



HISTORY OF SYRO-MALABAR MIGRATION FROM KERALA & THEIR PASTORAL CARE

Migration is a process of a person or people travelling to a new place or country to find work and live there temporarily or permanently. Migration - from one country to another, or within the territory of the same country - has become one of the most important and serious phenomena in the life of the present world, involving all nations, either as countries of departure, of transit or of arrival, and affecting millions of human beings. It is on the increase in the past ten to fifteen decades, for reasons of better livelihood or for other demands of life like jobs, taxing conditions in one's own country, religious persecution and so on. Process of migration is much accelerated due to modern development of facilities of transportation and net-work of communication. There were around 272 million international migrants in the world in 2019. Besides an estimated 740 million internal migrants (2009) migrate within countries. India has the largest number of migrants living abroad (17.5 million).

The Holy Mother Church sees the migrant Holy Family of Nazareth, fleeing into Egypt, as the archetype of every refugee or family whatever kind for all times and all places who whether compelled or by want, is forced to

leave his native land, his beloved parents and relatives, his close friends, and to seek a foreign soil. Therefore, the Church always has a particular care for the migrants, and has promulgated laws, issued instructions, and given directives and exhortations to ensure that the migrants are attended, especially in their spiritual needs. This article analyzes migration of the Syro-Malabar faithful from Kerala and the pastoral care proper to their ecclesial tradition they received and receive in the migrant lands.

Reasons for Migration from Kerala

Along with this global phenomenon, Syro-Malabar Catholics also were in move either as internal or as international migrants. Kerala, the cradle-land of the Syro-Malabar Catholics, has a good standard of living, having higher health, literacy and freedom from discrimination that are necessary to a good life as material wealth is. In spite of having such a good standard of living when compared to most of other states of India, a huge number of its population is either in other states of India or abroad. At present, 30% (15,31,600) of the Syro-Malabar Catholics (52,07,615) are living outside its cradle-land Kerala.

The reasons behind these migrations could vary. In general, the following reasons could be identified: demographic expansion and consequent unemployment, stagnation in the agricultural sector, higher literacy and inadequacy of equivalent jobs, non-expansion of adequate employment in the secondary and tertiary sectors, low man-land ratio, extreme social pressure, etc. Besides these, higher wages when converted to local currency, higher standard of living, higher social security, etc. in foreign countries also attracted people of Kerala to migrate.

Migration to Northern and Eastern Kerala

The majority of the St. Thomas Christians was living in the central parts of Kerala. The migration of St. Thomas Christians from the old Syro-Malabar Eparchies in central Kerala to the Northern Kerala started in 1920s. In later periods, there was a migration to the high ranges of eastern Kerala too. Syro-Malabar families, who were mainly farmers, found it insufficient as their ancestral properties were divided among the heirs who were large in number. This might be the main reason that forced them to move to distant lands in search of cheap and fertile land fit for cultivation and to have a better and prosperous future for their heirs.

Though these migrated families stayed in Kerala, they were out of the then Syro-Malabar territorial jurisdiction *i.e.* between *Bharathapuzha* and river *Pamba*. The bishops of Kozhikkode Latin diocese helped them in fulfilling their spiritual needs. When the Syro-Malabar faithful grew in number in that region, it became difficult to fulfill the pastoral obligations towards them and as a result, the Eparchy of Tellicherry was established in 1953, and bishop Mar Sebastian Valloppilly became its first bishop. With the extension of territorial jurisdiction of the Syro-Malabar Church to the whole of Kerala and also to some parts of the neighbouring states, the migrant eparchy of Tellicherry got bifurcated into Mananthavady (1973), Thamarassery (1986), Belthangady (1999), Bhadravathy (2007) and Mandya

(2010), and for the high ranges eparchy of Idukki (2003) was formed.

Migration to other States of India

Post-independent India saw a vast and decisive inter-state migration to major cities (like *Ahmedabad, Bangalore, Baroda, Bhopal, Chennai, Delhi, Dharmapuri, Hyderabad, Indore, Jaipur, Kolkata, Mumbai, Nagpur, Pune, Surat, Trichy, etc.*), seeking employment and better prospects of life. The Syro-Malabar Catholics, who were part of this demographic passage, were in unfamiliar religious and spiritual circumstances in the local Latin parishes. They always sought to preserve their ecclesial traditions and heritage intact and to faithfully hand over it to their children. Since they found lacking spiritual, liturgical and ecclesial formation of their Mother Church, they began organizing several spiritual exercises and traditional celebrations unique to their rite. Priests of Kerala origin helped them a lot in this regard. When the communities of the Syro-Malabar faithful grew in number and strength, there came ardent requests for ecclesiastical provisions independent of the Latin jurisdiction. Erection of the Eparchy of Kalyan in Mumbai was the first result of it.

Eparchy of Kalyan was the Syro-Malabar eparchy erected mainly for the pastoral care of the Syro-Malabar migrant faithful. It was the result of continued requests and petitions to the Holy See as well as to the other bishops of India based on the problems of the migrant faithful of the oriental Catholic Churches who have no pastoral care outside Kerala. Already in 1976, the then Syro-Malabar Bishops' Conference sent priests to Mumbai for the pastoral care of the Malayalee Catholics. Later, in 1978, Pope John Paul II appointed Abp. Mar Antony Padiyara as the Apostolic Visitor to study the spiritual as well as ecclesial situations of the migrant Syro-Malabar Catholics in Mumbai. At the request of SMBC, Bishop Mar Joseph Kundukulam sent priests from the then diocese of Trichur,

since a good number of migrants in Mumbai was from the civil district of Trichur. Pope John Paul II, after receiving report of a high-level Pontifical Commission appointed by him for this purpose, created the Eparchy of Kalyan for the Syro-Malabar Catholics in 1988.

Eparchies of Mandya (2010) with its later extension to Bangalore in (2015) and Faridabad (2012) were erected in the same model mainly for the pastoral care of Syro-Malabar migrant faithful. At last, with the erection of the Eparchies of Hosur (2017) and Shamshabad (2017), the Syro-Malabar Church has freedom of pastoral care of her migrant faithful as well as for evangelization all over India.

Migration of the Syro-Malabar Faithful Abroad

The secular studies reveal that there were international migrants from Kerala/Malabar even in 1921. But, as in the case of the Syro-Malabar faithful migrating to the other States of India, the traces of the Syro-Malabar faithful migrating to foreign countries like Arabian Gulf, Europe, United States of America, Canada, Australia, Singapore, etc. could be noticeable from the late nineteen sixties and seventies. While both professionals and unskilled labourers found better prospects in the Gulf region, developed countries like Europe, US, Australia, etc. welcomed professionals more, nurses being the first among them. Rapid growth of communication and transportation facilities provided better opportunities for them to go abroad in search of better wages and higher livelihood. Large flow of the Syro-Malabar faithful abroad improved their financial as well as social status both abroad as well as in homeland Kerala.

The Arabian Gulf

Arabian Gulf countries have the largest number of Syro-Malabar migrant faithful outside India (ca. 5,20,000). The Syro-Malabar faithful, migrated to the Arabian Gulf along with their initial struggle to get settled was also in search of spiritual

assistance from the Mother Church. Though they received spiritual care from the Latin Vicariates, they were not satisfied with it. Their ardent desire for the similar pastoral care which they received from their Mother Church - Syro-Malabar Church - found expressions in many ways like getting organized under linguistic or ritual groups. It was the result of their struggle to live their spiritual heritage and ecclesial traditions, the vicariate authorities organized facilities for the Syro-Malabar Qurbana in different centers.

When they realized that their children and most of the elders were finding difficulty in following the tradition and patrimony of their fore-fathers, and felt themselves strangers with respect to the services and proceedings during the religious functions, they decided to get united and practice their ecclesial heritage and tradition. The result was Syro-Malabar Cultural Association (*SMCA*), the official lay association of the Syro-Malabar Church in Gulf.

The reasons for forming such an Association, as given in the *Directory of Syro-Malabar Migrants - 2006*, are: 1). No chances for nurturing the Syro-Malabar faith traditions in the given situation, 2). Children are totally ignorant of the particular ecclesial traditions and faith manifestations of the Syro-Malabar Church, 3). Days of obligation as per the Syro-Malabar tradition are not announced in the Latin parish churches to assist the faithful to observe them, 4). Syro-Malabar Catholics are ignored and neglected in the Latin parish Churches, and 5). Because of the lack of pastoral care according to the Syro-Malabar tradition, many people were moving to the Pentecostal communities, which are very active in Gulf countries and the Catholics are even getting married to men and women of other denominations.

The first Syro-Malabar church in Gulf region consecrated in 2009 was the result of the desire and hard work of such an SMCA in Qatar to gather every week for their spiritual activities, to remain united in faith

through liturgical celebrations in the Syro-Malabar tradition and to prevent the possible disintegration of the community from the tradition.

Now, there are around 5,20,000 Syro-Malabar migrant faithful in the Gulf region within the pastoral care of two Vicars Apostolic. They do maximum possible helps to the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church that continuously requests the intervention of the Apostolic See for establishing Syro-Malabar ecclesiastical provision in the region.

To Other Countries Abroad

The last quarter of the twentieth century saw a continuous flow of Syro Malabar faithful migrating to the western countries like America, Canada, European countries like Great Britain, etc. as well as to other Asian and African countries like Singapore, Australia, Malaysia, New-Zealand, South Africa, Nigeria, etc. This was also in search of new possibilities of higher financial earning and better living conditions. Unlike Gulf countries, western countries and Australia, New-Zealand, etc. welcomed skilled professionals in medical and technical fields. Nurses, doctors, teachers, engineers, IT professionals, etc. found better and favourable soil to grow and settle. Under-population and high demand for qualified personnel in those countries caused the flow of foreigners to these countries and our Syro-Malabar faithful took advantage of these possibilities.

When they began to settle down in foreign countries, they experienced the need of ecclesial heritage and social values which they acquired from their homeland Kerala and of handing over those traditions and values to their next generation. The realization of the value of pastoral care and faith formation that they received from their pastors in Kerala led to the formation of small communities for occasional celebrations of Syro-Malabar Qurbana and other traditional spiritual as well as social activities of the

Syro-Malabar Church. The priests who went abroad either for study or pastoral service rendered their service, though infrequently, to these communities. This ecclesial life of the migrant faithful was a true witness of active Christian living to the natives.

Having experienced the vibrant nature of living their faith, the Latin prelates understood the need of protecting the ecclesiastical heritage of the Syro-Malabar faithful and they reported this to the Holy See. The repeated appeals by the migrant faithful along with the requests by the Synod of Bishops paved ways to the establishment of new provisions for the Syro-Malabar migrant faithful outside India.

Major Archiepiscopal Status & Commission for the Pastoral Care of the Migrants

The Syro-Malabar Church, ever since it was raised to a Church *sui iuris*, was always concerned for its migrant faithful both inside and outside India. That is why, in the very first meeting of the Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church in 1993, the decision was taken to constitute the Commission for Pastoral Care of the Migrants. The Major Archbishop being the father and head of this Church (CCEO c. 55), must be solicitous not only for the faithful of his Church in the proper territory, but also for the migrants scattered all over the world. He enjoys certain rights and duties towards the faithful who belong to his Church no matter wherever they stay (CCEO c.148§ 2). He exercises his pastoral obligations towards the Syro-Malabar migrant faithful outside the proper Syro-Malabar jurisdiction with the help of the Commission for Pastoral Care of the Migrants.

The Synod of Bishops of the Syro-Malabar Church held in Rome in 1996 decided to request the Holy Father to appoint two visitators, one for the U.S.A. and Canada and the other for Europe to study about the pastoral care of the Syro-Malabar migrants in those places. Accordingly, Holy Father

Pope John Paul II appointed as Apostolic Visitors Bp. Mar Gregory Karotemprel CMI (Chairman of the then Commission) for USA and Canada, and Bp. Mar Joseph Pallikaparambil (Member of the then Commission) for Europe.

After the constitution of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Commission for Evangelization and Pastoral Care of the Migrants, the Commission involved more in providing pastoral care to the migrant faithful through the bishops of the respective places by rendering the services of priests from the Syro-Malabar Church. It was the result of coordination and organized documentary works of the Commission that the Syro-Malabar Church received ecclesiastical provisions outside India. St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Eparchy of Chicago (2001), Eparchy of St. Thomas the Apostle - Melbourne of the Syro-Malabar (2013), Apostolic Exarchate for the Syro-Malabar faithful in Canada with its See in Mississauga (2015) and later Eparchy of Mississauga (2018), and the Syro-Malabar Eparchy of Great Britain (2016) are the eparchies established for the Syro-Malabar migrant faithful outside India. Besides these, the Apostolic See has made two ecclesiastical provisions of Apostolic Visitations - New Zealand (2014) and in Europe (2016).

The Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Commission for Pastoral Care of the Migrants tries its best to verify the state and needs of the Syro-Malabar migrant faithful who live in those territories where Syro-Malabar ecclesiastical provision has not yet been made. It encourages them to live their ecclesiastical heritage and tradition through communication and contacts. The Commission meets with the local bishops to organize in the best way possible to provide the migrant faithful with spiritual assistance and pastoral care according to the heritage of the Syro-Malabar Church. Now the Syro-Malabar Church has her major concern over the migrants in the Gulf region that has over 5,20,00 people and then for an independent

ecclesiastical provision for migrant faithful (ca. 40,000) residing in Europe.

Apostolic Visitation in Europe

Europe was one of the favourite destinations of the Syro-Malabar migrants from Kerala in the second half of 20th century, and countries like Austria, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Spain, and Switzerland, etc. attracted them more. In the beginning, though there was a flow of health care professionals to these countries, later in some countries, we find a concentration of domestic workers too. However, from the year 2000 onwards, IT professionals found Europe as their goal. These days we find Syro-Malabar IT professionals and nurses in Belgium, Holland and Scandinavian countries, University students in Bulgaria, Georgia, Poland, Latvia and Ukraine, and nurses and domestic workers in Malta also.

Italy has a very big number of Syro-Malabar migrant faithful (ca. 12,000) spread in the cities like Rome, Genova, Milan, Patti, Savona, Nocera-Pagani, Forli-Ravenna, Treviso, Florence, Macerata, Siena etc, working as doctors, nurses, home nurses, supervisors of houses, and workers in restaurants, bakeries, hotels, and factories. As the number of the Syro-Malabar Catholics increased considerably in Rome and other parts of Italy, the president of the Italian Bishops' Conference appointed Fr. James Pereppadan as National Coordinator in 2000 to facilitate the pastoral care of the Syro-Malabar community in Italy and later, Fr. Jose Pollayil (2004) and Fr. Stephen Chirappanath (2011).

In 2016, Msgr Stephen Chirappanath, who was serving also as the Procurator of the Syro-Malabar Church at the Holy See and the Priest in Charge of the Syro Malabar Faithful in the Diocese of Rome, was appointed as the Apostolic Visitor for the Syro-Malabar migrant faithful in Europe, having his residence at present in *DOMUS MAR THOMA*, the Procura of the Syro-Malabar Church at via degli Estensi 137, Rome. The

intention of appointing an Apostolic Visitor for the Syro Malabar faithful in Europe is to verify the state and needs of the faithful, to encourage them, to meet with the local bishops, and to make a report with proposals to the Congregation for the Oriental Churches. In the letter of appointment, Pope Francis clearly states that the apostolic visitor is appointed because of his concern for the needs of the flock of the Syro Malabar faithful; a great number of whom living in the European region lack a leader for their spiritual necessities.

Syro Malabar Community in the Diocese of Rome

In the context of the souvenir published on the occasion of the silver jubilee of the beginning of the pastoral care of the Syro-Malabar migrant faithful in Rome, Italy, a special reference to Syro-Malabar presence is opportune. In Rome, till 1993, the Syro-Malabar Catholics used to gather occasionally on Sundays for the Syro-Malabar Qurbana organized mainly by CMI priests. Later, on 07 November 1993, at the request of some lay people, priests from *Collegio Damasceno* under the leadership of Fr. Stephen Chirappanath and Fr. Francis Kodiyan MCBS started regular Sunday Qurbana at the convent chapel of *Suore Oblate di Bambino Gesu*, via Urbana 1, and guided the community with pastoral care for one year.

The Syro-Malabar community in Rome got official recognition from the Vicariate of Rome in 1994 as the result of the sincere efforts of Abp. Abraham Kattumana, Pontifical Delegate of the Syro-Malabar Major Archiepiscopal Church; accordingly, Rev. Fr. George Nedungatt SJ was appointed the priest-in-charge of the Syro-Malabar community in Rome and *Chiesa Santa Maria in Publicolis* near *Torre Argentina* was granted officially to the Syro Malabar community. During 1994-2000, Fr. Jose Kaniamparampil (1994), Fr. Sebastian Kalappura (1995) and Fr. James

Pereppadan (1997) served as Assistants. Later, there came a suggestion that it would be better to have the service of a full-time priest to look after the community in Rome and thus Rev. Fr. Job Myladiyil CMI (1999), Fr. John Poovatholil CMI (2001), Fr. Jacob Marangatt CMI (2006), Msgr. Cherian Kanjirakompil (2008), Msgr. Stephen Chirappanath (2011) and Fr. Cherian Varicattu (2017) were appointed as the priests-in-charge in Rome till 2019. Fr. Biju Muttathukunnel (2012-), Fr. Binoj Mulavarickal (2015-) and Fr. Sanal Malieyckal (2017-) have been serving as Assistants.

From the very beginning of Santhom Pastoral Centre, there were so many good lay faithful who wholeheartedly supported the growth of the community and shared in the pastoral administration through the formation of the parish committees. However, for varied reasons, office bearers of CLC too played a significant role in the smooth functioning of the parish for a good number of years. Since Syro-Malabar Qurbana was in Malayalam, all *Malayalees* used to gather at the altar of the Lord on all Sundays; however, in 2006, both Latin community and Knanaya community started separate Eucharistic celebrations. After moving to *Basilica Santa Anastasia* in November 2011, the parish committee, based on a census conducted in 2011, decided in the very beginning of 2012 to start the Holy Qurbana in different areas of Rome (Divino Amore, Prenestina, Monte Mario, Pisana, Magliana, Battistini, Sempione, Bracciano and Ostia) for a better participation and involvement of the Syro-Malabar faithful living in different parts of the city of Rome. Parish council, central council and core team were formed and Kaikkars were elected in 2014 for the pastoral administration, and associations like Mathrujyothi, St. Vincent De Paul Society, etc. were started. Rev. Sisters from the Congregation of the Holy Family were brought to Rome for Family Apostolate in the same year. Catechism classes, though started in various units before, got organized

at the parish level in 2017. Theology courses were offered to laity in 2019 under Alpha Institute of Theology & Science of the Archeparchy of Tellicherry. Santhom Silver Jubilee celebrations took place on 06 October 2019 in the presence of all the Syro-Malabar bishops at Divino Amore.

As we look back to the past 25 years, we see that though there are around 6000 Syro Malabar faithful in Rome, only half of them got themselves registered. We have in Rome around 125 diocesan priests, 225 religious priests, 10 religious brothers, more than 500 sisters and 40 seminarians belonging to the Syro-Malabar Church. Besides having a priest-in-charge in Rome, the Syro-Malabar faithful never had either a parish or a *quasi*-parish of their own. Instead, San Thom Centre, the name in which the community is known, remained merely as a pastoral centre for the Syro-Malabar community in Rome. The church designated for the use of the Syro-Malabar faithful at present is *Basilica Santa Anastasia*. Non-availability of a proper church and a common place for general gatherings negatively affect the pastoral care of the community. In the years 2011 and 2014, 2018 requests were made to Pope Benedict XVI and H.Em. Agostino Cardinal Vallini, the Vicar of the Holy Father for the Diocese of Rome and Pope Francis respectively. And, in the presence of the Synod of Bishops during their *ad limina* visit, a request was made in the Jubilee Year of Santhom Centre on 03 October 2019 by Mar Stephen Chirappanath, the Apostolic Visitor for Europe, to the Holy Father Pope Francis to raise our Santhom Centre as a personal parish and to give the Syro-Malabar community a permanent church with a presbytery or rectory. Thanks to God, on 8 July 2020, a decree was issued by the Vicariate of Rome entrusting the Basilica of Sant'Anastasia al Palatino with rectory to the Syro-Malabar community. The juridical status of the community is raised to chaplain with missione con cura d'anime and chaplain holds the responsibility of the Rector of the Basilica too.

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