

Ikkako Kathanar - the forgotten martyr

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Introduction

Centuries before, an incident shook both the land of Malabar and the Saint Thomas Christian community; the murder of one of their priests, Ikkako Kathanar, by European missionaries at the church in Verapoly (Varappuzha).

This incident in 1771 AD resulted in long ramification in the turbulent history of the ancient community of Saint Thomas Christians whose existence was threatened by the colonisation of the Malabar Coast of south-west India by European powers beginning with the Portuguese.

History sets in

The Saint Thomas Christians, locally known as Mar Thoma Nasranis, Suriyani Nasranis, Syrian Christians or simply Nasranis trace their origin to the missionary works of Saint Thomas the Apostle, who in Aramaic (East-Syriac) is known as Mar Thoma Sleeha. This community of Christians that existed in many parts of India were eventually restricted to the south-west Malabar Coast of India, encompassing the modern state of Kerala and nearby regions. They followed the ancient Aramaic (East-Syriac) tradition in worship and Aramaic was their liturgical language. Aramaic was the language of Jesus Christ and His disciples as well. The Nasranis were profoundly attached to the Aramaic (East-Syriac) language and their Aramaic heritage. [1][2][3]

The Nasranis were a fiercely independent community under its head who was known as the Archdeacon (Jathikku Karthavyan) and he held the title of 'Archdeacon and Gate of All India'. The Archdeacon also commandeered an army of his own. Each church had its own church assembly consisting of priests and laymen. The Archdeacon was guided by a General Assembly, known as the Palli-Yogam, consisting of both priests and laymen representing all churches. European missionaries marvelled at this and called the community as a Christian Republic. [4]

Geographically, the Nasranis were located in territories ruled by local Hindu kings and vassals and ecclesiastically they were part of the (East-Syriac) Church of the East which sent Bishops from Babylon and Persia. The bishops for the most part exercised the power of order only and the Nasranis lived a peaceful community life for centuries this way.

But things were about to change for them soon with the advent of the Portuguese Vasco da Gama in 1498.

The Portuguese who arrived in the dawn of the 16th century attempted to forcefully westernise the Nasrani community and bring them under their political and ecclesiastical authority.

These attempts culminated in the so-called Synod at Diamper (Udayamperoor) in 1599 and the Nasranis were placed under the authority of the Portuguese Padroado. The Padroado was an agreement between the kingdom of Portugal and the Roman Catholic Church according to which Rome delegated the administration of local churches to the kingdom (later republic) of Portugal. The king (or queen) of Portugal appointed bishops for regions under their influence. Mostly the Padroado was made up of Jesuits.

Though the Nasranis longed to have bishops of their own tradition, the Portuguese colonial authorities prevented their arrival from Babylon and also curtailed the authority of the Archdeacon and the General Assembly.

The Nasranis revolted in 1653 at Mattanchery, Cochin (Kochi) and this revolt resulted in the 'Coonan Cross oath' against the local Portuguese Jesuit bishop.

In response to the revolt, the Pope sent emissaries directly through its Propaganda Congregation that was mainly Carmelites of various European nationalities to work out a compromise. Gradually, a large section of the community was convinced or forced to accept the ecclesiastical authority of the Propaganda who were historically forced to ordain a Nasrani, Mar Parampil Chandy, as their Bishop. This section of the Nasrani community came to be known as Pazhayakoor (Old Allegiance) and was divided between the jurisdiction of the Roman Propaganda that was based in Verapoly (Varappuzha) and the Portuguese Padroado that was locally based in Cochin (Kochi) and Cranganore (Kodungalloor) under the diocese of Goa. However, the Propaganda refused to ordain any other Nasrani as Mar Parampil Chandy's successor.

The faction that refused to return to European ecclesiastical jurisdiction formed the Puthenkor (New Allegiance) Nasranis. Though both factions of Nasranis longed to be re-united, European missionaries sabotaged those attempts fearing a unified Nasrani community. Eventually, the Puthenkor faction became Jacobites and adopted the Antiochian West-Syriac tradition in the 19th century.

Here we mainly deal with the happenings within the larger Pazhayakoor faction of the Nasranis, because it is in this milieu that the Ikkako incident took place.

Though forcefully colonised, the patriotic Nasranis tried to safeguard their faith, East-Syriac rite of worship and culture in all possible ways. They also made numerous attempts to bring East-Syriac Bishops of Babylon, who were of their own tradition, and to re-establish the position of Archdeacon and reinstate lost authority of the General Assembly. In the process the Nasranis and their leaders went through several hardships and some paid with their lives as well.

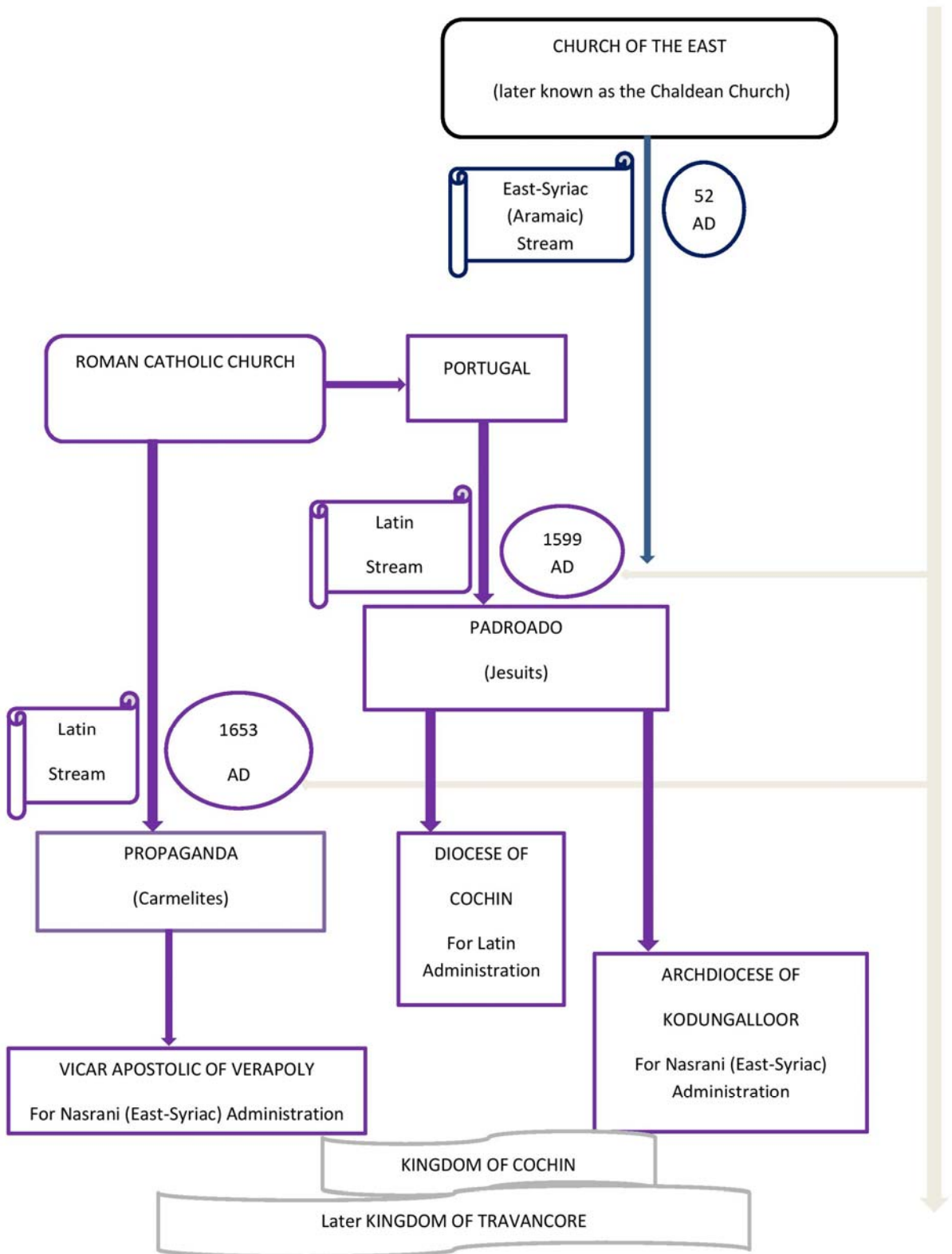


Figure 1: A pictorial overview of the religio-political situation of Nasranis during the time of Ikkako Kathanar.

One such martyr who laid down his life for the Church and nation is the priest, Fr. Jacob Puthenpurackal popularly known as Ikkako Kathanar of Champakulam-Kalloorkadu parish born in the Puthenpurackal family of Thekke Angadi. He was also

known as Chacko or Yakoov Kathanar. Yakoov is the Aramaic (Syriac) form and Chacko is the Malayalamised version of the name Jacob. The term Kathanar is used for Nasrani priests and it originates from the Aramaic (East-Syriac) word kashisa – presbyter. The term Padre is from the Latin language and was used for Latin rite priests, European and others.

Ikkako Kathanar lived during the time period when the Mar Thoma Nasranis nostalgically remembered their past glory but were disunited and too weak to fight off European Latin aggression. This martyr who made his name entwined in Nasrani history was soon forgotten and this chapter of history was hidden away by vested interests. Ikkako was the vicar of Edappally church at the time of his martyrdom. The struggle this priest and his Church went through continues to this day.

Kuttanadu : Champakulam – Kolloorkkadu church

Known as Kottanara in ancient records the Kuttanadu region is the rice bowl of Kerala. Located below the sea level this region is comparable to only Holland in Europe. Unlike other rice producing regions where water is brought in for cultivation, in Kuttanadu water is removed before planting saplings.

Kuttanadu has a large concentration of hardworking Nasranis and the Champakulam – Kolloorkkadu church is the most famous church in the region.

This church has several ancient inscriptions. One such Malayalam inscription is on the first wooden ornamented beam inside the church that reads “In the 1730th year of Mshiha's birth Thamalloor Itty-Kuruvilla Kathanar built this beam this year 905 in the month of Meenam”. (This is in AD 1730 and Kollam era or Malayalam calendar 905 in the month of March).

Itty-Kuruvilla's older brother was a Yaakov who moved into the household of Puthenpurackal. The protagonist of this article, Ikkako Kathanar was born to Yaakov's son Thommi.

Ikkako's home once stood at the same location where the St. Joseph's Mission Hospital is today.

Thekke Angadi (South Market) and Thachil Mathoo Tharakan

There is a market located on the south side of the Champakulam church known as the Thekke Angadi (South Market). This market prospered during the second half of the 17th century. The reason behind this prosperity was a trade agreement in 1642 between the Champakasherry king who ruled Champakulam and the Dutch with regard to trade centred on the Purakkadu (Porca in foreign records)

harbour. "When the Dutch came to Purakkadu in 1642 and entered into a trade agreement with Chempakashery, it was the dawn of better days for Kalloorkkadu". [5]

This was because goods from eastern regions like Arpookkara, Kudamalloor, Kuruppampadi, Kaduthuruthy etc were brought to Kalloorkkadu in large boats and from Kalloorkkadu they were taken to Purakkadu harbour.

Later, a well-known international trader, and Commerce Minister of the kingdom of Travancore, Thachil Mathoo Tharakan (1741-1814) set up base in Champakulam and this too increased the prominence of Champakulam.

But afterwards during the reign of Raja Keshavadas, the Diwan of Travancore, the town of Alappuzha (Alleppey) and its harbour gained prominence. This eventually reduced the importance of the Purakkadu harbour.

Ikkako Kathanar's home was located in the centre of Kalloorkkadu's Thekke Angadi. We do not have any records of his childhood or early life. However, his martyrdom in 1771 AD played an important role in awakening the contemporary Nasrani community.

Ikkako Kathanar at Champakulam

It all started at Champakulam.

It was the ancient custom in each Nasrani (Syriac) church that during its main feast days, all the priests who are born in that parish wherever they serve come back and attend the celebration. They are called 'local priests' (deshathu pattakkar). The main responsibilities of the feasts like carrying the Reliquary during procession, arranging valuable gold and silver ornaments on icons and statues and removing the same for safe custody in locker rooms all belonged to these local priests.

European Padres from Verapoly and even from Goa used to visit the feasts in the main Nasrani churches

When Bishop Florence from Poland was reigning as Vicar Apostolic of Propaganda in Verapoly, an argument arose between the local Nasranis and the European Padres at the feast at Champakulam church as to who should carry the Reliquary during the procession.

The Propaganda authorities ill-treated Nasranis through repressive policies and especially racial discrimination and they thought they monopolised the right of carrying the Reliquary in whichever local Nasrani church processions they visit during feast days.

The Europeans insisted that they had the right over the Nasrani vicar of the parish. However, the parishioners led by our protagonist Ikkako Kathanar did not yield and argued vehemently that they had the right. Finally to allow for a smooth

conduct of the feast a compromise was worked out by other priests and church representatives of the parish.

European Padres were then allowed to lead the main procession.

After the procession, it was time for the valuables, including gold and silver ornaments displayed on the Reliquary and other statues during the procession to be removed and inventoried with the list. Ikkako Kathanar and Poothara Korah Kathanar, along with the trustees, were entrusted with their safe-keeping in secure rooms.

While documenting collections from the feast, a group of people who accompanied the European Padres attempted to steal valuables and offerings. They were caught in the act and this led to unpleasant scenes and a little wrestling. Ikkako was again in the forefront of all this. This attracted a large crowd. The stolen things were recovered but the Europeans were accused of bringing thieves along with them. Again, elders and leading members of church assemblies mediated and the European padres along with their unscrupulous followers were allowed to return to Verapoly without harm.

The public disgrace was too much for the Europeans to digest. They swore revenge against the parishioners and Ikkako Kathanar in particular. Later on, sadly, the European padres extracted their revenge at Verapoly.

Looking at the brazen attempts at stealing valuables it is possible that European Padres and their followers may have stolen valuables from other parishes as well but were not challenged out of fear. The Europeans and their followers may have fought off any resistance. However, the experience at Champakulam turned out to be different.

This incident at Champakulam was lost in history and not widely known. However, it was written and saved in the book "Kalloorkkadu Church and Syrian Christians" written by late Jacob J. Kurialacherry, M M Press Champakulam 1986.[3] The information about Ikkako Kathanar's family and the incident at Champakulam church was collected from various documents from the homes of members of the Kalloorkkadu parish including Puthenpurackal branches.

Future incidents dealing with the death and torture of Ikkako Kathanar at Verapoly are documented in The Varthamanappusthakam written by Kathanar Thomman (Thomas) Paremmakkal. The Varthamanappusthakam is the first travelogue written in the Malayalam language. It describes the history of the Nasrani Church between the years 1773 and 1786 with emphasis on the journey of its author and Malpan Mar Ousep (Joseph) Kariattil from Malabar to Rome via Lisbon and back. Despite attempts by European ecclesiastical authorities to destroy it the major part of this book survived. Chapter 4 of The Varthamanappusthakam describes in detail the sufferings of Ikkako Kathanar. The Chapter is titled: The church assembly of Edappalli takes its complaints to the representatives of the churches assembled at Angamaly.

Ikkako Kathanar at Verapoly (Varappuzha)

We come to the second phase of the incident at Verapoly.

“While Monsignor Florence bishop of Areopolis was living at Verapoly as Vicar Apostolic of Malabar and of the diocese of Cochin, the Padres gathered together at Verapoly to celebrate the feast of St. Teresa who had reformed and founded their Order. After the solemn mass was over, the Blessed Sacrament was enclosed in a gold monstrance and exposed on the altar for the adoration of the faithful. The Padres then retired for dinner.

Among the priests and people who had come for the feast from the other parishes there was also Chacko (Ikkako) Kathanar of Kalloorkkadu, the vicar of Edappalli. When the feast was over he returned to Edappalli with the others. Owing to the greatness of the joy that followed the dinner the Padres forgot to close the church. The next morning the church was found to be open. The monstrance with the Blessed Sacrament had disappeared. After several enquiries, we do not know how, suspicion fell on Ikkako Kathanar.” – From The Varthamanappusthakam, Chapter 4.[1]

In simple words, the Padres forgot to close the door of the church after a sumptuous meal and the valuable gold monstrance was stolen. Though the author of The Varthamanappustakam wonders how suspicion fell on Ikkako Kathanar – we need not. The European Padres who swore revenge on Ikkako at Champakulam made "use" of this opportunity.

Anyway, Bishop Florence sent messengers to Edappalli, summoned Ikkako Kathanar to Verapoly and questioned him. He answered sincerely that he knew nothing about the matter, and that, since the Padres had gone to sleep, he left the place without taking leave of them. The Bishop and others were convinced of his innocence and he was allowed to return to his church.

But one German Padre Francis Sales was not at Verapoly when Ikkako Kathanar was questioned. When he came to Verapoly and heard of the case he affirmed that it was Ikkako Kathanar who had stolen the monstrance. From this we can only assume that it was Padre Francis Sales and his associates who were involved in the incident at Champakulam.

Padre Francis Sales sent messengers to Edappalli and had him brought to be questioned again. When Ikkako Kathanar realised that he would be questioned under torture he feared exceedingly, and owing to the intensity of the fear he returned to Edappalli without taking leave of the Bishop and the Padres.

Ikkako Kathanar had genuine reasons to fear as he knew of the existence of the infamous inquisition chambers in Europe during the middle ages and the cruel methods of torture that the European Padres were familiar with. Deep in fear, Ikkako sought the protection of the Swarupam (chieftain) of Edappally. The Swarupam took him under his protection and consoled him. However, this behaviour of Ikkako Kathanar only strengthened the suspicion of the Padres.

The Bishop and Padres concluded that Ikkako was the real thief, for if he were not, he would not have ran away and taken refuge with the Swarupam.[1]

“Conclusions like the one mentioned above may sometimes be correct, but under certain circumstances they may be erroneous also, especially in cases concerning superiors and inferiors. Fear is a formidable emotion and when it is at its zenith, man does not think of what he does. The anxiety is greater if those who inflict punishments are cruel and imprudent.” - From The Varthamanappushthakam, Chapter 4.[1]

Thus, Ikkako Kathanar was pronounced guilty!

Since those were the days when religion and politics went hand in hand; the German Padre Francis Sales with the permission of the Polish Bishop Florence proceeded with armed new converts to capture Ikkako. “As though going out for a war to subdue countries, a thing unheard of before, Padre Sales daringly proceeded to Edappalli to take Ikkako Kathanar by force. He besieged the residence of the Swarupam where Ikkako Kathanar had taken refuge.”[1]

The kings of Kochi and other states were mostly vassals of European powers and were scared of their military might. Also, the kings gained wealth through association with European powers. Hence, they hardly had any interest in controlling unjust activities of Europeans within their territories. So if the kings were in such a situation we can only imagine how weak local chieftains like the Swarupam of Edappalli would have been in. While the king or chieftain could do nothing the Nasranis of Edappalli tried all they could to save Ikkako Kathanar who was neither tried nor convicted.

All in vain!

What happened next is distressing indeed.

Padre Francis Sales and his gang took Ikkako Kathanar by force to Verapoly, shut him up in a room and tortured him severely. They wanted him to admit that he had stolen the monstrance. In spite of the physical pain and humiliation the brave Nasrani did not agree to their demands. He chose to suffer than put his family, parishioners and the community to shame. After exhausting torture methods the Padres condemned him to die by starvation, and he was left without food and drink for several days. When he was close to dying Ikkako Kathanar begged the Padres for the sacraments of confession and communion.

He was denied that as well!

When he died his body was wrapped in a mat and buried on the bank of a pond in the compound outside the church.[1]

As if torturing and killing this helpless Nasrani priest was not enough to quench their thirst for revenge, the Bishop and his Padres wanted to punish the Nasranis of Edappalli for trying to save their priest. The Bishop and his Padres demanded that the Edappalli church assembly hand over the keys of the church to them in Verapoly. The Bishop wanted to turn over the church to the new converts. The new converts, like the Bishop and Padres, were Latin rite Christians. The Edappalli church assembly out of fear deposited the key of their church with the Swarupam of Edappalli. The Bishop and the Padres were offended and the church of Edappalli was put under interdict. The Bishop and the Padres refused to allow any religious services in the church and it remained closed despite several requests and prayers from the Nasranis of Edappalli. The Edappalli Nasranis also promised to undergo the prescribed penance if they had done any wrong.

But all was in vain and the church remained closed.

To address this issue and get justice the church assembly of Edappalli decided to present their grievances to the General Assembly of Mar Thoma Nasranis who gathered at Angamaly. The reasons for the gathering at Angamaly are dealt with in detail in the next chapter.

“The Nasranis of Edappalli did nothing wrong. They acted according to God’s precept and according to natural law which demanded that our parents and teachers who are in distress are to be helped by us. They only did what they could in order to save their pastor who, as they knew, would be arrested and maltreated. In depositing the key of the church with the Swarupam they did not commit any crime. For they had seen that the key of the church which their forefathers of old had built would be handed over to some others. God has appointed kings and has given them authority on the earth to do justice for those who are unjustly oppressed. In accordance with what St. Paul says, every one, be he Pope or bishop, should obey this authority so that no one may suffer as the Nasranis of Edappalli suffered from the bishop and the Padres.” – From The Varthamanappushthakam, Chapter 4.[1]

General Assembly (Palli-Yogam) at Angamaly

In the midst of all this turbulence, the Carmelite Bishop of Verapoly Msgr. Florence died in 1773.

In conformity with their custom, the (East-Syriac) Nasranis of the churches of Angamaly, Alangat, Paravur, Kuthiathodu and many others, assembled at Verapoly and were about to bury the bishop according to their custom and East-Syriac rite.

Padre Anastasius of St. Jerome, the Provincial Superior of the Carmelite Padres came up to the Nasrani priests and laymen and asked,

“What business have you to come here now? Your bishop is the one (Archbishop of Kodungalloor) who resides at Pukotta.”[1]

He asked them to step aside and the bishop was buried by the Padres in their Latin rite. This humiliation at the hands of the Padres was too much for the Nasranis who were already being tested for their limits of tolerance.

On close scrutiny the meaning of the words said by the Padre Superior was true – the Padroado Archbishop of Kodunagalloor, who was a Jesuit, was the proper Pastor of the Malabar Nasranis. The Propadanda mission’s Carmelites at Verapoly were sent by the Pope to pacify the Nasranis after the Coonan Cross oath of 1653. Both Padroado and Propaganda were of the Latin rite whereas the Nasranis are of the East-Syriac rite. The last East-Syriac Metropolitan of the Nasranis resided at Angamaly and after the so-called Synod at Diamper (Udayamperoor) in 1599 the Nasranis were forcefully placed under the Latin (Portuguese) Archbishop of Goa. Later, a new Latin Archbishopric was introduced in Kodungalloor for Nasrani (East-Syriac) administration but was often called Angamaly-Kodungalloor or simply Angamaly. During the previously mentioned incident at Verapoly, the Archbishop of Kodungalloor was residing at Pukotta because of Dutch opposition.

The Nasranis considered the Propadanda Carmelites at Verapoly as mediators sent to resolve the issues between them and the Padroado Jesuits at Kodungalloor. Therefore, the Nasranis thought they had the right to bury the bishop according to their custom and East-Syriac rite.

Following the humiliation at the bishop’s funeral the Mar Thoma Nasranis decided to call a General Assembly (Palli-Yogam) of their churches to gather at Angamaly to discuss issues troubling their community. When informed of the gathering of the General Assembly, three Padres from Verapoly under the leadership of their Visitor Apostolic Padre Lawrence Justiniani, reached Angamaly to advocate their cause.

The Assembly gathered in great commotion and continued for a few days. The representatives were all agitated due to the humiliating past experiences at the hands of the Europeans. They daringly deliberated and put forward certain conditions for the Padres to accept. They were written down on paper and presented to the Padres. The item numbered 2 said “no punishment would be meted out for any grave crime committed by the priests or laymen before the matter was judged by the representatives of 4 churches.” Also it was demanded that during feasts the priest who celebrated the Qurbana (Liturgy) should carry the Reliquary and not the Padres.

Lawrence Justiniani and the other two Padres accepted the demands of the Assembly. They put their signatures and seals on the document. Also, the Assembly

demanded that the Edappally church be opened again for use. The Padres consented.[1]

Though it would seem that the Padres were willing to negotiate peace with the Nasranis, later incidents prove that they had no such intension.

All they wanted was for the General Assembly to disperse at the earliest!

The Padres were confident that no one would question them if they transgressed the terms of agreement the next day. The Padres were strong and proud; the enslaved Nasranis were weak and without a leader.

However, in 1774, the Propaganda Congregation from Rome gave strong instructions to the Carmelite missionaries against the illtreatment of Nasranis, especially their priests at the hands of the missionaries. It also reminded the missionaries that the (East-Syriac rite) Nasranis despise being governed by Latin rite heads and so should take care of their actions so as not to offend them further.

“Whereas the priests of that (Nasrani) nation have complained that several times action has been taken against them by way of imprisonment with the use even of chains and by way of cruel flogging, the S. Congregation has been deeply moved to hear that such cruelties are being practised specially against priests, and that religious men and a bishop who ought to profess meekness which is the special characteristic of our Lord Jesus Christ of whom they should be the living copy in their behaviour, have had the heart to practice them... In punishing them for their faults after legitimate proofs, they should adopt only means in harmony with meekness and the sweetness demanded by charity, the character of their office, and prudence, which should direct them not to anger the (Nasrani) nation which suffers badly from the yoke of being governed by directors and heads of a different rite on whose will alone depends its separation from the catholic union at one stroke.” [7]

However, neither sealed agreements nor strong worded instructions from their superiors had any effect on the conduct of the Padres.

The vicar of Malayattoor church Panachikkal Geevarghese (George) Kathanar was dragged from the procession after he celebrated the Raza Qurbana (most solemn form of East-Syriac Liturgy) on New Sunday.[1] The Kathanar was chained and taken to Verapoly by the Padres; tied to a bed with face up and beaten. This gang of Padres and their men were led by Padre John St Margaret. He was one of the three Padres who had promised the General Assembly, on behalf of all Padres not to harm anyone without proper deliberations with four churches and that the Padres would not demand the right to lead processions.

Many intelligent members of the Nasrani General Assembly had rightly predicted that any agreement with the Padres would never last and it would only cause further persecutions.

Return of Padre Francis Sales as Vicar Apostolic of Malabar

As a matter of further irony Padre Francis Sales, who led the kidnap and murder of Ikkako Kathanar, was sent back to Rome but soon returned to Verapoly on the 13th of October, 1775 as Francis de Sales bishop of Germanica, Vicar Apostolic of Malabar. This caused great sorrow and perturbation among the Nasranis. [6] Also, the Padres at Verapoly refused to accept him as their head. They claimed he was unworthy to be a Bishop and had created too many scandals in the past. However, the real reason was that the leading Padres who were mostly Italians refused to accept Francis Sales, a German as their head. They also removed another German, a Bavarian Padre Lawrence of St Rosita from the office of the vicar of the house of Verapoly and of the Vicar Provincial. They substituted Padre Clement of Jesus in his place. [7] Thus, the Propaganda mediators sent directly from Rome to settle the differences between the Nasranis and the Padroado bishop were quarrelling among themselves and rebelling against their own bishop and authorities!

“The Padres were of a race, language and rite other than those of the Malabarian Nasranis over whom they ruled... Such being the case they had no reason not to obey one from Germany...But this happened under the providence of God who could not allow the Bishop in company with the Padres to persecute the poor and the enslaved Nasranis. When Medionites took up arms against the Israelites Gedeon and the three hundred faced them, and they perished fighting among themselves. So God permitted the Padres to disagree with the Bishop in order to keep the Malabarian Nasranis unmolested.” – The Varthamanappushthakam, Chapter 8. [1]

The Bishop Francis Sales could not put up with the situation in Verapoly. He called over a leading Nasrani priest Kariattil Ousep (Joseph) Malpan from Alangad. Malpan is the Syriac word for teacher. Kariattil Ousep Malpan held a doctorate in Theology from Propaganda college in Rome.[8]

The Bishop described to the Malpan the humiliation he faced at the hands of his subordinate Padres. He cried and begged forgiveness for his past deeds against the Nasranis and promised that he would behave in the future. Kariattil Ousep Malpan believed the Bishop's words and with the help of an influential Nasrani lay man Thachil Mathoo Tharakan of Kuthiathode, Kariattil Ousep Malpan took Bishop Francis Sales to Alangad. Like the old Malayalam saying goes “picking up a snake from the fence and carrying it around ones neck” Kariattil Ousep Malpan took Francis Sales from Verapoly to Alangad. The rebellious Padres were proud at their success in literally casting their Bishop out of the house. [6]

However, Bishop Francis Sales' apology or promise of good behaviour was never genuine.

The Varthamanappusthakam describes in detail the cunning acts and financial hardship the Bishop brought on the Nasrani community. Later he reconciled with the other Padres and without following the customs of the Nasranis he re-located to Verapoly. However, Bishop Francis de Sales' reconciliation with his Padres did not last for long and he had to return to Europe in 1780. He died in Europe in 1787. It would be of interest to readers to know that the rebellious Padres had sent John St Margaret to Rome to revoke the appointment of Bishop Francis Sales. As mentioned previously, John St Margaret was the Padre responsible for the kidnap and torture of Panachikkal Geevarghese Kathanar of Malayattoor. John St Margaret was appointed bishop in place of Francis Sales but his appointment was revoked before he left Italy. [1]

Trial and verdict in the case of Ikkako Kathanar's murder

Meanwhile, the Swarupum (chieftain) of Venad under the famed king Marthandavarma annexed several petty kingdoms to his own and consolidated the Kingdom of Travancore. The majority of the Nasranis formed part of the kingdom of Travancore. The case of the murder of Ikkako Kathanar at Verapoly at the hands of Carmelite missionaries was heard by the minister of the King of Travancore in 1787. The then Vicar Apostolic and his missionaries wrote to the Propaganda congregation on May 7th, 1787 saying "Regarding the Syrian priest who was accused of many sacrilegious thefts, was shut up in a room and died in former times, the fault was attributed to the Bishop and to the Padres and also the Christians themselves".

The Nasranis have in their possession a document where the Carmelites promised to pay a fine to the government of Travancore for the death of the priest in question. Padre Paulinus and Padre John wrote the promissory document. The Bishop and his Padres paid 1100 rupees to the government of Travancore.

The verdict roughly reads like this: "We, Padre Paulinus and Padre John of the Verapoly Carmelite mission, appearing before the Government Affairs submit this affidavit on 2nd of the month of Medam in the year 962, agree to pay the fine and penance for the following offence. When Ikkako Kathanar of Puthanpurackal, Kolloorkkadu came to Verapoly in 946 it was presumed that he took away certain valuables to Edappalli where he was the vicar and hence we and our bishop sent new converts with Padre Francis Sales to capture him and confined him in a cell causing his death".

According to Ikkako Kathanar's family records, maintained in Kolloorkkadu, the date of his death according to the Kollam Era (Malayalam Calendar) is recorded as the 5th of Kumbham. In the above affidavit submitted by his murderers it says Ikkako came to Verapoly in 946. Hence in the modern calendar, it would be in the middle of February, 1771.

In later years, The Varthamanappustakam gained prominence among the Nasranis and it was read in their churches every Sunday after Qurbana (Liturgy). The European Latin ecclesiastical authorities forbid the use of the book and tried to condemn it to fire just like they destroyed numerous other ancient books of the Nasrani community. However, a large portion of The Varthamanappustakam survives to this day.

Ikkako Kathanar and Palackal Thomma Malpan

Though the direct relationship between Puthenpurackal Ikkako Kathanar and Palackal Thoma Malpan is not certain, the founder of the CMI congregation is a nephew of Ikkako.

Despite ancient references say that monasteries of the East-Syriac Tradition existed among the Mar Thoma Nasranis they gradually vanished and by the 19th century some visionaries of the community came up with the idea of starting a monastic congregation, like the Carmelites, for the Nasrani community. They were led by Palackal Thoma Malpan of Pallipuram, near Cherthala. Under him were Porukkara Thoma Malpan of Champakulam and Bl. Chavara Kuriakose Elias of Chennamkari. Their first monastery was established in Mannanam, near Kottayam in 1831. They were later known as Third Order of Discladed Carmelites (T.O.C.D) and eventually took the name of Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (C.M.I).

Palackal Thomma Malpan's biography was written by his relative and disciple Bl. Chavara Kuriakose Elias. According to it, Palackal Thomma Malpan's mother was from Kalloorkkadu's Puthenpurackal family of Thekke Angadi.[9]

Conclusion

The story of Puthenpurackal Ikkako Kathanar and his martyrdom is similar to the fate of the Mar Thoma Nasrani Church. Ikkako's family and community forgot his struggle and ultimate sacrifice; the Nasrani Church forgot the persecutions it went through for preserving its Oriental East-Syriac tradition.

Ikkako Kathanar suffered torture and sacrificed his life to preserve his faith, the dignity of his family, parish and the Nasrani community. The Coonan cross oath of 1653 of the Mar Thoma Nasranis (Saint Thomas Christians) is the first organised freedom struggle of any Indian community against European colonialism. The martyrdom of Ikkako Kathanar is a continuation of this freedom struggle as well.

The Pazhayakoor faction of the Nasrani Church today forms the Syro-Malabar Church. The Church still struggles to break the bondages placed by colonial

authorities since the 16th century. The fact that martyrs like Ikkako Kathanar and The Varthamanappusthakam have been forgotten by the Church and its leaders is proof of how far the Church has strayed from 'The Way' (Marthoma Margam) and its East-Syriac tradition planted in India by yet another martyr, Saint Thomas the Apostle.

Maran Esraham Alain (Lord, have mercy!). Amen!

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