

Mattancherry and Fort Cochin



Mattancherry and Fort Cochin are two cities in Kerala where various civilizations of the world have created significant impact which led to cultural and religious synthesis. The Portuguese followed by the Dutch and later on till independence of the country, the British ruled the cities and used them as their

first trade hub. Cochin became a thriving commercial centre, and later on a major religious centre where various religious groups tried to establish their administrative supremacy. This beautiful city surrounded by the Cochin backwaters was a common platform for various religious groups and cultural influences. The ancient temples, churches, mosques, historical monuments, old palaces, the backwaters and the beautiful beaches have made phenomenal contributions in making Kerala 'The God's own country'. In this regard, the St. George Church of Mattancherry, which still languishes in the historic memories of the legendary Koonan Kurishu Sathayam (Koonan Kurishu Oath) has played a never to be ignored significant role of its own.

Koonan Kurishu Oath

Koonan Kurishu Oath of 1653 is perhaps the first open revolt against the western colonialism ever recorded in the annals of history. This heroic declaration of independence by the people coming under the Malankara Christians (known as Malankara Nazranis) against the imposition of western supremacy in matters including Christian rituals and practices is also perhaps the first recorded revolt against the western imperialism.



Malankara Orthodox Church traces its origin to the evangelical activities of St. Thomas the Apostle in the 1st century. Since then, they have maintained their unique identity, their own rituals, traditions, values and cultural patterns. This life style well rooted in the cultural patterns of the land was known as 'The way of St. Thomas'. When the Portuguese established themselves in India in the 16th Century they found the church in Kerala as an independent administrated community. Following the arrival of Vasco-da-Gama in 1498 the Portuguese came to South India and established their political power there. They brought missionaries to carry out evangelistic work in order to establish churches in communion with Rome under the Portuguese patronage. They tried to impose upon the native Christians the supremacy of the Catholic Church, the Latin liturgy, western life style, culture and its ultimate expression was the Udayamperoor Synod of 1599.

The opposition to 'The way of Semavoon Kefa' imposed up on the people by the westerners, ultimately ended in their strong resentment. The native Christians tried to reestablish their undaunted allegiance to, 'the ways of St. Thomas' by the epoch making "Koonankurishu Oath" on 3rd Jan 1653. Majority of the community supported the Archdeacon

Pakalomattam Thoma, who was later elevated to the exalted position of the first native bishop, Mar Thoma Episcopa 1. A large number of Christian community and a Nazarani brigade assembled at Mattancherry together in swearing never to submit to the Portuguese which is known as "Koonan Kurishu Oath" of 1653.



Mattancherry Church

The history of Mattancherry Church is closely connected with the name of Mar Baselios Sacrella Maphriyono who came to Kerala in 1751 leading a Syrian priestly group. At that time he was the bishop of Aleppo town of Bravura. When his efforts to subdue the Malankara Christians met with a miserable failure, he had no other way but to flee from Travancore, Cochin and get himself confined to the church at Mattancherry within the jurisdiction of the British, where he breathed his last on 9th Thulam 1764 and his mortal remains lie buried at the premises of Kandanadu Church.

Mar Gregorios Yuhanon who came to India along with Baselios Sacralla Maphriyono ordained Kattumangattu Abraham Ramban as bishop Mar Kurilose in AD1772 in this church. But Mar Kurilose who could not get acceptance, either in Travancore or Cochin moved over to Malabar and established a church there, called Malabar Independent Syrian Church (Malabar Swathantra Syrian Church). This is known as Thozhiyoor church. Subsequently there was a dispute over the right to possession of the Mattancherry church and the Dutch governor who heard the case finally gave the verdict in favour of Valia Mar Divaniyos, the Malankara Metropolitan. In later years, Fort Cochin and Mattancherry churches were amalgamated to form a single Parish. This church which remained closed for more than 20 years following disputes was finally opened again in 1797 and services resumed ever since. The church is also known as 'Mattancherry Muri or Erimeghapally'. At present, this church is under the direct control, possession and administration of the Malankara Metropolitan.



The Holy Relics



old structure, worn out by time needs restoration to suit the dignity and sanctity of the holy pilgrim center.

This Church has a paramount position among other churches because of the fact that mortal remains of St. George is kept here. Quite naturally the number of pilgrims and visitors to this holy pilgrim center from far and near is ever on increase as days go by. Inside the church hall, from the west almost to the middle, there was a pretty attic room where the holy fathers used to reside. This

The Present Church

This church consecrated in the year 1751 was renovated later in 1974 under the initiative of His Grace Yuhanon Mar Severious of Cochin Diocese.



Holy Services

Even though it is not considered as a Parish, Holy Qurbana is conducted regularly on every Saturday and every first Sunday in addition to intercessory prayers to St. George, which is a regular feature. The special offering of unniappam by devotees for favours received and prayers heard is a speciality of this holy pilgrim center.

Administration

The church which is elevated to the Class A category under the direct control of the Malankara Metropolitan is administered by a Council headed by His Holiness Baselios Marthoma Paulose II, the 91st Catholicos of the East.

New Church and Pilgrim Center

The legendary Koonan Kurishu Sathayam and the celebrated Mattancherry Church affirm the spirit of independence, self reliance and the universally accepted cultural heritage of the Malankara Orthodox Christians. For the convenience of those who come for prayers and meditation a new church which breathes the antique beauty is needed. A Heritage Museum and Library for those who are interested in the history of Orthodox Syrian Church in India will be housed in the Campus which will enhance the historical importance of the center. A new modern building with all the modern facilities is the need of the time. The Orthodox Church has already begun certain constructive initiative in this line. This endeavour could be fulfilled only with the generosity and whole-hearted support of all those who pride themselves to be part of Malankara Orthodox Christian Tradition.

