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190

THE VARTHAMANAPPUSTHAKAM

An account of the history of the Malabar Church between the years 1773 and 1786 with special emphasis on the events connected with the journey from Malabar to Rome via Lisbon and back undertaken by Malpan Mar Joseph Cariattil and Cathanar Thomman Paremmakkal

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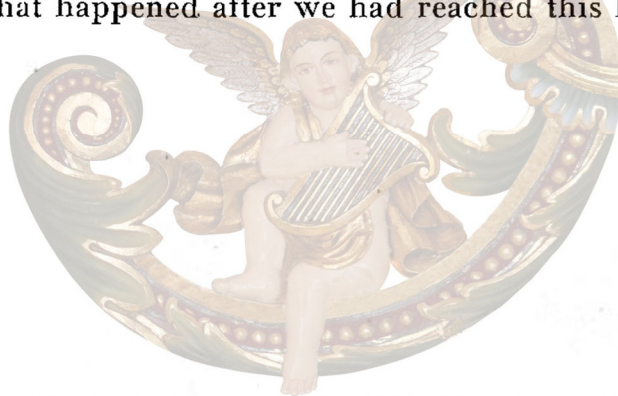
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INTRODUCTION

The term VARTHAMANAPPUSTHAKAM in the Malayalam language may signify any book that contains narrations of events of any kind. In Malabar, among the Thomas Christians, it stands for the book that contains the narrations of the events connected with the history of their Church from 1773 to 1786. The author, Cathanar Thomman Paremmakkal, was intimately connected with the events narrated in the book. He also took a leading part in those that took place between 1778 and 1786. The book contains his personal experiences, his intuitions into persons and happenings, his far sighted judgements and suggestions — all in terms of his disinterested love for his Church and community. The whole account is inspired by the history of the Thomas Christians, especially by the reminiscences of their ancient ecclesiastical constitution, rights and privileges. We, therefore, think it absolutely necessary to give a very brief sketch of the history of the Thomas Christians from the start until 1786 before we speak of the other things that are to be included in this Introduction.

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HISTORY

1. *Home and habitat*

The Thomas Christians of today have had their home and habitat in Malabar, the south west coast of India. From Malabar they are now spreading out to the other parts of India. Their home country, Malabar, is known by such names as Malankara, Malanadu, Malavaram, Malayalam, Kerala. Kerala at present does not stand for the whole of Malabar since politically it is one of the linguistic states that constitute the Republic of India. The language of Kerala is Malayalam, the mother tongue of the Thomas Christians of today. (The District of Malabar in the north of Kerala is not to be confounded with the greater Malabar we deal with here.)



2. *Early history*

The Thomas Christians hail the Apostle St. Thomas as the Founder of their Church. The Apostle's tomb is venerated in Mylapore on the south east coast of India. The first converts of St. Thomas were reinforced by local conversions and by christian colonisations from abroad. Connected with a IV century colonisation is the origin of those called *the Southists*. The Southists are an endogamous community now, and all the ancient Christians who are not Southists are known as the *Northists*.

3. *Liturgy*

From time immemorial the Thomas Christians used the East Syriac liturgy. It could be that this liturgy was known to them from its very birth. Malabar had commercial and cultural relations with the "Middle East" even before the dawn of Christianity. Aramaic whose classical form is Syriac was also the commercial language throughout the East before the rise of Islam. In Malabar, as in some other parts of India, there was the influence of the Jews who spoke Aramaic.

The Thomas Christians adapted the East Syriac liturgy to their surroundings and to the Hindu culture by christianising the customs and the practices of the high caste Hindus from among whom, according to tradition, their nucleus was formed by the Apostle St. Thomas. This Liturgy gave them the name of "Syro-Chaldean" also.

4. *Hierarchy*

From a very early period until the end of the XVI century they derived their bishops from the Church of Persia proper (Iran) first, and then from Seleucia-Ctesiphon of Mesopotamia (Iraq). The Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon was called the East Syrian Church or the Church of the East. This Church in *bona fide* through misunderstandings rejected the Council of Ephesus and venerated as saints Nestorius, Theodore of Mopsuestia and Diodore of Tarsus. Nothing of all this reached the Thomas Christians in any controversial way. Though the Church of Seleucia-Ctesiphon came to be labelled 'Nestorian', its dogma regarding the Incarnation was fundamentally correct. It also acknowledged, at least in principle, the Primacy of jurisdiction of the Roman Pontiff.



Owing to the geographical and the political conditions of the times, and also owing to the ancient system of Church administration, the Church in question had no contacts with Rome until the time of the Crusades. Since 1553 its Patriarchs began to be confirmed in office by Rome and they were also called the Syro-Chaldean Patriarchs. This caused the existence of two lines of Patriarchs. The Thomas Christians were juridically under the bishops sent by the Patriarchs who were confirmed by Rome, though certain bishops from the other line also were in Malabar in the XVI century.

After the XVI century the line of the Chaldean Patriarchs mentioned above abandoned the Roman Communion and gave rise to the present line of the "Nestorian" Patriarchs. Those of the other line began getting the Roman confirmation and gave rise to the present line of the (catholic) Chaldean Patriarchs.

5. *Gate of All India*

The chief bishop of the Thomas Christians was called "the Metropolitan and the Gate of All India". The bishops were foreigners. The effective administration was in the hands of Archdeacons known as "the Archdeacons of India". The Archdeacons who are historically known to us were all priests from Malabar. They were the religious, the social, the communal and the political leaders of the Thomas Christians. The bishops for the most part exercised the power of order only. The Indian Church of the Thomas Christians, therefore, gravitated towards Malabar.

6. *Administration*

The administration of the local churches was carried on by the church-assembly (yogam) that consisted of the priests and the adult males who were ascribed to the respective churches. These church-assemblies had the power to inflict even excommunication on the public delinquents. Matters of a serious nature were dealt with by the representatives of two or more churches. Matters pertaining to the whole Church or Community — religious, social and political — were handled by the representatives of all the churches. It was in these General-Church-Assemblies (the Malabar-Church-Yogam) that the Archdeacon, the Jathikkukarthavian (the one responsible for the Community), as he was popularly called, played his part in the most conspicuous way. The General-Church-Assemblies were practically supreme, and *de facto* no higher



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