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**Paper-1**

**Archbishop Mar Andrews Thazhath, "The Syro Malabar Church in the Evolving Hierarchical Structure of East Syrian Church in the Early Centuries"**

**Paper-2**

എഫ്.ആൻറണിപുത്തൂർ. ആദിമ ക്രിസ്ത്യാനികളും  
ദേവമാതാവമ്മാനെയും

## THE SYRO MALABAR CHURCH IN THE EVOLVING HIERARCHICAL STRUCTURE OF EAST SYRIAN CHURCH IN THE EARLY CENTURIES

Mar Andrews Thazhath

**1. Introduction:** The Syro Malabar Church, which is widely acclaimed as one of the most vibrant Churches of the Catholic communion in the modern era has got the gloried history from the very beginning of Christianity. Until 1887, these Christians were generally known as the Thomas Christians, although there were different appellations in the course of time. This article is an attempt to find out the evolving hierarchical structure of the Thomas Christians and thereby of the Syro Malabar Church until the XVI century given the background that the documentary evidences in the early centuries are scarce. For preparing this article, the author has mainly depended on his doctoral dissertation in Rome “*The Juridical Sources of the Syro Malabar Church*” (OIRSI, Kottayam, 1987).

**2. The Syro Malabar Church of the Thomas Christians<sup>1</sup>:** The Syro Malabar Church is that Apostolic, Indian, Oriental, Catholic Church which, according to strong and living tradition, was founded by the Apostle Thomas. Down to the centuries this Church has been called ‘The Church of St. Thomas’ and the followers ‘The Thomas Christians’. As Cardinal Tisserant writes: “The problems of the origins of the Syrian Christianity in India are closely connected with the evangelization of India by the Apostle St. Thomas. This apostolate is asserted by ancient traditions both literary and local”<sup>2</sup>. Scholars today generally accept as reliable the tradition about the apostolate of St. Thomas in India, more precisely in the Malabar and Coromandal coasts and about the martyrdom at Mylapore<sup>3</sup>.

The Church founded by Jesus Christ is one, holy, Catholic and apostolic. At present, the Catholic Universal-Church under the authority of the Roman Pontiff, the Successor of Peter, is a communion of 24 *sui iuris* Churches – both western and Eastern. The Syro-Malabar Church is one among the Eastern Catholic Churches. As per Eastern Catholic Canon Law CEO Canon 27, the specific features of a *sui iuris* Church are: (1) it is a community of faithful (2) united by a hierarchy (3) recognized by the Roman Pontiff or Ecumenical Council<sup>4</sup>. This article is indented to deal with the hierarchical structure of the Syro Malabar Church in the early centuries.

<sup>1</sup> For details, Cf. THAZHATH, *Juridical Sources* = ANDREWS THAZHATH, *The Juridical Sources of the Syro Malabar Church, A historic-Juridical Study*, OIRSI, Kottayam, 1987, p. 2, Footnote 1-2;

<sup>2</sup> TISSERANT, *Eastern Christianity* – TISSERANT EUGENE, *Eastern Christianity in India, A History of the Syro Malabar Church from the Earliest Time to the Present Day* (Authorized Adaptation from French by E. R. Hambye S.J., Calcutta 1957, p. 2. For details, See, THAZHATH, *Juridical Sources*, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> For details Cf. THAZHATH, *Juridical Sources*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>4</sup> For details Cf. THAZHATH, *The Quest for Identity* = ANDREWS THAZHATH, *The Quest for Identity*, TIT, 1992, p. 1-2.



3. **Origin of Syro Malabar Hierarchy:** The origin of Syro Malabar Hierarchy starts with Apostle Thomas who founded the Church in India. Tradition holds that the Apostle Thomas ordained bishops and priests for the Christian communities he had founded. According to *Ramban Pattu*, the Apostle Thomas ordained two bishops by name *Kepha* (Peter) and Paul for Malabar and coromandal coast Christians respectively<sup>5</sup>. This tradition alludes to the historical conclusion that the hierarchical structure of the Syro-Malabar Church started with the Apostle Thomas and Indian Christians as his successors.

4. **The Growth of Syro Malabar Hierarchy:** The history of the Church and thereby the growth of the Syro-Malabar Hierarchy can be divided as follows:

a) **The Apostolic - Indian period (AD 52 - ca. VII/VIII C):** This is a period of the founding of the Indian Church of St. Thomas the Apostle in the Dravidian, Buddhist, Jainist, Jewish and Persian cosmopolitan culture of South India and of the growth of this Apostolic Church in the 'Sangham' period. According to tradition there was some kind of relations with the Persian or East Syrian Church from the IV century onwards. We limit the period upto the VII-VIII century supposing that the Indian Church of St. Thomas Christians had hierarchical relations with the Chaldean Church by that time.

b) **The Chaldean period (ca. VII/VIII C. to 1599):** This is the period when the Indian Christians started receiving Chaldean prelates occasionally and when they shared East Syrian liturgy and discipline. According to tradition the Chaldean influence started with the coming of a certain merchant by name Thomas Cana (Thomas of Kynai) and some Persian Christian families along with a bishop in the year 345 AD<sup>6</sup>. The Knanites or Southists (of Kottayam Archeparchy) claim their origin back to this event. The coming of the Persians, in course of time, has possibly helped assure valid Episcopal succession according to canon 3 of Nicea I and even the survival and growth of the Indian Christians; but their coming divided the Indian Christians into two groups, namely the "Northists" and "Southists". There is still another tradition about the coming of the merchant Thomas Cana to Malabar in the VIII-IX century<sup>7</sup>. Another strong tradition is about the second emigration of Persian Christians in the VIII/IX century. Slowly the Chaldean prelates got control over the Church and never allowed any native to be bishop although there were long absences of bishops. But there was a happy co-existence during this period, since the Persian bishops did not enter into

<sup>5</sup> For details Cf. THAZHATH, *Juridical Sources*, pp.3-4.; Cf.F.X.ROCCA, "La leggenda di S. Tommaso Apostolo", in *OCP*,32(1933). Romae, pp.168-179; BERNARD, *The St. Thomas Christians*, = BERNARD OF ST. THOMAS TOCD, *The St. Thomas Christians (Malayalam)*, Vol. I, Pala, 1916, - the first three chapters; MCKENZIE, *Christianity in Travancore*, p.4; PODI PARA, *Hierarchy* = PODIOARA, *The Hierarchy of the Syro Malabar Church*, Aleppy, 1976, p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> For details, Fr. THAZHATH, *Juridical Sources*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Fr. THAZHATH, *Juridical Sources*, p. 68 footnote 15.

matters of administration which were under the native Archdeacons; but the bishops limited their activities to spiritual and liturgical fields.

- c) ***The Latin period (1599-1887)***: The coming of the Western (Latin) missionaries in the 16th century evoked a great change in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church. The Indian Christians were divided again into the Syrians (the Thomas Christians) and the Latins. After the Synod of Diamper the Thomas Christians were forced to be under the Latin jurisdiction of Padroado and later also of Propaganda. The Latinisation of the missionaries provoked revolt among the Thomas Christians in 1653 and the rebels formally accepted a new rite and Church (Non-Catholic) entirely foreign to the Indian culture, namely the Syro-Antiochian rite. Rome recognized the reception of the new rite by a portion of this division of Thomas Christians, when the Syro-Malankara Christians were reunited with the Catholic Church in 1930. Although the Latin rule made several changes in the identity of the Church of St. Thomas, it, on the other hand, helped their growth in matters of missionary enterprises, formation of clergy and laity, administration of the Church, etc.
- d) ***The Syro-Malabar Period (1887 -1992)***: With the establishment of Syro-Malabar Vicariates in 1887, the granting of local bishops in 1896 and the erection of a Hierarchy in 1923, the Catholic Indian Christians of St. Thomas slowly attained growth and soon became one of the most dynamic Churches in the 20th century. As part of its growth, the proper territory was extended to some part of Karnataka and Tamilnadu in 1955. The Church was given a second metropolitan See in 1956; but this situation, gave rise to problems and division, since a common 'father, and head' was lacking in the new set up. Later in 1995, two more metropolitan Sees were given. The granting of Mission eparchies from 1968 onwards was a great boosting for the missionary enterprises of the Syro Malabar Church.
- e) ***The Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Period (1992+)***: The Syro Malabar Church was elevated to major archiepiscopal status on 16 December 1992 and the formal inauguration was on 20 May 1993 with the installation of Mar Antony Padiyara as the first Major Archbishop and Mar Abraham Kattumana as Pontifical Delegate. From the year 2001 onwards, the Syro Malabar Church began to express its global character with the erection of the Eparchy of Chicago and later other eparchies outside India. All India became practically the proper territory of the Syro Malabar Church with the erection of the eparchy of Shamsabad on 10 October 2017 for all the areas in India where Syro Malabar jurisdiction was not then existing.

##### **5. Bishops/ Hierarchy of the Syro Malabar Church in the early Centuries**

The important references in the early history of the Syro Malabar Church regarding the hierarchy of the Church can be summarized as follows:

- (a) ***St. Thomas, the Apostle***, who is the founder of the Church in India (AD. 52-72).



- (b) **The First Hierarchy - Mar Kepha & Mar Paul:** According to the tradition found in very ancient song like *Ramban Pattu*, the Apostle Thomas ordained bishops and priests for the Christian communities he had founded, namely, the important of which are the ordination by Apostle Thomas two bishops by name *Kepha* (Peter) and Paul for Malabar and coromandal coast Christians respectively<sup>8</sup>. This can be supposed as the first hierarchy of India. In the ancient book *Doctrine of the Apostles* we read, "India and all its regions and those bordering it as far as the farthest sea, received the hand of the Apostles from Thomas who was the ruler and preceptor in the Church he founded and ministered to them"<sup>9</sup>.
- (c) **II Century:** According to Eusebius, Bishop Demetrius of Alexandria sent Panthenus to India in A.D. 190, who saw a copy of the Gospel of St. Mathew in Hebrew (Aramaic)<sup>10</sup>.
- (d) **III-V Centuries:** According to Mingana, in the beginning of the III century there were a number of bishops in the periphery of India in the West<sup>11</sup>. T. K. Joseph, in his book, *Malabar Christians and Ancient Documents*<sup>12</sup> writes about the presence of bishops from the third to fifth centuries in India. Whether they were successors of the sacred ministers established by the Apostle Thomas or bishops who came from Persia is not clear. Historians like T.K. Joseph mentions that between the years 295 and 390, a bishop by name Dudi is said to have gone to India from Basarah. According to the Chronicle of Seert, this bishop was Mar David of Basarah (Perat d'Maison) and he is said to have left his See to preach the Gospel in India<sup>13</sup>. In the Syriac list of the Fathers of the Nicean Synod I (325), the name of Bishop John of Persia and greater India is

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<sup>8</sup> For details Cf. THAZHATH, *Juridical Sources*, pp.3-4.; Cf.F.X.ROCCA, "La leggenda di S. Tommaso Apostolo", in *OCP*,32(1933). Romae, pp. 168-179; BERNARD, *The St.Thomas Christians - the first three chapters*; MCKENZIE, *Christianity in Travancore*, p.4; PODI PARA, *Hierarchy*, 24; Cf. H. Hosten, *The Song of Thomas Ramban*, Cochin, 1931; PODI PARA, *The Hierarchy*, pp. 24-26; THAZHATH, *Juridical Sources*, p. 34; THAZHATH, *The Quest for Identity*, p. 10; Footnote 9.

<sup>9</sup> Ebed Jesus (Abdiso), *Collectio Canonum Synodicorum*, S.V.N.C. 1837, p. 7, cited in PODIPARA, *The Hierarchy*, p. 24; THAZHATH, *The Quest for Identity*, p. 10; Footnote 10.

<sup>10</sup> THAZHATH, *Juridical Sources*, pp. 14-15; EUSEBII *HISTORIA ECCLESIASTICA*, Book V,10, *PATROLOGIA GRECA*, 20, 456; S.HIERONYMI 'De Viribus Illustribus', 36, *PATROLOGICA LATINA*, 23, 683; Cf. JOSE, *Historical Problems*, PP. 31-40; GEORGE APPASSERY, "The India of Pantaenus" (Malayalam), in *Kerala Caritrathrathilute*, Kerala History Congress, 1981, pp. 1-16.

<sup>11</sup> MINGANA, *The Early spread of Christianity in India*, Bulletin of John Reynold's Library, Manchester, July 1926, p. 29; cited in PODIPARA, *The Thomas Christians*, p. 64; THAZHATH, *The Quest for Identity*, p. 10; Footnote 11; p. 69 fn.17. .

<sup>12</sup> T.K. JOSPEH, *Malabar Christians and Ancient Documents*, Trivandrum, 1929, pp. 31-32; MUNDADAN, "Origins of Christianity in India", in PERUMALIL, *Christianity in India*, p. 28 cited in THAZHATH, *Juridical Sources*, p. 68 fn. 17.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.





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