



## THOMAS CHRISTIANS OF INDIA

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### ABSTRACT :

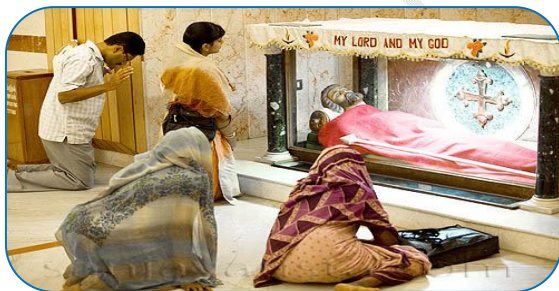
*There are scattered communities of people in the whole Indian sub-continent claiming a historical link with the Apostle Thomas, and venerate him as the father of their churches. To establish their stand, they have preserved and kept proper, written and oral evidences with them even now. The important Christian communities of St.Thomas are listed below:*

**KEYWORDS :** Christian , churches , communities of St.Thomas.

### Garthoma:

When St.Thomas preached the Gospel in North India he lived in a small village, close to Sircap in the district of Islamabad. A violent earthquake which devastated the whole region left untouched the particular small village where St.Thomas stayed<sup>1</sup>. To commemorate their deliverance, the people of that village named it Gar-Toma (the benevolence of Thomas). V.S.V. Ragavan also clearly elucidated this earthquake that happened in Taxila in 44 AD<sup>2</sup>.

Regarding Christians of the Eastern Coromandal coast Fr.Hosten writes "Christian communities existed in the first century not only in Mylapore, but farther South down to Cape Comorin and in Malabar<sup>3</sup>. Besides North West India and South India, other ancient Christian communities existed over the wide expanse of the Indian subcontinent - Thana Gujarat; Abati in central India Udaipur in the Malwa kingdom, on the Western Coast Goa, Mysore, Orissa, Patna and other places in Eastern India along the banks of the Ganges<sup>4</sup>.Patna was a renowned metropolitan city .In the year 1222 AD, Marco Polo informed in his account that there were six Christian kingdoms in central India during the thirteenth century. Among them three were Christian and three were Saracen<sup>5</sup>.



In 1321 AD three grave stones were found with cross engravings at Sironj in Vidhisha District (M.P) Jordanus Catalani reported that he visited the Thomas Christians in Broach and Supera where St.Thomas preached Christianity<sup>6</sup>.

Vijayanagar had a cordial relationship with the Portuguese and encouraged christians. Christianity flourished in this Kingdom. The king recruited a large

<sup>1</sup> George Nedungatt., Quest for the Historical Thomas Apostle of India, Bangalore, 2008. P.277.

<sup>2</sup>Ragavan V.S.V., Ptolemy, Chennai,1978. P.170.

<sup>3</sup>HostenHenry., Antiquities from San Thome and Mylapore, Calcutta,1936. P.402.

<sup>4</sup> George Nedungatt., *op.cit.*,P.278.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, P.278.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*,P.278.

number of christians in his army. Diogo Couto a Portuguese historian explained that "that Crisna" Rao of Narasenga of Vijayanagar had in his army a great number of christians of those whom St.Thomas made and who were his Vassals<sup>7</sup>.

There are Christian communities in the mouth of river Indus that claimed St. Thomas as the founding father of their church. The Tata Nagar Fakirs, a branch of Sendhis worshipping St.Thomas in the name "Thum Bhag" (Sons of St.Thomas), call themselves 'Bnai Thoma' an Aramaic word which means Sons of Thomas or Christians of St.Thomas. They had the gospel of St.Mathew and holy relics as authentic evidences to prove their connections with St.Thomas from the ancient times itself<sup>8</sup>.

### Udaipur Church of St. Thomas:

Udaipur in Central India was an ancient christian's community and had a Christian church, later converted into a Hindu temple.<sup>9</sup> There is an inscription on the stone jambs (door posts) of the main entrance of this temple. The past history of the church was revealed by Baron Textor de Ravis, a member of the Asiatic Society of Paris, and Archaeologist and former Commandant Administrator of Karaikal (1852-1862 AD) the then French Colony in India<sup>10</sup>. By presenting a paper dealing with Udaipur. Inscription, at the XII International Congress of Orientalists held at the 'Academia' del Lincei on 13 October 1899. According to him the temple was built by one of the first disciples of St.Thomas and perhaps St.Thomas himself laid its foundation. After its ruin it was rebuilt by Sangai Vardha king of Sac in the middle of XI century AD<sup>11</sup>.

Textor de Ravis Explains "The truth is that the temple of Udaipur which was built and restored by the disciples of St.Thomas for Christian, worship is now consecrated to Vaishnavite Cult.

The Sanskrit inscription of the Church states as follows:

"Amen.

*He is the only son of the most Blessed Lady. May he be praised. Glory be to Him who the son of the most High! O you the triple eye of this marvelous universe the author of all that passes and the producer of the breath which will endure forever, invisible being which art not limited by space and which having once assumed our flesh dost not cast off his raiment in the infinite grace of thy nature".*

This Church was dedicated to Mother Mary. During its rededicating ceremony 4339 people attended Pope Nicholas II (1058 AD - 1061 AD) sent a holy relic that was enclosed by a metal capsule<sup>12</sup>. Arch Bishop Zacharia established the holy relic. It emphasised the control of Roman Catholic Church which was in Italy, over Indian Churches. In the second session of the mass on the same day, attended by another group of 4160 people, 20 priests from near by churches attended and assisted to distribute the holy communion<sup>13</sup>.

Besides, the inscription mentions the names of the contemporary sovereign as below:<sup>14</sup>

1. Cheyaghesa, a man of evil renown who reigns at present under the name of Pari-Deva, at the same time that the queen Avanti Mzdu, worthy of all praise and happiness, the only heiress, and chief of the Sogdians, is still alive.
2. Martanda of Herat, a follower of Mahomed, a man of an incomparable audacity, who in our ever increasing discords, occupies the sovereign power; without being prevented in this by Mahata-Putra (the glorious son), who might do so, but who, having become Sasi-Putra (the weak and inconstant son) superintends, in exile, the works of the fields at Camaum.
3. KathiesPri, who rules over Ninam (the Deccan).
4. Yegali, over Kandana (Malabar Coast).

<sup>7</sup> Xavier Koodupuzha., *op.cit.*,P.198.

<sup>8</sup> John.K.U., St.Thomas at Nilackal past and present, Kottayam,1986 p.34.

<sup>9</sup> Xavier Koodupuzhu., Xavier Koodupuzha., Oriental Churches, Theological Dimension, Kottayam,,P.199.

<sup>10</sup> George Nedungatt., *Op.cit.*,P.282.

<sup>11</sup> Bartholomew of Jesus.,The Syrian Christians in Malabar,Mangalore, 1977.P.30.

<sup>12</sup> Ramalingam., T.S., History of Europe, Madurai,1979, P.118.

<sup>13</sup> Hosten Henry.,*Op.cit.*,P.56.

<sup>14</sup> Bartholomew of Jesus.,*Op.cit.*,P.30.

5. Ramu Putra over Cadamma (Bengal).

The present Udiapur temple was constructed by the cannons of Hindu temple architecture which could accommodate only 50-60 people. Because it was constructed only for individual pooja or family devotion and not for a mass worship. But the inscription of the temple reads that it was filled with the a vast number of people about 4339 and 4160<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> George Nedungatt., *op.cit.*,P.288.