

**HISTORY OF THE EARLY  
CHRISTIANITY  
IN  
INDIA**

**M.M.NINAN**





## HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

M.M.NINAN

### India Before Christ

In order to understand the History of Indian Christianity it is necessary to look into the environment in which Christianity developed in India. At the time of Jesus, India had a very flourishing civilization. It is normal for any country to claim a civilization, which started from the beginning of creation. But this is just a feature of nationalism. The reality is that there had always been civilizations in regions, which sustained life all over the world. Trade and relations between these civilizations molded the religious atmosphere of every civilization and country. India was no different.

At the time of Jesus, the Aryans were practically all over India. They had a very weak presence in South India where the Dravidians were more concentrated. By the second century BC Aryans must have reached even Sri Lanka. Aryan religion was essentially Vedic Religion. Though for the sake of pushing the date of the origin of Hinduism, Vedic religion is erroneously equated with Hinduism. Vedic religion in fact has nothing to do with Hinduism.

Vedism is a polytheistic religion brought to India around 1500 B.C.E. by the Aryans. It was the faith of nomadic warrior tribes whose gods were heroes of war and this reflected in their Scriptures. Thus, Vedic Religion was essentially a worship of the forces of nature. The famous triad gods are Indra, Agni and Varuna. Indra, the god of thunder was the king of gods. Agni, the fire god was the giver of energy and life. Surya or Varuna was the sun god. There are thirty-three gods mentioned in the Vedas. Today they are relegated to the level of secondary gods. There was no concept of Brahman. This concept of the ultimate God is nowhere found in the Vedas. It would require extreme allegory to impose the later concepts of Para Brahman into Vedic treatments as Swami Aurobindo has done. (1). One will have to manipulate and wrench out the secret meaning and the mystic wisdom couched in allegory and parables if at all they exist. "But all cannot enter into its secret meaning." At any rate it totally lacked the concepts of karma and reincarnation, which dominate Hinduism, as we know of today. (2)(3)

Vedism came from Persia and is a branch parallel to Zoroastrianism and Mithraism. Vedas are written in a language similar to Old Iranian, the language of Zoroastrianism's scriptures, the *Avesta*. (4) For lack of writing skills, these were not written down till the 2<sup>nd</sup> C BC. “The Rig Veda, the oldest of the four Vedas, was composed about 1500 B.C., and codified about 600 B.C. It is unknown when it was finally committed to writing, but this probably was at some point after 300 B.C.” (5) (6) (7)

The Vedic language is often erroneously referred to as Sanskrit. Vedas are written in Vedic language, which is very close to the Iranian languages and is almost identical with the Avestan language in which the scriptures of Zoroastrianism are written. Sanskrit on the other hand has close affinity with the Dravidian languages and was developed during the early second century AD. All the three religious branches, Vedic, Zoroastrian and Mithraism grew separately after branching out. Vedism emphasizes, nature worship and rituals involved in offering of sacrifices, magic and witchcraft.

Buddhism and Jainism developed in India around fifth century BC and are atheistic religions. They were essentially materialistic religion of action. The basic teachings of karma and reincarnations or transmigration of souls, brought into India probably by the Greeks, form the background of these religions. Under Emperor Asoka (ca. 273–232 B.C), the third Mauryan emperor, Buddhism spread far and wide; not only in India but also into neighboring countries. The Emperor Asoka built monolithic pillars with carved epigraphs crowned by capitals, rock-cut architecture, and stupas to spread the gospel. By the first century BC, Vedism, Buddhism and Jainism were the religions of the whole of India. There must have been also the Dravidian religion all over Southern India. We know very little about the nature of this religion. They had the concept of the “God Most High” – “El Elyon” – the Parameshwara or Maheswara. Most scholars believe that the Dravidian Civilization in Mohen-Jodero and Harappa worshipped Siva as the great God who ruled the heavens and the earth. Their religion included animal sacrifice and was very similar to Judaism. Like Judaism under the judges, early Dravidians did not leave any symbols or idols or temples. Almost all sophisticated art and architecture were either Jain or Buddhist origin until 300 AD. Under the influence of other religions, Buddhism developed later into two branches - Theravada or Hinayana (Lower Vehicle) and Mahayana (Higher Vehicle). Hinayana found mostly in Sri

Lanka is still atheistic in content, and Mahayana (Higher Vehicle) found in China and neighboring countries is theistic in content. Theravada Buddhism sees Buddha as a man. Gautama never claimed to be deity, but rather a "way shower." Mahayana Buddhism, however, worships Buddha as a manifestation of the divine Buddha essence. The later sect came into existence by the early second century AD and crystallized by the third century. It emphasizes salvation of sentient beings through the assistance of bodhisattvas, which later became the dominant form of Buddhism in most of Asia. (8)

### **Socio-Political background**

Inter continental trade played a major role in the political, cultural, religious, and artistic exchanges between civilizations. These land routes were in existence for centuries. The trade routes provided much needed luxury and exotic items to other lands. Some areas controlled monopoly of certain goods, like silk by China, Spices by Western coast of India and incense by Northern India and the Arabia. Thus there were Silk routes, Spice (cloves, cinnamon, pepper, nutmeg) routes and Incense routes. The ancient port of Muziris was described by the Roman historian Pliny (A.D. 23-79) as the most important port in the East, and Vanji (Thiruvanjikulam) was the capital city of the *Cera* people. While discussing the dealings of the Phoenicians with Muziris, Pliny mentions that every year large sum of money was going to India for silk, pearls, gems and spices. He states that Malabar ships were visiting the Persian Gulf, Aden, the Red Sea and Egypt regularly. Ptolemy's mid-second century map of India (9)(10) and the apparent third century (11) *Tabula Peutingeriana* or Peutinger Table. (A.D. 100-160) and the Periplus (the list of ports with distances) (12) of the Erythraean Sea (AD 90) include Malabar and its port Muziris. Diplomatic relations between India and Roman Empire existed even before the Christian era. Conquerors followed these routes to control them. The land routes were dangerous due to the presence of robbers, and later, sea routes became favorites due to its speed of transport and safety. Land transport was incredibly expensive in comparison with the sea routes. (13)

One such route was the spice route connecting Malabar Coast to Yemen, Egypt and to rest of Europe. In A.D. 45 Hippalus discovered the monsoon winds in the Indian Ocean and this discovery reduced the time of transit to less than forty days. It was this route that St. Thomas took. (14) (15)

### **Indo-Parthian Kingdom of Takshashila**

Following the Aryans, other invasions came along the same land route. Persian emperor Darius established two provinces in India – Gandara and Hindush. This was followed by the conquest of Alexander the Great (331 BC). The Indo Greek King Menander I established a kingdom in Taxila in 170 BC. Sakas (Scythians), Kushans and Huns came in from Central Asia. In due course, the Parthians ended up controlling all of Bactria and extensive territories in Northern India, after fighting Kushan Emperor Kujula Kadphises, in the Gandhara region. Taxila was the meeting place of the four great civilizations of the time -- Greco-Roman, Persian, Indian, and Chinese. At that time it was the capital of Hindus – The Indus Valley.

Around 20 AD, Gondophares, one of the Parthian conquerors, declared his independence from the Parthian empire and established the Indo-Parthian kingdom in the conquered territories. The kingdom barely lasted one century. It started to fragment under Gondophares' successor Abdagases. The northern Indian part of the kingdom was retaken by the Kushans around 75 AD. (9)

### **Enter Thomas**

Judas Thomas was one of the disciples of Jesus. He is also known as Didymus, which means the Twin. Thomas means Twin in Aramaic and Didymus means Twin in Greek. He is generally known as the Doubting Thomas since he refused to believe the resurrection unless he has verified it himself. If we apply the criteria of Rom. 10:10 Thomas was the first Christian, since he was the first person to confess that Jesus was indeed God.

His acts are not found in the Acts of the Apostles. But an apocryphal book written around 300 AD called "*Acts of Thomas*", describes it with embellishments and exaggerations. It was probably written in Greek and was translated in to Syriac. (16). It is also found in Latin, Armenian, Ethiopic (Coptic), and Arabic. These were written by Gnostic writers in Edessa and some scholars ascribe it to Bardaisan (155-223 AD) of Syria. Apart from embellishments and exaggerations

typical of these types of writings, the context and historical facts are true. Archeology and Indian traditions substantiate the basic historic and geographic context in this book.

“This Pseudepigraphic text relates the adventures of the apostle Judas Thomas as he preaches an ascetical or encratite form of Christianity on the way to and from India. Like other apocryphal acts combining popular legend and religious propaganda, the work attempts to entertain and instruct. In addition to narratives of Thomas' adventures, its poetic and liturgical elements provide important evidence for early Syrian Christian traditions.” (17)

One of the reasons for doubting the story was the absence of any King by the name of Gondophores in India. During the last few decades a large deposit of coins turned up which clearly showed Gondophores as the Indo- Parthian King with a brother whose name was Gad as mentioned in the Acts of Thomas. The coins from Taxila with the seal and inscription of King Gundophorus read: "Maharaja - rajarajasamahata -dramia -devavrata Gundapharase". Rock stone called Takhth-i-Bahi Stone of size 17" long and 14.5" broad has this inscription: "In the twenty-sixth year of the great King Gudaphara in the year three and one hundred, in the month of Vaishakh, on the fifth day" (18)

Kerala traditions are encoded in oral traditions handed down through generations as folklore, music and drama.

- Rambaan Paattu or Thomma Parvom is a song about the Acts of Thomas written around 1600 by Rambaan Thomas. Rambaan Thomas of Malyakal Family descends from the first Bishop whom St. Thomas is said to have ordained. The poem is the oral tradition handed down through generations. It is said to have been originally written by the Rambaan Thomas, the Bishop.
- Margom Kali (Drama about the Way) and Mappila Paattu (The Songs of the Children of the King) are series of songs of the Acts of Thomas and the history of the Malabar Church. They are sung in consonance with dance forms that are typical of the Syrian Christians. Some of them are dance dramas performed in the open as part of the festivals of

the church. These have no specific origin, but grew up in the course of history.

- Veeradian Paattu is sung by a local Hindu group (called Veeradians) in accompaniment of Villu - a local instrument (a stringed instrument like the bow) - during Christian festivals. This form of art also dates back to unknown period handed down through generations and modified in that process.

According to Kerala tradition Thomas landed in Cranganore in Mali Island on the present Alwaye coast in Malabar Coast, in 52 AD. It is also called Muchiri – three lips – cleft lips - as the River Periyar splits into three branches before reaching the Sea to form this island. This came to be known Muziris to the seafarers. The ruler of the Chera kingdom at that time was Udayan Cheran Athen I (page 44 of Cochin State Manual). Other names of this port are Kodungaloor, Cranganore and Maliankara.. There were Jewish colonies in Malabar in the first century. Here he preached to a Jewish community who accepted Jesus as mesia and their synagogue became a Christian church. It is said that Thomas ordained one Prince Peter to be the head of the church of the Jews and left for Takshasila, (Taxila, a University City in the Indus Valley) the capital of Gondaphorus Kingdom. He established a church in that region before he traveled to other areas of India. These churches were annihilated during the invasion of Kushan and Moghal dynasty and the Christians went underground.

He returned to Kerala where he established seven and half churches with 12 Brahmin families as teachers and over 3000 converts from Kshatriyas, Nairs and Chettiars. These new converts were called St: Thomas Christians. This church is one of the most ancient churches in Christendom. The seven churches are at Malankara, Palayur, Paravoor, Kokkamangalam, Niranam, Chayal and Kollam. Apostle Thomas was martyred in Mylapore near Madras. (Tradition calls this place Kalloor - the place of rock) in Tamilnadu State, India.

“There are other facts which seem to indicate a northern locus for St. Thomas’s work. Bardaisan in his Book of Fate (AD 196) speaks of Parthian Christians living among pagans, which might be a result of the destruction of the Indian Parthian empire by Kushan invaders about AD 50. There are also said to be Christian tribes still living in north India, but holding their faith a secret from all

others. For example, at Tatta in Sind (the ancient port of Pattiala at the mouth of Indus), there is a fakir community which calls itself by an Aramaic name, something like 'Bartolmai'(Beth Thuma), and claims to have been descended from St. Thomas's converts and to have books and relics to prove it. Unfortunately no outsider has ever been allowed to see this alleged proof." (19)

### **The Problem of Brahmin presence in Kerala**

One of objections of this traditional story raised recently is the problem of the presence of Brahmins in Kerala who were converted and were given the responsibility of teaching the gospel. The Namboodiri traditions of the present day traces their origins back only to the sixth century AD. That does not mean, there were no Brahmins in the first century in Kerala region. We know for certain that the Aryan conquest reached as far as Sri Lanka long before the Christian era. However the Aryans were never a controlling force economically or even intellectually until eighth century AD. There must have been a few Brahmin families, (as is true even today in the central Travancore area where Christians are concentrated) who were probably small businessmen in various parts of South India. As in all countries, it was the poor and the persecuted communities that came to faith first. I would assume that the Brahminic community of that time accepted Christianity en masse in Kerala. Conversion in early days was in community groups and families. Thus if 12 Brahmin families accepted Christianity in Malabar it cannot be an exaggeration or an impossibility. The tradition says that Thomas met these Brahmins while they were worshipping the Sun in their traditional way. Other than that it does not directly or indirectly ascribe power or prestige to these people. By the third century when the Syrian immigration took place, since Aryans are also of the same ethnicity, their status became more pronounced. Notice that they were not the only people who were converted. The majority of the converts were Dravidians with a Dravid to Aryan ratio of 3000 to 12.

### **Other References to Thomas Christian Tradition**

There are several references to 'Thomas' acts in India, which corroborates the general validity of the story.

- A Syriac document "Doctrines of the Apostles", (2<sup>nd</sup> Century AD) states, "India and all its own countries and those bordering on it, even to the farthest sea, received the Apostle's Hand of Priesthood from Judas Thomas, who was the Guide and Ruler in the Church which he built there and ministered there."
- St. Gregory of Nazianzen (AD 329-390) refers to Thomas along with other Apostles work in *Contra Arianos et de Seipso Oratio*
- Ambrose of Milan (AD 333-397) wrote thus: "Even to those Kingdoms which were shut out by rugged mountains became accessible to them as India to Thomas, Persia to Mathew...." *Ambrose De Moribus. Brach.*
- Jerome (AD 342-420) wrote thus: "Jesus dwelt in all places; with Thomas in India, with Peter in Rome, with Paul in Illyricum, with Titus in Crete with Andrew in Achaia, with each apostolic man in each and all countries." *epistles of Jerome.* He mentions the mission of Pantaenus, a Christian philosopher sent by bishop Demetrius of Alexandria, "to preach Christ to the Brahmins and to the philosophers of India" in A.D. 190. Born a Jew, thoroughly trained in Greek philosophy, Pantaenus converted to Christianity, and was the most outstanding Christian scholar of his time. He probably was the first head of the theological college of Alexandria. He was the teacher of the great Clement. (20)
- Jacob of Sarug (451 - 521) was a Syriac ecclesiastical writer. He was educated at Edessa and became bishop of Batnae in the year 519. He wrote hymns, - but his principal writing is a series of metrical homilies and his contemporaries gave him the name of honour: "The flute of the Holy Ghost". Two homilies are on the Ministry of Thomas in India and repeats the evangelization of Thomas as in *Acts of Thomas*.(21)
- Gregory, the Bishop of Tours (AD 538-593) in his *In Gloria Martyrdom* writes: "Thomas, the Apostle, according to the history of passion, is declared to have suffered in India. After a long time his body was taken into a city which they called Edessa in Syria and there buried. Therefore, in that Indian place where he first rested there is a monastery and a church of wonderful size, and carefully adorned and arrayed."
- Mar Solomon in 13th C wrote in his *Book of the Bee* as follows: Thomas was from Jerusalem of the tribe of Juda. He taught the Persians, Medes and the Indians; and because he baptized the daughter of the King of the Indians he stabbed him with a spear and died.

Habban the merchant brought his body and laid it in Edessa, the blessed city of our Lord. Others say that he was buried in Mahluph (Mylapore) a city in the land of Indians.

### **Enter Barthelomew**

There is also a tradition that the Apostle Barthemew came to India in AD 55 and preached the Gospel in the area near Kalyan, Bombay and was martyred in AD 62. (22)(23)(24)

Bar Thalomew is not really a full name. Most people think it is Nathaniel bar Thalomew – Nathaniel son of Thalmoi. Tradition makes North India his missionary field and Armenia the place of his martyrdom by flaying. The only references to this effect is found in the writings of Eusebius and Jerome (340-420 AD) where they say that Pantaenus the Philosopher of Alexandrian School was asked to go to India as a teacher in the Third Century and found in India some Christians. They showed him a copy of St. Matthew's Gospel in Hebrew, which had been brought there by St. Bartholomew .

Some scholars strongly believe that the reference of India in terms of Pantaneus is to the generic use of India, which could mean any where between Arabia Felix to Armenia. (25)

Dr. Miguana says: "... the India they refer to is without doubt Arabia Felix. The fact has been recognized by all historians since Assemani and Tillemont, and has been considered as established even by such conservative writer as Medlycott."

However the second reference of Jerome says:

"Pantaenus, on account of the rumor of his excellent learning, was sent by Demetrius into India, that he might preach Christ among the Brahmins and philosophers of that nation" (26) (27) The mention of Brahmins certainly settles the place as India.

The area of his work is thought to be in Konkan in Maharastra. Research Historian Mascarenhas in *Konkanachem Christaunponn'*1929 - [*Apostolic Christianity in Konkan*] says: "In Tulunadu, in South Kanara, there is Kallianpur. Here

Bartholomew, then popularly known as Bhethal, preached the Gospel.....  
There are many names and places, words and usages in the coastal Konkan region going up to Bombay and beyond which have originated from his name Bhethal and his preaching and that Barkur which is close to Kallianpur sprung after his name Bartholomew i.e. Bar + Thulami + Ooru = and so BARKURU” (28)

“Christianity has been long established in South Kanara and its adherents are more numerous here, than any other district of India. It is certain that, foreign Christian merchants were visiting the coastal town of Kanara and during that period of commerce some priests also might have accompanied them for evangelical work. According to tradition Kanara had its first missionary the Apostle St.Barthelomew, who landed on the shores of river *Swarna at Colombian or Colombo village* an ancient maritime port adjacent to Kallianpur, stayed there to preach. He was popularly called Bethel and so the origin of the place Barkur.....” (29) Barkur is located in Udupi Taluk of Karnataka, India.

Bar Thalomew’s ministry extended over several regions including Mesopotamia, Persia, Egypt, Armenia, Lycaonia, Phrygia, and on the shores of the Black Sea. He was martyred in Armenia. So it is possible that Barthelomew’s work was only for a limited time in the Konkan region.

The alternate possibility is that the name of Bar Tholomai is simply an intonational corruption of the tribal memory of Mar Thoma. This is supported by the presence of the fakir community in Sind which calls itself ‘Bartolmai’ and claims to have been descended from St. Thomas’s converts. (30) I would think this is a real possibility.

#### **Possible route of Thomas.**

Taking all the traditions and documents into account we can vaguely trace the route of Thomas in India. It covers almost all areas of India as far as China. Thomas must have traveled from Jerusalem to Yemen and must have taken a ship to Muziris in Malabar Coast. After a short initial stay, he must have traveled along the west coast of India to the city of Taxila. Here he must have stayed for at least a year or more and then proceeded to the Northern regions even unto China. At some point he returned to Ephesus to the deathbed of Mary, Mother

of Jesus and then returned. I assume that this must have been around this time and so he must have traveled along the spice route from and back to China. He seems to have returned from there to the North India along Ganges area to the Kaveri River area and to Coromandels – the land of Cholas. The capital of Chola Kingdom was Urayar with its port Kaveri and the Capital of Pandian Kingdom was Madurai with its port Korkai. It is during the second visit Thomas converted the local Brahmins and Dravidians and established seven and a half churches in Chera (Kerala). There was also another minor kingdom known as Ayr (probably the present Ayroor) ruled by Vel (from which we get the word Venad.) where Thomas established his church at Nilackel. Ptolemy mentions this Kingdom as Aioi in the second century. Ayr Kingdom lasted for over a thousand years from the time of Thomas. Even today most people in this area are Christians. (59) He then returned to Coromandel Area which was probably his head quarters. We have evidence to show that he made trips between Chera, Chola and Pandya regions during this time. Dr. Farquahar gives an alternative probable route: "Apostle St. Thomas, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus sailed from Alexandria to the Indus and reached the Kings capital 'Taxila' (Presently known as Punjab) about A.D 48-49. He left Taxila when the Punjab and its capital were seized by the 'Indo-Scythian Kushans' from China about A.D 50 and went from there to 'Muziri' (Presently known as Kodungallur in Kerala) on the Malabar coast via Socotra, reaching Muziri in AD 51-52."

Evidently Thomas' ministry covered the entire land of India over twenty years until his martyrdom in Mylapore. In AD 72 he was speared at Mylapore, Madras. The legend has that spear was inflicted on his side. He did not die instantly but crawled while bleeding through a tunnel and reached Chinnamalai and died there. His followers took his body and buried him in the tombs of the Chiefs. A merchant from Edessa in Syria who visited that region exhumed his body and took it to Syria where it was entombed in about AD 200. We could see these tombs in Mylapore and in Edessa. They were later translated from Edessa to the island of Khios in the Aegean, and from there to Ortona in Italy, where they are now.

**What form of Church did Thomas Institute?**

The question now is, what happened to these churches? Looking at the story of Thomas as a rationalist doubter turned believer, who unhesitatingly declared Jesus as “My Lord, and My God “, we should have no doubt about the theology of the churches he established. He certainly emphasized the God incarnate as the Jesus ben Joseph, the Carpenter, his Lord and Master. He was no Gnostic. Jesus of Nazareth was indeed God and Lord.

The first Council of the Churches at Jerusalem (49 AD) under James set the standards for gentile churches. It was Paul of Tarsus who proposed the model for Gentile Churches. The Council decided that the central core of the Gospel is not to be confused with the cultural forms of worship and life of the Christians. The Church was to interpret the Gospel, which was revealed in the Jewish cultural context to the other cultures in a culturally relevant manner. Paul illustrated the working of the model in transferring the gospel in Greco-Roman culture. This was already in process before Thomas left Jerusalem and Middle East. Thomas therefore knew the Apostolic mission and must have established norms and standards, which were culturally relevant to the Indian context. Hence we should not expect Thomas Churches of India to have the ritualism and structures of Greco-Roman or Asia Minor. There would be no church building with a cross on the top, no altars nor candles and candle stands. We should expect a replication of the events of the early Christian Churches in Jerusalem soon after the resurrection. These emphasized communal living, fellowship, sharing, singing, worship, common meals and symbolic Prasadams as Holy Communion with God and Man. For a very long time Christianity left no artifacts. Institutionalization came most probably after a century of Christian existence. Symbols and temples came into existence as a means of communication. By AD 150 we can see abstract symbols – Siva Lingam and Omkhara etc. Sanskrit came into existence as a liturgical language.

Thomas found a people who were very similar to the Hebrews in the Dravidians who were at that time concentrated in the Southern States. We have reason to believe that at least a part of the blood of Dravidans came from Abraham through his second wife Keturah. They worshipped a God of love who was willing to die for his creation and practiced animal sacrifice for the propitiation of sins. So it was easy for Thomas to preach to the Dravidian population rather than to the Aryans. There are some who believe that one of the wise men who visited baby Jesus was from these people. Compared to the Dravids, Aryans

were still pagans, worshipping the elementary forces of nature and involved deep in magic and witchcraft. This shows why Thomas had greater success in supplanting the Buddhism, Jainism and Vedism in the South rather than in the North.

The introduction of Christianity in the Indian religious arena brought forth an explosion of change, which can be easily seen by comparing the religious theology and practice before and after the arrival of St. Thomas. For some strange reason the history of religion is totally erased for the first three centuries except for few stray documents, reports of travelers, archeological and architectural evidences, artifacts and traditions. We have a lot of mythological stories in that place. History then starts only after 3<sup>rd</sup> century in Chola and Pandya regions and only after 8<sup>th</sup> century in Chera region. We can check up on any time line and see silence for this period.

### **Original Thomas Christians of Dravids**

In Kerala itself the first Christian Church was established among the Jews. Hence at least for these Jewish Christians, historians are of the opinion, that Thomas established the early liturgy in Aramaic (Syriac) the language spoken by Jesus and the Jews of that period. But for the Churches that he established in his second visit among the Indians he must have used local cultural modes of worship.

### **God and Trinity in Indian terms**

How would you translate the concept of God and incarnation into Indian context which never had that concept defined? Except for Dravids, there probably was no name for God. For Dravids the word translated as Isa or Maheswara – El Elyon. That was exactly the experience of Thomas when he said “My God”. How would the Apostle translate the holy Trinity, Father, Spirit and the Son in Dravidian language? Father is evidently Appan. The Aramaic female gender Holy Spirit that gives life is best translated as Amma and Son, evidently as Maman. And the original true Saiva Siddhantha was born. The correlation goes much deeper.

### **Siva Kovils – Early Indian Christian Churches**

Those of us who have been collaborating closely with the Bible Translators in Africa know the innuendos of the translation. There are occasional traps in translation. It can go at a tangent and the concept can be misconstrued and misinterpreted. All the places associated with Thomas are Saivite Temples. Those who place “Hinduism” - whatever that means - to have been in existence millions of years has it that this indicate the destruction of Temples and take over of temple sites by Christians. One such series is elaborated in “*The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple*” (31). Mylapore Shiva Temple was most probably one of the Kovils established by Thomas and was probably his seat in the Southern India. For all probability the Saivite temples were really the original Christian Churches. They flourished for at least three centuries when Gnostics and Brahmins took over these temples and converted them to “Hindu” temples.

In the same way it is not difficult to see the distribution of the Jyotirlingas all over India fall on the route of Thomas and its density proportional to the number of years Thomas labored in those areas. Thus we have a large number of Jyotir lingams near Taxila and Tamil Nadu. All along the route of Thomas schools of theologies developed and major teachers arose from these schools in the years that followed as attempts in revival of original Christian theology.

At any rate after a million years of “Hindu” existence in India, (as is claimed) something happened in Indian religions that drastically changed its content and form during the first century. The concept of God changed completely. The lower nature gods and their worship were replaced with the concept of Nirguna Brahman and Saguna Brahman. Nirguna Brahman is the ultimate God who cannot be comprehended, who resides in the darkness, cannot be seen or known. This God revealed himself as Saguna Brahman, who can be comprehended, seen, heard and touched and is a person, not just a force of nature. He is a person with a purpose and so created the cosmos. The concept of Trinity and the concept of Om – the Logos as the creative force of universe became part of the later Upanishadic theology. Kovils with tripartite separations of Outer Court, Inner Court and the Holies came to be prevalent. It took only two to three generations after the advent of Thomas for these to appear all over

India. All these were alien concepts to Indian soil. There can be no doubt that these are the results of efforts of Thomas.

Dr. M. Deivanayagam and Dr. Devakala in their studies on “Hinduism – Dravidian Religion” - The Revival Movement of Dravidian Religion (32) mentions five new doctrines that appeared all of a sudden in the Indian religious scenario in the first century:

- “Doctrine of Avatar - God becoming a man in order to redeem human beings. (Unborn Prime God was born in order to give us eternal pleasure)
- Trinity or Triune doctrine - God in triune stage - Appan, Ammai, Makan (Saivism); Siva, Vishnu, Brahma (Vaishnavism)
- Doctrine of fulfillment of sacrifice - The offering of sacrifice has ceased even though there is sacrificial altar in the temple. People do not offer sacrifice while they worship God.
- Doctrine of forgiveness of sin - There is forgiveness for the sins of human beings by the grace of God and this doctrine is totally controversial to *the saying that* ‘the actions of one person would definitely yield its fruits’.
- Doctrine of bhakthi - Appreciating the bhakthi which is in ones heart irrespective of one’s appearance, color, culture etc. (Kannappa Nayanar)

The five doctrines mentioned above are the basic doctrines for the religion of the Tamils or the religion of the Dravidians or for the Hindu religion. These doctrines are the Taproots for Hindu religion (Saivism, Vaishnavism).”

These form the back bone of the St.Thomas Christianity or Hindu Sanadhana Dharma, the Indian Catholic Church. Thus just as Roman Catholic Church developed in the cultural context of Greco-Roman culture, Indian Catholic Church was developed in the Indian cultural context just as Thomas expected it to be. Just for the fun of it, if you remove Jesus from the Roman Catholic Church, you will probably be surprised to see the modern Hindu Sanadhana Dharama. Dr. Alexander Harris puts this as follows: (33)

“In its section on the history of the Indian Subcontinent, the Encyclopedia Britannica (1982 edition) describes major changes in the religions of India. For instance the Vedic religion underwent changes with the gradual fading out of some of the Vedic deities, and further they state that,

*"The two major gods were Visnu and Siva, around whom there emerged a monotheistic trend perhaps best expressed in the Bhagavad Gita . . ."*

*"Sacrificial ritual was beginning to be replaced by the practice of bhakti (personal devotion), positing a personal relationship between the individual and the deity"*

Thus we see a new religion arise based on a monotheistic doctrine, and God who is first called Isa.

*"The cult of Siva or Saivism emerged first, and the Vishnu-Krishna cult or Vaishnavism came afterwards as an imitation or duplication. The earlier appearance of Siva is indicated in the first instance by the fact that it is he alone who is called Isa or Isvara."*

and

*"This peculiar character of the cult makes it permissible to infer that Siva was probably the first and only god of the monotheistic Hinduism which replaced Vedic polytheism as the highest expression of the religious sentiment of the Hindus. That is to say, originally the monotheism was unitary. In fact, even in recent times the Saivas of the south maintained that Siva was the only supreme deity." "*

Just as various theological stands produced various denominations and sects in the Western World in the later period, various sects were also developed in India emphasizing one or the other aspect of God and or ritual.

Saivism and Vaishnavism developed as a Bhakti movement around 6th, 7th c. A.D. in South Indian Thomas Churches. Yet in years to come these were disfigured and manipulated by Gnostics and the Aryans from Persia under the influence of Mani. Thus the modern Hinduism is an outgrowth of the Gnostic Christianity, and is a heresy of Christianity.

We can only make guesses regarding the original form of Indian Catholic Church prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

## **Sivlinga – Form of the Formless**

The development of the symbols of Sivlinga and the development of Makaan as Ganapathy are interesting studies in the concept developments. They also show how symbols can be misinterpreted by later generations and an edifice of myths and legends can come out of something very simple and direct. Today Sivlinga has been given a sexual interpretation assuming that it represents the penis. However any Saivite will be horrified by such a reference and will tell you that this is a misrepresentation of the concept by people who wanted to denigrate the Saivites. Since the God of creation do not have a form, the best visible representation of Invisible formless form is a formless form - the lingam. All symbols are meant to convey some deep mental and spiritual concept. These may be in sound as in languages and music, or form as in icons, idols and artifacts and architecture. Later in order to represent that this incomprehensible God incarnated in human form a face was added to the lingam. The earliest Ekmukh lingams (Udayagiri, Madhya Pradesh) are still in existence. (34)

Later another interesting representation was the placement of the Tamil Om on top of the lingam, which later led to the form of Ganapathy, the elephant faced. None of these symbolisms are found earlier than the first century AD.

## **Om as Logos**

The study of the sacred sound Om indicates that it is the representation of the Logos concept. In fact John 1:1 is replicated in exact form in the later Indian scriptures. Surprisingly the Om is not found directly or indirectly in any document or Vedas before the advent of Thomas. The earliest direct references are found in *Prashna Upanishad* and in *Mandukya Upanishad* which were written after 150 AD. . On the other hand Om is inscribed in all Kerala Christian Churches of antiquity at the entrance.

## **Development of Sects and Gnostic infiltration – Enter Mani**

As time went on evidently new thought patterns and theologies brought in varying sects emphasizing the various aspects and rituals of the Church. This resulted in competing and practically opposing groups. Gnostic infiltration into

Christianity started early - even during the Apostolic era. Simon Magnus who is revered as a saint in the Gnostic Church is referred to in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:9ff). While they were thwarted off by collective churches that emphasized the historical Jesus, the Gnostics thrived in many countries, especially in Persia.

*Gnosticism* is a philosophical and religious movement, which started in pre-Christian times. The term is derived from the Greek word *gnosis*, which means "knowledge". It introduced novel beliefs and new gods and goddesses who exist in "divine dimension". They insisted on universal revelation and insisted on considering all religions as equal and the ultimate salvation being achieved through the inner knowledge or enlightenment. Some of the early Gnostics include, Simon Magnus and Simonians, Nicolaitans, Cerinthus, Marcion, Basilides, (130-150 AD), Theodotus (140-160 AD), Valentinus, (140-160 AD), Heracleon, (170-180AD), and The Sethians. All these were dealt with by the early church. However the idea that Man can become God had always been a tender spot and temptation for man from the beginning with Adam and Eve. The Gnosticism always revived.

The land route to India brought in Gnosticism into India from its home land of Persia and impacted it to the utmost. It transformed Buddhism and Christian Churches of Inner India. Even though Gnosticism practically died out in Persia it still survives in China and India. It is told that Bardaisan came to Kerala during AD 154 – 222. (35). We have no details about this visit. But there are evidences that indicate that Bardesai met Mani in Kerala. It was after this visit he wrote the Acts of Thomas to present Thomas as a Gnostic. Apparently his labors were not fruitful in Kerala. Since at the end of his life Bardaisan returned to Christian faith, his followers probably returned to faith or merged with Manicheans.

Mission of Bardesai was followed by the ministry of Manichean (Mani or Manes) (c.216-300 AD). "About the year 242, he undertook an extensive journey as an itinerant preacher, proclaiming himself as the "Messenger of Truth," the Paraclete promised by Christ. Traveling throughout the Persian Empire and as far as India, he gathered a considerable following." (36) . Manicheanism was centralized in Kanchipuram Pallava Dynasty of Dravidia with its capital in Kanchi is known to be of the Persian race. Mani is associated with peacock

and he is said to have had the ability to fly as a peacock. Probably the city of Mylapore was the headquarters of Mani also. He practically took over Thomas Churches. Some people think that it is probably this concept of Mani the Ambassador of Light, that crystallized later in the Subramaniam myth associated with Saivism.

He called himself the Prophet of Jesus and Jesus was one of the first emanations from godhead. In Mani's own words: "At the close of King Ardashir's years I set out to preach. I sailed to the land of the Indians. I preached to them the hope of life and I chose there a good selection." And what did Mani teach? "The Bride is the Church, the Bride Groom is the Light Mind; the Bride is the soul and Jesus is the bridegroom! If he rise in us, we too shall live in him, if we believe in him, we shall transcend death and come to Life" (37). Mani's work were in Chola region where he had a great following. He removed the Jesus of Nazareth as an incarnation and replaced him with a teacher who showed the inner path to realization. (38) As a result the historical Jesus was of no consequence nor his life and death and resurrection. Gnostics differentiated Jesus from the Christ. The experience of the divine within each person was only important. As a result Inner Indian Churches became Gnostic Churches and dropped off Jesus as a whole. After returning to Persia, Mani sent his Father and one of his disciples called Thomas to India to continue to evangelize the nation. Mani was executed for heresy in Persia and all his followers in Persia went to the East – to India and China. All his apostles and his mother Mary were buried in Kashmir in a place called Barmulla. It is this last Aryan Brahminic migration that made a great difference in Indian Religious scenario. Mani's version of the Christianity is still seen in the Gnostic Churches of America and the Church of the East which presents the Yoga of Jesus. Thus Indian Christian Churches took a new form. - the form of Sanadhana Dharma, meaning Eternal Religion – Religion that started even before Man. In the process of historic growth it became the "Hinduism" as we know today

The early Gnostic Hidutva unleashed a war on historic Christianity - ideological, social and physical. . In the North India the believers went underground as a group of Fakirs, who were sworn in secrecy as to their true identity. These Fakirs surface occasionally. Sadhu Sunder Singh report to have seen them on his journey to the Himalayas. When the poor Indian missionaries need help, they

always appear from nowhere. Among the Sindhi's of the North India there is a group called Tatanagar Fakirs, who venerate Thomas as Thuma Bhagat. (39)

It was probably during this time Pantaneus was sent to India from the School of Alexandria to counter the teachings of Mani. The Manigramakkar, a sect of Hindu Nairs found in Quilon and Mavelikara, still preserve certain Christian customs. They are said to be the descendants of those apostatized early Christians.(40)

When the cloud clears off we have a large number of sects of varying faith and practices all over India. The Inner India Churches became Gnostic ("Hinduism") since they had little or no contact with the Christian Churches elsewhere. The Malabar Churches however because of its geographic position was in constant contact with other churches in Alexandria, Ethiopia, Rome and Antioch through the sea route. Because of this they remained within the Apostolic traditions – the faith that was handed over once and for all at the shores of India by Apostle Thomas – as was practiced in the rest of the world especially in Alexandria, Ethiopia, Rome and Syria. By the third century while the rest of India became Hindu, Hinduism came to stay in Malabar Coast only by the eighth century. Malabar remained a safe haven for Christians for several centuries.

As a result when the Gnostic (Hindu) persecution broke out in the Chola and Pandya region, many believers fled to Malabar. One such mention is seen in the Palm Leaf documents.

“AD 293. The Vallala converts to Christianity in Kavery poopattanam were persecuted by their King. So 72 families embarked on a ship and came to Korakkeni (Kollam, Quilon) where there were Christians at that time.” (41)

This is followed by another citation, which says:

“ AD 315 A certain sorcerer called Manikka Vachakar came (to Kollam) and converted back to Hinduism 116 persons belonging to eight of the 72 families from Puhur”

This story is also cited by other historians such as Moraes (42), White House (43), and Ittup (44).

Another Palm Leaf says:

“A certain sorcerer called Manikka Vachakar came to Kollam and converted back to Hinduism 116 persons belonging to 72 families from Puhur, 4 of about half a dozen families subsequently came from Coromandel Coast (perhaps from Puhur itself) and 20 families of local Christians (presumably from Quilon)”. Pam-leaf quotation.

We are not sure who this Manikka Vachakar is. The mention of the term Sorcerer and the name Manikka leads us to identify this person as Gnostic.

The Manichaen cross “was brought to Kerala by Mani himself. Abandoned during the sixth century it surfaced as Marthoma Cross” (45)

The impact of this Persian Gnosticism is seen in the appearance of idols and temples and an endless system of myths and legends and visions. By the end of third century most of the region beyond the Sahya Mountains became “Hindu”. It took at least three centuries more for it to reach Kerala.

### **The Story of Kerala.**

As mentioned earlier Malabar Churches developed independent of the rest of the Indian Churches. Kerala remained unconquered by any outside forces because of its geographical position. Recent Archeological and documentary studies by Prof. George Menacheril, indicates that Aryans came to prominence in Kerala, only by 4<sup>th</sup> century or later and Hinduism only by 8<sup>th</sup> century. (46)

“It may even be that the Syriac script and liturgy - surely the Pahlavi script - were in Kerala much before the Devanagari and the Vedas found their foothold here.

In spite of the many statements in Keralolpathy (47) most historians today believe that the Parasurama story is only a legend and Brahmins arrived in Kerala for all practical purposes only in the 4<sup>th</sup> century or later, and the Brahmins or Namboodiris established dominance only around the end of the first millennium C.E”

Parasurama legend says that the seventh incarnation of Vishnu rose up the land of Kerala from Gokarnam to Kanya Kumari and gave them to Sixty-four Brahmin families. This must have been around the 4<sup>th</sup> century or even later, if the Namboodiri traditions can be trusted. This legend therefore speaks only of the historical situation of the later centuries how the Aryan Brahmins came to dominate Kerala probably as advisers to the Kings of Chera, from the Tulunad.

Who were the Kings of Chera is difficult to ascertain. Until the first century till the coming of Thomas, it is certain that Buddhist Kings ruled Chera. But Buddhism disappeared from the Kerala scene altogether. Vaishnavites or Aryan Brahmins came into power only by the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Islam came into existence only by the 6<sup>th</sup> century and was never a power in Kerala. Then what was the religion of the Chera Kings? The only alternative is that they were Christians. It points to the possibility that Mahabali whom the fifth avatar of Vishnu defeated by cheating was none other than the Christian Dravidian King “The Great Sacrifice”. This name evidently fits only Christ and Christians. . His Kingdom evidently extended over three regions of India (the three worlds). Most probably the name is a generic name for Christian Kings. (The Chera King Kuru Varman-1 also known as Vyakrasenan who ruled Kerala from 40 AD to 55 AD was a Christian.) It is interesting to note that Mahabali was the grandson of Prahalada who was a staunch Vaishnavite (Brahmin?). Prahalada was the son of King Hiranyakashipu a Dravidian. Hiranyakashipu was killed by the fourth incarnation of Vishnu the Lion- Man. His brother Hiranyaksha was killed by the earlier incarnation of Vishnu, the Boar. Vishnu threw both these brothers out of the heavens where they were the gate keepers of Heaven. We know for certain that Mahabalipuram was Mahabali’s resort since every other attempt to explain the name fails. Mahabalikkara – Mavelikkara is traditionally associated with Mahabali. Incidentally Onam is the only festival, which is celebrated both by the Christians and the Hindus. If the Onam songs handed down to us from the 8<sup>th</sup> century are true, there was an egalitarian society – virtual Kingdom of God - fashioned out of the early Christian Fellowship Community experiment Jerusalem. The Jerusalem experiment failed with the deceit of Aninias and Saphira and the Kerala experiment with the deceit of Vamana. With the long period of innocence Mahabali could not discern the deceit of Vamana. Kerala, during the Tamil Sangam Age (1-500 AD) was a very egalitarian society. (48) Untouchability was unknown, manual labor was respected and women held in high esteem. The first Brahmin missionaries moved into Kerala through Tulu-naadu (Mangalore area). Thus Chera Kingdom continued as a Christian Kigdom from the first century onwards until the sixth century. Gradually the influence of the Hinduism from Chola and Pandya dislocated the Christian dynasties of Chera. With the cunningness of the Brahmin dominated Vaishnava advisors of other Kingdoms, Chera Kingdom was taken over by the Vaishnava cult finally. However one Christian Dynasty continued till the 15<sup>th</sup> century – the Villar Vattom Pana.

Even today Christians are respectfully addressed as "*Nazarani mappilas*", "sons of kings who follow the Nazarene" or "of the first Christian kings" (49) (50) It is actually a direct translation of the word "Israel". If this is the intent, it means the idea of Kingdom of Priests was introduced most probably by St. Thomas himself. Alternately, such a position came into existence because Christians were Kings in early period. The special position of Nazrani in relation to Hindu temples itself speak of the origins. Even today as a tradition, some old temples cannot open their gates, or open the holy of holies or raise the flag to start a festival without the physical presence of a Nazrani in the temple ground.

The Mahabali myth had created sensation even in the West, during the Middle Ages, as the myth of the Prestor John – a Priest King who ruled a powerful vast kingdom in India.- ruling over 72 countries in three Indias. (51) (52) (53) (54). This legend says that St. Thomas travelled to India and there established a Christian community that retained many of the ideals of the original church, and which blossomed into an almost perfect Christian kingdom, ruled over by this legendary king, Prester John. A second century Peutinger Map (11) indicates a temple not far from Muziris as "Temple Augusti" or "Temple of the Great King". Around the middle of the 12th century, a series of letters (forged?) found their way to the court of Pope Alexander III. These letters were from the Prester himself. Apparently an emissary was sent to the King Prestor John, but he was never seen again. This mythical (mystical?) figure certainly came from Chera Kingdom as Meir Bar-Ilan (55) points out. India is mentioned several times in these letters and the city of Kalicut is mentioned in one of the letters specifically. It specifies that he was in the land of India where the body of St. Thomas the Apostle was buried and they celebrated the memorial of Thomas on July 3<sup>rd</sup>. The letter also mentions that it is the land of the pepper and elephants.

When history finally opens, it was with Kulasekara Alwar who ruled Kerala in the 8th century. He became a devotional Vaishnavite poet. The earliest document, which tells us about the Onam festival, comes from this period. A last Perumal, Cheraman Perumal abdicated his throne in 825 AD, (some documents give it as 642-643 AD) converted to Islam and went to Mecca and died in Yemen. (56) He divided the kingdom and gave it to his Nephews.

**AD 325 The Council of Nicea Indian representation through Bishop Johannes**

At this time the Christological discourse and controversies were raging in the West. The Council of Nicea was held to draw up the Nicene Creed in order to establish the canon of faith. 318 bishops attended it among them was a Bishop Johannes, the Persian, for the churches of the whole of Persia and Greater India.

The Indian Church had ties with the Persian Churches right from early period. It is assumed that Indian Churches invited Persian priests to teach the Bible. The earliest bibles translated from Greek are found in Syriac. Malayalam did not have bible until recently. So it was necessary to have priests from Syria to publicly read, teach and explain the Bible to the believers. However the church administrations were completely controlled by the local elders while the clergy who were brought into the country provided the ecclesiastical services and doctrinal teachings.

### **Persian Immigrations**

In AD 340 the Suraya Christians from Persia (now known as Syrian Christians) came to Malabar Coast under the leadership of a bishop by name Dawood. Later a group of immigrants under the leadership of Thomman from Persia landed in Cranganore in AD 345. They included about 400 persons of seventy-two families of seven clans. A bishop named Mar Joseph, four priests and a few deacons were also with them. It is assumed that they came because of the Persian persecution under Zoroastrianism. There are scholars who believe that at least some of them were actually Mani followers (60) who came as a result of persecution. Other sources indicate that they were sent by the Catholicos of Jerusalem to get information about the state of the Church in Malabar. Whatever is the reason, they were received kindly by the Cheraman Perumal who gave him permission to buy land and settle down. The King also offered special privileges to him and his group. This group kept their social identity and forms the Kananaya Christians. Thomas is said to have married a local woman and hence had two groups - known as Eastern Group and the Western Group.

These Royal grants given by Cheraman Perumal, who was the ruler of Malabar, were inscribed on copper plates ( Knai Thomman Cheppedu), giving Knai Thomman and his descendants seventy-two royal privileges, in AD 345. In some places they are referred to as "Manigramma Nivasikal". These privileges are all Royal privileges indicating equal status of the Knai Thomman with the Kings

of Chera. They include: Royal robes, Royal Crown and head dress and other ornaments, authority to exact all types of taxes and act as judges over several groups of people.

This was followed by several other immigrations from Persia. In 880 AD, some Syrian Christian families led by Sabar Iso, a merchant from Persia, immigrated to Quilon. Two holy men named Mar Sapor and Mar Proth were also with them. They were twin brothers .[57]

The presence and the powers of the new comers from Persia added a new dimension to the local Christians who were already in contact with their counterparts in Persia. These ties were now strengthened. The Aryan Brahminic elements within the church itself got a privileged status within the caste system which began to appear. They now began to exchange priests, who brought with them the documents known as the bible, which were only available in Greek and Syriac. They soon incorporated the Persian way of church institution, worship and other ritualism. This gave them a unique culture,- under the influence of the Syrian Church - which came to be known as Syrian Christian culture. Kerala Christians came to be known as Syrian Christians- not because they are from Syria, but because they followed the liturgy and customs of the Syrian Churches.

### **Theophilus, The Indian**

Theophilus was a native of Maldiv Islands, off Kerala coast. Emperor Constantine took him as a hostage so that the Maldiv people will not plunder Roman ships as it passed that way. In Rome he became a Christian and became a Bishop. He visited India in AD 354 and noted that their worship practices differed considerably from those of other parts of the world. Particularly he noticed that Indians sang, heard the gospel and worshipped sitting down. He thought they were outrageous and ordered it changed. Probably the practice of worship standing was introduced from that time onwards.

### **AD 425 Daniel, The Priest, Indian**

It may be assumed that Indians sent their priests for training and studies to Syria. There was one Daniel who translated the commentary on the Epistle to the

Romans from Greek to Syriac in Edessa. He signed it as Daniel, the priest, the Indian. Ecclesiastical language of India was probably Greek and Syriac as the teaching of Bible came from there. Greek inscriptions are found on the bells of several churches.

### **Cosmos Indicopleustes and Universal Christian Topology**

Around AD 522, Cosmos a rich Christian merchant from Alexandria, visited India and wrote a book called Universal Christian Topology. He describes his visit thus:

"We have found the church not destroyed, but very widely diffused and the whole world filled with the doctrine of Christ, which is being day by day propagated and the Gospel preached over the whole earth. This I have seen with my own eyes in many places and have heard narrated by others. I as a witness of truth relate: In the land of Taprobane (Srilanka), Inner India, where the Indian sea is, there is a church of Christians, with clergy and congregation of believers, though I know not if there be any Christians further in this direction. And such also is the case in the land called Male (Malabar), where the pepper grows. And in the place called Kallia (Kollam) there is a bishop appointed from Persia, as well as in the island called Dioscores (Socotra) in the same Indian Sea. The inhabitants of that island speak Greek, having been originally settled there by Ptolemies, who ruled after Alexander of Macedonia. There are clergy there also ordained and sent from Persia to minister among the people of the island, and the multitude of Christians..."

### **A.D. 431 Council of Ephesus A.D. 451 Council of Chalcedon : Nestorian Schism**

Soon after the formation of the Church, heresy and variations in teachings were in existence in one form or other, all over the world. During the Apostolic Period, they were settled with the mediation of the Apostles and Apostolic Synods and Councils. The first of the council was the council of Jerusalem where the question of gentile inclusion in the church was discussed. However after the apostolic period this continued. Even today we have large number of theological systems varying ever so slightly. These movements arose powerfully around 400 A.D when Christianity became free from oppression and when being a Christian

became a prestige. In the year AD 425 Nestorius, a presbyter of the Church of Antioch became the Patriarch of Constantinople. He legitimately objected to the epithet of "Theokotos" or "Mother of God" as applied to Mary; since Mary was only the mother of the incarnation and not the mother who produced a God. This would imply that Mary was a Goddess. In this sense he was indeed right. However he was understood to have propounded the concept that the Logos of God indwelt Jesus the man. Thus there were two natures in Jesus at the same time. If we are to judge by the Nestorian churches of today this was a misunderstanding.

Cyril the Patriarch of Alexandria opposed this dual nature concept and insisted on the unity that Jesus was perfect man and perfect God without inconsistency. The controversy reached a climax when these Patriarchs excommunicated each other. However the conduct of the Ephesus council was totally deplorable that Nestorius was not even given a hearing. By the time Nestorius arrived at Ephesus the council had voted against him and he was excommunicated and exiled. Its decision though universally accepted, the way the issue was treated is still considered deplorable. Nestorius, a genius theologian of the time was derided without even giving him a hearing.

The fight went on and in AD 451 the Nestorians claimed a victory in the council of Chaldeons. In this council it was declared that in Christ the two natures were hypostatically united, without mixture, confusion and divisibility. Cyril the Patriarch of Alexandria and John the Patriarch of Antioch finally reconciled. Nestorians adopted the name Chaldeon Church and the Patriarch took the title of Patriarch of Babylon. These in fights in the Middle East and Europe had its repercussions in India too. There exists a Chaldean church with few followings even today, though majority of the Christian churches remained faithful to the declarations of Nicea and Ephesus. A copy of the pre-Diampur liturgy shows that Thomas churches considered Nestorius as one of their bishops and revered him.

#### **A.D 510 – 1439 The Christian Dynasty of Villarvattom**

By this period, the great Empire of the Chera Kingdom came to ruins and an immense number of small independent Kingdoms came into existence. Thus those areas where Christians were in prominence established themselves into

Kingdoms. Christians were traditionally good statesmen and warriors. One such Kingdom was the Villarvattom Pana. This Kingdom Villarvattom Pana extended from the coastal islands of Chennamangalam, Maliankara and others to the north of and south of Udayamperoor. The capital of this kingdom was at Mahadavarpattanam (Maha Thevar = Great God = El Elyon) in the island of Chennamangalam and later it was shifted to Udayamperoor when the Arab invaders attacked the island. The Udayamperror Church - which stands even today - was built by Raja of Villarvottam in A.D 510. There are several inscriptions in this church that supports this including the mention of one Raja Thomas who ruled in AD 900. In A.D 1330, Pope John XXII in a letter sent with Friar Jordan to the king of Vellar Vattom, address him as the successor of Raja Thomas. Pope Eugene IV addresses a Raja Thomas in A.D 1439. The papal record mentions "that there is a Kingdom twenty days journey from Cathay, of which the king and all the inhabitants are Christians, but heretics, being said to be Nestorians." "Historia de Variatate Fortunae, liv. IV, Poggi Bracciolini , Secretary to Pope Eugenius IV). It all indicates that Kerala was predominantly Christian in the First Century and was ruled by Christian Kings.

### **Reformation and Revival attempts in Inner Indian Churches**

In the 8th c A.D, Sankara a Brahmin born of an itinerant Aryan priest, from Kerala became the champion of the philosophical system known as Advaita which became the core of Gnostic Hindu thesis. As Gnosticism took its grip on Indian Christianity, saints from both the Vaishnavite and Saivite sects made several attempts to thwart all syncretization and to bring the God of incarnation and sacrifice back in the culture. The theology presented by Ramanujam (Vishista Advaita – Modified Monism) (1011-1137 AD), Madhava (Dvaita Vada – Dualistic theism)( 1197-1273 AD) and all the works of saints of the 7<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> century were bold attempts in reformation opposing Sankara. All the sixty three Nayanmars of Saivite persuasion, and twelve Alwars of Vaishnavite persuasion came from the Dravids. But the coming in of the Theosophical Society in the wake of Independence Movement practically took over Hinduism away from the reach of redemption.

However we can still see the worship of Jesus embedded in the temple worship and symbolisms. One such Namavali, worships the one who was born of a virgin, circumcised, died on a cross and resurrected. It was this faith that the

Tamil saints were trying to revive. (58) For other embedded mythological symbolism and theological expressions see Deivanayagam and Devakala (59)

### **AD 1498 Arrival of Vasco Da Gama and Roman Catholic Mission**

Vasco Da Gama landed in Calicut in AD 1498 and this started the Colonization process of India by the Western Nations. Along with this came the religious domination of Roman Catholic Church over the independent churches of Malabar. By this time Hinduism has lost Christ. Portuguese being of Roman Catholic persuasion wanted to bring the Malabar Christians under the pontificate of Rome. According to the Roman concept the Pope of Rome is the heir to the throne of Peter and is the Vicar of the Church Universal all over the world wherever it may be. The Roman Catholicism claimed that Pope of Rome was the supreme head of all the churches of the world and Indian Churches should also submit to this supremacy if they are to remain true as Catholic Church. The first such claim came with Friar John, whom Pope John XXII ordained as Bishop of Quilon in AD 1330 when he was sent him with a letter. Friar John is reported to have come to Quilon and founded a church in Latin rite. However historically there is no evidence that he ever came to Quilon. He is said to have been martyred at Kalyan in Bombay. There were similar visits from other legations from Rome. Though these were received with Christian courtesy it did not lead to acknowledgement of Papal supremacy as expected.

### **AD 1599 Synod of Diampore**

The Portuguese became powerful in certain areas of India especially in Goa and Bombay. In Jan. 1599, Alexiyodi Menessis, the Archbishop of Goa came to Cochin. Geevarghese Archdeacon was in charge of the churches in Kerala at that time. Menessis Archbishop with the colonial power behind him used the power to get Geevarghese Archdeacon arrested and put in prison under the orders of the King of Cochin. Then he traveled extensively and influenced the leaders and people. In July 5, 1599, he called the famous Udayam Perror Council (Sunnahadose). There were 153 leaders and 660 laymen were represented in that council. Under the yoke of the Portuguese Colonial force they, accepted the supremacy of the Pope of Rome. However the sailing was not smooth for Roman church. This domination continued for over five decades. Through political influence the Synod of Diamper (Portuguese name for Udayamperoor)

was held in 1599 and most of the St: Thomas Christians were brought under the Pope. During this period the Malabar Church assimilated many of the teachings and rituals of the Roman Catholic Church. They burnt almost all available documents as heretic.

## References

- (1). On the Veda. Aurobindo, Sri. (1964). Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram  
Aurobindo's writings were published in the monthly review, 'Arya' between 1914 and 1920.
- (2). J-Claude et Bernard Binett, History of the Hindu religion, Vedism and Hinduism: <http://members.tripod.com/historel/orient/10inde.htm>.  
See also Prof. Ingrid Shafer: <http://www.usao.edu/~usao-ids3313/ids/html/vedism.html>
- (3) ) Pundit Page: Wyatt Robertson  
<http://www.karma2grace.org/Webcomponents/FAQ/index.asp?det=65>  
“There are indeed no references to reincarnation in the Rig Veda. Or for that matter in the other Vedas (Sama, Yajur and Atharva).”
- (4). Dr. Deen B Chandora: In what language were the Vedas originally written?  
[http://www.geocities.com/vedic\\_temple/hinducentum/q10.html](http://www.geocities.com/vedic_temple/hinducentum/q10.html)
- (5). Internet Sacred Text Archive: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/>
- (6). *Richard K. Hines*: <http://www.wsu.edu/~dee/ANCINDIA/VEDAS.HTM>
- (7). Brian Turner: <http://www.comparative-religion.com/hinduism/vedas/>
- (8) Pat Zukeran, Buddhism, <http://www.probe.org/docs/buddhism.html>
- (9) Stevenson, Edward Luther , 1991 Claudius Ptolemy The Geography New York: Dover Publications.
- (10) Ptolemy and the Southeast Coast of India  
[http://www.nfobase.com/html/ptolemy\\_and\\_the\\_southeast\\_coas.html](http://www.nfobase.com/html/ptolemy_and_the_southeast_coas.html)  
“The great trading post here was Muziris, Ptolemy has it connected by the Psuedostomus River to the Chera capital of Karur. The Cheras controlled the interior of the southern part of the peninsula and the lower West Coast.”

- (11) [http://www.nfobase.com/html/the\\_peutinger\\_table.html](http://www.nfobase.com/html/the_peutinger_table.html)  
“What is really interesting here is the centrality of Muziris. It is marked with a big red circle. It is, indeed, the most important city east of Antioch. Yet it is not connected to anything in the interior, much less across the peninsula. To the left of Muziris is an "Augustinian temple." Many have taken this to be an old Roman structure. But that would seem odd on this decidedly Christian map.”  
Peutinger's Tabula was originally a long parchment map 6.80 metres by 34 centimetres.
- (12) The Periplus of the Eritrean Sea <http://www.earth-history.com/India/periplus.htm>
- (13) E. H. Warmington, *The Commerce between the Roman Empire and India*, London, Curzon Press. 1928, p.14. as quoted in T.V. Philip, *East of the Euphrates: Early Christianity in Asia*, CSS & ISPCCK, India, 1998)
- (14) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippalus>
- (15) Influence of Monsoon Winds, Kerala Calling, August, 2003  
[http://www.kerala.gov.in/kerala\\_callingaug/p24-26.pdf](http://www.kerala.gov.in/kerala_callingaug/p24-26.pdf)
- (16) M.R. James, “The Apocryphal New Testament" Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924 <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/actsthomas.html>
- (17) <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/actsthomas.html>
- (18) <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/html/chap4/chapter4a.htm>
- (19) (Lawrence E. Browne, *The Eclipse of Christianity in Asia*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1933, p.47. The information about the Bartolmai tribe is given by R. A. Trotter in a paper presented at a conference in Sind in 1947.
- (20) Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol.1. p. 301.
- (21) A. Mingana, *Early Spread of Christianity in India*, Manchester University, 1926 p 71

- (22). Rev Henry Heras, *The Two Apostles of India* (Trichinopoly 1844)
- (23) Quoted in C.V Cherian, Kerala Historical Society. CMS Press 1973
- (24) *The Church History of Eusebius. Book V, Chapter X*  
<http://www.ccel.org/fathers2/NPNF2-01/Npnf2-01-10.htm> ]
- (25) A. Mingana, *Early Spread of Christianity in India*, Manchester University, 1926 p 71
- (26) Jerome, *Liber de viris Illustribus* as quoted by Dr. Berchmans Kodackal in  
<http://members.tripod.com/~Berchmans/apostle.html>
- (27) <http://www.ccel.org/w/wace/biodict/htm/iii.xvi.vi.htm>
- (28). Quoted from <http://www.barkuronline.com/Abtbkr/Abtbkr5.html>
- (29) William Pais and Vincent Mendonca, *'The land called South Kanara'-2000*, - Image flex Publishers
- (30) R. A. Trotter in a paper presented at a conference in Sind in 1947
- (31) *"The Myth of Saint Thomas and the Mylapore Shiva Temple"* <http://hamsa.org>
- (32) Dr. M. Deivanayagam, Dr. D. Devakala, *The Revival Movement of Dravidian Religion, Hinduism – Dravidian Religion*  
<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/1412/hindudraavid.html>
- (33) Alexander Harris, *The Development of Civilization and Religion in India and its influence in World Society*. Chennai p 58 ff  
<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Parthenon/2104/hinduism.html>
- (34) <http://indiatemple.blogspot.com/2004/11/lingam-phallic-symbol-of-lord-shiva.html>
- (35) <http://alackal.conscient.com/SyrianChristians.html>]
- (36) <http://mb-soft.com/believe/txn/manichae.htm>

- (37) Duncan Greenlees, *The Gospel of the Prophet Mani*, Adyar, Madras, India the Theosophical Publishing House, 1956
- (38) For Manichean Scrolls see: <http://essenes.net/primarytexts.html>
- (39) <http://santhomechurch.com/apostleofindia/apostleofindia.html>
- (40) Travancore State Manual Vol. II, 139-142.
- (41) From the Palm-leaf manuscript entitled *Keralathil Margam Vazhiyute Avastha*
- (42) Moraes, G. M. *A History of Christianity in India*. Vol. 1. Bombay: Manaktalas, 1964
- (43) White House, *The lingering Light*
- (44) Ittup, *History of the Malabar Syrian Christian Church*
- (45) Indian Express, Friday April 24, 1998
- (46) Christianity Older than Hinduism in Kerala World Syriac Conference 2002 -SEERI – KOTTAYAM Paper presented by Prof. George MENACHERY
- (47) *Keralolpathi* printed by Gundert in AD 1890
- (48) How was the Caste System introduced in Kerala?  
<http://www.thrikodithanam.org/tidbits.htm>
- (49) Malankara Nasranikal : <http://www.indianchristianity.org/malankara.htm>
- (50) Dr. Berchmans Kodackal, *The Early Christians of India*, January 1998  
<http://members.tripod.com/~Berchmans/early.html>
- (51) <http://www.commonplacebook.com/fiction/myths/ch02/>
- (52) Otto of Freising: *Medieval Sourcebook: The Legend of Prester John*  
<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/otto-prester.html>
- (53) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prester\\_John](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prester_John)
- (54) <http://www.laohats.com/Prester%20John.htm>

- (55) M. Bar-Ilan, 'Prester John: Fiction and History', *History of European Ideas*, 20/1-3 (1995), pp. 291-298. <http://faculty.biu.ac.il/~barilm/presjohn.html>
- (56) B.S. Rao New Facts on the Arrival of Islam PTI, India, <http://muslimsonline.com/babri/keralamuslim.htm>
- (57) Moraes, G. M. *A History of Christianity in India*. Vol. 1. Bombay: Manaktalas, 1964
- (58) M.M.Ninan, *Hinduism –What Really Happened in India*, Global Publishers, 2003 (59) Dr. M. Deivanayagam, Dr. D. Devakala, 'The Revival Movement of Dravidian Religion, <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Ithaca/1412/>
- (59) Syrian Christian Traditions, P.E.Esow <http://alackal.conscient.com/SyrianChristians.html>
- (60) Mr. P.V. Mathew: Sugantha Bandu Nasrani History