused a great change in the society and the parents began involve directly in the affairs of their children. Total care and responsibilities of the parents towards their children improved and the children became more and more dependents and affectionate to their parents. Thus the entire family system underwent great change in the desirable line.

The nuclear family system necessitated a radical change in the society. Each family was forced to find out their own independent households, separate landed property, life style, religious belief, economic planning, educational facilities and the like. Change in the law of inheritance was also an impact of this system.

In short the nuclear family system made revolutionary and unprecedented changes in the modern Kerala society.

6.6.6.8. Status of Women

\(^{205}\) The holy family composed of Father Joseph, Mother Mary and Jesus, their son. Cf. *Holy Bible*, 4 Gospels.
Women's status in society implies their status in social, economic, political and cultural areas and is determined by the human rights they enjoy and manifested by the freedom of expression they possess. These include access to basic social services, education, information, quality health services, employment, income, land and credit facilities; their participation in decision making both at home and in public life; and an enabling environment and freedom from violence of any kind. Thus women's status in society is a reflection of their empowerment.

The present Kerala society is a model to the international community for its women empowerment. Still there are slight variations regarding the status of women among social groups. While going through the history of the Malankara Christians community, one can identify the elite social status of women. A Portuguese official, while referring to the status of Syrian Christians made a remark of the women of the community. He says, as reported by Mundadan:

“These people are of high rank and greatly reputed, well-formed and of good behaviour. The men are warriors; the women being honourable and rich, do the household works”.  

Claudius Buchanan writes about the Native Syrian Christians of Kerala during his survey of Malabar in 1806 as follows

“After some conversation with my attendants they received me with confidence, and affection; and the people of the neighbouring villages came round, women as well as men. The sight of the women assured me that I was once more (after a long absence from England) in a Christian country. For the Hindoo women, and the Mohamedan women, and in short, all women who are not Christians are accounted by the men an inferior race: and, in general, are confined to the house for life, like irrational

206 A. M. Mundadan, n. 35, op.cit. p. 121.; Cf. Z.M.Paret, op.cit., p.10
creatures. In every countenance now before me I thought I could discover the intelligence of Christianity.”

Conversion to Christianity was sometimes a family or a group decision, especially in communities where religion was always more than an individual affair. Women who had converted independently, the wives of Christian men, or a mixture of both? But for women, Christianity was particularly empowering, considering the low esteem of women where Hindu and Islam orders were concerned. The woman appears to be wearing a wedding band, though a ring is absent from the man’s fingers. The impact of Christianity on Indian marriages, though intriguing, is beyond this interpreter’s expertise.

6.6.6.9. Changes in the Law of inheritance: Marummakkathayam to Makkathayam

The St. Thomas Christians formed an integral part of the pattern of the Socio-cultural life of Kerala. Like most high castes, except the ‘Nairs’ who in course of time came to follow the matrilineal system of inheritance (Marumakkathayam), the Christians followed the patrilineal system (Makkathayam). The family system they had practiced was very strong in moral and ethical values. Children considered it a sacred duty to care for their aged parents who lived in the family of one of the sons.

Marumakkathayam or the law of matrilineal succession was a peculiar system of Kerala concerning the law of inheritance. Many see a peculiar social background that prevailed in Kerala among the Nair community. The taravad or the joint family system facilitated the matrilineal system of succession as the female member of the family resided in her own house due to the peculiar style of marriage, well known as sambandham.

209 Dr. Samuel Nellimukal, op.cit., p.434
The Syrian Christian society is strongly patrilineal. The father is the head of the family and is often called as *karnavar*, a title which is also given to the eldest male member in the family. Property is traditionally divided among the sons. The most notable is the age-old tradition that the youngest son is given the family house (*tharavadu veedu*) where he stays with the parents which is in contrast to rules in almost all other communities in Kerala and is strikingly similar to ancient Hebraic/Jewish property inheritance pattern. However, in view of the recent Indian Supreme court decision in favor of equal division of property, the future division of property will change.

The Malankara Church, from the very beginning, followed patrilienal system of succession. Their interaction with the Kerala society it made a lasting impact upon the social system of the country. Slowly and gradually the Kerala society realized the practical virtue of the patrilienal system and the seriousness of the family and the responsibility of the father in a family in looking after and exhorting the children.

The following were the recognized rules of inheritance among the Syrian Christians:

1) In the matter of inheritance there was no difference between the property of a male and that of a female.

2) There was no difference between an heir actually born at the time of the proprietor’s death and posthumous child.

3) The heirs in the descending line always excluded those in the ascending or collateral line and even collateral of any degree or their descendants had priority over ascendants of the same degree.

4) The heirs of equal proximity to the last holder divided his property equally among themselves whenever they were of the same sex.

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210 Z.M. Paret, *op. cit.*, P.121
5) The heirs of any degree and their descendants generally excluded those of a remote degree.

6) Among heirs of the same degree and those related to the proprietor on the same side (i.e., on the father or mother’s side) and related to him in the same way whether by the full flood or half-blood the male heirs always absolutely excluded the female except perhaps when the heirs were in the descending line. There was a general impression that in the latter case the daughter or the female descendants had a claim for streedhanam.

7) The paternal heirs were always preferred to the maternal heirs.

8) If a son or daughter or brother or sister or uncle or aunt, whether of the full blood or half blood, and whether on the paternal or maternal side, died before an intestate, his or her descendant would, on the intestate’s death, got the share in the property of the deceased, which he or she would had obtained if he or she had been alive at the time of the proprietor’s death.

9) When a man died leaving no children, but only grandchildren – whether by his sons or daughters- they took among themselves what their fathers or mothers would have taken, if they had been alive at the time of the intestate’s death. In other words the property was to be divided among his heirs, per stripes and not percapita.211

The Christians of Kerala were covered by the Cochin Christian Succession Act, 1921 and the Travancore Christian Succession Act, 1916, in Cochin and Travancore areas respectively. These Acts reflected a lot of gender inequalities. A widow or mother, for instance, under the Travancore Act could only inherit life interest in land and other immovable property. Even this was to be forfeited on remarriage. With the formation of the Travancore-Cochin State, the Indian Succession Act of 1925 should have superseded

211 See Report of the Travancore Christian Committee, Trivandrum, 1901, pp. 21ff
the Travancore and Cochin laws. However, a 1956 court judgment had the effect of saving the Travancore and Cochin laws. In 1983, Mary Roy, a Travancore Christian challenged the Constitutional validity of application of the old laws on grounds of equality of sexes guaranteed under the Constitution. In 1986, the Supreme Court held that the 1925 law, the Indian Succession Act, was the law that could hold the ground. As a result of this judgment of the Supreme Court, daughters can claim equality of right over fathers’ property. This epoch making verdict in favour of the equal rights of the children, irrespective of gender had made its repercussion on the society. The Madras government passed a law “the Madras Marumakkathayam Act of 1933”. It sanctions the partition of family properties equally among the children.

Most of the communities rejected the Marumakkathayam because of its unlawful system. This whole system was also faded away in the life of Kerala society.

**6.6.6.10 Equal share to Women in hereditary rights**

Equal share concept denotes back to the various proclamations made at the Synod of Diamper which stood for equal shares in ancestral property to both men and women.

The 16th Canon, (S. IX Decree.XIV) of the Synod of Diamper praises the custom of giving the 1/10th of the ‘Streedhanam’ (Dowry) amount to the Church (Passaram) as a mark of evidence. The Synod urges the need for a uniform custom throughout the State regarding the remittance of Passaram so that the Church records shall be used as a concrete evidence for the daughters being left destitute without any property.213

The Synod furthermore declared that the non-payment of the portion that may have been promised, is no just cause to leave one’s wife which he might have been

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212 Malabar was under the Madras State till 1956. It was the State reorganization on the basis of language brought Malabar under the State of Kerala, along with Travancore- Cochin State in 1956.

careful to have secured before they were married to them and that whosoever shall forsake their wives on that account shall be punished and constrained by excommunication to live with them. (Section vii, Decree XI). Regarding the execution of wills (Section viii, Decree XXXVIII) the Synod declared that the bishops and prelates were to see to the execution of those wills lawfully made by Syrian Christians before their death and that if any valid will made according to the custom of the place was not complied with in a year after the death of the testator, the Bishop would by censures and other penalties see to its fulfillment. 214

The 20th Decree of Section IX criticises the custom of denying inheritance rights to females even where there were only daughters. In such cases the inheritance went to the collateral heirs by denying the daughters any share in the ancestral property. The Synod comments that such a custom is not lawful. At the same time it insists on the provision of considering the Streedhanam given to daughters as well as the capital for business provided for sons alike for determining their share. 215

Regarding this equal share to daughters, the Malankara Metropolitan in the beginning of 19th century, issued a bull, 216 as the decisions of Palli Yogams. In some families in the south, it is the practice that the sons of brothers are inheriting the properties of those who have no sons. Such a practice is generally resulting in the loss of money. According to the custom of the community, the offspring, irrespective of male or female, has the right to inherit the property and to do the last rights and post-burial rituals. 217 This was the sum total of the decision of the Malankara Church in connection with the equal rights.

214 Ibid., p 227
215 Ibid., p 241
217 Dr. J. Alexander, Ibid.
6.7. The Church and its Struggle for Autonomy

The history of the Malankara Church during the post Portuguese period was the history of resistance and struggle for maintaining the indigenous autonomy of the Church or in a broader sense, the autocephalous nature of the Oriental Orthodoxy. According to the available facts, form the very origin of the Church, it managed to maintain the local administration autonomy as well as the spiritual autocephalous of the Orthodox Churches. The Church up to the beginning of sixteenth century, was one, independent, autocephalous Church. As observed, “At least one thing is certain for all- that the ancient church of St. Thomas in South India was one single entity. It is also certain that division occurred here during and after Portuguese occupation of the Malankara Christian community”218

The Malankara Orthodox Church has maintained the St.Thomas tradition unbroken in spite of the vicissitudes of history and the various contacts, both friendly and unfriendly, with the ancient Church traditions outside India like Persian, Roman, Syrian and Anglican. The community always silently assumed in its self-understanding three elements:

(a) The church in India was founded by St. Thomas the apostle and is apostolic like any other church in the world founded by Peter, Paul and other apostles.

(b) The church in India is Eastern in its ethos and worship and is clearly distinguished from the Latin/Western tradition. This awareness of distinction dawned on them when they first met the Latin West through Portuguese colonial conquerors.

218 C.V.Cheriyan, op.cit., pp. xiv, xv.
The Church is fully self-governed by its own local heads and is rooted in the social and cultural soil of India.\textsuperscript{219}

The successive interventions from Rome, Britain, and Antioch on the ecclesiastical structure and orthodox faith necessitated a survival resistance and eventually culminated in the establishment of Catholicate in India in 1912. An historical analysis of the following events during and after the Portuguese colonial domination of the country in general and the Church in particular will throw light on the impact that the Church made on the society in which it originated and branched out, in connection with the patriotic struggle to attain freedom of the mother land.

As mentioned earlier, the Malankara Church was an independent, autocephalous single Church till the synod of Diamper in 1599 A.D. The political and military strategy and superior diplomacy of the Portuguese succeeded in bringing almost the entire native Syrian Christians under the Roman ecclesiastical rule. But at the same time a considerable minority under the present Arthat Church and the Thiruvithamcode Church stood firmly with the orthodox faith and administrative autonomy in defence of the Church in spite of the Political and military strength of the Portuguese temporal authority. Bishop Leslie Brown vividly states this heroic resistance.\textsuperscript{220}

### 6.8. The role of Malankara Christians in India’s Freedom Movement

The Christian community’s leadership and solidarity with the Freedom movement was clearly manifested in a statement made at a conference of leading Christians from all over India, held in Ranchi in 1923, which declared that ‘swaraj,
nationalism, or self-determination helped the self-realization of a people: that it is consistent with the Christian religion and helpful to the Christian life’. 221

In 1930, the All India Christian Council, which is the executive body of the All India Council of Indian Christians, met and adopted a resolution which, while not subscribing to the civil disobedience movement as such, declared solidarity of Christians with the thrust of the national movement.222

_The Indian Social Reformer_, a leading national weekly of the time reported on the meeting thus: ‘The first resolution stated that the members of the Indian Christian community…were one with other communities in their desire to win for India complete _swaraj_ at the earliest possible moment, and were of the opinion that absolute non-violent salt _satyagraha_ was in no way against the teaching of Jesus Christ and was capable of achieving great moral victories. Among the 78 members of the Sabarmati Ashram who accompanied Gandhi in the Dandi March was Thevarthundiyil Titus. Titus, a young disciple of Gandhi was an agriculture student and a member of a Christian family in Travancore.223

The Christian community in Travancore played a key role in the pro-democracy movement in the State. The role of the Christian community in the Quit India Movement of 1942 and the Joint Political Congress, which determined the direction of the Travancore politics, was commendable. It is appropriate to recognize T M Verghese as the father of the democratic system of Travancore. There are a number of outstanding Indian Christian women like Accamma Cherian, who played a significant role on behalf of women and the pro-democracy movement. These women leaders came from the St Thomas Christian community.224 Accamma Cherian, known as ‘Jhansi Rani of

221 K.M George, _Christianity in India Through the Centuries_, Hyderabad, 2005, p. 207
222 Ibid., p.208
223 KM George, _op.cit._, p. 207
224 Ibid. p. 209
Travancore’ was one of the veteran freedom fighters of Kerala who had participated in the Quit India Movement also. Another Syrian Christian, a barrister, a fiery nationalist, an avant-garde journalist, a pioneer trade unionist and an ardent champion of great public causes, George Joseph (1887-1938) has an immortal place in the history of India's struggle for independence. He was in the forefront of the struggle for freedom along with great leaders like Gandhiji, Motilal Nehru, Rajagopalachari, Vallabhai Patel, Satyamurthy, Jawaharlal Nehru and Mahadev Desai. George Joseph played an important, and at times even a defining role, in shaping the policies of various organizations engaged in the freedom struggle from 1915 to 1938. Yet he remains a forgotten figure.225

6.9. Malankara Christians in the Kerala Polity

As Seen earlier the spirit of anti-Colonialism and autonomy within the Malankara Church that is manifested in the oath of Coonan cross in the 17th century, Arthat Padiyola in the 19th century and the formation of a Catholicate and a written form of Constitution in the 20th century had inspired many noble children of this national Church in the following years. Even though the official unit of the Indian National Congress was established in Malabar only in 1908, and the new Marxian ideology of liberation was unknown to Kerala even in 1910, the Church actively participated in the movements aimed at the revolutionary change and transformation of the Kerala society and polity. The close of 19th century witnessed movements for more participation in administration. It was the time when only Tamilian Brahmins were given appointments to high level jobs. Mar Dionysius226 of the Malankara Church created the awareness through the ‘Idavakapathrika’ that it was unfair to ignore the local tax-prayers. At that

226 He was the founder of this periodical Idavakapathrika. Details follows.
time, Vishakhom Thirunal who had just come to the throne then, visited Malankara Metropolitan at Kottayam, The Metropolitan presented a letter of felicitation to the king, which reflected the sentiments of the Malankara Christians towards the act of keeping the community away from equal opportunity for governmental jobs. Regarding this, the king gave a reply in the following words, in his own handwriting:

"Priests and people of the Syrian Church, we are pleased by the beautiful and truthful letter of felicitation that you have just presented before us. Your community is an ancient one, with its own historical literature; and it is an illustrious example of contentment, peace and devotion to the royalty. Rest assured that you can continue to hold, without any change, whatever positions you have always held. All the government jobs, in most departments, irrespective of religion, are open to all. I am assuring you that, without considering religious faith, people will be accepted on the basis of their merit and ability."

After the presentation of the letter of felicitation, in the fifth year, the king passed away. He did not get enough time to implement his promise properly. Therefore the political-communal efforts on the part of Mar Dionysius did not fully succeed. In those days, in the Travancore government, as all the high positions were being held mainly by Tamil Brahmins, and as they often felt jealous towards local people who were competent and efficient, they used to adopt ways of keeping the Christians and the Nairs away. Later when all the low caste people from the Keralite communities were thrown out of government jobs, and when Malayalees in general were denied access to government positions, this leader of the resurgence movement came to the forefront with his voice of protest.

229 Idavakapathrika, Kottayam, 1895, April.
The Christians, the Nairs and the Nambudiris joined together against this injustice and in January 1891, a Malayalee Memorial was submitted to Sreemoolam Thirunal Maharaja, signed by ten thousand twenty eight people. When no reply was obtained for it, meetings of protest were organised in different parts of the country. The very first political agitation of Travancore, though from behind the curtain, was controlled to a considerable extent by Mar Dionysius as one among the important leaders. In July 1891, the 'Memorial' fetched a favourable reply. This proves beyond doubt that Joseph Dionysius had the far-sightedness to be able to participate in the first step towards a democratic government.  

### 6.10. Monasticism in Malankara

There are occasional references to prove the presence of prelates who led monastic life in the Church. The Malankara Metropolitans and other bishops were always unmarried and there were a number of other celibates in the church.

The Bishop of Tours in his ‘In Gloria Martyrum’, a work which he revised in 590 A.D., shortly before his death (which occurred on the 17th November, 593 or 594), writes:

‘Thomas the Apostle, according to the narrative of his martyrdom, is stated to have suffered in India. His holy remains (corpus), after a long interval of time, were removed to the city of Edessa in Syria and there interred. In that part of India where they first rested, stand a monastery and a church of striking dimensions, elaborately adorned and designed... this, Theodore, who had been to the place, narrated to us.’

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‘Joseph the Indian’ the pioneer author of a history of the Church too narrates the presence of monasteries in the Malabar Church in 1490. Joseph also mentions that they had hermitages with monks dressed in black clothes, who live in chastity, and also nuns. The Italian text uses the same word for monks and priests but the Latin text uses different words—continentissime for monks and catissime for cathanaars. Fr Vallavanthara quotes Goes:

“They had monasteries of monks, who wear black dress. There are nuns too. Both monks and nuns live in great observance of honesty, chastity and poverty.”

Thomas Yeates cites a letter send by four Bishops who were sent to India and China by Mar Elias, the Patriarch of Mesopotamia, about a monastery of the Malabar Christians.

“There are here (on the Malabar coast of India) about thirty thousand families of the Christians of our communion............they now begin to build more churches, having abundance of everything, and are, blessed by God, meek and peaceable. And, moreover, the monastery of Mar Thomas begins to be occupied by Christian men, who are sedulous for their degree.”

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234 The narrations of Joseph had published in several languages. See George Schurhammer, *The Malabar Church and Rome during the Early Portuguese Period and Before*. Trichinopolv. 1934; Antony Vallavanthara, *op.cit*. p. 284


236 This Epistle was written in Syriac, and dated in the year of the Greeks, 1816, i.e. A. D. 1504; Quoted in *Indian Church History*, Thomas Yeates, London, 1818 p.109
Carmelite Missionary Paulinose had also quoted that there were monasteries for men under the Nestorian Patriarch at Edappalli, Angamali and Mylappore. 237 These monks were the spiritual leaders of the St Thomas’ Christians.

Osorius, a Catholic writer, who wrote about the Thomas Christians at the time of Emmanuel, King of Portugal, that “there are among them, fraternities of monks and associations of virgins; yet they are cloistered in separate buildings and chastity is maintained with great care” 238

But we don’t have any concrete evidence to prove a systematic monastic institution within the church till the foundation of Mulamthuruthy Vettical Dayara 239 in 1871 A.D. 240 It is considered to be the first organized attempt to patronize celibacy within the Malankara church.

It was Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius I started an organized effort towards this venture. The Seminary founded by him in 1815 was strictly for the bachelor students in line with Brahmin ‘upanayana’ system for Vedic studies as ‘brahmachari’ or bachelor.

He wished that the Church should have an established ‘dayara’ movement. One of his dreams was the prevention of married missionaries from entering the Seminary. He believed that a safe dayara was absolutely essential as a place for prayer, for copying out books of orders of worship, and for providing the Bishops needed for the Church. But that dream did not blossom. Even though it provided a handful of celibate priests in the Church, they were reluctant to give up the conveniences of ruling over a parish. Just

237 According to Paulinus, this is a letter written by Thomas Yab Alaha, Jacob and Dena to Elijah in 1504. See Fr. Paulino a.S. Bartholomaeo, India Orientalis Christina, trans., Fr. John Pallath, op.cit., p. 148; also see Thomas Whitehouse, Lingering of lights in a dark land, being researches into the past history and the present condition of the Syrian Church of Malabar, London, 1873, p. 82.
238 Cited in: Ibid., pp.85-86., Francis Day also points out the claim of the Malabar Christians about monasteries that they had prior to the coming of the Portuguese. See Francis Day, Land of Perumals its Past and its Present, Madras, 1863, p. 219.
239 Dayara is a Syriac word for Monastery.
240 Near Mulanthuruthy, established in 1871 by Mar Dionysius V of the Syrian Church.
a few like the Punnalhra Kathanar and Cheppaattu Philipose Kathanaar created the atmosphere of a hermitage in the Seminary and lived there. Because of his sudden death, it did not visualize during his lifetime. It was only when Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius II, Malankara Metropolitan came as one of his successors and founded the Vettikkal Dayara and the Parumala Seminary that the dream of that ancestor was fulfilled. In course of time a number of Monastries were established in different parts both for men and women. The Bethany Asram at Ranni-Perunadu was prominent among them. The following are the important Monasteries of the Malankara Church.

6.10.1. Monasteries of the Malankara Church: Asrams:

Bethany Asram, Ranni-Perunad.
Mount Tabore Dayara, Pathanapuram.
Bethlehem Asram, Chengamanad, Kottarakara.
St. George Dayara, Othera, Tiruvalla.
St. Paul’s Asram, Puthuppady, Kozhikode.
Holy Trinity Asram, Angady, Ranni.
Mar Kuriakose Asram, Kumbazha North, Pathanamthitta.
Mar Baselius Dayara, Njaliakuzhy, Vakathanam.
Mount Carmel Asram
Mathilakom, East Kallada, Kollam
Mount Horeb Asram, Muthupilakad P.O, SasthamkottaPhone.
M.G.D Asram and Balabhavan, Karunagiri, Karukachal.

241 This Dayara on the banks of river Pampa at parumala was also established by Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius II (1832 - 1909). Parumala Mar Gregorios, the pioneer saint among the Indian Christians, was in charge of the Parumala Dayara. See Pukidiyil Ittoop Writer, A History of the Christians of Malabar, (Mal), Kottayam, 1869., a contemporary of Mar Dionysius. Also see Malankara Orthodox Church Encyclopedia, op.cit.
242 Samuel Chandanappally, ed., Malankara Orthodox Church Directory, Kottayam, 1998; The official site of Malankara Sabha, http://malankaraorthodoxchurch.in
243 Ibid
Christu Sishya Asram, Thadagom P.O, Coimbatore.
Mount Calvary Ashram, Pattazhy, Kottarakara.
Mar Gregorios Bethel Asram, Kuttikonam, Kunnicode
St. George Mount Asram, Chayalode, Adoor
St. George Asram, Kulamudi, Mylom, Kottarakara.
Mount Tabore Ashram, Mathuramala, Pattazhy.
St. Gregorios Mount Asram, Kottarakara.
St. Thomas Asram, Nellipathy, Agali P.O, Palakkad.
St. Thomas Asram, Sooranad P.O, Kollam.
Mar Augen Asram, Piramadom (S), Pampakkuda.
St. Thomas Karunya Asram, Trivandrum.

Convents:
Bethany Convent, Ranni-Perunad.
Mount Tabore Convent, Pathanapuram.
St. Mary Magdalene Convent, Adupputty, Kunnankulam.
Bethlehem Convent, Kizhakkambalam, Alwaye.
Nazreth Convent, Kadampanad South P.O, Adoor.
Basalel Convent, Sooranad P.O, Kollam.
St. Mary’s Convent, Adoor.
Baselios Convent, Kottarakara.
St. Mary’s Convent, Kozhimala, Vallamkulam.
St. Paul’s Convent and Balikabhavan, Puthuppady.
Mount Carmel Convent, East Kallada, Kollam.
Gethsemon Convent, Adichanalloor, Kollam.

244 Samuel Chandanappally, ed., *Malankara Orthodox Church Directory*, Kottayam, 1998; The official site of Malankara Sabha, http://malankaraorthodoxchurch.in
Holy Cross Convent, Sreekariyam, Trivandrum.

St. Mary’s Convent, Thumpamon.

St. Gregorios Convent, Kalanthode, Kozhikode.

4.11. Philanthropic outlook and services of the Malankara Christians

The Christian gospel was a source for humanization. One of the important things that the Christian missions emphasized was the humanization of life in all aspects of all people. They struggled to arouse public opinion on the condition of the orphans, widows, lepers, untouchables, infant girls and women. The gospel message began to influence the society only when a vernacular translation was available in the second decade of 19th century. Even before the Malankara Christians were compassionate towards the fellow beings. Gouvea writes: “…they are charitable, and compassionate with one another, and they treat extremely well their captives....”245

Humanitarian outlook of the Malankara Christians were so gracious and appreciable. To which they are greatly indebted to the Missionaries, both Roman Catholic246 and Protestant. This spirit of concern and service to the humanity that is highlighted in the Bible was transferred into the community also. The native Christians during the colonial period had practiced and experienced it and their efforts were recognized by the society. Hospital services, widow houses and spirit of concern, orphanages and upliftment of poor class and public healthcares, refugee centres and relief funds involvement in natural calamities and epidemic periods, all are great witness for their public services and social concerns. All these services of mission and Christian communities were recognized and reputed not only by public but also by government.

245 Pius Melekandathil, ed., op.cit., p. 256.
246 Santa Casa de Misericordia or the house of mercy is a well known Portuguese institution. This was introduced in all Portuguese settlement in India. Also see Joseph Cheeran, Indian Orthodox Church, Thekkumkara, Thrissur, 1993, p.21.
and civil officers and administrations. Various funds introduced in the church and among this community such as orphanage fund, poor fund, widow fund, missionary fund etc., reveal their spirit of philanthropic activities. What a tremendous humanitarian activities done by this small Christian Community to the Kerala Society.

6.11.1 The Malankara Church and Social Justice

Justice is measure which enables people to perform their duties and obtain their rights as responsible citizens considering that one’s freedom and liberty are intimately connected and conditioned by the freedom and rights of others. This is the only way to ensure the happiness, safety and security of all people. Its fundamental tenet is based on human respect and the dignity of every person. Justice as a human concern has captured the attention of humanitarians, moralists, politicians and others for centuries. At present, the quest for justice has become the motivating factor of several organizations, NGOs, trade unions and grass-root level workers. The call for a New World order is also in similar currents; but who decides for whom is the question. The time has come for the Third World to assert their power, claim their selfhood and identity in terms of dignity as well as material resources which have been plundered by the so called civilized nations.

One of the fundamental human aspirations is justice: to do what is right. It is related to the quest for life in others which ultimately brings fulfillment deep within

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247 The annual budget of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church has special projects for the poor and needy, irrespective of religion. It utilizes millions of rupees for the Sick Aid Fund, Marriage Aid Fund, Housing Project Fund, Education Support Fund, Self Employment Fund etc. Other than this Common Charitable support each Independent Church spends a certain percentage of their total income for this purpose. The budget of the Malankara Church for the year 2011-2012 has been presented in the Managing Committee by Dr. George Joseph, the Malankara Association Secretary, for 302 Crores, contains proposals for charitable purposes for 121 Crores. *Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church Budget- 2011-2012, Kottayam, 2011.*
oneself. The lessening of this aspiration is the sign of corruption at the root of one’s humanness. Jon Sobrino relates justice to love:

“By justice we mean the kind of love that seeks effectively to humanize, to give life in abundance to the poor and oppressed majorities of the human race. Justice is thus a concrete form of love in which account is taken of the quantitative fact that its recipients form majorities and of the qualitative fact that they are poor and oppressed.”

Jon Sobrino calls the practice of justice as the historical form of love and sees it as an observation on the actual practice of justice rather than of conceptual analysis:

“When faced with the negation of the life of the majorities, or with the threat to this life, justice tries to re-create human beings and their life.”

It creates a primary stage of ensuring security for the poor. The concrete manifestation of love takes the form of service in ensuring primarily the safety and care for the poor - and gradually extending service for the fullness of life.

The understanding of justice has a spacious, temporal dimension, and therefore it is a dynamic and constantly growing value. No society can claim to have established justice since it is intertwined with constantly growing and changing relationship among people and their capacity to create and contribute to life. It is a commitment to society by every person to behave and deal with one another in a humane manner respecting the rights of each other and performing one’s duty in a responsible way.

At the primary level a shared notion of rights reflects the mediation between the quest for freedom and the constraints of responsibility as demanded by the norms of the collectivity- village, caste, religion, state or humanity that the individual or group is part of.

248 Jon Sobrino, *The True Church and the Poor*, Germany, 1984, p.53
249 Ibid., p.69
Thus the foundation of justice is based on dignity and human respect irrespective of ethnic, racial, economic or religious differences. The commitment to bring about justice holds the key to overcoming human-made differences and building a society of freedom and liberty ensuring the happiness of all. Thus our expression of justice emanates from the past, present and future; what is and what is not yet.

6.11.2 The Malankara Church and the Dalits

Many of the Church leaders and Prelates of the Church were and even now are very keen in the Dalit uplifting programmes. But in a period when the gulf between the Savarnas and Avarnas were intensified, the Church had produced some prominent Prelates like Joseph Mar Dionysius II, Parumala Mar Gregorios, Pathrose Mar Osthatheos, Pampady Kuriakose Mar Gregorios and lay leaders like Kandathil Varhese Mappila, Mammen Mappila etc. in the previous century.

The Caste consciousness was a significant element in the social life of the Malankara Christians in the pre-colonial period. This may have prevented them from missionary activities. In spite of the philanthropic concern that they possessed, they were to social privileges, so that they may engage in trade with the elite class. However the coming of the Europeans and their missionary activities greatly helped them to change their attitude towards the dalits.\textsuperscript{251} The synod of Diamper was a breakthrough in the history of the Malankara Christians. Even though it was an act of Catholicization, its Decrees on social reforms\textsuperscript{252} made revolutionary changes in the Christian community. These changes helped the Malankara Christians to make a social reform from within and

\textsuperscript{251} It is a term to denote the oppressed and marginalized people of the society. Gandhiji addressed them as harijans, the children of God.

\textsuperscript{252} An English translation of Decrees of the Synod is available in: Michael Geddes, The History of the Church of Malabar, London, 1694.
afterwards towards the Kerala society. The book written on Pathrose Mar Osthathiose, the first bishop of Malabar Diocese, for instance, shows that Deacon M. P. Peter not merely sympathized with the social reform movement, but actively assisted Sri T. Vijayaraghavachary, Dewan of Cochin State, as Special Officer for the uplift of the depressed classes. He organized many public meetings and got resolutions passed in favour of legally abolishing customs which restricted low caste and outcaste groups from the use of public roads and public places. It was at one such meeting that the Dewan announced his decision granting freedom for Pulayas and Parayas (the outcastes) to walk through all public roads in that State.

The Diwan T. Vijayaraghavacharya wrote a letter to Deacon Peter in 1920 about the opposition on the part of the high castes.

“…… There is a great deal of opposition here, practically everybody that counts is against our policy. The Hindu press, both English and Vernacular in the State has been violently denunciatory. But all this has only made His Highness firmer in his determination to pursue the policy already decided upon.

We are therefore getting on in spite of it all. After the Schools reopened in June there has been quite a number of “Strikes” in several schools as a demonstration against the admission of Pulaya boys in to schools. The recent political activities in the State appear to be directed in against this policy of the Government to have encouraged the higher classes to think that they can force the heads of Government but in this they will find themselves mistaken. Long before the local congress, I had begun to work on a

254 It was his name when he was only a deacon. He was consecrated as a bishop in 1953 A.D. with name Pathrose Mar Osthathiose. He was the first bishop of the Malabar Diocese of the Malankara Orthodox Church.
256 Ibid., p. 50.
scheme of constitutional reforms, which I hope will soon see fruition. The opposition will not stand in the way of my getting through with these schemes, but care will be taken that in any scheme that materializes, the interests of the depressed classes are efficiently protected.”

In 1924, Deacon Peter wrote in a prominent Newspaper from Madras which shows his ardent desire for social liberation. "If the ancient Syrian Christian community of Kerala had been sufficiently faithful to the freedom giving gospel of Christ, they would have done wonders” In the same year he established an organization for the Dalit Christians namely ‘the Servants of the Cross’ in the sign of Servants of India Society.

Once, Pampady Kuriakose Mar Gregorios, a Champion of the Dalit cause, remarked. “It is our duty to help and serve the suffering poor. What I have, I share with them. They are for me and I am for them. Aren’t we all the children of God” The Church prelates had always shared their agony towards the lot of the poor. They were anxious and worried about the pathetic condition of the poor.

No doubt, many Christians identified Gandhian non-violence with the way of the Cross a little too far, but it provided them with a new inspiration for their concern to fight against social injustice, especially the evils associated with the caste structures. The Vaikom Satyagraha, aimed at establishing the elementary rights of the untouchables, did bring to the educated groups in the Syrian Churches a new social consciousness. There was a searching of social conscience in all communities. But in the case of the Syrian Christians this found expression in the feeling of the leaders that if the ancient Syrian

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257 Letter of the Diwan to Peter on 7th July 1920. cited in Ibid., pp. 50-51.
258 The Swaraj Daily, Madras, 1924, April 30.
259 The Servents of the Cross was established on 14th of September 1924.
Christian community of Kerala had been sufficiently faithful to the freedom-giving gospel of Christ, they would have done wonders in this great humanitarian work, but it is not too late. The political struggle itself was not real at that period in the princely states of Travancore and Cochin, but the social struggle was very much alive affair.261

The Proclamation of the organization regarding social equality and emancipation of the dalits, was the fulfillment of a social cause to which the evangelistic and social awakening of the Christian Churches in modern Kerala had made a unique contribution. It was therefore proper that Syrian Christian leaders on the whole welcomed the recognition of fundamental human equality behind the Proclamation. A passage from the Report of the Servants of the Cross is worthy of quotation:

"... an important event of the year was the right of Temple Entry given to the depressed classes by Maharaja Bala Rama Varma. By the Proclamation His Highness has loosened the unjust bonds, released the oppressed, and destroyed the yokes. We are happy that the Travancore Government has co-operated in the work which Christianity has been long engaged in of establishing the Kingdom in this world by breaking the fetters of slavery of the low castes and uplifting them both spiritually and materially?"262

The Christian community on the whole stayed with the State Congress, so much so that unfriendly critics at times called it 'the Christian Congress'. Among the foremost leaders of the Congress was T.M, Varghese, who suffered much at that time and later, on the attainment of Independence, served in the State Cabinet for some years. The leading Malayalam daily in the State, called the Malayala Manorama, under the editorship of one of the acknowledged leaders of the Syrian community, K.C. Mammen Mappillai, lent its powerful support to the cause of responsible government.

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261 Speech by Deacon M. P. Peter as explained earlier. See P. P. Varkey & K. V. Mammen, op.cit., p. 47.

6.12. Church and Democracy

The Malankara Christians made an epoch making impact on the democratic concepts of the whole country. Even though the pre colonial church setup in Kerala before the Portuguese came to the country is not easy to be constructed because the information that has come down to us is absolutely meager to cover the period of about fifteen hundred years, there are random references and even secular writings to work out a connected history of the Church. The most important and mention worthy element in this regard is that the Church implemented such a democratic set up to reflect popular will in a period when the system was unknown to the people of India.

It is a fact that the Christian Church first appeared in India, as elsewhere, as a fellowship of self-governing communities. The Church, by 17th century, had developed a policy that is in some ways more democratic than in other Eastern churches. For example, all bishops, including the Catholicos, have to be elected by an assembly263 with one priest and laymen elected according to the parish membership by each congregation in the whole church. This assembly, called the Malankara Association264 has thus some 4000 members of whom two-thirds are laymen. It has also a democratic set-up for managing the properties of the church and for its budget and accounts.

Since the bishops were foreigners, the administration of the Church was in the hands of local prelates known as Archdeacons.265 The parish councils had a very important role in the Malankara Church. The council of the local priests (desathu pattakar) and the adult laymen administered the temporalities of the parish and looked after the Christian life of the people. This council could even excommunicate public delinquents. The recommendation of the parish council in writing (desakkuri) was a

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263 The Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church, op. cit., Declaration VIII, Article 113.
264 Ibid, Declaration IV, Article 70, 71, 97.
condition for ordination to the priesthood. The executive of the parish council was the Kariakkar (Trustee) elected by the council. Very important matters relating to the community were considered and decided by the general council of the representatives of all the parishes. In such general councils, the representative of Angamali had the first seat and the first voice. These councils were in full vigor until the end of the eighteenth century. The Malabar Church thus shows the clear picture of a Christian Republic. In most parishes, the councils have continued to function in unbroken succession to this day.

6.13. End of Pakalomattom Family Succession

It is a known fact that, hereditary monarchy, matrilinial inheritance, matrilineal succession etc. were the common practice of ancient Kerala society in general. The Malankara Church also followed the same system in the matter of ecclesiastical succession till the beginning of nineteenth century. But a group within the Church stood firmly against this system under their leader Fr. Joseph of the Chattukulangara Church and as a pioneer step to put an end to the Pakalomattom family hereditary succession of the Marthoma Metrans. This was mainly due to the weak successors of Mar Thoma VI. Those successors were inefficient and indifferent in facing the very many challenges of the time. He led a movement towards those prelates and the system came to an end in 1816 with the consecration of himself by Kidangan Mar Philaxinos of

267 Fr. Joseph was consecrated as bishop Joseph Mar Dionysius II in 1816 at Pazhanji St. Mary’s Church.
268 The ancient name of the present Arthat St. Mary’s Orthodox Cathedral Church.
269 There is a legend tradition that the Pakalomattom, is family that received ordination from St. Thomas.
270 Those successors were from the Pakalomattom Family; and some of them were adopted to the family with a view to claim Pakalomattom succession. These nominal claimants were inefficient and enthroned only by laying of hands of the sick or even dead predecessors.
the Thozhiyur Church. Thus by the beginning of nineteenth century, the Malankara Church came out from a traditional system of family succession. The modern Kerala society gradually realized the short coming of this system and began to react in line with the Church. The national movement in Kerala was directed towards the democratic system, thus to avoid the system of mere hereditary succession, prevailed among the royal families and local chiefs. The protest of Fr. Joseph got widespread access and sooner or later he was noticed by the existing social order. This lasting impact, regarding the removal of matrilineal hereditary succession of authority caused greater changes in the society in all walks of life.

6.14. The first Community Organization of Kerala

The Malankara Syrian Christian Association established in 1873 is to be considered as the first and foremost community institution of Kerala. Organizational strength, as exhorted by Sree Narayana Guru, to the Ehava community, was put into practice by the Malankara Church as pioneer move, four decades back of the formation of Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam. There have not been any noteworthy prophets in the fields of religion, politics, community, literature or culture who have not formed an organization of their loyal followers in this pattern. This is what the Church made possible through the community organization, the Malankara Syrian Christian Association, which Mar Dionysius V, formed at Parumala in 1873 and confirmed at Mulanthuruthy in 1876. The Kandanad Granghavari describes the following about the

271 In Kerala, all dynasties except one, followed the hereditary form of succession. It was a part and parcel of the Matrilineal system of succession.
272 Since then the system disappeared from the Church.
274 Original Minutes of the Parumala Association 1873, Mulanthuruthy Canon or the Synod Resolutions of 1876, The first minutes of the Synod of Mulanthuruthy., See also Niranam Grandhavari, op.cit., and Kandanattu Grandhavari, op.cit.
275 Kandanattu Grandhavari, Ibid.
276 Ibid.
formation of the Association. An Association composed of the Metropolitans, priests and believers of the Church has to be formed with a supreme authority to discuss the matters related to the religion and society;\textsuperscript{277} and the Mulamthuruthy Decrees as following. To which an organization of the entire community has to be formed with the name Malankara Syrian Christian Association.\textsuperscript{278} Though no earlier models were available in front of him, anybody will be struck with wonder by the endless stories about the arduous journeys this hardworking brilliant man made in order to create awareness towards this goal in the parishes which were scattered in the states of Travancore and Kochi and to find success. The heroic stories about the victory march he made from Kunnamkulam to Trivandrum may be compared with the laborious work done by the 'Iron Man' Sardar Patel later, in order to organize the more than 600 country-states of India under the Indian Republic. The grand forum of the Association formed by one clergyman representative and two laymen representatives from each church, a working committee constituted by a certain number of clergymen and double that number of laymen elected from the members of the Association, a treasurer and a secretary for it, the then Malankara Metropolitan to be its President. All parishes and members were to remit membership fees, according to their class divisions. A common fund thus collected. A constitution was drafted to define the aims and limits of authority of the community. All these were put into practice with the approval of the Association. The form and the nature of the organization were democratic in structure and functioning.

\textsuperscript{277} Semavoon Mar Dionysius, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 192.

\textsuperscript{278} Decree no.4 of the Synod of Mulanthuruthy held in 1876. See Z.M. Paret, \textit{Mulanthuruthy Sunnahados}, Kottayam, 1966, p. 102.
We are familiar with a number of organizations, both religious and secular in the present century like S.N.D.P.Y., N.S.S., S.J.P.S., M.E.S etc. But the leaders behind those organizations were able to imitate a prototype i.e. the Malankara Syrian Christian Association, pioneered by the Malankara Church in 1873 and put into practice in 1876. Sree Narayana Guru exhorted the Ezhavas to be enlightened with organizations in the beginning of twentieth century. While The Church put it into practice in the second half of nineteenth century.

It is an established fact that the formation of the S.N.D.P. Yogam by Narayana Guru has been effected in the social reformation of the state, and paved the way for the formation of further associations and organizations. But the first community organization of the state- the Malankara Syrian Christian Association, was the inductive force behind all these organizations, and hence the Malankara Church can be considered as the inspiration behind the consolidation of communities.

In a state where monarchy was in effect, Pulikkottil Mar Dionysius could imagine a democratic arrangement and put it into practice through detailed planning of all its aspects. Here we can see the Pioneer democratic prophet of the Kerala Church and culture. The Prelate himself threw away his Episcopal autocracy, glory, love of position and pride, and jumped into its democratic style of functioning, by going beyond the times. He made use of that common forum for fulfilling his innumerable dreams as it had representation from all parishes and it controlled all parishes. What he achieved through the formation of the Association was the awakening of the community from its slumber, because one has to get up first in order to start travelling.

279 Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam
280 Nair Service Society
281 Sadhu Jana Paripalan Sangham
282 Muslim Educational Society
The democratic awareness implied in the style of functioning, underlying the system of collecting and using funds through the mediation of the joint responsibility of a Church Trust constituted by episcopal, clerical and lay members symbolically representing the whole Church. The three-fold streams of power in the Church can also be seen in the parliamentary democratic administrative organization of later times that conducts its administration through a Prime Minister, a Cabinet, and the Parliament, the elected representatives of the people. The fact that the Supreme Court of free India, in 1958 as well as in 1995, instructed that the highest authority of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church should rest with this Association even in the future also. The Malankara Syrian Christian Association, the biggest Ecclesiastical Parliament in Asia, still shines and scatters light with brightness. During later times, the Ezhava community, the 

As a result of the working efficiency of the Association, there was born in the Church a kind of unprecedented novel energy. The secret behind it was that the clergy and the laity both felt happy about being able to participate in the general administration of the Church.

\textbf{6.15. The Mahajana Sabha}

The Church was able to analyze the trends of the times and realize that the religious and social progress of Kerala was in the hands of the educated people who had English education, and therefore, it formed an organization by name \textit{‘Mahajana Sabha’}
for the educated members of the Church. In due course a number of organizations in different castes were founded from the inspiration that they received from the Church. The visionary leader Mar Dionysius V was the spirit of initiation behind this endevour. For a long time the 'Mahajana Sabha’ worked as the brain of the Malankara Church. This organization that was formed in the month of Medam in 1897 at the Kottayam M.D. Seminary,\(^{284}\) for the purpose of social progress and refinement, later became more democratic. It may be the pioneer organization for the educated class in Travancore and Cochin. Parett writes:

'Joseph Mar Dionysius took the initiative for organised effort even in matters which lay outside the purview of the Church. One of the results of these operations was the organisation, the Mahajanasa Sabha.' In the open letter that E.J. John sent to Abdulla Patriarch in the month of Edavom in 1910, he wrote: "The history of the origin of the Malankara Mahajana Sabha is famous in the contemporary history of the Syrian community. When the love for the community made it impossible for some of us to keep quiet any longer in the face of the neglect suffered by the educational centre of the Church, the M.D. Seminary, the problems in many of the churches, and many of the social disasters, as a result of the multiplicity of the responsibilities that had to be borne by Mar Dionysius who had to spend his life battling against the religious problems that cropped up within the Syrian Church, we put our minds together and about 15 years ago, established this Mahajanasa Sabha.\(^{285}\)

The Malankara Church tried to make public consensus especially that of the educated class, through the formation of Mahajanasa Sabha, a common stage to act and react. It was a luminous period when the programmes of action churned out at the annual

\(^{284}\) Idavakapathrika, Kottayam, 1897, Edavam. See also Yugathejus, ed., Jacob Kurian, op.cit.p. 275.

meetings of the *Mahaajanasabha* and those of the priests were put into practice through the Association and the Managing Committee.

### 6.16. Literary Works and Journalism

The Church visionaries had better awareness than anybody else about the place that the media had in the progress of the community. E.M. Philip writes in his autobiography about the literary interaction of the Malankara Church Metropolitan Mar Dionysius:

"The Metropolitan was a share-holder in the company that Verghese Mappilai started for the running of the Malayala Manorama. For several years the office of the Malayala Manorama was functioning in the Woodland Bangalow. It was later that the press and the office were moved to the present building ... in another part of the Woodland Estate. The relationship between Joseph Dionysius and Verghese Mappilai, which paved the way for many good things in the community, perhaps started from their shared interests in journalistic operations".

The Church and its members had played an important role in the literary heritage of the State. There are a number of eminent writers and authors in the Church like Dr. K.M. Tharakan, The famous Poet, Puthencavil Mathen Tharakan, Dr. Samuel Chandanapilly, Paul Manalil, Dr. Kurian Thomas, Dr. C.V. Cherian, Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios, Fr. Dr. K.M. George, Fr. Dr. Joseph Cheeran, E.M. Philip, Fr. Dr. Jacob Kurian, Dr. Sibi Tharakan, Dr. Mathew Pulikkottil, Dr. A.V. Thamby, K.M. Mathew, etc. in the Church. Thousands of books have been published in the Church. Almost all the major branches of literature had been practically touched by the members of the Church.

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6.16.1. 'The Story of a Foreign Voyage' or Oru Paradesa Yatrayude Katha\textsuperscript{287}

The Work is unique of its kind, being the second book ever written in Malayalam, in the field of Malayalam travelogue. The first being ‘Varthamana Pusthakam’ of Paremakkal Thoma Kathanar.\textsuperscript{288} The Book is written by Mar Dionysius V in 1864- 65 A.D. describing his journey to Mardeen, the head Quarters of the Antochean Patriarch. The work makes it clear that he owned a prose style of writing which was pleasant, luminous and compelling in nature. This small work of art which combines the power of observation, the ability for analysis, detailed descriptions, very interesting pictures drawn with words, pleasing self-revelations, very appropriate illustrations, captivating scenes of internal struggles, a personalised style of writing and an attractive ability for description should really be considered the first perfect work in Malayalam literature describing a journey. This book which was written before 'Indulekha' testifies to Malayalam prose style having come of age. The prose of this book is sweeter, more pleasant and more energetic than that of Rev. George Maathen. The hero's courage, presence of mind in crises, self confidence, boldness, very appropriate approaches and decisions based on dependence on God, all these together present the reader with the picture of a very dignified man who was also a courageous leader.

6. 16.2. Descriptions of Joseph the Indian.\textsuperscript{289}

Even though the authenticity is doubtful, the narrations of Joseph the Indian can be considered as the first book ever written from a native source in the pre- Portuguese period. It is the description of an eye witness about the Malankara Church in and around


\textsuperscript{288} Paremakkal Thoma Kathanar, Varthaman Pusthakam, Kottayam, 1989 ‘Descriptions of the journey from Lisbon to Rome, 1778-1786’.

\textsuperscript{289} Francan Montalboddo, op.cit.; George Schurhammer, op.cit.; Antony Vallavartthara, op.cit.; also see Dr. Paulose Mar Gregorios, ed., Malankara Orthodox Church Encyclopedia, op.cit, pp.339, 340.
1490s, a little bit earlier to the description of Shaik Zainudeen’s *Tuḥfatul Mujahideen* of 1545.\(^{290}\)

Joseph, the Indian was a Christian priest from Malabar who had travelled to Mesopotamia, Europe, visited the Holy Patriarch of the East and ordained a priest by him, and also visited the Holy Patriarch of the Western Church- the Pope of Rome and declared the identity and ecclesiology of the St Thomas Christians to western Christianity. Joseph was interviewed by the Signoria of Venice and his accounts were written by an unknown European and have been published as 25 editions in seven different European languages.

The narrations of Joseph, the Indian throw light into the history of St Thomas’ Christians in the immediate pre-Portuguese period. The pre-Portuguese history of St Thomas Christians is not well documented. Many accounts have been found from various writings; letters of Patriarchs and Prelates, inscriptions and oral accounts. Many books have been written about the history of early Christianity in Kerala in 16th and 17th centuries but all of them are Western in origin. The narrations of Joseph, written by a European in an alien language to Joseph, are the only available account from a native source..

6. 16.3. The Niranam Grandhavari.\(^{291}\)

The discovery of *History of Vella* written in 1781\(^{292}\) is considered as a historical milestone in the study of Kerala History. The *Niranam Grandhavari* also is a contemporary work of “History of Vella” and contains even present tense descriptions earlier than that of the *History of Vella* In that sense it can be stated that this chronicle is

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the earliest among the known one. This 18th century chronicle gives us valuable contemporary information about both ecclesiastical and secular history of Kerala.

Until AD 2000, The *Niranam Grandhavari* was an unpublished manuscript written on palm leaves. The original is in the possession of Kanianthra family of Mepral near Thiruvalla. This manuscript has 179 leaves with writing on both sides. It was transcribed at Oriental Manuscript Library, Thiruvananthapuram in 1988.293

The Chronicle describes the life and history of the 18th century Malankara Church by a group of authors. The description of events in details, covering from 18th century to 19th century is the major content of the Chronicle. Some scholars believed that the *Niranam Grandhavari* was written by Mar Dionysius I, Malankara Metropolitan (AD1765-1808). There was a strong legend that an uninterrupted chronicle was kept by the Archdeacons until AD 1653.294 Dr. P. J. Thomas states that there exists a Church history written by Mar Dionysius I, based on the chronicles of the Archdeacons.295 C. M. Agur states in his *Church History of Travancore* that the Syrians have a brief history of their own composed by Mar Dionysius I. One of the two manuscripts examined by T. K. Joseph at Karuthadathu family at Mavalikkara in 1930 is identified as a copy of the *Niranam Grandhavari*.

6. 16.4. The Kandanad Grandhavari.296

This is also a Chronicle of a later origin. It is a 1577 page manuscript written in Malayalam. Semavoon Mar Dionysius, A Metropolitan consecrated by the Patriarch Peter III in 1877, is considered to be its author. It contains the 19th century history of the

293 Joseph K. Alexander, a senior member of the Kanianthra family, organized this process. The paper transcript has 384 foolscap pages.
295 There is a hint about such a chronicle of Archdeacons in *Niranam Grandhavari*. According to *Niranam Grandhavari*, white ants destroyed that at Niranam church. See: Kurian Thomas, *Niranam Grandhavari, op.cit.*, p. 127.
296 Semavoon Mar Dionysius, *op.cit.*
Malankara Church. There are first hand informations about the Church especially from a Metropolitan of the Church.\(^{297}\)

**6.17. National Indigenous Church**

The benevolent and tolerant attitude of the medieval local rulers and natives were helpful for the Malankara Christians to grow and branch out as an Indian religion\(^{298}\) in all respects except the matters of faith and form of worship.\(^{299}\)

Being an indigenous and independent body, the Syrian Christians had developed their own ecclesiastical order and the form of worship. The only guideline that they received was the orally transmitted system of practice and the gospel message the founder brought. They had no regular or uninterrupted contact with any early churches of either the Western or Eastern Traditions. However they had random and occasional visits of the Christian travelers, traders or Church prelates. Those prelates may have exercised or claimed a nominal spiritual control over the Church.

In the ecclesiastical history of the early universal church, there are references of prelates with the attribute or title ‘of all India’, ‘Door of India’, ‘Head of India’ etc. but can be taken in a loose sense.\(^{300}\)

The bishops reached India from outside always claimed to be the spiritual head of the Indian Church. But there is no evidence to prove their authority and claim. They may

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297 Mar Semavoon Dionysius (1823 - October 2, 1886) was a native Of Kandanadu, Ernakulam district, Kerala. He was consecrated as the Metropolitan of Kochi by Mar Peter III, Patriarch of Antioch in 1877. He wrote this lengthy and detailed Church history. This 1577 page manuscript is now kept at St, Peter & St. Paul's Church, Kadungamangalam, Ernakulam District, where he buried. The structure of this book indicates that he wrote it with the intention of publishing. This is a well-documented source material at least for his period. Copies of the same are in the possession of Fr. Dr. Joseph Cheeran, Pazhanji, Kerala, and Thomas Mar Athanasios, Metropolitan of Chenganur Diocese of the Malankara Church.


299 Joseph Cheeran, *Orthodox Christianity in India, A History of the Malankara Orthodox Church AD 52-2002,* *op.cit.,* p. 103.

300 C.V. Cheriyan, *op.cit.,* p.104.
have had a nominal authority and a sublime power of jurisdiction over the whole of India. There are references about the unnatural claims of the foreign princes in the European history. When Vasco Da Gama reached India under the direction of Dom Manual, the Portuguese ruler, he took the title “The Emperor of Ethiopia, Arabia and India.” A mere visit resulted in an unnatural claim. However, as observed, the Church of Malabar (Kerala) was fully at home on Indian soil. This was the individuality of this Church, and it was perfectly Indo-Oriental.

6.18. Mission and Vision of the Malankara Church Prelates

The transformation of the world in which the Church exists is the prime duty of the Church as commissioned by Christ Jesus. Thus the Church prelates intentionally interfered in the existing society with a view to reform it. Even though, the sum total of the Church’s mission was to emancipate people from the bondage of social evils and equip them to work for their revival and reformation, Prelates of this national Church regarded the uplifting of the society as the prime concern. But, being part of this society they had their own limitations and restrictions. In spite of all these limitations many far sighted fathers of the Church acted as mediators between the missionaries and the natives for the very purpose of social awakening.

6.18.1. Kandanad Padiyola- 1809 A.D.

*Kandanadu Padiyola* is found as the first attempt to write down a code of canons to regulate the ecclesial and temporal life of Nazranis in the post-Portuguese period. This

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301 Ibid., p.105.
303 Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius I & II, Parumala Mar Gregorios, Pathrose Mar Osthateos, Geevarghese Mar Ospathheos etc.
*Padiyola*, signed by fifty four churches, has eleven clauses with numerous sub clauses.\(^{304}\)

The topic of each clause is as follows.

- Regarding the day of Baptism
- Regarding the religious instruction of the children
- Regarding the daily prayers
- Regarding the observance of Sundays and feasts
- Regarding the lent and fast
- Regarding the marriage
- Regarding the manners of the priests
- Regarding the establishment of seminaries
- Regarding the spreading of *Aandu Taksa*, the book of feasts
- Regarding the administration of local churches
- Regarding the sacraments.\(^{305}\)

The pattern of these canons indicates that the Malankara *Pally Yogam* considered all aspects of the Malankara Christians in framing these canons. The canon regarding marriage admits that there were slight difference in its social ceremonies in the south and north and hence, fixed different standards for both the places.\(^{306}\) *Kandanadu Padiyola* was executed as bound to all the Malankara Christians. In the last canon it is read as "[It is decided that] all of the above mentioned canons will be observed without any alterations and if any of them would be violated, those will be punished with excommunication and [they] will be readmitted only after the completion of the punishment pronounced over them."\(^{307}\)

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304 Semavoon Mar Dionysius, *op.cit.*
307 *Ibid*.
The Kandanadu Padiyola must be taken as the initiative of Malankara Christians to establish an identity with their own code of canons.

6.18.2. Founding of the Old Seminary - 1815 A.D.

According to the Kandanad Padiyola, the Church were to start two seminaries: one in the South and another in the North of Kerala. But his friendship with Col. Munroe, the Diwan of Travancore, resulted in the establishment of the Seminary at Kottayam. However Joseph Ramban308 wanted to start the seminary for education of the deacons with a strong vision to train the future leaders of the Church and the society. He realized that only a learned leadership can lead the society for its awakening. For this purpose he claimed from Colonel Monroe, the British Resident, the accumulated interest of Vattipanam309. The Resident gave him interest for four years disregarding the claim by Mar Thoma VIII. Colonel John Munroe, the then British Resident in the Kingdom of Travancore offered his unreserved support for the Educational plans of the Ramban. Gowri Parvathi Bai, the queen of Travancore granted 16 acres of tax-free land, Rs.20,000 and the necessary timber for the construction of the Seminary.310 The work started in 1813 and the building was completed and classes begun in March 1815.

The beginning of the Seminary synchronized with the arrival of Church Missionary Society Missionaries to Kerala. For some years the relationship between the missionaries and the Church was one of cordial co-operation. The missionaries were

308 The technical problem about having received the interest of the ‘Vattippanam’ by a Ramban other than the Malankara Metropolitan, was finally solved when Ittoop (Joseph) Rambaan was consecrated as Bishop under the name Joseph Mar Dionysius by Kidangan Mar Philexinose, who was the successor of Kaattumangaattu Koorilose, at Pazhanji church, on 21st March, 1815.
309 ‘Vattipanam’ literally meant a deposit with an anticipation of annual income as interest or Vatti. A lump sum amount (3000 Poovarahan) was deposited in the British East India Company on an 8% interest by Marthoma VII in 1808. Thus, for the first time, created a general means of income for the Church – the Vattippanappalisa. The annual interest was to be received only by the official successor of the Malankara Metropolitan.
310 Sreedhara Menon, op.cit., p.298.
allowed to teach English and biblical languages in the Seminary. The early missionaries who worked here - Norton, Baker, Bailey, and Fenn - rendered remarkable service.

Instruction in the Seminary was primarily meant for the future priests of the Church. But lay people also were admitted as students because the Seminary was the first seat of English general education in the State of Travancore, and perhaps one of the earliest in the whole of India.

Col. Munroe wrote in 1815 about his intention to start English education in the Seminary: “A course of English instruction is very much wanted in the college”

The Old Seminary could visualize the multi oriented functions of the Malankara Church. It had been the Head Quarters of the Malankara Church for a couple of centuries. The training of the priests, the leaders of the Church, was conducted in the Seminary. Along with it functioned as a Pioneer English School of Travancore and also as Women School.

6.18.3. Mavelikkara Padiyola- 1836 A.D.

In 1836, the Malankara Church convened a synod at Mavelikara, on 16th January 1836 to consider the suggestions put forth by the Anglican bishop, Daniel Wilson. They came to a decision to neglect the proposal and to cut off the connection with Church Missionary Society. "We would not follow any faith or teaching other than the Orthodox faith of the three catholic synod of Nicene, Ephesus and Constantinople, which was brought to us by the Jacobite Syrian Church to the end that we may obtain salvation through the prayers of the ever happy, holy and ever blessed Mother of God, the


312 The Anglican Church was anticipating a total union with the Malankara Church. Those proposals were for the ‘Reformation’ of the Church and for its absorption, thus to make a part of the Anglican faith.
redresser of all complaints and through the prayer for all saints". The decision of the Synod with a detailed description on the history and faith of the Church is known as Mavelikkara Padiyola of 1836 A.D. The Padiyola reads: “While affairs were being thus conducted, the Missionaries took to managing the Seminary without consulting the Metropolitan, themselves expended the interest money drawn annually on the receipt of the Metropolitan, dispersed the deacons instructed in the Seminary, conducted affairs in opposition to the discipline of the church and created dissensions amongst us, all of which have occasioned much sorrow and vexation. For this reason we do (would) not follow any faith or teaching other than the Orthodox faith of the Jacobite Syrian Christians, to the end, that we may obtain salvation through the prayers of ever happy, holy, and ever-blessed Mother of God, the redresser of all complaints and through the prayers of all Saints. Witness, Father, Son and Holy Ghost.”

Under these circumstances, the Correspondence committee of the CMS at Madras decided to discontinue their co-operation with the Indian Orthodox Church and requested the British Resident to apportion the properties including the seminary. In 1840 ended the official relationship between CMS and the Malankara Church. The immediate effect was the breaking away of a group of people who stood with the CMS missionaries from the main stream of the Church. They formed CMS Church and followed the Church of England for their faith and administration. The Malankara Church gained a lot from the relationship with CMS. Unfortunately they had to break away the relationships because of the extreme positions taken by the both parties.

6.18.4. Kottayam Synod- 1853 A.D.

314 Kaniyamparambil Curian Cor- Episcopa, Suriyani Sabha, Thiruvalla, 1982, p.140.
315 With the Royal Court Judgment of 1889, that group left the Church to form the Mar Thoma Church.
316 The CMS Church had two dioceses at Travancore and Cochin and later they unified with the Church of South India in 1947.
This Synod was convened by Mathews Mar Athanasios in 1853 at the Old Seminary. Several parishes from Travancore and Cochin attended the meeting. A detailed description of the Synod and its decisions are narrated in the *Kandanad Grandhavari*. 103 decisions were taken regarding the social life, worship, duties of various church office bearers, the sacramental life of believers, and the role of the Church, Parishes and believers in the social transformation and educational advancement of the community and the society etc.\(^\text{317}\)

**6.18.5. Parumala Synod- 1873 A.D.**

The Malankara Church under Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius met at Parumala to discuss the issues related to the Reformation programme headed by Palakunnath Mar Athanasius, and the Ecclesiastical circular of the Patriarch, regarding the excommunication of Mar Athanasius. The representatives from each parish both priests and lay leaders resolved to rally behind Mar Dionysius. A draft constitution for the Malankara Church has been prepared containing provisions for the autonomy of the Church and programme for establishing educational institutions all over Travancore and Cochin. The *Kandanad Grandhavari* gives a detailed description of the Parumala Synod decisions.\(^\text{318}\)

**6.18.6. Mulanthuruthy synod- 1876 A.D.**

The attempt of Mathews Mar Athanasios to make changes in the faith of the Malankara Church, under the Anglican influence, Pulikkottil Joseph Mar Dionysius, who has been consecrated by the Antiochean Patriarch, decided to bring the Patriarch Peter III to Malankara, for safeguarding the true faith of the Church. He reached in 1875 and convened a Synod or Parish representatives. An invitation dated 5\(^{th}\) June 1876 was issued to all churches of Malankara desiring each parish to send one priest and two laymen as

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\(^{317}\) Semavoon Mar Dionysius, *op.cit.*, pp. 60-78.  
representatives to meet at Mar Thoman Church Mulanthuruthy on 29th June 1876. On receiving this invitation, the delegates met at the Church and deliberated for three days - 29 and 30th of June and 1st of July 1876. 150 parishes are said to have represented the Synod. The Synod adopted eighteen canons for the administration of the Church. The synod decided and defined many important things such as the relationship between the Malankara Orthodox Church and the Syrian Orthodox Church of Antioch and the administration criteria of the Church. The important decisions were as follows:

The First Canon enjoined each parish to execute a bond expressing its will to continue steadfast in the faith of the Eastern Orthodoxy and to give a registered copy of the bond of allegiance to the Patriarch.

The Second Canon desired a census of each parish, which could be utilized to collect Resissa due to the Patriarch.

The Seventh Canon decided that the Syrian Christians of Malankara shall have a body for their governance and it shall be called the 'Malankara Syrian Christian Association' with the Patriarch as its patron and Malankara Metropolitan as the president.

The Eighth Canon proposed a Managing Committee for the Association consisting of twenty-four members with a Secretary. Eight elected priests and sixteen elected laymen were to constitute the Managing Committee.

Canon Fourteen vested full powers on the President of the Association to conduct all legal suits on matters concerning the Church affairs and its properties and also to raise funds to finance court proceedings.  

319 Z. M. Paret gives an elaborated study and many of the other Church historians also reported the synod with details. See Z.M. Paret, n. 282, op.cit., p. 102.

320 Resissa is a Syriac word which used to indicate 'Per Capita Church tax'.

321 Z.M. Paret, Mulanthuruthy Sunnahados, op.cit., pp. 102ff.
All these important discussions decisions of the above mentioned Synods and institutions had made lasting impact upon the growing Church and to a certain extent on the Kerala Society, in the recent century in a way or another.

6.19. Pioneer Charitable Institutions

The resent charitable activities, irrespective of caste creed and colour, are, to a certain extent, part of the humanistic interaction of the Christian Church and Missionaries. As explained earlier, the caste- ridden Indian society believed in the *Karma- Karmaphala* theory of the philosophic Hinduism along with its belief in fate. The high castes believed that the privileges enjoyed by them were predestined by the will of God, while the low castes regarded their pathetic social condition as a part of the fate and the results of their previous birth. Any deliberate action with a view to change their lot can be interpreted as an action against the predestined will of God. More over it was impossible because no one can change the predestined will of God. Charity can be discussed in this background. Helping others to change their lot was considered as a sin against God’s will. This ideology prohibited them from doing any charitable help to the fellow beings.

A Change in this regard was brought into practice with the impact of biblical messages and the attitude of the Church. The biblical message had influenced the society in three ways. First of all, the liturgy or the weekly worship, through which the gospel and the life of Christ was interacted in the society. Secondly, the life of the Christian community which they practiced and visualized the Christian dogma. Thirdly, the gospel translation of 1811 and the remaining part of the Bible in the following years.

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322 ‘The Ramban Bible’ – 4 Gospels, *op.cit.*, Bombay, 1811
323 The Daily Bible - 1829
The Malankara Church, in the modern period had started a number of charitable institutions for the benefit of the entire society. The Church believed that the entire talents and resources are bestowed upon the humanity by God for the wellbeing of all. Human beings are not its owners but only stewards. It has to be distributed among the needy and poor, and thus have to bring about equality. The following are some of the important charitable institutions of the Malankara Church.\footnote{Source: http://malankaraorthodoxchurch.in/institutions}

\textbf{6.19.1. Orphanages}

- M.G.D Asram and Balabhavan, Karunagiri, Karukachal
- St. Paul's Convent and Balikabhavan, Puthuppady, Kozhikode
- St. Mary's Boys Home, Thalacode, Mulanthuruthy.
- St. Paul's Bala Bhavan, Puthuppady, Kozhikode.
- Mar Baselius Children's Home, Mannapra, Palakkad.
- Mar Baselius Children's Home, Vadavucode.
- St. Thomas Children's Home, Bhilai.
- St. Thomas Balabhavan, Haripad.
- Valayanchirangara Balagram, Perumbavoor.
- M.G.D. Asram Balabhavan, Karunagiri, Karukaehal
- St. Gregorios Balagram, Nirmalagiri, Yacharam,
- M.QM. Abhaya Bhavan, Pothenpuram, Pampady
- Holy Trinity Disabled Children's Home, Sreekariyam.
- Mar. Gregorios Rehabilitation Centre, Kodunganoor.
- Gethsemon Convent, Adichanalloor, Kollam.
- Holy Cross Convent Sreekariyam. Trivandrum.
- St. Mary's Convent, Thumpamon.

\footnote{Source: http://malankaraorthodoxchurch.in/institutions}
St. Gregorios Convent. Kalanthode, Chathamangalam, Kozhikode.
M.G. Bethel Karuna Centre, South Karassery, Thathankulam.
St. Mary's Balikamandiram, Kizhakkambalam, Alwaye.
Basalel Girls' Home, Sooranad.
St. George Balikagram, St. Thomas Nagar, Cantt P.O., Pune
Joseph Mar Pachomios Memorial Pratheeksha Bhavan, Koothattukulam.
Mar Baselius Santhi Bhavan, Thalavoor, Kottarakara.
Bethanya Bhavan, Tiruvalla.
NAMS Snehasadan, No.28, Vodarahalli, Vidyooaranoyapura,
Mar Baselios Gregoriose Merey Home, Mannadisala, Vechoochira.
St. Thomas Balabhavan, Vazhuthoor, Neyyattinkara.
St. Thomas Balabhavan, Agali, Palakkad.
Karunya Visranthi Bhavan, Kattela, Sreekariyam. Trivandrum.
St. Macreena Santhi Bhavan, Baselios Convent. Kottarakara.
Cheppad Mar Dionysius Foundation, Cheppad.
St. Paul's Balagram, P.B. 45, Itarsi.
BMM II Sneha Bhavan, Kizhakketheruvu, Kottarakkara.
Vattasseril Mar Dionysius Home, Madavoor, Muvattupuzha.
Mar Baselius Children's Home. Vadavucode.
Mar Gregorios Balahhavan, Thadagom, Coimbatore.
BMM II Balahhavan, chengamanadu, Kottarakkara.
Karunalayam, Balavadr, Mysore
St. Thomas Children's Home, Sasthamkotta.
Hanna Bhavan, Kottukalam Visranthi Bhavan, Kuzhimattom.
Mar Athanasius Memorial Prathyasa Bhavan, Kuzhimattom.
At present there are the following organizations and institutions functioning under the direct control of the Church. Moreover numerous organizations and institutions are running by individual parishes and the members of the Church. All are for the well being and transformation of the entire society, regardless caste and religion.

1. Orthodox Theological Seminary, Chungam – Kottayam.
2. St. Thomas Orthodox Theological Seminary, Ubali Road, Brahnani P.O, Kalmeshwar, Nagpur.
5. Orthodox Youth Movement Old Seminary Road, Chungam,
6. Martha Mariam Vanitha Samajam Martha Mariam Mandhiram, Kanjikkuzhi, Kottayam.
7. Servants of the Cross Karmel Dayara, Kandanadu
8. St. Thomas Clergy Association O.T. Seminary, Kottayam

6.20. Medical Mission

325 Source: http://malankaraorthodoxchurch.in
As mentioned earlier preaching, teaching and healing have always been considered as the duty of the Christian Church. According to Bible, the duty of the church is as exactly as that of Christ Jesus did during his earthly dispensation. Christ preached gospel, taught his disciples and also conducted the mission of healing. Through which Christ was symbolizing the trichotomy of human beings. Human beings, to the Christian concept, are composed of Body, Mind and Spirit. Preaching is directed to the nurturing of the Spirit and teaching to mind and healing to body. Because of the union of trichotomy these three aspects have an integral unity and correlation.

As part of the healing ministry, the church had conducted many charitable works for supporting the sick and poor. But in due course the Church co-ordinated and organized the medical mission as a separate wing of the Church. The Church is maintaining a Sick Aid Fund for the poor and needy and each diocese of the Church have been taken the task as a major duty of the Church and utilizing enormous funds. The individual Parishes too spend a prominent share of their income for this purpose. Moreover, at present there are a 29 Hospitals and one Medical College in the Church, other than those hospitals run by the local Parishes. The prominent among them are:

6.20.1.Hospitals

The Malankara Medical Mission Hospital & Medical College.

MGDM Hospital, Devagiri, Kangazha.

St. Gregorios Mission Hospital, Parumala.

St. Mary’s Hospital, Eraviperoor.

M.D. Cheriapally Hospital, Kottayam.

Mar Theodosius Memorial Bethany Hospital, Ranni-Perunad.

326 Source: http://malankaraorthodoxchurch.in
Mar Theodosius Medical Mission Hospital, Sasthamkotta Poruvazhy P.O., Kollam.

St. Andrews’ Hospital, Puthencavu, Chengannur.

St. Mary’s Hospital, Vallamkulam, Tiruvalla.

St. George’s Hospital, Puthuppady, Kozhikode.

Malankara Medical Mission Hospital and Nursing College, Kunnambukalam.

CDM Hospital, Kottappady, Kunnambukalam.

St. Thomas Charitable Dispensary, Calcutta.

Paret Mar Ivanios Hospital, Puthuppally, Kottayam.

Mar Baselius Medical Mission Hospital, Kothamangalam.

St. Mary’s Hospital, Manarced, Kottayam.

Idukki Orthodox Medical Centre, Nettithozhu, Kumily.

Kurisupally General and Eye Clinic, Puthenangady, Kottayam.

Bishop Walsh Medical Centre, Thadagom, Coimbatore.

Madras Medical Mission, 4-A. J.J. Nagar, Mogappair, Madras.

B.M.P. Mission Hospital, Uditarayapu P.O., Kalahandi.

M.G. Asram Medical Aid Clinic, Mulanthuruthy.

Malankara Medical Mission Eye Hospital, Kariampady.

Mount Tabore Medical Mission Hospital, Mathur, Pudukkottai.

St. Thomas Mission Hospital Attappady, Agali P.O., Palakkad.

B.G.M Trust and Hospital, Kundara.

St. Paul’s Dispensary, Panimunda P.O.,

Abayanikethan Hospital, Makhodia.

St. Mary’s Hospital, Pothanicad, Muvattupuzha.
The reflection of the medical mission in the social transformation and overall development of the State is remarkable. The Kerala model healthcare is a model for other states and even countries abroad. The state has been able to reduce the infant mortality, child mortality, pre-natal and neonatal mortality and maternity mortality substantially. Part of the reason for Kerala's achievements is the elaborate network of healthcare institutions, both in the private and the public sector.


As a result of the Bible translations and missionary enterprises Jesus Christ was introduced to the society as an embodiment of all virtues. Many Hindu reformists and even revivalists saw Jesus Christ as an example of simplicity, love and sacrifice. This made the neo-Hindu leaders distinguish between the person and message of Jesus Christ. Another response to Christian missionary work was the extension of the concern towards the lower castes. By seeing the result of the work of the Christians among the lower castes, T. Rama Rao, Dewan of Travancore once went to the extent of saying that

“...Christianity came from God who made all men, since it had such an effect in raising the degraded”327

The Census Commissioner for the year 1891, a Brahmin, spared no words in praising the Christians for their work among the lower castes. He wrote a long paragraph of glowing tribute in the Census Report to the work of the Christians. He wrote:

“But for these missionaries, these humble orders of Hindu society will forever remain upraised......... belongs the credit of having gone to their humble dwellings, and awakened them to a sense of better earthly existence”328

In the same way in the Census Report of 1901 it was also said that, "...But the heroism of raising the low from the slough of degradation and debasement was an element of civilization unknown to ancient India and this was done by the missionaries."

In 1894, an open letter signed by many higher caste Hindus said that, “We know well that it was through the influence of Christians that a great number of good changes in this state, Schools and Hospitals have been established everywhere; Slaves and other oppressed classes have been set free: Government posts have been thrown open to many sections of the community: several heavy taxes have been removed and peace and prosperity have been greatly advanced. In short, the Christian Missionaries have been the great benefactors of the country in a hundred ways."

Even though these remarks were particularly about the Christians Missionaries it is generally about the Christian community. The results of all these were general enlightenment in the values of individual freedom and social equality, in the light of which the traditional social order appeared as enslaving to the individual and unjust in its manner of relating man to man, and man to woman. This was the dynamic behind later movements for social liberation. Such movements however gained an added vigour and a new sense of direction when Mahatma Gandhi appeared on the scene and made abolition of untouchability and other social evils a plank in the programme of the national struggle for freedom. It was in this context that groups of Syrian Christians in Kerala (though not the Syrian Churches as a whole) awoke to their responsibility to participate in

329 Quoted in A.F. Painter, op.cit., p. 350
330 A letter written by Hindus of different castes, residing at Vaikkum, Kadakavoor and other places addressed to the Rev. W. A. Osborne & Mrs. Osborne and H. Hewett Esq., dated January 18, 1894, (printed letter), TR-IL, Box 16, F 4, J D, CWMA.
movements of political, economic and social liberation, and made attempts to relate this sense of social responsibility to the dynamic of the Christian Gospel.

6.22. Conclusion

From the above analysis it is clear that the Malankara Church was able to transplant a conceptual framework of modernity to a land where archaic system was the order. But the question is that is it possible for an ancient Church, inclined to antiquity to make considerable changes in a traditional society. Here one thing has to be clarified. The far sighted leaders of the Malankara Church were able to accept the humanist and revolutionary ideas of the European Missionaries and to make structural changes within the Church. First of all they tried to transform the Church according to the standards of the modern ideology, new humanism; and then through their positive interaction to the transformation of the whole society. Now they could move further more with new vision and mission.

The works of the Malankara Church and that of the Missionaries had made a lasting impact upon the social life of modern Kerala society. The early Christians of Kerala were true Keralites and identified with the local community in all possible ways. But at the same time they led a life of ethical purity. The loyal and honest Christians of the time had a great influence over the entire society. Their weekly get together for worship, parish festivals of cultural interaction, their love and care for the fellow beings, their social privileges, democratic administration of the parishes, Church oriented life, indebtedness and obedience to the leadership, love for freedom and autonomy and all the more the indigenous form of life style and eagerness to acquire knowledge and education all these had lasting impact upon the Kerala society.

In the recent centuries the Malankara Church interacted with the society in a different manner. With the coming of the Europeans, the local Christians were prepared
to accept the elements of European Renaissance from them and favourably attracted to
the new forms of social transformation. Seeing the unprecedented growth and
development of the local Christians, even without surrender of their freedom, the natives
though gradually, were attracted to the new system. Moreover the institutions and parish
schools tried their level best to propagate the novel ideas and prepared the local people to
accept the factors responsible for social revolution. Thus the Malankara Church acted a
dual role for the social awakening of the state. First of all they themselves practiced the
new system and secondly acted as a link between the European missionary efforts.

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