

The following article is extracted from an upcoming book written by John Prabhudoss, titled The Upper West House.

CHRISTIANITY IN INDIA

Christianity which was practiced in erstwhile kingdoms of the Indian Subcontinent is as old as the Faith itself.

Christianity was first introduced in the Subcontinent by Christ's own Apostle - the 'doubting' Thomas.

Thomas initially visited Northwestern parts of the Subcontinent in the years between 46 AD and 49 AD.

Besides Thomas, another Apostle of Christ, Bartholomew also visited Northwestern kingdoms of the Subcontinent establishing churches as far down South as the Port city of present day Mumbai.

Though there were many churches as far down south as modern day Mumbai, the concentration of those churches were found across the kingdoms of the northwest region and Indo-Persian region, including the territories of what is now known as Pakistan, Baluchistan (part of modern day Pakistan bordering modern day Iran) and Afghanistan.

Bartholomew and Thomas had traveled by land, from Mesopotamia of yester years, to the northern kingdoms of the Indian Subcontinent through present day Iran, Baluchistan and Pakistan - the same route through which *Vedic Aryans* came to the Indus Valley several hundred years earlier. Evidently this is the same route through which Alexander the Great entered the Indus Valley as well.

Though, Apostles Bartholomew and Thomas had both established communities of Christian believers in the northern kingdoms of the Indian Subcontinent, Thomas has come to be known as the 'Apostle to India', because the mission in the Indian Subcontinent became the primary focus for Thomas for the rest of his natural life. Thomas finally died as a martyr, pierced to death, in Mylapore of Thamilagam, near modern-day city of Chennai, India, in 72 AD, almost 26 years after his first arrival in the Indian Subcontinent.

The way Thomas came about to the Indian Subcontinent in itself is an interesting history.

Thomas came to the Subcontinent as did Apostle Bartholomew, because, during the time of His worldly Mission, Jesus had commissioned His disciples to, go into all the world, and preach the message about him to all people. This is what the Christians call the 'Great Commission' or the "Great Commandment" of Christ. It is part of the day today responsibilities of every person who follows Christ.

This *preaching* of the good news of Jesus can be in any form. It could be just living a life that witnesses Christ to others in everyday life or talking to friends and neighbors about Christ or even telling strangers about Christ as a vocation.

Apostle Thomas and other disciples took this 'Great Commission' from Jesus, to tell the Good News of the resurrected Christ to the world, very seriously.

Jesus also tasked his disciples to bring this good news about the *Messiah* - the Savior whom they have been expecting, to the lost *House of Israel*.

Even at the time of Christ, the Hebrew people were living all over the known world including many countries and kingdoms of the Indian Subcontinent. The Hebrew people (Jews and other eleven tribes of Israel) were expecting a Messiah, the Savior to come and deliver them.

Recorded history shows that a prosperous Hebrew merchant community thrived in the Chera kingdoms known then as Thamilagam besides the northern kingdoms of the Subcontinent from at least before the time of King Solomon. (King Solomon ruled Palestine almost a thousand years before Christ, between 970 and 931 BC). This western Malabar Coastal region of Thamilagam later came to be known as Trevancore and Kerala in recent periods. Those Hebrew people in the Indian Subcontinent were mainly engaged in trade.

These Hebrew merchants had been trading in spices, gold, silver, sandalwood and ivories among other things, with the people in Asia Minor and Indian Subcontinent for several centuries by then. So, historically, Hebrew/Jewish merchants have had settlements in different kingdoms of the Subcontinent for at least a thousand years before the time of Christ. It also implies that Judaism has been in practice in the territories of the Indian Subcontinent for at least 3000 years now and at least for 1000 years by the time of Christ.

Because of these well-known historical facts, Thomas and other disciples had come searching for the Jewish diaspora in this part of the world, in addition to their desire to fulfil the Great Commission – to preach the Gospel of Jesus to all human kind.

A book in Syriac, dated to have been written in early 3rd-century AD, called the *Acts of Thomas*, talks about how Thomas traveled to northern kingdoms of the Subcontinent at first and then to southern Chera kingdom, during his second visit.

This book describes the way in which Thomas was chosen by the group of disciples to go to the Indian Subcontinent. The book says that Thomas was hesitant first to travel to the kingdoms of the Indian Subcontinent and so Christ appeared to Thomas in a dream and encouraged him to go on the journey fearing nothing.

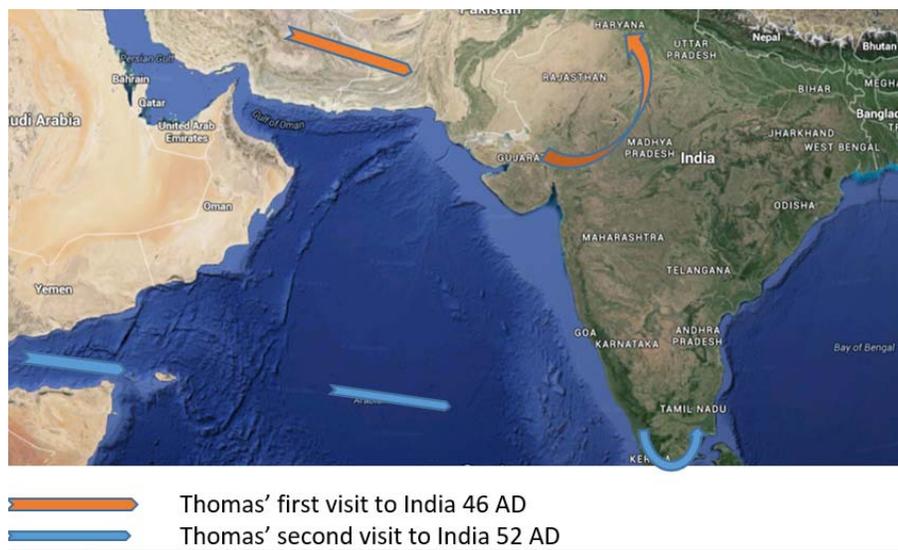
So, Thomas accepted the assignment and accompanied a merchant by the name Abbanes, first to northwest kingdoms of the Indian Subcontinent. They traveled through Persia and present day Pakistan, around 46 AD.

There were many Hebrew/Jewish merchant settlements all through the region during those days. These Jewish communities and synagogues served as their host and the launching point for next destinations. Besides, synagogues along the way also served as their link to the region. Their purpose was very simple. It was to tell the world about Jesus who changed the life and understanding of Thomas during the three and a half years of his life he spent with Jesus.

Once Thomas reached the Indus Valley, he and Abbanes met a local Indo-Parthian king (Indo-Persian king) identified in Syriac as Gondophares. Because Thomas was also a good carpenter and a builder in his previous trade, Gondophares asked Thomas to build a palace for him. Income from such construction work was one of the ways in which Thomas paid for his expenses during his travels (in the same way other Apostles like Paul who made his income from making tents). So, Thomas agreed to build a palace for king Gondophares.

Some versions of the story informs us that Thomas spent all that money on poor people instead of building the palace. So, when the king came to see the construction of his palace, he

asked Thomas where his palace was. Thomas told the king that he built a palace for the king in heaven with the money he gave so that the king could use it when he went there. Of course the king did not like what he heard and arrested Thomas and Abbanes.



Eventually, the king and his brother became followers of Thomas and accepted the ways of Christ. The book, *Acts of Thomas*, describes how the king and his brother along with tens of thousands of people from all sections of the population became his followers and adopted to the faith in Christ. This is probably the first recorded conversion of non-Jews to Christianity by Thomas in the Indian Subcontinent.

During his first visit, Thomas did not stay in the Subcontinent too long. He is believed to have left within a short period as the region was threatened by frequent wars and instability. When Thomas left the Indian Subcontinent, he is generally believed to have returned to Edessa via Babylon.

(These Christian communities founded by Thomas, Bartholomew, and other Disciples of Christ which thrived until the 7th century AD in Asia Minor, Central Asia and the northwestern kingdoms of the Indian subcontinent were all overrun by Islam during later centuries when Islamic armies marched across the region).

Then Thomas came to know about large settlements of Hebrew/Jewish merchants in Malabar Coast ruled by Chera kings. They were in the Southwest coastal territories of Tamilagam as it was known then (presently known as Kerala) in the Indian Subcontinent. So, naturally Thomas was convinced that he had to return to the region where there were more Jewish settlers. Thus he again embarked on his second mission to the Subcontinent in 52 AD.

Thomas chose the sea route this time. So he hitch hiked his way back in a merchant vessel, arriving at the Chera kingdom of the Malabar Coast. He is also believed to have visited Southeast Arabia and Socotra, an island off the coast of Yemen, en-route to Malabar Coast. When he reached the Subcontinent this time, he landed in Muziris.

Muziris was a flourishing port city of their time. It was located not too far from the modern city of Kochi in the modern day state of Kerala.

This popular Port of Muziris is mentioned in famous *Sangam literatures* like *Manimekalai*. But this port is not there anymore. Records show that it was destroyed by a devastating cataclysmic floods and cyclones in 1341 AD. Modern day archeologists believe that the floods and the cyclone of 1341 has reshaped the landscape in that area. They also believe that most of the old city of Muziris was washed out or swallowed by the sea.

Until the events of 1341, Muziris was a very busy port-city for trading with Phoenicians, Egyptians and Greeks. Several hordes of Roman gold coins have been unearthed in the region supporting the opinion that Romans also frequented Muziris.

Today, some archeologists believe, small towns such as North Paravur and Kodungalloor near the present day port city of Kochi, on the banks of the Periyar River could be the remaining landscape of the ancient Port of Muziris.

Because it was a well-known port-city for the Romans, Greeks, Arabs and Egyptians, facilitated by the South-West monsoon winds, as pointed out by the First Century Roman author and philosopher Pliny the Elder, there is no surprise that the merchant vessel which Thomas was sailing also came to Muziris. In this voyage, Thomas was accompanied by other Jewish merchants and also by his long time traveling assistant, Abbanes.

Tradition says that, when Thomas returned to the Indian Subcontinent, the people who first accepted Christ were not the Jewish merchants who had settled in the Chera kingdom, but rather a group of *Vedic Aryans* locally known as *Nambudiris* became his first followers. As mentioned earlier in Part I, *Vedic Aryans* were making their way into the far reaches of the Indian Subcontinent after they first arrived into the Indus valley from Central Asia at the dawn of Iron Age. Some of these *Vedic Nambudiris* were already living in that part of the Chera kingdom for some time by then.

The way in which these *Nambudiris* became followers of Thomas is also a very compelling story.

When the merchant ship, in which Thomas was traveling was getting closer to the Malabar Coast, they were caught up in a bad storm. The vessel they were traveling was big enough to withstand the storm but the storm was strong enough to sink smaller boats. In the middle of the storm, Thomas and the passengers on board the merchant vessel noticed a small boat full of people were struggling to stay afloat on high seas. That smaller boat was carrying a group of *Nambudiri* men and their families who were on their way back from an Island off the coast of Kerala, possibly from one of the Lakshadweep Islands, after taking part in an annual pilgrimage. When the boat in which they were sailing was seriously damaged and started to sink, the merchant vessel came to their rescue and saved the group of *Nambudiris* from drowning.

It was on that merchant vessel this group of *Nambudiris* first met this extraordinary man - Thomas. The group of *Nambudiris* were instantly captivated by Thomas and his personality. As a result the entire group of *Nambudiri* families turned their Faith towards Thomas and Jesus whom he was preaching. Thus this small group of *Nambudiris* became the first to follow Christ before anyone else did in Malabar Coast and other regions of the Dravidian kingdoms.

Though that group of *Nambudiri* families started to follow Jesus, certainly before the Jews and local people in the Malabar Coast did, they pretty much kept the faith in Christ to themselves for almost two millenniums. They did not share their knowledge of Jesus with anyone else outside of their group and if they think they did, it was very minimal.

Nambudiris were culturally and socially a very closed community. They must have probably migrated to that region themselves only recently from the northern regions. They did not generally mingle too much with local Dravidian population. Their religious literatures were in Sanskrit and they must have been speaking a Sanskrit based language – part of the Indo European family of languages – instead of Dravidian languages spoken locally. Generally they were an island of settlements to themselves. This was almost half a millennium before *Aryanization* of the Dravidian kingdoms began. This Aryanization efforts later resulted in the gradual control of Dravidian society and their temples by *Vedic Aryans*.

So, even after becoming the followers of Thomas, these *Nambudiri* families continued to practice their social customs and stayed away from local people. Today, after 2000 years of having followed Thomas, converted *Nambudiris* have grown to be a large community divided into various sects and groups. They are all known as part of Thomas Christians, belonging to various denominations like Malabar, Malankara, Orthodox, Marthomite, Jacobite and few other Christian groups. (See the chart)

Some of these denominations of Thomas Christians are 'open' and 'inviting' these days though others are still 'closed' to outsiders. One can become a member of these 'closed' denominations only through birth or by marriage to another member of their group even today.

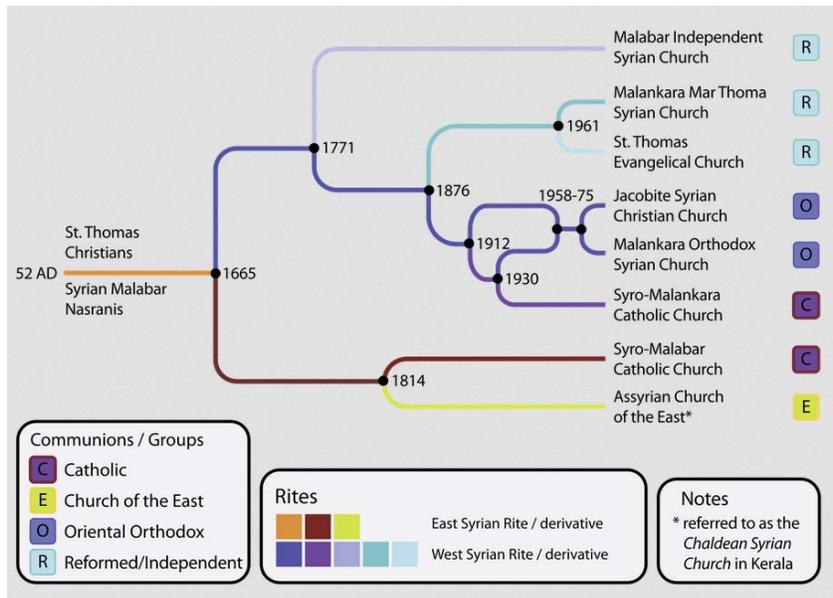
But back then, Thomas did not hold back. He continued to preach about Christ to everyone.

Thomas preached the Gospel to the non-Jews in good measure besides the Jews and the *Nambudiris* in the Malabar Coast. He was very effective in communicating to people about divine grace of Christ and redemption through faith in Christ as opposed to living a cycle of births and deaths carrying the burden of *karma* of the parents and grandparents. Tens of thousands of people from all walks of life and from all religious practices were attracted to his message of salvation.

Finding a serious need for large number of priests required to lead this huge Jewish and non-Jewish followers in the Malabar Coast, Thomas sent for more priests from Damascus and Babylon who were already trained in Judeo Christian scriptures. Thomas must have seen his Faith in Christ as an extension of his Jewish Faith or as reformed Judaism, though the mainstream Judaism neither accepted Christ nor believed in conversion of non-Jews. But because Thomas thought his Faith was rooted in Jewish traditions, he sent for more priests who were already trained in Jewish scriptures to lead the newly established Christian communities throughout the Chera kingdom. Bringing new priests from Damascus and Babylon was his first choice as it was much easier option than trying to train local converts in the scriptures to lead the congregations.

Besides Jerusalem, Damascus, Babylon and Edessa were the epicenter of Christian religious/cultural life in those days. This was almost 600 years before Islam was born. These cities and regions were connected to the Indian Subcontinent during those days in more than one ways. They were closely connected by trade, culture and blood. To this day, many churches, including some churches in Kerala are formally affiliated with the Antiochian and Nestorian churches which are headquartered in Damascus in the nation of modern-day Syria.

Many, known today as *Syrian Christians* and *Cannanaiya* in the state of Kerala are the descendants of people and priests who came to the Malabar Coast from Damascus and Canna, to nurture these newly formed churches during and after the time of Thomas.



Source: By *St_Thomas_Christians_divisions.png*; *Joehoya3* derivative work: *Fred the Oyster (talk) - St_Thomas_Christians_divisions.png*, CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=9747713>



Thiruvudhamcode Arappally. Souce: By *Jaisontsy* at English Wikipedia by *Rojypala* using CommonsHelper, Public Domain

A church called *Thiruvithamcode Arappally* also known as *Thomaiyar Kovil* (in English, Church of Thomas the Priest), near Kanyakumari, the southernmost region of the Indian Subcontinent, is believed to be the oldest Christian church building in the world today. It is believed to have been built by Apostle Thomas himself between AD 57 and 63 under the care of Thomas Christians. This small structure has survived all these years. The Church was named as *Amalagiri* by King Udayancheral, (also known as Uthiyan Cheralathan) of the *Chera Dynasty*. King Udayancheral is the first recorded king of earlier *Chera Dynasty* by some accounts during the first century AD. It is a pilgrim center these days.

The encyclopedia points out some other interesting things about the Malabar Coast of the modern-day Kerala from this same period. It says

“Most of the Chera population followed native Dravidian practices. The worship of departed heroes was a common practice in the Chera kingdom along with tree worship and other kinds of ancestor worships. The war goddess Kottavai was propitiated with complex sacrifices. The Cheras probably worshiped this mother goddess. Kottavai was later assimilated into the present day form of the goddess Devi. There is no evidence of snake worship in the Chera realms and until the 7th century AD there is no proof of Ganesha worship either. Perhaps the Brahmins came to the Chera kingdom in the 3rd century BC following the Jains and Buddhists. It was only in the 8th century AD that the Aryanisation of the Chera country reached its climax”.

The encyclopedia further says,

“A small percentage of the population followed Jainism, Buddhism and Brahmanism. These three philosophies came from northern India to the Chera kingdom. A small Jewish and Christian population also lived in the Chera territories”.

This, points to the fact that, Thomas Christian population existed in Kerala long before *Ganesha* or *Snake* worship began. It also indicates that Christianity took root in Kerala before *Brahmanism* or *Vedic Faiths* became a dominant religion later in the 8th century as a result of massive *Aryanization* efforts. *Vedic Aryans* who migrated into the southern reaches of the Subcontinent before Thomas arrived, lived in small isolated communities. Brahmanism was not yet a major religion in the southern kingdoms ruled by the Chera, Chola and Pandya dynasties, the three major dynasties of that region until the 13th century AD.

The *Aryanization* was imposed on general population during later periods in the form of enforcing a strict caste system, infusing the *Vedic* doctrines and assimilating or absorbing the local faiths, practices and institutions, starting from the 8th Century in the heels of the *Vedic* religious revival period known as the *bhakti* movement. Institutions and mutts founded by people like the *Advaita* philosopher Aadi Shankara, along with aggressive conversion efforts of *Saivite* and *Vaishnavite* missionaries of *Vedic* faiths such as Appar, Sambandhar, Thirunavukarasar and others played a major role in this *Aryanization* campaign. (We will see more on this bit later).

It is said that Thomas established seven full-fledged centers of his Faith besides one more which is not considered to be a full-fledged Christian center in Malabar Coast, before moving to the Coromandel Coast. After establishing several churches along Coastal Malabar region, Apostle Thomas kept moving along the coastline towards the Coromandel Coast (the southeastern coastline of the Subcontinent) preaching and teaching about the Jesus of Nazareth.

THOMAS CHRISTIANS IN COROMANDEL COAST

There is no historical evidence to show if there were any large settlements of Hebrew/Jewish merchants in the Coromandel Coast during the first century like we see in the Malabar Coast. So, people who followed Thomas in Coromandel Coast must have been exclusively local Dravidians who had no social or commercial interactions with Jewish people except for occasional contacts in one or two major port cities.

Substantial number of people practicing native Christianity in the coastal regions in South India today and their reverence to Apostle Thomas, referred to as *Thomaiyer* in Tamil, is an indication that Thomas travelled along the coastline from Malabar Coast, eventually reaching the place called Mylapore. Today, Mylapore is part of the modern coastal city of Chennai. (Chennai, formerly known also as Madras, is the capital city of the modern Indian State of Tamil Nadu).

While Thomas was camping in Mylapore, he established a church, known today, simply as Mylapore Church or St. Thomas Church. This is one of the last churches Thomas personally established besides a number of churches and Christian communities along the way all across the Coromandel Coast.

By the time Thomas reached Mylapore he is also believed to have picked up local language Tamil and their traditions. (An older form of Tamil was spoken also in Malabar Coast during this period before Malayalam evolved into a language of its own. Malayalam, a close relative of Tamil, became the preeminent language in Malabar Coast during recent periods). This would have helped Thomas to translate Hebrew and Aramaic words/names into Tamil.

Having already spent a few years on the ground, Thomas also must have had time to train new priests from the local communities itself to lead his new followers instead of fully depending on priests who were already trained in the Judeo-Christian thoughts, which was what he had to do in Kerala during the period immediately after his arrival in Muziris. Obviously, these newly trained local clergy would have had limited knowledge of Jewish customs and traditions.

Having spent several years already among the local people, Thomas must have also picked up religious and cultural practices of local Dravidian people and tailored his teachings accordingly in the Coromandel Coast to suite the cultures of the local Dravidian people. Thomas had a very effective approach for introducing people to his message and theology.

By the time Thomas arrived for the second time in the Subcontinent, several kings in the southern regions, including kings of major Chera, Chola and Pandya dynasties were already following Buddhism or Jainism. Obviously, it would mean that a large number of local Dravidian people living in these kingdoms were already following the religion of their kings. In the north, the *Kushan* and *Gupta* empires have not only adopted the Jainism or Buddhism but they were also exporting it to other kingdoms, beyond the Subcontinent.

It is plausible for us to imagine that people in the Chera, Chola and Pandya kingdoms were familiar with the idea of *karma* already because, both Buddhism and Jainism believed in the idea of *karma*. But Thomas was going around telling people that the grace of god and not *karma* helped where their spirit went at the end of their lives. It was a refreshing idea but it was also a revolutionary idea.

It was a time when *Vedic* leaders were also trying to occupy the religious space in the society though Jainism and Buddhism beat them to it by becoming the mainstay for several centuries by then.

In spite of the fact that most kings were following either Jainism or Buddhism, *Vedic Aryans* started to slowly infuse their own ideas of caste hierarchy among the Dravidian population. But, now Thomas was not only challenging the idea of *karma* but he was also teaching people that they are all created equal in the sight of god; and that no one is superior or no one is inferior.

Thomas coming along with such forceful ideas in an already crowded field meant that any possibilities of *Vedic Aryan* philosophies becoming mainstream in the Dravidian kingdoms faced with yet another challenge. It was a tumultuous period.

Vedic leaders were afraid that their efforts to take away the social and religious space from Buddhism and Jainism, to establish their practices as the preeminent faith was being blindsided by this new *Dharm* or way of life, taught by Thomas. So, they wanted to stop Thomas' effective evangelism and put an end to his revolutionary theology.

Thomas' ideas were undermining the legitimacy of the caste system and its institutionalized hierarchy. The status quo of the society was challenged in good measure by Thomas. The doctrines of *Vedic religions* were fundamentally challenged. So people who considered themselves as upper castes under the *Varnashra Dharm*, were threatened by this new idea. They thought the very privileges they enjoyed in the system they created were at stake. They knew if it was not stopped, it might become a major hurdle on their plans.

Though both Buddhism and Jainism are offshoots of *Vedic* philosophies and rooted in Central Asian and the Indus Valley cultures, they in many ways were contradicting and often challenging the ideas of various schools of *Vedic Brahmanism*. Both these religions kept the *Vedic Brahmanism* confined to certain groups of people. But Thomas was trying to shake the very foundation of a carefully laid *Vedic* social doctrine and their prospects for a massive *Aryanization* efforts.

Proponents of *Vedic* philosophies saw Thomas's presence as another potential hurdle besides Jainism, and Buddhism for enforcing their own social status and to capture the social space. (*Vedic* school of thoughts have successfully incorporated most of Buddhist and Jain thoughts during subsequent centuries into the ever evolving *Vedic faiths*. We will discuss this phenomena later).

Besides, Thomas also believed to have infuriated a local king because the king's own sister referred to in Syriac as Tertia and son referred to again in Syriac as Ouazanes or luzanes along with several members of the king's household including his brother's wife referred to as Mygdonia started to follow Thomas.

The determination to capture the social space coupled with jealousy of *Vedic* religious leaders and Thomas' troubles with the king evolved into a plot to kill Thomas. This poisonous environment and plotting eventually lead to the stabbing death of Thomas in 72 AD.

Apostle Thomas was pierced to death with a spear by soldiers on a hill known today in Tamil as *Parangi Malai* or Saint Thomas Mount, located only a few miles from Mylapore. The word "*Parangi*" means "foreign" in Tamil. This word could have been derived from an Arabic term *al-faranji* meaning anything that of a foreign origin. "*Malai*" means a *hill* in Tamil. So, *Parangi Malai* so came to be called because this was the hill where Thomas, a lighter skinned Semitic foreigner who was from Palestine was finally killed by his enemies.

Today, some may argue that *Vedic religious* leaders are so benevolent and strictly follow the ideal of non-violence that they would not have committed such murders. It is a valid argument. A lot of people in the world today would think it to be a fair assumption. Not hurting another life,

whether human or otherwise has come to be a major part of the belief in *Vedic faiths*. It is true for a majority of *Vedic* religious leaders even today. They would not harm even an insect because of the idea that the spirit transmigrates into eight million lifeforms and that insect could be one of it. But elimination of the 'source of threat', or the destruction of the "other" (the unrighteous) by "us" (the righteous) – in their perspective, even by 'violent means - if necessary', is very much part of the *Vedic* doctrines.

Such violent methods to spread the *Vedic* religion in the past was also documented by several Jain monks of that time period. Jain religious leaders and philosophers who have experienced the wrath of *Vedic* religious leaders as late as the 6th century and 8th century AD have eloquently recorded the bloodbath and the sufferings they endured in the hands of *Vedic* religious leaders.

As mentioned, today, most people who identify themselves with one or the other form of *Vedic* religions generally believe in the idea of *ahimsa* (non-violence); and would not harm even an insect or an animal. But, some leaders who believe in the same *Vedic* doctrines are willing, able and intent on committing such acts of violence against "other human beings" in the name of their faith perfectly well. In a sense, the people of this category who follow the *Vedic* religions are no different from similar fringe elements in other world religions like Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Buddhism and other smaller faith groups. They are all guilty of having engaged in such violence themselves in their own parts of the world from time to time.

The Israelites have done it in Canaan when they returned from 450 years of slavery in Egypt. They slaughtered all men, women and children living in Jericho except Rahaab, the woman who sheltered the Israeli spies. Christians have done the same thing in the middle ages in Europe and during the crusades. Buddhists have committed such acts of violence as recently as in places like Sri Lanka and Burma and some groups in Islam seems to have got stuck on that mode even today to mention a few. In 72 AD also, there were people among *Vedic Aryans* who were perfectly willing to kill for their faith.

The Acts of Thomas also records that, before dying, Thomas appointed a newly converted Siphor, the captain of the king's army to be the Priest and Iuzanes, the son of the king as a deacon to lead the church in Mylapore.

Upon the assassination of their teacher, the followers of Thomas took his martyred body and buried underneath a worship place in Mylapore.

Historical records show that, in 232 AD, one of the last kings of the *Kushan Empire*, Vasudeva I, took the remains of Thomas to the city of Edessa in Mesopotamia as a token of his deep respect for the Apostle. Vasudeva is referred to as "Mazdai" in Syriac, or as "Misdeos" in Greek, (as "V" and "B" are interchangeable in Greek). From the coins unearthed from the period stretching across the Kushan Empire, these names are identified as "Bazdeo" or Vasudeva. However, there are no records to definitively say whether or not King Vasudeva or Bazdeo whose empire was predominantly following Jainism only a couple of hundred years earlier, became a follower of Thomas at any point in his life. But all we know is that King Bazdeo (Vasudeva), during his reign, felt compelled enough in his heart to take the remains of Apostle Thomas from Mylapore all the way to the city of Edessa in Mesopotamia almost 6000 Kilometers away.



Another obvious question one might ask also is, why did he take the remains of the Apostle to Edessa in Mesopotamia instead of another place like Jerusalem or Damascus? Scholars believe that King Vasudeva took the remains from Mylapore to Edessa because, the church in the Indian Subcontinent was still under the patriarchate of Mesopotamia during that time and Edessa was the seat of that patriarchate. Edessa also considers Thomas as its Patron Saint. This took place more than 100 years before either Rome or Constantinople came to be the centers of Christian church. This *Kushan* king must have known the importance of Edessa in the ancient church circles for taking the remains of Thomas there instead of taking it to some other place.

The well-known Martyrologist Rabban Sliba dedicated a special day in honor of Apostle Thomas along with the Indian Kushan king Vasudeva I who brought the remains of the Apostle from Mylapore, to Edessa. The church in Edessa continues to celebrate this feast every year, even today.

When Edessa was later conquered by Islamic king Rashudin in 638 AD, most of the remains of Saint Thomas was moved again for safe keeping to a Mediterranean island called Chios. In 1258 AD, the Apostle's remains were again moved to Abruzzo, in Ortona, Italy where it is currently kept in the *Church of Saint Thomas the Apostle*. In 1999, Pope John Paul II brought the bone of the right arm of Apostle Thomas, to India to be placed in a newly built memorial near the town of Kodungaloor. The present day town of Kodungaloor is the remaining landscape of the port of Muziris, where the Apostle landed in 52 AD.



Church of Apostle Thomas, Ortona, Italy

Most scholars believe, the Christianity which Apostle Thomas established in Coromandel Coast, unlike in Malabar Coast, have been mostly absorbed by local traditions and cultures over a period of several centuries until it could no longer be recognized or separated from the ever evolving traditions and customs of the Dravidian people. This type of assimilation and absorption of different religions and religious philosophies is very common in the Indian Subcontinent.

Vedic faiths and Dravidian faiths have the ability to absorb and internalize all forms of ideas and philosophies including the ideas and philosophies of external origin, as their own.

Local faith systems evolve with a belief that the “Truth” is found in different forms of worship and traditions, however unrelated they may be. This approach does not believe in a single tradition or belief to be the only way to reach god.

This ‘tradition of evolving’ or a ‘tendency to evolve’ could have been the result of their own history and experiences, affected by new thoughts and ideas constantly coming to the Subcontinent from different places and different backgrounds over a period of several thousand years. These belief systems in the Subcontinent considers all enlightened religions lead to the same Creator from Whom all things came into Existence.

These faith systems also see the Reality as the struggle between Good and Evil, Light and Darkness, Righteous and Unrighteous - *Dharm* and *Adharm*. So, whenever people in the Subcontinent come across teachings of good value, they tend to put those ideas in the above context to absorb and internalize them as their own.

For example, though they are in a sense anti-Brahminic faiths in its origin, the once dominant Jainism and Buddhism, today at least in India, considered to be a part of the modern Hinduism. Similarly, a holy man known as Sai Baba belongs to the Sufi Islam (a mystic form of Islam), he is revered and considered to be a saint by many caste Hindus today.

Similarly, scholars believe, the religion and the ideas which Thomas taught in in the Coromandal Coast also got absorbed into the ever evolving local belief systems and traditions. Some of those ideas taught by Thomas are believed to have become a religion unto itself – over a period of time. However, no archeological evidence or written records survived/found to conclusively demonstrate it than the circumstantial evidences, cultural practices and practical similarities found among these indigenous religious practices. Perhaps further studies needs to be done to determine the origins of some unique practices of Dravidian population (that are not rooted in Vedic thoughts) in the Coromandal Coast.

But the fact is that, in almost the same way how Buddhism, a foreign religion for the people of Indonesia, Thailand, Japan and other countries was accepted as part of their own cultures and traditions, Thomas Christianity was also accepted and absorbed by the people of the Coromandel Coast as part of their own, by fully assimilating and absorbed into their culture.

External References:

There are several external references to the presence of Thomas Christians and the missionary work of the Apostle in the kingdoms of South Asia and in particular, among the kingdoms of the Indian Subcontinent during the 1st century.

For example, Bar-Daisan (154–222 AD) an Assyrian, born in the ancient city of Edessa (modern day Urfa located in Turkey) made a record of Thomas Christians whom he came to know about living in the kingdoms of the Indian Subcontinent. Bar-Daisan is the founder of Bardaisanites, an offshoot of Mesopotamian religion which formed the basis for the teachings of gnostic Manichaeism. Bar-Daisan was known for his extensive knowledge about this region in his time.

Bar-Daisan reports that, he has met Christian tribes from different kingdoms of the Indian Subcontinent (most likely from the North and Northwestern parts) who claimed to have been following Christ because of Apostle Thomas. He also mentioned in his writings that the people he met from the kingdoms of the Indian Subcontinent had books and relics to prove it.

In 190 AD, Philosopher Pantaenus of Alexandria, Egypt, mentions his knowledge of Thomas Christians in Indian Subcontinent in his writings. He wrote that he found copies of the Gospel according to Mathew in papyrus scrolls written in Hebrew language, being used by Christians in the Chera kingdom of Malabar Coast. This Gospel of Mathew in Hebrew must have been the copies brought by Jewish traders traveling back and forth between the Malabar Coast of Tamilagam and Palestine, frequently.

When the Second Persian Empire was established in 226 AD, church records indicate that there were several Bishops in the Indian Sub-continent, who were affiliated to the Church of the East. During this time, Edessa had become a major Faith center. It had become the seat of the church all across Mesopotamia and South Asia. All Christian communities established by Thomas and Bartholomew, including the churches they established in the kingdoms of South Asia and Asia Minor, came under the patriarchate of Edessa. This was well before the church in Rome was established.

Then, a new group of Christians from Edessa under the leadership of a man named Thomas of Cana arrived in Malabar Coast in 345 AD. They were affiliated to their church in Persia. This group remained separate from local populations. Their Bishops were appointed from Persia until at least 15th century.

We could also find several other references in Dravidian literatures besides remarks made by notable writers during antiquity about the flourishing Christian population in Dravidian land.

Some of such references to Thomas Christians are seen in Dravidian literatures like *Manimekalai*. *Manimekalai* is a Tamil epic written during the *Sangam* period between 2nd and 3rd century AD. (*Sangam* is the period named after the famous academies of poets and scholars based in the city of Madurai). It mentions about a group of Thomas Christians called *Nasraines* as *Issanis*.

The *Thazhekad Sasanam*, an edict by the Chera Emperor, written between 340 AD and 360 AD in Pali, the canonical language of Buddhists, granted special rights and privileges to these Nasranies or Issanies Christian communities.

A 6th century merchant from Alexandria, *Cosmas Indicopleustes*, who became a hermit in the Church of the East, traveled to Tamilagam in 522 AD. He also wrote a book called the *Christian Topography* in which he describes a vibrant Thomas Christian population that thrived in the Indian Subcontinent.

Besides these references, two more copper plates seems to have survived which document special privileges issued to Christian communities in Malabar Coast by the Jain King Sthanu Ravi Gupta Perumal and King Ayann Adikal Thiruvadikal of Venad in 824 AD and 849 AD respectively. Though this period was witnessing the height of Aryanization in the Dravidian kingdoms, these copper plates show that some of the Jain kings tried to protect the Christian communities from the onslaught of the *Vedic missionaries*.

Then in 883 AD, King Alfred the Great of Wessex of England, (849 AD -899 AD) initiated contact with Thomas Christians in Tamilagam by sending gifts through Bishop Sighelm, the

Bishop of Sherborne. Bishop Sighelm arrived in Malabar Coast and met the Christians who came to be known as Marthoma (Mar Thomas or Saint Thomas) Christians, belonging to the protestant traditions today.

But by the time Marco Polo visited the Malabar Coast in 1292, it is confirmed that the conversion campaign and *Aryanization* program of the *Vedic Aryans* has found considerable success in Malabar Coast. Marco Polo points out in his records that, the population in Malabar Coast was made up of a large number of *idolaters*, though there were many Christians and Jews present among them. He draws the distinction between these two communities interestingly as that of those people who seem to be worshipping idols as opposed to the ones who were not worshipping idols.

These references indicate to the fact that Christianity continued to grow continuously throughout this period across the Subcontinent in different regions ruled by different kings.

Absorption of Thomas Christianity:

As we have seen, Christianity has been part of the culture and life in the Malabar region for 2000 years. It has survived the test of time. It is one of the Christian communities in the world that survived without a break in its continuity. The church has existed continuously as an identifiable entity starting from 52 AD until now in the Malabar Coast. Along the way, Christianity in the Malabar region has absorbed so many local customs and practices and has become an integral part of the life and culture here while remaining as an independent identifiable separate faith community for the past 2000 years.

The orthodox churches in the Malabar Coast consider themselves as ancient communities identifying themselves as part of the "ecclesiastical world of Eastern churches which has been adopting to the changing socio cultural environment of their homeland, becoming "Ind" in its culture, "Christian" in its Faith, and "Judeo-Syriac-Oriental" in its origin.

On the contrary, scholars and historians believe that the Christianity which Thomas established in the Coromandel region in the years leading up to the assassination of Thomas, has been completely absorbed into the local traditions and customs as mentioned above. This kind of absorption has gone so well seamlessly to the extent that it could no longer be identified as a separate faith or as part of what we know today as Christian Faith, in the form of either Eastern or Western rites.

Scholars believe that this kind of absorption was also unavoidable in this particular case for several internal and external reasons.

Some scholars believe, when the news about the martyrdom of Thomas reached Palestine, a brother of Thomas came to Coromandel Coast to help lead the infant church in Mylapore. We do not know whether if this brother was his own biological brother or a brother in the sense of a fellow believer in Christ. We also do not have records to know what happened to the brother eventually. No traditions or writings about him seems to have survived. But after a few decades, there are references to show that there were occasional visits by other leaders of the church from outside the Subcontinent, especially from Asia Minor visited the church in Mylapore. However, frequency of such contacts was inevitably limited and became rare after the initial period.

While the churches in Asia Minor itself became a victim to the spread of 'Islam' in the later parts of 6th and early 7th centuries, the church in Coromandel region became a victim to, the lack of strong knowledgeable leadership in Judeo Christian traditions who also had necessary

organizational network in the face of forceful missionary efforts of *Vedic* sects, *Saivism* and *Vaishnavism*, during the *Bhakti* movement period.

Successive weak leaderships and their lack of knowledge in fundamentals of the Judeo-Christian doctrines not only caused the group to lose its distinct identity but also jeopardized the very continued existence of Christian communities as a unique separate identifiable entity. This loss of unique identity did not help matters much where local religious practices were absorbing each other at a faster rate.

In the absence of strong leadership, many infant churches and their congregations in remote areas of Coromandel region also began to come under the pressure from other up and coming religious groups of the day. Aggressive and hostile social policies of competing religious groups also played a detrimental role to the long term viability of the Christian communities in Coromandel Coast as a separate entity.

In many cases, general lack of royal patronage for these churches, except in few cases, also greatly affected the viability of these communities in a social and political system that was very different from ours today.

Prevailing socio-political environment, partly fueled by the changes in demographics also became a major factor for the long term viability of these religious institutions. It would be interesting to study somewhat similar changes taking place in Europe now.

We will see how long the church as a dominant cultural and religious force could manage to assert its relevance in many parts of European societies today given the drastic drop in birth rate and unprecedented influx of refugees and migrants from the Middle East while the church leadership there is becoming more and more secular. This rapid change in demographics combined with people's lack of interest in adhering to their 2000 years of Christian cultural roots is going to be a factor for the viability of the church and its influence in Europe in our own time.

Similarly, changes in demographics combined with weaker leadership in the face of an aggressive missionary efforts of Vedic monks could have played a role in the dissipation of church as a separate identifiable entity in the Coromandel region.

There could be other subtle factors as well that affected the longevity/viability of the church in the Chola and Pandya kingdoms of the Coromandel region.

By the time Thomas reached the Eastern shores of India, he is believed to have learnt the local Tamil language and culture. So he taught a native *Indianized Christianity* using names and words translated into Tamil so that people can easily remember or absorb or perhaps Thomas simply did not want to thrust foreign names on the local people.

For example, instead of calling the mother of Jesus as Mother Mary or Mariam in Aramaic and Syriac, he could have identified her as *Mary-Ammal* or *Maryamma* or even *Maary'aatha* in old Tamil. (Amma or Aatha in Tamil means Mother).

It is obvious that Thomas did not use Hebrew, Aramaic or Syriac words which would have been the natural choice on Malabar Coast for his Jewish and non-Jewish converts initially. He would not have had many other options at that time. He may not have even thought about using local languages because there were sufficient number of Jewish settlers there at that time. But when he left that region and started to travel farther, he would have found the people to be speaking exclusively an older form of Tamil with no Jewish settlers among them. This would have prompted him to use derivative nouns than foreign sounding original nouns.

So, in Tamil, *Maary'aatha* literally means *Mother Maari* or *Mary*. However, today, the names like *Maaryaatha* (feminine) or *Mari'appan* (masculine) which are common among the Dravidians, particularly among the Tamil speaking people, could not be conclusively tied to the early Christian names or Christian belief systems. Because, the word *Maari* could also mean *rain* in old Tamil. So, could *Maary'aatha* be just a name for a Dravidian Rain goddess and not *Mother Mary*? Or is it just a natural variation in the word that means *Mother Mary*? Coincidentally this Mother Goddess, *Maari'amma* or *Maary'aatha* who brings blessings (such as rain) is also believed to have been conceived of a virgin in the local folklore!

We know for sure that *Maari'amma* belongs to non-agamic faiths. It means that this deity of *Maariamman* is not converted by the *Vedic Aryans* to make it one of *Vedic* deities by incorporating it into their epics. However, in the recent past, this *Maari'amma* is compared to other *Vedic* goddesses revered in North India. Also, few popular and larger *Maari'amma* temples in Dravidian regions have been brought under the control of *Vedic Brahmins* lately while vast majority of these temples, mostly smaller temples, are still controlled and served by non-Brahmins. In many such cases, the priests serving these gods in *non-agama* temples happen to be female priests - a factor un-common among *Vedic* practices.

Interestingly, though there are several female deities in the pantheon of *Vedic* faiths and a number of female religious spiritual leaders who command huge following from time to time, no women are found to preside as priests in *Vedic* temples. It is our understanding that there are no explicit restrictions for women to be priests in *Vedic* temples, but it is simply just not the practice. Priests in *Vedic* temples is exclusively the domain of men for the most part. *Vedic* faiths are essentially served by male priests belonging exclusively to Brahmin caste.

A Supreme Court of India's verdict in 2015 further not only re-affirmed this practice but also narrowed the question about who can be the priest and who is allowed to even touch the idols in the sanctum sanctorum of a temple, to very few families with a bloodline that connected them to a particular category within the larger Brahmin caste.

But the vast majority of priests in *Mary'amma* temples are non-Brahmin women. If so, the real question then is, who is this *Mary'amma* and what is the origins of this faith in *Mary'amma*?

There are no archeological evidences or historic records to conclusively say anything about it yet. It is also difficult for us today, to identify which of those Thomas' teachings, names, doctrines and practices are still being followed or used by people in Coromandel region.

We also can not authoritatively identify the words/nouns which Thomas used as part of the traditions which Thomas might have taught because of yet another practical reason.

As briefly mentioned above, it is suspected that after the stabbing death of Thomas, successive Christian leaders were from the local communities which had little to no knowledge of Judeo Christian traditions. Over a period of four or five hundred years, these leaders have become weaker and weaker. Thus, combined with a lack of strong and authoritative leadership besides suffering from a poor or lack of administrative network, the Christian community became susceptible for influence by other dominant or resurgent groups. This successive weaker leaderships led to a weaker organization that did not see a need to maintain its distinct Judeo Christian identity especially in the face of growing hostilities.

Acts of Thomas, allude to the appointment of two new local converts in leadership position before his martyrdom. These two names translated in Syriac are Siphor and Iuzanes. Iuzanes is

identified in the *Acts of Thomas* as a son of the king. The other is the commander of the army. Though these leaders would have had a great deal of faith in Thomas and the Faith he preached, they may not have had a strong training in theological aspects of the Faith and its Hebrew roots.

Lack of strong theological training in Judeo Christian doctrines for successive leaders could have contributed greatly to the loss of unique identity and distinct characters of the faith that Thomas taught.

This could have had severe effect on the continued existence of the church as a distinct identifiable entity also because, there were no sustained supply of theologically trained priests from Jerusalem, Damascus or Basra to meet the needs of Christian churches in Coromandel region unlike was the case in the Malabar Coast.

There are also little to no continued 'contact' or 'communication' with churches outside of their region unlike in Kerala where the church remained in continuous communication with the churches abroad, particularly with Christians in the Middle East, facilitated by trade and other naturally occurring interactions.

Such isolation from other Christian communities and a lack of Judeo Christian doctrinal foundation to successive leaders would have added to the vulnerability of the Christians in the midst of hostile environment. Though Thomas would have had sufficient time to train local people to lead the new followers in Coromandel Coast, to what extent their own understanding of the Christian theology suffered due to a lack of familiarity with the Jewish scriptures is an open question.

Nouns, names and practices that survived this period also could not be definitively identified or associated with modern day Christianity because, modern day Christianity in India is an Anglicized/Europeanized version of the Judeo-Christian Faith. This Europeanized, Judeo-Christian Faith uses Anglicized Hebrew and Aramaic words instead of (translated) Tamil nouns and words that Thomas would have taught.

It is believed that the widening gap between the original Hebrew doctrines and the understanding of Hebrew history by locally trained successive religious leaders over several hundred years, could have resulted in the loss of the Faith's unique characteristics to set them apart from the other local traditions.

The successive leaderships raised from local populations with less knowledge on the original Hebrew Scriptures would not have seen a reason to maintain their distinct identity.

Words, nouns and basic ideas that survived among majority of the people could have further drifted from its original source, resulting in the evolution of the religion as something other than what it had been originally, when Thomas introduced it at first.

Also, there was less and less contacts between Thomas Christians in the Coromandel region and the Christendom in other parts of the world, resulting in the churches in Coromandel Coast to isolate itself significantly. So when such organized massacre like the one that is recorded to have taken place during the 6th century in the heels of the *Bhakti movement*, people and organizations outside of the Coromandel region would not have had an opportunity to hear about it in time to extend any help. Thus the news about the damage caused to a large population of Thomas' followers would have been localized and contained within the region keeping it from outside world resulting in the abrupt discontinuation of overt Christian religious identities and their institutions.

The intentional destruction of original writings, their worship places, institutions and other evidences by rival religious groups during the period of *Bhakti* movement also played a role in the disappearance of an already weakened faith. This is the same period in which large scale massacre of people, particularly of people still following Christian doctrines as taught by Thomas and of the people following Jainism and Buddhism took place.

It is a well authenticated fact that punitive damages and large scale massacres were carried out by rival religious groups during this period for refusing to turn submissive and accept their religious ideologies.

This large scale destruction of evidences and massacre of people in history is referred to as, *Kuhai Iddi Kazagam*. (*Kuhai* in Tamil means caves, *iddi* means destruction and *Kazagam* means riots).

Though most evidences and records of such massacres from this period did not survive, records of few similar well known massacres have however survived. One such record of massacres shows that King Koon Pandian also known as Sundara Pandyan, the then king of Pandya Dynasty based in the city of Madurai, ordered the massacre of over 8000 Jain followers and monks. The surviving name of the place where this massacre took place is called Samanatham, about 10 Kilometers south of the historical city of Madurai. The name of the place Samanatham in Tamil literally means the blood of Jains. (Ref.....) In this particular incident, Jain worship places and religious literature, records were all destroyed after King Koon Pandian who was briefly following Jainism was converted to *Saivism* by then *Saivite* missionary Saint Sambandhar. Upon his conversion to *Saivism*, King Koon Pandyan ordered the massacre of all Jain monks, Jain scholars and the destruction of all their worship places, monasteries including their religious literatures and inscriptions.

Scholars like Deivanayagam and Sadhu Chelleppa of Chennai, India, believe that such massacres were ordered against Thomas Christians as well, by rulers and by the people acting on behalf of those rulers during the revival days of *Shivaism* and *Vaishnavism*. These “cleansings” were carried out in different places at different times as and when the *Saivaite* and *Vaishnavite* missionaries succeeded in converting local kings.

These scholars believe that during those days, followers of the religion which Thomas taught, fled their homes and villages to hide in caves and forests whenever their lives were threatened by the leaders of the *Vedic* religious faiths. In an effort to wipe out the opposition, the *Vedic* leaders hunted the people down, brought them back to village squares and executed them.

People who refused to denounce the Faith that Thomas taught were hunted and brought back from where they were hiding to villages and slaughtered in public places while their literatures were all burnt and their institutions were destroyed along with evidences of their very existence.

During this period several worship places dedicated to Thomas along with Jain and Buddhist temples were also believed to have been either destroyed or converted into other worship places. At the end of this period, Jainism, Buddhism and Thomas Christianity, which once dominated the landscape disappeared from the Coromandel region suddenly with no trace.

While some might argue that there is no conclusive evidences for showing such a violent campaign ever taking place, others argue that the mere fact that no evidence survived except in few cases like the massacre 8000 Jain monks just in one location alone, is the testimony to the extent to which such campaigns were successful. They also argue, if there were no such large

scale coordinated campaign, how is it possible for dominant faiths like Jainism and Buddhism to just disappear from the land in such a short period of time at the arrival of the *Bhakti* movement of *Vedic faiths*?

Today, however, several studies are conducted by scholars which traces some of these traditions and practices that are not part of Vedic traditions and outside of the scope of “*agama*”. These traditions which are still in use in Dravida lands, particularly in places like Tamil Nadu, to things that could have been taught by Thomas during the first century AD.

Such findings are significant because the remnants of Christianity which Thomas taught about 2000 years ago in Chola and Pandya Kingdoms continues to be practiced in various forms and traditions by local people of all castes and also by the *Aadi Dravidas* of the Coromandel Coast. However, the fact is that, some of these practices are so diluted and co-opted into local cultural traditions and folklore over a period of 1400 years that it could not be definitively identified as part of the faith that Thomas taught without further conclusive archeological evidence.

People who follow these practices today in Dravidian regions, particularly in Coromandel Coast, do not necessarily consider themselves even remotely as Christians. Christians in modern India, as we know of them today, are mostly practicing an Anglicized or Europeanized Judeo-Christian faith. But at the same time, some of the religious practices still followed among the *Dravidians* are unique to the people in the region and these practices are not considered even remotely as part of the original *Vedic* religious traditions – neither are they considered to be part of Jain or Buddhist traditions.

Such practices of local people, which are distinctly Dravidian, has become a religion unto itself within the broader defines of the ever evolving Ind/Hind cultures and practices.

However, the church which Thomas established in Malabar region withstood the test of time and continues to thrive, maintaining its own distinct identity. Episcopal affiliations based on doctrines and organizational structures forced these churches to make some changes from time to time but they did not debase the church and its identity as a definable single faith group or its continuity in the Indian Subcontinent.

Thomas Christianity in Malabar Coast absorbed many local cultural practices and adopted to changing world without diluting its core Christian identity unlike its counterparts in Coromandel Coast.

It is often said that when early European missionaries reached the Malabar Coast in the 15th century, they did not quite recognize the form of Christianity practiced there by local Thomas Christians. Of course, no wonder they could not recognize the Indian Christianity because, the unique core of Eastern-Malabar-Jewish-Chera Christianity of the Malabar Coast was very different from Europeanized Judeo-Christian faith practiced by early Missionaries who came from Portugal and France who themselves have gone through changes by adopting to their own social, cultural and political factors.

The fact that these churches, as an identifiable single religious group, had a continuous existence in the Indian Subcontinent is historically important for another reason.

Scholars believe that the current form of *Hinduism* as we see today, has evolved and came into existence only in the 17th and 18th centuries (We will see more on this bit later). This new identity of the faith came to be known as *Hinduism* has formed obviously by merging various, divergent often conflicting religious practices and traditions of the native people with the belief

systems and traditions of the people who migrated into the Subcontinent from Central Asia carrying their own grand stories to tell along with them.

All those different practices and belief systems which merged with each other to form the modern *Hinduism* could be claimed to be distinctly *Indian*, if one considers the regions of Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Iran as part of the *Indus civilization* of the yester years. Scholars and Indologists call this influence brought from Central Asia by *Vedic Aryans* and their successful campaign to convert native populations to their philosophies as the *Aryanization* of the Indian Subcontinent. It is important to note that these *Vedic* belief systems brought by *Vedic Aryans* were alien to the people of the Subcontinent during those days in the same way Christianity or Islam were during later centuries.

Before the arrival of Thomas Christianity, people in the Indian Subcontinent were following different forms of faiths such as Tantric, Jewish, Zoroastrian, Buddhist, Jain, Saivism, Vaishnavism besides other forms of Dravidian nature worships. But the word "*Hinduism*" as we know of it today did not exist then. It did not exist until after another 1000 years after the periods of Bhakti movement. In that sense, the Christianity which Thomas established in India is naturally older than the modern faith we now know today as *Hinduism*.