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## The parting of ways: Ripples of the oath of Coonan Cross\*

### I. Introduction

Kerala, which lies on the south-west coast of India, has an extensive coastline that bequeathed to it a trading heritage from the early historic period.<sup>1</sup> Another heritage is the presence of diverse religious communities here that was integrated to her social mosaic. The long coastline that she has on the west has more than often compensated for the Western Ghats that forms her eastern boundary cutting her away from the rest of the Deccan Plateau. This long coastline has led her to develop trade relations with countries far away like those in the regions of the Persian Gulf, Europe, China and the Far East. It is through this trade that religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam reached her shores.

Christianity reached Kerala in the early years of its development itself. The legend among the Christians in Kerala is that it was the apostle of Christ St. Thomas who spread Christianity here. This belief has led the Christians of Kerala to call themselves as St. Thomas Christians. The Christian community was initially involved in trade, as is attested by the presence of a Christian trading guild called *Anjuvannam*<sup>2</sup>. Many locals who joined their services gradually adopted the creed

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1 Though the term „*Keralam*” or „*Malayalam*” had been in usage from the ancient period, the homogeneous political unit of Kerala came into being only after the reorganization of Indian states on Nov. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1956.

2 *Anjuvannam* was the name of the trading guild of the Christian community. So also the Jews had their own trading guild. The Syrian Christian copper plate dated to 880 A. D. records a grant given to Mar Sapir Iso, the leader of *Anjuvannam*, by Stanu Ravi, the ruler of Venad (country located in the southern part of Kerala). See K. T. Joseph, „Malabar Christian Copper Plates”,



of their masters or inter-married with them, a process leading to a steady numerical increase of their community.<sup>3</sup> Later on, the community slowly spread to the interior areas and took to agriculture. Thus, the community saw itself getting moulded into the political, social, economic and cultural fabric of Kerala society. At the same time, at least in the period just preceding the arrival of the Portuguese in Kerala (1498), they owed their ecclesiastic allegiance to the Church of the East, whose Catholicos Patriarch appointed and delegated the „Metropolitans of All India”, assisted by the local leader of the community, the Archdeacon.<sup>4</sup> In this way, the St. Thomas Christians were so integrated into the Kerala social structure, on the one hand, and into the Syrian ecclesiastic structure, on the other hand, that later, when the Portuguese arrived and established themselves in Kerala, they found the customs of the St Thomas Christians scandalously different from theirs. This perception of the Portuguese, coupled indirectly with the pressures of the Counter-Reformation in Europe, triggered a violent attempt to latinise the Christian community.

The last Syrian Metropolitan of the St. Thomas Christians in the sixteenth century, Mar Abraham (ca. 1556-1597), who resided in Angamali, submitted himself to the Roman Catholic Church via the Chaldean Patriarchate of Babylon, but stuck to the Syrian customs. After his death in 1597 the Portuguese prevented the appointment of another Syrian Metropolitan, so Alexis de Menezes, the Portuguese Archbishop of Goa, took over the diocese of Angamali.<sup>5</sup> He arrived from Goa in 1599 and convoked a synod to Udayamperoor (Diamper) for the 20<sup>th</sup> of June, 1599. The decrees adopted by the synod prohibited both the Syrian and the Indian customs of the St Thomas Christians and wanted to force them to conform in everything to the Roman Catholic customs, including the liturgy that was later to be translated from Latin into Syriac by the next Latin Archbishop of Angamaly, the Jesuite Francisco Roz. Though the picture presented by Menezes on the out-

*Kerala Society Papers*, Series 4, 1930, Gazetteers Department, Government of Kerala, Trivandrum: 1997 (Reprint), pp. 202-203.

- 3 M. G. S. Narayanan, *The Perumals of Kerala: Political and Social Conditions of Kerala under the Cera Perumals of Makotai (c. 800-1124)*, Printex India, Calicut: 1996, p. 157.
- 4 On this structure of Church governance and especially on the function of the „Archdeacon of All India” see Jacob Kollaparambil, *The Archdeacon of All India* (The Syrian Churches Series, vol. 5), Kottayam: 1972. and, recently, Istvan Perczel, „Language of Religion, Language of the People, Languages of the Documents: The Legendary History of the Saint Thomas Christians of Kerala,” in: Ernst Bremer, Jörg Jarnut, Michael Richter and David Wasserstein (ed.), *Language of Religion - Language of the People: Judaism, Medieval Christianity and Islam* (Mittelalter-Studien 11), Wilhelm Fink, Munich: 2006, pp. 387-428.
- 5 Pius Malekkandathil sees the Synod as part of a mercantilist venture to control the „spice producing community and to restructure the affairs of the St. Thomas Christians community so as to ensure integration and cohesion required for that venture.” Pius Malekkandathil (ed.), *Jornada of Dom Alexis De Menezes: A Portuguese Account of the 16<sup>th</sup> century Malabar*, LRC Publications, Kochi: 2003, p. lvi. He considers the journey of Menezes into the spice-producing centers at the time of the Synod a show of power. *Ibid.*, p. lix.



come of the Synod was a bright one, there were strong undercurrents and dissensions not only among the Christians but also among inland rulers and Muslim merchants.<sup>6</sup>

Upon returning to their parishes after the Synod, the priests found out that the laity was not willing to give up their old traditions. The attempt by the Portuguese to try and eliminate the authority and the special position of the Archdeacon led to disastrous results, too. The tensions between the two sides finally culminated in an open revolt beginning with the famous Oath of Coonan Cross on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of January, 1653.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, some of the people followed the decisions of the Diamper Synod while the majority refused. By 1665 A. D., the Syriac Orthodox (Jacobite) Bishop Mor Gregorios Abdul Jaleel arrived in Parur. People who were against the decisions of the Diamper Synod accepted him as their Bishop. With this, the formation of the *puthankuru* faction, that is, those Saint Thomas Christians who continued in their old tradition, and the *pazhayakuru* faction, that is, those who were within the folds of the Roman Catholic Church and accepted the jurisdiction of the Latin archbishops, started crystallising.<sup>8</sup>

Towards the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, in many churches of the Syrian Christians there were followers of both factions. Later the churches were partitioned between these two factions. Tradition says that, in such cases, the members of the majority retained the old church, while the minority went away with their share and established a new church. Even today, many of the old churches of both the factions either can be seen sharing the same boundary wall or are located in close proximity, reiterating the fact of sharing.<sup>9</sup>

A set of palm-leaf manuscripts has been discovered in Marthamariyam<sup>10</sup> (St. Mary's) Jacobite Church, Kuruppampady<sup>11</sup>, one of the older churches of Kerala. These palm-leaves describe the actual process involved in the division of this church and its properties between the two factions that emerged after the Coonan

6 Ibid., p. Lx-Lxi

7 *Coonan* in Malayalam means „bent”. Tradition says that a rope was tied to the cross so that all would touch the rope while taking the oath, in lieu of the cross itself, and the result was that the cross became stooped.

8 *Pazhaya* in Malayalam means „old” and *kuru* means „allegiance”. One current explanation for this name is that the term was coined by those people who supported the Catholic tradition to give more legitimacy to their tradition, which had to be projected as the older tradition in comparison to the Syrian tradition, so they called the followers of Syrian tradition *puthankuru* (*puthan* meaning „new”). Another version is that the name is due to the fact that the *Puthankuru* faction followed the western Syriac tradition after the arrival of Mor Gregorios Abdul Jaleel. This tradition, being different from the East Syriac tradition that was practiced in India in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, came to be called „new”.

9 The churches at Tripunithura, Chempu, Angamali etc. are clear examples to this.

10 *Marthamariyam* is derived from the Syriac word, *Marth*, meaning „Saint” (in female gender) and *Mariyam* being Mary.

11 St. Mary's Jacobite Church, Kuruppampady is in the Ernakulam District of Kerala and is, today, with the Syriac Orthodox faction of the Syrian Christians in Kerala.



Cross Oath. The significance of this manuscript lies in the fact that it sheds light on the details of how this partition actually occurred in the Kuruppampady church community. I believe that the conclusions drawn from the examination of this document can safely be projected to the partition of the churches of the larger Syrian Christian community in Kerala and are also in conformity with the oral traditions on the partition process.

## II. Kuruppampady – its historical antecedents

Kuruppampady<sup>12</sup> is situated 4 kms east of Perumbavoor in the Kunnathunadu *taluk* of Ernakulam District. It is situated on the highway between Aluva and Munnar. The old trade route from Idukki-Munnar to Thrikkakara-Kodungalloor passed through this area.<sup>13</sup> This is the trade route through which the spices of the neighbouring hills reached the ports. The old Jain temple at Kallil<sup>14</sup> is located 5 kms from Kuruppampady. The traditional lore says that the Kuruppampady church was established around 1300 A. D. There were several Christian families who were members of the Kanjoor<sup>15</sup> church residing in Kuruppampady. They established a church at Kuruppampady with the help of a member of the Kulangara Avathoot Kuruppu's family.<sup>16</sup>

The Kuruppampady market was, supposedly, established by Kulangara Avathoot Panikkar Achan<sup>17</sup> to avenge an insult he had to suffer under the hand of Tamil merchants at the Kothamangalam<sup>18</sup> market.<sup>19</sup> Subsequently, the weights

12 Kuruppampady, is from *Kuruppinpadi*, meaning „The gate of the Kuruppu”. Kuruppu was the honorary title of the local chieftain family. *Padi* means „gate” in Malayalam.

13 M. R. Raghava Varrier, „Madhyakalarambhathile Keraliya Jainakshetrangal” („The Jain Temples of Early Medieval Kerala”), in *Keraliyatha Charitramanangal, Vallathol Vidyapeetham, Sukapuram*: 1990, p. 74. Kodungalloor was a known center of pepper trade since ancient times.

14 At present, it is a Hindu temple.

15 Kanjoor is on the banks of river Periyar, around 8 kms west of Kuruppampady. Kanjoor church was, supposedly, established around 1100 A. D.

16 Kulangara Avathoot Kuruppu's family was the prominent chieftain Hindu family of the locality. According to Rt. Rev. Gheevarghese Corepiscopa Athumkal, one of two surviving women of the Kuruppu's family was childless. Due to the influence of the Christians, she pledged that if she bore a child she would build a church in the name of Mother Mary. When she gave birth to a child, she and her child became Christians at the Kanjoor Church. Later, with the help of the local Christians, they built the Kuruppampady church. Rt. Rev. Gheevarghese Corepiscopa Athumkal, *Kuruppampady Palliyude Charitram (The History of the Kuruppampady Church)*, Evangelical Association of the East Press, Perumbavoor: 1981, pp. 20-23. Rev. Gheevarghese being able to read the *Kolezhuthu* script, had translated many manuscripts of the church. He described these in the aforementioned book along with the history of the church as handed down over the ages in traditional lore. Though not a product of historical scholarship, his translations of the manuscripts have been highly accurate as was seen from our readings.

17 Kulangara Avathoot Panikkar Achan was the name given to the descendants of the other lady-member of the Kulangara Avathoot family, who did not embrace Christianity. Rt. Rev. Gheevarghese Corepiscopa Athumkal, op. cit., p. 23

18 Kothamangalam is 16 km east of Kuruppampady.



and measures of Kuruppampady came to be widely accepted, as the saying „*Kuruppampadykku otha para*”<sup>20</sup> signifies. This phrase was even found in the sale deeds of land until recently.

#### IV. The manuscript

The manuscript is written on long palm-leaves (*ola*) cut in oval shape on both sides. Each palm leaf is 75 cms long and 2.5 cms wide. The account of events is written in *Kolezhutthu* script characteristic of the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. The length of the written matter on the leaf is 62 cms. The account is written on four palm-leaves tied together, both on the obverse (*puram-1*) and on the reverse (*puram-2*) sides. In each of the palm leaf, the writing is arranged in four columns, called *patthi* in Malayalam, so that the columns have four lines each. The spacing of the lines is 0.5 cms and the height of the letters is roughly between 0.2 and 0.3 cms. The manuscript was deciphered, as mentioned before, by Dr. Raghava Varrier, an acknowledged epigraphist and historian of Kerala. The palm-leaves give the description of how the *pazhayakuru* and the *puthankuru* factions in the Kuruppampady church split and established two separate churches.

In the Kuruppampady church the first altercation between the two factions took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> day of *Meenam*<sup>21</sup> in 943 Kollam Era, that is, 1768 A. D. When the *puthankuru* faction came to prepare for the celebration of the Holy *Qurbana* (the Eucharist) on this Sunday morning, they found that the *pazhayakuru* faction had already prepared the main altar on the previous evening itself to celebrate their *Qurbana*. The *pazhayakuru* faction assured that they would vacate the altar after they celebrated the *Qurbana*. However, since they delayed the celebration, the *puthankuru* faction had to go back without celebrating their own Eucharistic prayer. Unable to celebrate the *Qurbana* they took the issue to Paraveli Panikkar of the Kulangara Avathoot family, who was the *nagarakarthavu* (lord of the town)<sup>22</sup> of the church and the market. He assured them that he would enquire into the issue and asked them to celebrate the holy *Qurbana* the next day.

19 To establish the market, Kulangara Avathoot Panikkar Achan built a wide road between his house and the church. He also built rooms on either side of the road. He, then, brought in Christian families from Alangad (a place near Parur on the banks of river Periyar) and Kanjoor (both being market places) and gave them each a shop room. Rt. Rev. Gheevarghese Corepiscopa Athumkal, op. cit., pp. 28-9.

20 This means that the measure is as accurate as the „*para*” (a paddy measuring vessel) of Kuruppampady.

21 The Malayalam month that roughly corresponds to the period of mid-March – mid-April. For a list of the Malayalam months and their rough equivalents in terms of European months, see Appendix III.

22 *Nagarakarthavu* means overlord of the town (*Nagaram* means town and *karthavu* means lord). As said earlier, since this family had been responsible for the establishment of the market, they would have been given authority over it. Our document, therefore, provides indirect written evidence to



On the next Sunday, the 16<sup>th</sup> of *Meenam*, when the *puthankuru* faction was beginning to celebrate the *Qurbana*, the *pazhayakuru* faction brought Panikkar to the church. He asked the sexton of the *pazhayakuru* faction to bring down the articles arranged in the main altar to the minor altar below and allowed the *pazhayakuru* faction to celebrate the *Qurbana* in the main altar. This led the *puthankuru* faction to take the issue to Sankaran Annazhi, the *Kariyakkar*<sup>23</sup> (district officer) of Kunnathunadu *Mandapathumvathikkal*<sup>24</sup> (the district office of Kunnathunadu). The latter called the two factions to hear the issue. Then both factions brought the parish members of the nearby churches along with the prominent members of the respective factions and laid down their claims. Since the *Kariyakkar* could not settle the dispute, he said that he would like to hear from some more prominent members of the two factions before proceeding further. However, the *pazhayakuru* faction continued celebrating the *Qurbana* in the church, whereas the *puthankuru* failed to do so.

While this impasse continued, Pallikara Menayapalliveetil Govinda Pillai replaced Sankaran Annazhi as the *Kariyakkar*. The *puthankuru* faction presented their grievances before him, which, in fact, led to the reopening of the case. When the new *Kariyakkar* heard the case again, he convoked members of the two factions of the church, as well as parishioners of the nearby churches. Upon the inter-rogation of the *Kariyakkar*, both parties agreed that the part of the *madbaha*<sup>25</sup> (sanctuary) below the arch was built before the split, whereas the rest of the structure was built by a contribution from the *puthankuru* faction alone after the split, but at a time when both factions were still getting along amicably with each other. It was also agreed by the two factions that for building the part of the *madbaha* below the arch a sum of 25,000 *puthans* (silver coins) had been spent, while for building the rest of the structure, including the part of the *madbaha* above the arch, the *haikkala* (nave) and the *mukhayira* (facade), a cost of 36,000 *puthans* was incurred.

ground the traditional lore regarding the establishment of the market. *Ola* 1, *puram* 1, *patthi* 2, line 4 and *patthi* 3, line 1.

23 *Kariyakkar* literally means manager. V. Nagam Aiya equates it to the district officer. V. Nagam Aiya, *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. I, Kerala State Gazetteers, 1999 (Reprint), Trivandrum: p. 370.

24 *Mandapathumvathikkal* can be equated to the district office, i. e. the office of the *Kariyakkar*. Literally, it means the doorway of the god's *mandapam* (an open or closed pillared assembly hall in front of the shrine of a Hindu temple). This term came into use with the dedication of the Kingdom of Venad to Sri. Padmanabhaswamy, the deity Vishnu, by Maharaja Martanda Varma on January 1750, as the first revenue *kacheri* (office) was established in front of the *mandapam* of Sri. Padmanabhaswamy in Thiruvananthapuram (Trivandrum). In the Kingdom of Venad, all the administrative departments of the state functioned within this temple complex. See V. Nagam Aiya, *ibid.*, pp. 362-3.

25 *Madbaha* is the sanctuary of the church. The part of *madbaha* below the arch constituted the area between the *madbaha* and the *haikkala* (i. e. the nave of the church). This part had the minor altar, whereas the major altar was in the *madbaha* itself.



The *kariyakkar* tried to settle the issue by asking the *pazhayakuru* faction to spend another 36,000 *puthans* towards the construction of the church. This would have meant that the amount spent by both factions would be the same and hence both factions could share the church equally, rather than the *puthankuru* faction using the main altar and the *pazhayakuru* faction using the side-altar<sup>26</sup>, which, according to his reasoning, led to the dispute. On hearing this, the *pazhayakuru* faction suggested another alternative – if they would be given a piece of land and 12,500<sup>27</sup> *puthans*, then they would build a church of their own and part from the old church.

Since the *puthankuru* faction constituted the majority, the *Kariyakkar* agreed to this solution and it was laid down that the *puthankuru* faction would give to the *pazhayakuru* faction 12,500 *puthans* in four instalments between the months of *Chingam*<sup>28</sup> and *Vrichikam*<sup>29</sup> of 944 Kollam Era (1769 A. D.). The agreement to this effect was signed and handed over by the trustees of the *puthankuru* faction to those of the *pazhayakuru* faction on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the month of *Karkidakam*<sup>30</sup> of 943 Kollam Era. In return, the trustees of the *pazhayakuru* faction transferred to the trustees of the *puthankuru* faction the full rights of the church and its properties. The *puthankuru* faction then paid 800 *rasis* (copper coins) and the *pazhayakuru* faction paid 500 *rasis* as dues to the state. Raman Unni, the *Pravurthiyar*<sup>31</sup> (village officer) of Asamannoor village, was sent from the *Mandapathumvathikkal* as overseer for the settlement. The two factions brought and placed all the articles in their possession in front of the church and Raman Unni divided the articles between them equally. A promissory note and the list of articles in the possession of the two factions were then exchanged.

As per the agreement, the trustees of the *puthankuru* faction were to give 12,500 *puthans* to the *pazhayakuru* faction in four instalments between the months of *Chingam* and *Vrichikam* of 944 Kollam Era. In this, the trustees of the *puthankuru* faction, namely Puthussery Avura, Attupurathu Paily and others (altogether four trustees, out of which two are mentioned by name in the docu-

26 The *puthankuru* faction built the major altar and they used it until then. As per the *Kariyakkar*, if the *Pazhayakuru* were to spend an equal sum, they would have the right to share the church equally.

27 This sum was half of 25,000 *puthans* that was spent by both factions together for building the *mad-baha* as mentioned before.

28 The Malayalam month that roughly corresponds to the period of mid-August – mid-September.

29 The Malayalam month that roughly corresponds to the period of mid-November -mid-December.

30 The Malayalam month that roughly corresponds to the period of mid-July – mid-August.

31 The literary meaning of *Pravurthiyar* is „one who does the work”. The works were executed by the village office and hence the village office was called *pravurthikacheri*. The village officer was called *Pravurthiyar* and his area of jurisdiction was a *pravurthi* (village). His main duty was the collection of taxes. His superior officers like *Mandapathumvathikkal Kariyakkar* and others above would only issue instructions.



ment<sup>32</sup>), together with Kallarakkal Pailly Tharakan and Karavattu Mathu gave a total of 6,659 *puthans* between the 4<sup>th</sup> of Chingam and the 25<sup>th</sup> of *Vrichikam* of 944 Kollam Era in three instalments, on the 15<sup>th</sup> day of every month, to the trustees of the *pazhayakuru* faction, namely Arakkal Pailly Tharakan and others (altogether four trustees, out of which only one is mentioned) and to the sexton Mathu. The balance of 5,841 *puthans* were handed over on the Sunday of the 20<sup>th</sup> of *Makaram*<sup>33</sup>, 944 Kollam Era, that is, more than two months after the stipulated deadline. The *pazhayakuru* faction refused to accept this because of the delay.

When this was reported to the *Mandapathumvathikkal*, an order was issued by the *Kariyakkar* to the *pazhayakuru* faction to accept the money on 4<sup>th</sup> *Kumbham*<sup>34</sup>, so that the remaining 5,841 *puthans* could be thus handed over on this date. Thus the total due of 12,500 *puthans* was settled. But the *pazhayakuru* faction did not give the receipt for the money received, saying that since the money was paid later than the stipulated period, they were not able to build the church. Seeing that the *pazhayakuru* faction started once again coming to the church in spite of the settlement of dues, the *puthankuru* faction registered their protest with the *Mandapathumvathikkal* and the *Sarvadhikariyakkar*<sup>35</sup>. But on seeing that no action was taken on the complaint, on 7<sup>th</sup> *Dhanu*<sup>36</sup>, 945 Kollam Era, the *puthankuru* faction took the issue to *Thampikumaran Chempakaraman*<sup>37</sup> Pillai, who was the *Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar*<sup>38</sup> appointed Deputy Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Venad.

The *Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar* passed an order for evicting the *pazhayakuru* faction from the church. The order was given to the *Sarvadhikariyakkar*, who in

32 Almost all the churches in Kerala during the medieval period used to have four trustees, and this was reiterated by a decision of the Diamper Synod. These trustees would be from the four prominent wealthy families of the church. The status of a church depended upon the wealth and the social status of the trustees. However, in the Kuruppampady church the number of the trustees was raised to eight by the middle of the sixteenth century, in contrast to the Diamper Synod decision. When the split happened, four of the trustees stood with the *puthankuru*, while the other four was with the *pazhayakuru*. Then the *puthankuru* trustees co-opted four more members as co-trustees. These were members of four other families who were as wealthy and prominent as the former trustees. See Rt. Rev. Gheevarghese Corepiscopa Athumkal, op. cit., pp. 44, 65.

33 The Malayalam month that roughly corresponds to the period of mid-January – mid-February.

34 The Malayalam month that roughly corresponds to the period of mid-February – mid-March.

35 There were three divisions in the kingdom of Venad, each under a *Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar*, each of which had four subordinate officers called the *Sarvadhikariyakkar*, so that altogether there were three *Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkars* and twelve *Sarvadhikariyakkars*. See V. Nagam Aiya, op. cit., p. 370.

36 The Malayalam month that roughly corresponds to the period of mid-December – mid-January.

37 The title Chempakaraman was an order of knighthood instituted by Maharaja Martanda Varma to reward public servants who have distinguished themselves in the service of the state of Venad. V. Nagam Aiya, op. cit., p. 361.

38 In 1768, Thampikumaran (or Tampi) Chempakaraman Pillai, one of the three *Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkars*, was entrusted with the function to assist the *Dalawa* (Prime Minister) Gopala Iyen (ibid., p. 382). It was to his authority that the issue was taken by the trustees and members of the church.



turn issued an order to the *Mandapathumvathikkal Kariyakkar*. The *Mandapathumvathikkal Kariyakkar* in turn ordered the *Pravurthiyar* to execute the decision and also sent along the *Cheriyakunjuttikaran*<sup>39</sup> (an orderly). On the 13<sup>th</sup> of *Dhanu*, 945 Kollam Era, the *Pravurthiyar* came along with the *Cheriyakunjuttikaran* to the church and evicted the *pazhayakuru* faction. Thus ended the impasse and the church came under the *puthankuru* faction.

## V. Inferences and Conclusions

The value of this document does not uniquely lie in its relevance for Kerala church history, but also in the fact that it throws light on the social, economic, administrative and cultural aspects of pre-modern Kerala. This document also has historiographical significance. It debunks the notion that Indians had no sense for history.<sup>40</sup> The mere fact that such a manuscript was written shows that it was precisely out of such a sense for history that an event of such importance as the division of the church was recorded for posterity. The manuscript had two blank leaves attached in the front and the back to act as a cover to keep the contents safe. The writing is a factual recording of the events. Nowhere does the description become rhetoric or partial. Another added advantage of this writing style is that a clear chronological scheme is followed with the year, the months and the dates being specified. The Kuruppampady church has a vast collection of day-books and accounts also written on palm-leaves, just as in many other churches<sup>41</sup>. But this manuscript was kept separately, showing that those who assigned to it its place felt the importance of this record.<sup>42</sup>

Another important fact that emerges from the study of this manuscript is that the split between the two factions did not take place overnight, but over a period of time. For a long time the two factions continued to conduct service in the old churches till certain issues precipitated the final separation, when cooperation be-

39 Probably an orderly.

40 Colonial historians, such as V. A. Smith and A. B. Keith, made sweeping statements about Indians lacking any taste for writing history. This was accepted to some extent also by nationalist historians, such as R. G. Bhandarkar, Rajendralal Mitra. However, Marxist historians, such as Romila Thapper and K. N. Panikkar have contested such statements. For further debates, see Michael Gottlob, *Historical Thinking in South Asia: A handbook of sources from colonial times to the present*, 2nd impr., OUP, New Delhi, 2005.

41 Churches like St. George Church, Karingachira, St. Mary's Church, Tripunithura etc. have a vast collection of these. The Catholic church of Kuruppampady also has a collection of palm-leaves, containing mainly accounts, according to Prof. Pius Malekkandathil, who has seen them and with whom I had a discussion. A detailed study of these is yet to be undertaken.

42 Trustees and parishioners of the church said to me that there had been several other documents like this manuscript, which could throw light on the history of the establishment of the church. Unfortunately many of these documents have been lost. Mr. P. G. George, a retired village officer, has informed me that he has seen copper plate documents in the church even as late as the 1970s.



tween the two factions became impossible. Even though the Coonan Cross Oath had taken place on January 3<sup>rd</sup> 1653, the final split in this church occurred only by December-January 1770 - one hundred and twentythree years later - as can be seen from this manuscript. The separation in the churches, as the traditional lore says, took place with the majority taking the older church and giving the minority their share to build a new church. The present document fully confirms this tradition. Thus the account not only corroborates the traditional lore but also gives more insight into the whole process of the split. It has also to be noted that these splits were conducted in a peaceful fashion.

From this document one can also draw more general conclusions on how a dispute between two factions in the church was settled in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. First, the case was taken to the local secular authority, the *nagarakarthavu*, for, probably, a settlement. What is notable is the absence of the involvement of the priests or higher clergy on both sides. The parish priests are conspicuously absent in the whole record, even though we hear of the sexton. This fact shows that primarily the trustees and prominent members of the church directed the affairs of the church. The trusteeship of a church was generally in the hands of the families who were responsible for the establishment of the church. These would generally be the prominent families of the community. Until recently, in the Kuruppampady church, one of the trustees used to be from the Kallarakkal Tharakan's family. According to oral tradition, this trustee had a room inside the building of the church and the *Qurbana* would only begin once members of the trustees' family arrived (now the church functions on democratic principles and trustees and other governing body members are elected). The trusteeship came to be established as the hereditary right of such families and they directed the affairs of the church. This is further seen in the deeds and accounts of the church, where documents were all signed by the trustees on behalf of the church. The trustees were in charge of raising the money due to the other faction and of handing it over to them, while the trustees of the other faction were designated to accept the money. Thus the principle of the sovereignty of the parish and the fact that the church belonged to the people were well-established. It is also to be remembered here that the administration of the Hindu temples, too, was conducted by the *uralars* or the trustees belonging to the Brahmin castes. When the issue was taken to the officials, it was not the bishops or other senior clergy that the people took along for support, but the members of the other parishes and the prominent members of the faction.<sup>43</sup> The fact that the laity was more powerful than the priests and that they had the say in the affairs of the church is one of the reasons why the Synod of Diamper could not totally change the practices of the Syrian Christians, who resented this command from above.

43 The word used is „*thajjanangal*” meaning one's own people. *Ola* 1, *Puram* 2, *Patthi* 2, lines 2-3, *Ola* 1, *Puram* 2, *Patthi* 3, lines 1-3.



One should also note the way how the huge amount of money that was to be given to the *pazhayakuru* faction was raised.<sup>44</sup> The amount was raised by contributions from the parish members. As the requisite sum could not be raised by contributions alone, Kallarakkal Pailly Tharakan, a member of the prominent and wealthy family of the church, borrowed 4000 *puthans* in two instalments from Bishop Mor Divanyasios (Dionysius) in the month of *Vrichikam* of 944 Kollam Era. It is significant to note that the money was given by the bishop on the then prevailing interest rates.<sup>45</sup> This bishop was a relative of Kallarakkal Pailly Tharakan.<sup>46</sup> The bishop, probably, gave the money due to this relationship and not because of his relationship to the church as a bishop. This could have been one of the factors that, later on, led to the trusteeship of the church passing into the hands of the Kallarakkal Tharakan family. Thus, even though the church was standing on his side, the bishop gave only a loan on interest and not a contribution. This also reiterates the argument that churches were established and maintained by the local people and the bishops and the priests had only spiritual control over them.

The document also throws light on the legal/administrative hierarchy of pre-modern Kerala. Kuruppampady was part of the Venad kingdom that extended roughly from the southern tip of Kerala to the banks of the Periyar river. At the time of this incident, Rama Varma, also called Dharmaraja: „the Just King” (1758 A.D. -1798 A.D.), was the king of Venad. When the dispute occurred, it was taken to Paraveli Panikkar of the Kulangara Avathoot family, who was the *nagarakarthavu*, the one in charge of the church and the market. When a satisfactory solution did not emerge, the issue was taken to the next higher authority (district level), at *Mandapathumvathikkal Kariyakkar*. Subsequently, the case was taken up to the *Sarvadhikariyakkar* and then to the *Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar*. Once the case was settled at the *Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar* level, for execution it traverses down as follows: from the *Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar* through the *Sarvadhikariyakkar* and the *Kariyakkar* to the *Pravurthiyar*.

*Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar*

/

*Sarvadhikariyakkar*

/

*Kariyakkar*

/

*Pravurthiyar*

Administrative hierarchy

*Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar*

/

*Sarvadhikariyakkar*

/

*Kariyakkar*

/

*Nagarakarthavu*

Judicial hierarchy

44 The set of manuscripts that mentions these matters is badly damaged and cannot be properly read. Luckily it was translated by Rev. Fr. Gheevarghese Corepiscopa Athumkal, op. cit., pp. 74-79.

45 Ibid., pp. 77-78.

46 Ibid., p. 84.



Thus it can be seen that the *Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar*, the *Sarvadhikariyakkar* and the *Kariyakkar* had both judicial and administrative powers, whereas these powers were, probably, vested with two different authorities at the village level. According to The Travancore State Manual, under the *Sarvadhikariyakkar* there would be a judge called *Toraikaran*.<sup>47</sup> But in the case of the Kuruppampady church, the judge *Toraikaran* does not come into the picture. It is also to be noted that legal fees were to be paid by both factions for the hearing of the case.

Last, but not least in importance, is the significance of the church and of the Christian community in the socio-economic scenario. Churches were not just religious institutions but, like the temples of Kerala, played a significant role in the society. For example, close to this church there was a market. Tradition says that the *nagarakarthavu* of Kuruppampady had brought some Christian families to the locality from outside and gave them rooms in the market. A building belonging to and beside the church had a door that opened to the market (this door has by now been sealed off). Thus the market and the trade seem to have been in the hands of the Christians and the church had direct connections with the market.<sup>48</sup>

A quick survey of some other manuscripts in the church shows that the church, which had money at its disposal, was lending money on interest to the needy upon the mortgage of their lands. To quote an example from among the many such documents, there is the *kanam* document<sup>49</sup> of 1848 A. D. In this a sum of 8,121 *puthans* was given on loan to Naramangalathu Thattan Narayanan, a Hindu, on mortgage of certain lands that he owned. The trustees of the church signed this document on behalf of the church. The church also had vast areas of land generating additional income, as seen from accounts on money paid as wages for maintenance of land as contained in several documents. Another example of the variegated functions of the church is a reference to the *ezhuthu kalari*<sup>50</sup> functioning under the church, in a manuscript dated 1895 A. D. In such schools children of all denominations were being taught. Thus, the church not only served the religious needs of the Christians, but also had a significant role in the life of the people of the locality as a whole.

The few manuscripts analysed here are just the tip of the iceberg. A fuller picture will emerge only after a thorough study of the other hundreds of manuscripts preserved in the various Syrian Christian churches. Such studies would not only

47 See V. Nagam Aiya, *op. cit.*, p. 370

48 Probably, one could get more insight to these matters if one were to go through the entire collection of the palm leaves in the church.

49 *Kanam* is a land tenure based on mortgage or lease. Here money was lent on interest on mortgage of lands to the church.

50 *Kalari* generally refers to the place where martial arts were taught in Kerala. Here it would mean a place where letters (*ezhuttu*) were taught. This palm-leaf manuscript talks about the labour charges given for the making of a new door in the *ezhuthu kalari*. Incidentally, it may be noted that the church at present has two schools functioning under its supervision.



enrich the history of Kerala but also lead to a deeper understanding of the past of the Syrian Christian community which, by now, is mostly recollected on the basis of myths and folklore.

## APPENDIX-I

### TRANSLATION OF THE MANUSCRIPT

Taking refuge in the Lord,

In the year 1768 of our Lord and in Kollam Era 943, in the month of Meenam, in the evening that ended on the 8<sup>th</sup> day <of the month>, the people belonging to the *pazhayakuru* faction came to the church to set up the main altar for the celebration of the Holy *Qurbana* for the next day. On Sunday, the 9<sup>th</sup>, when the *puthankuru* faction came to celebrate the *Qurbana*, they asked the *pazhayakuru* faction to vacate the altar, whereupon they said that they would do so after they had finished. However, because the *pazhayakuru* faction delayed in conducting the *Qurbana*, the *puthankuru* faction had to return. This issue was taken to Paraveli Panikkar of the Kulangara Avathoot family, who was the *nagarakarthavu* of the church and the market. He assured them that he would summon the *pazhayakuru* faction and enquire into the issue and asked them to celebrate the Holy *Qurbana* the next day. The next day the *Qurbana* was celebrated. On Sunday, the 16<sup>th</sup>, when the *puthankuru* faction was beginning to celebrate the Holy *Qurbana*, the *pazhayakuru* faction went to Paraveli Panikkar of Kulangara Avathoot, apprised him and brought him to the gates of the church. He asked the sexton of the *pazhayakuru* faction to remove the things arranged in the main altar and to place it on the minor altar below, thereby enabling the *pazhayakuru* faction to conduct the Holy *Qurbana*. The *puthankuru* faction was thus unable to celebrate the *Qurbana*. After this, <the *puthankuru* faction> went to the Kunnathunadu *Mandapathumvathikkal Kariyakkar*, Sankaran Annazhi for a redressal of their grievances. He convoked the *pazhayakuru* faction, people from both factions, Christians from other parishes and other prominent members, and heard their claims. Since the claims and counterclaims of the common asset by the factions did not terminate, he told <them> that he would hear it <the case> later, calling the prominent members once again. In the meanwhile, the *pazhayakuru* faction conducted their services in the church while the *puthankuru* faction was unable to celebrate the *Qurbana*. While this impasse continued, Pallikara Menayapalliveetil Govinda Pillai replaced Sankaran Annazhi as the *Mandapathumvathikkal Kariyakkar*. When the *puthankuru* faction presented their grievances to him, he called the *pazhayakuru* faction, other parish members and prominent members to hear



the case. Both parties agreed that the part of the *madbaha* below the arch was built when the two factions were going together, whereas the rest of the structure was built by a contribution from the *puthankuru* faction alone, when both factions were getting along amicably with each other. It was agreed and decided by both factions that a sum of 25,000 *puthans* was spent for that part <of the church>, which had been constructed together, while for the rest of the structure built by the *puthankuru* faction, including the part of the *madbaha* above the arch, the *haikkala* and the *mukhayira*, a sum of 36,000 *puthans* was spent. He <the *Kariyakkar*> said that now it was because the *puthankuru* faction was holding their *Qurbana* in the main altar of the church and the *pazhayakuru* faction celebrating their *Qurbana* in the minor altar that the dispute arose and that the two factions should get along without quarrel, spending equally. He also said that since the *puthankuru* faction had spent 36,000 *puthans* more than the *pazhayakuru* faction, the latter should spend 36,000 *puthans*, convince the former about this and, then, for further construction both factions should spend equally. On hearing this, the *pazhayakuru* faction suggested that if they were given a piece of land and half the amount of what they had spent together with the *puthankuru* faction for building the church, that is, 12,500 *puthans*, then, they would build a church of their own. It was decided by the authority and <agreed to> by the people assembled that since the *puthankuru* faction was in majority, half of what was spent together by both factions, 12,500 *puthans*, should be given by the *puthankuru* faction to the *pazhayakuru* faction in four instalments between the months of *Chingam* and *Vrichikam* of Kollam Era 944. An agreement to this effect was signed and handed over by the trustees of the *puthankuru* faction to that of the *pazhayakuru* faction on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the month of *Karkkidakam* of Kollam Era 943. The *pazhayakuru* faction transferred, in writing, the rights in full of the big church of Kuruppampady and its properties to the *puthankuru* faction. The *puthankuru* faction also pledged, in writing, to the *pazhayakuru* faction that they would not have any rights on the church that would be built. The *puthankuru* faction paid 800 *rasis* and the *pazhayakuru* faction paid 500 *rasis* as fees to the state. The *Pravurthiyar* of Asamannoor village, Raman Unni, was sent as an overseer by the *Mandapathumvathikkal*. The two factions brought out and kept in front of the church all the articles that were in their joint possession. They swore that nothing more was to be brought out. These were then divided between them and a certificate was also given. <The *Pravurthiyar*> saw to it that a deed was exchanged renouncing the half right <on the other party's possessions>. The amount that was agreed to as jointly spent by the two factions for the construction of the church, and so on, is 25,000 *puthans*. The sum to be given to the *pazhayakuru* faction was half of this, that is, 12,500 *puthans*. As per one promissory note written and given <to the *pazhayakuru* faction>, the amount that was to be paid by the trustees of the *puthankuru* faction, Puthussery Avura and others, in the four months from the



month of *Chingam* to the month of *Vrichikam* of 944, was 12,500 *puthans*. In this, the amount that was paid by the trustees of the *puthankuru* faction, Puthussery Avura, Attupurathu Paily and others, four of them, as well as by Kallarakkal Paily Tharakan and Karavattu Mathu, to the trustees of *pazhayakuru* faction, Arakkal Paily Tharakan and others, four of them, and to the son of the sexton Mathu <of the *pazhayakuru* faction> on <every> 15<sup>th</sup> <of the month> from the 4<sup>th</sup> of the month of *Chingam* until the 25<sup>th</sup> of the month of *Vrichikam*, was 6,659 *puthans*.

The balance of 5,841 *puthans* was given on Sunday, the 20<sup>th</sup> of *Makaram*, 944 Kollam Era. But the *pazhayakuru* faction refused to accept this, since the stipulated time had lapsed. Upon reporting this to the *Mandapathumvathikkal*, an order was issued by the *Kariyakkar* to the *pazhayakuru* faction to accept the money on 4<sup>th</sup> *Kumbham*. This money was handed over on that day. But the receipt for the total money amounting to 12,500 *puthans* thus handed over on the issue of the Kuruppampady church, from the 4<sup>th</sup> of *Chingam* to the 4<sup>th</sup> *Kumbham* in 944 Kollam Era, to the trustees of the *pazhayakuru* faction, Arakkal Paily Tharakan and four others, as well as sexton Mathu, by the trustees of the *puthankuru* faction, Puthussery Avura, Attupurathu Paily and others along with Kallarakkal Paily Tharakan and Karavattu Mathu, was not given. The *pazhayakuru* faction said that since there were dues, they could not build the church [...]<sup>51</sup> the *pazhayakuru* faction started coming to the church. A protest was registered with the *Mandapathumvathikkal* and the *Sarvadhikariyakkar*. But as the *pazhayakuru* faction was not evicted from the church, on 7<sup>th</sup> *Dhanu*, Kollam Era 945, the issue was taken to *Thampikumaran* Chempakaraman Pillai, who was the *Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar*. The order given by His Lordship *Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar* was given to the *Sarvadhikariyakkar*, who in turn issued an order to the *Mandapathumvathikkal Kariyakkar*. The *Mandapathumvathikkal Kariyakkar* in turn issued an order to the *Pravurthiyar* and, together with him, he also sent along the *Cheriyakunjuttikaran*. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of *Dhanu*, Kollam Era 945, the *Pravurthiyar* came along with the *Cheriyakunjuttikaran* to the church and evicted the *pazhayakuru* faction from the church.

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51 In Ola 4, Puram 1, Line 1 and 2, the ends of the lines, as well as the beginning of Line 3, are illegible.



## APPENDIX-II

Glossary of Malayalam and Syro-Malayalam terms<sup>52</sup>

<i>Achan</i>	The word means „father”, but is sometimes used as an honorific title
<i>Anjuvannam</i>	Trading corporation of the Christian merchants
<i>Cheriyakunjuttikaran</i>	An orderly
<i>Ezhuthu kalari</i>	School
<i>Haikkala</i>	Nave of a church (S-M)
<i>Kacheri</i>	Office
<i>Kanam</i>	Land tenure based on mortgage or lease
<i>Kariakkar</i>	Literally the word means „manager”. Here it means the officer-in-charge of a district
<i>Kolezhutthu</i>	The form of writing produced by a style or an elongated, stick-like material ( <i>kol</i> means „stick” and <i>ezhuthu</i> means „writing” in Malayalam)
<i>Madbaha</i>	The sanctuary in a church (S-M)
<i>Mandapam</i>	A pillared hall in front of a Hindu temple
<i>Mandapathumvathikkal</i>	The office of a smaller division in the state, which, probably, can be equated to a district
<i>Marthamariyam</i>	Saint Mary (S-M)
<i>Mukhayira</i>	Facade of the church
<i>Nagarakarthavu</i>	Lord of the town
<i>Ola</i>	Palm-leaf
<i>Para</i>	A measuring vessel of Kerala
<i>Patthi</i>	Columns on a written palm-leaf, consisting of several lines (in this case, 4 lines)
<i>Pazhayakuru</i>	Literally „those of the Old Allegiance”, a section of Syrian Christians who owed their allegiance to the Pope
<i>Pravurthi</i>	Village
<i>Pravurthikacheri.</i>	Village office
<i>Pravurthiyar</i>	Village officer

52 (S-M) indicates that the Malayalam term had been borrowed from the Syriac.



<i>Puram</i>	One side of the palm leaf
<i>Puthan</i>	A silver coin
<i>Puthankuru</i>	Literally „those of the New Allegiance”, a section of Syrian Christians who acknowledged the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch as their spiritual head
<i>Qurbana</i>	The Eucharistic liturgy (S-M)
<i>Rasi</i>	A copper coin
<i>Sarvadhikariyakkar</i>	An officer under the Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar
<i>Taluk</i>	Administrative subdivision of a district
<i>Toraikaran</i>	Judge
<i>Uralar</i>	Brahmin trustees of the Hindu temples
<i>Valiya Sarvadhikariyakkar</i>	Officer-in-charge of an administrative division of the Kingdom of Venad

### APPENDIX-III

#### Kollam Era and Malayalam Calendar Months

A year in the Malayalam Era (Kollam Era) starts with the month of Chingam that is from mid-August to mid-September. The year has 12 months as listed below. The Kollam Era started in 825 A. D. with the establishment of the port of Kollam (Quilon).

<i>Chingam</i>	August-September
<i>Kanni</i>	September-October
<i>Thulam</i>	October-November
<i>Vrichikam</i>	November-December
<i>Dhanu</i>	December-January
<i>Makaram</i>	January-February
<i>Kumbham</i>	February-March
<i>Meenam</i>	March-April
<i>Metam</i>	April-May
<i>Etavam</i>	May-June
<i>Mithunam</i>	June-July