Acts of Thomas in South India
by
Ramban Thomas

Ramban Patti

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

PROF. M. M. NINAN
By tradition these songs were composed and taught by Maliakal Thomas Ramban the first Brahmi convert to Christianity and was handed down through generations orally. Between AD 180 and AD 250 these were written down in Edesa combining stories from South India, North India and Parthia in the Syriac language. They were later translated in Greek and Latin also. But Ramban Pattu as taught by Ramban Thomas is the earliest form in history. In due course of transmission gradual changes must have happened as well as further revision due to changes in language as they were transmitted from one generation to the other. It was finally written down as we have today in AD 1601 by the 480th descendant of Malyekal Thomas—another Ramban Thomas II. As every scholar in the bible knows, this was the method employed from the time of Moses to hand down the heritage for the community of faith. Since it is sung over and over again, it will be remembered easily and since it is sung by several groups within the community, it will be continued with least loss of accuracy in transmission. As such we can trust these tradition as valid history. The only doubts through two millenium is in the numbers in certain places.

This translation into English is to transmit our great heritage to our children who have migrated from Kerala and has lost touch with the language of Malayalam.
By the grace of the True Triune God,
May we be able to tell the story of the good works of Apostle Thomas
Which have been transmitted to us through generations from one
generation to another generation
in Songs, dance and music
through two millenniums .
May the grace of YHVH,
the Wisdom and the Power of the Holy Spirit
And of the Incarnate First begotten Son
enable me to do that.

Prof.M.M.Ninan
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Invocation
By the grace of the true Triune God, may we be able to tell the story of the good works of Apostle Thomas.

Give us a renewed and regenerated understanding of our Savior the incarnate Mesiah - be given to us through the good works of Apostle Thomas.

Let the grace of (10-11) Mary the mother of our Lord the embodiment of godly virtues also be with us.

Acts of Apostle Thomas
I will describe in summary how the Way of the Son of God was brought into Kerala by the grace of God.

Mar Thoma who was the son of the uncle of the Way of Grace, entered in the ship along with servant of Chola Perumal and travelled across the Arabian sea and reached the shores of Kerala (Maliankara) in the year 50 of our Lord in the month of Dhanu (December-January).
Surprisingly within a period of eight days he established the way there.

He then in haste proceeded to Mylapore.

He preached the gospel there for four and a half months and then went on to China where he preached for four and a half months also and returned to Mylapore.

Apostle Thomas collected some more money from the Perumal (King) of Chola for some additional work. Thomas distributed those for the betterment of the poor. He also preached to them the way.

The son in law of the King of the Tiruvanchikulam (Kodungalur) came pleading and kissing his feet to return to Kerala within a month.

They took the ship and reached Kerala in AD 51 in the month of Dhanu.(Dec/Jan) Along with the family of the King over (50) three thousand believed.

50 over four thousand

Mylapore is a place in present day Madras State or Tamil Nadu. Mylapuram means Land of the Peacocks. Since he landed in Dec/Jan of AD 51/52 for his Kerala mission scholars take it as from AD 52.

Tiruvanchikulam is the port of Kodungalur in Cochin.

The Chinese mission period here is only for four and a half months whereas recent Chinese studies shows that Apostle Thomas was there sometime for over three years. It must have been during his Parthian and North Indian mission period which was from AD 36 to AD 50.
Along (52) with forty migrant Jews they all got baptized within an year and a half.

For the purpose of worship Thomas established a cross there and a church building. Along with that he ordained teachers and priests with common agreement and taught them the secrets of the scriptures.

Kepha - the son in law of the King Andrew was ordained with the title of the Teacher.

Thomas then proceeded to the Southern region along with the strong Kepha and worked in Quilon (Kollam) for an year and (69) a thousand four hundred got baptized there. There also he established a worshiping place along with a cross.

Traveling East West he reached Trikaleswaram (Koodungalur) and preached the gospel there also for an year.

52. Forty Jews
69. Two thousand four hundred
A thousand and two hundred were baptized there. Having established a cross there for worship and travelling East he reached the mountain city of Chayal (Nilakkal). Here again he worked for an year and preached the gospel and over (85) one thousand and one hundred were baptized. He established orders for worship and put up a cross there also.

Since the elders of the Trikpaleshwaram insisted continuously to return back to them he joined them and went back to Trikpaleshwaram. Since the villagers desecrated the cross which the church used, Apostle cursed the village.

He ordained by common agreement one of two elders - Thomas - as priest to perform all liturgical procedures. . Elder Thomas was taught all the knowledge of the scriptures necessary to teach and perform his duties.
The Apostle baptized 200 people again. He removed the cross which he put up previously and gave it to be established on the Southern part of Niranam to the Priests Thomas and Simeon. He also established a new temple for worship and then proceeded south to Gokamangalam village.

Without fail he preached the gospel for an year and (117) baptized one thousand six hundred people. He established a cross there and ordained worship procedures there also. Then he proceeded to Kottakayal (Parur).

There also he preached the way for an year (125) and a thousand and seven hundred people were baptized.
He put up a cross along with worship orders there also.

He then proceeded south and reached Maliankara. He was well pleased to see that everything was going well there. After half a month he then proceeded to North and reached Palayur.

He worked there (137) or an year. (139/140) He baptized a thousand and fifty people and established worship orders and put up a beautiful cross there also and went along with the people from the Chola king and reached Mylapore in AD 59 during the end of the month of Kanni.
King of Chola enquired about the work of the palace Apostle Thomas was supposed to be doing. When he could not see any structure for the palace Thomas was imprisoned. The king’s brother was so angry that he died. When his anger has subsided he saw a beautiful palace up there.

When he was resurrected back to life he reported the wonder of it to the king. He requested the king to sell it to him repeatedly. Both the King and his brother along with his servants with lots of celebrations proceeded to the jail.

They picked up St. Thomas in their chariot and begged him to forgive their failures and to know the truth about it all, they asked all sorts of questions to St. Thomas. When they knew the truth they got themselves baptized and along with them two thousand people joined the way.
He established the worship cross and the temple there.
After declaring the way for two and a half years he baptized seven thousand people.

Among the kings of Chandrapuri - Peter and Paul - he appointed Paul to be the Metropolitan. He also ordained six under him as teachers of the word and rule those who were under them. (189,190,191,192) They brought all their assets to the feet of the Apostle and he explained their duties and procedures to them.

Under the care of the angels, St.Thomas was able to travel on land route to return to Malyalam reached Malayatur.

He preached the way for two months and baptized two hundred and twenty believers.

The verses 189 to 192 are not found in some copies

(12) 189,190,191,192 ഭുക്തോറും വിശദീകരണവും പാലികളുടെ കൊണ്ടുപണി
From there he walked and reached the village of Palur. From there by land he reached Kottakayal through Malyam and then on to Gokamangalam and Quilon. In these places he stayed one year each in each village. He set up worshiping temples and priests and the order of procedures. In the end according to tradition he gave them the blessing of the Holy Spirit.

Again in Niranam Apostle stayed over an year and was pleased with the good conduct of the congregation.

In the end he gave them also the blessings of the Holy Spirit and the accompanying blessings.

He then reached Chayal hills. There also he established a church and the priest and all the procedures of the worship in the one year period. In the end he gave them the blessings of the Holy Spirit and revealed his plans of travel.
He adorned Kepha who was always with him with his (230) own robes and placed his hand on his head and entrusted the rule over all the believers there on him. Thomas told the people to receive Kepha as though he was Thomas himself.

The Priest received the charge of St. Thomas with utmost love and humility. The name of the Maliyekal Thomas was to remain all through future existence (242) and the priesthood of the future was to remain within the (243) patriarchal generation of Maliyekal Thomas. All these were given as a blessing on Kepha.

He also ordained the rank of priest as Ramban in the kingdom of Kerala. He handed the book to Malyekal Thomas so that it may be remembered that the good news was preached in this land by St. Thomas.

231-232 He robed him with his own robe and placed his hand on him

241-242 these two lines are missing in some copies

243 in the generation/ in the younger generation through their father’s line
When St. Thomas said good bye to the people, the entire village lost their control and their eyes were filled with tears and the noise of crying was heard from all those friendly people. (256)

The three then went through the hill route for about seven and a half miles; with the help of the angels Thomas alone went on to Pandya kingdom (260).

How great are the loving deeds of our father St. Thomas in all the countries where the knowledge of salvation was limited till AD 61 month of Medam. It is impossible to describe all the things that he did in all these lands with the hands that touched the blood stained side of Jesus which formed the signs of the cross. The results of those signs of the cross are being told here in summary.

Twenty nine dead were given new life; Two hundred sixty people were released from the bondage of Satan.;

(16) 253: 254: 255: 256: പിത മാതാവിനെ ഒബ്ലേക്കിലിന
(17) 259 മൊണാസ്റ്റേറ്റ് പിസ്കോതി സുൽഫനെ
260 മൊണാസ്റ്ററിൽനിന്ന് മുട്ടെന്നെ
Two hundred and thirty lepers received healing for their bodies;  
Two hundred fifty blind received sight;  
Two hundred twenty weak limped received the healing of their hands and feet.; (282)

Twenty deaf and dumb were healed;

He healed two hundred eighty incurable sick people who were rejected by their doctors.

In order that the people may not be blind but able to receive the truth, he did all that he could and even more.

That which shines above the character of humanity he was able to save the souls of seventeen thousand four hundred and eight. (296)

He received into the way:
Six thousand eight hundred Brahmins;
Two thousand five hundred Kshatriyas;
Three thousand seven hundred fifty Vaisyas;
Four thousand two hundred eighty Sudras. (304)

Thus he received the upper class people(305) and among them who were leaders he appointed as bishops.

Those who were leaders of the village he ordained as teachers. Among them four were ordained as Rambans (Professors)

He appointed twenty one lords of the village as stewards for the common assets and wealth for the use of the good of the people and ordained other procedures that were required.

He ordered that all of the duties and procedures may be done without any change or deviation.

(21) 296-303 in some copies are as follows:

490 Brahma Ksatrias
3750 Vaisyas
4280 sudras

305: These upper class people …
The elders did everything well (320)

St. Thomas who had received many types of people in many different kingdoms into the way of the grace, on 72 AD in the month of Karkadakam on the date of 3 early morning joined other travellers. These travellers were brahmins who were going to Chinna Malai in Mylapore to worship Kali Devi. They surrounded him with anger and told him:

“Those who are not bowing down to the Kali Devi grove should not travel in this road today. If you bow down to the grove you will receive food also”.

“Will I bow down to Satan for the sake a meagre dry rice? If I bow down the grove itself will be destroyed by fire.” replied St.Thomas.

The Brahmins insisted that they wanted to see the truth about his words.

Then St.Thomas made the sign of the cross and said the blessing and Kali ran out of the grove as a dog.

320 making them right
The grove caught fire and burnt. The Brahmins ran out shouting angrily out of the grove.

They did all sorts of cruel things to St.Thomas.

One cruel Brahman took a long spear and pierced it through the heart of the saint and they all ran away and hid themselves.

St.Thomas fell on a stone in the forest and began to pray. Angels informed all that has happened to St. Thomas to Bishop Paul.

Bishop Paul and all the elders and their servants came running to the grove of Kali. They found St.Thomas with a spear thrust deep into the heart. In a hurry Paul pulled out the spear and took him into their chariot to take him to the doctor.

“Dont worry” said St.Thomas. “My good fortunes are here.” as they all who came stood in honor around him.(371)
He then went on to explain all the various things until three and a half hours past in the morning to the rulers of the church and gave up his soul. They saw something like a white dove rise up to the heaven, surrounded by many forms wearing white. They also heard loud music from various instruments like violin and flute, praising God.

The elders took the body with respect and carried him and placed him inside the church. They prayed together for special favors and in the morning they retired to their homes in sorrow.

Angels reported the death to Bishop Kepha (394) and he hurriedly started his journey to Mylapore along with two rambans on the month of Karkadakam on the twenty first day and reached the church.
The two bishops and all those priests as a group performed the ritual chants and worship according to the order without brake for a period of ten days. Then a great appearance was seen where a silvery bright beam fell on all present. They all saw visions of heaven which cannot be described in words. (412)

Bishop Paul said that he had seen this vision before. Those around heard the songs and the beauty of them cannot be explained by humans.

In the midst of these sat St. Thomas on a throne and he began to give many advises to his people for the future.

411-412 They saw a lotus palace which cannot be explained nor its color can be stated
Whenever the sons remember my death they will be blessed. When they come and greet me at my tomb they will be blessed.

After giving all these instructions the appearances faded away and was cleared. All the people gathered went home.

How St. Thomas established the way in India is described by Malyekal Ramban Thomas the second is explained in detail in his history. What is sung here is a summary without detail.

This song is written by the forty eighth descendant of the Ramban Thomas one describing the works of St.Thomas and is placed at the feet of the Lord in the year 1601 AD in the month of Karkadakom on the third day.

Let the Lord God give his grace so that these may be made known to all those who worship him.

424 given for all time
439-440 in some copies the words “48th descendant” is missing but adds “by Thomas who has no qualifications” is added.
446 on the month of Karkadakom day one.

Now that you have the history hear the malayalam pattu sung:
Ramban pattu Youtube
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EyKC2uBuhJY
This youtube gives the Ramban Pattu in malayalam and shows the churches Apostle Thomas established during his mission in South India from AD 52 till his martyrdom
Summary of Rambaan Paattu
Ballad sung by the Deacons

Thomas the Apostle coming from Arabia, landed in Maliankara in the year AD 50 in the month of December/January. (Maliankara is another name for present day Kerala region). After a short stay there he proceeded to Mailapuram and from there went to China. (Mylapore – a place in present day Madras State or Tamil Nadu. Mylapuram means Land of the Peacocks)

Coming back to Mailapuram port he sailed to Maliankara being invited by the King of Thiruvanchikulam, and founded seven and a half churches there.

[Thiruvanchikulam literally means the Pond of the Sacred Boat. Cranganore is a name given by the British during the British rule a corruption of the name for Kidangallore – the city of water channels Kodungallur is also known as Cranganore, Muchiri, formerly known as Mahodayapuram, Muyirikkode, and Muziris) is a municipality on the banks of river Periyar on the Malabar Coast in Thrissur district of Kerala, India. It is situated 18 miles north of Kochi (Cochin)]

These are the seven churches well known in tradition. These cities are still in existence. There was an church in Nilackal. This church was destroyed and now an ecumenical church of recent origin is there.

1. Kodungallur or Maliankara or Muziris in Cochin
2. Palur or Palayur (A place near Guruvayur)
3. Paraur or Kottukavu (A Place near Cochin)
4. Kokkamangalam - (A place between Alleppey and Kottayam)
5. Nirnam (A place near Tiruvalla)
6. Chyal or Nilakkal (An interior hill side place near Sabarimala)
7. Quilon or Kollam
   And
8. Thiruvithamcode Arappally

Ara Pally is usually considered as the administrative office. Aramana means the residence of the King. In AD 59 in the month of September/October he was called back to Mailapuram by King of Chola, who imprisoned him. But the king’s brother died at that time and was brought back to life and Thomas was set free and the king along with 700 received baptism.

After a stay of two and a half years in Mailapuram, the Apostle returned to Malabar via Malyattur and visited the old places: Cranganore, Kottakayal, staying in each place for a year and conferring on the faithful the sacrament of confirmation.

In Chayal, the Apostle took leave of the Christians, telling them that they would not see him again. Then in the year AD 69, he departed from there to the land of the Tamils. At this point, the poem enumerates the miracles performed by the Apostle:
he brought back to life 19 dead,
drove the devil out of 260, etc...
In all he converted 17750 persons, of whom 6850 were Brahmins, 2800 Kshatriyas, 3750 Vaisyas and 4250 Sudras...
(These are the various castes in India)
Kepa and Paul are said to have been consecrated bishops.
Kepha belonged to the Cranganore royal family and he was set over Kerala. He took part in the burial of
the Apostle.

Back in Milapuram in the year AD 72 on the 3rd day of Karkadakam (July/August), on the way to the Little Mount, he was pierced with a lance by the angry Brahmins since he refused to bow down before the Kali Devi.

In those days the country was ruled by many kings under three Periya Perumals (Emperor) as Chola, Chera and Pandya.