

## Synodality: Malankara Orthodox Perspectives 20 MARCH 2023

### *-Biblical foundation of Synodality*

**1. *Koinonia in the NT:*** Acts 4:32. ‘Synod’ of Jerusalem: Acts 15: 6; ‘it seemed good to us/ apostles and the elders’, (Acts 15:22; 25).

#### **2.1 *Collegial character of the ministry***

Ministries were exercised by groups, that is collegially. e.g., ‘The Twelve’ (‘apostles’: Lk. 6:13); ‘Prophets’ (Acts 11:27; 13:1), teachers (Acts 13:1)].

*Elders* : Acts 11:30; 14:23; 21: 18; James 5:3; 1 Pet 5:1 etc.

*Episcopoi* Acts 20:28 (= elders: Acts 20:17) ; Titus 1:5-7 (elders = episcopoi).

Ordination was also done collegially (‘the apostles laid their hands’ -Acts. 6:6). It was probably ‘the prophets and the teachers’ in Antioch, who laid their hands on Barnabas and Saul before their first missionary travel (Acts 13:1-3).

#### **2.2 The titles *episcopos*, *presbyteros* and *diakonos***

imply the collegial character of their ministries.

*Episcopos* is shepherd (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2), father of the household (1 Tim. 3:1-7) and God’s steward (Titus 1:6).

- stewardship (1 Cor. 4:1); cfr 1 Pet 5:2-3).

### **3. *Ministers and the community in the first four centuries***

(i) Epistles of Clement of Rome to the Corinthians. (ii). Didascalia of the Apostles; (iii). Apostolic Constitutions (iv). Testament of our Lord. They attest the synodal character of the election and ordination of the ministers.

- Ministries (*episcopos*, *presbyteros* and *diaconos*) were basically liturgical functions. The collegial/ Synodal life of the Church is manifested in the liturgical celebrations (*Didascalia*, XII).

- The ministers were elected by the community. In the case of a bishop, he was ordained by three bishops from the neighbouring dioceses. The election was regarded as the manifestation of the will of the Holy Spirit (*Didascalia* III: “Let the bishop be appointed (upon) being elected by all the people according to the will of the Holy Spirit”). cfr. *Apostolic Constitutions* VIII, 4, 2-5.

- According to the *Testament of our Lord* (TD: c.500 AD): “the bishop shall be appointed, elected by all the people according to the will of the (Holy) Spirit”<sup>1</sup>. He is ordained by the bishops from the neighbouring dioceses. The people endorse the election by a threefold acclamation: ‘He is worthy’”.

#### **4. Synodality among the St Thomas Christians**

- General Assembly’ (*Malankara Pally Yogam* : Association of the parish churches.
- Parish Assemblies (*Edavaka Yogams*)
- Synod of Diamper (1599) was a *Pally Yogam* convened by Archbishop Alexis Menesis of Goa
- ‘Synod’(*Pally Yogam*) in Ankamaly in 1603 –convened by Francis Roz.
- For centuries, *Pally Yogams* were held according to unwritten laws known in Malayalam as *Edathile maryadakal* (‘local customs’).
- *Arthattu Padiyola* in Copper plate.

Important *Pally Yogams* held between 1653 and 1876.

- (i). *Coonen Cross Oath*: January 3, 1653- Ahattallah, an Antiochene prelate
- (ii). In February 1653: Arch-deacon was accepted as the spiritual head (*Veda thalavan*).
- (iii). In May 1653, *Malankara Pally Yogam* in Alengadu, near Ankamaly and resolved to raise Archdeacon Thomas as bishop with the name Mar Thoma I (1653-1670).
- (iv). *Malankara Pally Yogam* in Chenganoor (1686) ; Convened by by Mar Ivanios Hidayatullah (d.1694), a visiting Antiochene
- (v). A *Pally Yogam* at Mavelikara in 1789 (ME 964) – *Padiyola* or agreement was signed.
- (vi). The *Malankara Pally Yogam* at Kandandu in 1809, adopted 11 resolutions (*Kandanadu Padiyola*) endorsing the use of West Syrian liturgy
- (vii). *Malankara Pally Yogam* in 1836 at Mavelikara (*Mavelikara Synod/Padiyola*).
- (viii). *Kannanadu Yogam* (August 15, 1843. Consecration of Palakunnathu Mathews Mar Athanasius, the first bishop of the Reformed group, was reported. But the meeting did not accept the consecration of and the *Sthathicon* (letter of Consecration from the Patriarch) was not permitted to be read. Thirty days later<sup>2</sup>, some priests and representatives of 22 churches who

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<sup>1</sup> *Synodicon* Vol I, CSCO 368, SS 162, p. 35; Rahmani, TD, I, 20, p. 26 (syr).

<sup>2</sup> ME 1019 Kanni 3.

supported Mar Athanasius met at Kallungathra (near Kottayam) and a *Padiyola* (*agreed statement*) was drafted (*Kallungathra Padiyola*).

These two meetings show that the bishop consecrated by the patriarch needed the approval of the community to exercise his office.

(ix). In 1851, Mathews Mar Athanasius convened a meeting of the *Malankara Pally Yogam* at the Old Seminary, Kottayam and adopted 101 rules (*Chattavariyola or rules*) regarding the administration and liturgical and sacramental life of the Church.

(x). The rights and privileges of the *Pally Yogam* were similar to that of a Synod (in fact they are often called Synods).

### ***5. From Pally Yogams to the Malankara Syrian Christian Association [MSCA]***

- ‘Mulanthuruthy Synod’ of 1876, convened by Patriarch Ignatius Peter IV, who wanted to put an end to the monepiscopal/monarchial leadership of the Malankara Metropolitan ( *methrante ekanayaka sakthi : single leadership system*)

- (i). instituted ‘Malankara Syrian Christian Association’ (the General Assembly for the whole Church).

- (ii). A Managing Committee consisting of priests and lay people was constituted.

### ***6. Constitution of the Malankara Orthodox Church***

6.1. In 1934, the *Malankara Syrian Christian Association* (MSCA) adopted the Constitution of the Church.

6.2. In the Malankara Syrian Christian Association, each parish is represented by a priest and one or more laymen, elected by each Parish assembly (for a period of five years).

6.3. Managing Committee (MC) elected for five years by the MSCA.

6.4. Bishops, Managing Committee members are also members of the MSCA.

6.5. The Malankara Metropolitan/Catholicos is the president of the MSCA and the remaining bishops having administrative charge of Diocese shall be Vice-presidents of MSCA.

6.6. Secretary and Co Trustees: one priest and a layman.

6.8. The Catholicos and the bishops are elected by the MSCA. and the election shall be approved by the Episcopal Synod.

6.9. The Episcopal Synod has authority to decide matters concerning faith, order and discipline.