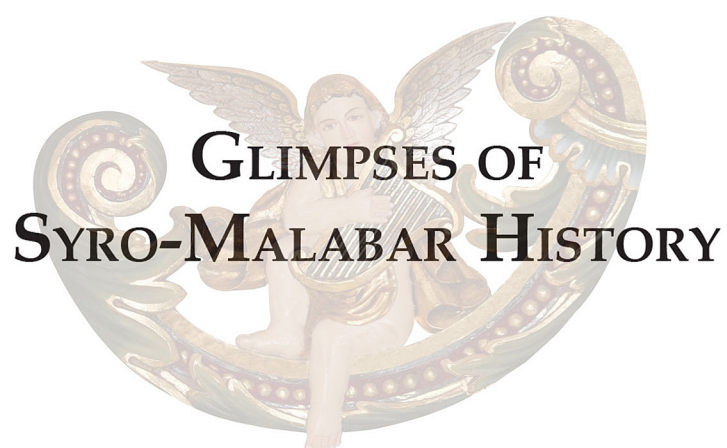




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JAMES PULIURUMPIL



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PREFACE

Nowadays there is an increasing interest to read history. To cater to such needs there is need of books to provide them with the necessary materials for the reading. In history classes many expressed the wish of having history of our church in a compact form as they have no time to read a detailed history. This desire of many really prompted me to write this book giving a concise history of Syro-Malabar Church. Syro-Malabar Church has a long history. But certain elements of her history are yet to be made clear. Studies are going on in this regard. The ancient period can rightly be called 'the apostolic period' in the history of the Syro-Malabar Church. Apostle St Thomas laid a strong foundation to this Church. The beliefs of our ancestors handed over to us as traditions are not fictions, but historical facts, but often shrouded with other narrations, as their intentions were not exactly to hand over the historical facts.

As early as the fifth century and perhaps even before India's Christian community had maintained a conscious connection with the authority of the Persian patriarch and with the Syriac language and liturgy of the Nestorian Church or the Church of the East. In the seventh century this dependence took on a measure of structural independence when the Nestorian patriarch granted the metropolitan (archbishop) in India freedom from the jurisdiction of the Persian metropolitan of Rew-ardshir.

The period during which the St Thomas Christians were under the Portuguese Padroado and Propaganda Fide rules (16th till 19th centuries) is considered the modern period of the SyroMalabar Church. During this period the church witnessed a number of changes in all respects. The oriental nature, Syrian liturgy, Indian customs all underwent changes.

The contemporary history or the real modern period of the Syro-Malabar Church begins towards the end of the nineteenth century with the establishment of two separate vicariates of Kottayam and Trissur in 1887. This new beginning is strengthened with the appointment of native bishops in the new three vicariates in 1896. The separation of the Syrians from the Latins helped the growth of both churches in India. The steady growth of the Syro-Malabar Church enabled to be granted a hierarchy which came in to existence in 1923 with one archdiocese and three suffragans. From 1962 onwards mission regions and dioceses started functioning. 1992 this church was recognized by Rome as a major archiepiscopal church. Present major archbishop Mar George Cardinal Alencherry is the third major archbishop after Mar Antony Padiyara and Mar Varkey Vithayathil. The Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church is the most active, living and rapidly growing eastern church with 35 dioceses, 63 bishops and has faithful all over the world.

I am indeed happy to express my heartfelt gratitude to His Beatitude Mar George Cardinal Alencherry, the major archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church, and to Mar Joseph Kallarangatt, the bishop of Palai for their encouragement, support and the words of appreciation. Thanks in a special way to Rev. Dr. Prof. Joseph Pariath for going through this work with necessary corrections. Thanks are also due to the staff of Amala Press, Kanjirapally and to the OIRSI Publications, Vadavathoor.

Fr. James Puliurumpil



ANCIENT PERIOD



1

MISSIONARY JOURNEY OF ST THOMAS IN NORTH INDIA

The missionary journey of Apostle Thomas to India from Jerusalem in the first century of the Christian era was not something unimaginable or impossible as some think. He reached India either by land route or sea route. The existence of these routes and the oft-frequented Alexandria-India travels by the traders should have helped Thomas. The visit of a trade agent from an Indian king to Jerusalem and even a voyage to India by an apostle of Christ would have been not at all unusual. The account of the *Acts of Thomas*¹ takes him on a sea voyage to India, which at that time was part of the Parthian kingdom of Gundaphar² with the capital Taxila and a second one to South India including Kerala to the kingdom of Mazdai which could be called *Tamizhakam*. Although both land and sea routes were operational, the later were faster, safer and were used by preference by travellers.



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