

One-man Mission

'Puthiya Niyamam' (New Testament)

Authentic Translation of the Peshitta Bible into Malayalam



ക. നി. മു. സ. മാണി കത്തനാർ (ആണ്ടുമാലിൽ)

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Introduction

The first half of 20th century saw the emergence of several erudite priests leaving their foot prints on the progress and resurgence of Syro Malabar Church. Nidhirickal Mani Kathanar (Fr. Emmanuel Nidhiry); the uncrowned Leader and visionary of Syro Malabar Church, left for his heavenly abode, in 1904. Alencherry Bernard Thoma Kathanar TOCD - the pioneer Church Historian also called the Eusebius of India, Kalapurackal Andrews Kathanar – the great exponent of East Syriac and Andumalil Mani Kathanar TOCD – the translator of Peshitta (Syriac Bible) into Malayalam are the trio whose painstaking efforts laid the historical and theological foundation for Syro Malabar Church to grow beyond the confines of Kerala and India.

Biographical Sketch



Mani Kathanar was born on the 22nd of July, 1878 in the Muttathupadath Andumaly family of Kudamaloor Parish, part of Varapuzha Vicariat at that time. Kudamloor forane is now a part of the Syro Malabar Archeparchy of Changanassery.

After his schooling at St Ephrem's High School, Mannanam, Mani Kathanar entered the TOCD (Third Order of Carmelite Divine) Seminary on the 26th of May, 1901. Subsequently he was ordained on the 22nd of May 1910.

By the time he became a Priest, Mani Kathanar had acquired real mastery in Syriac as also Latin and English. Besides he had a natural flair for Malayalam - his mother tongue, with special affection for the various literary works including poetry. Penning down poems in

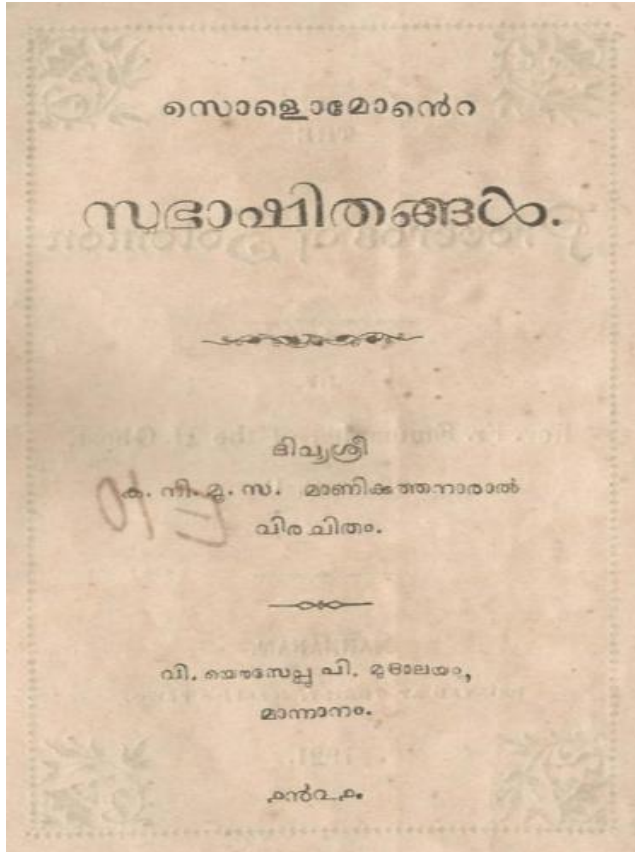
Malayalam, was a habit he developed from his school days and this firm grounding in Malayalam was to stand him in good stead in his future endeavors related to Peshitta translation.

The Polyglot in Mani Kathanar could not be held back for long. He was appointed as the Managing Editor of 'Nazrani Deepika' the newspaper of Malankara Nazrani Catholics. Incidentally this Newspaper was founded by Nidhirickal Mani Kathanar (Fr. Emmanuel Nidhiry) in the year 1887, and it's the oldest Malayalam Newspaper. Later he took charge as Managing Editor of 'Karmala Kusumam', the first Malayalam Christian Family Magazine. Founded in 1903, the magazine published by CMI (TOCD) continues to be a voice of Nazrani Catholic values and Syro Malabar traditions.

Mani Kathanar had a stint as Teacher of the Seminarians and also Secretary to the Prior General of the Congregation. He was called to his eternal rest on the 9th of January 1941.

Literary Contributions

As an accomplished poet and essayist many of his articles and poems were published in Catholic magazines and Newspapers of the period.



His published works include ‘Premamrutham (Nectar of Love), ‘Divyamathruka’ (Divine Model), ‘Prasangikan’(Ecclesiastes) ‘Subhashithangal’ (Proverbs) and ‘Peedanubhava pana’ (Song of Passion). Many of his verses were popular among the student community who used them at will in various Elocution and Essay competitions.

Alencherry Bernard Thoma Kathanar TOCD, published his 2-volume treatise on Church History, ‘Marthoma Kristhyanikal’ (History of St. Thomas Christians) in 1921. His Chief collaborator in collecting manuscripts & documents and collating data was none other than Mani Kathanar.

Bible Translation

Mar Augustine Kandathil, the Metropolitan Archbishop of Ernakulam, granted his permission to the Prior General of TOCD for a Malayalam translation of the Bible. Accordingly, the then Prior General formed a translation committee in 1927. Andumalil Mani Kathanar as part of the committee was entrusted with the translation of Pentateuch. He published the translation of Genesis in 1928 and completed Pentateuch in 1934. Since the translation of rest of the Old Testament was getting delayed, Mani Kathanar decided to translate the New Testament and got it published in 1935. This New Testament went through 20 editions and sold more than 8 lakh copies.

Mani Kathanar cites several reasons for deciding on translating Peshitta, rather than the Latin Vulgate. “Since the majority of Kerala Syriac Catholics have been reeling under the Latin yoke for centuries (precisely from 1599 to 1887),

their understanding and formation has been in the Latin way with out ever giving credence to the value and necessity of Syriac. This has been a matter of scorn for the Syriac Catholics in the world of the learned.

Due to the abject ignorance regarding the rich Oriental traditions, even the so called knowledgeable among the Syriac Catholics, consider only the Latin tradition as authentically Catholic– a shameful and lamentable state of affairs and its time that the Syriac community is woken up. Several European Pandits have earnestly studied the history, ancient fame and the rite of the Syriac Church of Kerala, and they are saddened by the present status and rather astonished by the apathy of its members. Hence, in the present times a Malayalam translation of Peshitta - the pride of this Church can surely be an instrument to awaken its



members from this deep slumber. Also, it’s the wish of the Popes that Eastern churches do grow and flourish, and for this to be realized selecting Peshitta as the primary source book for translation, would be of great help to the Kerala Syriac Catholics “

Peshitta & Mar Toma Nazranees

For the Nazranees, Peshitta evoked reverence being the word of ‘Alaha’ (God) and pride that it was in the same language spoken by Isho M’shiha (Jesus Christ). The East Syriac Liturgy as also the Liturgy of the Hours was replete with direct readings and prayers from Peshitta.

The Nazrani Clergy was well versed in Peshitta – exemplified by none other than Paremakal Thoma Kathanar, whose magnum opus ‘Varthamanapustakam’ is richly endowed with quotes from the Bible throughout its pages. It is noteworthy that when Paremakal wrote Varthamanapustakam in 1785, there weren’t any Malayalam translations of the Bible. Also in the ‘Malpanate’ (clergy training under a learned priest) system prevalent until the first half of 19th century, the popular way of imparting East Syriac was to make the aspirants copy Peshitta. In view of the aforementioned reasons, Nazranes never felt the need to have a copy of the Bible at home.

Malayalam Bible translations

The first translation of Bible into Malayalam was from Peshitta in 1807, known as ‘Ramban’ Bible – translated by Pulikkottil Joseph Ittoop & Kayamkulam Philipose Ramban assisted by Thimamah Pillai. This version was published in 1813.

Benjamin Baily, the great Anglican Missionary translated the New Testament in 1829 and the Old Testament in 1841. This was updated and revised by Herman Gundert – the German Evangelist who came to Kerala through Basal Mission and made remarkable contributions to Malayalam Literature including the first ever Malayalam Dictionary.

The complete Bible was published by Madras Bible Society in 1887. This was revised and updated in 1899 and survives today as the ‘Satyavedapustakam’ - a combination of the efforts of Benjamin Baily and Herman Gundert.

CK Mattam brought out a translation of New Testament in 1962.

‘Divyasandesham’ was a new translation of New Testament published from Kottayam in 1981.

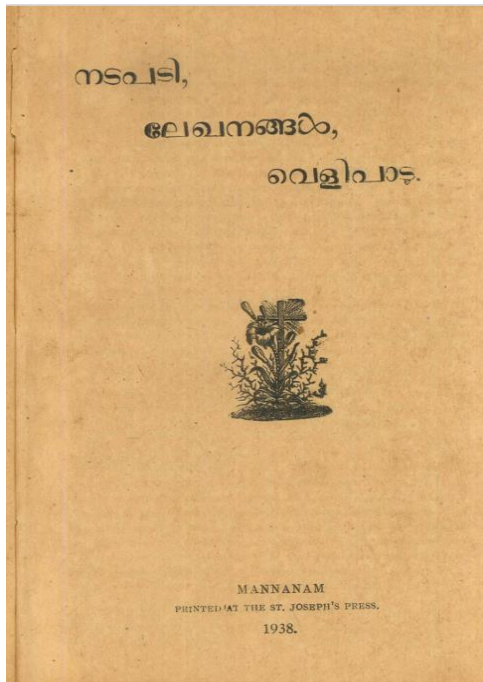
The New Testament was translated from its original Greek version by Dr Mooliyil in 1982. In 1983, Indian Institute of Christian Studies at Edamattam (Pala) under the leadership of Joseph Pulikunnel; who had earlier got together a group of learned laity, clergy and Malayalam Pandits (including Non-Christians) came out with a translation of the Complete Bible –known as ‘Oshana’ Bible. This translation gained popularity in the secular world as well, due to the usage of modern Malayalam, with high literary standards.

Malpan Kaniyampampil Kurian Corepiscopa, Syriac Scholar of the Malankara Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church translated both Old and New Testaments from Peshitha which was published in 1994 as ‘Visudha

Grandham’.

Catholic Bible in Malayalam

The first Malayalam Bible translation for the Catholics had to wait until the 20th century. In 1905, three OCD priests- Fr. Aloysius, Fr Michael and Fr. Polycarp from Manjummel (near Ernakulam) translated the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles into Malayalam – this gained popularity as Manjummel translation.



Mani Kathanar completed Genesis in 1928, Pentateuch in 1934 and New Testament in 1935.

Fr Mathew Vadakkal brought out a translation of Old Testament in 1939. Monsignor Thomas Moothedan translated the Complete Bible in 1963. The year 1978 saw the publication of New Testament from Mannanam.

The Pastoral Orientation Centre (POC) under the Kerala Catholic Bishops’ Council (KCBC) came out with the Complete POC Bible in 1981 as an inter ritual (for Syro Malabar, Syro Malankara and Latin Catholic Churches) collaborative effort.

Rev. Dr. Thomas Kayyalaparambil from Vadavathoor St. Thomas Apostolic Seminary translated the New Testament from Peshitta in 1987.

In 1997, yet another translation of Peshitta came out – this time the complete Bible by Fr. Mathew Uppani, CMI.

Unique features of Mani Kathanar’s ‘Puthiya Niyamam’ (New Testament in Malayalam)

Mani Kathanar translated New Testament into Malayalam from the Peshitta version published in 1887 from Mosul. ‘The authors of the New Testament were all native speakers of Aramaic and they wrote in Greek for the benefit of those outside Palestine. Hence the original Greek New Testament contains various idioms and expressions of the prevalent Aramaic. These idioms and expressions merge seamlessly with the Aramaic text in Peshitta. In the early

centuries Peshitta was a revered text. Among the Syriac speaking people Peshitta commanded deep respect and its authenticity was an accepted fact. When the Armenians went in for a new translation of the Greek Bible, they made sure that the names of persons and places were accurate after doing a cross check with Peshitta. With the Islamic invasion, the Churches in the middle east went into decline and the popularity of Peshitta, also came down. Moreover, Syriac was a language not really known to the Europeans and hence it remained relatively unknown, in that continent as well'. As an ardent lover of both Malayalam and Syriac with established prowess in both the languages, it was natural that Mani Kathanar would leave behind, indelible marks of his scholarship and piety. We will now look at some of the outstanding features of Mani Kathanar's translation.

1. The correct usage of Nouns, verbs and expressions :

With Peshitta as the source book of translation, Mani Kathanar went ahead with correcting the errors that crept in as a result of translating from the Greek version. As far as possible Mani Kathanar retained the original Aramaic usage. In Mathew 5:18, when every translation says that 'not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished', Mani Kathanar uses Yodh (the smallest letter in Syriac Alphabet) instead of the expression: 'the smallest letter'. Similarly in Revelation 1:8, instead of Alpha and Omega, Mani Kathanar retains 'Alap and Taw'.

Mani Kathanar was equally keen on retaining the Aramaic names – Mani Kathanar went for Bar Abba (Mathew 27:16) meaning 'Son of Father' instead of the incorrect usage Barabbas. In Mathew 10:3, for Mani Kathanar it is 'Bar Tulmay' (meaning son of furrows in Aramaic) and not Bartholomew.

Even for place names, he stood by the original Aramaic names – Qatne for Cana and Bezlehem for Bethlehem. Mani Kathanar wanted to be as close as possible to the original Peshitta and steered clear of the overbearing influence of Greek translations -a note worthy feature .

2. Rich Literary Style:

In his translation Mani Kathanar maintained a prose that stood out by the choice of words, the imagery it conceived and the myriad expressions that could

be brought forth. For this to happen Mani Kathanar was convinced that translations have to be contemporary and not archaic.

The words have to resonate with the ordinary faithful and at the same time keep up to literary standards. In fact Malayalam literature is endowed with a rich style of Biblical prose, thanks to Benjamin Baily, Herman Gundert and Mani Kathanar and the latter stands out for his inimitable style of writing – mastery of words and exemplary craft of sentence construction.

3. Beyond verses:

Mani Kathanar envisaged his translation as a complete study material. He went on to provide introduction to every book placing the author and the book in its historical and theological context. Such was his scholarship that wherever possible, verses were followed by index to similar verses-in both Old & New Testaments.

He went further in giving short interpretations of the verses and gave indications of his deviations from the original with reasons and in comparison, with Vulgate and Greek versions.

4. Varying Style of Prose:

The books of the Bible are not written in the same style. The Acts of the Apostles and the book of Revelation have contrasting styles of writing. The translator should be able to catch the nuances and make appropriate changes so that the spirit and thematic emphasis of the Book is not lost in translation.

Mani Kathanar understood this well and had this uncanny ability to vary his style as suited to the Book in consideration. 1 Corinthians Chapter 13 is a treatise on love and Mani Kathanar's vivid translation is on flow, unmatched till date by any of the previous or later year translators.

While translating Proverbs ('Subhashithangal') as an independent work, Mani Kathanar went for poetry. Unlike his other translations he had kept the possibility of non-Christians also as possible readers and hence the style was secular poetry. As moral teachings in poetry, the translation got wide

acceptance and was a prescribed text for schools in erstwhile Kochi and Travancore states.

5. Biblical language versus Liturgy:

Bible is a book of prayer, contemplation and reflection. Holy Qurbana is the source and summit of Christian life. Hence the Biblical names and expressions should be the same as used in the daily liturgy. If not, Bible and Liturgy would run as parallel streams instead of converging to the point of mutual enrichment.

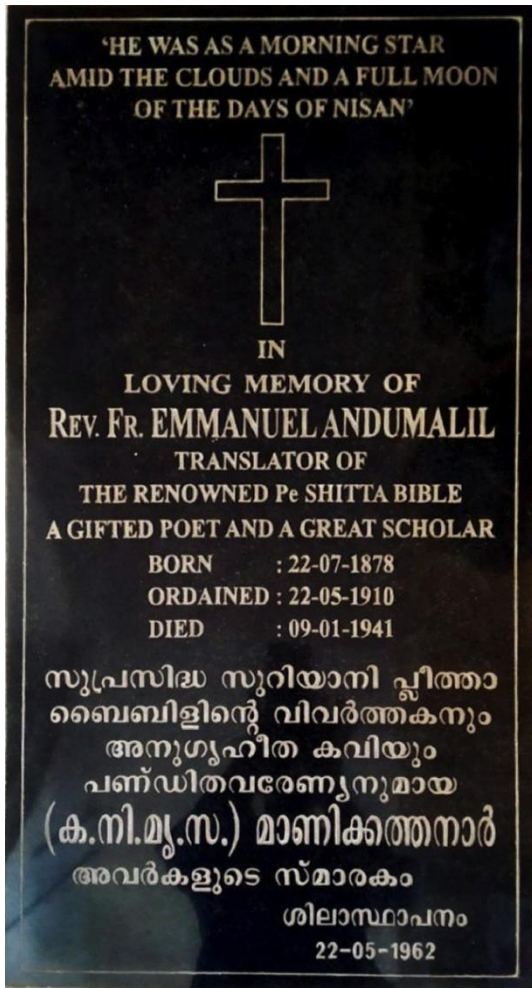
Mani Kathanar didn't fall prey to the temptation of secular language and expressions in his translation of the New Testament. For the Mar Toma Nazranees, the words *M'shiha* (Jesus), *Rooha D'qudisha* (Holy Spirit), *Mariyam* (Mary), *Yawsep* (Joseph) and many other Aramaic (Syriac) names have been in usage for last 20 centuries and they evoke piety as well as an emotional connect. Replacing these words will surely take away the emotional factor leading to a disconnect in the prayer life of the faithful.

In addition to the Aramaic names, Mani Kathanar diligently used many Malayalam expressions as well, which had become common parlance through wide spread use in prayers.

Decline in Popularity

With the advent of charismatic movement in Catholic Church, there was a renewed surge in reading and studying the Bible, with a stress on a copy of the Bible in every Catholic home. Since Mani Kathanar didn't translate the Old Testament, the need for a complete Catholic Bible in Malayalam arose. Unfortunately, the concerned authorities couldn't take timely steps to revise and edit Mani Kathanar's New Testament, nor was there an attempt to get in a companion Old Testament.

Meanwhile the POC Bible gained wide popularity, as the Complete Catholic Bible, replacing the New Testament of Mani Kathanar. Surprisingly the Complete Bible by Monsignor Moothedan (1963) and Fr Mathew Uppani (1997), - the former from Greek and latter from Peshitta, just disappeared, due to unknown reasons.



HE WAS AS A MORNING STAR
AMID THE CLOUDS & A FULL MOON
OF THE DAYS OF NISAN

Rev. Fr. EMMANUEL ANDUMALIL

TRANSLATOR OF
THE RENOWNED PESHITTA BIBLE.
A GIFTED POET AND A GREAT
SCHOLARs

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വിവർത്തകനും
അനുഗൃഹീത കവിയും
പണ്ഡിതവരേണ്യനുമായ
ക. നി. മു. സ. മാണിക്കത്തനാർ

Conclusion:

At a time with limited resources and travel facilities, Ka. Ni. Mu. Sa Mani Kathanar (Fr. Emmanuel Andumalil TOCD) dedicated his life for making available a Malayalam Translation of the Bible. His concern was the spiritual upliftment of the Mar Toma Nazranees and to this end he accomplished a faithful and authentic translation of Peshitta. He had the zeal to persevere against all odds as a one-man mission. Despite the availability of many Bible translations, ‘Puthiya Niyamam’ (New Testament) of Mani Kathanar, remains a role model in terms of its style of language and lofty Literary standards. As the beneficiaries of his yeomen efforts, we are dutybound to perpetuate his memory in a commensurate manner.

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History has always been a passion and especially Church History has remained so fascinating and interesting for him. Being a proud Syro Malabarean, it is natural that the East Syriac legacy and heritage remains close to his heart.

He believes, revival and promotion of Syriac language is an essential and unifying factor for Syro Malabar Church, that is spread across continents, languages and cultures!.

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