



ON KNANAYA MIGRATION IN THE TRAVANCORE MANUAL

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The Travancore Darbar proposes to publish an official Manual of the Travancore State and has entrusted to Mr. Nagam Aiya, Settlement Peishkar, the task of compiling this Manual. Mr. Nagam Aiya asked me to assist him with the chapter on Christianity. I have written this chapter and my cordial thanks are due to all who have given me information or advice. Some time will elapse before the other chapters of the Manual are completed and therefore His Highness the Maharaja has permitted the manuscript of this chapter to be printed for facility of perusal and correction, on the understanding that it will be regarded only as a paper written by me and not yet as part of the official Manual. My special thanks are given to Dr. E. Thurston of Madras who has promised to send four illustrations for this chapter.

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THE TRAVANCORE MANUAL THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

The history of Christianity in the Travancore State is a subject of very great interest, not only because there is ground to believe that from early times a Christian church was in existence on this coast, but also because at the present day one-fifth of the people of Travancore are Christians. The greater part of these Christians are known as Syrian Christians. They are Hindus by race and speak the Malayalam language that is spoken by their neighbours who are Hindus by religion. This name, Syrian Christians, has been given because in their churches they still use Syriac or Chaldaic liturgies. These Syrian Christians are found in central and north Travancore, in the Cochin State and in the Malabar district of British India. There are none in south Travancore. The bulk of them are Roman Catholics but nevertheless follow their own Syriac Rite. Others adhere to the Jacobite Patriarch or Antioch. The remainder approach the Protestant standards of doctrine and ritual and are usually called the Reformed Syrians, although they themselves dislike that name and call themselves the Christians of St. Thomas. **These three bodies of Syrian Christians agree on one point in claiming to be the descendants of the converts made by the Apostle St. Thomas on this coast or of early Christian immigrants from Persia or Mesopotamia.**

In addition to the Syrian Christians there is throughout Travancore a large number of Roman Catholics who follow the usual Latin Rite. They are the descendants of converts made in the last four centuries since the Portuguese landed in India, and they have never used the Syrian Rite. There are also numerous Protestants who are converts made in the last century by missionaries of the Anglican Church Mission Society of the London Mission Society and of the Salvation army. If the Dutch, during their stay on this coast, did any mission work no trace of it now remains.

Tradition assigns the origin of the ancient Christian Church on this coast to the labours of St. Thomas the Apostle. All the Syrian Christians firmly believe that St. Thomas landed at Cranganore in the year 52, established seven churches on this coast and suffered a martyr's death at Mailapur or St. Thomas' Mount near the modern city of Madras. This tradition was widely held from early times and it has been accepted as true by many writers of repute. There is in the tradition itself nothing improbable. At that date there was commerce between India and Europe by caravans overland, by the Persian Gulf and by the Red Sea, so that the Apostle could journey to India. The tradition is supported by numerous passages

in which early writers allude to the work of St. Thomas in India or mention the existence of Christians in India. Several old liturgies and martyrologies speak of St. Thomas in India and this shows that the tradition had spread throughout the various Christian Churches. The truth of this tradition has been doubted by recent writers who suggest that some other man named Thomas in later centuries founded this church or suggest that the name India at that date was applied to the country on the west of the river Indus and not to the peninsula which now bears the name. The arguments put forward by these writers seem hardly sufficient to explain away all the passages which speak of St. Thomas in India and these writers do not give due weight to the antiquity and to the strength of this venerable tradition which is held so tenaciously by all the Syrian Christians.

This Christian Church on the Malabar coast, whether it was founded by St. Thomas or at a later date existed through long centuries and was here in full vigour when the Portuguese anchored at Calicut in 1498 but the materials before that date for any history of this Church are very meagre and to compile that history is a delicate task, because upon these meagre materials the various bodies of Christians now in Travancore have formed opinions wide as the poles asunder.

These opinions may be arranged in four classes: firstly, the Reformed Syrians and many Protestant writers see in this ancient Church a Church of primitive simplicity of doctrine, forcibly compelled by the power of the Portuguese to submit for a time to Rome, but escaping when the Dutch shook the Portuguese supremacy and ever since that date striving to return to its pristine purity of doctrine and ritual. Secondly, the Latin Roman Catholics regard this Church as a Church which originally held the faith taught by the Apostles but fell into the Nestorian heresy and other errors because of the difficulty of communication with Rome. When that difficulty was removed by the arrival of the Portuguese this local Church willingly came into communion with Rome and has since remained in Communion with Rome, notwithstanding the defection of some of their number in 1653. Thirdly, some of the Syrian Roman Catholics are so eager in their zeal for the dignity of their Church that they deny that their Church was ever Nestorian. They say that their Church, founded by an Apostle and using the language which Christ himself spoke when on Earth, always kept the Catholic Faith was hindered only by distance from union with Rome, embraced the opportunity given by the arrival of the Portuguese to enter into union with Rome and has ever since that date remained a Church of an Oriental Rite in full communion with the Holy See. Fourthly, the Jacobites maintain that the Patriarch of Antioch has from early times included this coast in his Patriarchate and has therefore had jurisdiction over this Church. These opinions are put forward at the present day not only in academic controversy but also as the basis of litigation for the possession of Church property and of Trust funds. An official publication must be neutral in such disputes and all that can here be attempted is to set out the facts with little or no comment, indicating, so far as is possible, the sources from which information has been obtained.

The tradition of the Syrian Christians says that St. Thomas ordained clergy who after the Apostle's death carried on the ministry of this infant Church, but here, on the very threshold, controversy begins. The reformed Syrians say that the Apostle ordained priests only and that these priests ordained other priests by laying on of hands. The Romo-Syrians and the Jacobites say that St. Thomas consecrated bishops and one Latin writer tells us that in the East the Apostle founded eight Archbishops' Sees of which Malabar was one. There is no historical support for either tradition. The first historical fact on record is that one of the bishops present at the council of Nicea in 325 signed the decrees of the council as John, Bishop of Persia and Great India. Nothing is known of this bishop beyond what his signature tells us. He may have been a Persian bishop and the part of his diocese which he calls Great India may be the India west or the Indus.

A few years after this date a merchant named Thomas Cana trading on this coast became acquainted with this Christian Church and in the year 345 he brought to Cranganore a colony of four hundred Christians from Nineveh and Jerusalem. Among them was a bishop from Edessa named Joseph and several priests and deacons. From the time of this immigration the Church seems to have been on a much firmer footing. It is said that the Ruler of Cranganore, Cheruman Perumal, conferred privileges upon Thomas Cana and on his people. That this Church was now in communication with the Churches of Asia appears from the tradition that the body or part of the body of the Apostle was carried towards the close of the fourth century, from Mailapur to Edessa.

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