



Chapter 2

My Syro-Malabar Church

The Church instituted by Lord Jesus, to continue His mission. The Church fashioned by the courageous bloodshed of Thomas the Apostle, my father of faith. The Church that gives me Jesus, my most precious treasure. The Church that prepares the womb, my baptismal font, and the tomb my final resting place. My Syro-Malabar Church my mom who teaches me about faith, worship, life, and prayer and thereby nurtures me in Jesus.



- Do I love the Church, my mother?
- I cannot love without knowing; do I have sufficient knowledge about the Syro-Malabar Church?
- What is the identity and uniqueness of my Mother Church?

Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, the prefect of the Oriental Congregation for Eastern Churches, once said: "I love your Church because I know her history." In order to love the Syro Malabar Church, our mother, we must know her history. The history of the Syro-Malabar Church begins with Jesus and the Holy Church He founded.

Jesus and the Holy Church

Responding to Jesus' call, the disciples followed Him. Jesus trained them through teachings. They knew Jesus through experience. The resurrected Jesus, before His ascension exhorted His disciples: **"Go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation"** (Mk 16:15).

The disciples, taking up the mission, traveled across the world, preaching about Jesus and His teachings. Through their proclamation, Jesus the Good News reached everywhere. In each place, those who listened and believed them, received baptism and became one community. The Church took shape in all those places. Thus, the Holy Catholic Church is the union of these church communities across different parts of the world. The Holy Church, the Mystical Body of Christ (2 Cor 12:27) continues His mission.

The Unique Identity of the Syro-Malabar Church

The Holy Church is the communion of churches formed in different parts of the world, and in union with the Popes, the successors of St. Peter. Although one in Christ, each Church

THE NAME SYRO MALABAR

The liturgy of the Mar Thoma Nasrani Christians was in the Eastern Syriac language.

The word 'Syro' in the Church's name signifies this.

The foreigners of ancient times called the western part of India, Malabar. This word is the second part of the name.



Read and discuss
Youcat 121

Blessed are you
Mar Thoma *Sleeha*!
Because the Mighty
God has sent you to
India to win it for His
only begotten Son.

Mar Aprem



Mar Thoma *Sleeva*
was obtained from the
tomb of Mar Thoma
Sleeha in Mylapore.

Learn in detail the
various significance
of what the *Sleeva*
symbolizes and present
to the class.

has its own unique identity. “When she puts down her roots in a variety of cultural, social, and human terrains she takes on different external expressions and appearances in each part of the world” (CCC 835). Let us examine the factors that differentiate the individual Churches.

- Liturgy
- Theology
- Spiritual heritage
- Governance

The Syro-Malabar Church is an individual Church with its distinctiveness and identity in the factors mentioned above. Mar Thoma *Sleeha*, who preached the Gospel in India is the father of this Church. The identity of the Syro-Malabar Church is shaped by the messianic experience of Mar Thoma *Sleeha* and the cultural, social, and human uniqueness of India. To know the Church, our Mother which follows the apostolic tradition of St. Thomas the apostle (Youcat 137), we must know her history.

The Sons/daughters of Mar Thoma *Sleeha*

Mar Thoma *Sleeha*, who embarked the mission on proclaiming the Gospel, made two missionary journeys to India. During his First Missionary Journey between AD 44 - 50, the Church he established in Persia and Syria reached up to the province of King Gondapharas in the northwestern India. In his second Missionary Journey in AD 52, he arrived at ‘Muziris’ (modern-day Kodungallur), a world-renowned trade center. After establishing the historically significant Seven and a Half Churches (known as faith communities), he attained martyrdom in AD 72 at Mylapore, near Chennai.

World Map: The Two Missionary Journeys of Mar Thoma *Sleeha*



Route map of two missionary journeys of Mar Thoma *Sleeha* to India.
Taken from St. Thomas Christian Museum, Mount St. Thomas, Kakkanad, Kochi



What are the personal blessings you have received through the Syro Malabar Church? Elaborate.

The historical proof of Mar Thoma *Sleeha*

The historical authenticity of King Gondapharas is scientifically proven by the discovery of coins he issued

- The San Thom Cathedral Church is built on the place where the mortal remains of Mar Thoma *Sleeha* is buried.
- No other place in the world claims to have his tomb.
- There are records of the relics of Mar Thoma *Sleeha* taken to Edessa in the 3rd century, to Kiosk island in AD1241, and Ortona in Italy in 1257. The holy relic is still kept at the San Thom Cathedral, Ortona.
- A portion of this Holy relic (bone of the right hand) was taken from Ortona and enshrined for veneration in Azhikode, Kodungallur.
- All through history, there are records of pilgrims visiting Mylapore from different parts of the world

The Historical Journey of the Syro-Malabar Church

For centuries the Nasrani community in Malabar remained connected to the Persian Church established by Mar Thoma *Sleeha*, following the Syriac liturgical tradition. The history of the Syro-Malabar Church, originated with Mar Thoma *Sleeha*, has undergone many complex phases. God's providential care has always been with her. Pay attention to the Milestones in the History of the Syro-Malabar Church.

1. The Church of Jesus

The resurrected Jesus instructed His disciples to go into all the world and proclaim the Good News. As a continuation of Jesus, to give Jesus to the world, the Holy Church was established.

3. The Nasranis

Mar Thoma Christians, known as Nasranis, were Indian in culture and Christian in faith.

4. Connection with the Persian Church

From the early centuries, the Nasranis maintained a close relationship with the Persian Church founded by Mar Thoma *Sleeha*.

- o AD 345: Under the leadership of Bishop of Uraha Mar Yoseph and Knai Thoma, the Knanaya Christian community arrived in Kerala, contributing greatly to the growth of the Indian Church.
- o Until the time of Mar Abraham, Metreopolitans from Persia guided the spiritual affairs of the Church.
- o The Archdeacon (*Arkadiyakkon*) oversaw the temporal administration.

2. The founding of the Church in India

AD 44 - 50: Mar Thoma *Sleeha* in the province of Gondapharas in northwestern India.

AD 52: The *Sleeha* reached Kodungallur, gave baptism and founded the Church.

AD 72: Martyrdom at Mylapore.

5. The Archdiocese of Kodungallur

The bishops who came from Persia resided at Kodungallur.

According to historical documents

AD 1504: Mar Yaqob Abuna chose Kodungallur as his diocesan headquarters.

AD 1552: The headquarters was moved to Angamaly.

AD 1600: Angamaly Diocese was renamed as Kodungallur Diocese.

AD 1886: The Kodungallur Archdiocese was dissolved. It was divided into three vicariates.

6. The Portuguese Connection

- 1498: Vasco da Gama discovers the sea route from Europe to Asia.
- In the lands they reached, the Pope granted the Portuguese king the authority (*Padroado*) to spread the faith, establish dioceses, and appoint bishops.
- AD 1534: The first Latin diocese in India was established in Goa.
- The Portuguese maintained friendly relations with bishops from Persia.
- Later, due to the disagreements of the Portuguese regarding the liturgical practices and administrative system of the Nasranis, disputes arose.



Mar Thoma *Sleeha* came to Kerala and founded the Church: Elucidate based on historical facts.

'Muziris' the Kodungallur

Kodungallur was the most renowned port of ancient Kerala. Kodungallur, then known 'Muziris', was the region where the river Periyar meets the Arabian Sea. Records confirm that traders from all parts of the world arrived and stayed there. Numerous archaeological remains of Arabic, Chinese, and Roman origin have been discovered from there. The town where Kerala's biggest archeological research happens today is situated in the region of Kodungallur. Kodungallur lost its significance on account of a massive flood (Tsunami) occurred in AD 1341 in the River Periyar, altering its course and leading to the destruction of the port.



Mar Thoma *Sleeha* came to Kerala and founded the Church'. Justify?

8. The Oath of Coonan Cross

- January 3, 1653: The declaration of independence made by the Mar Thoma Christians against Portuguese dominance.
- Holding the Holy Scripture and the Cross, they made an oath: "We shall never be under the authority of the Sampalur Priests as long as we and our descendants live. We accept our archdeacon as our administrator."
- This event led to a division within the united Saint Thomas Christian Church.
- In response to this crisis, Rome established direct governance in Kerala through the propaganda administration.

10. The Hierarchy of the Syro-Malabar Church

- 1923 December 21: Pope Pius XI established hierarchy for the Syro-Malabar Church with Ernakulam as its center.
- 1962: The first mission diocese of the Syro-Malabar Church, Chanda, was established.

12. A Growing Church

- 2017: The Syro-Malabar Church was granted jurisdiction over the entire territory of India.

13. The Syro-Malabar Church Today

- 2024: 5 archdioceses, 30 dioceses, and one apostolic visitation.
- It is the second-largest individual church in terms of the number of faithful among the 24 individual churches within the Catholic Church.
- Approximately five million faithful.
- The Church that has the greatest missionary zeal
 - **Major Archbishop: Mar Raphael Thattil**

7. The Synod of Udayamperoor

- 1599: Alexis Menezes, the Archbishop of Goa, convened the Synod.
- Several ancient Nasrani traditions were declared heretical and superstitious.
- Western liturgical practices were imposed on the Nasrani community.

9. Syro-Malabar Vicariates

- 1886: The Padroado and Propaganda governance systems were abolished, and the Latin hierarchy was established in India.
- 1887: Pope Leo XIII separated the Syrian Christians from Latin jurisdiction (Varapuzha) and established two vicariates for them: Thrissur and Kottayam.
- 1896: Pope Leo XIII restructured the vicariates into Thrissur, Changanassery, and Ernakulam, appointing native apostolic vicars.
- 1911: Pope Pius X established the Knanaya Syro-Malabar Vicariate in Kottayam.

11. Major Archiepiscopal Church

- 1992 December 16: Pope John Paul II elevated the Syro-Malabar Church to the status of a Major Archiepiscopal Church.



A seminar should be organized to discuss the contributions of Paremakal Thoma Kathanar in reclaiming the identity of the Syro-Malabar Church.



Make a note on the importance of the history of the Church in India, described in the book 'Varthamana pusthakam' and present.



The Syro Malabar Church is an Indian Church, why?



Conduct a digital presentation of the most esteemed bishops who have accomplished the position of the Major Archbishop of the Syro-Malabar Church.

The Identity of the Syro-Malabar Church

The Indian Church founded by Mar Thoma *Sleevea* was known as 'Mar Thoma Nazranikal'. Their way of life and culture were unique. We have preserved this identity even to this day despite the various challenges faced over time. The identity of the Mar Thoma Nazrani forms the foundation of the Syro-Malabar Church's unique character. Let us examine some of its distinctive features.

1. The Syro-Malabar Church is an Oriental Church

The churches located in the eastern part of the ancient Roman Empire are known as Oriental churches. The Syro-Malabar Church is an Oriental Church.

"The Catholic Church holds in high esteem the institutions, liturgical rites, ecclesiastical traditions and the established standards of the Christian life of the Eastern Churches" (OE 1)

These renowned characteristics upheld by the Catholic Church are possessed by the Syro Malabar Church in abundance; she continues to sustain her identity.

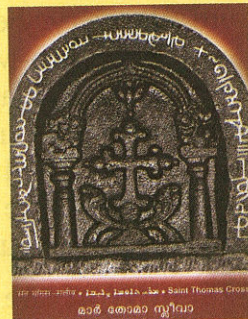
Since it follows the East Syriac liturgical tradition, they were known as *Syrian Christians*.

2. Identity of the Liturgical Tradition

- Since the time of the Church Fathers, the liturgical tradition of the Syro-Malabar Church has continuity, richness, and meaningfulness.
- This liturgy is centered on the Messianic Mystery.
- Our liturgy is designed on the basis of the liturgical year.
- The Syro Malabar Church has its own distinctive Liturgy of the Hours (*Yaama Prarthana*).
- Devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is another significant feature of the Syro-Malabar Church. There are numerous churches and faithful bearing the name of Mother Mary. The Church continues to observe the traditional fastings such as the eight-day fasting and the fifteen-day fasting.
- The Sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation, and the

Identity

(From the Latin word *identitas* = sameness)
state of being the same
undiluted
singleness



**The Miraculous
Sleevea of
Mylapore (The
feast day
December 18)**

Devotion to the Sleevea

In the 16th century, missionaries who arrived in India described the Mar Thoma Nasrani as *Sleevea* Bhakthar. When the Portuguese came, there were no statues in the Nasrani churches, except the *Sleevea*. The *Sleevea* was carried with solemn celebration during the processions.



Organize a presentation on the architectural styles of ancient Christian churches in Kerala

Holy Qurbana, administered together as the Sacrament of Initiation for infants, have been in practice in the Syro Malabar Church since the beginning.

- Throughout the Syro-Malabar liturgy, special importance is given to the Resurrection of Jesus.

3. Identity in the Language

From its very beginning, the worship and liturgical rites of the Syro-Malabar Church were conducted in the Aramaic -Syriac language. This was the language spoken by Jesus. It was in this very language that Mar Thoma *Sleeha* proclaimed the faith (Mar Walah!) and preached the Gospel. We are continuing the same liturgical heritage handed down through the Syriac language, even today.

4. Identity of the Administrative System

The Church administrative system of Mar Thoma Nasrani had its identity. Metropolitans from Persia monitored the spiritual affairs of the Church, while the temporal administration was performed by a native ecclesiastical leader, the Archdeacon (*Arcadiacon*).

The general matters of the Church were determined through a system known as the *Palliyogam*, composed of local clergy and heads of families. The Archdeacon presided over this body. The parishes also had similar system like the *Palliyogam*.

5. Identity in Cultural Adaptation



Kallooppara Church

The Church planted by Mar Thoma *Sleeha* in the Indian soil, grew up by imbibing the elements of Indian culture. When the Christian faith was expressed in the Indian culture, the *Thali Kettu*, unique style of attire, the *Kudumi* on men's

The Seven and a Half Churches Founded by Mar Thoma *Sleeha*

- Kodungallur
- Palayoor
- Kottakkavu
- Kokkamangalam
- Niranam
- Nilackal
- Kollam
- Thiruvankodu (Half-Church / Arappalli)



Explain how the unique personality of Mar Thoma *Sleeha* is reflected in the Church he established in India?



Find and present more examples of the devotion to the Cross (*Sleeva Bhakti*) in our Church.



“Name carries traditional identity”
Study the tradition of baptismal names and name transfers within the Syro-Malabar Church and evaluate the statement.

heads, east-facing houses, a distinctive formation system for priests (*Malpan*) etc, grew up as a unique heritage of Mar Thoma Church.

The ancient Christian churches of Kerala were built in the architectural style of Hindu temples. They were distinguished from the temples by the cross placed on top of the church. The interior of the church was divided into three sections as *Madbaha*, *Kesthroma*, and *Hykala*.

Lamps and ornamental umbrellas were similar in both churches and temples. On the western side of the church, there were *Kodimaram* and *Kurishinthotty* with *Kalkurissu*.

6. Identity of Lifestyle

The Mar Thoma Nazrani were Christians in faith, Oriental in worship, and Indian in culture.

- Their way of life was known as "Mar Thoma Margam" (The Way of Mar Thoma). They practiced fasting and abstinence as part of their lifestyle, and they were known as "The Brethren of Fasting."
- In matters of birth, marriage, death, and family ceremonies, they followed numerous customs rooted in Indian traditions.
- Living in harmony and peace with people of all faiths, they were widely respected and honored. Local rulers recognized their distinct identity and granted them special privileges and rights through royal decrees known as *cheppeḍs* (copper plates).

A cherished tradition of the Syro-Malabar Church is the observance of the Paschal Meal (*Pesaha Appam*) at home, where the head of the family breaks and distributes the unleavened bread in remembrance of Christ's Last Supper. As a pilgrim community, always anticipating the Second Coming of Christ, the Syro-Malabar Church maintains the tradition of:

- Constructing altars facing east
- Praying while facing east, both in churches and at home

Founded by Mar Thoma *Sleeha* to bring Christ to the world, our Church continues its dynamic journey into the third millennium with renewed vigor and spiritual vitality.

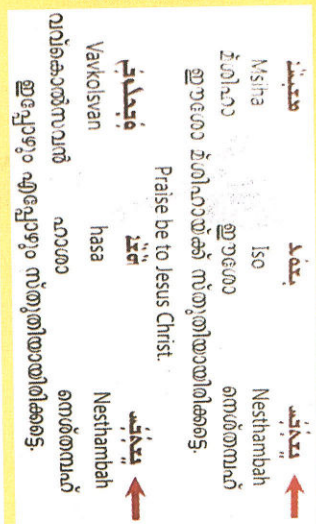
The Tharisappally Cheppedu (Tharisappally Copper Plates)

Around AD 850, Ayyan Adikal, the ruler of Kollam, granted the Tharisappally Copper Plates to Mar Sāppīr Īsō, a Syriac Christian merchant.

This decree, engraved on six copper plates, conferred upon Mar Sāppīr Īsō: Official titles, land to build a church in Kollam, protection for the church and its community, various rights, including workers for the church's service. These copper plates are among the most significant and authenticated sources of Kerala's history.



Explain the unique Christian identity that the Syro-Malabar Church; as a mother, molds in her?



From the heartfelt invocation "Īśōyē" (O Jesus!) to the countless missionaries who dedicate their lives in service worldwide are the contributions of this mother church.

When we live as true children of this Mother, we become authentic disciples of Christ; Then, our earthly journey will truly become heavenward.



My Convictions

The Syro-Malabar Church is my Mother.
The Syro-Malabar Church was founded in Jesus Christ and established in India by Mar Thoma Sleeha.

The heritage of my Mother Church is dignified, glorious, and uniquely rich in tradition.



Let Us Read the Word of God

The Holy Gospel of St. John
Chapters 5–8



Let us illuminate our hearts

"Thomas, who was called the Twin,
said to his fellow disciples,
"Let us also go, that we may die with him"
(Jn 11:16).



My Resolution

I will cherish and uphold the heritage
of the Syro-Malabar Church and will
faithfully pass it on to the next
generation.