

Mārggam Kaḷi (Dance of the Way)

Synopsis of the fourteen cantos

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Source:

Jacob Villian & S. Kurian Vempeni. *Thanimayūṭe madhuragīthi: Mārggam kaḷi* (Malayalam, The sweet song of identity: Dance of the Way). Kottayam: Current Books (1995), pp. 87-127.

Blessing

A prayerful homage to St. Thomas, who is covered with peacock feathers and has a body that resembles that of a peacock. (Note: The reference to peacock and peacock feathers in the opening strophe connects to the stories of the Apostle's martyrdom and the name of the town where it happened: Mayilāpūr [the land of peacock]; Peacock is the national bird of India, and is prominent in Hindu mythologies).

Canto 1: The king of the Chōzha Empire in South India, having heard about the great Temple in Jerusalem, decides to build a magnificent palace for himself.

Canto 2: The King sends Habān, a celebrated merchant in his kingdom, to the land where milk and honey flows to find a suitable architect. Haban is asked to carry all that he needs in money and materials for the long journey.

Canto 3. After saying his prayers to the One who commands the sea and land, Haban and his entourage board the ship. They end up at a Jewish enclave at Mahosa, on the outskirts of Seleucia-Ctesiphon, the capital of the Persian Empire. While wandering there, the Lord Jesus appears to Haban.

Canto 4. Haban tells Jesus the reason for his long trip from India. The Lord promises to show him a suitable architect.

Canto 5. Jesus describes the many qualifications of this great architect who is equally talented in working with wood, stones, pearls, silver, bronze, and iron; there is no one better than he among all the architects in the world. At this time, the angels carry the architect, Thomas the Apostle, the twin, over the sky and place him in front of Haban.

Canto 6. Haban is delighted to see the Apostle. He is convinced that he got the best architect in the world, and orders the Apostle to start the journey with him to India. At this time, the Apostle envisions all the hardships that he is going to face in the strange land of India, faints, and falls on the ground.

Canto 7. The Apostle expresses his concerns about the strange land that is India and its strange customs, and pleads with Jesus to not send him to that country. The Apostle specifically refers to the customs of cremating the dead bodies, officiating marriages of dead virgins, and other

“shameless practices” of the kings of the land. All the countries assigned to the other Apostles are much better than India, the Apostle complains. Moreover, Apostles go in pairs to the other countries, while Jesus is asking him to go alone to India.

Canto 8. Jesus consoles the Apostle, who is in tears, by telling him not to be afraid because he is not going alone on this mission; Jesus assures that he will be with the Apostle always, wherever he goes (cfr. Mt 28:20). Jesus sells the Apostle to Haban for an unspecified amount. Haban is delighted with the transaction. Haban pays the amount to Jesus, who entrusts the money to the Apostle. Haban and his team, along with the Apostle, board the ship. The Apostle reaches India and appears in front of the king. The Apostle draws a design of the Temple that Solomon built. Delighted to see the unique design, the king commissions the Apostle to start work, and assigns him men and money. The king says that he will visit the building site within one year.

Canto 9. The Apostle bids farewell to the king and is on his way to the building site. On the way, he attends a wedding and gives blessings to the couple. One of the guests at the wedding is offended by this and slaps on the face of the Apostle. Later, a lion bites and severs the right hand of the man who beat the Apostle. A dog brings the severed hand to the Apostle. Seeing this, all the people believe in the Lord and receive baptism from the Apostle who miraculously puts the hand back on the body of the wounded man. After proclaiming the Way (Mārggam) in Molocco and China, the Apostle comes to the king’s land in Mayilapur where he preaches the Word of God. From there, the Apostle goes to Kerala and preaches the Mārggam to the tribe of Urālar, establishes a Cross there for everyone to venerate, and ordains two men. The Apostle goes southward in the region of Kerala, preaches the Mārggam, and establishes the Cross at Kollam, Niranam, Kokkamangalam, Kottakkayal, Chayal, Palur, and finally at the seat of the Kingdom in Kodungalloor (a total of seven places). Up on hearing the news, the king becomes furious and sends people to all the parts of the land to bring the Apostle to him. The Apostle comes to the court of the king, who admonishes the Apostle for wasting gold and other resources and not showing not even a foundation for the palace. The king says that he is offended by the disparaging comments of the people about the incomplete palace, and that he wants to see it completed before his death. The Apostle responds: “Please listen to me calmly and without anger; with money and stones that you gave, a beautiful palace for you is nearing completion; it has nine stories; people who reach that palace will never experience sunset; there is a lamp that never goes out, and the light from that lamp surpasses the brightness of the sun; the people who live there will not experience any kind of sickness; there are ten paths [the ten commandments] to reach the palace, and there are seven ladders [seven sacraments] to reach the tower.” The king responds: “I would like to listen to more of your descriptions, but let us go right away to that palace; I am eager to see it today itself; if you postpone the trip for tomorrow, I shall be deeply disappointed; do not waste another moment, let us go now.” Knowing that the king is agitated, the Apostle tells him the truth that he can see the palace only after his death. Dumbfounded, the king roars like a lion and orders the Apostle to be bound, put in jail, and killed along with Haban.

Canto 10. The king calls his beloved brother and relates to him the shame that no other king in this land has ever suffered; the king tells him that he is not worthy any more to continue as king,

and asks him to take over the rule. Perplexed, the king's brother becomes deadly sick; the angels carry his soul to the skies; there the soul sees the name of his brother, the king, written in front of the beautiful palace. He then goes inside and sees all the beautiful things there.

Canto 11. Six angels gladly bring back his soul and put it back into his dead body. He wakes up and stands in front of the king with folded hands. He narrates to the king all that happened, and describes the beautiful palace that he saw.

Canto 12. A pandemonium follows. After everybody calms down, the Apostle begins to preach the Mārggam to everyone who is present. The king, his brother, Haban, the courtiers, and all those who are gathered there solemnly accept the Mārggam and receive baptism from the Apostle.

Canto 13. The pearl that is the Mārggam is shining more and more each day. More and more kings receive baptism; the news about the Mārggam spreads in the land like wildfire. The Apostle goes away from there, and happens to pass by a forest-temple dedicated to the goddess Kāḷi. The devotees of the goddess stop the Apostle and tells him that if he worships Kāḷi, he will be given sweet desserts and be allowed to pass by. The Apostle angrily disowns Kāḷi and tells her devotees that he will never worship her. Then the Apostle curses Kāḷi and fire consumes the temple and the forest. Kāḷi prostrates like a dog at the feet of the Apostle, and then runs away from there. Fire, wind, and the burning forest create a terrible scene.

Canto 14. Angels descend from heaven, and carry the news to Chinnamalai. They sing songs with the accompaniment of musical instruments (different kinds of harps, lutes, and several wind instruments). The angels take the soul of the Apostle from his body and bring it to heaven. People take the body and bury it in the church. Let us avoid great disasters by following the path of the Great One.