

KNANAYA CATHOLICS

HISTORY - HERITAGE - HEROES



Alexander J. Mapleton
EDITOR

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ARCHEPARCHY OF KOTTAYAM

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MESSAGE

I am very happy to learn that Dr. Alexander Mapleton and his team are publishing “Knanaya Catholics: History, Heritage & Heroes”. As I understand, this book highlights the history, development, and glorious moments of Knanites in North America. Not only does this book give us a glimpse of our glorious past, it also outlines a framework for the future. A map for the road ahead should be based on the roots and heritage which is unique to the community. When we reflect on our past from the Jewish origin to the windy city of Chicago, a silver lining of God’s providence is evidently felt. It shows that God has a definite plan for our community. We should thankfully submit to His Will and Providence.

Our glorious past should not make us lazy or cynical. In every step of success there is a sweat story behind. These stories will inspire the future generations and they can be proud of their Knanaya roots. This book will serve as a source of reference for many to know the American Knanaya Community in detail and in depth. It also gives an overview of the parent community in India which will be very informative for the second generation American Knanites. As we approach the centenary celebration of the Archdiocese of Kottayam, it is very timely to get the first hand knowledge of a major segment of this community outside India, and how they live their faith and culture on the other side of the world.

I congratulate Dr. Alexander Mapleton and his collaborators for this valuable contribution. May God’s choicest blessings be showered on them and on all those who draw inspiration from this laudable work.



+ Mathew Moolakkatt OSB

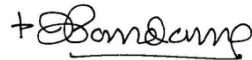
Mathew Moolakkatt
Metropolitan Archbishop of Kottayam



MESSAGE

History is one step backward and one step forward. As we move on, future generations need the annals of the past to lay the foundations for their faith and culture. The strength of any community is to congregate inspirations from the toils of the past and to carve out milestones with the dreams of the future. Considering the perils of travel by sea, our historic journey from Mesopotamia to Kodungalloor in the year 345, was indeed a leap into the darkness. Yet, our ancestors dared to overcome all initial hurdles with faith in the divine Providence and Knanaya identity. Due to the industrial revolution and later globalization, opportunities in the U.S., European countries and the Middle East were enormous and wide open and members of our community were ever ready to face the challenges of migration. Hence our presence is felt round the globe. Wherever we migrated, we never compromised with faith; the Knanaya identity and unity have always kept the traditions intact. Now the Knanaya presence is felt in many of the states in America, thanks to the pioneers and those who took the lead through the associations and now through the missions. The book by Dr. Alexander Mapleton gives the history of the Knanaya community in general and a flashback of the life and growth of our community in the US in particular. These facts and figures of the past is a brainwave to our children and youth in the US and elsewhere. The great achievements and the envious growth we have are solely by the grace of God. So let us be ever thankful to the gift of God “and let our light so shine before men, that they may see your good works give glory to your father in heaven.” (Mt 5:16) Congratulation and prayerful best wishes to all the collaborators and especially to Dr. Alexander Mapleton for this commendable work and I pray that your labor may bear much fruit to our community.

Mar Joseph Pandarasseril
Auxiliary Bishop of the Archeparchy of Kottayam

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FOREWORD

*MY DEAR BELOVED SONS AND
DAUGHTERS IN THE LORD,*

To many in Kerala and elsewhere, the Knanaya community and the Archdiocese of Kottayam, are wonders. That we strived to maintain our ethnic identity, follow our age old traditions and rituals and preserved our religious beliefs and loyalty to Rome since our forefathers set foot on the Kerala coast, are historical facts. Even when we were actively nurturing and assisting the spiritual growth and welfare of St. Thomas Christians during earlier centuries, we guarded ourselves to keep our ethnic identity. This was for a good reason. Our history also reveals that we had five churches of our own with Knanaya priests exclusively for Southists. In addition, we had joint rights at many other parishes. The erection of Kottayam vicariate for Southists, establishment of the diocese later and now its elevation as an archdiocese – all these did facilitate our allaround growth and development as a sub ethnic community.

The past, present and future are our life's boundaries. While we look forward to our future with optimism and hope, we must lead our life of today by learning lessons and drawing inspiration from the past. Needless to say then, how valuable our present and future

would be if our past history and legacy are very well known to us. Today Knanites have emerged as a global community. Undoubtedly, every Knanite is proud of his community's history, heritage, our leaders and our accomplishments. The bonding we display and our feeling of belonging particularly to our own family and our community-at-large are very strong. Our eagerness to get together socially as evidenced by the warmth and large attendance at our local, regional, national and now global gatherings speaks eloquently about this trait. Only when we get to know about anything, we can start liking or develop an appreciation for it. So if we want to preserve our loyalty towards our ancestry, then we must begin to learn more about ourselves. How knowledgeable all of us, both young and old are about our community, is anybody's guess. There are many books and publications in Malayalam on this subject. To my knowledge, there is none in English which is as comprehensive as *KNANAYA CATHOLICS: History, Heritage & Heroes*. For this very reason, I feel that this book is immensely important to every Knanaya family especially for those living outside Kerala. It is also timely because it not only documents the glorious past of our community, but also expresses the dreams and aspirations of its future. My prayer and hope is that this book will prove to be a great boon to everyone in our community especially in the Centenary year of the Archdiocese of Kottayam.

I am very happy to hear that the seeds of faith we implanted in the 1980's in North America through

Associations and Missions are bearing fruits. Let our migrations to all other parts of the world also become journeys of faith and unity. Our dream of a *sui juris* Church for Knanaya Catholics is not an impossible one; it can be a reality if we hold on to our Catholic faith and unique traditions and strive as one united team to reach that goal.

I have known Dr. Alex Mapleton, the editor of this book, since the 1960's. During the last few months, we had many discussions about this book. The depth, breadth and comprehensiveness of the book's contents and the number of scholars from our own community which Alex has perseveringly brought on board for this task, speak highly of the importance he has given to this project. What I said in 1993 in New York during the 2nd North American Knanaya Catholic Convention while releasing Alex's audio publication, "NAZARANIPPATTUKAL: *Christian Wedding Songs of India*", comes to my mind: "... Only a person, who is genuinely proud of his Knanaya heritage, has fervent loyalty to his Catholic faith and is musically gifted, can bring out such a memorable piece of fine art." It appears, I must paraphrase my own words. Alex's pride in Knanaya heritage, his determination and steadfastness to include many essential bits of information about our community in this work, his ability to assemble a scholarly team for this project and above all his own lucid literary skills—all these have made this work invaluable and immortal.

I wholeheartedly congratulate and ask God's abundant blessings on Dr. Alex Mapleton and his collaborators for undertaking this painstaking venture.

Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry

METROPOLITAN EMERITUS OF KOTTAYAM

PREFACE



Stories and pictures of people who preceded us are valuable for many reasons. Photographs, descriptive memories, genealogies and traditions serve as fertile fields through which future generations can be favorably influenced, molded and nurtured.

National and ethnic histories add character, color and accent to each individual's identity and sense of self (self awareness). By and large, we receive our faith from our elders and pass it on to the next generation through our embodied faith stories. Similarly, legacies of traditions and values are passed through the generations and are manifested in our persons. It is very unlikely that any community or society which loses sight of, or ignores its history, can grow deep roots; its growth and development may even be stunted.

A realization of this prompted some of us to do a library research; we wanted to learn more about our community's history, legacy, contributions etc. Our hope and plan was to compile this and to pass it on to our next generation. Even though this body of knowledge can be ferreted out from several valuable volumes currently available, no single work in the English language appears to be sufficiently comprehensive to fill this vacuum. Around this time, the Knanaya Catholic Congress of North America entertained the idea of compiling and publishing a book containing stories of "Knanaya Catholic Pioneers of North America." With my enthusiastic support, the idea was expanded to include other essential and useful pieces of information about our community. What is in your hands today is the

net result. It is our hope and belief that this book will serve this unmet need.

This book, from its very title to its bespoke contents and their sequence were compiled with purpose. I toyed with many titles for the book until coining the present one, which seems as concise as possible: *KNANAYA CATHOLICS: History, Heritage & Heroes*. It is divided into four parts. Part I deals with historical details as they pertain to our community, culled from a variety of sources and knowledgeable persons. Part II is all about the Knanaya legacy or heritage, the very foundation on which we pride ourselves, from our unique wedding rituals to some special recipes. Part III contains the personal stories and messages of some of our fellow Knanites, who, by making personal contributions and taking sometimes extraordinary risks and challenges in their lives, have made themselves honorable examples for us to learn from. In other words, they are our “heroes”. They are grouped into three categories. The first group is made up of a few of our luminaries from yester years. Over thirty Knanaya Catholic “pioneers” are featured in the second group. These interesting and lively narrations describe the pioneering experiences of the people who ventured to North America since the 1950’s. Those members of our community, who were the *first* in their chosen field, make up the third category. I believe that each and every story in Part III is unique and equally interesting. I truly find them inspiring and am thrilled they are here for us to share. The final part, “Other Points to Ponder & Matters that Matter” include additional pieces of information – from a peek at our future in our adopted lands to our potential recognition as a *Sui juris* Church, and much more. I and my collaborators hope that these additional pieces of information will be both useful and interesting to all Knanites.

In all, there are over 90 articles in this book. It must be made very clear: *By its very nature, the varied opinions and views expressed in this work are solely those of the writers. They do not, unless stated otherwise, represent the official stand or policy of any Knanaya lay organization or the Archeparchy of Kottayam.*

Acknowledgements

My salutations go out to all three of our shepherds in Kottayam. Mar Mathew Moolakkatt and Mar Joseph Pandarasseril have blessed us with their loving and scholarly messages. From the very beginning, Mar Kuriakose Kunnacherry took a serious interest in this work, instructing and directing me to other knowledgeable people for help, making critical judgments wherever and whenever needed, and finally complementing our work with his thoughtful and forthright foreword. I am very thankful to many of my relatives and friends who helped me in one way or another.

I commend all my associates, consultants and the contributors for their untiring efforts to bring out this book. Jose Kottoor was the originator of the project, conceiving the idea of compiling and publishing the story of the “Pioneers.” His valuable assistance conducting a nation-wide survey soliciting suggestions about our future and writing the history of KCCNA and its components, deserve special recognition. Joseph Pathyil, who edited the section on “Knanaya Pioneers...,” contributed an article on “Diaspora” and sketched the biographies of three “Luminaries...”, did a remarkable job. Contacting our “Pioneers” or their relatives and motivating them to write their stories were both time consuming and demanding.

Ms. Jackie Odirakallumkal organized the section on “...Pioneers...” into meaningful groups based on the traits they exhibited. She also edited a few articles and valiantly tried to enlist the help of some of our youth for this project. My second son Shawn spent countless hours offering constructive suggestions, reviewing virtually everything from cover to cover, doing some editing as needed as well as formatting all articles for the final publishing of the book in its current form. My hat’s off to these four fine people. I am also thankful to Msgrs. Jacob Kollaparambil and Jacob Vellian and Fr. Cyriac Peringelil who made valuable suggestions and contributions. The helpful participation and encouragement I received from Rev. Dr. Thomas M. Kottoor during the past few months were invaluable; my sincere thanks to him. I must also thank John Elackatt for his contributions to the section on “Luminaries...” Johnson Mekkattel, Kidangoor assisted me with his secretarial skills while I was in Kerala.

All the members of my immediate and extended family greatly assisted me during the different and difficult logistic phases of this work making it feel like a family project. Using some familiar icons, Shinoo, my eldest son, helped create a contemporary cover for the book, a look you will love. My brother-in-law Cyriac Chazhikatt adorned the book with two of his outstanding designs combining traditional heroes and practices. They offer a warm welcome to my sections on “...Heritage...” and “...Pioneers...” My grandson Renjith helped author one of the articles with me. Renjith, Reshmi and Jaya, my three eldest grandchildren, along with my daughter Shiny and daughter-in-law Stacy, extended a helping hand by typing some of the articles. I am also appreciative of my son-in-law Rinly Moolakatt, who frequently provided his thoughtful perspective and printing expertise. Lastly, but

certainly not least, is my wife of 46 years, Molly, who helped me with this project in every way possible, including writing one article. I cannot thank her enough.

It is my earnest hope that this book will prove to be a source of reference and enjoyment for all Knanites and others in North America, U.K., Europe, the Middle East, Australia and elsewhere. Perhaps this book may prove to be a missing link between what you already know and what you and members of your family wish to learn about the Knanaya community. It is in this vein that this publication can earn a legitimate place on your bookshelf.

Alex Mapleton
December 1, 2010

PS- The terms *Knanites* and *Kinanites* are sometimes used interchangeably. Many years of use has established the spelling *Knanites*, however Rev. Dr. Kollaparambil recommended *Kinanites* as the new spelling based upon his study done in 1990 published in *The Babylonian Origin of the Southists Among the St. Thomas Christians.*

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Joseph Pathyil (Kaipuzha, Kottayam) has lived in Canada since 1967. For 37 years, he was a teacher of English and school principal in both India and Canada. He has been very active in Knanaya and Malayalee associations. He was the Convention Chairman for the 2004 KCCNA Convention held in Toronto. He is also an active member of Canada's Liberal Party. He is now retired and lives in Mississauga, Canada, with his wife Josephine. His two sons are Frank and Vince Pathyil.



Shawn Mapleton, my son, was a Knanaya youth representative to the KCCNA and helped in the formation of the KCYLNA in 1995. He has routinely edited my writings for many years. He is a graduate of the University of Nevada School of Medicine and has been practicing Family Medicine and HIV Medicine in Las Vegas, Nevada, for the past 8 years.



Jackie Mathew Odirakallumkal's involvement in the Knanaya community includes past KCYLNA Secretary, and KCYLNA Souvenir Editor. She is a graduate of the University of California at Berkeley and Loyola University Chicago School of Law. Jackie works in the online media industry. She is currently working on publication of her book, "Mine by Design: One Mom's Journey to Create a Soul-Centered Legacy." She lives in Chicago with husband Matt and children, Dylan & Marissa.



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