

# A Hindu Church And An Indian Christ

The Rejection of 'Syrian' Christian Identity & The Quest for  
a Judeo-Dravidian Bhartiya Malankara Nasrani Identity

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## **Excerpts from book - A Hindu Church and An Indian**

**The Rejection of 'Syrian' Christian Identity & the Quest for a Judeo-Dravidian Bhartiya Malankara Nasrani Identity**

### **The Prologue**

#### **A Confused Sanghi<sup>1</sup>, a Struggling Nasrani<sup>2</sup> and a Corporate Catholic**

A conversation between a Sanghi, Nasrani and a Uniate Catholic<sup>3</sup> takes place in the light of the current socio-political scenario.

**Sanghi:** Good evening guys. See, I am not happy today. You Christians are creating further troubles and making it difficult for Hindus.

**Catholic:** Why? What happened?

**Sanghi:** You guys are converting too many Hindus.

**Nasrani:** We do not convert Hindus or people from other religions.

**Sanghi:** No, that is not true; You Christians are converting too many Hindus by offering food and other materials.

**Nasrani:** Yah, Maybe it's the Roman Catholic Church or the Protestants, not ours.

**Catholic:** Yes, we do have missions and we have converted people, but we do not forcefully convert others.

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<sup>1</sup>A member of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) , its affiliates. In a political sense he/she is a person who has a more radical outlook. All Sanghis are not radicals.

<sup>2</sup>A member or faithful of the Malankara Church.

<sup>3</sup>Former Eastern Christians or Orthodox christians/Churches who have been received under the jurisdiction of the Church of Rome, however, retain their own rites and canon laws.

**Sanghi:** That is not right. You Christians are creating immense problems.

**Catholic:** How can you blame us if someone wants to convert to Christianity?

**Nasrani:** Why are you blaming everyone for the acts of a few people?

**Sanghi:** You guys belong to the same Christian sect right?

**Nasrani:** Sorry. I do not belong to their Christian sect. We are a different community.

**Sanghi:** How come? All Christians are the same right?

**Nasrani:** Sorry, no, and it is not wise enough to blame everyone for the actions of a few.

**Catholic:** Both of us belong to different denominations. But in general, we belong to the larger Christian community. To be more specific, the Syrian Christians of South India.

**Nasrani:** Sorry brother, we are a bit different from you.

**Sanghi:** How are you different from other Christian Churches in India? That seems an interesting point to converse.

**Catholic:** No. You are no different. How come you are different? You are a Syrian Christian. To be more specific, an Orthodox Syrian Christian, and I am a Catholic Christian. To be more specific, a Syrian Catholic<sup>4</sup> Christian.

**Nasari:** Brother, listen carefully. We are not Syrian Christians, but Syriacised Malankara Nasranis.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Syro-Malabar Uniate Christian.

<sup>5</sup>The Syriacisation process of Malankara Church began with the entry of East Syriac (Church of the East) and West Syriac (Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch).

**Catholic:** What difference does that make?

**Nasrani:** A Nasrani is not Christian.<sup>6</sup> Christianity is a Roman religion that was imposed on Malankara Nasranis. Nasrani is a caste<sup>7</sup> just like our Hindu brothers and sisters. The Malankara Nasrani community is one of the ancient followers of Yeshua of Nazareth.<sup>8</sup> To be more specific Dravidian is my ethnic identity, Nasranieth is my cultural identity, Orthodox Christianity is my adopted Christian (faith) identity and India is my national identity.

**Sanghi:** That seems interesting. I never knew it...

**Nasrani:** Not only you, but most of the people in India are also ignorant about it. You need to educate yourself on such facts before accusing us.

**Catholic:** We are also Nasranis, but we are in communion with the Pope of Rome.

**Nasrani:** Yes, a part of you is Nasranis for sure. But not all of you are Nasranis.

**Catholics:** How can you say that? On what grounds do you make such an argument?

**Nasrani:** See, the original Malankara Nasrani community evolved mainly as a result of the mixing of Dravidians and Jews. The Nasrani community is highly indigenous in every aspect of their life. The Nasranis were divided heavily with the arrival of the Portuguese. A part of the Nasranis accepted Roman Catholicism

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<sup>6</sup>Malankara Nasranis are caste-based pre-proto Orthodox cultural community originated in modern day Kerala.

<sup>7</sup>Please refer to the first chapter of this book for more details on Nasrani Caste.

<sup>8</sup>Jesus Christ.

whereas others remained independent. The Syrian Catholics or the Uniate Catholics converted a lot of people and labelled them as Nasranis. Moreover, true Nasranis cannot be in communion with the Pope of Rome.

**Catholic:** Why not? Being in communion with the Pope is our right.

**Nasrani:** Yes indeed. It is your right to follow any religion or to be in communion with anyone. However, not only the Roman Pope but also the Syrian Churches (Christians) are geographically, politically and ethnically separated from the Nasrani community of India. The Nasranis do not wish to be ruled by a foreign Church.

**Catholic:** But you are also part of a foreign communion of Churches.

**Nasrani:** Yes we are part of the ancient Oriental Orthodox communion<sup>9</sup>, just like India is a member of international organizations. The functioning of the Malankara Church is not based on a foreign church or its system. We have a constitution that has been ratified by the Supreme Court of India. We make our own decisions according to the law of the land. Neither Oriental Orthodox Churches nor any foreign party can decide for our Church.

**Catholic:** We also live by the law of the land. We make our own decisions and our local head is stationed in India. We are just in communion with the Holy See.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>A communion of six autocephalous Eastern Churches, also known as lesser Eastern Church or Old Oriental Churches.

<sup>10</sup>The universal government of the Catholic Church based in the Vatican City.

**Nasrani:** But can you deny the fact that the Roman Pontiff<sup>11</sup> is the supreme authority of your Church? He is infallible for the Roman Catholic Church. He can make and break decisions and has enormous influence on the affairs of the global Roman Church.

**Catholic:** Yes that is right. But that is similar to your case as well. According to your constitution, the Syriac Patriarch of Antioch and All East<sup>12</sup> is the head of your Church.

**Nasrani:** Yes, that is right. Such an arrangement was made due to the historic relations with the Syriac Church of Antioch. But are you ignorant of the fact that the same constitution states that the head of the Malankara Church is none other than the Catholicos and the Malankara Metropolitan who is stationed in India? The Patriarch is treated as the first among equals. Do you know why Malankara Nasranis are involved in an age-old dispute with the Syriac Church in court?

**Catholic:** That is for the control of Church property right?

**Nasrani:** That is where people have it wrong. It is not just for the control of properties alone. The dispute is part of the identity struggle for the Malankara Nasrani community. The dispute is a protest against the domination of the Syriac Church in the affairs of the Malankara Church. The Nasranis do not want a foreign Hierarch to rule us or decide for us.

**Sanghi:** Hey guys, let me ask you. Then why do you guys call yourselves Syrian Christians?

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<sup>11</sup>Pope or Bishop of Rome.

<sup>12</sup>The head of the Syriac Orthodox Church.

**Nasrani:** As mentioned earlier, we are wrongly called 'Syrian Christians'. We are not Syrian Christians, but Syriacised Christians or Syriacised Malankara Nasranis. The indigenous Malankara Church came in contact with the East and West Syriac Churches in due course of time. We also adopted the West Syriac Liturgical Rites and several practices of the Syriac Church. That is one of the reasons why Nasranis are also called the Syrian Christians.

**Sanghi:** I see. This seems interesting. So you mean Nasranis are an indigenous caste-based community in India.

**Nasrani:** Yes. That is right.

**Catholic:** I cannot comprehend it. There is no caste in Christianity.

**Nasrani:** Christianity in Malankara is not of Roman origin nor it is an offshoot of any foreign missionary efforts. The cultural practices of Nasranis are the biggest living evidence that it is a caste-based cultural community. The cultural practices and even the old religious practices and social life of Nasranis were very much aligned with our Hindu brothers. Nasrani practices are very different from that of the Roman Christians. Everything changed with the arrival of Roman Christianity. But our forefathers resisted foreign imperial domination.

**Sanghi:** Can you tell me a little bit more about the resistance movement?

**Nasrani:** Why not. The event is known as the Oath of the Leaning Cross,<sup>13</sup> which is indeed the first-ever independence movement in India but is sadly forgotten by many. It was in the year 1653. The Nasranis who gathered at Mattancherry protested against the Roman Pope, Jesuits, and the Portuguese. The Malankara Nasrani community declared independence from the imperial Papal rule over us.

**Catholic:** It was not against the Pope of Rome but Jesuits and Carmelites.

**Nasrani:** Is that so? Who is the head of the Roman Catholic Church?

**Catholic:** The Pope of Rome.

**Nasrani:** To which Church do the Carmelites and Jesuits<sup>14</sup> belong?

**Catholic:** To the Catholic Church.

**Nasrani:** So the rest is clear.

**Catholic:** India is a secular state and every religion has the right to thrive forward.

**Sanghi:** Yes that is right, but no religion has the right to convert others by offering material benefits.

**Sanghi:** We appreciate an indigenous Christian community. However, I am still confused...

**Nasrani:** You are confused because you still fail to segregate the indigenous Nasrani community from other Christian communities.

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<sup>13</sup>Also known as the Great Oath of Bent Cross, or the Oath of the Slanting Cross, this event marked the resistance of Malankara Nasranis against the imperial rule of Portuguese Roman Catholics.

<sup>14</sup>The Order of the Brothers of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel, and the Society of Jesus are two religious orders of the Catholic Church.



For you everything Western is Christian and Christianity is foreign religion that tries to operate Western or foreign ideologies in India. Radical people among you believe that Hindustan is just for Hindus and others are foreigners. That is Political Hinduism, and it is extremely dangerous for the nation. Your people, party workers especially at the grass-root level need to learn to understand facts before generalizing everything with “Christianity”. However, at least some of the Sanghi<sup>15</sup> leadership has understood the value of the indigenous Malankara Church and how different it is from other Christian communities in India.

**Sanghi:** There is nothing like that. We are trying to organise our Hindu brothers and sisters.

**Nasrani:** Political Hinduism doesn't organise Hindus as you perceive, rather it polarises votes for certain political parties. It promotes radical ideas that alienate Hindus from other communities. Shrewd politicians make the best use of Political Hinduism to operate their agendas.

**Catholic:** I agree with you. But I do not agree that the Malankara Church is something special, nor that it derives special treatment in the Country.

**Nasrani:** We do not demand special treatment. My point is that the Malankara Nasrani community is not like any other Christian community in India. It is heavily indigenous and does not promote foreign evangelical, missionary, or political agendas. The

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<sup>15</sup>Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) is a right-wing, Hindu nationalist, paramilitary volunteer organisation headquartered in Pune, India.

Malankara Church promotes national and patriotic ideas. We are not bound by a foreign leader.

**Catholic:** We have the support of the Vatican and we are a global force.

**Nasrani:** Yes, I know that very well. That is why I always say that the Roman Catholic Church is one of the biggest corporations in the world. Moreover, they have created several Uniate Rites all over the world to operate their religious and political agenda.

**Sanghi:** I support your point regarding the Roman Catholic Church.

**Catholic:** How can you guys accuse the Vatican and the Catholic Church? We have made enormous contributions to Indian society.

**Sanghi:** Please don't tell me that. I know about the history of hate and torture propagated by the Catholic Church. The Goan Inquisition and the involvement of the Catholic Church is a classic example of intolerance. Such an attitude is similar to the approach practised by terrorist groups like ISIS.<sup>16</sup>

**Nasrani:** The Portuguese and the Roman Catholic Church culturally exploited Malankara Nasranis and divided us by creating Uniates. The Catholic Church alienated the Nasranis and Hindus by purposefully creating enmity between them. By the way, the torture unleashed by the Roman Catholic hierarchy is not just limited to India, but they have done the same in other parts of the world.

**Catholic:** Don't talk nonsense, we have not purposefully tortured anyone.

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<sup>16</sup>Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant is a militant Sunni organization.

**Nasrani:** Sorry brother. I can give you examples. The torture unleashed by the Catholic Church of Serbs and Gypsies in Croatia<sup>17</sup>, the torture of Cathars,<sup>18</sup> opposition to Galileo,<sup>19</sup> countless people who were burned as heretics, and your involvement in the Rwandan genocide<sup>20</sup> and torture of indigenous Canadian children<sup>21</sup> are just a few examples. Your Church is famous for its torture techniques. Moreover, you are well aware of the stand taken by your Church regarding the assault on Prof. T. J. Joseph<sup>22</sup> by Islamic radicals.

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<sup>17</sup>Dedijer, V., Kendall, H. and Niemietz, G., 1992. *The Yugoslav Auschwitz and the Vatican*. Buffalo, N.Y.: Prometheus Books.

<sup>18</sup>Crawford, J., 2020. *The Cathars: Persecuting Heretical Christians In The 13th Century*. [online] TheCollector. Available at: <<https://www.thecollector.com/cathars-persecution-of-christians-13th-century/>> [Accessed 18 December 2021].

<sup>19</sup>Wolf, J., 2016. *The truth about Galileo and his conflict with the Catholic Church*. [online] UCLA. Available at: <<https://newsroom.ucla.edu/releases/the-truth-about-galileo-and-his-conflict-with-the-catholic-church>> [Accessed 18 December 2021].

<sup>20</sup>The Guardian. 2016. *Rwanda genocide: Catholic Church sorry for role of priests and nuns in killings*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/21/rwanda-genocide-catholic-church-sorry-for-role-of-priests-and-nuns-in-killings>> [Accessed 18 December 2021].

<sup>21</sup>Aljazeera.com. 2021. *Canada PM slams church amid call for probe into Indigenous deaths*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/6/5/canada-pm-blasts-church-amid-call-for-probes-on-indigenous-deaths>> [Accessed 18 December 2021].

<sup>22</sup>PT, T., 2021. *'I Don't Hate My Attackers Like I Don't Hate The Axe They Used To Chop My Hand': TJ Joseph*. [Online] outlookindia. Available at: <<https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/entertainment-news-i-dont-have-any-hatred-for-my-attackers-like-i-dont-have->

**Sanghi:** Yes, yes. I know that case very well. The Church did not support the Professor regardless of his innocence. Interestingly, the same Catholic Church has taken a strong stand against the “Love Jihad”<sup>23</sup> to criticize the historical invasion of Tipu Sultan,<sup>24</sup> and voice their concerns against growing Islamic radicalism. That is hypocrisy.

**Nasrani:** They changed their stance to appease the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It seems that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church in India wants their Church to be recognized as “National”.

**Sanghi:** That is not possible. We are not in a position to support an imperial Church.

**Catholic:** We are not an imperial Church. Many other Christian denominations maintain foreign collaborations as well.

**Nasrani:** You are an imperial Church by all means. The administrative and hierarchical structure and policies of the Catholic Church in India and elsewhere are heavily dependent on the Vatican and the Roman Pope. Both are foreign entities. Just go through your canons to understand the various aspects of the doctrine of Papal supremacy.<sup>25</sup> Yes, it is also true that many religious organizations receive foreign affiliation and that receive foreign funds. However, such things segregate Malankara Church

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any-grudge-against-the-axe-they-used-to-chop-my-handtj/395225> [Accessed 18 December 2021].

<sup>23</sup>An Islamophobic conspiracy theory that has resulted in several controversies in India.

<sup>24</sup>Also known as Tiger of Mysore, Tipu was the ruler of the Kingdom of Mysore (South India) who pioneered Artillery.

<sup>25</sup>A doctrine of the Catholic Church that states that the Pope acting as supreme teacher and under certain conditions, cannot go wrong when he teaches in matters of faith or morals.

from other religious communities in India. Because our community does not receive foreign funding.

**Catholic:** So you think that we are foreigners and leave India?

**Nasrani:** I did not ask you or anyone else to leave. India is a secular country and everyone has the right to live here. But we need to remain a bit sceptical about foreign religious institutions and their proxies in India. The Catholic Church is not an indigenous institution. Regardless of the ongoing effort (by certain groups) to “Indigenise” your Church, it won't succeed as long as you remain connected to the Pope and the Vatican. You can only be a true indigenous Church only when you cut your ties with the Roman Papacy, which is an impossible aspect for your community.

**Catholic:** We have already started a dialogue with the leadership of the BJP for a better understanding.

**Nasrani:** Yes, in recent times, it seems that BJP is interested in the Catholic Church for securing votes. Your Church is a vote bank for them.

**Sanghi:** The Sangh won't allow that!

**Nasrani:** Hopefully they won't...

**Catholic:** You have no right to criticise the Catholic Church. See what your Church is up to. You guys are encroaching the parishes of Jacobites.

**Nasrani:** We did not encroach on anyone's property. The Supreme Court of India has issued a verdict in favour of the Malankara Church and the Malankara Metropolitan that all disputed Churches in Malankara shall be ruled according to the 1934

constitution of the Malankara Church.<sup>26</sup> Hence we are just obeying the Court rule and reclaiming our Churches.

**Catholic:** There is no meaning in such. As Christians, you need to sacrifice a lot.

**Nasrani:** Over the centuries the Nasaranis have sacrificed a lot. We do not dance to the tune of other Churches. Because it is a matter of our indigenous identity and survival. Do you agree that Jacobites and Orthodox are the two parties involved in the conflict and they approached the Supreme Court together? Right?

**Catholic:** Yes they did.

**Nasrani:** So are they bound to accept the verdict of the Supreme Court?

**Catholic:** Yes. But they have the right to go for further appeals. As Christians, a settlement outside the court is better. None of the Churches in Kerala support your community. All are in favour of the Jacobites.

**Nasrani:** Even after the verdict, they approached the court several times, but failed. Several efforts were made to settle it outside the boundaries of the court. But nothing succeeded and finally, it was settled by the Supreme Court of India. Above all, the Jacobites are given two options. They can either accept the 1934 constitution or become a part of the Malankara Church or they are free to move out and build their church buildings. Other Churches do not

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<sup>26</sup>Philip, S., 2019. *The Church dispute in Kerala: what Supreme Court ordered, government failed to do*. [online] The Indian Express. Available at: <<https://indianexpress.com/article/explained/the-church-dispute-in-kerala-what-supreme-court-ordered-government-failed-to-do-5813728/>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

support the Malankara Church for obvious reasons. They know that the best way for them to move forward is by destabilising the most ancient cultural and religious community in India (among the Christians), which is none other than the Malankara Church.

**Sanghi:** Indian citizens should obey the verdict of the Supreme Court, whatever it takes.

**Nasrani:** That's all. Keep in mind. The Orthodox, Jacobites, Marthoma, Thozhiyoor, a part of Syro-Malabar and Syro-Malankara and CSI are Nasranis, who are either 'Syriacised, Latinised, or Anglicanised'. The Roman Catholic Church did the biggest damage to Nasranis.

**Catholic:** There is no one without sins. We are Christians, we need to stand together against radicalism.

**Nasrani:** We do not want to be “bonsaied” by the Roman Catholic agenda. We are fine with maintaining fair relations with everyone. However, our Nasrani identity matters the most to us. We cannot compromise our identity in the name of ecumenism. We cannot dance to the tunes of your Church. By the way, do you guys know that we have more former Roman Catholic Konkani communities under the Malankara Church and the founder of that community was a staunch Swadeshi who fought against the Portuguese and the Portuguese authorities in Goa?

**Sanghi:** Wow, that is something new for me. Who is that Swadeshi?

**Nasrani:** He was none other than Alvares Julius of Ceylon, Goa and India.<sup>27</sup> He was born a Roman Catholic. However, he

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<sup>27</sup>P. Kamat, P., 2014. *The Goa-Ceylon religious connection: a review of the 'The Indian Cry' of Alvares Mar Julius, Archbishop of*

denounced Catholicism and joined the Swadeshi Malankara Church. He had strong disagreements with Papacy, the Catholic Church and the Portuguese authorities. He objected to the imperial rule over Goa and rejected foreign goods. He urged everyone to use swadeshi goods and stood with the poor and downtrodden. He toiled a lot in Ceylon as well, where he organized working-class people. Alvares was severely persecuted by the Portuguese authorities and by the Catholic Church. They excommunicated him. But he never gave up. He is known as the Apostle of charity. He was a social reformer who objected to the exploitation of the poor by the rich and powerful. He duly promoted swadeshi ideas and set a new example for charity, much ahead of any modern missionaries in India.

**Sanghi:** I was never aware of such a person. I have only heard of Mother Teresa of Calcutta.<sup>28</sup>

**Nasrani:** That is because the Catholic presence in the media is always predominant. Mother Teresa was heavily backed by the Catholic Church. Alvares was forgotten but Mother Teresa is well known. It is also a mistake on the part of the Malankara Church leadership that they did not promote nor highlight the Swadeshi contributions of Alvares.

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*Ceylon, Goa and India.* [online] Sabaragamuwa University Journal. Available at:  
<<http://doi.org/10.4038/suslj.v12i1.7024>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

<sup>28</sup>NobelPrize.org. n.d. *Mother Teresa Biographical.* [online] Available at:  
<<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/1979/teresa/biographical/>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].



**Catholic:** You are no one to criticise Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Your Church has more than enough problems. You fight with the Jacobites and your priests are involved in abuse cases.

**Nasrani:** Did I criticise her? I stated the kind of help and publicity she received for her missionary work. Mind you, no one is beyond criticism, neither Mother Teresa nor the Pope. I fully agree with you that the Malankara Church has several issues and it needs a clearing. But those issues are nothing like that of the Catholic Church. Apart from the historic aggressions, your Church is at the forefront of child abuse globally where we have an unending list of victims, also your involvement in political issues and so on. Let us not forget the case of Bishop Franko, Sister Abaya and others.

**Sanghi:** Teresa converted a lot of Hindus with force in the name of Christian charity.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, many Christian Pastors mock Hindu Gods, and practices. Some of them have publicly spoken against yoga. Such things are unacceptable. This is Hindustan and the country belongs to Hindus.

**Nasrani:** What you stated is a radical Sanghi ideology and it is the biggest threat to the national unity of India. Radical Sanghis and political Hinduism preach the doctrine of intolerance which is similar to that of ISIS and any other terrorist group.

**Catholic:** That is why we don't accept Hindu fanatics. These idol worshipers are not good for secularism.

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<sup>29</sup>Opindia. 2020. *Mother Teresa: Here are some accounts of forced conversions, primitive medical practices and suffering.* [online] Available at: <<https://www.opindia.com/2020/09/mother-teresa-forced-conversions-primitive-medical-practices-suffering/>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

**Nasrani:** The problem is not with Sanatana Dharma or Hinduism.<sup>30</sup> The problem is with the new age radicals who misuse Santha Dharma and propagate the idea that India is only for Hindus. Mind you, Hinduism is the world's oldest religion and preaches one of the finest philosophies. It is not a mere religion, but rather a way of life. If Hindus are idol worshipers, then Catholics are the same as well. You venerate statues. Go and count the number of statues of Jesus, Mary and other Saints inside your Church.

**Catholic:** We do not worship idols. We revere them.

**Nasrani:** Even if you deny it, idols are indeed part of your worship unless you remove them completely from your Churches.

**Catholic:** If that is the case, then you guys venerate icons as well.

**Nasrani:** Malankara Nasranis do not venerate or worship statues or icons. Orthodox Christians venerate icons. The influence of Orthodox Christianity has resulted in the creation and veneration of icons in Malankara.

**Sanghi:** We consider every Indian citizen a Hindu.

**Nasrani:** From a wide perspective that is a fine approach. But, once you start associating such concepts with political Hinduism, problems arise. A true Hindu who follows Sanathana Dharma does not propagate radical ideologies. We had a lot of great Hindu leaders who ruled our land with a secular outlook. The great Kings and rulers of this land welcomed foreign communities and their religion and provided space to construct centres of worship. They fostered sensible and healthy relations between the Nasrani

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<sup>30</sup>The oldest religion in the world.

community and Hindus. Do you know that the Sabarimala Temple was reconstructed by Malankara Nasrani?

**Sanghi:** I have heard so. But I also know that few Christian missionaries were involved with the burning of our temple.

**Catholic:** That is nonsense. Christian missionaries won't do that.

**Nasrani:** The burning was an act of cowardliness, even if someone was involved in it. The King of Pandalam<sup>31</sup> chose Kochumman Muthalali, a Nasrani contractor from Central Travancore to rebuild the temple<sup>32</sup>. He passed away due to ill health and the construction was not yet over. It was further carried and completed by his son-in-law, Skaria Kathanar, a Nasrani priest.<sup>33</sup> That was the kind of relationship that existed between Hindus and Nasranis.

**Sanghi:** So on the whole, what are you trying to state?

**Nasrani:** My point is that India is a secular country. This nation is not the property of a particular religious community. We shall not attempt to kill the soul of this country by any means. Every community has a right to exist here, but no community has the right to disrupt peace and national unity. We strive hard to maintain a peaceful relationship with other cultures and nationalities, but no foreigners or institutions have the right to

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<sup>31</sup>R, A., 2018. *Pandalam royals and Ayyappa myths*. [online] OnManorama. Available at: <<https://www.onmanorama.com/news/kerala/2018/10/30/pandalam-royals-and-ayyappa-myths.html>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

<sup>32</sup>Kumar, S., 2011. *SABARIMALA TEMPLE Constructed by Polachirakkal Kochumman Muthalali*. [online] Enadimangalampanchayat.blogspot.com. Available at: <<http://enadimangalampanchayat.blogspot.com/2011/08/?m=1>> [Accessed 20 December 2021].

<sup>33</sup>*ibid.*

interfere in the internal affairs of this country. Those religious communities that have foreign affiliations should respect the sentiments of the rest of the indigenous religious communities in India. The majority religious groups together with the ruling parties should protect the minority groups. More importantly, respect and obey the law of the land.

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## **Chapter IX**

### **A Hindu Church and An Indian Christ**

**George Alexander**

#### **Yeshu Devan and Jesus the Guru, the Indian Christ**

Yeshua of Nazareth, popularly known as Jesus Christ, was a first-century Jewish preacher. He is the key and central figure in the Christian religion. Most Christians worship and revere him as the 'Son of God' or the God-Man.<sup>34</sup> Jesus is also one of three persons in the Holy Trinity. However, many others consider him a Prophet, and an Apocalyptic Jewish preacher who believed in the imminent arrival of the Kingdom of God (Jehova).<sup>35</sup> Some consider him a historic figure whereas others reject his divinity.<sup>36</sup> Few others believe that he was nothing but a myth.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Popovich, J., 2008. *The Man and the God-Man*. USA: Sebastian Press.

<sup>35</sup>World History Encyclopedia. n.d. *Jesus Christ*. [online] Available at: <[https://www.worldhistory.org/Jesus\\_Christ/](https://www.worldhistory.org/Jesus_Christ/)> [Accessed 7 December 2021].

<sup>36</sup>Ehrman, B., 2015. *How Jesus became God*. 1st ed. New York, NY: HarperOne.

<sup>37</sup>Ehrman, B., 2013. *Did Jesus Exist?: The Historical Argument for Jesus of Nazareth*. 1st ed. New York: HarperOne.

'Yeshu Devan' in Malayalam means Lord Jesus, a term employed by Hindus who respectfully revere the Christian God. K P Keshava Menon, the late patriot, idealist and Indian independence activist even authored a book titled 'Yeshu Devan'<sup>38</sup>, which is one of the best-written biographies of Jesus Christ in Malayalam. According to J.P. Schouten, 'People in India form images of Jesus Christ that link up with their own culture. Hindus have given Jesus a place among the teachers and gods of their religion, seeing in his life something of the wisdom and mysticism that is so central to Hinduism'.<sup>39</sup>

There has been a continued interest in the case of Jesus Christ among Indian scholars, philosophers and yogis. In 1820, a book titled *the Precepts of Jesus, the Guide to Peace and Happiness*, by an anonymous author published by Ram Mohan Roy, the father of Raja Ram Mohan Roy.<sup>40</sup> It sparked a public debate since it was one of the first published works on Jesus Christ and the bible by a Hindu in India. This was followed by a profound interest among Indian philosophers and scholars in Jesus. However, on the other side, Christianity and its founder met with tremendous criticism as well. However, Jesus and his teachings influenced and continue to influence many Indians irrespective of their religious affiliations. Also, the role played by countless priests, bishops, pastors, and

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<sup>38</sup>Keshava Menon, K., 2012. *Yeshudevan*. Kozhikode: Mathrubhumi Books.

<sup>39</sup>Schouten, J., 2008. *Jesus As Guru: The Image of Christ Among Hindus and Christians in India (Currents of encounter*. Editions Rodopi B.V.

<sup>40</sup>Roy, R., 1825. *The precepts of Jesus, the guide to peace and happiness*. New-York: B. Bates.

preachers who have toiled to propagate Christianity in different parts of India shall not be ignored.

## Interests

Legends like Sree Ramakrishna Paramahansa,<sup>41</sup> Swami Vivekananda,<sup>42</sup> Mahatma Gandhi,<sup>43</sup> Tagore,<sup>44</sup> and many others have shared their perspective about Christ. However, I am not sure if any of these legends had a particular interest in Malankara Christianity as such. A lot of Hindu monks and scholars have written on Jesus Christ. A noteworthy work was by Paramahansa Yogananda titled *The Second Coming of Christ*.<sup>45</sup> The book depicts the life of Jesus in Chronological order with commentary on passages from the four Gospels. Activists like Pandita Ramabai

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<sup>41</sup>Mathur Pulkit Mathur, P., n.d. *How Sri Ramakrishna Saw Jesus Merge Into His Body – The Spiritual Bee*. [online] Spiritualbee.com. Available at: <<https://www.spiritualbee.com/posts/sri-ramakrishna-vision-of-jesus/>> [Accessed 3 January 2022].

<sup>42</sup>VivekaVani. 2020. *Swami Vivekananda's Quotes On Christianity - VivekaVani*. [online] Available at: <<https://vivekavani.com/swami-vivekananda-quotes-christianity/>> [Accessed 8 December 2021].

<sup>43</sup>Nazareth, P., n.d. *Gandhi, Christ and Christianity | Relevance of Gandhi | Articles on and by Mahatma Gandhi*. [online] Mkgandhi.org. Available at: <[https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/gandhi\\_christ.html](https://www.mkgandhi.org/articles/gandhi_christ.html)> [Accessed 8 December 2021].

<sup>44</sup>Palathunkal, J., 2018. *Christianity and India in the eyes of Tagore - Living in Faith*. [online] Living in Faith. Available at: <<https://www.livingfaith.in/daily-reflection/christianity-and-india-in-the-eyes-of-tagore/>> [Accessed 8 December 2021].

<sup>45</sup>Paramahansa, Y., 2008. *The Second Coming of Christ*. Los Angeles, Calif.: Self-Realization Fellowship.

(Christian social reformer, educator and Bible translator),<sup>46</sup> missionaries like Sadhu Sundar Singh,<sup>47</sup> and many others have played their roles in propagating the message of Christ in India. The list is quite lengthy. The Christian Ashram movement<sup>48</sup> has also played a role in propagating the message of Jesus Christ in various parts of India.

### **Difficulties and Criticisms**

At the same time, there have been several criticisms put forward by Hindu spiritual leaders. A classic example is the Chattampi Swamikal<sup>49</sup> who made several rebuttals of Christianity and opposed missionary conversions through his books.<sup>50</sup> The journey of the Nasrani community and Christians in the Indian Society was not always as easy as we think. They have faced opposition from other communities, and have conflicted with them as well. It is well argued that by the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>46</sup>Bu.edu. n.d. *Ramabai, Dongre Medhavi [Pandita Ramabai Sarasvati] (1858-1922) | History of Missiology*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.bu.edu/missiology/ramabai-dongre-medhavi/>> [Accessed 3 January 2022].

<sup>47</sup>Indian Christian missionary.

<sup>48</sup>Kristukripaashram.com. n.d. *History of Christian Ashrams*. [online] Available at:

<<http://www.kristukripaashram.com/2016/11/28/history-of-christian-ashrams/>> [Accessed 3 January 2022].

<sup>49</sup>Hindu Sage and Social reformer.

<sup>50</sup>Internet Archive. n.d. *Kristumata Chedanam - Chattampi Swamikal - English Translation : Chattampi Swamikal : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive*. [online] Available at: <<https://archive.org/details/KristumataChedanam-ChattampiSwamikal-EnglishTranslation>> [Accessed 9 December 2021].

the Christian community in various parts of India was considered foreign and was attacked on various occasions.<sup>51</sup>

### **Jesus Myths and Legends in India**

A lot of myths, legends and investigations on the life of Jesus in the Indian Sub-continent and a lot have been published on the subject as well.<sup>52</sup> One of the legends/myths connected with Jesus Christ in India is that one of the three biblical Magi (wise men) was from India.<sup>53</sup> The other is more famous, which is believed and propagated by the Ahmadiyya<sup>54</sup> sect. They believe that Jesus did not die on the cross, rather he moved to Kashmir and died a natural death and was buried in *Roza Bal* in Srinagar, Kashmir.<sup>55</sup> However, the general public and scholars have approached these legends with curiosity and scepticism alike.

However, the Christian God is not at all a point of interest among radical non-Christian groups as they keep bashing

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<sup>51</sup>Hertzke, A. and Shah, T., 2016. *Christianity and Freedom: Volume 2, Contemporary Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>52</sup>Prophet, E., 2008. *The Lost Years of Jesus*. 1st ed. Delhi: Jaico Publishing House.

<sup>53</sup>Dhondy, F., 2018. *Of the Magi, high priests, kings... and how India got its 'boxwallas'*. [online] Deccan Chronicle. Available at: <<https://www.deccanchronicle.com/opinion/op-ed/291218/of-the-magi-high-priests-kings-and-how-india-got-its-boxwallas.html>> [Accessed 29 January 2022].

<sup>54</sup>Ahmadiyya Muslim Jama'at, is an Islamic revival or messianic movement founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1889 in Punjab, British India.

<sup>55</sup>Nabi Khayal, G., 2015. *Ahmediyas believe Jesus Christ is buried in Rauza Bal, Kashmir*. [online] India Today. Available at: <<https://www.indiatoday.in/magazine/religion/story/19770615-ahmediyas-believe-jesus-christ-is-buried-in-rauza-bal-kashmir-823785-2014-08-19>> [Accessed 29 January 2022].



Christians as intruders into the Hindu land.<sup>56</sup> It is important to understand that Jesus is not the invader here but those colonial intruders who invaded several lands in the name of Jesus. Nevertheless, in the name of the Son of God, the Western Colonial missionaries colonised the indigenous Nasrani Christians in Malankara. Western Christian Church, particularly Roman Catholics 'ravaged' the gospel of Christ not only in India but all over the world.

### **The Christian Rage**

The word of God was not only spread through peaceful means but also through colonial invasion, murder, torture, force, war and by bringing purposeful and irrecoverable damages to indigenous culture.<sup>57</sup> The hierarchy of Roman Churches, their supporters, imperial crowns, clergies, and missionaries was part of such unfortunate means.<sup>58</sup> By this, I do not mean all Christian Missions/Missionaries are villains. A lot of Christian missionaries

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<sup>56</sup>Stolicker, B., 2016. *India's Christians told to leave by 2021 - Mission Network News*. [online] Mission Network News. Available at: <<https://www.mnnonline.org/news/indias-christians-told-to-leave-by-2021/>> [Accessed 8 December 2021].

<sup>57</sup>International, S., 2015. *Pope apologizes for Catholic church's crimes against indigenous peoples*. [online] Survivalinternational.org. Available at: <<https://www.survivalinternational.org/news/10845>> [Accessed 8 December 2021].

<sup>58</sup>Radio, C., 2016. *500 years ago: Pope gives permission to conquer Indigenous people | CBC Radio*. [online] CBC. Available at: <<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/tapestry/reclaiming-indigenous-spirituality-1.3636858/500-years-ago-pope-gives-permission-to-conquer-indigenous-people-1.3637062>> [Accessed 8 December 2021].

around the world have been toiling for centuries to uplift communities from superstitions, atrocities and to provide them with a better life.<sup>59</sup> However, the question remains i.e. what is the ultimate aim of a Missionary? Is it service or acquiring souls for Christ? Take the case of Kerala for example. The rise of new generation Churches (Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and non-denominational groups) has severely affected Malankara Church and other episcopal Churches. They have converted a large number of faithful from Orthodox, Catholic, Marthoma and Anglican Churches.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, they show no respect for the practices, culture and traditions of any religion and have also converted several Hindus<sup>61</sup>. This has created yet another crisis for mainstream Churches in Kerala as several Hindu groups tend to criticise Christian Churches in general for the action of certain sectarian groups.

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<sup>59</sup>Luckhurst, T., 2018. *John Allen Chau: Do missionaries help or harm?*. [online] BBC News. Available at: <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-46336355>> [Accessed 8 December 2021].

<sup>60</sup>Frederiks, M. and Nagy, D., 2020. *World Christianity*. Netherlands: Brill.

<sup>61</sup>Lakshman, A., 2010. *New generation churches 'poach devotees' in Kerala*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.rediff.com/news/report/new-generation-churches-poach-devotees-kerala/20101123.htm>> [Accessed 8 December 2021].

## **Christian Persecution**

On the contrary, in the modern world, Christian Persecution is at its highest. A large number of Christians get killed for their faith in many parts of the world.<sup>62</sup> The situation is not different in India as well. Attacks on Christians, Churches and other places of worship have risen dramatically.<sup>63</sup> In 2021 alone more than 300 attacks were made against Christians in India.<sup>64</sup> As of 2022, India ranks 10th among the list of countries where Christians are heavily persecuted.<sup>65</sup>

**“The community (Malankara Nasrani) was historically united in leadership and liturgy and was undifferentiated in many ways with the Hindu brethren they were living with, but later due to many foreign migrations and invasions it has been split into several different Church denominations and traditions” – Prof. Cincy Mariamma Thomas.<sup>66</sup>**

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<sup>62</sup>Brock, T., 2020. *50 most dangerous countries to be Christian revealed*. [online] CHVN Radio. Available at: <<https://chvnradio.com/articles/50-most-dangerous-countries-to-be-christian-revealed>> [Accessed 8 December 2021].

<sup>63</sup>Jafri, A. and Madhav, N., 2021. *Why India is witnessing spike in attacks on Christians, churches*. [online] Aljazeera.com. Available at: <<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/12/2/india-christians-church-hindu-groups-bjp-conversion>> [Accessed 8 December 2021].

<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup>Open Doors USA. n.d. World Watch List | Persecution in India | Open Doors USA. [online] Available at: <<https://www.opendoorsusa.org/christian-persecution/world-watch-list/india/>> [Accessed 4 February 2022].

<sup>66</sup>Thomas, C., n.d. *THE ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY OF INDIA*. [online] Elib.bsu.by. Available at: <<https://elib.bsu.by/bitstream/123456789/222277/1/378-382.pdf>> [Accessed 7 December 2021].

## **Hindu-Nasrani Convergence**

Hindus in Kerala have shown great reverence towards traditional Churches. Many of them take part in festival celebrations of saints and welcome Christian religious processions (Perunnal)<sup>67</sup> with great respect. They also visit churches to pray and to make offerings to the Christian God. There also exist several cordial traditions between several Nasrani Churches and temples. Nasrani Priests do not shy away from quoting Hindu philosophers in their sermons.

In the past, the Hindu rulers of Kerala provided Malankara Church with adequate space to construct parish Churches. Some examples are St George Church, Kanakapalam in Erumely, Thumpamon Church,<sup>68</sup> Kalllooppara Church<sup>69</sup> etc. This doesn't mean that Nasranis never faced opposition from Hindus. There were oppositions by various groups in several instances. An example is the local opposition faced during the construction of Paliakkara Church in Thiruvalla.<sup>70</sup> However, Rani Sethu Lakshmi

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<sup>67</sup>Feast day of a Saint in whose name the parish Churches has been established.

<sup>68</sup>Mathew Medayil, K., 2000. *Thumpamon Devalayam Oru Charithravalokanam*. Thumpamon: Thumpamon Orthodox Cathedral.

<sup>69</sup>Kalloopparapally.com. n.d. *Church History*. [online] Available at: <[https://kalloopparapally.com/new\\_church\\_history.html](https://kalloopparapally.com/new_church_history.html)> [Accessed 30 December 2021].

<sup>70</sup>Paliakkarachurch.blogspot.com. 2006. History of Paliakkara St.George Church, Tiruvalla. [online] Available at: <[http://paliakkarachurch.blogspot.com/2006/02/history-of-paliakkara-stgeorge-church\\_18.html?m=1](http://paliakkarachurch.blogspot.com/2006/02/history-of-paliakkara-stgeorge-church_18.html?m=1)> [Accessed 30 December 2021].

Bhai, the regent ruler of the State of Travancore aided the construction of the Church.<sup>71</sup>

A classic example of Hindu-Nasranis convergence in Kerala is St. Matthias Church (established in the 18th century), which is located in Kunnankulam, in the Thrissur district of Kerala. This Church is also known as Ambala Palli (temple Church).<sup>72</sup> History asserts that one of the temples was converted into the present Church during the reign of Shakthan Thampuran (1751–1805).<sup>73</sup> Kunnankulam is often hailed as an example of religious harmony and coexistence in Kerala as well.<sup>74</sup>

There are also a few practices that shall be considered as examples of religious caste-based coexistence in Kerala. Two examples are (1) Kurishupally Kottayam<sup>75</sup> and Thirunakkara temple:<sup>76</sup> As part of the Devaprasanam,<sup>77</sup> the office bearers of the Thirunakkara Temple donate oil to Kottayam Kurishupally every year during the temple feast. (2) Nadamel Church<sup>78</sup> and Royals of

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<sup>71</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup>Minds360, A., 2021. *St. Matthias' Church | South Bazar Church | Ambala palli | Kunnankulam | Reframed.* [online] Youtube.com. Available at: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZajKu-LzR2o>> [Accessed 30 December 2021].

<sup>73</sup> Rama Varma IX (Shakthan Thampuran) was the ruler of the Kingdom of Cochin.

<sup>74</sup>Alchetron.com. n.d. *Kunnankulam.* [online] Available at: <<https://alchetron.com/Kunnankulam>> [Accessed 30 December 2021].

<sup>75</sup>A 15th-Century Church located in Kottayam, Kerala, India.

<sup>76</sup>A 500 year old Temple located in the heart of Kottayam City in India.

<sup>77</sup>An astrological ritual carried out to interpret the will of the gods.

<sup>78</sup>A 12-th Century Church located in Tripunithura, India.

Cochin: There exists a ceremony in which the Kathanar of this Church carry *Kuthu Vilakku*<sup>79</sup> to the Palace of the Raja of Cochin for the *Ezhunnallathu* ceremony. In response, the Raja hands over a Kizhi to the Kathanar as a gesture. The Royal family also makes an offering called *sharkara thattu veypu* whenever a new King ascends to the throne.<sup>80</sup> There exist many similar or different localised regional practices in Kerala.

Mutual welcome provided to processions from Churches and temples also remains a common gesture of religious co-existence in the State. Nevertheless, these localised and regional practices may not have a long-standing history of ancient origin. However, such practices play an important role in fostering caste and religious harmony in the Kerala Society. Regardless of the past or present scenarios of harmony, it seems that such days are slowly fading away and Nasranis and other communities are living in a society where minorities, especially Christians are threatened their existence by various extremist religious and political groups.

There are Christians how to think that it is a sin to celebrate or take part in Hindu festivals or listen to Hindu scriptures and religious stories. My late paternal grandmother used to recite stories from Ramayana and Bahabarthha alongside stories from the Bible and other Christian texts. I grew up hearing stories of Jesus of Nazareth, Rama, Krishna, Pandavas and Kauravas alike. I was taught to respect other religions and cherish their stories as well.

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<sup>79</sup>A traditional lamp made of brass.

<sup>80</sup>Syriacchristianity.info. n.d. *Nadamel St.Mary's Jacobite Syrian Church*. [online] Available at: <<http://syriacchristianity.info/ch/NadamelChurch.htm>> [Accessed 14 January 2022].

I wholeheartedly enjoyed stories from Hindu scriptures. Such things never altered my faith.

### **The Hindu Church of India**

It is not easy to define a Hindu or Hinduism even though countless theories have been produced on the same. Hindus in a general sense denote people beyond the river Sindu (Indus).<sup>81</sup> Their religion, to be more specific comprises the beliefs or the way of life followed by Hindus is called Hinduism, which is also known as Sanatana Dharma.<sup>82</sup> Interestingly, Hinduism is the oldest of all major world religions.<sup>83</sup> The present RSS supremo Mohan Bhagwat considers every Indian as part of the Hindu Society.<sup>84</sup> According to him, a Hindu is a person who considered India his or her motherland, worshipped it, and loved its land and water.<sup>85</sup>

The Malankara Nasrani Church, the rightful Church of India is very much Hindu and Dravidian in its cultural and its lost religious practices. In the Malankara context, Nasranis were already followers of Jesus much ahead of the arrival of foreign Christianity. The life of Malankara Nasranis was not different from

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<sup>81</sup>Tharoor, S., 2018. *Why I am a Hindu*. 1st ed. New Delhi: Aleph Book Company.

<sup>82</sup>Santhana Dharma means Eternal truths.

<sup>83</sup>Penney, S., 1988. *Sikhism*. G.B.: Heinemann.

<sup>84</sup>The Hindu. 2019. *130 crore Indians are Hindu society: Mohan Bhagwat*. [online] Available at:

<<https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/130-crore-indians-are-hindu-society-mohan-bhagwat/article30397898.ece>>

[Accessed 27 December 2021].

<sup>85</sup>*ibid.*

that of their Hindu brethren.<sup>86</sup> Malankara Nasranis developed Indian religious practices, far away from the influences of the Western/Roman system. Neither Syriac nor Latin Churches had the right to say that what was practised by Malankara Nasranis was heresy. Sadly, Nasrani leadership compromised the value of what they practised and submitted themselves to Syriac and Latin Christianity. There was no need for the so-called 'regularization' of the Episcopate of Marthoma I by Abdul Jaleel Mar Gregorious of Jerusalem.<sup>87</sup> It was because the Nasrani leadership could not understand the value and power of their indigenous priesthood. Such a submission marked the beginning of the hectic Syriacisation process of the Malankara Church. Irrespective of the heavy Syriac, Latin and Western Christian influences, Malankara Nasranis continue to maintain the Dravidian essence that has been moulded with Judeo influences and indigenous Dravidian practices which is quite clear from the below table.

### **Practices, Systems Peculiarities and Symbols of the Malankara Nasrani Caste (Jathi) <sup>88</sup>**

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<sup>86</sup>Gilman, I. and Klimkeit, H., 1999. *Christians in Asia before 1500*. 1st ed. London: Routledge.

<sup>87</sup>Gedsh.bethmardutho.org. n.d. *Malankara Syriac Orthodox Church*. [online] Available at: <<https://gedsh.bethmardutho.org/Malankara-Syriac-Orthodox-Church>> [Accessed 9 December 2021].

<sup>88</sup>These are practices associated with the socio-political and religious life of Malankara Nasranis. A number of scholars and historians have mentioned the same in their works. Some are well documented, whereas others remain a part of the everyday life of Nasranis.



<b>SL No:</b>	<b>Traditional Socio-Cultural, Religious Practices, peculiarities, systems and Symbols of Malankara Nasranis</b>	<b>Present Situation</b>
1.	Thalikettu (groom tying a knot over the bride's neck during the wedding ceremony)	Still in practice
2.	Ezhuthiniruthu <sup>89</sup>	Still in practice
3.	Panam Vekkal burial practices	Still in practice
4.	Use of Nilavilakku (lamp) and oil in Church and at home. Applying oil from Nilavilakku on the forehead and neck	Still in practice
5.	Praying in a sitting posture	Still in practice at Nasrani homes
6.	Observing Rahukalam <sup>90</sup>	Some Nasranis still observe the same
7.	Erection and use of Kodimaram <sup>91</sup> at parish Churches	Still in practice

<sup>89</sup> A ritual that marks the formal introduction of toddlers to writing and knowledge.

<sup>90</sup>Refers to inauspicious time span (every day) which is not considered favourable to start a new activity.

<sup>91</sup>A flagstaff that is commonly found in the Hindu temples and Nasrani Churches across South India.

8.	Dravidian style Church Architecture	Still in practice with Latin/modern/Byzantine architectural influences
9.	Dakshina Kodukkal <sup>92</sup>	Still in practice
10.	Kosher Food (refraining from the consumption of shark, whip ray, swine etc)	Not strictly followed
11.	Usage of drums, chenda melam <sup>93</sup> , Muthukuda <sup>94</sup> , and other types of equipment for Perunnal (festival/perunnal procession) and the use of firecrackers	Still in practice
12.	The naming of children with Judeo Christian and Dravidian names	Not strictly followed
13	Appointing Deshathu Pattakkar <sup>95</sup> to their respective parishes	No more in practice

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<sup>92</sup>A ceremony in which Bride and groom touch the feet and seek blessing from elders and teachers before leaving for the wedding.

<sup>93</sup>Percussion using Chenda (instrument).

<sup>94</sup>Royal umbrellas.

<sup>95</sup>Priest used to serve in their own parishes

14.	Learning Kalaripayattu <sup>96</sup> as a Martial Arts and ownership of Kalaripayattu training centers	No more in practice
15.	Ear piercing by Nasrani men	No more in practice
16.	Marriage of Priests	Still practised Malankara Nasranis. Not by Romo-Syrians (Uniates)
17.	Shower and abstain from consuming beef before entering the Church	Cleaning oneself before entering the Church is in practice. However, abstaining from the consumption of beef is not in practice. Beef is served for various functions within the Church premises
18.	Use of tobacco and alcohol during marriage ceremonies	Not strictly followed
19.	Nasranis were excellent traders and businessmen.	There are many successful Nasrani

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<sup>96</sup>An Indian martial art and fighting style that originated in Kerala.

		traders and business gadgets
20.	Sindoor <sup>97</sup> wore by married Nasrani women	In general, no more in practice. However, Some women still use Sindoor
21.	Offering obsequies for the souls of the dead ancestors	Still in practice. However, reformed Nasranis abstain from such rites
22.	Vestments of Nasrani Priests	At present, it is a mix of Latin, Syriac and Anglican styles
23.	Simple interiors (with a Bible and a Cross) of the Church	Changed with the arrival of Syriac and Latin Christianity
24.	Confession to priests	Introduced by the Portuguese and still in practice
25.	The Nasrani Army as a protection unit of the Malankara Mooppan/Metropolitan	No more in existence

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<sup>97</sup>A traditional cosmetic powder worn by married women.

26.	Nasrani homes as the place of the wedding ceremony	No more in practice. Weddings take place inside parish Churches
27.	Presence of Hindus inside the Church	No more in practice. However many Hindus take part in Church festivals
28.	Celebration of non-Christian festivals like Onam, <sup>98</sup> Vishu <sup>99</sup> and others. Accepting vishu kaineettam <sup>100</sup>	Generally, Nasranis celebrate/take part in non-Christian festivals. Vishu kaineettam is still in practice
29.	Kaineettam <sup>101</sup> on the day of the Vishu festival	Still in practice
30.	Pesaha night rituals of Nasranis in preparing Kalathappam unleavened bread on the day of Passover. Preparing and serving Kalathappam as an	Still in practice

<sup>98</sup>The annual Hindu harvest festival that is celebrated in Kerala.

<sup>99</sup>A Hindu festival celebrated in some parts of South India.

<sup>100</sup>The hanel given to children by elders during Vishu festival.

<sup>101</sup> A is a gift given on Vishu day (usually money).

	exclusive family Tradition, with Pesaha Appam and Milk	
31.	Pela Kuli	No more in practice
32.	Sthanam Nokkal (identifying the right place) for the construction of the building	Still in practice to a greater extent
33.	Beliefs in Horoscope (Nalunokkal)	Some Nasranis still adhere to such practices.
34.	Serving Kanji and Payar (rice gruel, peas, papad and pickle)on Good Friday in earthen pots. However, not a long-standing Tradition	Still in practice. Serving style and food items may vary according to each locality
35.	Usage of appellations like Mooppan, Moopachen, and Kathanar	The appellation Mooppan or Malankara Mooppan is under revival. 'Moopachan' and 'Kathanar' are in use at least in some places
36.	Use of Kindi and Montha (traditional bronze vessels) to wash hands and feet before entering the Church	No more in practice

37.	Removing footwear before entering the Church	Still in practice
38.	Preparation of Kallappam and other unique Nasrani cuisines	Still in practice
39.	Folding the edge of the plantain leaf while serving food on special occasions	Still in practice
40.	Sitting on a mat on the floor to consume food	No more in practice
41.	Use of Chattayum Mundum by Nasrani women	Still in use by elderly Nasrani women
42.	Access inside Hindu Temples and involved with festivals and other events	Has undergone drastic changes. Many temples are no more accessible to Nasranis and non-Hindus
43.	Mutual participation by Nasranis and Hindus in each other's festival	This practice has undergone a lot of changes. However, mutual participation exist
44.	Use of Kudumi hairstyle (man bun) and ear-piercing by Nasrani men	No more in practice
45.	Burial of the dead within the premises of Nasrani homes	No more in practice.

		Cemeteries are in use
46.	Nasrani Sthambam (Open air cross)	Erected in front of certain parish Churches
47.	Margam Kali <sup>102</sup> and Parichamuttu Kali (mostly developed as a later Tradition)	In practice as a revived cultural event
48.	Pennukanal (Bride viewing) ceremony	Still in practice
49.	Boiling milk or Paalu Kaachu on the day of the housewarming	Still in practice
50.	Refraining from the use of wooden benches inside the Church	Still in practice. However, several Romo-Syrian parishes have wooden benches
51.	Feeding newborn babies with a mix of honey, milk, gold powder and vayampu (herb)	Still in practice
52.	'Neyyappam' <sup>103</sup> or 'Unniappam' <sup>104</sup> , an integral part of the food prepared on	Still in practice

<sup>102</sup>Indian round dance.

<sup>103</sup>Rice-based sweet fritter prepared in ghee.

<sup>104</sup>A sweet snack made from rice, jaggery, banana, roasted coconut pieces, roasted sesame seeds, ghee and cardamom powder fried in oil



	the 40 <sup>th</sup> day of the memorial service	
53.	Choroonu <sup>105</sup> ceremony, in which babies are fed rice for the first time	Still in practice
54.	Aranjanam Kettal <sup>106</sup> on the 28 <sup>th</sup> day after the birth of a child	Still in practice
55.	Oozhiyamkuth (developed as a later Tradition in Central Travancore)	Not in practice
56.	Manthrakodi <sup>107</sup> (Saree) laid on Nasrani bride gifted by the groom during the wedding ceremony which is equal to Pudava Kodukkal <sup>108</sup> in Hindu wedding ceremonies	Still in practice
57.	Women wearing a pottu or a bindi	Not strictly in practice
58.	Bride entering into groom's house for the first time holding nilavilakku and with right foot after the wedding	Still in practice

<sup>105</sup> First rice eating ceremony of a child.

<sup>106</sup>A ceremony of tying a girdle-like ornament tied around the waist on the 28th day after birth of the child.

<sup>107</sup>Bridal saree as a gift from husband.

<sup>108</sup>An important part in the Hindu marriage in Kerala. A ritual in which the groom presents the Pudava to the bride.

59.	Observance of Jewish Sabbath	No more in practice
60.	Wearing Mekka Mothiram earring on upper earlobes by Nasrani Women	No more a usual practice
62.	Greeting guests by putting a mark on the forehead	No more in practice
63.	Vayaru Kanal chadangu <sup>109</sup> and Vilichondupokal chadangu <sup>110</sup>	Still in practice
64.	Placing a white cloth on the bed after the demise of a person and refraining from consuming non-veg food for forty days	Still in practice
65.	Madhuras Veppu <sup>111</sup>	Still in practice
66.	Marriage decision by the eldest male member of the family	No more in practice. However, some Patriarchal dominated families adhere to such decisions

<sup>109</sup> A ceremony in which the relatives visit the pregnant woman with sweets and gifts.

<sup>110</sup> A pregnant woman is taken to her house for delivery.

<sup>111</sup> A pre-wedding ceremony held at the house of bride and groom.

67.	The practice of Srardham, <sup>112</sup> Pulakuli <sup>113</sup> and Chatham <sup>114</sup> regarding the death and funeral of a person	Still in practice. However, different terminologies are employed to denote such practices
68.	Nasranis as patrons and sponsors of temple festivals.	No more in practice. Rare cases may exist
69.	Nasrani women covering their heads during worship	Still in practice
70.	Sleeping with head eastwards and feet southwards.	Not strictly in practice
71.	Usage of Nasrani Churches as Dharmashalas or Inn	No more in practice
72.	Bringing the sick to the Church towards the end of their life	No more in practice
73.	Usage of Malankara Nasrani terminologies such as Perunnal, Yeshu, Rasa etc	Still in usage
73.	Exoticism, divination, and dream interpretation	No more in practice. However, Thozhiyoor

<sup>112</sup>The ceremony of paying homage to one's ancestors.

<sup>113</sup>Funeral ablution.

<sup>114</sup>Annual remembrance of the deceased.

		Nasranis practise Exoticism
74.	Nasrani Kathanars invited to 'purify' objects 'polluted' by lower castes by touching	No more in practice
75.	Marriage ceremony extending up to four days	No more in practice
76.	The usage of Bhandaram <sup>115</sup> which is equivalent to donation boxes in Hindu temples	Prevalent in few Nasrani Churches
77.	Drawing a circle with rice around the newly wed couple	No more in practice
78.	Taking a thread out of the cloth before cutting it	Still in practice (case to case basis)
79.	Practise of marrying at an early age	No more in practice
80.	Beliefs in spirit and demonic possessions	Depends on case to case basis
81.	Malankara Nasranis did not practise confirmation, reconciliation, baptism and unction	All of these are in practice today
82.	Burial of the dead in homestead and not always in Church	Dead are buried in Cemeteries

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<sup>115</sup> Offertory box.

83.	Simony was practised among Nasrani Kathanars	No more in practice
84.	Nasranis address God as 'Thampuran' <sup>116</sup>	Still in usage
85.	Polygamy was practised by Nasranis <sup>117</sup>	No more in practice
86.	Nasrani Kathanars engaged in secular jobs and trade	Case to case basis. Some Kathanars involve in secular jobs
87.	Usage of terms like Manavalan and Manavatti <sup>118</sup>	Still in usage
88.	Malankara Nasranis rarely consumed meat. They had a more vegetarian diet	Almost everyone consumes meat
89.	Women were not allowed to visit Churches after childbirth for forty days	Still in practice
90.	Malankara Nasrani Married women always wore Thali <sup>119</sup>	Still in practice

<sup>116</sup>Meaning God. It also the term is used to address a King or a person who has a high status in a caste-based society.

<sup>117</sup>Thomas, M., 2005. *The Identity Question of Malankara Nazaranies; A Study Based on 'Niranam Grandhavari'*. Ph.D. Mahatma Gandhi University.

<sup>118</sup>Manavalam means Bride Groom and Manvatti means Bride.

<sup>119</sup>A gold thread worn by brides post-wedding in the Southern part of India.

91.	Taking two grains back while measuring grains in unit	Still in practice (case to case basis)
92.	The Last Will was always given to Son or a male relative	Still in practice with changes
93.	Wooden carvings of birds and animals inside the Church	Some of the old parish Churches still retain them
94.	Engaged in ceremonial ablutions to remove pollution caused by birth, death and life crisis events	No more in practice
95.	Offering and contributions made by Nasranis in temple festivals were duly accepted	Case to case basis and not a general practice.
96.	The sight of cows, lighted lamps, women carrying a pot of water, etc is considered a lucky sign. To see a widow or woman without ornament is considered bad	Still in practice (case to case basis)
97.	The casting of the horoscope of a newborn baby	Still in practice (case to case basis)
98.	Dakshina, Kaineettam were given in odd numbers	Still in practice
99.	Preparing the thread for tying the Minnu by extracting three threads from Manthrakodi	Still in practice

100.	Issuing Deshathukuri <sup>120</sup> as part of Nasrani wedding	Still in practice
101.	'Vilichu Chollu' <sup>121</sup> and money offered to the Parish church as a donation for the wedding.	Still in practice

I have listed several indigenous Dravidian Hindu and unique practices or specialities of Malankara Nasranis in the preceding table. It is also important to note that there are also differences between Vaddakan and Thekkan Nasranis in their cultural practices. For example, some of the Nasrani practices in Kunnankulam may not be applicable or practised by Malankara Nasranis living in Chengannur or Mavelikkara. The table is not limited to practices alone, but it also contains other specialities as well. I have categorically mentioned them for readers to understand that these practices do not have any connection with Syriac, Latin or Anglican Christianity. If Malankara Church was just an offshoot of Syriac Christianity, then these practices should have been least important in the life of Nasranis, somehow at least! Some of the above-mentioned Nasrani practices have evolved and some are part and parcel of their culture.

Considering the origin, historical development, culture, and tradition, we may state that Malankara Nasranis belong to a Hindu Church and they worship an Indian Christ.

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<sup>120</sup> A document issued by the respective parishes of the bride and groom that consist details of the couple.

<sup>121</sup> An announcement made in the Parish Church by the priest regarding the proposed wedding to ensure that there is no objection to the same in the immediate community.

**“Malankara Nasranis need to break off the Syrian and Latin hegemony that has been imposed on their shoulders..... They need to breathe free...” - the Author.**

### **Nasrani Pride? Do they need it?**

Do Nasrais possess pride? Do they need pride because they are a peculiar high caste community? Are they a peculiar high caste community? Do they need to place their so-called aristocracy over humanity? Nasranis love to consider them 'Royal Christians' of this land. However, in reality, everything was not royal about Nasranis in the past.

The Nasrani community equally suffered just like any other caste based-communities. Relations with other religious communities were not smooth always. They encountered socio-economic and political struggles, irrespective of the so-called privileges they enjoyed. There are also arguments that Nasranis or the Christian communities in Kerala were not a part of any aristocracy until the arrival of the Portuguese.<sup>122</sup> In reality, there is no need for pride or to think that Nasranis are above other Christian communities in India. They are not below anyone as well. At the same time, Nasarnis need to defend their unique tradition, culture and heritage. There is no room for unwanted pride. Moreover, unlike the Knanaya community, Malankara Nasranis do not find unwanted pride in 'pureblood' theory and do not engage

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<sup>122</sup>Venkateswaran, D., 2018. *Syrian Christians were not part of aristocracy until Europeans' arrival; St Thomas tradition, a hoax.* [online] Available at: <<https://indusscrolls.com/syrian-christians-were-not-part-of-aristocracy-until-europeans-arrival-st-thomas-tradition-a-hoax/>> [Accessed 4 February 2022].



in such practices. Nasranis live in a secular society and they enter into marital relations with other communities as well. However, some practices have not yet changed. They do not prefer to enter into marital relations with Latin Catholics. Even Romo Syrians (Uniate Catholics) also refrain from entering into marital relations with the Latins even though all of them belong to the same Catholic Church. Malankara Nasranis in general are hesitant to enter into marital relations with Uniate Catholics as well. However, such an approach is changing as several youngsters choose to find their partners regardless of religious denominational differences. There is no need to polish the past nor manipulate it to propagate that Nasranis or the Christian community in Malankara was exceptional in all aspects. Stories about the Villarvattom Kingdom, and its ruler King Thoma is used to glorify the past of the Kerala Christian community.<sup>123</sup> What I mean is that the Nasrani community shall propagate realistic history and accept the realities of the past instead of clinging to cooked-up stories.

“Unlike a drop of water which loses its identity when it joins the ocean, man does not lose his being in the society in which he lives. Man's life is independent. He is born not for the development

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<sup>123</sup>It has been observed that Syro Malabar Catholics are at the forefront of propagating such stories. Their sources state that King Thoma of Villarvattom was the head of Nasranis as they had the privilege to elect their own ruler and that he is buried at the Synod of Diamper Church. Villarvattom, the so-called Christian Kingdom (which later became a part of the Kingdom of Kochi) is yet another story propagated among Nasranis. Villarvattom is considered as the Kingdom of Thoma I. However, neither King Thoma nor Villarvattom has received any sort of archaeological attestation. I have discussed the same in my book 'Malankara Nasrani Research Papers'.

of the society alone, but the development of his self".<sup>124</sup> These are the words of Dr B R Ambedkar.<sup>125</sup> Likewise, Malankara Nasranis need to understand that their identity matters and it does not get lost. However, no one shall help them if they immerse their identity in some foreign traditions. Hence, they shall not become blind prey to the Syriac Traditions and the Roman Church Traditions. It seems they cannot survive without the Syriac-Latin connection. Nasranis need to focus on what they retain and what they possess and invest in self-development instead of getting mesmerised in Syriac and Latin stories. This doesn't mean that they need to hate Syriac or Latin traditions, as they have become a part of their ecclesiastical life. Nasranis need to take an enormous effort to reinvent their true identity. **Saying this I am proud to say that I am a Hindu Christian, a Malankara Nasrani of India, rather than a Syrian Christian.**

### **What Do Malankara Nasranis Need to Be Proud About?**

Nasranis need to focus on what they retain as their true assets, as they are rich in culture and traditions of their indigenous origin. Hence, they do not require a certificate from Edessa, Antioch or Rome. Sadly many Church leaders, faithful, scholars and Church historians seem more interested to get an

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<sup>124</sup>The Orwell Foundation. n.d. *A Million Drops of Water - Jamie Toeg* | *The Orwell Foundation*. [online] Available at: <<https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-youth-prize/2018-youth-prize/previous-winners-youth/2017-winners-2/a-million-drops-of-water-jamie-toeg/>> [Accessed 3 February 2022].

<sup>125</sup>Indian jurist, economist, and social reformer.

attestation from Antioch or Rome for their tradition and existence in Malankara. It is high time to rethink their priorities.

Malankara Nasranis need not worry about Edessa, Seleucia-Ctesiphon, Antioch, Rome or Canterbury. Over the centuries, there have been a lot of visitors from these places to Malankara. Nasranis welcomed them and provided the space. Some of the visitors established their faith and colonies on the soil of Malankara. There is no denial of the encounter, cooperation, or exchange between the Malankara Church and East/West Syriac and Latin Churches. These are part of history and it is also a fact that Malankara Church has been heavily influenced by the Syriacs and to a great extent by the Latin Church. However, I vehemently oppose the idea that Malankara Nasranis remain under the umbrella of Syriac or Latin Christian identity. Malankara Nasranis need not adhere to a colonial or Western leadership, however, they need to maintain cordial relations with everyone. Nasranis need to be proud of their indigenous identity, origin and development, cultural heritage and the uniqueness they possess over the so-called Syriac heritage and traditions. Nothing shall be placed above their unique Judeo-Dravidian cultural heritage, indigenous cultural practices and the unique pre-proto orthodox religious system where they remain as one of the early followers of Yeshua of Nazareth.

We may derive certain conclusions based on the discussions made in the book. However, I refrain from such an attempt. I leave it to my readers to make their derivations and conclusions.

**Malankara Church and Nasranis will attain ultimate 'salvation' only when they come out of the vicious**

**ecclesiastical and social circles created by the Syriac and Latin Churches - The Author.**

When I talk about the importance of the past, cultural practices, traditions, and decoloniality, at least some people tend to criticize it as an attempt to drive the Nasrani community back to the 1st century. That is not the idea here, but this thesis is a reminder for Nasranis to preserve their identity, uphold their freedom, successfully encounter the challenges and march forward for a better tomorrow.

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