

  
**THE HARP**  
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# THE HARP

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## APHRAHAT

(Demonstration IV, On Prayer)

Purity of Heart constitutes prayer more than do all the prayers that are uttered out aloud, and silence united to a mind that is sincere is better than the loud voice of someone crying out.

My beloved, give me now your heart and your thought, and hear about the power of pure prayer; see how our righteous forefathers excelled in their prayer before God, and how it served them as a pure offering. For it was through prayer that offerings were accepted, and it was prayer again that averted the Flood from Noah; prayer has healed barrenness, prayer has overthrown armies, prayer has revealed mysteries, prayer has divided the sea, prayer made a passage through the Jordan, it held back the sun, it made the moon stand still, it destroyed the unclean, it caused fire to descend. Prayer closed up the heaven, prayer raised up from the pit, rescued from the fire, and saved from the sea. The power of prayer, like the power of pure fasting, is very great; and, just as I explained and told you in the previous chapter about fasting, I shall not refrain from telling you here about prayer.

*The Syriac Fathers on Prayer and the Spiritual Life*, pp. 5-6

## **Editorial**

In the last two issues of the Harp (No. 30 & 31) we published some of the papers presented in the 8<sup>th</sup> World Syriac Conference held in SEERI during Sept. 2014.

In this issue (No. 32), we are happy to publish some more papers presented in the 8<sup>th</sup> World Syriac Conference, together with a few scholarly papers submitted by learned authors. In the ensuing issue also, we will publish the remaining papers presented in the conference.

We hope that those who did not get the opportunity to participate in the last conference will be greatly benefitted by the presentations published in this volume. Let this issue be a valuable addition to their collection of the Harp.

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*Martin Thomas Antony<sup>i</sup>, Judeson Kochuparampil<sup>ii</sup>,  
Alphin Joseph Chackochan<sup>iii</sup>.*

## **Pahlavi inscribed Sliva of Irinjalakuda: An appraisal of the iconography and theology**

### **1. Introduction**

Pahlavi inscribed bas relief crosses are the most ancient antiquities of the Saint Thomas Christians of India. A modern Pahlavi inscribed granite bas relief sliva has been found installed at the Saint Thomas cathedral of Irinjalakkuda belonging to the Syro Malabar Major Archi-episcopal Church. This was installed during the renovation of the cathedral on the occasion of the Silver Jubilee celebration of the eparchy and cathedral in 2003. This sliva is found on the left wall of the main nave of the church on the side of the altar. There are several such crosses excavated from South India and South Asia reminding us of the common religious-cultural patrimony of the East Syriac Christians of the area. Several scholars have studied these crosses and they have been discussed in many oriental scholastic forums. It has been confirmed that

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- i. Author of the paper.
  - ii. Contribution to the theological and iconographic discussion.
  - iii. Contribution in the form of unveiling this previously not very well known sliva to the public by his investigative and research attitude towards Thomasine Christianity and traditions.



these inscriptions are in the Pahlavi script that was used to write middle Iranian languages.

The ancient sliva of Alengad<sup>1</sup> is supposed to be most ancient of this genre of crosses based on the epigraphical studies<sup>2</sup>. The Alengad sliva has been dated back to the 3rd or 4th century AD. It is accepted by scholars that these crosses in South India are unintelligent copies of a single original<sup>3</sup> which could be the Alengad sliva.

It was Arthur Coke Burnell<sup>4</sup> who first reported that these inscriptions are in Pahlavi, a Middle Persian language<sup>5</sup>. Due to the presence of a Middle Persian language on it, Burnell commented that these could belong to a group of Christians who were once Manicheans and then converted to Christianity as the

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1. Alengatte Purathana Thoma sleeha Kurish (Malayalam) Ernakulam Missam, February 1930, pp 78-79. This ancient Pahlavi inscribed granite sliva found near Alengad Church. This was found on the basement of an open air rock cross at the junction near the church.
  2. M T Antony, Alengad Sliva: The neglected jewel of the ancient Christian settlement in Alengad and the most ancient Christian artefact of Malabar, South India, *The Harp*, Vol XXX, 2016, pp 267-316.
  3. C P T Winkworth, A new interpretation of the Pahlavi Cross inscription of South India, *The Journal of Theological studies*, April 1929, pp 237-243.
  4. Arthur Coke Burnell was an English Sanskrit scholar born in Gloucester in 1870. His father was an official in the East India Company and he moved to Madras in 1860 as a member of the Indian Civil Service. He acquired and presented a collection of 350 Sanskrit manuscripts to the India library in 1870. In 1874, he published 'A handbook of South Indian Paleography'. He wrote articles about the Pahlavi inscriptions on the Mailappore Cross in *Indian Antiquary* in 1874
  5. A C Burnel, Pehlvi inscriptions, *The Academy* Vol IV, No 74, June 14, 1873, pp237-238.

cross and inscriptions are definitely of Christian in character<sup>6</sup>. Burnell wrote that he would expect to find more evidence of a Manichean presence in South India but so far, no artefacts have been found.

Richard Collins refuted Burnell's arguments quoting Eusebius' account of Panthaenus who reported to have found Christians with a Gospel of Mathew in Hebrew characters before the second century to prove that Christianity existed in India before the period of Manes<sup>7</sup>.

Further research brought out a large body of evidence pointing towards the presence of Syriac Christianity in relation to the Persian Church in Malabar refuting the argument of Burnell. Moreover, further studies were carried out on these inscriptions and more Pahlavi inscribed crosses were excavated which lead to accurate reading of the inscriptions. These studies confirmed that these crosses are the most ancient artefacts of the East Syriac Christianity in Malabar founded by Apostle Thomas and its relationship with the Church of Fars in Persia Proper.

Certain vested interests within the Syro Malabar Church once resulted in accusations that these crosses were Manichean in origin by misquoting Burnell. Burnell never commented that these crosses were Manichaeian. He only commented that as these crosses bear Pahlavi inscriptions, they could belong to a group of Christians who were once Manicheans<sup>8</sup>.

6. A C Burnell, *Earliest Christian Missions in South India*, in *Correspondence and Miscellanea* as a reply to Rev, 18 May 1875, in *Indian Antiquary*, vol IV, 1875
7. Richard Collins, *Malabar Christians*, in *Correspondence and Miscellanea*, 23 June 1875 *Indian Antiquary* Vol IV, 1875
8. Burnell connected these Crosses to Persia and assumed that as Christianity was vogue in Persia and Manicheans were popular, it could belong to a group of Christians who were once Manicheans., as the inscription on the Cross was Christian in its content.

## 2. Christian community of Irinjalakkuda

The Christian community of Irinjalakkuda belong to the ancient Christian community of 'Kodungallur'. Due to political disturbances in 'Kodungallur' during 1523-24<sup>9</sup>, Christians migrated to nearby places. There is an ancient Christian church at 'Mapranam' near 'Irinjalakkuda' dedicated to 'Mar Sliva'-Holy Cross.

The Eparchy of 'Irinjalakkuda' is part of the Syro Malabar Major Archi episcopal Church within the province of the Arch eparchy of Trichur. Within the religio cultural politics of Thomas Christians of Kerala during the 16th to 19th centuries, the Christian community of 'Irinjalakkuda' and the Eparchy of 'Irinjalakkuda' were part of the 'Pazhayacoor' community of Syriac Christians who remained loyal to the communion with the Universal Catholic Church effected through the Patriarchate of Chaldeans since AD 1552.

### *Puthencoor and Pazhayacoor*

During the advent of the colonial Portuguese missionaries, the Saint Thomas Christians were in friendship with them in the initial period. Following the illegal and un-canonical 'Synod of Diamper' in AD 1599, the entire Thomas Christian community was subjugated under the Roman Rite and were separated from

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9. Jacob Kollaparambil, The Persian Crosses of India are Christian, not Manichaen, Christian Orient, vol XV March 1994 citing A M Mundadan, The Arrival of the Portuguese in India and the Thomas Christians under Mar Jacob, (Bangalore, 1967), pp 99-100  
A M Mundadan, History of Christianity in India Vol 1, Church History Association of India, Bangalore, 2001p 302. The Samuthiry and the Muslim army attacked Cranganore and burnt the Saint Thomas Christian Churches in AD 1523-24. Christians escaped Kodungallur to nearby places.

the Patriarchate of Chaldeans and its jurisdiction.<sup>10</sup> However, due to the heavy handedness of the Portuguese missionaries and attempts at Latinisation, the entire Saint Thomas Christian community in Kerala revolted against the missionaries through the great 'Coonan Cross oath'<sup>11</sup>. Due to the intervention of Rome, Carmelite Missionaries were sent to pacify the situation and majority of the Thomas Christians returned to the Roman communion due to the following reasons.

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10. Rev Dr Paul Pallathu, Were the Saint Thomas Christians in India Nestorians at the time of the Synod of Diamper in 1599 ?, Ephrem's Theological Journal, vol 5, No 1 March 2001, pp34-70. Dr Pallathu cites the bull of confirmation of Patriarch John Sulaka, 'Divina disponente clementia', Pope Julius III (1550-1555) acknowledging the jurisdiction of the Chaldean Patriarch in India. (...postmodum vero ecclesia Patriarchali de Muzal et insulae Tigris ac caeterarum civitatum et terrarum orientalium eidem patriarchae subjectarum, necnon monasteriorum ejusdem in Sui Massin et Calicuth ac tota India existentium eidem etiam Patriarchae subditorum dum viveret praesidebat...) This citation is from S Giamil, Genuinae relationes... 17-18, Subsidiium ad Bullarium Patronatus Portugalliae, 4. Dr Pallathu also quotes the letters of Pope Pius IV to the Chaldean Patriarch Mar Abdiso, dated 23 February 1565, to the Archbishop of Goa dated 28 February 1565 and to the Bishop of Cochin dated 28 February 1565, categorically and explicitly confirms the jurisdiction of the Chaldean Patriarch over Saint Thomas Christians of India. The Pope also reminds the Bishops of Goa and Cochin that the Chaldean Patriarch Mar Abdiso personally travelled to Rome to submit the profession of faith and to receive the pallium and warns them that it would be detrimental to the Pope and the Apostolic See if he would hinder the jurisdiction of the Patriarch and orders that this jurisdiction of the Patriarch must remain untouched and intact.
11. Joseph Thekkedath, History of Christianity in India Vol II, Church History Association of India Bangalore, 2001, pp 91-94. The community had sent several letters to Eastern Patriarchs to send a Bishop to Malabar. As a response, one Mar Ahathalla arrived in Mailappore in AD 1652. Two deacons who were in Mailappore on pilgrimage brought this information with a letter from Mar Ahathalla to Kerala in which he stated that he was a Patriarch sent by the Pope. Mar Ahathalla was taken by the Portuguese for inquisition. Archdeacon Thomas organised a meeting of the community at

- Since 1552, beginning with the Chaldean schism inside the Church of the East, a section lead by Patriarch Yohannan Sulakha came into full communion with the Pope of Rome and there was a continuous line of Bishops sent to Malabar from the Patriarchate of the Chaldeans approved by the Pope of Rome.
- Since the Synod of Diamper in AD 1599, the whole of Saint Thomas Christian community were in full communion with the Pope of Rome and the name of the Pope was remembered in the Liturgy.
- The revolting Archdeacon claimed the mandate of the Pope to ratify his consecration as a Bishop by 12 Priests but the Carmelites who were sent by the Pope to pacify the situation clarified the community that the consecration was invalid and not canonical and the Archdeacon did not have the mandate of the Pope.
- In 1663, a native Thomas Christian from Kuravilangadu, Palliveetil Chandy became the leader of the 'Pazhayacoor' with a canonical consecration as the Metropolitan while the Archdeacon was still trying to get a legitimate Bishopric consecration.

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Udayamperoor and requested Archbishop Garcia to take Mar Ahathalla to Malabar. Archbishop Garcia responded that even if Mar Ahathalla was sent by the Pope, Ahathalla did not have the authority from the King of Portugal(Padruado) and hence could not be released. Mar Ahathalla was taken to Goa. In their anger and disappointment of having a Syriac rite Bishop, they took a public oath at Mattancherry on 03 January 1653, stating that they rejected Archbishop Garcia and the Jesuites who disobeyed the Pope and removed their Patriarch sent by the Pope from them. They took this oath by tying a rope to a cross in front of the Church of Our Lady at Mattancherry and the cross bent as people pulled the rope. Hence, this oath was called the Coonan Cross oath- the bent cross oath.

- The Portuguese Colonial power influenced the local Kings in favour of Catholic side.

These led to the majority of Thomas Christians returning to the communion with the Pope of Rome<sup>12</sup>. Thus there was a split in the community with one section under the leadership of Bishop Palliveetil Chandy on the Catholic side retaining the Catholic communion from AD 1552 while the other group under the leadership of Parambil Thomas with no legitimate Bishopric consecration and brought in a set of new Bishops with a different rite and customs- the Jacobite Church of Antioch. They used a similar language, the west syriac but with a variant pronunciation<sup>13</sup> and script, their customs and rite were obviously different<sup>14</sup> while the Catholic party continued to use the same language east Syriac with the same customs and rite. Thus the new sect with new set of Bishops with a new language and rite were called 'Puthencoor' and the other sect which continued status quo was called 'Pazhayacoor'.

The East Syriac Church always accepted the primacy of the Bishop of Rome even when there was no explicit communion<sup>15</sup>. There were several Patriarchs who sent formal letters of

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12. It is very interesting to note that prominent Syriac Orthodox churches Basilica at Champakulam was with the Archdeacon.
  13. The west syriac pronunciation is obviously different. The Thomas Christians pronounced the name of Jesus as Eashow in east Syriac for time immemorial while the new set pronounced Yesu. Also Qurbana and Qurbono and so on.
  14. The Archdeacon had to insist the visiting Antiochian Bishops to stick on to local rite.
  15. Rev. Dr. Placid Podipara, The Church of Selucia and its Catholic Communion, in Collected Works of Rev. Dr. Placid J Podipara, C M I, vol I Ed. Fr Thomas Kalayil C MI, San Jos Publications, Mannanam, Kottayam, 2007, pp 66-133.. Church of Selucia declared independence from Church of Antioch by the Synod of Markabta in AD 424 by declaring the title of the Metropolitan of Selucia as

communion with the Pope of Rome<sup>16</sup>. One of the famous among them is the visit of 'Ramban Sauma', the then patriarchal visitor who travelled to Rome to meet with the Pope. 'Ramban Sauma' was received by the 12 member Cardinals. There was a formal

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Catholicose -Patriarch and the second Peter and decided that there should not be any appeals to the Western Fathers. This means only that the Catholicose Patriarch will do all the matters like resolution of disputes etc that were done by the Western Fathers. According to Rev Dr Placid Podipara, this was only an evolution and organisation of an ecclesiastical assembly. By stating that the Catholicose is second Peter, the Church remained in the Catholic communion by accepting the primacy of Peter. The then Universal Church anathemised Nestorius in the Synod of Ephesus in which the Church of Seleucia did not take part probably due to political reasons. Due to this, the Church of Seleucia was accused by the later Historians as Nestorians. Later, the Universal Church by the Synod of Chalcedon, accepted the so called Nestorian principles by vehement denial of the Monophytism. Patriarch Timothy I in AD 778 wrote 'If because of the Apostle Peter the first and the Chief rank is preserved to Rome, how much more to Selucia and Ctesiphon because of the Lord Peter' attesting the Primacy of Peter and Rome. Another Bishop David contemporary of Patriarch Timothy I praises Rome "..... glorius Rome where Peter and Paul are placed as pillars where are the ornament of princess and the stole of those of the household of Abraham..." in the book 'Mensura Climatedum et Variationes Dierum ac Noctium'. Bishop Elias Damascenus of the Church of the East in AD 893 wrote " have ordered and said let there be in the whole world of four Patriarchs, and more, as four Evangelists.. and let him be the Superior who is Rome...", " The first Patriarch is the Patriarch of Rome who has so much honour and eminence over all the Patriarchs...". Abdallaha Benattabus, a famous canonist of East Syriac Church in the 11th century wrote "like the number of four parts of the globe, the Patriarchs are to be four and their Chief, the Patriarch of Rome as the Apostles have ordained."

16. Rev. Dr. Placid Podipara, opus cit. pp 136-150. Since the time of Crusades, there was communications between various Popes and East Syriac church. Pope Innocent IV sent Dominican Friars to the Nestorian and Jacobite Patriarchs. The Nestorians gladly entered into communion with the Roman Patriarch. Patriarch Jaballaha II in 1233 professed Catholic faith according to the writings of Guriel.

communion. The Pope allowed 'Ramban Sauma' to celebrate Holy Qurbana in Vatican in the Syriac language. The Pope send a golden crown, a red embroidered vestment and a ring to Patriarch Jaballaha III with a letter of authorisation as Patriarch of all over the Orientals and made 'Rabban Bar Sauma' as the Papal visitor<sup>17</sup>.

***Attempts of reunion with Chaldean Church-Paulose Pandari, Mar Rokos and Mar Melus***

The Pazhayacoor group were adherent to the Christian principles of obedience and submission to their legitimate spiritual superiors. This led them to fall into the trap of the spirituo-colonial obedience and submissive stewardship of the Roman Catholic missionaries. The heavy handed attitude of the missionaries was intolerable and it led to the community seeking to get reconnected to the Babylonian Patriarchate of the Chaldeans. Several delegates were sent to the Patriarchate that resulted in consecrating a native Thomas Christian as a Bishop in 1798- 'Paulose Pandary' as Mar Abraham<sup>18</sup> and sending Patriarchal visitors to Malabar- Mar Thomas Rokos in 1861 and Mar Elia

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Patriarch Sabriso in AD 1247 had closer relations with the Pope Innocent IV. Pope sent a letter to Sabriso V according to Giamil. Patriarch's vicar Rabban Ara, representing the whole Selucian church submitted a letter to Pope along with a letter from Chinese Christians and Metropolitan Isoyahb of Nisbis and two other Archbishops and three Bishops. This was a formal letter from the Hierarchy of the East Syriac Church. Patriarch Jaballaha III (Monk Markose) sent Rabban Bar Sauma as his visitor to Rome in 1287. Pope Nicholas IV allowed Rabban Bar Sauma to celebrate Holy Qurbana in Syriac at Rome and on the Palm Sunday, Bar Sauma received Holy Communion from the Pope.

17. James A Montgomery, The History of Yaballaha III, Nestorian Patriarch and his vicar Bar Sauma.
18. Rev Dr James Puliyurumpil, History of Syro Malabar Church, OIRSI NO 382, pp 265-67. Pandary Seesma, (Malayalam) OIRSI Publications, No. 279, p 67.



Melus in 1874<sup>19</sup>. These two Patriarchal visitors and their activities resulted in a minor division among the 'Pazhayacoor' which resulted in a group of the followers of Mar Melus joining the non Catholic Church of the East.

### ***Saint Thomas Cathedral of Irinjalakkuda***

The Saint Thomas' Cathedral at Irinjalakkuda was formerly the Saint George's church founded in AD 1845 by the migration of Christians from Mapranam, Kalparambu, Veleyanad and nearby places. During the time of Mar Elia Melus, the visitor from the Patriarch of the Chaldeans, a majority joined the Melus party. Some of whom later became the Church of the East in India but called Chaldeans of Trichur as the group was the result of the efforts to get reconnected to the Patriarch of the Chaldeans. During that time, those 'Pazhayacoor' Syriac Christians in allegiance with the Pope of Rome built another church in 1880 in the name of 'Marth Maryam'. Later, the 'Mellusians' of Irinjalakkuda returned to the 'Pazhayacoor' community and both churches became Catholic churches side by side.

When the eparchy of Irinjalakkuda was formed in AD 1978, both the parishes were amalgamated and Saint George's Church was renamed as Saint Thomas' Cathedral.

On the occasion of the Silver Jubilee of the Eparchy of Irinjalakkuda, renovation works were carried out at the Cathedral church and as part of it, a granite bas relief 'sliva' was made and installed in the church in 2003. Rev Fr Jose Irimpan was the Cathedral Vicar during that period. Fr Irimpan commented that he was aware of the disputes about these crosses but did not

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19. Cherian Varicatt, The Suriyani Church of India, her quest for autochthonous Bishops (1877-1896), OIRSI No. 175, pp 6-7 and 14-16

consider the disputes as relevant. Hence he considered installing such a cross in the renovated cathedral. He found this design of cross in a book and commissioned a stone smith at 'Kurukkanpara' near Trichur to make one and installed it in the church<sup>20</sup>.

There is no surprise to see this cross installed in the cathedral at Irinjalakkuda as it is very appropriate. The opposition and disputes about these crosses were not from the ordinary faithful or clergy but from certain groups with vested interest inside the Church. The Syro Malabar faithful in Trichur area, being the descendants of the Christians of the ancient Christian centres of Kodungallur and Palayur would be more adherent to the East Syriac spirituality and traditions. They even today celebrate the feast of Denha as 'Pindikuthy perunnaal' with lamps lighted on a plantain bark- pindi. Singing the Syriac chant 'El payya- God is Light' was traditionally associated with this celebration.

### **3. Irinjalakkuda Sliva**

The basic structure of this sliva is similar to the most famous among the genre of Pahlavi inscribed crosses of south Asia, 'the Mount Cross' - the sliva adorned in the main altar of the Saint Thomas Mount church at 'Mailappore'. The 'Irinjalakkuda sliva' has a few unique features. It is more complex and elaborate in its artwork.

This 'sliva' looks very fine in the art work and finish, like a modern make. The granite tablet was made into a niche with two pillars and an arch with beautiful floral pattern on the base and above the arch. There are a series of flowery pattern engraved over the arch as a band in between two lines. There are floral

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20. Personal communication with Rev. Dr Irimpan.

designs seen on the base also, in 5 square pattern and 4 circles in between with leaf design on both ends. These circular and rectangular shaped 'end on' view floral design is a common theme on the pedestals of most of the open-air rock crosses found in front of the ancient Saint Thomas Christian Churches. The plaster art seen on the walls and facades of some of the ancient Nasrani churches also shows the same pattern. Above the band of floral design on the top of the arch, a plain cross is engraved in the centre with symmetrical leaf petal design on both sides. This part of the design seems to be an imitation of the art work on the 'raredos' over the famous Pahlavi inscribed Cross at the Saint Thomas Mount National Shrine at Mailappore, Chennai.

Within the niche, the Pahlavi inscribed cross design has been carved. There are again two pillars and a round arch within the niche on either sides of the cross, with Pahlavi inscriptions outside the pillars and arch. On the top of the pillars, as seen on the mount cross, we can identify the aquatic creature- 'makara' as seen in the Mount Cross. The arch is three layered with segmentation on the middle layer. The cross has longer lower arm with three buds on all four ends. There is upward directed curved flowery design in three layers surrounded with a linear leaf petal design towards the outer side. Below this, there is downward directed curved pattern with inner layer as plain raised edge and outer two layers appear segmented like linear leaf petal design.

Within this downward directed curved floral pattern, there is an inverted arrow or spear like structure with curved top with indentations. The spear penetrates into the base design which is a symmetrical rectangular structure with curled vine design on it.

Unlike most Pahlavi inscribed slivas, the three steps on the base of the cross is not present here. The dove is very well

designed with two wings and a tail with the feathers clearly seen. On either sides of the dove, there is another inverted floral design.

The Pahlavi inscriptions seem to be the copy of the rest of the crosses. As we already know, the inscriptions on these crosses are unintelligent copies of an original. Since this inscription is a modern make, there is not much epigraphic value in it.

#### **4. East Syriac theology behind the sliva**

‘Prabho Mihindukulasuriya’ of the Colombo Theological seminary has commented that the Pahlavi inscribed crosses of Sri Lanka and South India bear three important stylistic elements that characterise East Syriac crosses. They are the leaved elements emerging from the base of the cross, the pearl like element on the ends of the four arms and the three-stepped pedestal<sup>21</sup>.

##### ***Leaved elements on Crosses, the Tree of Life.***

The leaf like design seen on the base of the cross and the sides of the dove and on the top of the slab are quite similar to the East Syriac Christian iconographic style. K Parry comments that leaved crosses- plain crosses with flared arms with two large leaves raising either side of the base is seen in both East Syriac Christianity and in the Byzantine Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Armenian Khatchkar, the religio cultural symbol of the ancient Christianity of Armenia, are stone crosses widely seen in Armenia with a plain cross emerging from two leaf like structures on either side.

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21. Prabho Mihindukulasuriya, Persian Christians of the Anuradhapura Period, in *A Cultured faith: Essays in honour of Professor G P V Somaratna on His Seventieth Birthday*, Colombo, Sri Lanka, Colombo Theological Seminary, 2011.

22. K Parry, *Images in the Church of the East: The evidence from Central Asia and China*, p145, *Bulletin of John Rylands University Library*, Manchester, 1996

Archaeological studies of crosses found at 'Ain Shaia' in Iraq, 'Al Qusur' on the island of 'Failaka' of the sixth century and island of 'Kharg' of the sixth century demonstrate that the leaved cross design is common among the East Syriac Christians.<sup>23</sup>

The cross emerging from the leaves on either side symbolises the Tree of Life. For the Syriac fathers, the tree of life symbolises Christ and the Cross<sup>24</sup>. In the Syriac language, the term 'Sliva' denotes 'the Cross', also has a meaning 'the one who is crucified'. The word sliva originates from the root 'slb' which means to crucify. Sliva means the object that is used to crucify and also the one who is crucified. Thus sliva means Christ.

In 'Mapranam', near 'Irinjalakkuda', there is an ancient church in the name of Mar Sliva. The devotees traditionally call the Sliva as 'Sliva Muthappan' - personifying the cross into a person rather than an object. Here, 'Sliva Muthappan' is Christ himself<sup>25</sup>. This is agreeing with the East Syriac tradition of placing the 'Sliva' in the Madbha as body of Christ and the 'Word' as the soul of Christ<sup>26</sup>.

Gregory of Nazianzen wrote 'Jesus himself is the tree of life, in the same theme of the burial of Jesus it is appropriate to

23. K Parry, opus cit p 146.

24. Mar Aprem wrote that the wood will resemble the cross through the various use of it. It carries on the sea, it guides on the land, it multiplies itself in its advantages and becomes rich in its assistance.

25. In many places in Kerala where churches are devoted to Mar Sliva, devotees call the sliva 'kuriyachan' in the meaning 'kurish achan' personifying the Cross as a person. This must be the continuation of ancient usage in Syriac tradition.

26. Charles Pyngott CMI, *The Cross, its place in the Hudra and its sign in Baptism and Eucharist*, Doctoral Dissertation submitted to Pontifical Oriental Institute, Rome, 1971, directed by Rev. Alphons Raes S J, pp 40-41.

speaking of his Person being planted in the earth than the Cross<sup>27</sup> St Cyril of Jerusalem depicts the Cross as the tree that overcame the sin that came through a tree.<sup>28</sup>

The Irinjalakkuda sliva is adorned with plenty of artwork of leafy pattern above the arch. Many of the leafy patterns are of a bi-petal arrangement.

### ***The Pearl ended arms***

The pearl arrangement at the ends of the four arms is also a theme in Syriac devotional literature and iconography. The pearl is a famous theme in Syriac poetry, the Hymn of the Pearl mentioned in the apocryphal Acts of Thomas depicts partaking in the kingdom of God<sup>29</sup>.

In Hymns of the Pearl, Ephraim the Syrian, the great Syriac father and the Harp of the Holy Spirit highlights the Pearl as salvation.<sup>30</sup> Crosses with expanding and bifurcating arms terminating in one or three pearls are very common on Christian seals of the Sassanian period. Such crosses are found in stucco crosses and other Christian artefacts in the Far East also. K Parry comments that these crosses ending in pearls are more representatives of the Church of the East than the leaved crosses<sup>31</sup>.

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27. Gregory of Nazianzen, Oratio XXIX Theologica tertia, Patrologia Graeca, J P Migne, Paris, 36, col 101 cited by Joseph Vazhuthannappally, Archeology of Mar Sliba, OIRSI No 139, p 33.

28. Joseph Vazhuthannappally, Archeology of Mar Sliba. OIRSI No 139, p 32.

29. A F J Klijn, The so called Hymn of the Pearl, Acts of Thomas Ch 108-113, Vigilie Christiane, vol 14 No 3, Sep 1960, pp 154-64.

30. Kathleen E McVey, Ephraim the Syrian, in the Early Christian World Vol II, Ed. Philip Francis Esler, Routledge, p 449.

31. K Parry, opus cit p 146.

### ***Spear replacing the three steps***

An important feature of the Irinjalakkuda sliva is the absence of the three steps. The three -steps are replaced with an inverted spear penetrating a rectangular base which is decorated with vine design. This could be the depiction of resurrection. The spear head opening the tomb and the risen Christ stands over it triumphantly depicts the victory over death.

### **5. Iconographic and theological development**

Overall, the Irinjalakkuda sliva depicts the development of the theology of worship and iconography from simple ‘lotus cross and dove’ design to a more complex and elaborate design. As it is a modern design with no evidence of a local progressive development, it cannot be considered as a native development of theology or iconography. We can observe some initial progressive development of these crosses from the Alengad Sliva to the Mount Cross at Mailappore. Alengad Sliva shows the leafy design similar to that of Mesopotamia which developed into more or less like a lotus shape in the Mount Cross. The lotus is better defined in similar crosses of Far East. The pearl at the end of the arms also shows development into a well defined tri petal design like a bud.

The descending dove is an addition from the famous Armenian Khatchkar crosses which are only leaved crosses. This is a theological development in iconography, new life of the church in the Holy Spirit<sup>32</sup>. Descending dove onto a cross has been seen in many ancient Christian artefacts. The sacrophagus of

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32. Dove and Cross, Indian Church history review, IV.1 June 1970, pp 3-4 cited by Eckehard Bickelmann, The Saint Thomas Cross: An early example of the inculturation of Christian art in India, Indian Church History Review, p 66.

Archbishop Theodore who died in AD 691 at Ravenna, the apse mosaic of the Basilica of Saint John Lateran in Rome<sup>33</sup> and a Syrian marble slab of the sixth or seventh centuries<sup>34</sup> are some examples.

### ***Indian religio-cultural influence.***

When we move from the western coast to the eastern coast of South India, we can see the adoption of more of Indian inculturation in the development of the Sliva specifically with regard to the arch, pillars and the lotus. The arch is pointed in the Alenagd sliva which becomes a rounded 'torana' on the Mount cross. The round arch is common in Hindu and Buddhist art. The arch springs from an aquatic object makara. Makara torana is also seen in Kailasanatha temple of Ellora, seventh century rock temples in Mahabalipuram and at the Vaikuntha Perumal and the eighth century Kailasanatha temples at Kanchipuram<sup>35</sup>. There are many ancient south Indian sculptures from Hindu temples displayed in the British Museum in London displaying the round arch. This shows the adoption of local culture in the development of iconography of these Pahlavi inscribed granite crosses of South India. The Saint Thomas Cross is an early, perhaps the earliest example of inculturated Christian art in India.<sup>36</sup>

## **6. Conclusion**

Saint Thomas Crosses are the only developed icons of worship found among Saint Thomas Christians. According to

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33. John Butler, Further thoughts on the South Indian Crosses, *Indian Church History Review*, IV No 2, 1970, pp 73-74.

34. Eckehard Bickelmann, The saint Thomas Cross: An early example of the inculturation of Christian art in India, *Indian Church History review*, 25/1 June 1991, p 66.

35. Eckehard Bickelmann, *opus cit*, p 64

36. Eckehard Bickelmann, *opus cit*, p 64.



the early Portuguese writers, the ancient Churches of the Saint Thomas Christians were adorned with only these crosses.

All the so called disputes about this sliva in the 1980s and 1990s came out of the involvement of certain vested interests and hate-mongering groups within the Syro Malabar Church who created anarchy, indiscipline and hatred that hampered the development of the Church. This cross itself is a proof of the evolution of a definite theological development in the church which could have lead to a locally developed liturgical rite. These crosses are an expression of our faith and worship. Theology develops from worship. Icons of worship develop from the faith experience of the community. Iconographic studies are important in studying about worship and the theology of the Church.

Studying about these crosses will definitely lead us to more understanding of our faith and worship and theological development. Ignoring the iconography and theology of these crosses would be detrimental to the study and development of theology of the Saint Thomas Christians of Malabar. The Theologians and Liturgists of the Syro Malabar Church should focus on studying these Pahlavi inscribed bas relief crosses and inscriptions which could pave way to the development of a local liturgical theology, as a section in the Church is pushing for writing a new anaphora for the Syro Malabar Church. Liturgical theology cannot develop instantaneously on its own as evolution of Liturgy is a progressive development imbibing the local traditions of worship and culture. Any development of Liturgy or Anaphora without considering these crosses are like implanting a new theology to the Church against a natural and progressive theological development.

***Credits***

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