

DHARMARAM COLLEGE
LIBRARY
BANGALORE-29

THE DHARIYAIKAL CHRISTIANS OF TIRUVANCODE

By

Rev. Fr. Placid, T. O. C. D.

Syrian Carmelite Monastery, Changanacherry, S. India



Arch

J64
P69

Reprinted from :

Indica

The Indian Historical Research Institute

Silver Jubilee

Commemoration Volume.

BOMBAY

1953.

DHARMARAM COLLEGE LIBRARY
Ac. No 41173
Call No

THE DHARIYAIKAL CHRISTIANS OF TIRUVANCODE

By

Rev. Fr. Placid, T. O. C. D.

Syrian Carmelite Monastery, Changanacherry, S. India

There is a community of Christians called the *Dhariyaikal Christians* in Tiruvancode in the South of modern Travancore. *Dhariyaikal* may be a modernised form of some appellation similar in sound. Tiruvancode was rendered Travancore by Europeans and in course of time Travancore came to be applied to the State of Travancore extending from Cape Comorin in the South to Cranganore in the north.

The *Dhariyaikal Christians* call themselves St. Thomas Christians ; but they say they are not of the stock of the other St. Thomas Christians of Kerala. They dress like Tamilians and keep several christianised Hindu customs. We may here mention one such custom. As soon as a child is born the head of the family utters into its ear the Syriac words *Mârân Ishō M'shîchâ* (=Our Lord Jesus Christ) and calls it by the name which will be given it in baptism. At baptism, if it is a male child, a *pōōnōōl* (sacred thread) is blessed and put on its body. At home the *pōōnōōl* is removed and kept away to be used when the child attains to the age from which onwards he is entitled to wear it always. The christianised Hindu customs of the other St. Thomas Christians of Kerala in several points do not agree with those of the *Dhariyaikal Christians*. Once they were a flourishing community ; but now they are reduced to two families.

Who are these *Dhariyaikal Christians ?* According to some they came to Tiruvancode being driven away by persecution that raged on the Coromandal coast. The king of Tiruvancode thinking they were Hindus offered them ashes and flowers. But being Christians they did not put ashes on their bodies. They were thus called *Dhariyaikal Chetti's, i. e. Chetti's* or merchants who do not put on ashes. In fact Gouveas and others have recorded of a persecution on the Coromandal coast as a result of which Christians fled to Kerala where they were hospitably received. Those who settled down in Tiruvancode in the south and in Todamala in the north having had no touch with other Christians are said to have been greatly Hinduised. Their migration to Kerala, some say, took place at the very time of the Apostle St. Thomas who led them to Tiruvancode or Quilon. There is a tomb near their church which, they say, one of their priests ordained by St. Thomas was buried.

Others say that the king of Tiruvancode brought them to Kerala when they were being persecuted on the Coromandal coast in the 6th century or so. There are those who say that the king brought them or they came to Quilon first, and then settled down in Tiruvancode.

Some Malayalam accounts (not very old) say that the *Dhariyaikal Christians* are those who did not put on the ashes offered by Mānikkavasagar a conjurer of the 2nd or 3rd century. *Dhariyaikal*, they say, is a modernised form of the Syriac word *th'rîtsâ* which with suffix *Kâl* (*th'rîtsâkal*) means orthodox But others think that the appellation derived as it is from the Syriac *th'rîtsâ* was *th'rîtsâ-î-kâl* which means heterodox, *i. e.* those who were seduced by Mānikkavasagar. According to some others, however, those who were seduced by Mānikkavasagar were not the *Dhariyaikal Christians* but the *Manigramam* people of Quilon and other places.

It is admitted by all that in Quilon there were Christians called *Tarisa Christians*. Their church was called *the Tarisa church*. If, as some say, the *Tarisa Christians* were from Tarsus the *Dhariyaikal Christians* may not be their descendents. The social customs of the *Dhariyaikal Christians* are Indian in origin and development.

We may note that in Kerala all Christians, even the Portuguese were once called *Târûthâkâl*. On the authority of the late Professor D. S. Margolioath of Oxford, Dr. P. I. Thomas once wrote that *Târûthâkâl* may be the plural of *Tarisa* a term used in Persia for Christians. It may be derived from *Tarsidon* (=those who fear [God]). More probably it was used to denote Christians who stood firm against dissenters like Manicheans. In Tartary also the term *Tarisa* was in use. One would think that the *Dhariyaikal Christians* of Tiruvancode alone might have retained the appellation *Târûthâkâl* meaning Christian, and they might have modernised it into the present form *Dhariyaikal*. The above-mentioned hypotheses might all be of later origin except perhaps that they migrated to Kerala from the Coromandal coast owing to persecutions.

The Synod of Diamper, 1599, speaks of the Christians of Travancore (Tiruvancode) who were Christians in name only. The Synod decreed that their Church was to be repaired and priests sent to them. Fr. Campori, S.J. with some others visited the Church before 1618. Campori says that the village where the church is situated is called *Taridacal*. The Christians were against admitting Europeans into the Church. But Campori and others putting on white soutane boldly entered it. Campori says : "The prelates having sent them a few priests, the idols were removed, a decent church built and good Christian manners restored." He also says that owing to the zeal of Bishop Roz, S.J. (1599-1624) they had comformed themselves to other Christians in the administration of sacraments, in fasts, in feasts, etc. Campori met there

a man of sixty, a widower, who had the gift of prayer. He knew by heart the mysteries of the Rosary and other prayers. He was given his food from the palace of the king which was close by. On his way to the palace he used to be so absorbed in prayer that he would not salute any one even the king. About these Christians Campori makes the remark : "They are considered by the pagans as of noble birth and high standing. They have free entrance to the palace, their office being to supply all the needs of the King, so that they have no intercourse not only with low-caste people but even with Portuguese and other St. Thomas Christians. But they follow their civil customs in everything."

The present church is a small granite structure in the old Syrian fashion probably repaired by the Portuguese in the 17th century. Recent repairs have not changed its form. Portuguese paintings and inscriptions may be seen on a tabernacle still kept in the church. The church stands on a plot of ground given by the King tax-free. The *Dharyaikal Christians* say they were 64 families with houses in 64 plots of ground given them by the King on a nominal tax. Many of them have immigrated into other parts of Kerala and have merged into the other St. Thomas Christian Community. The two families that remain are now ministered to by Jacobite priests of the Catholicos party. They are Syrian in Rite like the other St. Thomas Christians.

These few lines are intended to rouse the interest of scholars to whom *the Dhariyaikal Christians* may offer a field wide and unexplored.

