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# HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF KARUNAGAPPALLY TALUK: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON TEVALAKKARA MARTHA MARIAM CHURCH AND KOVILTHOTTAM ST ANDREWS CHURCH

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## ABSTRACT:

*Kerala has a long history with the outside world since ancient times. It had trade contact with King Solomon referred to in the Old Testament. Later, it enjoyed its hay days with the Romans. Many of its ports like Musri's and Kollam were famous for their spice trade pepper, teak wood, sandalwood, and tortoise shells were exported to European countries during the classical period. With the advent of the Christian Era, it was one of the places visited by St Thomas in 52 A.D, followed by the migration of Syrians and they too settled inside the state. The Syrian Christians have been practicing Christianity long before the advent of the Portuguese. The monument that stands testament to that tradition is Thevalakkara Marthamariam Church. Later in the 16th century Portuguese domination came into being. A grandiose epitome of the legacy of the Portuguese in Kerala is the Kovilthottam St Andrews Church, which is one of the earliest churches in the Kollam diocese. Kovilthottam Church is a fledgling parish with 1000 families which is threatened by the approach of the sea and mining of rare earth minerals can trace its origins to the early Christians of Kerala, whose preservation is a matter of protection of its age-old traditions, customs, and heritage. This article is trying to do a one to one study of the two distinct historical monuments, their history and how they are connected both historically and culturally. The method employed in this study is that of descriptive in nature. The research done for this article included field visit, architectural documentation, interviews, going through previous scholarly works, use of original sources. By comparing these monuments we are contrasting the existence of two distinct religious sects and how they interacted with history during their time of existence.*

**Keywords:** *Christianity in Kerala, Kovilthottam St Andrew church, Thevalakkara Martha Mariam Orthodox Church.*

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## LOCATION

The Karunagappally is a municipality located in the Kollam district of Kerala, India. It is 24 km north of Kollam and 60 km south of Alappuzha. Karunagappally taluk consists of small clusters of settlements in the present area such as Alappad, Ochira, Adinad, Karunagappally, Thazhava, Pavumba, Thodiyoor, Kallalibhagam, Thevalakkara, Chavara, Neendakara, Clappana, Kulasekharapuram, Thekkumbhagam, Ayanivelikulangara, Panmana, Ponmana, and Vadakumthala. Geographically, taluk is bound on the north by Kayamkulam, on the east by Kunnathur taluk, on the south by Kollam, and on the west by the Arabian Sea. It is one of the fastest developing towns in Kerala and is part of the Kollam metropolitan area.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Kollam constitutes among the fourteen districts of Kerala. Kollam has a long history of tradition with the global world since Biblical times. The Christian community of Kollam has a long and illustrious history. It is to be noted that the Kollam Diocese is the first diocese created by the direct intercession of the Roman papacy in India. According to legend, Kollam was the place where St. Thomas Apostle reached India in 52 AD in Kodungallur and with his missionary work erected one among the seven churches aka Church Communities (*Ezhayra Pallikal*).

This is a mere legend, not supported by historical evidence. According to Saint Ephrem, Thomas and Bartholomew were tasked with a mission to preach the word of our lord to dark people he was murdered and the remains were sent to Edessa and buried there. There is evidence to claim that he died in Mylapore in Chennai. In Kollam, he built the church which consecrates the community worship with the prayers incorporated into Syrian Christian tradition.

The advent of the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries witnessed the spread of Islam and Crusades, the subsequent loss of the holy land, and the loss of Byzantine lands to the Arabs. Then with the Mongol invasion and the promising legend of King Prester John. There arose a need to find this Christian king who was killing the enemies of the church thereby injecting new energies and zeal into the missionary work.

During this time political events were shaping the papacy and its residence in Europe. The King of France used his political muscle to move the residence of the pope to Avignon in France. The influence of Franciscan missionaries and the need to find missionary work for spreading the Franciscan order across the globe. The influence of Francis Assisi in spreading the Christian message even to Egyptian sultan Melek Al-kamil made a huge impact on missionary work among the Neo-Muslims. With this purpose, Pope John Paul XXII with his residence in Avignon, issued a papal bull 'Pontifex Romanus' dated Aug 9<sup>th</sup>, 1329 to appoint the Franciscan Missionary Jordanus Catalina de Severac as the Archbishop of *Coloumbum* (Kollam) suffrage to all the churches of the East.

Jordanus Catalani arrived in Surat in 1320 AD after his ministry in Gujarat, he reached Quilon in 1323. He not only revived Christianity but also brought thousands to the Christian fold. He came again to Quilon as the bishop in 1330. He built a church at Quilon, known as St. George's Church. His book "*Mirabilia Descripta*" is a rare work on plants, animals, and the people of India and of other countries in Asia and this is an authoritative work on India. This book is considered to be a landmark chronicle of its time since it was written in 1324.

The first Bishop of Quilon was received with great jubilation by the faithful of Quilon. He brought a message of good wishes from the Holy Father to the local rulers. As the first bishop in India, he was

also entrusted with the duty of spiritual nourishment of the Christian community in Calicut, Mangalore, Thane, and 'Broach' (north of Thane). He was martyred by Muslims in Bombay in 1336.

In the year 1348 John De Marignoli, the Papal Legate to China on his way back to Rome sojourned here for 14 months. With the martyrdom of the first Bishop, the seat of Quilon remained vacant. There was a 'historic gap' with regard to ecclesiastical administration in India till the Portuguese landed here in 1498 AD. It follows from the Friar Jordanus tradition of Catholicism and not just Christianity that is deep-rooted in Quilon. Hence, it is now clear that Latin Catholicism was brought to Kerala in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century by the French Dominicans. It is now evident that while Bishop Jordanus introduced Latin Catholicism, the Portuguese popularized it. The fact that Quilon is the founding seat of the Catholic Church in India is often found obscured in the midst of history. It is also established by the history recorded by Fr. John Marinjoli that he worshiped in the church built by Fr Jordanus. It is to be noted that the St. George Church was Destroyed by the Arabian Sea in --- AD.

However, it was the oldest church constructed by the Europeans in Kerala. The Kollam Diocese founded by the Jordanus was in charge of the South Indies and East -----?. Hence, Christianity was a thriving religion in Southern Kerala, and the same community held huge sway over the socio-political affairs of the state. The local kings had given powers over the material and spiritual affairs of their land to the church and its affairs.

The bull of Pope John XXII, dated 5<sup>th</sup> April 1330 address the christians of the Columbum ( Kollam) and intends them to be deliver to them by Jordanus , who has been nominated Bishop of the Kollam.

***“Noibili viro domino Nasxcarinorum et universis sub co Christianis, Nascarinis de Columbo, Vernerabilem Fratrem nostruim Jordanum Catalani, episcopum***

***Columbuensem, Proedicatorum Ordinis professorum, quem nuper ad episcopalis aignitatis apicem anctoriate apostolica duximus promovendum.”***

## **SOCIO-POLITICAL AFFAIRS**

On May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1498 AD, Vasco Da Gama followed the sea route navigated by Bartholomew Diaz, which is circumnavigating the Cape of Storms and reached Mozambique. He sailed far east and finally reached present-day Calicut. At this time the Portuguese were Latin Christians, and quite intolerant towards the other religious faiths and believers. The Portuguese were quite happy to see the Christian community in Kerala. However, they wanted these Christians to be under their denomination or their brand of Christianity which is Latin Christianity. They considered the Syrian Christians were heretics. Through the policy of a mixed colonial system and missionary activities, they set out to convert the people under them into their image. Many missionaries accompanied the sailors and traders and established Latin dioceses in Cochin and Goa. Thereby the due importance of the Kollam diocese was declined. Later it came under the Cochin diocese, which was headed by the diocese of Goa.

In 1542, the King of Portugal sent Francis Xavier to India to spread the word of the Lord to Non-Christians of India. He arrived in Goa and later moved to Kerala. In 1544, the ruler Madurai Nayak and his army invaded Travancore. Francis Xavier interceded to stop the invasion of Madhura Nayak's army in the heartland of Kerala. The future saint impressed the captain of the army that the invasion was stopped and they returned back to their native place known as Madurai. The king of Travancore was so pleased with the work of Francis Xavier and allowed him to carry on his missionary work zealously. Later,

Francis Xavier built 45 churches in Kerala. Due to his evangelizing work, most of the fishermen folk of the coast of Travancore had converted to Christianity. They were originally known as 'Arayas' and constituted a backward community by the Government of Kerala. It is interesting to note that today's Latin Christians of the coast of Kerala are the direct descendants of the 'Arayas' community which exist even today but with sparse members in it are involved in fishing.

In the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, Kerala Christians were spiritually led by Bishops sent by Patriarchies of Babel of the Eastern Orthodox Church of Antioch that is Damascus, and Syria. The representative of the Patriarchies looks after the welfare affairs of the neo-converts. According to Lodovico di Varthema wrote in 1503, "Every three years a priest comes from Babylon to administer baptisms." Interpreting this line, it gleans that there was a shortage of ordained priests in the Kollam diocese at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

In 1549 Mar Jacob, the last of the four Bishops sent by Patriarchies of Babel died, and there was no Bishop to lead the Christians of Kerala for almost six years. To solve this issue in 1555, the Patriarchies of the Babel, sent Bishop, Mar Ouseph, to Kerala. The Portuguese harbored an ulterior motive of bringing the Malayali Christians under the direct control of the Papacy in Rome. Moreover, they imprisoned Mar Ouseph in Goa for 18 months, after his release he reached Cochin and died due to illness. This is the beginning of the widening schism between Kerala's traditional Christians and the Portuguese.

In 1595 Alexios De Menezes was made the Archbishop of Goa. He sorts methods to strengthen the power of the Portuguese in India. One goal in achieving this aim

was to bring the St. Thomas Christians under the direct control of Rome. By 1597 the last metropolitan bishop of the Saint Thomas Christians, Abraham, had died, and Menezes was able to secure the submission of Archdeacon George, the highest remaining representative of the native church hierarchy.

In this connection, the power over the St Thomas Christians was secured. Later he set out to unify the two orders. In 1599, he came to Kerala and convened a synod at Udayamperoor in Central Kerala at ----- ?. He visited many local churches in Kerala and dialect the details of this visit were written in the masterwork "*Jornada of Dom Alexis De Menezes*" by Antonine De Gouvea, published in 1603.

Hence the above historical facts reveal by invoking the synod was to purge them and guide the traditional Catholics to stay in their "true catholic faith" and destroy all the "heretical books". In order to get the upper hand in the synod the archbishop had done a mass ordination in a short time of four months in which more than a hundred new priests were newly ordained. So, the number of ordained priests rose to 153 during the synod.

Thus, the archbishop totally dominated the synod and his agenda of Latinizing the entire Kerala Christians as it was in Goa. He brought spiritual changes to the Kerala Christians and transformed them into the essence of an original Goan.

## NEO CHRISTIAN CULTURAL TRAITS

In Goa the process of de-Indianizing had created a new culture in which the Portuguese dress code was imposed on the locals, the mass was performed in Latin, and the food constitutes of animal flesh and red wine. The women abstained from signing in churches. The Portuguese, especially the archbishop, wanted to impose this Western lifestyle on the Christians so that they looked and behaved



differently from the local Hindus and Muslims.

It is to be noted in a few years the Udayamperoor Synod changed the life of Kerala Christians. It had a profound impact on all aspects of the Christian life. Quite interestingly, during this time, the priests of the St. Thomas church were married and had children. They engaged themselves in many occupations to earn a living almost like the rabbi of Jews. They however were trained in the scripture and can conduct mass and lead a flock of worshippers in the community.

The Synod of Udayamperoor changed all these aspects to a certain extent. The priests were not forbidden to marry and many married priests were forced to abandon their wives. The synod had cut the link between the Kerala Church and Persian Church. Father, Ros S.J. was appointed the new Bishop of the Syrian Church. Father Ros set out to visit churches and destroy all the traditional books kept there.

The Kerala Christians informed all these atrocities to the Patriarchies of Babel and he sent another bishop to Kerala in 1653, but at Quilon port, the Portuguese stopped the bishop from landing in Kerala. Insulted by these events, the Syrian Christians met at the 'Church of Our Lady of Life' at Mattancherry, near Cochin on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1653, and took the '*Oath of Coonan Cross*'. To further state they will not be subjected to the 'Sambaloor Priests' (Jesuit Priest of Portuguese). Further, this led to a split in the Kerala Church. The split divides the churches into two divisions namely, one recognized by the bishops appointed by Rome and the other continued to be with the west-Syrian Church of Antioch. In 1685 two bishops came from Syria to lead Jacobite Christians. They introduced many reforms like reintroducing the marriage ceremony among the Jacobite priests and removal of idols installed during the Portuguese influence.

After the Coonan cross oath, the Pope began to take special interest in the affairs of the Kerala Christians. Several Carmelite monks were sent to India. In this direction, Fr. Joseph Sebastiani was sent as Bishop of Kerala.

## DUTCH INTERVENTION

In 1633 the Dutch captured Cochin ending the Portuguese occupation. The Dutch being protestant despised the Catholics, so they forced all Catholics out of Goa. This included the Portuguese Bishop **Sebastiani**. Before leaving Goa, Sebastiani consecrated F.Chandy Parambel, known in the west as Alexander de Campo, as the Bishop of Kerala on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1663, at Kanduruthy Church. The Portuguese had also at the time of leaving, nominated 'administrators' for Malabar who were stationed at Kodungalloor. This dual jurisdiction, within Roman Catholics itself, was a cause for further complications. So, in 1787, representatives from 84 Roman Catholic churches assembled at Angamaly in central Kerala and drew up a document to the Roman pontiff, showing the problems of dual jurisdiction and strong demand for native bishops. This document is called '*Angamaly padiyola*'.

In 1887, Pope Leo XIII decreed the division of Roman Catholics into two with the separation of the rite of the Syrian Catholics from that of the Latin. In 1896 the Pope made another decree for the erection of three more varieties of Syrian Catholics at Thrissur, Ernakulam, and Changanassery under three Indian Bishops. Further, in 1911, Pope Pious-X erected a third division within the Roman Bishops. Known as 'Kananya' (claim to be the decedents of Eastern-Syrian Christians who migrated from Persia along with Kanai Thomman in 345 AD) with the vicariate at Kottayam. From the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Protestant Missionaries also reached Kerala and established their consecrations.

## **(I) KOVILTHOTTAM ST ANDREWS CHURCH**

The Church is presently located in the Panmana-Chavara panchayat, Karunagapally Taluk, Kollam District of Kerala State. It is surrounded on western side with the Arabian sea and the eastern side by the Travancore-Cochin canal; on the North and South it is surrounded by the Kovilthottam hamlet. The church can be approached from the Kollam railway station by local transport system. Kovilthottam St Andrews Church is the epitome of Portuguese late 18<sup>th</sup> Century architecture. The Church however is much older, established in the year 1398 AD. The church is a Latin church that has maintained its Portuguese heritage and tradition. The prayers are performed in the Latin liturgy and priests follow the Latin catholic tradition of Prayer, Poverty, and strict abstinence.

### **HISTORY OF THE CHURCH**

The history of the Parish begins before the arrival of the Portuguese Missionaries in India and is one of the Oldest Christian communities especially the Parish under the diocese of Quilon. The Church is situated in Panmana and Chavara Panchayats of Karunagapally Taluk. As per the diocese records the Church was constructed in 1398 A.D and given the name "St. Andrews Church". It was the first church constructed in Karunagapally Taluk as is known as "Karunagapally Pally".

In the list given in the Synod, there is the mention of the church at "Martha" and 'Martha' being the name given by the Dutch to Karunagapally. It is worth noting that the Church records has references to three churches. The first church was constructed on the west side of Kottamkulangara temple which is near to present day National Highway No 66. The church was erected in "Kunnickal Purayidom" and records states that there

were about 35 catholic families in parish and they were spread around the backwaters and coastal plains of Kollam. The said plot "Kunnackal Purayidam" was owned by the Church. Due to demographic shifts and new conversions caused the first church to be shifted to adjacent area known as "Paniyil Purayidam" it was located half a mile east of the present Church location. Priest's residence was termed as "Kathanar Parsum", which usually was adjacent to the Church premise for practical purposes. As per historical records land tax was exempted by the ruler Rama Kulashekhara for the church properties before AD 1070. The places and the names are referred to in "Palliyl and Pathirayam" as the names in the said plots are mentioned in the records.

The Chavara - Panmana canal passing in front of the present church and was not there before 1749. There were only flush paddy fields. The said canal was made for irrigation purpose from Panmana Vattakayal to Chavara and land divided into two areas. A book published by Fr. Archilos Mirsmon (1921 to 1942) named "*Friars Minors or otherwise Franciscan in India*" printed in the Karachi Rotary Press kept in the library of the Tillery Monastery of Franciscans. This book gives valuable evidence about the church in pages 820 & 830 about the parish and the adjoining parishes. In 1749, eight parishes were given to the Franciscan missionaries to look after the parishioners and for their service; Quite interestingly Kovilthottam was one among the parishes found in the records.

During 1749 in the war between Travancore state under Marthanda Varma and Kayamkulam, due to the chaos of war, the second church was destroyed by fire and the Christian community lived there scattered in and around the hamlets. Franciscan Provincial of Goa has contributed to the reconstruction of the third Church (Present) because of the two

well-known Priests of Franciscans served in Kovilthottam church. At that time there were 300 members in the parish. 54 members in Pandharathuruthu Moreover, the Three Kings church (main church of Maruthukulngara) and 200 members in Karithura Francis Assisi church are also administered by the under Kovilthottam church. After the war, the third new church was constructed part by part over a period of time using local lime and stone (mix of jaggery paste and egg yolk) in 1779 by Fr. Yovakim de Santiago. Fr. Yovakim served the fold and herded the flock diligently with his inborn qualities of christian traits like humility, concern and care for this parish. Most of the parishioners are under Kodungallur Diocese. The parishioners are located in the coastal area from Vellanathuruthu to Chavara Light House and on the old church located areas. As per church records six new parishes formed from Kovilthottam parish such as Vadakkuthala, Karithura, Neendakara, Mamukil, Koivila andKulangarabhagom).

The church's comfrey in the adoration of Mother of gifts was consecrated in 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1770. Then rector of the parish was Bishop of Kochi Rev Clement Jose

had sent a decree on the formation of comfrey was founded by then parish priest Rev Father Micheal Netto while searching in the archives. The decree was written in Portuguese language. This was translated to Tamil by Father Carlos Merxeded de Mellow S J, portugese expert residing in Punappel Seminary who was chosen with the help of Father Mathew Norrenjo. He also rebuilt the church after the last one was burned during the local war. Hence, it can be assumed on typological grounds that today's church was built during the 1770. The Settlement register circa 1909, includes the St Andrews in the Survey number 1024.

At that time only the portion of the church west of the pillars only existed. The extensions beyond the pillars were constructed during the time of Rev Fransis Fernandez. The extension for the congregation to the North and South were constructed during 1892. On the eastern side there is a rare picture of Saint Mary. This picture is thought to have been washed up on the seashore, which was later enshrined in the church and is said to be the source of countless miracles as attested by the local people of that area.

### HISTORY OF PARISH PRIESTS WHO SERVED THE CHURCH SINCE ITS INCEPTION

The following parish priests who served in the church since its inception is followed herewith in the table mentioned below.

Priest Name	Year of Service	
	From	To
Rev. Fr. Yoachim D'santiago - 1770	1770	1778
Rev. Fr. Francis Alvaras - 1779	1779	1779
Rev. Fr. Louis Ker Netto	1881	1881

Rev. Fr. Mathai Nelluvelil Kathanar	1881	1883
Rev. Fr. John Kathanar	1883	1884
Rev. Fr. Michael Kathanar	1884	1887
Rev. Fr. Thoma Kathanar	1887	1899
Rev. Fr. John a. Netto	1899	1901
Rev. Fr. Micheal Jackson	1901	1905
Rev. Fr. Joseph Peres	1905	1910
Rev. Fr. M. David Fernandez	1910	1911
Rev. Fr. Peter Morris	1911	1911
Rev. Fr. Francis Fernandez	1911	1913
Rev. Fr. John A. Netto	1914	1917
Rev. Fr. Leene B. Miranda	1917	1919
Rev. Fr. George Karikuzhi	1919	1919
Rev. Fr. Bernard Benjamin Fernandez	1919	1923
Rev. Fr. Simon s. Gonzago	1923	1933
Rev. Fr. Mark P. Fernandez	1933	1934
Rev. Fr. Marceline Morris	1934	1939
Rev. Fr. Bernard Benjamin Fernandez	1939	1946
Rev. Fr. Valerian M. Fernandez	1946	1956
Rev. Fr. Michael M. Netto	1956	1968



Rev. Fr. Elias Varghese	1968	1972
Rev. Fr. Christopher Morris	1972	1984
Rev. Fr. Christy Daniel	1984	1987
Rev. Fr. Joseph Morris	1984	1987
Rev. Fr. K. J. Jesudas	1987	1990
Rev. Fr. Andrew Eugene	1990	1992
Rev. Fr. Sefernos Sebastian	1992	1997
Rev. Fr. John G. Fernandez	1997	1998
Rev. Fr. Hubert Fernandez	1998	1999
Rev. Fr. Antony John	1999	2003
Rev. Fr. Joseph Detto Fernandez	2003	2003
Rev. Fr. Dionysius C. Antony	2003	2006
Rev. Fr. Milton G.	2006	2008
Rev. Fr. Franklin Francis	2008	2013
Rev. Fr. Arun J. Aradan	2013	2014
Rev. Fr. Shani Francis	2014	2017
Rev. Fr. Abel Lucious	2018	2020
Rev. Fr. Milton George	2020	present

## ARCHITECTURE

The Present-day Church was built in 1779. The church is built in the gothic architecture of Europe enshrined by the pointed arches, long vertical doorways, and windows also have the gothic elements. The church has tall vertical walls with wooden beams to support it. The beam is placed such that they are supported by the walls and the next stage of wall building is done with the support of the initial structure. The construction is done using laterite bricks which was the traditional building material in Kerala at this time. They must have been held together using calcium carbonate. A type of construction popularized by the Portuguese early settlers of Kerala.

Further, to add support to the upper structure there are columnar pillars to support the extra weight placed on it. Though they are few in number in certain angles and provide them a glimpsed floral motif. The church has two wings of the cross to house more faithful. It also has the gothic style of windows and doors having tall pointed arches. The altar is conical in shape which adds to the functionality of serving the congregation in front, both sides.

The roof is made of burned clay tiles (usually Mangalore roof tiles) made of Kollam which were supported on a wooden truss work. In which each wood is interlocked to one another, a row of trapezium like wood usually made of coconut or teak having holes in them (called kazhikole) These holes are filled by long slender wood called 'ottu-pattiyel' that holds the odu or manglore clay tiles. These 'kazhikoles' are aligned in place so that the 'pattiyel' and 'odu' can be arranged as it is, this is called 'vallah or bandham'. To mention further a square cross sectioned wood that is inserted into the 'kazhukolu' through holes in them, Arudam utharam consist of two strong but long wooden structure that forms the mid rib of the structure. They support the

Pradhana utharam that sits at the apex of the structure called Mekkudu which is the whole strong pyramid like structure and this is placed on the walls by a thick strong wood called 'utharam'. The clay tiles are arranged in a jig-saw like fashion and they are placed on a thin wood that is nailed to the 'kazhikole'. This is the traditional method of roof making in Kerala. The body of the church is of gothic origin and however the roof is of traditional construction.

## RENOVATION

In early 2003 under the parish priest Father Dyncious renovation of the church began without destroying the traditional appearance but added innovative features. The renovated church was opened by then Bishop Rev Stanley Roman in 2006. The renovation mainly involves replacing the clay tiles of the roof with asbestos sheets. Another change was the fresco painting structure made of Styrofoam and Aluminum. This is a cheap form of cultural vandalism that lessens the original architecture of the church. Another change was the new worship chamber on the southern side which housed the St Andrew's reliquary. This was a positive action in bringing more spiritual tourist and pilgrims to the church.

## FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

### (a) CONFRIYA FEAST

The last Sunday of the month of September is celebrated as the day of the Comfrey festival which is celebrated as the Feast of the Lady of Mercy. During this festival people from all communities from far off places come to visit the church. The mass gathering is increasing every year. In which long queues can be seen to worship the Mother Mary's portrait and seek blessings from the reliquary of St Andrew. The management of this huge influx of

pilgrims is a matter of concern to the church authorities, first being the pathetic condition of the bridge across the present-day Travancore Cochin canal, through which the pilgrims could reach the Church and its premise on time by using traditional boat transportation system. A better bridge with a large span and strength to transport heavy vehicles is needed. In addition to this a large parking area for vehicles is necessary for the growth of spiritual tourism in Kovilthottam area with St Andrew church as its epicenter.

#### **(b) FEAST OF ST ANDREW**

St Andrew's feast is another day that is celebrated in the Church. It is the day of the Patron Saint of the church: St Andrew. It is celebrated with daily mass, a procession around the church.

#### **(c) BASIC CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY**

Kovilthottam church has over 1000 families with 61 family units, 102 inmates. 1707 November 16<sup>th</sup> Comfrey community C.L.C was formed in 1900, St Vincent De Paul society was formed during 1952. The K.C.Y.M which was formed during 1979. The Church choir was formed during 6<sup>th</sup> April, 1965 by Father Micheal Netto. Church's flag post was brought from Alapuzha's south and floated through Arabian sea through Neendakara Harbor.

#### **(d) EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE**

The Saint Ligorio's LP School which is situated next to the Church was established in the year of 1900 late. Lourde Mata English Medium Higher Secondary School was established in the year 1983, which is situated across the TS canal, serve of the educate pursuit of the local people.

#### **(e) MISSIONARY INSTITUTIONS**

Lourde Mata Convent which lodges nuns who serve the church and they run the

Lourde Mata School. It is situated some quarter kilometer from the Church adjacent to Sankaramangalam Road.

#### **(f) THREATS FROM THE SEA AND MINING:**

The sea coast of Chavara is famous for the rich mineral deposits that include monazite, rutile, zircon and other lanthanides and Actinide elements which are very rare and are used in making ceramics which are used in many industrial purposes and now a days they are used in the making of the screens of the mobile devices that the world is depended upon. This demand for essential raw materials that are found only near the hamlets of Kovilthottam and Karithura. Public sector company like Indian Rare Earth Ltd is responsible for the mining of these rare earth minerals. This company has taken land from the Christian hamlets of Kovilthottam and Karithura, which is housed the native parish of the Church and has been unable to properly rehabilitate these people in a phased manner. The people now have lost their home and livelihood due to the mining activities. Hence had no choice but to reside in rented houses for a considerable period of time. Most of this people are debt ridden and the offers to grant a job to these families have remained unfulfilled.

In addition to these the church lost most of its church going population. Some estimates put it as much as a 40% dip in the church's daily attendance. This has a detrimental effect on the running of the church and its future.

#### **(g) NATURAL THREATS**

It is to be noted that right from the year 1990 to 2023, the state of Kerala witnessed the rise of temperature from (30 degree Celsius to 38 degrees Celsius during the month of March and May. Hence the rise of global warming and rapid climate change the cyclonic storms arising intensely. In effect for a coastal church

like St Andrews to a certain extent. The mining for rare earths just accelerates that threat. The sea waves are touching the church cemetery and are further pressured by sea erosion. Further to a defense against the sea waves is the stone block wall that protects the encroachment of the sea to a certain extent.

## **(II) MARTHAMARIUM ORTHODOX SYRIAN CHURCH**

Martha Mariyam Orthodox church is situated in Theevalakkara some 10 Km from Karunagapally town. This church gives a glimpse of the Persian influence in the Christian history of Kerala. It is a pilgrim center for Syrian Christians for the remains of Mar Abo was placed inside the church. The church was established in the 4th century. The name Martha Mariyam itself proves the antiquity of this church.

### **LOCATION**

The church is situated near the chaliyath mosque, some distance from the Tevalakkara Temple. It is situated on a flat level ground slightly lower than the chaliyath mosque. The name 'Tevalakkara' comes from the 'Devalokakkara'. The Tevalakkara used a center of trade and commerce. Its proximity to Tevalakkara Temple is noteworthy.

### **HISTORY OF THE CHURCH**

The history of the church is dated to 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. The ancient church of Kollam (built by St Thomas) was eroded by the sea. Then according to legend, the families of Kallungal, Thachicheri, Tharayil built this church. The Kollam port and town was rebuilt by Sabor, Mar Efroth. They also rebuilt the church destroyed by storm, which is now known as Tharisha Pally. Stanu Ravi the then Chera emperor gave them a place to settle and inscribed this in the Tharisapalli copper plate.

In 1569 Chaliyath Matakkar attacked the Tevalakkara temple, and many were converted to Islam. The evidence for this was found, in 1971 during the construction of a new church. A mass grave was dug up near the main entrance of the church. In addition to the resting place of Mar Abo, it also houses the resting place of many other church fathers. The people of the church built a new church from the destroyed church, this was undergoing decay when the new church was built in 1971.

In 1599, the Archbishop of Goa, Alexies De Menzes initiated the Synod of Diamper for the Church visit. The Martha Mariam Orthodox church was one of the churches he visited. The parish authorities then presented the archbishop the inscriptions in which the local rulers entitled the church some special authorities. Most of these inscriptions are now in Devalokam Aramana. During his visit he mentions the Tevalakkara was under the rule of Chenganatu Rani and the people were illiterate. He mentions that they grew their hair long and most of them were interested in the commercial and economic activities. To further glean, a firsthand historical report of this area under study by Archbishop of Goa, Alexies De Menzes as mentioned herewith.

*"This church of Teualecare is situated in the lands of queen Chenganate, and although its structure is the nest in the Serra, he Archbishop found its people much uneducated and indomitable, because there they almost never had the Mass, and those who were young had never heard it, and all the people and priests were more busy in trading than being Christians, and thus there were Cassanars who went about with long hair and without a crown and with a sword and shield like lay people, and some of them very rich, who were dealing in pepper,*

*married, with wife and children, and in layman's dress, which the Arch-bishop soon made them change, and also to cut the hair, to have a crown and to proceed in everything like priests. On the first day that the archbishop went to the church very few people came, and these did not want to touch him, nor his people, in the gentile fashion. Seeing this and the need for doctrine which those people had, more than other people, he stayed on for many days with them, preaching each day and teaching by himself and through the Cassanars who were with him, till they were domesticated and all came to the church without a single one ailing to do so, and he confirmed and confessed all of them, and baptized many children and young people, and the leaders of the people and all the Cassanars who had not been to the Synod professed the Faith, all of them gave up the superstition of untouchability, and pollution, and others which they had, and in everything they became so different, and when he tried to go away they requested him with strong instance to stay for more days with them, through whom they were receiving the fruition of his doctrine."*

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This historical letter extract has been taken from the "Jornada of Dom Alexies De MenMenezes which was a Portuguese account of 16<sup>th</sup> century Malabar. The church people presented to the archbishop the copper plates which proclaimed the titles the local rulers had given to the church. The archbishop got hold of these possessions. Many of these data were destroyed. However, the remaining copper plate inscriptions were placed in the Devalokam Aramana museum.

### **MAR SABOR AND PERSIAN IMMIGRATION**

Kerala the land of Cheras had a long history of trade with the Persia and Middle East. It was because of this trade links and

familiarity of the place that aided St Thomas to reach here and preach the word of Jesus to the local people. The Persian and Syrian traders had long been a part of ancient Kerala's cosmopolitan nature. Along with the trade goods ideas and religion also came to land of Cheras. The advent of Islamic expansion in the late 7<sup>th</sup> and early 8<sup>th</sup> century the Jews and Christians once again came to be prosecuted and had to move to a safer place to survive. Land of Cheras was the was the first place on their list of places to come and settle. So, during the early Islamic expansion there was a mass migration of Persian Christians to Kerala.

During. 822-823 A.D in Kuraikoni Kollam Mar Sabor and Mar Eproth came to Kollam with their mass followers. Most important among these were Mar Sabor aka Maruvan Sabir Isho. According to the historian P V Matthew Mar Sabir Isho was responsible for the construction of Kuriyikoni Kollam (According to him the todays Tevalakakra Church). The archbishop Menezes came to visit the he was presented with three copper plates, which were the titles and responsibilities the Chera ruler gave to the Church.

According to historian P.V Mathew Mar Sabor established Kadamattom Church and later he came to Nilakkal via Niranam and died while he is in Niranam or Nilakkal. He gave his titles and made hie heir a Kefa (Maravan) during 905 CE,in Kollam Era it is dated to 80<sup>th</sup> year. This Kefa was buried in Tevalakkara.

### **MAR ABO**

In the tradition of the Syrian church 'Mar' is used along with the name. 'Abo' means father. During 900 AD Mar ABo reached Kadamattom, the migration could be due to the Islamic conquest of his native place. He established the church in Kadamattom and made Kadamattathu Kathanar his disciple in charge of the church. He moved South and reached Tevalakkara Church. In



those days the Church resembled like a native temple. The church had a mukha mandapam which also contains the gate by which the people enter the church. Mar Abo took residence in this Mandapam to escape the elements. He got settled in Tevelakkara Church. He was called 'Marrachan' by the natives of Tevalakkara. To further glean the historical data the scholar analysed the following letter in connection to Mar Abo. *"On AD 905, a Metropolitan by the name 'Dhanha' came. Along with him came Rabhan, Yaunan and Maravan. Of these who came to Malabar. Yaunan died in Niranam Parish Chennithala Hamlet Thekkevittil Kuruvila's House. Danha died in Kannankulam family residence near Kodascheri in outside the fort. Maravan died in Tevelakkara Church."*

From this letter it is gleaned that the Maravan might be Mar Abo. The word 'maravan' is used to be a common name in Pre- Islamic and Islamic era, Middle East. For example Marwan ibn Abi Hafsa (d. 797), is an abbasid-era poet. There were Arab rulers whose name was Marwan. Mar Abo is said to be from Egypt and on facing prosecution in his own land. He reached land where Permals reigned.

## LEGEND OF MAR ABO

Mar Abo is regarded as the teacher of Kadamattathchan. It was Mar Abo who gave Kadamathathu Kathnar the ordained priesthood. The legend goes like this. Mar Abo came to Kerala and landed at Kadamattom in 905 AD. He had to wander around the area and was starving. He reached a small hut with a boy and mother. They too were facing poverty and other deprived conditions. Mar Abo asked the two of them to find any rice grain inside the house. They found one grain and gave it to Mar Abo. He prayed and put this into a boiling pot than the pot got overflowing with boiled rice. The boy and his mother was more than grateful for the miracle work of Abo. He quenched their hunger

and opened their spiritual eye. The boy became a disciple of Mar Abo and started to follow his teachings.

Moreover, the ordained as a priest became Kadamattathu Kathanar. Mar Abo in the fullness of time gave a ring to Kadamattom Father and told him that when the stone falls down from the ring, that day you remember, I will be dead. Saying this bidding his farewell he traveled South and reached Tevelakkara Church. He settled and took residence in the Padippura or Entrance of the Tevelakkara Church. Mar Abo had told the people of Tevelakkara that when he dies make sure to inform the Kadamattom priest. So, when the Church Father died, they duly informed the Kadamattom. It is to be noted that while the Father Kadamattom arrived at Tevelakkara little late prior to it the body of Mar Abo was already cremated. According to legend Father Kadamattom acquired the hand of Father Abo and he placed this hand on the Mahathba of Kadamattom Church. Hence, Tevelakkara Church is a pilgrim center for Mar Abo. During Chaliyath Matrakkar's invasion, the warriors of Islam damaged the resting place of Mar Abo and the cemetery was vandalised.

## ARCHITECTURE

The church has a padipura meaning and entrance gate. It is believed that it was here in this padipura that Mar Abo had initially stayed after his journey from Kadmattam. This is made in traditional Kerala architecture with pagoda like appearance. This Padipura is characterised by door with wooden hinges and they were placed on walls made of laterite brick wall plastered with lime. The padipura has varandaha on outside and inside where people can take refuge from the elements or take rest.

The main building or the church is almost 5 meters from the Padipura. It has a facade, unlike the facade of the latin

church this is no that elaborately decorated. However the facade do tapers into multiple arm with each arm ending in the elongated closed bud. The facade also has a on its front face an image of rising sun and the cross on the top arm of the facade has curved on all sides.

The main door is rectangular but the door's top ends in a pointy curved. This houses a window interlaced wood work. The church have a rectangular large hall that leads to alter. On the left side of the alter is the tomb of Mar Abo, which is covered in a wooden covering. Adjacent to the church is the place of veneration of Mar Abo that placed mar Abo's painting and on the side of this stone with the marking of cross with anchor like appearance. This stone is a remnant of the church that was rebuilt during 1971. The church also has a large stone cross that dominates its premise.

## COMPARATIVE STUDY

Historically the two churches represent two facets of history. Thevalakkara church can trace its history to the early Christians especially assigned to St. Thomas. Due to the flourishing trade with the Persian and Roman empires it reflected the core message of Jesus. So, St Thomas Christians flourished with the advent of the immigration of Persian merchants to Kerala. This is added by the influx of more refugees following the religious purges, prosecutions and in the 7<sup>th</sup> century with the advent of Islam prompted even the Pope to establish a diocese in the East with Kollam at its center. It laid the foundation for the establishment of Latin catholic tradition. Kovilthottam St Andrews Church is the product of such an intervention. Thus, these two churches represent two branches of culture sprouting from same religious outreach. Both these branches were coexisting in the Kerala coast until the advent of Portuguese.

The study reveal that compared to St Andrews Church; the Martha Mariyam church is not that massive in size. Saint Andrews church with its Latin tradition have a facade on four sides, further it is much bigger than the Orthodox church. It was built using the techniques involved in Portuguese gothic architecture. The bulbous and trapezoidal motifs adorning the façade; however, it lacks a padippura which the Martha Mariyam Church constitutes.

The Martha Mariyam church follow orthodox liturgy, St Andrew Church follow Latin liturgy. Historically these churches reveal the historicity, evolution and growth of Christianity in Kerala. From the days of St Thomas to the Persian Christian merchants, to the overreaching influence of the Pope, with the advent of the Portuguese, the growth of Synod of Diamper, the Oath of Coonan cross, reestablishment of the Kollam Diocese in the 19<sup>th</sup> century is reflected culturally.

The St Andrews Church's parish mainly consists of the mostly fisherman folk, whose main occupation is fishing and lied activities. The new generations are relatively educated and are seeking blue color occupations. They follow spiritual directions of the Bishop of Kollam diocese.

Their priests and nuns have to follow the three paths of poverty, abstinence and service to the church.

Martha Mariam Orthodox church parish mainly consists of the descendants of Syrian traders who came to settle in the vicinity of the church. Some can trace their ancestry to the time of St Thomas himself. They are a much older christian community. Most of the people are traders by occupation. Trading in spices and cashew nut. The priests of these Christians have wives and children. They serve their family and their parish unlike the latin priests who have to have to abandon thei family altogether to serve the diosce. Another difference is the fact that

Orthodox church's absence of nuns. There are lot of difference between these to churches, in the old days the marriage between the people of these churches was not practiced, However with the more secular outlook grown after the Independence and digital revolution these barriers have been breaking down.

## CONCLUSION

The Kovilthottam St. Andrews church and Martha Mariam Orthodox Church are among the historical monuments, whose study sheds light on the history, culture, evolution of art and architecture of the Christians during the pre-colonial and later it reflects the same attributes akin during the colonial times. This revelation of socio-culture, historicity, spirituality, and legacy, it attributes to the long-lasting heritage is noteworthy. The study further reveal that the Kerala's Christian culture is currently facing multitudes of threats which are both natural and man made. However, it stands defiantly against all odds towards an unknown future. The church authorities must recognize the importance of this church and its unique architectural features, its traditional rituals, spiritual values and unity of the parish and highlight its essence of eccentricity to the future generations. Hence, to ensure long term survivability of the churches in both these worldly and spiritual attributes is must so it can pass on to future generations without any hindrances.

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