

Knanaya History:

The Knanaya Community, a Jewish-Christian group, originated in Southern Mesopotamia. Led by the enterprising merchant Thomas of Cana (Knaï Thomman) and the spiritually revered Bishop Uraha Mar Joseph, accompanied by four priests and several deacons, they migrated to the Malabar Coast's Cranganore (Kodungallur) in AD 345. Welcomed by the ruler of the Chera Empire, who granted them land and 72 royal privileges, their arrival marked a pivotal moment for the St. Thomas Christians of Malabar, who were then grappling with persecution and internal divisions. This influx of organized leadership under Bishop Uraha Mar Joseph significantly strengthened the Church of St. Thomas. The Knanaya community, numbering around 400 individuals from 72 families across seven clans, maintained their distinct ethnic and ecclesial identity within the broader St. Thomas Christian community through endogamy and their own clergy and places of worship.

From the year 1600 onwards, the Latin Bishops under the Portuguese Padroado as well as under the Propaganda Fide respected and preserved the distinction between the Southists and the Northists also ecclesiastically, instituting separate parishes for these communities, and appointing only priests of the respective community as parish priests. After the Holy See effected a ritual separation between the Orientals and the Latins in Kerala and erected the Vicariates Apostolic of Kottayam and Trichur for the Orientals in 1887, Msgr. Charles Lavinge, SJ, the Vicar Apostolic of Kottayam, appointed two pontifically privileged Vicars General, Msgr. Mathew Makil for the Southists and Msgr. Emmanuel Nidhiri for the Northists. In 1896, the Holy See re-distributed the St. Thomas Christians into three Vicariates Apostolic-Trichur, Ernakulam and Changanacherry. Then the first Vicar Apostolic appointed for Changanacherry was Mar Mathew Makil, a Southist.

On December 23, 2003 His Holiness Pope John Paul II made a sovereign decision that the status quo (pro gente suddistica) of the Eparchy of Kottayam must be maintained and left it to the Bishops' Synod of the Syro-Malabar church to decide on the desired enhancement of the juridical status of the Eparchy of Kottayam. In November 2004 the Synod gave its consent to elevate the Eparchy of Kottayam to the rank of a Metropolitan See without a suffragan eparchy. On March 21, 2005, the Congregation for the Oriental churches issued a letter of no-objection to the decision of the Bishop's Synod. Accordingly, on May 9, 2005 the Major Archbishop Mar Varkey Cardinal Vithayathil issued the decree "The Eparchy of Kottayam" elevating the Eparchy of Kottayam to the rank of a Metropolitan See, and another decree "God our loving Father", appointing Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry as the first Metropolitan of the newly erected Metropolitan See of Kottayam on June 3, 2005, the feast of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus, at a liturgical service the Major Archbishop canonically erected the Metropolitan See of Kottayam and enthroned Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry as the first

Metropolitan of Kottayam. The Syro-Malabar Synod accepted his resignation on January 14, 2006. Mar Mathew Moolakkatt took over as the Metropolitan of the Archeparchy of Kottayam on January 14, 2006.

Accacio Cardinal Coussa has interpreted, in matters such as determining the proper parish priest having jurisdiction to bless the marriages of the Southists or the Northists, the distinction between these two communities of the Northists and the Southists has the same canonical force as the distinction between two individual *sui iuris* Churches.

Thus, all along the past sixteen centuries ecclesiastical authorities have recognized and confirmed the special individuality of this endogamous community of the Southists among the St. Thomas Christians of India.