

Patriarchate Of India- An Appraisal Of The Evolution Of The Episcopal Hierarchy Among Thomas Christians Of Malabar By [M.Thomas Antony](#)

### Christianity in India

Thomas Christians of India are one of the most ancient Christian communities in the World. Apostle Thomas founded the Church in India in the first century itself. Tradition says that Apostle Thomas landed at Kodungalloor in AD 52 and founded 7 and half communities in the Malabar coast. Even though there is no solid historical evidence of this, considering the available historical, archaeological evidences and logical thought, many researchers and historians have concluded that the visit of Apostle Thomas is possible. There are solid grounds for believing that there was a Christian community that existed in Kerala in the very early period.

The arrival of Apostle Thomas in North West India is now, an accepted story, especially after the discovery of coins with the name of the Parthian King Gondophoros in the region, which validate the story in the apocryphal Acts of Judas Thomas

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[1](#)

After a critical study about the apocryphal work 'Acts of Judas Thomas' J N Farquhar, who was a Professor of Comparative Religion in Manchester University argues that the legend of Thomas Apostle coming to Musiris where a large number of Jews, Greeks Romans and others lived and preached the Gospel and founded Christian communities among them, or in simple words, the Apostolate of Thomas in South India is on balance of probability, is distinctly on the side of historicity

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[2](#)

The widespread presence of Pahlavi inscribed granite crosses in south India are the most ancient antiquities available about the history of Thomas Christians in the region. They denote the presence of a Christianity related to Persia. Eminent Pahlavi scholar B T Anklesaria has commented that the most ancient of these crosses, the one found at Alengadu could be of AD 340 or earlier but later than AD 302, (depending on the style of the letters and use of adjuncts, comparing to the styles seen in the ancient coins excavated, manuscripts and inscriptions). As the Pahlavi language died out

by AD 650, many of the scholars put the age of these crosses as AD 650.

[3](#)

### East Syrian Connection

Thomas Christians have always been under the jurisdiction of more advanced Christianity in Mesopotamia and Persia. There are hints from ancient literature that Apostle Thomas had sent letters to the Church in Edessa from India

Cureton in 'Ancient syriac documents' comments about Apostle Thomas' letters received in the Church of Edessa. J N Farquhar, after critically analysing the possibilities, states that as there was a Bishop in Edessa from the time of Mar Addai, and there were no Bishops in India, the Christians would have corresponded with them and recognised the supremacy of Edessa.

[4](#)

There is plenty of documentary evidence to show the connection of the Church in India to the Church of the East. Alphonse Mingana, after studying numerous ancient documents and manuscripts, commented that "any attempt to speak of early Christianity in India as different from the East Syrian church, is, in our judgement, bound to fail"

[5](#)

### Early Christian Church.

The Early Christianity was evolved in three different cultures- Syriac, Greek and Latin. [6](#) Syriac Christianity evolved as a separate strand alongside the Latin and the Greek.

[7](#)

It is believed that Aramaic was the language of our Lord Isho M'shiha and his disciples. It was the language of early Christians. The early Christians were Syriac speaking. But later, Christianity developed in Jerusalem and Antioch in a Hellenised culture and hence Greek became the official language. [8](#) Greek language and hellenic culture, during the time of Isho M'shiha, was like English language and American culture today. Thus, the development of the primitive church was rooted in Greek language and hellenic culture. Alexandria and Constantinople were the Great Centres of Greek Christianity.

Rome was the centre of the Christianity in Latin. Latin was the language of the West. Irenius preached the gospel in Latin in Lyons. By second and third century, enough writings and documents including translations of the gospel were produced in the west in Latin.

### Evolution of East Syriac Church.

Aramaic or Syriac was the language of our Lord Isho M'shiha and his disciples. It was in the same language that the angels spoke to Marth Mariam( Saint Mary), Mar Yawsep ( Saint Joseph), and Zacharias, the father of Yohannan Mamdana( John the Baptist). It was also the same language that broke out from heaven when our Lord Isho M'shiha was baptised in the river Jordan. Thus, Syriac was the language of heaven in which the mysteries of the salvation of human kind was revealed.

Many of the Aramaic words are still preserved in the Bible, even after several translations to translations into different languages and cultures. Examples are 'Amen', 'Maranatha', calling God almighty as 'Abba' (Rom 8:15 and Gal 4:6)and the last words of Our Lord Isho M'shiha on the cross- 'Eloi, Eloi (actually Elahi) lama sabachthani' (Mark 15:34)

Syriac Christianity evolved around Edessa and adjacent parts of Mesopotamia. The Syriac school at Edessa and Saint Ephraim of Edessa nurtured the early Syriac Church. All the ancient Syriac churches were founded by either [Thomas the Apostle](#) or his disciples. The Assyrian Church in Mesopotamia was one of the very first Churches founded in Apostolic times. Acts of Apostles mentions about the presence of Assyrians on the day of Pentecost . (Acts 2,9) Very ancient Syriac writings such as 'The Doctrine of Addai', 'The Chronicles of Arbela' and 'The teachings of the Tweleve Apostles' mention that Saint Thomas sent Thaddeus and Mari to preach Abgar Ukkama the Black, the King of Assyrians at Osrhoene (Edessa).<sup>9</sup> Eusebius, the father of Church history also witnesses in AD 325 that he personally searched the state archives of the Assyrians in the capital city of Edessa and found official records of this Apostolic visit .<sup>10</sup>

Apostle Thomas is believed to have gone to Parthia and India to evangelise.

The Church of India and The Church of Persia claim to be founded by the Apostle Thomas himself. South Indian tradition supported by a large number of ancient writings talk about the Apostle's visit to South India. The Church of Fars also claim that their church was founded by Apostle Thomas.

[11](#)

Thus,  
the Churches of Edessa, Seleusia-Ctesiphon of Babylon, Persia and India constitute the Thomasine Churches and these Syriac churches consolidated under the banner of the Church of the East due to their linguistic and cultural relationship. They were interlinked from the early period itself

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But the East Syriac Church, the communion of early Syriac churches which happened to be under the Persian empire did not want to be under the Patriarchate of Antioch which was in the Roman Empire. This had political influence due to the feud between Persian and Roman empires. Initially, the Church of the East- the Syriac church was supported by the Patriarchate of Antioch even in the midst of political strifes. But, for survival, the leaders of the Church of the East adopted a nationalistic strategy and declared independence from the Patriarch of Antioch and declared their Catholicose as the Patriarch of the Church.

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