

History

The tradition of origin among [Saint Thomas Christians](#) relates to the arrival of Saint Thomas, one of the 12 disciples of Jesus at the ancient seaport of [Muziris](#) (present day Kodungallur, Kerala) in AD 52.

The Saint Thomas Christian tradition has historically been, as recorded by scholars, that Thomas converted 12, in some accounts 32, nair families/clans including Pakalomattom, Sankarapuri, Kaliyankal, Kalli, Kalikay, Kottakali, Kayakkam, Madeipur, Muttal, Nedumpally, Panakkamattam and Thengummoottil from which many Saint Thomas Christians, particularly those from prominent families, have traditionally claimed descent.

The four families Sankarapuri, Pakalomattam, Kalli, and Kaliyankal were considered particularly preeminent, and historically the most aristocratic Syrian Christian families tended to claim descent from these families.

The text describes Thomas' adventures in bringing Christianity to India, a tradition later expanded upon in early Indian sources such as the "Thomma Parvam" ("Song of Thomas"). Generally he is described as arriving in or around Maliankara and founding Seven Churches, or Ezharapallikal: Kodungallur, Kollam, [Niranam](#), [Nilackal](#) (Chayal), [Kottakkavu](#), Palayoor Kokkamangalam and Thiruvithamcode Arappally (a "half church"). A number of 3rd- and 4th-century Roman writers also mention Thomas' trip to India, including Ambrose of Milan, Gregory of Nazianzus, Jerome, and Ephrem the Syrian, while Eusebius of Caesarea records that his teacher Pantaenus visited a Christian community in India in the 2nd century.

The medieval historian Pius Malekandathil believes these were customs adopted and privileges won during the beginning of the Brahmin dominance of medieval Kerala. He argues that the St Thomas Christians, integrated with Persian Christian migrant merchants in the 9th century, had become a powerful trading community by this time and were granted the privileges by the Brahmins and the Hindu rulers to promote revenue generation and to undermine Buddhist and Jain traders who rivaled the Hindus for religious and political hegemony in Kerala at the time.

Some writers believe that the original converts would have included the Jews already present in Kerala at that time. The Cochin Jews are known to have existed in India around that time. Indeed, a version of the Songs of Thomas or Thomma Parvam, written in 1601 believed to be a summary of a larger and older work, narrate the conversion of 40 Jews along with the Brahmins and the local King at Kodungallur by St Thomas, - the Hindus converted it claims numbered around 3000. The Thomma Parvam further narrates St Thomas's mission in South India and states that before his martyrdom at Mylapore in

present-day Chennai, Tamil Nadu, he had converted 6,850 Brahmans, 2,800 Kshatriyas, 3,750 Vaishiyas, and 4,250 Shudras.

The tradition of the coming of a foreigner by the name 'Thoman' who debated with the Brahmans and converted many 'prominent people' including a King is part of Nambudiri Brahmin folklore and is found in the important Nambudiri Brahmin 17 century tract the Keralolpathi.

India's Christians: Roots and disputes



Christians are a minority but celebrations are big

By Charles Haveland

BBC correspondent in southern India

Christians are a tiny minority in India - less than 3% of the population.

But in the southern, coastal state of Kerala, they number around 20%.

Christians have lived and worshipped in Kerala for some 2,000 years but the last century has been marked by a bitter feud within the Church which has led to factional fighting.

Kranganor, on the coast of Kerala, is the cradle of Christianity in India where according to legend, St Thomas, or Doubting Thomas - one of the 12 apostles of Jesus - first came ashore in AD 52.

"This is the place where he landed, imparting the message of Jesus," says Father JB Putor, keeper of the shrine to Thomas.

Deep roots

St Thomas' Christian community was augmented in the fourth century by refugees from east Syria - now Iraq.

All Kerala Christians who trace their ancestry to these times call themselves Syrian Christians.

Some have become Catholic or Protestant in their outlook, others are Orthodox.

The melody played at the Holy Communion at the Orthodox Syrian Church of Cheriapoli, in central Kerala, is of ancient Syria.

So is the language used in some of the prayers - Syriac, very close to what Jesus himself spoke.

One of the congregation, Matthew Kurian, told me he was deeply attached to this link with the early Church.

"We are keeping the Syriac language as a basis.

"And Syriac is an important thing for us. There are many other Christians here - Latin Catholics, Roman Catholics. So we are proudly saying we are Syrian Christians," he said.



Kerala (/ˈkɛrələ/), sometimes referred to in historical terms as **Keralam**,^[4] is a [state](#) in the [south-west](#) region of [India](#) on the [Malabar coast](#). It was created on 1 November 1956 following the [States Reorganisation Act](#) by combining various [Malayalam](#)-speaking regions. Spread over 38,863 km² (15,005 sq mi), it is bordered by [Karnataka](#) to the north and north east, [Tamil Nadu](#) to the east and south, and the [Lakshadweep Sea](#) to the west. With 33,387,677 inhabitants as per the 2011 census, Kerala is [the thirteenth largest state by population](#) and is divided into 14 [districts](#) with the capital being [Thiruvananthapuram](#). [Malayalam](#) is the most widely spoken and official language of the state.

Malayalam /mæləˈjɑːləm/^[4] (മലയാളം, *Malayālam* ? [mələʝaːləm]), sometimes referred to as **Kairali**, is a language spoken in [India](#), predominantly in the state of [Kerala](#). It is one of the 22 [scheduled languages](#) of India and was designated a [Classical Language in India](#) in 2013.^[5] Malayalam has [official language](#) status in the state of [Kerala](#) and in the union territories of [Lakshadweep](#) and [Puducherry](#). It belongs to the [Dravidian family of languages](#) and is spoken by some 38 million people. Malayalam is also spoken in the neighboring states of [Tamil Nadu](#) and [Karnataka](#); with more populace in the [Nilgiris](#), [Kanyakumari](#) and [Coimbatore](#) districts of Tamil Nadu, and the [Dakshina Kannada](#) and [Kodagu](#) districts of Karnataka

The **Malayali** are a Dravidian people who inhabit the [South Indian](#) state of [Kerala](#) and the [Union Territory](#) of [Lakshadweep](#) and have [Malayalam](#) language as their [mother tongue](#). Malayalis are described to be one of the most accepting and diverse communities in India, owing to a history of immigrants to the region from various parts of the world, as well as a unique sub-culture owing to the tropical environment of the state.^{[4][15]} According to the Indian census of 2011, there are approximately 33 million Malayalis in Kerala,^[6] making up 96.7% of the total population of the state. Hence the word **Keralite** is often used synonymously with Malayali, though a proper definition is ambiguous.^[17]