

**THE SACRED LAMPS OF INDIA:  
Mar Gregorios of Parumala and  
Sadhu Sundar Singh**

(Malayalam)

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**THE SACRED LAMPS OF INDIA:**

**Mar Gregorios of Parumala and Sadhu Sundar Singh**  
(Biography)

**Fr. A. K. Cherian**

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First Published : March 2016

Copies : 1000

Published by : **Sophia Books**  
IInd Floor, Kandathil Bldg,  
Thirunakkara, Kottayam

Cover Design,

Typesetting & Printing : Sophia Print House, Kottayam

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Sadhu Sundar Singh**

**Fr. A. K. Cherian**

Translated into English by  
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**Sophia Books**  
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# Preface

What prompted me to read and learn about the two great Indian ascetics are the tales my mother used to tell me during my boyhood days. My maternal grandmother was a native of Niranam. When St. Gregorios of Parumala passed away my mother was ten years of age. One of the popular stories about the saint was a miracle seen by some farm labourers who were lying in the paddy field at the time of the saint's demise. The farm labourers saw a pillar of fire descend from the sky towards the Parumala Church. It was when they told about this strange sight to others the next day, that they learned to their great consternation that Mar Gregorios of Parumala had passed away that night. This incident and stories of similar miracles connected with the saint ignited my boyish soul and developed love and devotion to the saint in my heart. My mother used to take me to Parumala since my boyhood days.

Similarly my mother told me about Sundar Singh, a Sikh boy who got converted to Christianity. Sundar Singh had come to the Maramon Convention to preach. Among the tales of experiences he shared, one story was very impressive. Once during his travels through the Kailas Peak he slipped and fell into a rock. In a cave nearby, he saw something like a monster. On approaching it he understood that it was a human being. This man told Sundar Singh that he was a Christian and that he was three hundred years old. He had been a Muslim from Alexandria in Egypt. He said he got converted to Christianity in his youth and travelled across the world preaching Jesus. Finally he came to the Kailas Peak and was in prayer for the entire mankind. His body was covered with earth and he had a long beard and nails. When my mother quoted this tale by Sundar Singh, I was wonder struck. I wanted to become someone like that ascetic of the Kailas Peak or at least Sundar Singh. Such divine anecdotes or tales said by mothers or relatives during infancy or childhood of their words impress the latter. Such impressions undoubtedly transform the personality of children.

Books and biographies of these two great saintly souls were quite few. Though the world had recognised them as saints, there was only one published biography each of Sundar Singh and Mar Gregorios available in Malayalam. These were rather books of miracles performed by them. There were no books which highlighted their personality. Sadhu Sundar Singh himself had authored certain books in Urdu, English and German. The books in English and German were infact translations from their Urudu originals. These books were translated into Malayalam language only after the 1980s by the Christian Literary Society. Besides some christian men of letters took interest in Mar Gregorios of Parumala recently and declared that his Travelogue on Journey to Jerusalem is the first published travelogue in Malayalam.

Moreover they have tried to analyse the extant decrees of the metropolitan and have tried to gauge his thoughts, opinions and personality. Late Professor Samuel Chandanappally, one of my intimate friends, had made pioneering efforts in this study. His book 'Church Fathers of Malankara' includes an indepth study of Mar Gregorios. There were some insightful articles about Mar Gregorios in a Souvenir titled 'Sacred Memoir' published in connection with the consecration of the newly constructed church in Parumala as well. The articles of K. C. Mammen Mappila, O. M. Cherian, Editor Jacob Kurian and Painter K. M. Varghese who had stamped their personality in various walks of life, helped me to get insights into the personality of Mar Gregorios. The small but significant historical book 'Behold a Saint' by the journalist Sunny Thomas also helped in understanding the life and values of the Metropolitan.

The books on Sadhu Sundar Singh published by the Christian Literary Society and the seven books authored by the Sadhu himself throw light on his superhuman personality. Besides this, several historical books have come to my aid in authoring this book.

Here I would like to give some clarifications foreseeing certain questions that are likely to crop up regarding this book. St. Gregorios

of Parumala is the only declared saint of the Orthodox Church when I write this book. Being a priest in this church, how could I call an ascetic layman like Sadhu Sundar Singh who didn't 'belong' to any particular church fold a saint. The Sadhu had his affinities with all church denominations and preached Jesus around the world independently. Let me clarify something. What I am attempting is not a comparison between Mar Gregorios and Sadhu Sundar Singh. They were two entirely different personalities. Mar Gregorios pleased Christ within the hierarchical fold of the church. He dedicated himself to Christ ever since his boyhood days. Thereafter he didn't turn back or vacillate. Like the Church Fathers of the early centuries he led a life of prayer and vigil. Fasting became the fundamental doctrine of his life. Observing Lent and Fasts became an important part of the process of self purification. When the church called him for an important work, he submitted himself to God's will and became the good shepherd of his flock. Yet he did not deriate an inch from his goals.

On the other hand, Sundar Singh believed that all Christian Churches in the world are part of God's church. He did not find fault with the belief system of any church. He got baptised in the Anglican church and studied for priesthood for one year under it. He wandered barefooted around the world clad only in simple clothes and cloak bearing the Holy Bible and preached how Jesus Christ appeared before him, how the christians should shed worldliness and return to Christ etc. He suffered a lot of tribulations for the sake of Christ. Like St. Paul, he was led forward by the conviction that "to live is Christ and to die is gain." He remained faithful to Christ from the day Christ appeared to him till his disappearance from this world. He experienced heavenly rejoice even in his life on earth. He held incessant fellowship with Christ, Heavenly Hosts and Saints. He could envision life after death through the inner eye during meditation. When Jesus Christ delegated His disciples and 72 messengers before him to spread the Gospel of Kingdom of God, He commanded:

“Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts. Nor bag for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs...” (St. Mathew 10:10). Sundar Singh too observed that commandment throughout his life. In the early centuries people who died and were persecuted for Christ were accorded special position and respect within the church. The bones of Christian martyrs were accepted with respect. Such martyrs were looked upon as saints. From this point of view, several tribulations suffered by Sundar Singh for the sake of Christ make him a saint.

Mar Gregorios of Parumala by his prayers and intercession still attracts many people to God. There are several churches founded in his name in towns and cities across the world where we find Orthodox Christians from Kerala. Every Orthodox home is decorated with his portrait. Thousands of people testify that they had miraculous experiences because of the intercession of this saint.

Let me praise God for giving me the opportunity to study the lives of these saints and author this book so that some of what I learned could become beneficial to others. This book is published with the earnest hope that it would help the readers to dedicate themselves to God and grow up spiritually.

World famous missionary and my teacher, His Grace Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios has read this book in manuscript form and has blessed me with a note of felicitation. Rev. Dr. O. Thomas, my brother and professor of Orthodox Theological Seminary has encouraged and made suggestions during the composition of this book. He has written the foreword after a comprehensive study of this book. Let me place on record my intense gratitude to them. Thanks is also due to my brother T. Mathai, who helped in the editing of the manuscript of this book and to Rev. Dr. T. P. Elias and Joice Thottackad who helped in the printing of this book. I am also indebted to my fellow workers, Amma, Kottayam, which made the cover design and also to Sophia Print House, which executed type-setting and printing.

I am very much indebted to Prof. Jose K. Philip who translated the Malayalam book in to beautiful english for the benefit of the young christian men and women who are not familiar with malayalam language.

The income from the sale of this book will be utilized to meet the expenses of the inmates of St. Mary's Boy's Home, Thalakkodu, Mulamthuruthy, Kerala run by Parumala Mar Gregorios Charitable Trust, an organization founded by the late remembered Dr. Paulos Mar Gregorios.

**Fr. A. K. Cherian**

## **Dedication**

To the memory of my dear mother who used to shed tears while at prayer who got up early in the morning, sang hymns and worshipped the Lord and who led me to God during my childhood days.

# Felicitatio

## Dr. Geevarghese Mar Osthathios

The request to write a note of felicitation to the book 'The Sacred Lamps of India' authored by my dear disciple Rev. Fr. A. K. Cherian has gladdened me a lot. My friendship with the author is deep and long standing I remember Fr. A. K. Cherian receiving the special 'Best Student Award' during his seminary days. This award was given not only on the basis of excellence at studies, but also on the basis of character and conduct. Even after his migration to the USA for parish work, he continued to love and help the church and its missionary activities. Most of the projects executed through me, found their best benefactor in St. Mary's Church, Bronx in which Fr. A. K. Cherian served as the priest. This church has been in the forefront in providing support to all kinds of charitable activities of the Malankara church. I have visited the USA five times in my life. This includes the three year long visit for my studies there. On every visit I have been to his parish. I still remember my visit to his Church after I became a Metropolitan.

Fr. A. K. Cherian's ministry and family life are good models to behold. He has found time to read and write a lot after his retirement from his job. He has proven that it is not right to lament about lack of time for these activities during the busy life in the USA.

I too agree with the claim made in the foreword that this book is not a comparative study of Mar Gregorios and Sadhu Sundar Singh. Both lived and preached the Gospel of Jesus on two different planes. I haven't met either of them in person. Yet I have heard and read about them a lot.

Mar Gregorios of Parumala is "a jewel gifted to the Malankara Church by God." We haven't produced another pious saint like him during the two thousand years of our history. He became a saint not because he was beatified by the church. Several miracles have hap-

pened at his intercession even during his life time. Above all he was a man of prayer; a saint who had immeasurable love for the church. In one sense he was a pioneer in the missionary activities of the Malankara Church. Later Pathrose Mar Osthathios was indirectly inspired to work among the weaker sections of the society because of Mar Gregorios. He founded schools for social upliftment of the depressed classes. I doubt whether we are able to retain his vision today. When I reached Parumala as a Metropolitan in 1975 the offerings at his tomb were about four thousand rupees a week. Today it has grown into a considerable amount of two three lakhs per week. Unfortunately the income from his tomb has been spent on court cases etc. in the past. My hope is that the church would put an end to the court cases after the recent verdict and would utilize most of the offerings at the tomb for the evangelical and charitable works of the church.

Sundar Singh was born into an Orthodox Sikh family. Like St. Paul he was originally antagonistic to evangelism and later accepted Lord Jesus Christ through a vision. This made him wander around the world with his Holy Bible, a book which he had turned away in his boyhood days. He was a great missionary. He proclaimed the missionary models of sacrifice, poverty and sharing. Once during his visit to Kerala he was given the return ticket and a packet of food. There is a story that he had accepted only the return ticket. He is reported to have said that God would provide him the meal on the way. He never bothered about his food and clothing. He had no hesitation to accept humiliation and tribulations for the sake of the Gospels. No one knows where he died and was buried. However he continues to live in the thoughts and studies of thousands of people. Many who laboured to build up their fame get forgotten quickly.

We should teach the young generation the lives of these devotees so that the world would realize that Christian life is self-abnegation through love. While dogmas divide mankind love unifies it. As God is a triune God, he is also love. Sharing becomes complete in

love. Hence I firmly believe that the future of mankind will become prosperous only through the formation of the only religion of love. I have been trying to convey this message through my writings and speeches recently.

Mar Gregorios of Parumala and Sadhu Sundar Singh were apostles of the religion of love. Even though they don't carry this tag, theirs was a style of functioning founded on love. Let this book become a medium to communicate this message to the world. I felicitate my dear disciple Fr. A. K. Cherian who authored this book. Let me conclude this foreword by quoting Mar Aprem who lived in 4<sup>th</sup> century AD. "Let One True church originate from all churches. Let the children of all churches assemble in the lap of this church. Thus let us be able to confess the goodness of God. .... Extricate the profane practices. Let the church doesn't accumulate wealth. Let the souls be the wealth of the church so that it becomes satisfied and saturated in a miraculous measure.

9<sup>th</sup> December (84<sup>th</sup> Birthday)  
St. Paul's Mission Centre  
Mavelikkara.

# Foreword

**Fr. Dr. O. Thomas**

Even though this book is not composed for the sake of novelty, it makes a totally novel enquiry. The question of how to bridge the divergent faiths of various churches and religions has ever been prominent among theologians of various ages. Schools of thought like Inclusivism, Exclusivism and Pluralism have emerged out of enquiries in this direction. The jargons and associated concepts of intellectuals are beyond the reach of common man. However the methodology followed in this book is simple enough for people to understand. The approach followed here is to find similarity among diversities and to use common yard sticks for both. This book is about two contemporary devotees who never met each other during their lifetime. It provides a new enlightenment to the readers.

Sadhu Sundar Singh was born into the Sikh Community. He became a convert to the Anglican church and following the tradition of Indian asceticism preached the gospels within and outside India. Mar Gregorios of Parumala followed the spiritual rigors of the Oriental Orthodox Churches and led a saintly life as an ascetic. He is the proclaimed saint of the Malankara Orthodox Church. The question why they should be compared is relevant. But this is not a comparative study. This study focuses on how true devotees who grow up in God experiences discern a moral world beyond the framework within which they live and help the faithful laity to co exist in mutual respect. The world of morals revealed by this study is quite extensive. Let me pointout a few of them.

## **(1) A Childhood which promoted devotion**

Sundar Singh was born into religiously devoted Sikh family and Mar Gregorios into a similar Syrian Christian family. The principle that religious devotion is inherited from parents, especially mothers was true in the lives of both. Even though those who took to asceti-

cism in later life have eschewed families, what led them to the heights of asceticism was none other than their families. The truth is that good families are needed to create good ascetics. Even though Sadhu was converted to Christianity, he confessed that the origin and enthusiasm of his devotion was from his mother. The lives of both these devotees reveal that family life need not be disparaged to uphold asceticism.

## **(2) Spirituality centered on Jesus Christ**

A life of devotion centered on Jesus Christ is revealed in the writings of Apostle St. Paul, who declared the retained Christ and the cross as the centre of his faith. Even though these two ascetics followed different paths and methods, they, like St. Paul, considered Jesus Christ as their only wealth. When the devotion of the faithful stretches upto pilgrim centres and the living and the dead saints who can perform miracles, Jesus Christ often gets marginalised. This leads to distortions in a life of devotion. Even though expressions of devotion are on the rise, the churches aren't growing up spiritually. We should wonder whether this is because devotion is not Christ centered.

## **3. Ascetic Model**

Both these devotees were good ascetics. The characteristic feature of asceticism is not mere celibacy. True ascetic liberates himself from love for money, power and sensory comforts. Even though modern ascetics are able to liberate themselves from some of these desires, they fall prey to some others. Those who free themselves from power mania might be attracted by money; those who shed their bondage to money might show predilection towards sensory comforts. The two devotees in this book were free from earthly bondages of all kinds.

## **4. The miracles performed for the sake of others:**

The biographies of these saints reveal that they performed several miracles even during their life time. However none of these

miracles were meant to reveal or advertise their power for miracles. A saint is the one who does miracles without claiming that he is a miracle doer. They intensely desired to do good for others without any dream of rewards and this desire resulted in their miracles.

### **5. Pilgrimage to Jerusalem**

The pilgrimage to Jerusalem was a very important incident in the lives of both these saints. Both of them felt nearer to God as they saw the land of birth and paths of travel of the Saviour. In modern times pilgrimages have deteriorated into tour trips. But the experience of these pilgrims were entirely different. Today one would doubt whether the godliness of Jesus Christ is forgotten in the ebb of liberation theology. Many people are interested in presenting Christ as a deliverer from socio economic disparities in the society. But these saints were interested in establishing a personal relationship with Christ who was born in history as the Saviour of the World. Mar Gregorios of Parumala also gave a valuable travelogue to Malayalam literature through his 'Journey to Jerusalem.' It was the first printed travelogue in Malayalam language.

### **6. Mysticism**

Spiritual experience has a plane beyond mere intellect and emotion. It is got not merely as the result of observing the practices and rituals systematically. Mar Gregorios of Parumala and Sadhu Sundar Singh had mystic experiences similar to the one experienced by St. Paul at the city gates of Damascus. It is recorded that a vision similar to that of St. Paul was the basis of the conversion of Sadhu Sundar Singh.

### **7. The Holy Cross and Resurrection as the pivotal incidents in the life of Jesus Christ**

Evangelism in the modern world neglects the Holy Cross and founds itself on the miracles in Christ's history. This is not in tune with historical truth and the gospels. The picture of Jesus Christ who willfully bears the cross obeying God the Father is a true model

for devotees of all times. In the modern day spirituality many people try to avoid the Holy Cross. Christ has asked us not to impose the cross on anyone but to accept it on one's own will. We can see several instances of bearing the cross in the lives of both Mar Gregorios of Parumala and Sadhu Sundar Singh. Their lives were an exemplification of the exhortation of Deiatric Bon Heuffer that "when Christ calls one, one should be prepared even to die for Christ."

### **8. Evangelical methods**

Both these saints didn't imitate the western missionary methods which tried to either impose the gospels on others with the support of colonial powers or exploit the economic and educational backwardness of the poor. What inspired their evangelism was their obedience to the ultimatum of Christ. They aimed at transformation in life rather than increase in the number of members. Hence they found the relevance of the gospels both within and outside the church.

The essence of the gospels is building up the kingdom of God. It transforms the entire history and everything contained in it into goodness thereby creating a new earth and new sky where righteousness prevail. These saints pointed out the possibilities of new values which the church and community can attain in Christ. Their activities stand apart from the present day evangelical work alone through futile verbal exercises and selfish interests devoid of 'purity.'

### **9. Social commitment**

They had found out that just as the individual is subject to sins, society too is subject to evil. Hence these great men were at the forefront in the fight against social evils. Both of them stood up against caste difference and evil practices like untouchability. They understood that since among God's creation, man alone is entitled to God's image and semblance, any system and arrangement that undermines human dignity is sinful. So they empathized more with the poor, the diseased and the condemned rejected by the society. They tried

their best to imitate Christ's attitude in this regard. It was not the inspiration of ideology but the life in Christ that led them to social commitment. When the churches and their leaders adopted the hypocritical style of claiming to be in Christ and living without any social commitment, the secular world had to take up the question of social justice. However this secular world which kept away God in their attempts at social transformation, could not make much progress. Of course, we have several lessons to learn from these saints in the matter of social service.

### **10. Both love travels**

In order to do good to church and society, both of these saints undertook several journeys. When compared with today, travelling in those days was quite a hard task. They travelled beyond hills and seas and had to suffer hunger and hardships during the process. All these journeys were in search of Jesus Christ and His kingdom and they helped to sustain several people in true faith.

A deep and precise reading of their lives will reveal many more common features. This doesn't mean that there were no differences between them. The differences don't lead to contradictions. They reveal that there are several paths in the search for God and that these paths are complementary.

When his family and the church built up the life of St. Gregorios of Parumala, the vision of Jesus Christ became the basis of Sadhu's conversion. When St. Gregorios steeped himself in sacramental life, meditation and learning of the word of God was Sadhu's cup of tea. When the rituals and practices of the Oriental Orthodox Church led St. Gregorios to the pinnacle of sainthood, Sadhu tried to integrate the Indian ascetic model with the rigours of the Western Anglican Church. When St. Gregorios dedicated his life for building up the Malankara Church, Sundar Singh laboured to turn people of various religions and castes to Christ. He did not merely aim at the expansion of the church of which he was a member. Godliness and

the spiritual transformation of his being distinguished the vision of St. Gregorios of Parumala. Sadhu, on the other hand, advocated high moral standards in personal and social life. When St. Gregorios adopted several methods of self-infliction as his training for holiness, Sadhu Sundar Singh was literally tortured by others. Thus they upheld the glory of renunciation in two different ways.

St. Gregorios observed solitude, lent, prayer and fasting according to the prescriptions of the church. Like the early monastic fathers and the Indian ascetics, Sadhu sought solitude in dense forests and caves. These two teachers teach us that there can be different ways for self realization and earning God's grace. Both of them fulfilled the duties of a true teacher through their writings, teachings and preachings.

The author of this book has been living in the Western world for more than three decades. It might seem surprising that such a book ensured from his pen. However the author's vision of life is latent in this work. He tries to imitate certain good models of the western world in his life. At the same time the author Rev. Fr. A. K. Cherian maintains a nostalgic fascination for his mother church and mother country and the value systems of both. Hence his diaspora has caused only greater devotion and respect to these saints than that kept by those living in the homeland. It seems that there is a self induced emotional compulsion rather than a cognitive yearning behind this work. This factor earns this work its distinction.

Several other works about St. Gregorios and Sadhu Sundar Singh have been published in Malayalam. However this work stands apart from all others. As mentioned earlier, it follows a unique methodology. We should learn the experiences of the saints who lived dear to God in various traditions in order to facilitate intimacy and mutual respect among different churches. The paths they trod might have been different. But they had the common goal of "knowing God, loving fellow creatures and as far as possible wiping the tears of others." The study of great men helps us to respect not only them

but also the traditions that created them. If we understand Gandhiji, we can understand the real Hindu religion. Similarly when we attempt a comparative study of St. Gregorios and Sadhu Sundar Singh, we will come to know about the sources of the high ideals they kept. Thereby we will develop respect for those traditions. Another insight given by this work is that the different experiences of spirituality lead not to contradiction but to integration.

Just as all creatures have equal claim over God, the entire mankind has equal claim over the great men of God. Hence it is not wrong to think that both St. Gregorios and Sadhu Sundar Singh intercede for the sake of the whole world in God's court. Thus this book which contains several such new ideas, is unique in various respects.

Even though the author lives in the social environment of the west, his legacy of the great feelings of the Oriental spiritual experiences might have led him to such a study. All those who read this book will beyond its level of information, experience at least minor tremors of spiritual experience in their inner soul. The author of this note of appreciation likes to place the greatness of this work at that front.

# Publishers Note

St. Gregorios and Sadhu Sundar Singh were two divine lights who integrated the Indian ascetic tradition with Christian spirituality. Their pilgrimage in search of the in depth meaning that real christian faith gives to human life led them to the spiritual resources of Christianity.

Their self discipline, philanthropy, thirst for justice, self sacrificing attitude which have more weightage to the general good of the society rather than selfish comforts, and their meaningful worship took them to the heights of saintliness. They were able to envisage guidelines for a new human society by sharing their rare experiences with others and through their continuous silent prayer.

Fr. A. K. Cherian describes the spiritually inspiring biographies of these saints in a simple and beautiful language through his work. The life stories of these saints help the readers in their transformation in spirit and growth towards divine light.

Fr. A. K. Cherian is a senior priest in the Diocese of North East America. He is a writer and a good organizer. When he describes through a book the biographies of two ascetic saints who inspired him during his boyhood days, it has a special flavour. The fact that none has neither to attempted such a work is an important feature of this work.

Fr. A. K. Cherian has authored a few books which have caught the attention of the readers. The fact that he finds time for literary and research projects even amidst his busy pastoral work is noteworthy. The author is a bosom friend of Sophia Books. We present his book gladly before the readers.

For Sophia Books

**Fr. T. P. Elias**  
(Vice President)

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# 1

## The Dawn of Modern India

The period from AD 1850 till 1900 is described as the Dawn of Modern India. This was a period of social revolution and political renaissance. The ancient educational system of India gave way to the Western educational system. Western education brought in new ways of thinking and a new social structure came into existence. The Society tried hard to liberate itself from the clutches of caste differences. Women grew aware of their liberation. The logical ways of thinking started questioning the meaningless social practices. Art and literature were revived in Bengal under the leadership of Rabindranath Tagore. Strong resistance against British domination developed throughout India. The Indian National Congress was founded. The foundation stones of boycott of foreign goods, town cleaning, rebuilding of villages and educational upliftment were laid. Great religious leaders like Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda etc. gave leadership to religious organizations like Arya Samaj, Brahmo Samaj etc. The motto of Arya Samaj was "Return to the Vedas." Brahmo Samaj tried to reinterpret traditions and make them relevant to the times. Even though Raja Ram Mohan Roy looked at the Western philosophy with respect, he denied the Christian belief in the Holy Trinity completely. At the same time he believed that the teachings of Jesus Christ were useful for the upliftment of millions of Indians. Rabindranath Tagore was deeply attracted towards the message of the Upanishads and he redesigned community life. On the other hand, Keshav Chandra Sen longed to steep himself more into Christian life experiences. At the same time he showed his predilection for Hindu Vedanta and the Bhakti movements. Swami Dayanand Saraswati and his followers, who were the stalwarts of Arya Samaj, tried hard for the revival of Vedanta philosophy. They believed in the infallibility of Vedanta and looked upon the 'vedas' as a philosophy capable of leading man successfully in all spheres of

life. They taught that there was nothing new to be learned beyond the Vedantha traditions and that Indians should return to their traditional paths of life and belief systems. Swami Vivekananda was attracted towards the principles of Arya Samaj and Brahma Samaj. He spoke and taught that the Christian belief system and Islamic religious beliefs didn't teach anything better than the Vedantha philosophy. He desired to give a new interpretation to Vedanta. Gandhiji was gradually advancing in his 'search for truth.' As a result of all these developments, the spirit of nationalism entered the hearts of Indians and got expressed as the desire for independence.

The ripples of these social changes which originated in North Eastern and Central India were also felt across South India. In those days, the State of Kerala of today was divided into three administrative units. Travancore was a princely state under the rule of King Uthram Thirunal Marthanda Varma. The princely state of Cochin was under Kerala Varma. British Malabar became a part of Madras province from May 21, 1800 onwards and came under the British rule. Thus the reign of Zamorin in Malabar came to an end. The reformation movements founded in Kerala by Chattambi Swami (1854-1924) and Sree Narayana Guru (1856-1928) could deeply influence the public life of the Hindus here.

Chattambi Swami was a reformer of the Nair caste. He tried to demolish the illegitimate authority and influence held by Brahmins in the society. Sree Narayana Guru gave strong support to this movement. Since the Nair and Ezhava communities had long been kept away from the main stream of the society, they were on the verge of disintegration. Both these great men strived hard to overcome this sorry state of affairs. Both of them undertook intense ideological struggle against the superstitious practices associated with caste. Rituals like ceremonies tying of 'thali' (a gold triangular plate) which incurred a lot of expenditure had shaken the very foundation of the economic security of Hindu society. The activities of these two great men who struggled brilliantly to save the society from all these prac-

tices, awakened the Hindu community from its long slumber and helped to revitalize it.

During this period (1850-1900) four kings reigned in Travancore and five in Cochin. During these times several reforms for human welfare were begun in Travancore. During the times of Rani Gowri Lakshimbhai (1812) the accursed injustice that existed in Travancore namely, the slave trade had been abolished. However its remnants still lingered in certain pockets. There were still slaves under the government. The children of slaves were emancipated during those days. There was a practice in the state of Travancore to show the supremacy of the Nair community. The women folk of Channars, who were considered low caste, were not allowed to cover their breasts. However those who were converted from Hinduism to Christianity could adopt the dress worn by Christian women or even by the Hindu (Nair) women. This led to a new transformation. The thought that they would be equal to others after their conversion to Christianity reigned among the lower caste. This angered the Brahmin-Nair axis which had vested interests. They became wrathful towards the converts, and the Christians who caused the conversion. The Channar revolt in Southern Travancore was engendered by this State of affairs. However the Channar woman got permission to cover their breasts through a royal decree in 1859.

During this period the first school for girls was started in Thiruvananthapuram. In 1866 an Arts college was founded in Thiruvananthapuram. The landlord - tenant proclamation was made in 1876. Private individuals got permission to run schools. The children of the untouchable classes got admission to government schools. Thus the dawn of a comprehensive social transformation was visible in Travancore.

During this period 5 'divans' (prime ministers) ruled in Cochin. Slave trade was abolished in Cochin in 1854. Schools and hospitals were founded. Thus the progress of reforms was visible in Cochin too.

As a result of the work of Christian missionaries, the educational sector in Malabar progressed. The first Mission School here was started in 1848. This later developed into Malabar Christian College. In 1856 Basal mission founded the first English school in Thalassery. The 1850s were times of the first Mappila Revolt in Malabar. This revolt was caused by poverty and the heartless and insensitive behaviour of the landlords. The activities of Indian National Congress intensified in Malabar and people like Sir C. Sankaran Nair became its first leaders. This was a period of rapid strides politically and educationally in Malabar.

## 2

# The Social Condition of St. Thomas Christians

When the Portugese traders established themselves in Kerala, became powerful and formed military alliances with the ruling kings, St. Thomas Christians of Kerala hoped to enjoy peace and happiness in the advance of their Christian brethren even though they were foreigners. However this progress became a guillotine for the St. Thomas Christians. It is not an exaggeration to state that the onset of foreign domination led to the deterioration of the social conditions of this Christian community. All Christian foreigners who came to Kerala tried to divide the undivided christian community here and caused the withdrawal of their legitimate royal patronage. They also used immoral and cruel methods to harm the divided communities by earning bitter experiences for them from their local rulers. The Portugese, the Dutch and the English are no different in this regard. They tried to impose their faith over the traditional faith of St. Thomas Christians. The king of Portugal recognised the overlordship of the Pope of Rome and the men of East India Company were under the rule of British government which was opposed to Rome. Both of them thought that the faith and rituals which they didn't follow were unchristian and incongruous. Moreover they were under the notion that they could, by their economic and military dominance, subjugate this community which was administratively unorganised and which had to depend on foreign churches for bishops. The activities of people from Bishop Menasis to the Englishman Peet don't lead us to the conclusion that they were men inspired by God. The foreigners who came to 'evangelise' this christian community which had for centuries retained its faith and apostolic succession and had enjoyed high status in the society were bigots. They thought that only what they believed in was correct and Godly

and all other traditional faiths were derilish. Both Romans and the English tried to win people through various tricks and succeeded in their schemes. The economic possibilities in Europe offered by these countries paved the way for this success. Forsaking one's own faith and accepting a new one for the sake of money and position is seen even today. Hence we need not wonder much about the olden days.

When the christian community stood united, they used to hold respectable positions in the society as soldiers, military leaders and servants of princes and local chieftans. There were also several farmers. But when the community got divided many princes formed alliances with the white foreigners and the social position of christians deteriorated.

The statement that christian community deteriorated much is no exaggeration. The following is an extract from a letter of Approbation submitted to King Visakham Thirunal by the christian community at Kottayam on 30<sup>th</sup> Karkitakam 1880.

“Our community had been dear and most useful to the ruling dynasties of Travancore. The history of our community is replete with several examples of this relationship. ... We had been a considerable community in the total population of the country. There was a period in the history of our community when our prominent men because of their dignity and patriotism were carefully selected to the important posts in state administration. Because of unforeseen developments and deterioration of times have almost been denied opportunities to serve the country in its administration. ... We plead to Your broadmindedness to issue orders to reinstate the good times of Syrian Christians of Travancore when they had been appointed to responsible and confidential positions in state administration, so that Your reign which began recently will be marked with glory and brilliance.

The Prince of Travancore gave a reply to the above the very next day at the court palace of Kottayam Division. A passage from this reply is quoted below:

“Dear priests and laity of the Syrian Church, we are pleased with the impressive and sincere ... you have submitted to us. Yours is an ancient community with a history of its own. You have been a perfect example of satisfaction, peace and patriotism. Even if we redefine this land gifted by Parasuram we cannot see a people more patriotic and good than you. You have, in your ..., mentioned about the great positions your community enjoyed during the reigns of our renowned predecessors. Rest assured that all these will be maintained without any amendments. We solemnly affirm that we would be committed to the welfare of the Syrian community which had enjoyed renown since ancient times in Travancore.”

We can judge, without further explanation, from the above and its reply the low social profile which Syrian Christians of Travancore suffered during those days.

The Syrian Christians of Cochin too were loyalists.

The deteriorating social position of Syrian Christians was stalled to a certain extent by the Metropolitan Mathews Mar Athanasius of Palakkunnathu. The Metropolitan was a powerful, intelligent and proud bishop. He was on intimate terms with several European officials in the administration and claimed their respect. Officials from the British resident downwards interacted only respectfully with him. In certain places where the christian community was weak, christian women had to mill rice for the neighbouring temples. Similarly in certain places Christian men had to show the way to Brahmins who after supper in their own homes left for the houses of their wives at night. Such men had to swing a flaming torch made from fronds of coconut tree, ahead of the Brahmins on their way. In those days compulsory mourning for all in a locality was insisted upon if someone in the household of princes and local chieftans died. This meaningless practice prohibited freedom and rituals of the Christians. Mathews Mar Athanasius confronted the King of Cochin face to face and declining his pride violated this evil practice. Thus he reestablished the rights of citizenship of Christians and the other rights

traditionally enjoyed by the christian religious leader who shone like a king. He affirmed his position as the Metropolitan of Malankara through a royal proclamation. Thereafter he could wipe out the denigrations suffered by Christians and reclaim their lost dignity.

Rev. Abraham of Palakkunnath started 'Reformation' in the church under the inspiration of European missionaries. He required the support of a Metropolitan to implement his ideas with this aim, he sent his brother's son, Deacon Mathews, with the support of the Europeans, to the Syrian Orthodox Patriarch Ignatius Elias II who lived in Mardeen. Deacon Mathews was consecrated bishop and he returned to his home country in 1843. In 1852 he became the Metropolitan of Malankara through a royal decree. However there are no records which state that this Metropolitan gave up his own faith and promoted reformation during his life time. Historians believe that he only wanted to revive the church by wiping away certain shortcomings that had crept into the practices of St. Thomas Christians. "There is every reason to believe that Mar Athanasius tried to implement a reformation here without changing the ancient and holy practices of the 'New Allegiant group' in the Malankara church."

However his successor Thomas Mar Athanasius tried to promote the ideas of Reformation from the very beginning. It was during this period that the spiritual awakening movements originated in Kerala.

The concept of Reformation was the first step towards the phenomenon called awakening. After 1870s Mosa Valsalam Sasthri of London mission and Vidwankutty of Yooyomaya made a lot of prophecies and created commotion. A person called Sadhu Mathai came from Thirunelveli and made awakening speeches here. They spread their teachings among Syrians who were living in Kayamkulam, Kottayam, Thiruvalla etc. They prophesied that there would be great darkness on 10, 11 and 12<sup>th</sup> of August 1876 and the Second coming of Christ will be in 1881. But nothing happened. Though the prophecies were proved false, the perpetrators of awakening didn't

withdraw. They continued with their activities in one form or other. Simultaneously the other reformist groups also were at work during this period. They succeeded in creating confusion among the St. Thomas Christians by raising doubts about the fundamental beliefs of the Church.

This was the period in which St. Gregorios of Parumala was born and brought up. Also it was this state of affairs that he had to encounter in his capacity as a bishop.

### 3

## The birth of two Saints

St. Gregorios of Parumala and Sadhu Sundar Singh were two blazing spheres peerless in their brilliance, that arose in the Christian firmament in India. They were more or less contemporaries born and brought up in two far away princely states lying South and North of this vast subcontinent. They accomplished their mission and passed away from this world in the later stages of their youthhood. The divine mysteries presented to mankind by these two great men during the short span of their lives are invaluable.

Both of them followed the footsteps of the great and holy ascetics who lived for ages in the holy soil of India. Both of them gave the message of salvation to the world that the fulfilment of spiritual enrichment derived from the divine essence latent in the great ascetics is given by God to the world through Jesus Christ and that God revealed himself fully to the world through our Lord Jesus Christ. One of them was a beautiful and holy tree that sprouted from the underground roots of deep rooted Christian faith. The other was an upper caste Sikh who in his boyhood days was brought up cozily in the embrace of the high echelons of Hinduism. One was a St. Thomas Christian who in his childhood itself got the opportunity to dedicate his life to Christ. The other was a believer of Hinduism, who even when he was scantily informed hated Christ and Christians bitterly. He had been a young man malignant enough to stone the gospelists who preached christianity and tear their holy book, The Holy Bible and throw it to flames. One showed fondness for prayer and reading of the Holy Bible from his boyhood days. He happily read and learned bible stories and biographies of saintly Christian fathers. He learned Syriac and all other studies required for the vocation of a priest from his father's brother, Fr. Geevarghese, during his boyhood. The other one learned the basic lessons of his religion

from his mother who was a devout Hindu and a model woman. His mother would wash and purify herself even before sunrise and would read Bhagavat Gita and other religious texts daily. She taught him from childhood the importance of getting up early and praying to God and insisted that he should not eat breakfast before completing his worship of God. Thus he realized from his boyhood days that God has supreme importance in one's life. The mother desired that her son would become a Sadhu or a Hindu ascetic.

Sundar Singh once said, "My first school of asceticism is the bosom of my fond mother who instilled love and fear of God in me even from childhood. She trained me, as far as she could, to become a Sadhu for Christ and to do His work."

The former was born as the youngest son of Kochu Mathai and Maria at Chathuruthy house in Mulamthuruthy in the princely state of Cochin. He was born on June 15, 1848 AD and was called 'Kochaippora.' Later he became priest and bishop and while he was reigning over the southern seas, passed away on November 2, 1902. He became the proclaimed Saint of Malankara Orthodox Church. He is none other than Geevarghese Mar Gregorios Metropolitan who is well known as Metropolitan of Parumala or Parumala Thirumeni.

The latter was born as the youngest son of a rich landlord namely Sardar Sher Singh at Rampur village in Patiala on September 3, 1889. His name was Sundar Singh. He grew up in the care of a devout and philanthropic mother and three elder siblings. Even though a Sikh, he was a believer of Hinduism. His hatred of Christianity led him to tear up a Holy Bible and throw it in fire. As a consequence he lost his peace of mind and in remorse prayed to God to appear in person before him without which he was determined to commit suicide in the morning by jumping before a speeding train. However as he was praying "Jesus Christ whom he had believed to have died appeared before him." The former Sundar Singh died and a new Sundar Singh arose. Consequently he was

converted into a servant of Christ (December 18, 1904). He suffered several tribulations. Yet he travelled around the world and confessed Christ. On 18 April 1929 he departed for his evangelical work in Tibet as usual and disappeared for ever during his journey.

# **A Boyhood and Youthhood inspired by the Holy Spirit**

## **1. St. Gregorios of Parumala**

### **(a) From boyhood till he was professed Ramban**

During his childhood itself, his mother was laid to eternal rest. Thereafter he was looked after by his elder sister, Mariam. She had a son of the same age of her brother. This sister left her husband's house and came to live in her own house for the sake of her brother. He learned the alphabet and got his basic education from the teachers in his neighbourhood. His teachers were Onakkavil Ayya and Mani Aasan. Kochaippora had good qualities like humility and respect for teachers ever since his boyhood. He was very enthusiastic about reading the Holy Bible and praying.

He was named Geevarghese at the time of Baptism. His father's brother Rev. Geevarghese Malpan was an unmarried ascetic priest well versed in Syriac. Rev. Geevarghese Malpan identified a 'Calling for God's work' in his nephew. This priest had a direct experience of the divine nature of the boy and counted upon him as eligible for the vocation of priesthood. On September 14, 1858, the day of Feast of the Holy Cross, the then metropolitan of Malankara Mathews Mar Athanasius of Palakkunnathu ordained Kochaippora deacon at Karingachira Church. Ordination as deacon is the first step towards the ordination as priest. Deacon Geevarghese received his training for priesthood from Fr. Geevarghese Malpan for about seven years. Several other deacons also received their training along with him. Kochaippora became a model for them and their leader. It was a happy period in his life. In those days child marriages were in vogue. Several proposals of marriage were placed before the deacon. But he was not interested and kept away from them.

Married life is a blissful way of living. Those who undertake it receive God's grace along with the sorrows of this world. Our forefathers from Abraham (Genesis 12:5) till the first of Apostles, St. Peter had been married men. All beatified saints of the church are born of married parents. But the life experiences of those who remain celibate without compulsion, dedicating themselves completely to God are very noble. Here the temptations of the material world will be quite strong. But it also provides more opportunities to work for the development of the kingdom of God. It is desirable to select this path of life with total dedication. But it requires God's calling and grace.

Deacon Geevarghese had to suffer a dark period in his life. His paternal uncle died of small pox. The deacon had nursed him in his sick bed. In those days there were no medicines to prevent small pox. As the deacon was bewailing the untimely death of his teacher, he too fell a prey to this fatal disease. But while he was lying on his sickbed, he had a vision. St. Mary stood beside him and instructed him to dedicate his life for God. He accepted the suggestion and thereafter his illness abated. His vision of life underwent a drastic change.

From that day onwards Deacon Geevarghese started praying seven times a day as per the stipulation of the church. He retained this practice till the very end of his life. He never uttered the name of 'Virgin mother of God' without piety. St. Gregorios of Parumala had great faith in the intercession of Mother of God.

He joined a famous spiritual education centre for further studies. Several students aspiring for priesthood were studying Syriac etc under Konattu Malpan. His educational centre functioned as the seminary of the Northern region. There was a good library at that centre. He studied there for one year and acquired more knowledge.

This was a decisive period for the Malankara Church. Reforma-

tion of the Church, which was the goal of English missionaries, was getting implemented through different means. Moreover a Syrian bishop named Yuyakkim Mar Coorilos, allegedly according to the decision of the Patriarch of Antioch, came to Malankara and started interfering in the administration of the church in an unprecedented manner. Even though the then Metropolitan of Malankara, Cheppad Mar Dionysius was a pious soul, it is said that he had been feeble hearted. Besides he had been vying with Mar Athanasius of Palakkunnathu for the position of Malankara Metropolitan. The missionaries and the government of Travancore recognised Mar Athanasius as the Malankara Metropolitan. Mar Dionysius was an old man and he found it impossible to resist the staunch political and social support of Mar Athanasius. Besides it was doubted that the leadership of Mar Athanasius would forego the doctrines of faith. In this context Mar Dionysius who wanted to entrust the position of Malankara Metropolitan with someone who was dominant, powerful and had good support, abdicated his throne for Yuyakkim Mar Coorilos. Thus a foreign bishop became the administrator of Indian christians who believe in the heritage of St. Thomas.

It is a historical truth that whenever Malankara Church desired for affiliations with exotic churches and their leaders, it has resulted in the destabilization and destruction of the church. The Portugese Roman Christians who were warmly accepted as our Christian brethren, papalised a considerable part of the Malankara Church. The English protestants who were welcomed with the expectation of doing good to the Malankara Church created two more factions out of it and divided it into three. Moreover they encroached the property of the church through royal decrees. The leadership of the Malankara Church was too weak to resist this tendency. It had to rely on a foreign church for the consecration of its bishops. Then the Syrian Orthodox Church cunningly came to our aid. After a while they started demanding that the Malankara Church should surrender all its material and spiritual rights and powers to the Syrian church

and tried and is still trying for this end through various means. Like other foreigners, they too broke a schismatic group off the Malankara Church. Subsequent developments are heading towards another split in the Malankara Church.

Yuyakkim Mar Coorilos came to Malankara in AD 1846. He is understood to be a cunning person with evil schemes. When he came to Malankara as the emissary of the Patriarch he had the signed letterpads of the Patriarch with him. After coming over to Malankara, he forged episcopal decrees in the name of the Patriarch as per his needs and even produced them before the law courts. But his perjury was exposed and in 1852 a court order banished him from the states of Travancore and Cochin. Thereafter he left for Malabar and lived there until 1857.

During this period, out of the fear that Mathews Mar Athanasius would encourage reformation, Joseph Ramban of Pulikkottil was sent to the Patriarchal headquarters at 'Dyer Becker' to be consecrated as bishop. In 1865 Patriarch Yakob II consecrated Joseph Ramban bishop with the name Mar Dionysius and subsequently the latter returned to Malankara.

It was during this time that Yuyakkim Mar Coorilos met and acquainted Deacon Geevarghese. Mar Coorilos appointed the intelligent, pious and linguistically endowed deacon as his secretary. Mar Coorilos ordained Deacon Geevarghese as full Deacon in September ('Thulam') 1865 (As per some records it is 1864), as priest and Arch-priest in October (Vrichikam) 1865. Geevarghese was eighteen years old at that time.

The undesirable activities and methods of Mar Coorilos and the factional strifes in the church disappointed Fr. Geevarghese. He had always carried a sense of the divine presence with him. He desired to keep away from all these affairs and in constant communion with God. Hence he didn't accept the administration of a parish and went to live in the monastery at Vettickal. He used to tell his visitors: "I have dedicated my life for God."

During the period of strife between Joseph Mar Dionysius of Pulikkottil and Mathews Mar Athanasius of Palakkunnathu for the position of Malankara Metropolitan, the Old Seminary was in the hands of the Reformists. There were no other facilities in the Southern regions to train deacons for Priesthood. In these circumstances Mar Dionysius once went and stayed at Paliyekkara Church, Thiruvalla. A person from Parumala named Mathen of Arikupurathu house paid a visit to the Metropolitan. Some other church elders were also present there. The Metropolitan placed the need of the church before them. Mr. Mathen of Arikupurathu offered to donate the land needed for the Seminary. What else was required was a good building and a good teacher. The people who assembled there said in one accord that the pious and scholarly Fr. Geevarghese of Chathuruthy would be an ideal choice as the teacher. The metropolitan of Pulikkottil communicated this preference to Fr. Geevarghese, which threw the latter into a dilemma. He disliked leaving the monastery at Vettickal. At the same time he hesitated to turn down the choice of the Metropolitan. Any how the Metropolitan permitted him to remain at Vettickal till the construction of the Parumala Seminary was completed.

On April 7, the day of the Feast of Assumption, 1872 AD Joseph Mar Dionysius professed Fr. Geevarghese of Chathuruthy as Ramban at Mulamthuruthy Marthoman Church. This was done as per the unanimous decision of the General body meeting of the parishoners. Rev. Geevarghese was twenty four years old then.

### **(b) Vettickal Monastery and Ramban Geevarghese of Chathuruthy**

Most Reverend Geevarghese Ramban was instrumental in reviving the monastic life in Malankara, in the model of the life of St. Antony of Egypt who lived in the third century AD. St. Antony was born as the son of wealthy parents in AD 251. He took the vows of monasticism at the age of twenty. He kept apart a portion of his wealth for his sister and donated the rest to the poor. Thereafter he

went to the desert and started his monastic life. “Similarly Geevarghese Ramban, after coming to Vettickal monastery started observing the vows of monasticism rigorously. He used to recite the prayers of penitence incessantly. As a result many who came to visit him had to go back without seeing him. Whenever he was not in prayer, the Ramban would be reading the Holy Bible and other religious books. Or else he would be genuflecting before God or meditating. He did not go for much medical treatment even if he was ill. The vows and prayers would double during the days of Fast. He would observe fasting at least till 3 pm and the meals thereafter would be quite frugal. After food he would copy Syriac books. His calligraphy was more or less like printing. He said his canonical prayers at the exact hours even at midnight.”

He was in the habit of tying a broad cloth-band round his waist and abdomen to keep the capacity of his stomach in check. He seldom bothered about the nourishment of his physique. Once, when he was at Vettickal, a painful abscess developed on his back. Ayurvedic doctors were of the view that it would aggravate. But the Ramban was undaunted. He refused medical treatment saying “The illness which appeared on its own will disappear on its own.” His father who came to know of the illness procured some ayurvedic medicines and sent them to him. The Ramban accepted them, but never made use of them. After a few days the abscess abated.

The Ramban lived for eleven years at Vettickal monastery. People in the neighbourhood came to know about the great ascetic and thronged the monastery for prayers and attended to the welfare of this hermitage. This was a new step.

The monastery at Vettickal belonged to the Mulamthuruthy Church. It is said that the church used to give grants for the welfare of Ramban Geevarghese. Besides he also got support from his home according to his requirements. When he shifted to the monastery, the Ramban was never worried about what he would eat and wear. His only thought was to become a sacrifice for the Lord.

“It was his life in this monastery at Vettickal and the observance of spiritual rigours that transformed the Metropolitan of Chathuruthy into a true devout, an ascetic like Eliah or St. John the Baptist, a divine personality like Isaiah and a monk, hermit and saint like St. Antony.”

Vettickal monastery was an ideal place for incessant communion with God. It was a holy spot of land devoid of the din and bustle of urbanity and polluted air. Here the life of Geevarghese dedicated to God from childhood, in no time, flourished and blossomed. Several people started coming there for prayer. Miracles and healing of diseases happened. Geevarghese Ramban continued his monastic life with disinterestedness oblivious of what was happening around him.

St. Gregorios of Parumala was a self-submitted offering to God. Even though the origins of that offering happened in his infancy, the total submission of this sacrificial offering occurred in the monastery at Vettickal.

## **II. Sundar Singh**

### **(a) Family background**

Sundar Singh was the youngest son of a rich and respected Sardar named Sher Singh. Sher Singh was the headman of his village and was held in high esteem by his villagers. Sundar Singh grew up as the apple of the eyes of the members of his family. Most Sikh families followed the practice of assembling together for worshipping God. They used to assemble every morning to read from their holy book and praise God.

The members of Sundar Singh’s family lived in mutual love and respect. His mother, who was a very pious woman, earned boundless respect from all others. This noble woman respected all religions equally. The ways of his mother influenced Sundar Singh deeply. The mother had been in the habit of gathering her children around her while praising God. In the woods nearby their house, there lived

an ascetic. The mother was in the habit of taking her children to this ascetic to seek his blessings and spiritual teachings. Once the mother said to her beloved son:

“Dear Son, You should ever long for peace of the Spirit. Love your religion. You shall grow up into a saintly Sadhu (ascetic) in future.”

The mother who had realized that the noblest experience in life was spiritual peace invited her children too into it. She imparted good thoughts to her son’s budding heart and passed away from this world. Sundar Singh was fourteen years old then. Later he used to refer emotionally to his mother in his speeches. In one of his speeches he said:

“I won’t stay in a heaven in which I can’t see my mother who died as a pious Sikh woman. I would ask my Christ to send me to the place where I could see my mother.”

Not long after the mother’s demise, Sundar Singh’s elder brother too died. The wounds inflicted by these two deaths might have compelled him to discover a new plane in his perspective of life. He says:

“These mishaps had been a great shock to me. I was shaken by them. The thought that I won’t be able to see those beloved one’s again grieved me very much. I felt dispossessed. Who will I be in my rebirth? The indefiniteness of these questions irritated me. I was broken hearted and the only solace available to me in Hinduism was bowing my head before the Laws of Fate ensuing from one’s actions.”

These deaths might have led him to understand the morality and ephemerality of life in this world.

Sundar Singh’s heart was full of love and misery. During this period he chanced upon a destitute old woman in the street. She was weak with hunger and cold. He gave her the money he had with

him. However when he asked his father to buy a woolen blanket for her, it was declined. Sundar Singh was bent on buying a blanket for the old woman. Hence he tried to steal some money from his father. The father discovered the theft but when questioned, Sundar Singh denied any compliance with the crime. Sundar Singh was stricken by remorse and he confessed his crime and the reason for doing so to his father the next day. The father then agreed to fulfil the desire of his son who had a good conscience. Thus that old woman received a good blanket.

### **(b) Education**

Mission communities from the West were coming on a large scale to India. They conducted their activities in India in two different ways. First of all they founded schools to provide English education. Secondly medical clinics were established in rural areas which did not have any medical facilities. Thus they could interact with the people in their area of work and provide help according to their needs. This phenomenon was happening in all parts of India. CMS, LMS, and Basal mission in Kerala, the Calvinists called Dutch reformed Church in North India engaged in missionary activities. It was during this period that the Christian Medical College Vellore, renowned in India and South Asia today, was founded by the Reformed Church Missionary Dr. Ida Scudder. The Presbyterian mission founded Ludhiana Medical College, Punjab during the same period.

A school was opened near Sundar Singh's house in Rampur. Even though English education was provided there, Bible learning too was insisted upon. This irritated Sundar Singh. People thought that the goal of this learning was religious conversion. Sundar Singh studied at this school unwillingly for one year. Next year he joined a government school at a place called Saniwahl. Sundar Singh retained great hatred for his former mission school in his heart.

Gradually this hatred grew into a hatred of Christianity and its

perpetrators. He joined with his fellow students in abusing and harming Christian missionaries. They had no qualms in storming and disparaging the preachers of Christianity.

### **(c) Conversion**

Chapter 7 of Acts of Apostles contains the description of stoning St. Stephen to death. At that time a youth named Saul was keeping the clothes of those who did the stoning (Acts 7:59). This passage doesn't contain a description of how the prayers and death of Stephen affected the life of Saul. However it seems that there was not even an element of peace in the heart of Saul when he angrily set off with the High Priest's letter of authority to Damascus to exterminate Christians. A great battle was going on inside his heart. The questions of right and wrong weighed him down heavily. He was relieved of the weight on his heart only when he heard the voice of Christ at the gates of Damascus. When the loud question "Saul, Saul.... Why do you harm me?" rang in his ears, Saul asked "Who are you, my Lord?" The reply he got was "I am the Jesus you are trying to harm." The miracle that happened here was that Saul who had taken the pledge to destroy the church of Christ was transformed into St. Paul who became instrumental in the growth of the Church of Christ.

An equivalent incident transformed Sundar Singh, a Sikh youth who used to stone Christian preachers, into Sadhu Sundar Singh who could live and die for Christ. On December 15, 1903 (in some records it was in 1904) Sundar Singh snatched the Holy Bible away from a preacher who happened to pass through Rampur. He tore the Holy book to pieces and threw it into fire. This incident happened somewhere near Sundar Singh's house (Some writers record that this Holy Bible belonged to Sundar Singh himself and it was received from his mission school. Sundar Singh burned it when his enmity to Christian religion peaked). When his father came to know about this he grew sad. He summoned his son and chided.

“O Son! Why did you resort to this folly which even fanatics hardly resort to? What is the benefit of setting a religious book to flames?”

Sundar Singh remained silent and didn't reply.

However we can gauge from subsequent events and his speeches this incident caused a great pain in his heart.

Sundar Singh lost his peace of mind completely. His heart pricked with pain. He felt that he was in a quandary. He bore the agony for three days. Then a terrible thought came to him. He wanted to put an end to his life that could not give him peace and joy. On the third day of setting the Holy Bible to flames - that is, on December 18 - a sleepless Sundar Singh got up at 3 am in the morning. After taking a bath in cold water he immersed himself in devout prayer. “O God! Kindly reveal yourself to me if you are a living God.” He decided to throw himself before a speeding train and commit suicide if his prayers were not answered before five o'clock in the morning.

Sundar Singh says: “I remained in prayer till 4.30 am. Then an unexpected and strange incident occurred. I saw a great and intense light in the room. Something like a breakout of fire. I looked around but could not see any fire. The light grew in intensity and in this light appeared an unexpected person - Jesus Christ whom I believed to have died. I will never forget till eternity his glory and luminosity and the few words he said in Hindusthani. “Why do you rebel against me? You have prayed to know the path of truth. Then why don't you accept it.” These words got inscribed in my heart as if they were etched with an electric current. I fell prostrate before Him. My heart was filled with indescribable joy and peace. From that moment onwards, my life underwent a sea of change. The old Sundar Singh died and in order to serve the living Christ a new Sundar Singh was born.”

Immediately Sundar Singh went to his father and told him about his vision. However the father didn't consider it anything more than

the hallucinatory experience of a teenaged boy who had been grieved by the death of his mother and brother. The boy had burned a bible only three days before. Hence he advised Sundar Singh thus: "Go to bed dear son! It is only three days you burned their bible. Now you say that you have become a Christian convert." Sundar Singh narrated his experience to all the near and dear ones in the family. They started questioning his balance of mind. There were discussions among them whether it was the beginning of a mental disease itself. They could in no way look upon it as an experience similar to that of Samuel when He called him for His work (1 Samuel 3).

In April 1903 (or 1904?), a few months before this incident, a few missionaries and Indian soldiers had assembled in Sialkot of Punjab for prayers. In those days the christian church in Punjab was in a deplorable state. The reason for it was the lethargy of lazy and dispirited Churchmen. A new community called 'The prayer group of Punjab' originated after this prayer meeting. They started praying for the spiritual awakening of Punjab. Was there any connection between the prayers of this Christian fellowship and Jesus Christ's appearance to Sundar Singh? Only God knows.

The divine vision of Sundar Singh was the beginning of his heavenly experiences. Many people doubted the truth of this divine vision. But for Sundar Singh it was the realisation of the spiritual joy and peace he had desired for . It enabled him to encounter any hardship in life. It was this feeling of spiritual joy that enabled him to sing hymns even in the midst of grief and hardships.

For the Sikhs, forsaking their own religion and getting converted to another religion was a humiliating affair. Hence when Sundar Singh said that he had become a Christian, his father, paternal and maternal uncles tried their best to dissuade him. Many of them were landlords and officials of the king. Even though they offered even their properties, Sundar Singh's decision could not be diverted. He had decided to count upon what was gain for him as losses for the sake of Christ.

Sundar Singh, ‘the disobedient son’ was dispelled from his house and banished from his caste. After serving a supper for the last time, he was sent out of his house. Sundar Singh, spoke about his experiences of this first night during his speech at Tavenis on March 1, 1922.

“They removed my clothes and threw me out naked. It was a terribly cold night. I sat shivering under a tree the whole night. I hadn’t known hardships or suffering till then. I had grown up a midst luxuries, comforts and much pampering. Hence it was very difficult for me to undergo suffering. Satan brought in a tempting thought that yesterday I enjoyed peace and comfort at home and now I was suffering hardship. I had been dissatisfied with the luxurious life at my home. But I enjoyed a lot of peace under the tree on that terribly cold night. That was my first night in heaven.”

Next morning, Sundar Singh borrowed clothes from someone and boarded a train to Patiala. However he alighted at Ropar railway station in order to visit the Christians living there. This was prompted by God. There were several Christians, who had fled from Sundar Singh’s native place because of their conversion to Christianity, residing at this place. Many of them were known to Sundar Singh. Sundar Singh went to the house of the Presbyterian Pastor P. C. Uppal. Suddenly he developed a severe stomach pain and started vomiting. Besides blood started oozing out of his mouth and nostrils. A doctor came and examined Sundar Singh. Sundar Singh had been poisoned because they wanted him to die. Sundar Singh fell unconscious. The doctor went back thinking that he would die. The pastor and his wife kept vigil and nursed him. Next morning the doctor came to see a dead Sundar Singh. However to his astonishment, he saw that Sundar Singh whom he thought would have died, was recovering. The doctor who came to know about Sundar Singh’s belief in God, bought and read a New Testament and later became a missionary in Burma. During one of his preaching conventions in Burma Sundar Singh met this doctor again. To the doctor’s question “Do you know me?” Sundar Singh replied

“we met when I was in my sickbed. They praised God for the God-given opportunity to meet once again.”

From Ropar, Sundar Singh went to the Christian missionaries in Ludhiana. In AD 1905 he joined a boarding school there. Sardar Sher Singh who came to know that his son was in Ludhiana, came there with a group of people to take him forcefully away from there. However he couldn't succeed in his designs. The Sardar was overcome by grief and he wept in front of his son. Seeing the father's grief, Sundar Singh also wept. But he stood firm in his decision. Since the Sardar was a very influential person, the issue became complicated enough to pose threats against the Mission Centre at Ludhiana. Considering the safety of Sundar Singh, the missionaries sent him to Subatu in Shimla. On September 3, 1905 AD, the day on which he became sixteen years old, Sundar Singh got baptised at St. Thomas Church, Shimla according to the rites of the Anglican Church. An Anglican missionary named Rev. J. Redman administered his baptism. After the baptism the missionaries extended special care to Sundar Singh. On the thirty third day of his baptism, Sundar Singh decided to wear saffron clothes thereafter following the practice of Indian ascetics. Thus he realised the desire of his mother. Sundar Singh says: “The Holy Spirit transformed me into a Christian. But it was my mother who transformed me into a hermit.”

Sadhu Sundar Singh eschewed the bonds of the material world and its luxuries. He wore saffron clothes and embarked on a new stage of his life. Then he made his first preachings of the gospels at his native place, Rampur. The people of Rampur listened to his preaching diligently. In the evening, Sadhu went to his house. But he was accorded a cold reception there. He was served food far away from the premises of the house, as if he were a low caste person. The father commanded him to leave before dawn and prohibited him from setting foot again in the house. He spent the night under a tree. He got up in the morning and left for other villages of Punjab in order to preach the gospels.

The Anglican bishop of Lahore, Dr. Leoffroy desired to ordain Sundar Singh a priest and admitted him at St. John's Divinity School, Lahore for this purpose. Sundar Singh studied there from December 1909 to July 1910. It was not a period of great spiritual attainments for him. He learned several things but became convinced that none of them will be useful to the path he had selected. Hence he left the Seminary. He says about his decision thus:

“It (the Divinity School) was fun, but it was not spiritually useful. Even though I could learn historical facts and explanations of several things, I learned spiritual lessons at the feet of Jesus Christ.”

Even though Sadhu received his baptism from the Anglican Church, he was grieved by the Lahore bishop's insistence on preaching and serving only within that church. There was a recommendation and decision to ordain Sundar Singh as deacon of that Church. It was the first step of priesthood. He had been granted permission and license to preach in the Anglican Churches. Sadhu was weighed down with the thought that all these would limit his activities in the vast field of God. Hence he returned his license for preaching to the bishop and informed him that he was not accepting the position of a deacon. The bishop respected the sincerity of the Sadhu, who had accepted his desire to worship in all people, as the tenet of his life. Their hearty relationship was retained throughout their lives without any estrangement.

Sadhu says about his decision to leave the seminary: “Since the genesis of theology is in the Lord's court, he will enable us to understand the truth we could grasp from other places, after years of study, within a moment. If ever I learned or acquired anything, it happened when I remained alone before the Lord.”

In the modern times what we receive from the seminaries of the Christian Churches are mostly information and knowledge. The Churches should ponder whether they are providing sufficient nourishment to spiritual life. Orderly and systematic teaching and wor-

ship are good. It will teach the student discipline. Our worship should not be a mere ritual. Instead it should become a means of spiritual awakening and communion with God. Priestly education that is evaluated only in terms of the quantum of learning and scholarship and not on the message received from the Lord might become futile.

#### **(d) Early experiences in Evangelism**

Sadhu Sundar Singh's life experiences were much similar to those of Apostle St. Paul. St. Paul had the conviction that God had set him apart for preaching gospels among the gentiles. Similarly Sundar Singh had the conviction that God has called him to preach the salvific gospel of Jesus Christ in those regions of North India and in Afganistan, Tibet etc. where the Light of Christ hadn't dawned. After the bitter experiences from his home and family, Sundar Singh travelled around the villages of Punjab and preached about Christ. Then he went to Afghanistan through Khyber pass and from there to Kashmir to preach the word of God. Initially he faced great opposition at a place called Jalalabad. But later the people repented and sought his pardon. Sundar Singh lived with them for one whole week and confessed Christ. From there, Sadhu left for Kotgar. In 1906 he acquainted with an American missionary S. E. Stoke. Stokes also started working together. They went without food or lodging for several days. Sadhu writes about one night in which they took lodging next to a manger:

“We spent that night in prayer thinking about how the king and creator of the world condescended to be born in the manger at Bethlehem for the sake of mankind. In the morning we left for another place.”

Sundar Singh never had any complaints against anything that be fell him. He accepted everything with joy. He considered his hunger, thirst, stones and thorns as his normal experiences of life. Nothing like wanderings, misery, hunger, rain or frost could prevent his activities. When he was tired with fatigue he would go to Kotagar in the Himalayas and take rest for a few days.

Once when Sundar Singh and Mr. Stokes were preaching in the Kangra valley, the former fell ill. He became unconscious because of fever and stomach pain. Stokes panicked and while he was trying to keep Sundar Singh's head up asked:

“How do you feel now?”

“It is a very joyful experience to me. How sweet it is to suffer miseries for the sake of Christ.”

They reached the homestead of a European, who was known to Stokes. He was not a religious person. But after his interaction with Sundar Singh for a few days, he became a good follower of Christ. His was a memorable conversion. Sadhu Sundar Singh and Stokes worked together for one year. In 1908 Stokes bid goodbye to Sundar Singh and retired to USA. Sundar Singh decided to leave for Tibet.

C. F. Andrews, the world famous professor of St. Stephen's College, Delhi once visited Sundar Singh and Stokes at Kotgar during a summer vacation. He has recorded what he saw there as follows:

“There is a cave in the hilly parts of Kotgar village. Sundar Singh and Stokes lived along with five orphan boys in this cave. It was a strange family. Two of the children were sons of lepers and were under observation as leprosy suspects. One was lame and another was blind. These children had been urchins and beggars. The two missionaries were adopted by them as their father and mother. The children were spared of their pang of hunger and poverty because of the kindness and care of these two men. Even though their meals were frugal, I haven't come across another family as happy as them.”

The thought pattern and view of life of several people who interacted with Sundar Singh underwent a drastic change. Sadhu was greatly interested in interacting with students. His intimacy with C. F. Andrews and Sushil Kumar, the principal of St. Stephen's College, Delhi led him to interact with college students. Such occasions

enabled him to inspire spiritual fire, sense of equality, charity and Christian service mindedness among students.

Sadhu's intense spiritual strength could mellow even cruel wild animals. They behaved like deer in his presence. Several incidents of this kind have been recorded. Swaram Singh, a known Christian leader of those days, has recorded his experiences of spending one night with Sadhu.

“Before we went to bed one night, we saw some moucing lights in the valley. Sundar Singh said that it might be hunters poaching a tiger. After midnight, I woke up hearing someone pacing about in the room. I saw the Sadhu descending the steps from the room. Since I knew that he was in the habit of spending several hours in solitary prayer, I didn't get up from bed. After a longtime, Sadhu didn't return. I became worried and looked out through the window at the woods around. I saw Sadhu sitting motionless on the stone steps. I felt that something was moucing to his right. Yes it was a wild animal. I understood that it was a leopard when it came very near to the Sadhu. I stood there transfixed in fear. I couldn't even raise my voice. But the Sadhu stretched out his arm towards the wild animal and stroked it. The pleasure of Sadhu's touch mellowed the creature. Like a pet dog, it lay beside the Sadhu stretching its head upto his strokes. It was an unforgettable sight for me. Sadhu returned to the room after a while. He went to bed and fell asleep soon. I wondered who gave him power and domination over such cruel wild animals and remained awake throughout the night.”

Sundar Singh shared St. Paul's view of life that trials promote endurance, promotes spirituality and spirituality promotes hope. The experiences of Sundar Singh were similar to those of St. Paul during the latter's period of evangelical mission. St. Paul says:

“I have worked harder, been put in jail often, been whipped times without number, and faced death again and again. Five different times the Jews gave me their terrible thirty-nine lashes. Three times

I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. Once I was in the open sea all night and the whole next day. I have travelled many weary miles and have been often in great danger from flooded rivers, and from robbers, from my own people. I have been in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the Churches” (2 Corinthians 11:23-31).

Sundar Singh too, like St. Paul, had to suffer several tribulations during his preaching of the Gospels. However, along with trials, he could also experience the unique caring of God. Once he was preaching the Gospels in Tibet. It was the season of harvest. While travelling through a field of grains, he spoke to some harvesters. When he talked about Christ, they became angry and violent. A short tempered man hurled a cobble at Sundar Singh. It hit the Sadhu on his head and the Sadhu started bleeding profusely. Suddenly this assailant fell sick. Sadhu went upto him, took his scythe and started reaping for his sake. Seeing this, the other people who had come for harvest, felt love and respect for the Sadhu. Sadhu talked to them about Christ till dusk. In the evening, he bid goodbye to them and went to the nearby village. The harvesters, after the threshing process was over, found that they got more grain than they had expected. They hunted after the Sadhu but could not find him anywhere.

Tibet was Sundar Singh’s favourite ground for his evangelical activities. The people of Tibet were followers of Buddhism and were following meaningless rituals and practices. Sadhu desired to see the light of Jesus Christ dawn there. Hence he overcame every likely obstacle to go to Tibet several times and preach the gospels there. He had to suffer a lot of trials and tribulations during this period. He had to live days on end without food or lodging. He lived on water from wild brooks and fruits from forests. His sole possessions included a Holy Bible in Urdu and a blanket. Once he went to sleep in

a den. When he woke up he saw a large leopard fast asleep beside him. On another day he saw a poisonous viper on his blanket. On another occasion he was sitting on a rock in deep prayer when a black leopard came roaming around as if to guard him.

The experiences of Sundar Singh during this period exemplified the word of God given in Psalms 91:13. "You shall tread upon the lion and the cobra, the young lion and the serpent you shall trample underfoot." He had to suffer physical torture at several places he preached the gospels.

An IAS officer and member of the Arya Samaj describes his experience with Sadhu Sundar Singh which kindled his respect for the Sadhu and which enabled him to become a follower of Christ in later years: Once he was walking down a mountain pass towards a valley. He saw an ascetic youth coming up the mountain path and going past him. The IAS officer felt that the ascetic's personality was magnetic and started following him up the hill. He was curious to know who this ascetic was. The Sadhu walked along swiftly. After a while they reached a village. Sadhu sat under a tree and started singing. A few villagers who heard his song, assembled around. But when they realized that the Sadhu was singing hymns in praise of Christ, they grew angry. A villager named Kruparam slapped the Sadhu on his face. The blow was so severe that the Sadhu fell on the ground. The Sadhu was injured; he had bruises in his face, head and elbows. However he did not utter a word against his assailant. He tore some cloth from his turban and wrapped the wounds. After that he stood on his knees and prayed for Kruparam. He then spoke to those assembled that Jesus Christ has taught that one should love one's enemies and should pray for them and that He had prayed for those who had crucified Him. This was a novel experience for Kruparam. All those who were assembled were moved and Kruparam apologised. The IAS officer had been watching all these. Sadhu left them and went elsewhere. Kruparam got converted to Christianity. He confessed Christ openly and got baptized. The IAS officer has recorded that he too got converted to Christianity because of this incident.

### **(e) The miracle ascetic of Kailas and the Secret Ascetic Mission**

Sadhu Sundar Singh underwent various types of experiences and developed numerous personal relationships during this period of his life. Fr. T. K. George quotes from Sadhu's travelogue in Urdu, a miraculous experience that Sadhu had in Kailas peak.

“I went from Tehri to Kailas Peak via Gangotri. I met the ascetic accidentally at Kailas. As I was travelling in the direction of Manasarovar Lake, I spotted a stone cross raised on a hill. Later I understood that this cross of victory was raised at that uninhabited spot 13,000 feet above sea level by Nestorians who had come to Tibet to preach the gospels. As I was climbing down hill from that spot, I slipped on the ice and fell in front of a cave. As I pulled myself upright after the fall, I saw an ascetic in deep meditation inside the cave. His beard and hair and nails had grown long and his body was covered with hairs. He was indeed a terrible creature to look at! At first I was terrified. But the ascetic opened his glistening eyes and gestured to me to sit down. Then the thought that he was not a fearsome person, but a true ascetic consoled me.”

This incident happened during the summer of AD 1912.

Before entering into a conversation, the ascetic said that they would pray for a while. The prayer was said in chosen words and was concluded in the name of Lord Jesus. Then he opened a scroll in Greek language and started reading chapter five of the gospel according to St. Mathew. Sadhu Sundar Singh was overjoyed. He requested the ascetic to reveal who he really was. The ascetic narrated his story briefly: I belonged to a Muslim family of Alexandria, Egypt. Because of my religiosity, I became an ascetic at the age of 30. Even though I read the Quran and said my prayers regularly, I didn't get true peace of mind. In those days I happened to hear the preaching of an ascetic who reached Alexandria from India and thereafter I had my repentance. At the age of 35, I got baptized by

Jarnos who was the nephew of Francis Xavier. He presented me with this scroll of scriptures. I went about preaching till the age of seventy five. I could speak twenty one languages. When I felt that I was too weak to wander around preaching, I left for this hermitage.”

Sundar Singh continues:

“The surprising and joyful words of the ascetic were imprinted in my ears. I felt I wanted to live with him for ever. But alas! He didn’t permit me to stay there beyond twenty four hours. However I can see him in my soul every now and then. The ascetic used to travel around the world in spirit. Initially I was doubtful of this faculty. Later, when the ascetic told me not only my personal details, but also the facts pertaining to others, I became convinced that he could travel around the world in spirit despite being physically stationary. We conversed on various subjects. He told me that we can enter the world of spirits and commune with the departed saints and that those who have departed to the Other World are not far away from us.

Sadhu believes that the ascetic might be more than 300 years old.

The belief of the ascetic regarding the world of spirits was beyond Sundar Singh’s comprehension. The ascetic said that an incident that will happen in Sadhu’s life soon would dispell all his doubts. The Sadhu started pondering what that incident might be. Sadhu went away from the ascetic to another village. He reached that village named Tehri only after walking a long distance. But the Sadhu’s real destination was yet another village near to Tehri. The villagers who came to know that Sundar Singh was a Christian, directed him through a path that led to the forest interiors. Sadhu walked and walked but failed to find a village. It was getting dark. At last he reached the banks of a river. Night fell and the loud screams of wild animals flooded the place.

He looked at the other bank of the river and saw a man warming himself up beside a fire. The man shouted across to Sundar Singh: “Don’t worry, I will come to your aid.” He swam across the river towards Sadhu and asked Sundar Singh to climb fearlessly on to his back. Sundar Singh obliged. When they reached the other shore, Sundar Singh looked around to thank him for his help. But the man had disappeared. The Sadhu understood that God had sent him help from the invisible world and started believing in the words of the ascetic.

Sundar Singh came to know about another truth from the ascetic. The ascetic had said that an organization called ‘Secret Ascetic Mission’ was functioning in North India. Even though the ascetics are Hindu in their apparel and outward expressions, they are Christians. There are about 24000 members in this society. They work for Christ secretly. There are two types of ascetics among them. The first group is called ‘swamis’ and the second one ‘disciples.’ The swamis wear saffron coloured apparels. They have received baptism and the Sacred Supper. They join together in the mornings for prayers and fall prostrate while they pray. They believe that they can have vision of Christ if they pray with concentration and purity of heart. The ascetic himself is a member of this society.

When two members of the society meet together they exchange the greeting “Hail Lord Jesus of Nazareth.” Even though Sadhu admonished them to confess Christ in the open, they were not prepared to do so.

### **(f) Sundar Singh’s Fasting**

During this period Sundar Singh was directed to do gospel work among the Sikh migrants in Canada. But he could not fulfil his mission due to technical obstacles. So Sundar Singh decided to realise two desires he had in his heart after baptism. The first one was to undertake fasting just like Jesus Christ who had gone on fasting for

forty days in the desert before his public ministry. The second desire was to visit Palestine - the land where Jesus travelled and taught, got crucified and resurrected. There were hinderances in fulfilling the second desire. So the Sadhu decided to undertake the first desire.

Thus he reached his spot of meditation two miles away from Rishikesh. He selected the region called 'Kebuli' for his fasting. But Sundar Singh could not fulfil his desire to complete forty days in fasting. Bishop Appa Swamy, who was Sundar Singh's friend and a known man of religion thinks that the fasting lasted only for 23 days. Sundar Singh reached 'Kebuli' forest on January 27, 1913. On February 20 some bamboo cutters found and carried a too weak Sadhu to Rishikesh. The Sadhu was taken from there to Rishikesh. News that Sadhu Sundar Singh died went around and was published as the headline news in several newspapers. Prayers and meetings commemorating him were held in various places. The members of St. Thomas Church, Shimla where he had his baptism, decided to raise a memorial stone to honour his name. Nevertheless Sundar Singh resuscitated within a few weeks and came to St. Thomas Church to preach. It is confessed that Sundar Singh had great spiritual enlightenment after his fasting. He received the strength to control his thoughts and desires totally. Sadhu himself testifies to this through his words:

“As my physical strength waned, my happiness and peace increased from this I understood that their origins are not physical but heavenly. The spirit outlines the body and exists into eternity. The brain is only an office of the soul. Before my fasting I had been tormented by several trials and temptations. I used to complain when I suffered from hunger and thirst. I was tempted to abandon asceticism itself when I suffered taunts and tortures. I have even thought of returning to family life and keep my communion with God as a pious and devout Christian. However after the fasting I became convinced that the Lord has called me for a different life and that the

joyful experience of extra sensory experience is far superior to family life.”

After the fasting, Sundar Singh developed St. Paul’s attitude to life that “For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Philippians 1:21). He developed the desire to join with his Saviour as early as possible. He used to say “Why does my Saviour tarry so much?” During this period he had an intense longing to complete his work in this world quickly. When he regained his health a bit, he made his preparations to leave for Tibet. He had the desire to die there as a martyr. But he had to turn back as he developed severe diarrhea during the journey. Later he went to Nepal.

There is absolutely no correlation between the gospel work of Sadhu Sundar Singh and that of the contemporary gospelists who proudly labour to ‘Christianise’ the Christians. Sundar Singh wanted to spread the gospels in places where the Christians were prohibited. Even though his life was at risk, he was prompted by the compulsion of his love for Christ. One who bears such a mission for the sake of Christ will have to pay a great price for it. It will be painful as well. But doing ‘gospel work’ among the Christians doesn’t require to pay a price. Moreover it will be an easy and challenge free work for God. Had the work of some contemporaries been like that of Sundar Singh, the stagnant Christian churches of today could have co existed without quarrels.

The scars of the tribulations suffered by Sadhu in Nepal remained with him till the end of his life. Once he was preaching in a town when the authorities caught and bound him up. They left him there one day and one night to be bitten by blood-sucking leeches. The leeches sucked away most of the blood in his body. He praised God and sang hymns for the opportunity to suffer for the sake of his Saviour.

Sadhu gained several enemies during this period. They propagandised that Sadhu was a cheat and many of his stories were

fictitious. His fasting escapade and the news of his death were alleged to be his own tricks for self-advertisement. There was a lot of criticism against him in the newspapers. Some even wrote that the tribulations he is said to have suffered in Nepal and the mysterious ascetic he saw in Kailas were products of his imagination and there are no witnesses to them. Many of these allegations were popularised through pro-Catholic church newspapers in the European countries as well as in India. However a Catholic publication from Paris came to the support of the Sadhu. In 1925 it stated that the Sadhu was a true Catholic because the true Catholic church exists where Christ is and that Sadhu was a saint called by God. This could prevent the darts of criticism at least temporarily.

Tibet had a period in its history when it lend its ear to Christian teachings. The Roman Catholic church had undertaken missionary activities there. But later this mission spirit died off in response to the Chinese and Russian influences upon this country.

Another Sikh named Karthar Singh had preached the gospels and suffered martyrdom in Tibet. He was a rich and respectable youth from Patiala. In his youth he was attracted to Christ and dedicated his life for the sake of Christ. He selected Tibet as the venue of his gospel work. Tibet had prohibited Christian religious activities. Karthar Singh spoke against this law and was sentenced to death. There was a terrible method of execution in Tibet of those days. The culprit would be wound in the hide of wild buffallo and would be left in the sun. As the sun intensifies, the hide shrinks and the culprit inside would be asphyxiated.

As the time of his death Karthar Singh said:

“This life which I am giving back to my Saviour, is a gift from him. Even if I get thousands of lives like this, I will dedicate them for that divine love. O Lord Jesus Christ! I entrust my soul in your hands.” The death of Karthar Singh reminds us of the persecution suffered by Christians in the early periods of Christianity. When Sundar Singh

came to know about the stories of Karthar Singh's execution, he became more inspired and desired to become a martyr like Karthar Singh. During one of his preachings at Patiala railway station, he mentioned the end of Karthar Singh's life. He noticed a man wailing at a distance. It was Karthar Singh's father. Sundar Singh talked with that sad man. The father said that he too was christian but was refraining from confessing it openly. Sundar Singh became truly glad at this.

Sadhu used to narrate anecdotes to embellish his preaching. A sample anecdote is given below. Once Sundar Singh and a man from Tibet were climbing up a hill. They came across another traveller lying unconscious in the snow. Sundar Singh asked for the help of the fellow traveller, to carry the fainted man to a safe spot. But the fellow traveller didn't heed and went forward. Sundar Singh lifted the fainted man up onto his back up hill. He was troubled by the weight of the man but managed to walk along. Soon the body temperature of the fainted man rose as he and the Sadhu exchanged their physical warmth through huddling together. He regained consciousness and the Sadhu also felt energised. After a while they saw a man lying dead and frozen in their path. It was none other than the fellow traveller who had walked along leaving them behind. But Sundar Singh and the man whom he carried reached the next village safely. Sadhu used to quote this example when he preached on the biblical verse "whosoever is desirous of saving his life shall lose it; Whosoever gives up this life for my sake shall find it."

There were staunch oppositions against the gospels in the villages and towns of Tibet where Sundar Singh had preached. As a result he was subjected to various kinds of physical suffering. The judges were called 'Lamas.' Sadhu was arrested for preaching at a place called 'Rasaar.' He was taken to the court of the local Lama who sentenced him to death. Sadhu was thrown into a covered locked well and the key was given in Lama's custody. Sadhu remained in this dirty well three days and three nights welcoming his

death. He was glad that the time to reach the court of his saviour had come. Simultaneously a doubt whether God had forsaken him also crept in. He remained in prayer without food or water. Suddenly someone lifted the lid of the well and threw a rope down. The Sadhu was asked to hold on to the rope tightly and was slowly lifted upwards. Sadhu climbed out of the well and turned around. To his dismay, he found the lid still locked and the man who lifted him up was nowhere to be seen. Sadhu understood that God had saved him by sending one of his angels. After taking rest for a while, he returned to the village and confessed Christ again. The Lama was black with anger when he heard about this. He ordered Sundar Singh to leave the place.

Sundar Singh left the place for another neighbouring village. This incident is similar to the release of Apostles by God's angel from captivity, described in Acts of the Apostles chapter 5 (Acts 5:18-32).

## 5

# Mathews Mar Athanasius and Reformation

A large part of our church history is intimately connected with the history of individuals. The phenomenon known as ‘Reformation’ that arose in the church, was one of the several components that shaped the thoughts and actions of St. Gregorios of Parumala. We have already discussed the origin and development of this phenomenon in the previous chapter.

Historical records testify that Mathews Mar Athanasius of Palakkunnathu remained steadfast in the existing faith of Malankara Church till the end of his life. Even though critics like E. M. Philip, the author of ‘Indian Church of St. Thomas’, claim that it was the Metropolitan’s diplomatic strategy, they too don’t record any aberration in faith. Then where lay the problem?

Churches, both old and new, are likely to develop faulty practices that require to be eliminated carefully from time to time. If such practices are not diligently extricated from time to time, they will become fossilised as the faith of the Church in future and the laity would revere them more than they revere the fundamental dogmas of faith. One such practice that developed in certain Orthodox Churches in olden days, was slaughter of poultry on the day of the Feast of St. George. We do not know how this practice came into existence. Mathews Mar Athanasius is recorded to have opposed this practice (Feast?). If an Orthodox Metropolitan prohibits some illogical and unchristian practices associated with feasts in churches, it is not right for us to denounce it as violating our dogmas of faith. Even Patriarch Peter who convened the Synod at Mulanthuruthy is said to have removed certain erroneous trends existing in the parishes then.

Mathews Mar Athanasius was a brave soul. He used to address the unquestioned and powerful non-native ‘Divans’ of Kerala by their name. E. M. Philip, the writer and biographer, is a staunch critic of Mar Athanasius. Yet he confesses that Mar Athanasius didn’t find fault with the faiths and rituals of the Church he had been born into and didn’t deviate from its faith. He had the courage to oppose wrong doings openly. Those who became Reformists were aware of the need of a bishop’s help for their growth and development. Some well known families and missionaries in the southern parts of Kerala supported this move. There were different reasons for this. The Reformists were on intimate terms with the Metropolitan. Besides he had been ordained a Metropolitan without the prior consent of some powerful men of the Church and had a royal way of speaking which made them jealous. Moreover some were doubtful and afraid of his predilections and sympathies to the reformist faith of his paternal uncle Abraham Malpan. Hence the thought that he should somehow or other be kept away from the church arose from some pockets of ecclesiastical power. However Mar Athanasius didn’t vacillate from the faith he had confessed, before and after being raised as the Metropolitan of Malankara or even when he was ousted from office against natural justice unreasonably. This points to a question. What did Mar Athanasius desire for - a reformation in faith or a reformation in rituals? What was his role in the Reformation process? Did he desire for reformation at all?

This is an issue to be deliberated at length. Moreover we have to concentrate on what we have been discussing. Hence for the time being, we may spare there questions.

Malankara Church was going through hard times. The position of Malankara Metropolitan became a tightly contested one. Mar Dionysius of Cheppad (Dionysius IV) was a pious yet weak ruler. He abdicated his throne for a foreign bishop named Mar Coorilos who ruled with the connivance of the Patriarch. Mar Coorilos proclaimed himself as the Metropolitan of Malankara. He had kept

proofs of his legitimacy with him. We had mentioned about them in the previous chapter. Mar Athanasius also tried to sustain his position as Malankara Metropolitan. He had the order from the Patriarch, the co operation of British administration and other favourable conditions up his sleeve. Besides he was naturally bold and diplomatic. The people of Malankara Church who were rather unorganized and who lacked a strong leadership got divided into two factions and started vying against each other bitterly. The initial victory was with Mar Athanasius. This was due to the favours and support he received from the British administration and the reluctance of princely rulers to interfere in the affairs of the church. The plethora of petitions filed by both parties before the government became a great headache to the administrators and the government of Travancore. Finally the British Resident suggested for judicial solution in the matter and the Divan asked the Metropolitan to 'plead before a law court.' "If the court could issue a verdict regarding any one church, the principle involved in that verdict could be employed in settling the issues of other churches as well."

Thus the church which went to court in the later half of the nineteenth century, could not get out of it even in the early half of the 21st century and is undergoing a period of intense spiritual draught. As suggested by the Resident and the Divan, Mar Dionysius V filed a suit regarding one church in the civil court. But the verdict went in favour of Mar Athanasius. All cases and verdicts went in his favour. Thus the "government and law court shut their doors against Mar Dionysius V."

This led to the onset of the authority of Syrian Patriarch over the Malankara Church. Dionysius V requested the help of the Patriarch. The then reigning Patriarch Ignatius Peter III counted upon this as a good opportunity. He decided to capitalize on this opportunity to expand the Syrian Church. "The Patriarch was bent on ploughing any field where he could spread the roots of the Syrian Church." He decided to come over to India. In 1874 he reached

England and met officials like the India secretary. He submitted requests and informed them of his views regarding the state of the church in India. To crown all those, he also paid a visit to Queen Victoria and received gifts from her. Thus victorious and jubilant, the Patriarch reached Malankara in 1875. Immediately after his arrival he met the king of Travancore and requested the cancellation of the royal proclamation in favour of Mathews Mar Athanasius. Thereafter the state of Travancore withdrew its right to interfere in the proclamation and withdrawal of Metropolitans and issued on March 4, 1876 a new order to all factions of Christians to settle their claims and disputes through court verdicts. The Patriarch desired not only to retain the supremacy of the Syrian Church of Antioch but also to organize the church administration in a systematic fashion. He divided the See of Malankara into different dioceses and appointed Metropolitans in each and collected written agreements of allegiance from them. Moreover he travelled and visited several churches for obtaining similar agreements from them too but couldn't realise his goal. This administrative reform can be looked upon in two ways. The first perspective is that the Patriarch wanted to consolidate his supremacy. The second one is that a single Metropolitan was not enough to administer a large church spanning across two princely states and the church is likely to develop schisms and stagnation. Hence more dioceses and Metropolitans could make the governance more successful. The Malankara Church had been administratively independent and hence its activities were not satisfactory. The activities of the parishes had been governed by age old practices. A written constitution and written procedures of church administration were lacking. The rights and powers of the Metropolitans, priests and parishes had not been defined. The people looked upon the Metropolitan as a godly figure. The church constitution came into existence only in 1934.

In July 1876, the Patriarch convened a meeting of Church representatives at Mulamthuruthy. This came to be known as Synod of Mulamthuruthy. Mar Dionysius V was elected as the Metropolitan

of Malankara at this Synod. Moreover six more Metropolitans were ordained for the Malankara church. In the ordination that took place at Paravur church on December 10, 1876, Kadavil Paulose Mar Athanasius for Kottayam Diocese, Geevarghese Mar Yulios of Konattu for Thumpamon diocese, Geevarghese Mar Coorilos of Ambattu for Ankamali diocese and Geevarghese Mar Gregorios of Chathuruthil of Niranam diocese were ordained. At the Chiralayam (Kunnamkulam) church Paulose Mar Ivanios of Murimattathil (Later the first Catholicos of Malankara) and Simon Mar Dionysius of Karottuveettil were also ordained. The Patriarch obtained documents of allegiance from all of them. But when he asked the Malankara Metropolitan Mar Dionysius V to sign such a document, the latter became suspicious of the damages it could bring to the Malankara church, and diplomatically evaded such a commitment. Even though the Patriarch directly visited several churches he could obtain agreements from only twelve churches.

Patriarch Peter didn't know any languages other than Syriac and Arabic. Some historians say that he didn't know a word in English. When he came to Malankara he was in need of a translator and Geevarghese Ramban of Chathuruthy was delegated for this purpose. Thus Geevarghese Ramban could interact with the Patriarch at close quarters. He could visit several churches accompanying the Patriarch and could work as the Patriarch's translator and secretary. Thus he had a direct experience of all the major churches in Malankara. The Ramban played an active role in the consecration of the Holy Chrism at Mulamthuruthy in 1876 and also in the Synod of Mulamthuruthy.

Geevarghese Ramban of Chathuruthy was only twenty nine years old when he was ordained a bishop. Hence everyone called him 'Kochu Thirumeni' (the young bishop). After the consecration, all the Metropolitans stayed at Vettickal Dayara for 40 days and immersed themselves in prayer and meditation. Then they left for the respective dioceses to which they had been raised.

We have seen in the previous chapter that a christian community leader named Koruthu Mathan of Arikupurathu had consented to donate 30 rods of square land (about 2 acres) to Joseph Mar Dionysius of Pulikkottil. The deed of this donation was written on Karkitakam 13, 1047 as per the Malayalam Era, but was registered at the Office of Registration at Thiruvalla on 16 Chingam 1048. Besides Koruthu Mathan also constructed a small church on his land lying to the east of the donated plot. Later his sons donated this land also to Mar Dionysius and donated an elephant named ‘Kanjirappalli Velu’ to raise funds for the expansion of the church. What broadmindedness!

By 1877, a building named ‘Azhippura’ for accomodating the deacons and a chapel was constructed. The young bishop shifted from Vettickal monastery to Parumala monastery. Thus Geevarghese Mar Gregorios of Chathuruthy came to be known by his saintly name ‘Parumala Kochu Thirumeni.’

In 1877 itself, Patriarch Peter returned to Syria. Before his return he issued certain interdicts which need to be mentioned here. He placed an interdict on three major Metropolitans in Malankara in those days - Mathews Mar Athanasius of Palakkunnathu, his successor Thomas Mar Athanasius and their opponent Joseph Mar Dionysius II of Pulikottil. Interdicts and curses were two great weapons used by Syrian bishops and Patriarchs. Mathews Mar Athanasius of Palakkunnathu mentions about them in a jovial manner in a pastoral letter he sent to the children of Malankara Church from Thiruvananthapuram on Kanni 5, 1875. The passage quoted below are extracts from the middle and the end of the letter.

“I learn that you haven’t sent any petitions against me. Neither do I think that you will abandon or surrender the independance and greatness of this throne of St. Thomas which is as old as the throne of Antioch. ... The foreigners are adopt in cursing. But such gimmicks won’t work these days. Those who are blessed by God will remain blessed and those who are cursed by Him will remain cursed.

Curses issued in the light of pride, vanity and selfishness will only turn against those who issue them, however great they are.”

Mathews Mar Athanasius of Palakkunnathu passed away on July 18, 1877 (Karkitakam 2). There is no doubt that the eviction of this unquestioned ruler of Malankara Christians from power, had caused deep wounds in him. He passed away when he was only fifty nine years old. A group of Syrian Christians unnecessarily hated this great Metropolitan who had courageously tried to preserve the total independence of the throne of St. Thomas. They deliberately humiliated the purity of his convictions. Historians have proved with substantial evidences that Mathews Mar Athanasius had been opposed from the very beginning to the Reformation advocated by Abraham Malpan, and as a progressive minded Metropolitan, he only wanted to bring about certain changes in the church practices. He remained steadfast in the faith and rituals of the Orthodox Church throughout his life.

Just before the advent of Patriarch Peter in India, the Metropolitan had consecrated his nephew Thomas Mar Athanasius as a bishop. Mathews Mar Athanasius was interred in his own parish namely the Maramon church. An indepth study is required to grasp the greatness of his personality and perspectives of faith fully.

## 6

### Life in Parumala

River Pamba originates from the sanctuaries of western Ghats and flows into the Arabian sea enriching the fertile and prosperous inlands that lie in between. At a place called Eramallikkara, the river bifurcates into two and both branches reunite to the east of Pannai river bank at Mannar. This bifurcation has created an island in between. This island is ten square miles in size and is known by the name Parumala. The sacred grove of Panayannar which had been a holy land of Hinduism and a nightmare for others and the famous Kali temple are located here. It is rumoured that in olden days there were animal and human sacrifices at this temple for pleasing the deity and that the place was the abode of devils and evil spirits. People belonging to 'Paraya' and other castes alone lived here. The land in those days had been notorious for plunder, looting and other crimes.

In those days the Orthodox church did not have a headquarter in the Southern regions. Later history testifies that by God's grace a centre could be established here. The Seminary at Kottayam had been shut down as a result of the quarrels between the Orthodox and the Reformists. Thus there were no means to educate the priests. The seminary that developed later was Parumala. This institution founded by Mar Gregorios after coming to Parumala, developed from its humble origins. The unknown woodlands of Parumala was blessed by the footprints of this saint and the whole region became famous around the world.

The shift of residence to Parumala didn't hinder the ascetic vows of Mar Gregorios in any way. Along with fulfilling the administrative responsibilities as a Metropolitan and teaching the deacons, he adhered to his schedule of prayer and meditation without any dilution. We do not see in him any instance of forsaking his spiritual attitudes

when he rose up to the leadership. One reason for it might be his belief that the upliftment to the position of a Metropolitan was a gift of God rather than a product of his own efforts.

The schedule of Mar Gregorios during his life in Parumala was as follows:

He woke up at 4 am every morning and said public prayers till 5 am. He then taught the deacons catechism from 5 am till 7 am. This was followed by secret prayer and breakfast. Again at 9 am he said prayers and taught the deacons till 11 am. From 11 am till 12 noon he looked into the matters of administration. At 12 noon, he said the noon prayers and proceeded for his lunch and rest. After that he taught the deacons from 1.30 pm till 4 pm (In between, at 3 pm he said solitary prayers - He would eat food only after these prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays as well as during the period of Fasts). After 4 pm he returned to matters of episcopal administration. After 5.30 pm he said the vespers, had his bath and walked about for a while in the courtyard of the church. Then he taught the deacons liturgical songs and hymns. He said the prayers of the Nocturn at 9 pm. Then he had his personal reading and went to bed at 10 pm. He would wake up at midnight for his midnight prayers and would sleep till 4 am. This schedule was adhered to on all normal days.

There were about 30 deacons residing at Parumala for their training for priesthood.

During his stay in the thatched wooden house he rendered his services in the small church donated by Koruthu Mathan of Arikupurathu. Then he thought of expanding the seminary and the church. A new church was built and the Metropolitan officiated the temporary consecration of this church on 15 Makaram (May) 1895. This church was built in the name of St. Peter and St. Paul. During this period the Metropolitan had to take up the administrative responsibilities of the Dioceses of Kollam and Thumpamon as well. He had the ability and grace of God to execute without fail the duties entrusted with him. Divisions and differences in parishes were

usual phenomena. This is not a cause of wonder when we think that Syrian Christians are traditionally disobedient and quarrelsome. But the Metropolitan would visit those parishes where there were differences and would dissolve the differences through his mediation. Those who disobeyed him had to come to sorrow in later days. Several such incidents have been reported.

It was during this period that Mar Gregorios could fulfil a long cherished ambition. He had an intense longing to visit the Holy Land where the Saviour for whom he had dedicated his life performed his salvific ministry. The pilgrimage to the Holy Land which began on 28 January 1895 was completed on Edavam 5 (May), Friday at the Shornur railway station. Before long, he wrote a travelogue and published it. He sent a copy each to all the churches of Malankara. Today this travelogue has become a subject of discussion among the writers of Malayalam literature. It has an important position as the first published travelogue in Malayalam. However a book called 'The Book of Tidings' had been written 100 years before the publication of this book. But the first to be published was the travelogue to Jerusalem. We cannot imagine that this would undermine the primacy of 'The Book of Tidings' in anyway. It was the travelogue describing the journey of Rev. Joseph of Kariattil and Rev. Thomas of Paremakal to Rome via Portugal. Scaria Zacharia records that they had gone with a petition to bring about unity between the 'Old Allegient group' and the 'New Allegient group' of Syrian Christians. On the other hand E. M. Philip says that this journey was for establishing a see of the local bishop in the Chaldean rite for the Roman Syrians in Kerala. However later history testifies that the above journey was ineffectual and futile.

We can see a greater social commitment in Mar Gregorios after his journey to Jerusalem. He established new churches and educational institutions and created the awareness of Christian mission for gentiles among the people. God also empowered him to tackle the growing issues in the church and the faulty beliefs and practices that

crept into the church. Through his preachings and pastoral letters, he admonished the people to uphold true faith and embrace it passionately.

The rigorous vows, fasting busy schedule, and constant prayers of Mar Gregorios illuminated and divinely empowered his soul. At the same time his physical health was waning day by day and he became ill. However he was undaunted by his disease. Even when minor diseases aggravated, he prepared himself for his journey to the eternal home. His life was similar to that of the wise maids who were prepared to receive the groom. He had a severe attack of visceral ulcer one month before his death. The last days of the Metropolitan were spent in great pain and weakness.

The Metropolitan lay on his death bed. It was November 2, a Sunday. The day went off as usual. Priests, laity and the bishops came to know about his physical condition through hear say and newspapers. They thronged the seminary to see the Metropolitan for the last time. The Metropolitan had received his extreme unction and the Holy Communion. He prepared to pass into the eternal home moment after moment. "His face became more and more radiant. In the silence of the night - in the hour of his daily communion with God, the father - at midnight, the moment of his departure arrived. The saintly soul of this great ascetic, ever thirsty of leaving his earthly abode for eternal rest, receded from the chant of Psalms showered by his disciples and ascended to the Creator to join the choirs of angels to sing His praise. ... At the moment of this mishap, this departure for the eternal rejoice, several people witnessed a deep and great brilliance that towered upto the skies over the Parumala Seminary" (The exact time of his death was 1 O' clock in the morning. Hence the actual day of his death is November 3. Yet this difference of time is not taken into account and November 2 is observed as the day of commemoration of this saint).

Thus this sacred lamp which started burning on 15 June 1848 was put out on November 2, 1902.

## The personality of St. Gregorios

### (a) The Spiritual brilliance of St. Gregorios

The life of St. Gregorios was a unique one spent in constant communion with God. His was a life dedicated to the Lord from childhood. He didn't deviate in any way from this dedication. Due to his vows of prayer and fasting, the spiritual light latent in him awakened. His great love of God helped in enriching that spiritual experience further. He found opportunities to reach nearer to God's court several times everyday. The occasions of worship filled his heart with indescribable joy. Several people have witnessed that whenever the Metropolitan enters the Holy of Holies for celebrating the Holy Eucharist, his face would become excessively radiant. He never dispensed with the prayers and services a Metropolitan was expected to fulfil. He used to fulfil them even when he was physically weak and infirm. K. C. Mammen Mappila, a respected elder of the church, who participated in the services of the passion week officiated by the Metropolitan a few months before the latter's demise records:

“Some months before his death, the Metropolitan officiated the services in the church on Good Friday. The weariness he showed while performing the rituals of the liturgy like swinging of the censor, frightened the laity. They feared that the Metropolitan would collapse and pass away during that service itself. The congregation in church wailed aloud.” The Metropolitan insisted that a ritual that should be performed by himself should be performed according to the custom of the liturgy.

The Metropolitan never resorted to any extrinsic expressions that would register an impression of his spiritual heightness. He believed that whatever he got was a gift from God. He never attempted a display of actions to convince others. His incessant prayer and fast-

ing was a part of his life. He never tried to bask in the glory of this rigorous spiritual life. Even his consecration as Metropolitan was contrary to his desire. He had assimilated the attitude of Lord Jesus Christ within him.

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do he will do also, and greater works than these he will do, because I go to My Father” (St. John 14:12).

When Jesus Christ performed His miracles, he never thought of his glory or fame. Mar Gregorios also lived in a similar way. There are witnesses of miracles that he performed during his life time. Several of his biographers have written about them in great detail. The thoughts and words of the Metropolitan had strength, power and implications. They were effective as well.

The book ‘Travancore State Manual’ required the photograph of a Metropolitan to illustrate the vestments worn by a Syrian bishop. A Britishman named Decruz was the photographer of the government of Travancore then. He had the responsibility of collecting this photograph. He placed this request before Mar Gregorios who had been residing in the church at Thiruvananthapuram. Even though Mr. Decruz came to the church several times with his photographic equipments, he could not take a photograph because of the incessant prayer schedule of the Metropolitan. The Englishman was disappointed. He informed the servants of the Metropolitan that the photography was getting unduly delayed and requested them to allot a few minutes at the earliest. When the Metropolitan came to pose for the photo, the light was not good enough to take one. Mr. Decruz looked through the camera lens and became conscious of the problem of illumination. He became worried about the clarity of the photograph. The metropolitan who realized the grief of the photographer turned his face upto the sky and stood a moment in meditation. He took the cross in his right hand and blessed the skies with it. He instructed the photographer to take the photograph quickly. Suddenly a dark cloud appeared in the sky and covered the burning

sun. Mr. Decruz who looked through the camera was surprised. He could not have got a better illumination than this even inside the studio. After he took the photograph the sun returned to its formal state.”

There are several such instances in the life of the Metropolitan. But they are not going to be described here. The goal of the book is also different. Hence we may mention only a few incidents before proceeding further.

Once Mar Gregorios was travelling on a boat through the backwaters of Vembanad. The boat was about to drown in the turbulent waters. The oarsmen started crying out for help. Then Mar Gregorios lifted his cross, blessed the waters and calmed the waves. On another occasion some prominent men of the Nair caste tried to block the path of the Metropolitan and prevent his journey. But they could not become successful in their designs as their elephant refused to walk and stood stubbornly still. A person who wanted to sabotage a reception accorded to the Metropolitan threw cow dung on his vestments. He died of small pox before long. His partners in the crime begged the Metropolitan's pardon and escaped from mishaps. Several people have recorded such miraculous incidents in the life of Mar Gregorios. God gave the Metropolitan power to control forces of nature and adversity. There are records of mishaps happening to those who spoke against the Metropolitan. But the Metropolitan was seldom aware of these developments. When he happened to hear about these mishaps he would turn sad and would comfort those who came to him.

The life of the Metropolitan teaches us that the words of the Lord are impeccable and unique and those who believe in them will have miraculous experiences. An example is given below:

The initial days of Parumala Seminary were really hard times. The meager income was not sufficient to feed the thirsty deacons and other inmates. One evening after the vespers, the cook com-

plained to the Metropolitan that there was no grocery left for the next day. The Metropolitan replied: “Don’t worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will take care of itself” (St. Mathew 6:34).”

The next morning a large quantity of sumptuous food was brought to the seminary from Manathara house in Niranam. It was the day of commemoration of their dear departed. The inmates of the seminary were surprised by this gift.

“Therefore do not worry saying ‘what shall we eat?’ or ‘what shall we drink?’ or ‘what shall we wear?’ for after all these things the gentiles seek. For your heavenly father knows that you need all these things” (St. Mathew 6:32). Here we can observe the spiritual brilliance and perspective of life of the Metropolitan.

### **(b) The social commitment of St. Gregorios of Parumala**

Mar Gregorios was a great ascetic who abandoned all comforts of the world and led his life in the path of justice and saintliness. But when we learn that he had a political consciousness far ahead of his times we will be surprised. This saintly soul who lived in this world without becoming worldly had knowledge about all things happening around him. He was interested in knowing about them and had his opinions regarding the business of the world. In the previous chapter we have stated that Mar Gregorios lived in an era in which social reform movements were founded and they were advocating reform. In Kerala the attempts of Chattambi Swamikal, Sree Narayana Guru and Ayyankali at social reform were looked upon with respect. Due to English education progressive ideas were filtering down into the hearts of people. Even kingship as an administrative system was questioned. Despite the fact that there were several educated men within the state, higher posts in state administration were given only to brahmins who came from outside Kerala. The educated middle class challenged this practice. Which had been in vogue since the time of Ramayyan Dalawa (prime minister). A petition against this reservation of jobs, signed by more than ten

thousand people belonging to various communities was submitted to the king on 10 January 1891. This became known as 'Malayali Memorial.' This memorandum asked the king to formulate and implement a law to appoint the common people in government jobs. Another petition signed by thirteen thousand one hundred and seventy six people, known as 'Ezhava memorial' was also submitted to the king on 3 September 1896. Dr. Palpu and others organized this movement. Both these memoranda raised a storm of debates. Newspapers like 'Malayala Manorama' came forward to publish the responses of the common people on this issue. Opinions, for and against, regularly appeared in these newspapers. During this period of turmoil, another organisation called 'counter memorial' was founded. It was a pro-brahmin movement and a meeting of this movement was held in Alappuzha. We might be surprised to hear that Mar Gregorios presided over this meeting. Mar Gregorios rejected the views of even his dearest follower Kandathil Varghese Mappila and had no qualms in declaring publicly in that meeting that the Christian community of Travancore had no complaints regarding the jobs in the state government.

This statement was a memorable one because of two reasons. In fact it is evident that the Christian community had complaints. Hence this statement made by him conceals two truths which the Metropolitan could conceive of because of his far sightedness. If a christian gets a government job he could only serve the government for a few years. The Metropolitan might have felt that it would be better for christians to explore the varied paths of opportunities that lay in front of them and thus improve their social and financial condition. This attitude might have prompted the Syrian Christians to take initiative in various fields like industry, commerce and business. This might also have helped the Christians to obtain jobs in foreign countries and thereby progress economically. This thinking might have helped in looking for new avenues for progress in life and not just wait for a government job. Another truth was that if the jobs in the

government were given on the basis of religion and caste, people with merit will be neglected. Thus this incident shows the great ability of the Metropolitan to think ahead of his times.

During the rule of kings, the Diwans (prime-ministers) were the most powerful subjects in the state. The diwans were often selected from outside the state and it is doubtful whether they had enough knowledge about the socio-cultural system of this land. The administration was carried on either according to the wishes of the king or according to the wishes of Diwan. The people were much dissatisfied about these outlandish Diwans. But Mar Gregorios always respected the administration. When he lived in St. George Church, Thiruvananthapuram, several high officials of the state administration used to come and visit him in the church. Most of them were Hindus. K. C. Mammen Mappila has recorded that, the Diwan of Travancore Ramayyankar came to Parumala to see the Metropolitan. In the reception accorded to the Diwan there, Mar Gregorios praised the talents and administrative skill of the former and this pleased the Diwan a lot.

The Metropolitan was convinced that the only way to social progress was education. He started schools during his brief span of life, so that people get English education. These schools were very useful to people belonging to different communities. Syrian Christians were a majority in places like Thumpamon, Thiruvalla etc. English schools were founded in both these places with the support of the people. Today these two schools exist as memorials of the Metropolitan. The school at Thumpamon was started in a church building in 1901 and the school at Thiruvalla was started in 1903. Even though the decision to found this school was taken in 1902, it could be established only after the Metropolitan's demise. The school started functioning only on 14 January, 1903.

In a pastoral circular sent from the church at Niranam on Kumbham 29 (March), 1893, the Metropolitan wrote about the greatness of education and its importance for Syrian Christians thus:

“Everyone agrees that there is nothing better than education to enlighten and enliven us in matters of spirituality and the world. Our saviour, Lord Jesus Christ accorded primacy to education among all his graces and entrusted the duty to educate with his disciples. Our king also places a great value on education for bringing about prosperity throughout his land. All other churches like the Romans, Protestants etc. establish seminaries and schools in their strong holds to promote learning. We carry the pride of being an ancient apostolic church and vaingloriously proclaim its merits. But we don’t do anything that befits the status. We can’t teach or preach because we don’t know how to we have become staid and sterile. Besides our churches have become notorious for their quarrels and bickerings and have ceased to be progressive altogether. We have become the butt of ridicule of other churches and others.”

Mar Gregorios here looks at a community on the verge of self destruction. It can’t understand its mission and enters into debated and quarrels bearing the brunt of omission and excess. The Metropolitan understood that the only panacea for all these was education. Moreover this letter reflects his deep grief about his church.

Mar Gregorios returned from his pilgrimage to Jerusalem as an enlightened man. He wanted to convert the low castes like Pulayas, Parayas and Kuravas. He said: “Such low caste Hindus could easily be won over. They should be taught Christian principles and should be won over for Christ. For this we should create awareness among their masters belonging to our community. It is our responsibility to raise them from their low status.” The Metropolitan earnestly desired that the church should be able to provide them with divine light through education and spiritual instruction. He issued orders to build separate churches for them initially and baptize them as Christians. Later they should be given the opportunity to worship together with others. Similarly he also desired to build separate schools exclusively for them and make arrangements to learn along with others at a later stage. The Metropolitan also believed that English education could retrieve a people from social retrogression.

### **(c) Mar Gregorios's perspective of life**

Mar Gregorios of Parumala believed that the earthly life given by God to man was meant to be spent on God and the fellow creatures. At the beginning of his youthhood, he wanted to adopt the rigors of early Church Fathers in life and time in a constant communion with God. His life in Vettickal Dayara is an example for this. He never desired to deviate from his divine experiences. However when he was raised to the position of a Metropolitan in an age old church, because of God's ineluctable grace, his perspective of life underwent a thorough change. Along with retaining his incessant communion with God, the Metropolitan developed the conviction to part take of the contemporary process of social development and acted accordingly. The Metropolitan realized that if the Church stood away from the developmental process happening all around, it would suffer negligence from others and hence it should play its role. The protestant missionaries and the Catholic Church were opening a lot of schools and were spending a lot of money on education. They tried to alhere the Syrian Christians through various means, and because of that several people were falling prey to their schismatic designs. The Metropolitan was aware of the consequences of an unorganized community without any conviction about its fundamental faith, responding positively to the activities of other churches.

The Metropolitan had very good social, political, educational and spiritual visions. He didn't want the church to become a component that stands aloof from the society and works for something else. Instead he wanted the church to share the joys and sorrows of the society, understand its heart throbs and contain a dedicated vision of life. This concept might appear novel even in the twenty first century. But the Metropolitan could toy with this concept one hundred years before. Such a great soul had he been! He didn't borrow these ideas from anyone. He acquired them on his own. It was a God-given perspective on life churned out of his spirituality.

There have been great men in this world, who scaled the pinnacles of new frontiers in life. They have travelled through their own paths without following the oft beaten tracks traversed by others. The blessed priest Father Damien who sacrificed his life for lepers is one example. He lived in Moloccai islands along with lepers and disbanded people from 1873 to 1889. He was a contemporary of Mar Gregorios. Father Damien never thought what he would get in return for his deeds. His sole thought was about what he could give for the world. What he had to give was his own life.

There are incidents which made Mar Gregorios neglect his own life and work for others. In 1870s there was a break out of small pox in Thumpamon. If small pox was reported in one region, the people would leave their homes and go away to far off places. If anyone tarried back to look after the diseased, they too would die of this terrible disease. The Metropolitan who came to know of the break out came and resided in the Thumpamon Church. He visited home after home and prayed. Even though several people died in that disaster, the Metropolitan lived in the region till the disease went by. He kept on praying for his people with a bold and undaunted heart. He exemplified the biblical verse: "The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep" (St. John 10:11). He used to say "An ideal devotee is one who loves his fellow creatures." Here love of God and love of man merged as a single entity. Whosoever loved God loved man as well.

We have seen in the previous chapters that Mar Gregorios had a definite vision regarding the upliftment of fellow creatures. Syrian Christians had been conservative and were opposed to admitting the lower castes in the church. The Metropolitan, in a speech made in Parumala Church, after his journey to Jerusalem said:

"We shall think of what we have to do as Christians. There are several ignorant and poor people in this land who live in distress and sin. The people called 'the low castes', like the Pulayas, cannot travel through public roads and cannot live together with fellow hu-

man beings. It is our important duty to instill belief in the true God among them and thereby save them from sins and faults.”

The vision of life of Mar Gregorios was informed by Lord Jesus Christ’s words: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent me to heal the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” This shows that he could empathize with Christ completely and could assimilate the attitude of Christ within him.

The future of the church was a significant part of the Metropolitan’s vision of life. The history till 1875 doesn’t prove that the church had an organised administrative system. There had been independent parishes, parish councils and local priests. The “elder” among the local priests would be the oldest priest. In that period there had been only one Metropolitan. We cannot gauge the extent of his influence in the organised administration of the churches. There are only two instances in which representatives from different churches came together for meetings. It occurred when foreigners came and tried to bring the Malankara Church under their control. The first is Synod of Diamper and the second is the meeting known as ‘Mavelikkara Padiyola.’ When Claudius Buchanan visited Mar Thoma VI, the latter said: “You are visiting a retrogressing church. Even though I am old, the hope that the church can progress energizes my heart even in this old age.”

The factors that led to this retrogression were the ability of Portuguese Catholics to cause a split in the church, the bickerings of Syrian Christians and the inability of the missionaries to read the circumstances. The internal strifes of the local Christians added oil to the fire. In 1708 a Nestorian bishop named Gabriel arrived in Kerala. A local chieftan who was opposed to Marthoma IV caught hold of this bishop in his custody. What he said on this occasion later became a saying among people “He is neither my father nor my paternal uncle, yet can be utilized for the present task” (that of

opposing the Marthoma). All foreigners who came here exploited this attitude of the local chieftans.

Association with the missionaries caused great losses for the church. The church split apart into three and a significant portion of the property gifted to the church by the local king was lost. Colonel Monre had handed over this property to the church for its growth. The greatest difficulty came when the Syrian church tried to impose its authority here, and those difficulties persist even today. The Church reached a new juncture in its history when Mathews Mar Athanasius of Palakkunathu and Joseph Mar Dionysius of Pulikkottil approached the Patriarch for their consecration as bishops and paved the way for the arrival of the Patriarch in this soil. They confessed in the legal and the royal courts that the Patriarch was the head of the Malankara Church and in the process of their tussle for the post of Malankara Metropolitan, the authority of the Patriarch came to be established here. One of them was prohibited and deposed by the Patriarch. The other had to spend his days in silence under an interdict with his limbs and tongue metaphorically bound.

Mar Gregorios of Parumala worked in tandem with Mar Dionysius of Pulikkottil who strongly opposed the excessive authority of the Patriarch. But we have to doubt whether Mar Gregorios of Parumala shared the anxiety of Mar Dionysius of Pulikkottil and Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril that the sword of authority of the Patriarch would spoil the future of the church. There are no records of his learnings on the issue.

The thoughts and ideas of Mar Gregorios regarding the future of the church were different. He believed that the church would develop into a bright future through progressive action. He decided to bring about the prosperity of the church through founding schools, taking care of the destitutes, evangelism, confirming the laity in faith of the church, opposing the blasphemous beliefs, founding of churches, empowering the priests in spiritual and social domains, and providing opportunities for them to work and learn in groups.

There is no doubt that Mar Gregorios too would have towed the line of thought of Mar Dionysius of Pulikkottil and Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril if he had to bear the burden of Malankara Metropolitan.

One important component of the vision of life of Mar Gregorios was submission of all affairs in prayer before the Lord's court. This invariably caused his spiritual heightness.

#### **(d) The administrative skills of Mar Gregorios**

The administrative skills of Mar Gregorios was founded on love. As in the case of other virtues, Mar Gregorios acquired his skills of ecclesiastical administration too from God. There had been only one Metropolitan in Malankara Church till his times. His association with Yuyakkim Mar Coorilos was not conducive to the founding of a Godly pattern of administration. The actions of Mar Coorilos were detrimental to this. Mar Gregorios also lived for a few months with Patriarch Peter III. It is not possible to pinpoint how far this association had enabled him to assimilate the peculiarities of the people of Malankara. Like all his other virtues, the administrative skill too was God given. He was put in charge of a new diocese called Niranam when he was only twenty nine years of age. When Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Yulios of Konattu passed away, the administrative responsibility of Kollam and Thumpamon dioceses were also vested with him. The Metropolitan had a great ability to comprehend the facts he saw and heard. He was also able to speak and write clearly on what he had comprehended so that they would impress upon his listeners.

When we think of the biblical knowledge and resolve of faith of the people of Malankara in those days, we cannot place them on a high pedestal. Mar Gregorios was sad about this state of affairs. He was grieved by the spiritual and material lethargy of his people when other churches and communities were heading in the path of progress. He wrote in a general circular to the priests:

“Dear priests, The problems faced by our community have relegated it to a deplorable state not only in its material aspects but also in its spiritual aspects. The other churches around us are progressing day by day because of their enthusiastic endeavours and their church administration has become effective enough to disseminate their beliefs. We witness that change and are ashamed about us. This would invariably cause sadness in all those who love God and his Church.”

The Metropolitan sees how people of all castes and religion work for the betterment of their faith and is grieved by the aimlessness of his own flock. He writes:

“Even though we are truthful, we are like a thoughtful flock of sheep without a shepherd. We don’t have sufficient protection, so that anyone can catch us easily. We are like a flock of sheep straying away from the guiding light of the shepherd. Hence we live among others denigrated, ashamed and assaulted. Isn’t it a matter of great grievance?”

It was a period in which there was no teaching about the faith of the church. The people were quite loose in matters of faith. The people, including the priests, were ready to rally behind any church faction which came and invited them. Several people including Syrian priests joined Yooyoism (the church of Vidwankutty), CMS and Abraham Malpan of Palakunnattu. Many people in the society were prepared to fall into the various temptations offered by other churches. Syriac had been our liturgical language. People who knew its meaning and depth were few. Most priests were not proficient enough to teach faith. All these factors were sufficient to scatter the population of Syrian Christians.

Mar Gregorios of Parumala conceived the inherent lacunas of the Church. He put in his best efforts “to alter the visible discourses of this ancient church and affirm it in true faith and also to revive the ancient spiritual and material conditions it enjoyed.” He instructed that the period should be confronted on a war footing.

The idea of Mar Gregorios regarding the development of the Church was in terms of “material growth that would naturally proceed from spiritual growth.” He had the awareness that this community could not be revived unless there are efficient and hardworking priests. The origins of all spiritual organizations of Malankara Church can be traced back to this period.

The priests were for the first time brought together for a meeting and were given instructions regarding their responsibilities. This meeting was named “cleric meeting.” All priests of the diocese were members of this meeting. Twelve among the priests were selected to constitute a committee called “Rosai meeting.” It was decided to conduct “Cleric meetings’ at a specific time every year in order to hold discussions and take decisions. “As per the decisions taken at Rosai meeting, people were to be deputed for various tasks. Some were to be made itinerant preachers, some should be posted to build up and run and inspect schools, prayer groups and catechism in all churches including those which have them at present. Some others were to be posted for the planning of ‘Reesh Kohanoosa’, some as auditors of the accounts of various churches, some as moderators and peacebrokers in cases of rifts within a parish. Some people should be given the responsibility of constructing the main building of Parumala seminary and nearby church, the foundations for which had been laid. Some should be posted for raising charity collections and donations for the construction.”

It is evident from this quoted passage how diligent Mar Gregorios was in planning the administration of his diocese. The Metropolitan had understood that a church could not progress without the co operation of a team of priests who had knowledge, ability, devotion and dedication. Certain facts become evident if we closely analyse the responsibilities entrusted with Rosai meeting. The Metropolitan prepared the priests for various activities other than spiritual services like sacraments and rituals, with the view of developing the church. This was a new enterprise. Moreover he wanted to de-

velop the seminary in order to provide the required knowledge and readiness to the succeeding generation of priests. Moreover he quoted from the Old and the New Testaments of the Holy Bible in his pastoral letters to instruct the priests about their responsibilities:

“The saying that ‘if a teacher gets one letter of the alphabet wrong, the student will get all fifty one letters wrong’ points to the daily life and activities of religious preachers and priests. The priestly leadership should be a godly leadership and not a worldly leadership.”

In those days it was very difficult to raise money. So the Metropolitan made arrangements to collect farm products for the running of various church organizations. He would visit the parishes for the collections of rice grains. A part of the handfuls of rice collected from each parish would be set apart for mission activities among the gentiles.

For the functioning of the Seminary, 23 Acre 59 cents of paddy field was acquired from the government at a place called Kattanam. This land was given to the church as a source of income.

The Metropolitan instructed the people to observe Sundays Holy as the day of the God and asked them to keep away from all material activities on that day. He gave directions to hold prayer meetings and reading of the Holy Bible in the church and the schools after 3 pm on every Sunday. People, after attending the Holy Eucharist and the preaching till noon, had to attend these meetings. Moreover the children had to be taught prayers and the Holy Bible and Gospels had to be preached among the gentiles. From these we understand that the present day spiritual organizations like the meetings of priests, mission work, Sunday School, Prayer meetings etc. originated during the time of Mar Gregorios of Parumala.

There were rifts and quarrels in several parishes. Some people held the trusteeship of churches for a long period of time. The church did not have a systematic administrative system for a long period of time. Hence the trustees of various parishes, who handled the pub-

lic money, held on to their posts for a lifetime. Some of them mis-managed the public funds and some significant people of the parish would support them for personal gains. The Metropolitan on hearing about such a case, would arrive in a parish and would advise the trustee lovingly and calmly. He would then ask for handing over the accounts and key to him. Most of such people have agreed to settle the matter carefully. If someone disobeyed and rejected the advice of the Metropolitan, he would come to sorrow before long and would repent and adhere to the Metropolitan's orders. There are several instances of this, but we shall spare them for the time being.

If there were two factions in a church, the Metropolitan would arrive in that parish and would effect peace between them. Whatever be the decision of the Metropolitan, both factions would agree to it and thus the problems would be resolved.

### **(e) The relationship of Mar Gregorios with his family**

Mar Gregorios never spent any money of the church on his family. On the contrary he used to ask for money from his family for activities of the church. It was considered inappropriate for a Metropolitan to show interest in the affairs of his family, once he was consecrated. But Mar Gregorios thought in a different manner. He maintained constant communication with his family. The family used to inform him of their affairs and he would handle these affairs with care. He used to help them through wise advice. He would give them advice regarding most affairs to be observed in a Christian household like construction of houses, education, marriage, prayer, charity, affairs of the Church, sending someone to priesthood etc. Some of the advices offered by him are given below:

“The anointed bishop and priests have the authority in the affairs of the church. We should submit ourselves to them and should regard them with devotion. Any act opposed to them is thanklessness. Denigrating them will reap curses on us.”

“We should believe that God exists in the church and the affairs of the church are one’s own affairs. If anything is due to the church, it should be given with interest.”

“Learn that a person would make pretences in the church during his evil days. The affairs of the church should be thought about, enquired into, grieved about and devoutly spent upon in a manner greater than one would think about his own affairs.”

“We should remit what is due to the church as early as possible. Don’t enter into the quarrels in the church and cause harm to the church in anyway. Don’t think about the affairs of the church in the spirit of competition, quarrels, egoism and folly. Blessed are those who radiate humility, rely upon God and satisfy the people around.”

“Respect the priests. Don’t denigrate them in your actions, words, attitudes or even in your hearts. Never refrain from doing what ought to be done for them. Never quarrel with them. Never argue with them in money matters. Never do anything to bring their pang upon your heads. If you have done anything against them, beg their pardon and seek their blessing.”

“Give primary importance to fear of God. Don’t let anyone come to grief because of you. Don’t hesitate to do possible good deeds. They alone would remain as your final possession. Don’t harm anyone in anyway. It would cause harm to you and your children as well as your family. Cling fast to the fear of God. Wear humility as your ornament.”

“Don’t think that you are superior to others. Think that all others are greater than you, however poor they are.”

“It is badtimes that result in court cases. There is no way other than the grace of God to wipe off those bad times.”

All these quotations are taken from the letters he sent to his nephew Kochu Mathu. The Metropolitan desired that the people of his family should set an example in their response to matters of the church, behaviour towards priests and in their social life.

Jimmy Chathuruthy, in his article ‘Family memoirs’, records the relationship that existed between the Metropolitan and his family. Even though our Father (Mar Gregorios of Parumala) was engrossed in rigorous ascetic vows and troublesome church administration, he never kept the affairs of his family at bay. He had a special consideration for all affairs of the family, both big and small. Those who wanted to get something done from the family, directly approached the Metropolitan. In short, the Metropolitan functioned as the patron of the family.”

The Metropolitan was against childmarriage. He wrote to his nephew Kochu Mathu:

“I don’t like to see them married off even before they develop real teeth after the loss of milkteeth or before their fondling by parents is over. I would like to see them grow up in learning and knowledge, devotion to God and fondness for people.”

When one of his cousins died Mar Gregorios could not attend the funeral. He reached the house, the next day itself and stayed there overnight. His relatives have recorded that he left the house only in the morning and went to the Church. Mar Gregorios would not have done so had he thought it wrong to return to one’s own house or sleep at night there after being consecrated a bishop.

Mar Gregorios was a great support to his family in all its affairs except in providing them with financial help.

### **(f) The foreign trips of Mar Gregorios and their spiritual results**

On May 29, 1892 Mar Gregorios along with Paulose Mar Athanasius of Kottayam diocese and Alvares Mar Yulios of Ceylon-Brahmavar diocese consecrated a priest from the USA named Reni Vilathi as Bishop of Old Catholics of USA. The consecration took place at ‘Our Lady of Good Death’ church in Colombo as per the direction of Peter III, the Patriarch of Syrian Orthodox Church.

This journey to Colombo had been the first foreign trip of Mar Gregorios. However this consecration did no good either to the Malankara Church or the Syrian Church. Moreover the newly consecrated Reni Vilathi Mar Thimothios, brought in humiliation to these Churches because of his later activities. He joined the Catholic Church and lived with Selesian monks at Varseillus. He died of heart attack on 8 July 1929 and was buried, without his vestments on like a common man (The book 'Joseph Reni Vilathi Mar Thimothios' by this author gives a detailed account of this Metropolitan).

Mar Gregorios has not written at length about this journey. He states the purpose of his journey in a letter to his nephew:

“I embarked upon this journey to Colombo yesterday, along with Bishop Alvares and Bishop Athanasius of Kadavil. This journey is for consecrating an American named Reni Vilathy as bishop as per the orders of the Patriarch. We have reached here (Alappuzha) this morning. We will go from here to Trivandrum by train and will subsequently go to Tuticorin. From there we would reach Colombo by ship. I rely on God for all these. I will not stay there for more than two weeks. I would write to you later for the news.”

In a letter after his return from Colombo, he writes about his illness.

Like all Christians, Mar Gregorios also cherished a great dream of going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. It was a period of interim relief regarding the quarrels in the Church. As per the Royal Court Judgement of 1889, the Reformists lost their claims over the properties of the church and the long standing quarrels enjoyed a temporary respite. Mar Gregorios embarked upon his long cherished dream of pilgrimage to Jerusalem on 28 January 1895. He travelled in a group of 8 people. After overcoming several difficulties he reached Yoppa harbour on 7 April. It was Palm Sunday. From Yoppa he travelled by train and reached St. Mark monastery in Jerusalem by evening. He lived there as the guest of Mar Gregorios, the bishop of

Jerusalem. In the days that followed he visited the holy places intimately connected with the life of Jesus Christ and also the tombs of Prophets and kings of the Old Testament. On the day of Easter, he participated in the worship in Kyemtha Church. The Metropolitan has said that the objects taken as offerings to the tombs were very beautiful and surprising to the beholders. Thus after a pleasant and joyful visit to Jerusalem, Mar Gregorios returned on 23 April and reached Bombay on Monday, 15 May. He reached Shornur railway station on May 20 and thereafter proceeded to Parumala.

Today journey to Jerusalem has no charm attached with it. Several people go as groups to visit the Holy Land. Each of such pilgrims might enjoy a different spiritual experience. But how many of them could direct the spiritual experience got from the pilgrimage towards social good is a matter to be pondered over. After his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, Mar Gregorios experienced a new awakening. He understood that upliftment and Christening of the lower castes was a fundamental duty of the church and that all people should become one in Christ. He spoke and wrote about it and prompted his people to think in these lines. Several low caste people turned towards Christ. We have earlier spoken about the schools and churches built for them. It is a sad fact that these activities slackened after the death of the Metropolitan. Metropolitan Pathrose Mar Osthathios tried his best to continue this mission work began by Mar Gregorios. But after the former's death, the mission work in this direction slowed down considerably and the church seemed to have lost its hope in this regard. Today the leadership of the church is more interested in founding institutions which are profitable and which would earn prominence in the society rather than in missionary activities. Even though this is a serious allegation against the church no one seems to consider it seriously. It is not possible for others to gain the same spiritual vision which Mar Gregorios of Parumala had!

God used to give hundred fold returns in all matters which Mar

Gregorios of Parumala undertook. Mar Gregorios could introduce a variety of novel ideas like evangelism, education, Church administration, teaching and moral instructions in the Church. Thus he could make the Church radiant and could awaken the children of the church from their deep slumber and transform them into active believers.

The world famous Metropolitan Paulose Mar Gregorios described Mar Gregorios as “a talented Saint.” How apt and meaningful is that epithet!

### **(g) The literacy works of Mar Gregorios**

The travelogue ‘Journey to Jerusalem’ of Mar Gregorios is a great work replete with a variety of features like extra ordinary verbal felicity, objective observations, faultless descriptive power and an indiscribable spiritual experience. The Metropolitan was aided in its composition by his general education, the scholarship he acquired from the Seminary at Pampakkuda, his wide and in-depth readings and the cognitive skills he acquired from his daily communion with God. The book was composed within a short span of time, printed and was sent to all churches in Malankara. The Metropolitan did so out of his conviction that people who had no prospects of undertaking a pilgrimage to Jerusalem could connect themselves with the experience of Jesus Christ’s times and could experience a spiritual awakening by perusing the book. He desired to impart at least a fraction of the spiritual joy he experienced in Jerusalem.

Modern men of letters are of the opinion that this book is an ideal travelogue. Even though everyone noticed this book during the period of its composition, later it went into oblivion. In modern times some Christian authors revived its greatness and brought it to the limelight. It became acclaimed as the first printed travelogue in Malayalam. Even though ‘The book of Tidings’ was written in 1875, only manuscripts of the book were available. It was printed and published only in 1936. But ‘Journey to Jerusalem’ was published in July 1895, the very year of the pilgrimage. The first edition sold

like hotcakes and the second edition was printed. Later several publishers released several editions and hence the total number of copies sold cannot be estimated (A reprint of the first edition is brought out by Sophia Books, Kottayam).

A Metropolitan becoming an author is a rare event. Similarly we can only say that an author becoming a Metropolitan is also not impossible. The essays of Mar Gregorios written in Malayalam capture our hearts.

“The Metropolitan had a beautiful and original literary language. It is a sad fact that he could not fully realise his original literary learnings because he had been enmeshed in the tangles of church administration.”

“The book contains an incessant gush of sentences pregnant with meaning and imagination from cover to cover. This is due to the loftiness of clear and holy thoughts and the greatness of experience.”

“Mar Gregorios has made use of a rustic style which was in vogue in Central Travancore one hundred years before. It was a style most acceptable and pleasing to the readers of those days.”

The Metropolitan’s power of observation was incomparable. Like the meanings and explanations of words given in a dictionary, his writings were self-contained and self explanatory. His views were objective and truthful. For example when he describes the terrain surrounding the fort at Jerusalem, the Metropolitan who stayed only for a few days at that place writes:

“The fort is surrounded by steep valleys to its east, south and west. The eastern valley is called ‘Yahoshaphath’ valley, the southern valley is called ‘Hinnom’ valley and the Western valley is called ‘Sheehon’ valley. River Kidron is at one end of the valley. The tank Sheeloho is in Hinnom valley.”

Both these waterbodies are familiar to all those who have read

the gospels. Mar Gregorios in his descriptions follows the style of linking the unfamiliar facts with the familiar. The fact that he could learn so clearly about these places within a short span of time, is a visible expression of his unique grasping power.

When he mentions about the tomb of St. Mary, his powers of close observation becomes evident once again. He says that one could reach this church only by descending forty eight steps from the ground level. He has measured and counted every step taken. The author of this book too had the good fortune to visit the Holy Land a few months before and could observe this fact first hand.

In the end of the book, the Metropolitan describes the spiritual awakening and experience he had during his pilgrimage:

“When we knelt and prayed before the tomb of Jesus Christ, the mental commotion, thoughts of sins, repentance and devotion we experienced were unprecedentedly intense. Ha! We felt that our minds were glued to God. We felt that we had witnessed His passion and crucifixion and His tribulations with our own eyes. Our hearts melted. We were unwilling to stop our prayers and meditation and rise up from there. We felt that we could stay there. We felt that we could stay there for days and nights and pray before the tomb.

It is doubtful whether we could attain such an intense and sustained faith, penitence and sense of sin even if we spent a fifty thousand.”

The spiritual experience of Mar Gregorios from his journey to Jerusalem was similar to that of the two disciples during their journey to Emmaus. The resurrected Christ walks along with them and clarifies to them that Christ had to bear his tribulations to enter into His glory. They identify Him as Christ at the dinner table and He disappears. Immediately they return to Jerusalem and on the way say to one another. “Did not our heart burn within us while he talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (St. Luke 24:32). The spiritual experience earned by Mar Gregorios

from his visit to Jerusalem was similar to the experience of the disciples. His soul burned within him; his heart melted; he developed a state of mind which created penitence and remorse. This was an incomparable spiritual satisfaction.

Mar Gregorios who returned to Parumala with his soul ignited in Jerusalem, became a true pilgrim possessing the real spiritual enrichment due from a pilgrimage. He could impart this experience to others as well. Mar Gregorios would never have desired to become a known writer in the world of literature. His travelogue 'Journey to Jerusalem' was written with the only goal of recording his spiritual experiences. Whenever a painter or writer undertakes a serious creative endeavour, he would not be thinking as much about how the future generation would regard his work as about how it would help to satisfy his soul. Let this great work of aesthetic satisfaction, which remains novel even after a century, ever remain fresh and relevant!

# The Missionary Journeys of Sadhu Sundar Singh

## (a) In Asian Countries

The Sadhu became 28 years old. He thought that God will call him to the eternal abode, like his Saviour, at the age of 33 and desired for such an end. Till that age Sundar Singh had preached Christ in the Himalayan region and its foothills as well as in Tibet. He desired to go to the Southern regions of India. In January 1918, he reached Madras. During this period he had been receiving invitation from various countries and continents.

He interacted with a lot of students during this period. However he never compelled anyone to take to a Sadhu's way of life.

The Sadhu believed that "it was not necessary for a person to lead an ascetic life unless he gets a clear and special calling from God." He gave this suggestion to all those who approached him. He told them that whatever be the way of life one adopts, it should be conducive to the glorification of Lord Jesus Christ's name.

In February 1918, he preached at Maramon Convention. This world famous Christian Convention was founded in 1895 during the reign of Marthoma Titus I.

He spoke in Hindi and the translation was done by Mr. M. O. Oommen, Chief Conservator of Travancore. He began his homily by quoting the biblical verse "One who wants to follow me shall hate himself, bear his cross and then follow me." Humiliation and harm are the share of Christ's Cross. If Christ's nature was suffering without any protest, a disciple who bears his suffering silently reflects his teacher's nature and proclaims the power of His love. Even though suffering causes tears like a medicine applied to the eyes, it is a magic medicine that provides relief and vision.

He continued: “The ancient church was preserved in the Southern end of India for centuries in order to spread the light of the gospels in this land. However as you have failed in your duty, European missionaries had to come over here with the message of the Gospels.

If India is compared to a person, the Himalayas are the head, South India is the feet. Punjab is the right hand and Bengal is the left hand. If the Indian person has to stand upright his feet should be strong and firm. The Christian Church of India has to walk about in this non Christian country using these feet. The Christians in Kerala are numerous and educated. The Churches existing in this land are also self-sufficient. Even though the Syrian churches are capable of standing on their own feet, because of rifts, quarrels and strifes, they have become as sluggish to move as a person suffering from elephantiasis. Mutual love and the urge to help others died out. The churches of South India should waken up to spread the gospels hereafter.” He gave this advice to all Syrian Christians of Kerala.

To the women who assembled at Maramon, he said: “If a mother who didn’t know about Christ could show me the path towards God, why don’t you, who claim to love Christ, bring your children to his feet?”

This question pierced the hearts of the Syrian Christian mothers assembled. Those mothers who heard God’s call through these words, dedicated the fruits of their womb to Christ. Some of these children dedicated by their mothers, later became servants of God.

From Maramon, the Sadhu went to neighbouring places. He also preached at Makkamkunnu Syrian Convention. In May 1918 he went to Colombo. His preachings in Colombo helped several people to turn to God. Several people came forward to take up asceticism and do the work of God. But Sadhu discouraged them. He advised them that the ultimate goal of life is to glorify Christ in life.

After a few week’s sojourn in Colombo, he returned to India in

the month of June and preached in Thiruvananthapuram. By July he went to Tamilnadu. From there he reached Bombay and subsequently went to Calcutta. He lived in Bholpur as the guest of Rabindranath Tagore. He left for Burma from there and preached in places like Rangoon and Singapore. Several people heard the word of God through him. Most of the people who met Sundar Singh felt that he resembled Lord Jesus Christ. We do not have detailed records of his activities in Japan. He could not find translators there to translate his preachings. Sadhu Sundar Singh said about Japan:

“India has nothing to learn from Japan in matters of spirituality. The recent prosperity and victories in war have drained the very foundation of spiritual life from this country. They are fatally imitating the west. For Japan which is drowned in the gush of modernity and worldliness, the philosophy of earthly glory and greatness is paramount.”

From Japan, Sundar Singh went to China. “The Chinese still retain their respect for and interest in religion. Their ability to appreciate spiritual issues and grow up spiritually haven’t died out.”

In connection with Sundar Singh’s visit to China, there was news that large groups of students turned to Christianity. Sundar Singh’s reply, when asked about it, was significant:

“By merely looking at the number of pledge papers signed by students after a meeting, we cannot say how many of them became Christians and added to the members of the Church. I do not believe in spreading Christianity through signing of pledge cards.”

In March 1919, a missionary from Shanghai, China wrote about Sundar Singh:

“The Christian preacher named Sundar Singh, who arrived here from India is unique. He keeps up his hygiene and purity of life. He is moderate in food habits. He doesn’t like any luxury in dressing or is not particular about his bed. He is satisfied with whatever food he

is given both in hotel and at home. His speeches and talk remind one of Jesus Christ who walked about in the streets of Galilee twenty centuries before.”

On 9 May 1919, Sadhu Sundar Singh returned to India after his itinerant preaching in Oriental countries. When people came to know of his arrival in Madras, they thronged in large numbers to listen to his preachings.

He said: “All Christians have the calling and the right to bear witness to Christ. One should not confess Christ merely through words, but should confess Him through life and actions. The opportunity and right granted to us for suffering for the sake of Christ, generate jealousy even among the heavenly hosts.”

He ended his speech by declaring that he was embarking on a dangerous journey to Tibet. He was not sure whether he would return. He hoped, that if he could not meet the people again, he would meet them in Heaven.

Sadhu Sundar had to undergo a lot of hardships on his way to Tibet. He reached Kotgar from Shimla and left for Tibet from there. A Tibetan missionary accompanied him.

On 16 July he reached a village named ‘Mudd’ on the Tibetan border. He stayed and preached there for a few days. Then he went to neighbouring villages and preached there too. At a village called ‘Keevaar’ he fell into the hands of thieves. But he could win them over for Christ gradually. He then thought of going to kailas peak from there. But he wanted to return to India before it became too cold to travel through the mountain passes. Hence he returned to India in August. On 10 October he reached Ludhiana and left for Rampur to see his old father. They were meeting after a period of fourteen years. The father received the Sadhu with lots of love and respect. During this period Sardar Sher Singh had become a believer of Christ. He told his son: “You have opened my mind’s eye. So you yourself should baptize me.” On hearing this, Sundar Singh

was overjoyed. But the Sadhu didn't like to baptize anyone and hence refused his father's desire. However he had the fortune to see his father getting baptized and turning to Christ. He lived there for a few days and prepared himself for confessing Christ in European countries.

## **(b) In Europe**

### **Sadhu Sundar Singh in England**

The rapidity of Sundhar Singh's activities in the last years of his life shows that he was convinced that the end of his life was in sight. He desired to do as many things as possible. He used to say often: "Why does my Saviour tarry so long?" (about his death). He felt an inner urge to confess Christ in the western countries. He talked about this desire with his father. The father encouraged his son promising to bear the cost of the journey. Thus on 16 January 1920 Sundar Singh left for England from Bombay in a ship named 'City of Cairo.' The voyage was immediately after the first worldwar. He harboured at Liverpool on 10 February.

Sadhu preached at several places in England. All those who listened to his speeches became enriched in spirit. A lady named Mrs. Holyland wrote about Sundar Singh to her son in India:

"Sundar Singh's arrival in our house and his stay here were an indescribable experience. We experienced great joy at his arrival. Something similar to the joy at the arrival of Jesus Christ in our house. Words can't describe the greatness of our interaction with him."

From the home of Holyland, Sadhu went to the community house of Cowley Fathers at Oxford. Holyland was a Quaker. But Sadhu Sundar Singh kept thoughts of church factions at bay. He would congratulate the good aspects found in all churches.

Sadhu made several speeches at Oxford. His homilies were addressed to all categories of people including students, priests and

ordinary people. From Oxford, he went to Cambridge and after his preachings there came back to London. He lived for a few days at Lambeth Palace, the residence of Archbishop of Canterbury.

The Sadhu voiced his theological opinions during his interaction with the Roman Catholic theologian Barren Frederick von Huchel. He said: "I do not literally believe that the church has an apostolic succession and that it is the basis of its strength. But if someone finds solace in this belief, I am not opposed to it. ... If the resurrected, living Christ resides in our hearts and acts in our vicinity, why should we hold fast to such external trappings?"

Climatically, England is a land of slanting sun. It is a land of insufficient insolation. The Sadhu based his speech on this climatic reality and spoke about the dimness in the spiritual life of Christians. But he confessed the families of England were religious, God fearing and disciplined.

### **Sadhu Sundar Singh in Paris**

On 28 March, the Sadhu reached Paris. He was attracted by monuments like the memorial pillar of Christian martyrs, the icon of St. Sebastian spiked with arrows and Napoleon's tomb. He enquired about the end of Napoleon's life. He was so much interested in Napoleon an account of a statement made by the latter at the end of his life.

"Alexander, Caesar and myself established empires. But these empires founded on physical strength alone were destroyed. But the empire of Jesus Christ founded on love will remain for ever." This statement reveals an eternal truth. Jesus Christ lives for ever.

In Paris, Sadhu got an opportunity to converse with the famous philosopher Henric Bergson. Sundar Singh told him about his experiences and opinion of Lord Jesus Christ and asked him how he viewed Christ.

Bergson replied: "I agree that Christ was an extraordinary person. But he has no place in my philosophical analysis."

### **Sadhu returns to London**

From Paris, Sadhu returned to London. He preached at several meetings. The homily made at Metropolitan tabernacle was a memorable one. It was a Good Friday. The topic of the speech was the succession of events on the day of Crucifixion. He spoke about the death of the unrepentant sinner in his sin, the death of the repentant sinner for his sin and the death of Christ for the sake of sin.” It was a large gathering of about 5000 people when the Sadhu came to the stage, all stood up and offered courtesy with a ‘Salam’ (Salute) in the Indian manner.

Sadhu went from London to Scotland and Ireland. There he spoke about the spiritual joy he had after turning towards Christ. That heavenly experience doesn’t leave him in any circumstance. He was sad about the divisions in the Christian Church. He used to say that Christ never liked these divisions. But he also hoped that when all churches become one, the kingdom of heaven will arrive on earth.

### **(c) Sadhu Sundar Singh in the United States**

Sadhu Sundar Singh delivered a speech series in the USA for about two months. On 30 May 1920, he reached New York. There were large gatherings to hear his speech in cities like Hart Ford, Boston, Philadelphia etc and in places like Baltimore and in Princeton. At one place Sadhu said:

“I have not come here to criticize America. I have come here to bear witness to what Christ has done for me. America is a Christian country. When we read the inscription “We rely on God” printed on the dollar, we would think that there is no country as pious as the USA. But what seems truthful is to inscribe “we rely on dollar.”

“The Americans are nearest to the kingdom of God. But they haven’t entered it. Imagine that a tiger chased a hunter who was hunting in a forest quite familiar to him. He ran to his shelter with the

confidence that he knew where it was and had the key with him. But when he reached in front of his shelter he understood that he had lost the key. The tiger caught the hunter and tore him off. There was only a wall that separated that man from his salvation. But since he could not enter his shelter he died off. Even though this country is Christian and the people go to church and do virtuous deeds, it would also have the fate of the hunter. If leaders who haven't directly experienced God and who are called for eternal life don't arise among you, America too will meet with a similar fate."

"Scientists say that in olden days the Ostrich could fly long distances. But today it has become a flightless bird. Americans who cannot conserve the faith of their forefathers, will eventually lose it."

"We are living in a sinful world. But if Jesus Christ is alive within us, we won't have the taint of sin upon us. We will be like the fish that lives in Salt water; without the taint of salt."

Jesus Christ proclaimed in Palestine. "All those who labour and bear burden, come to me. I shall comfort you." The same Jesus today tells the Americans 'All those who bear the burden of prosperity and labour for luxuries come to me. I shall comfort you.'

Sadhu Sundar Singh did not stay in America for long. Yet he could visit most of the states of the USA. He visited and talked to several church leaders and students. Sadhu's visit to the USA hidden in a smog of excessive materialism was effective. The Americans opined that he was a person "who lived like Jesus Christ in this world."

### **(f) Sadhu in Australia**

Sadhu went from the USA to Australia. He preached in Sydney. From there he went to Melbourne and preached for a week. In the first meeting, more than 3000 people came to listen to him. On 3 September he spoke in Adelaide, the capital of South Australia. A friend named Smith has recorded that the biblical statement that 'Hanok walked along with God' was true in the case of Sadhu.

By the end of September he returned to Bombay.

### **Again to Tibet**

In May 1921 Sadhu went to Tibet along with his friend Wright. They reached the Tibetan border and stayed with a few Christian friends in a village. Sadhu organized meetings there and spoke about his experience to them. But suddenly his friend Wright developed stomach disease and they returned to Shimla.

During this period he received an invitation from Switzerland. He desired to pay a visit to Palestine also during this trip. He also received an invitation from Mahatma Gandhi and stayed with him for two days at Sabarmati Ashram. He described his relationship with Christ during a morning prayer there. Mahatma Gandhi and others carefully listened to his description of Christ's appearance to him.

### **Visit to Holy Land**

In January 1922, he went from Bombay to Palestine. He went by a ship called 'Chaledonia' and reached Palestine. He lived there as the guest of Sir William Cox the engineer who constructed Aswan Dam, Egypt. Sir Cox took Sadhu in his car to visit the holy places in Jerusalem. He saw and prayed at all the important places in the Holy Land like Jericho, Bethany, Bethlehem, Hebron, Rama, Bethel, Nazareth, Tiberis, Magdela, Capernavm, Sea of Galilee, Dead Sea, Jordan river, the holy places in Jerusalem, Mount Olive and Gathsemane. He also preached in the Cathedral of Jerusalem at the behest of the Bishop of Jerusalem. Sadhu left the Holy Land rejoicing in the fulfilment of the greatest ambition of his life. During this period he used to say "wherever I go He is with me."

Sadhu went from Palestine to Egypt. He visited the church built at the place where Jesus Christ and His parents took refuge during their flight from King Herod.

On 27 February Sadhu reached Geneva. The meeting was held in the courtyard of a school in Tavanés, the city of clocks. Thou-

sands of people gathered there to listen to him. He told them about his transformation and said that the living Christ is a shepherd who still goes about in search of his sheep.

On 3 March he reached Laussane and preached at Christ Church. A large number of people gathered to hear his speeches at places like Bern, Zurich etc. A communist who was listening to the speeches of Sadhu said: "If all people were like this Sadhu, we would have no need of communism."

Pastor Otto Lotterberg who translated Sadhu's speeches in Switzerland wrote: "For the past few weeks, India's apostle Sadhu Sundar Singh was travelling through Switzerland. In towns and villages he spoke about the means by which Christian happiness comes to a person's life. ... One evening, the church at Laussane became too crowded so that the Sadhu had to shift his speech to an open ground outside the church. What was so special about him that attracted people? Are they attracted by the fact that he had given up his family and homeland and was wandering wearing saffron clothes and overcoming several difficulties? Were they attracted by the accounts of his experiences in Tibet? There is no doubt that they are unique experiences. We have seen speakers who are often disappointed by their speeches. ... Sundar Singh's preachings are simple and humorous enough to attract human hearts and lead them into higher pedestals of nobility. ... How sweet is his interaction with people! All those who see him at the breakfast table after his reading of the Holy Bible could observe the peace and calmness displayed on his face. What is the essence of the message of Sundar Singh? Prayer. Incessant prayer. Pray earnestly in order to receive grace for doing fruitful actions. He said that awareness of one's duties, sacrificial love and sense of responsibility towards neighbours are blessings to be received as a result of prayer. ... He added that priests and those who do the work of God should pray more.

From Switzerland, Sadhu Sundar Singh visited countries like Germany, Scandinavia and Holland. On 5 April 1922, he reached Ger-

many. Most of the Germans were Lutherans. They did not like the way in which Sundar Singh preached. The Lutherens believed in St. Paul's tenet of 'Justification through faith' only and believed that this alone would bring about salvation. For them, Sadhu Sundar Singh's concept of unity of all churches might not have been acceptable. Sadhu was worried about the frantic rush of Germany after material gains. Sundar Singh's interpretation regarding prayer was also unacceptable to Germans. About prayer Sundar Singh said:

“Real prayer is not supplication for material objects; but communion with God. As God's spirit resides in us, prayer is gathering what is due to us and what we own.”

“Just as fishes can't live under water without emerging to the surface and taking in atmospheric air at times, our souls engrossed day and night in labouring for worldly gains feel suffocation and death in the depths of darkness unless they are able to breath in the air high above.”

The Evangelical Lutheran magazine criticized these views in its editorial “We cannot fully agree to Sadhu's views that prayer is unification with God and several Christians do not know how to pray. But as per Christ's teachings, prayer seems to be supplication for one's needs.”

On 13 April Sadhu reached Sweeden from Germany. He was the guest of the Archbishop of Sweeden. When he went to Stockholm for preaching, he stayed in the palace as the guest of the reigning King's brother Prince Oscar Bernard. The people of Sweeden confessed that they had never seen such a large gathering for a spiritual speech. From Sweeden Sadhu went to preach in countries like Norway, Denmark and Holland. At Copenhagen Sundar Singh visited Queen Davager, the mother of Tsar Alexander III who had been killed in the Russian revolution and prayed for her. The second missionary journey to Europe helped Sundar Singh to interact with several people belonging to the upper classes of the soci-

ety. But whenever he found time, he went to interact with the peasants in villages.

Sadhu returned to England from Holland. The hectic schedule of speeches and preachings tired Sadhu very much. He preached at the Keswick convention. The topic of the speech was Romans 1:16: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes." He addressed the meeting of priests and declared the reason for lack of enlightenment and fire among those disciple of Christ:

"When Christ called his disciples some of them were fisherman. He transformed them into those who catchmen. But after Christ's crucifixion they returned to their old jobs once again. When Christ saw them again they had back tracked from the job he had entrusted with them and had returned to their former jobs. Even today several servants of Christ have left the duties God had given them and have become fisherman."

On 28 July, 1922 (as per some records the date is 22 July) he embarked on a ship from London to Bombay. Thus he completed his European tour. Sadhu used to say:

"I have to go happily wherever God sends me. I have found my bed sometimes in palaces, sometimes in huts and mostly in open fields. But wherever I have been, I have longed only for the glorification of my master and king, Jesus Christ."

## A brief survey of Sundar Singh's books

After the European tour, the Sadhu's health deteriorated rapidly. He continued to receive invitations from Europe. But he decided to spend the rest of his life in India and Tibet. On 25 September 1922 he reached Bombay. After his return he started publishing a book each every year till 1929.

1. At the Master's Feet - 1922
2. Reality and Religion - 1923
3. A Search for Reality - 1924
4. Life of spirituality - 1925
5. World of spirituality - 1926
6. Real life - 1927
7. People with Christ and without Christ - 1928

All these books were written in Urdu. The hectic schedule of programmes affected Sadhu's health considerably. Several diseases like heart disease, blindness and ulcer weakened him. He decided to take rest at Subathu.

### **At the Master's Feet**

Sadhu's first book 'At the Master's Feet' is a conversation between a Master and his disciple. The master is Lord Jesus Christ and the disciple is Sundar Singh. The master instructs his disciple from the Holy Bible and the experiences of life. The master gives definitions as reply to each question. This book contains six chapters and is a small, yet great work. It describes six topics namely the revelation of God's presence, sin, salvation, prayer, The holy cross and the mystery of salvation, and 'Heaven and Hell.'

In the preface of the book, Sadhu talks about three visions he

had. Sadhu reached a forest at night for his prayer. Suddenly a poor man came to him. Sadhu thought that he had come to ask for alms. He told the man that he was a poor Sadhu and had nothing with him. If he reached the neighbouring village he was likely to get something. Immediately the man glowed like a lightning and disappeared. It was only then that Sadhu understood that it was his master. He thought of this incident and wept for a while. On another day, he went to pray at the same place. A person who looked pious and respectable came there. He started advising the Sadhu in a very humble manner. He said he earnestly desired that the great Sadhu would join Hindu religion or Islam. They have a larger following and the Sadhu through his work could give great leadership to these religions. Suddenly Sadhu understood that it was Satan. He replied:

“O wicked Satan. Go away from my sight. I have understood at the outset that you are a wolf masquerading as a Lamb.” The Satan responded angrily and withdrew with snorts and grunts. The Sadhu wept and prayed:

“O Master and God! O my life soul and everything! Look at me in your tender mercy. Fill me with your Holy Spirit so that there shall be no room left in my heart for anything other than You. It is You, the donor of life and all blessings I am searching for. I am not searching for any other gifts.”

When he rose up from prayer, his eyes were filled with tears. So he could not see the Saviour standing beside him. Sadhu understood that Christ wanted to talk to him. Jesus Christ sat on the rock where the Sadhu had been sitting and the Sadhu sat at his feet. The ensuing conversation between the master and his disciple informs the contents of this book. The disciple gets detailed answers for all the questions he asks his master.

The publisher’s note of this book describes it as a great work. It is also stated that critics have compared this book to ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ and ‘Imitation of Christ.’

## **Reality and Religion**

This book contains twenty seven essays beginning with ‘The aims of Creation’ and ending with ‘Time and Eternity.’ Sundar Singh says in the preface of this book that he is attempting an explication of divine truths. He had earned them through his prayer and meditation. Even though their depth cannot be described through human language he was trying to describe some of them as best as he could. This book contain his philosophical musings.

He says: “Even though the philosophers have travelled for centuries, they have not reached their goal. But they have left some oil in their books which they squeezed out of things gleaned from here and there. This oil is insufficient to remove the drought of human needs.” The way forward is a product of faith and awakening, not of philosophy.

## **Certain quotations about prayer**

“Those who don’t have communion with God in prayer don’t deserve to be called humans. They act like animals trained to do certain things under certain systems at certain times. They are sometimes worse than animals because they don’t realize their nothingness their relationship with God and their duties towards God and man. But people who pray earn their right to become children of God and will grow in his image and semblance.”

## **About meditation**

“The real state of our soul is revealed in meditation. When we meditate we give God the opportunity to converse with us and shower His blessings abundantly.”

## **About Penitence**

“Penitence is essential for salvation. But if the sins are not absolved by the mercy of God, the sinners won’t attain salvation merely by their penitence.”

“When we always criticize and find fault with others, we cause them and ourselves harm. But when we give up self-praise and resort to self-criticism, we renew ourselves and become people with love and kindness towards others. As a result we do good to others and ourselves. We would inherit the promised land which is the kingdom of real love.”

When he speaks about life which begins in this world and reaches up to eternity, Sundar Singh says: “As a silkworm is constricted within its cocoon before it flies out as a beautiful butterfly, hardwork and hardships prepare us to enter the domain of perfection.”

This slender book contains reflections capable of bringing a Christian close to Christ and leading one to the experience of perfection.

### **Life of Spirituality**

Sadhu begins the preface of this book thus: “This book contains meditations on various aspects of our spiritual life. I have discussed the difficulties a man faces when he passes through various stages of spiritual life.” Sadhu here ascribes spirituality to twelve topics and connects the thoughts emerging out of them with Christian life. He has selected various topics like pain, hardship, opposition, criticism, morality, beauty, service and sacrifice for meditation.

“All pains and sorrows are tools to increase the depth and development of our spiritual life.”

“We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God” (Acts 14:22). We cannot know the real value of peace unless we undergo suffering; the value of sweetness without tasting bitterness; the value of goodness without experiencing evil and the value of life without passing through death. It is God’s wish that we should learn an eternal lesson from our own experience by undergoing all these, before we enter and live for ever in God’s kingdom.” He narrates the story of Oysters as an example. When a grain of sand or insect enters the shell of an oyster, the oyster will try to evict it, often with-

out success. The oyster then undergoes great pain and as a result the material, whatever it be, that got inside gets transformed into an invaluable pearl. The terrible pain experienced by the oyster gets transformed into a pearl.

In the chapter ‘Opposition and Criticism’, Sadhu says:

“It is not a matter of wonder if people don’t understand us properly and criticize our objectives. It is not something new if they, out of misunderstanding, oppose or persecute us. There are several people who don’t know their purpose of life. If they knew, they would not have wasted their time interfering in the affairs of others. Those who have understood God’s purpose about their lives, have to complete several specific duties. ... As our Christ and creator understands our good intentions, why should we worry about opposition.

He continues: “The critics who are opposed to truth do not have any specific duty. ... Their lazy hands do not have any work to do. Hence they throw stones at those who do the work of God. As Satan looks upon them as lazy people, he issues orders to them.”

Sadhu believes that eventually all people will come back to God.

### **Spiritual World or Life After Death**

The original title of this book was ‘Vision of the Spiritual World.’ It contains miraculous event. In 1912, Sadhu was praying at a place called Kotgar. His inner eye was opened to see a heavenly vision. After this Sadhu underwent the same spiritual process several times a month. Sadhu felt that he had died and had entered into heavenly bliss. There he walked and conversed with Jesus Christ, angels and the saintly souls who had departed from this world. He got his doubts clarified by them and have included them in his preachings and writings. Sundar Singh writes:

“This book repeatedly states about spirits, saints and angels. They can be distinguished as follows. Souls or Spirits include both good

souls and bad souls. They exist in an abode midway between heaven and hell. Saints have passed this stage and have climbed into the higher levels of the spiritual world. Special services are set apart for them. Angels are glorious creatures delegated to do all kinds of noble services. They are accompanied by several Saints both from this world and all other worlds. All of them live together as a family. They serve each other out of their mutual love. They experience eternal happiness in the radiance of God.”

He continues: “Since the language and examples of this world are insufficient to describe the spiritual realities, it is not possible for me to describe all that I have seen in the spiritual world. A spiritual language alone is capable of making such a description.”

He continues: “The souls of people who were thoughtless or unprepared, after entering the spiritual world will feel confused and sorry about their sudden change of state. Hence they will have to tarry longer in the dark and lower intermediary world of souls. The souls in this lower world will always disturb the people of the world. They can harm only those people who are like-minded and those who open their hearts to receive them out of own will. If God hadn’t appointed multitudes of heavenly hosts to protect His men and creation, these evil souls working in tandem with other evil souls would have brought in a lot of harm to this world.

“Those who do not submit their lives to God, will appear delirious at the time of their death. Do you know what happens at that time? They see the monstrous and devilish faces of evil souls standing around them and grow too weak to talk.”

A believer’s death is normally just the opposite. He sees God’s angels and holy souls coming to welcome him and becomes very happy. He is able to see his dear departed ones on his death bed and they get permission to lead his soul into the world of souls. In the case of some people, Christ himself arrives at the deathbed, and wiping the tears of His beloved ones, leads the soul into paradise.

“Because of the limitation of our worldly language we can only say that a sinner’s soul experiences unmitigated pain without any respite, wherever it goes. A fire without heat would always burn and torture these souls. In the world of these souls of darkness and in the place called ‘hell’, there are several grades and levels.

When I read this book I was surprised by a strange correlation. The statements made by the souls of saints to Sundar Singh regarding the state of souls of the departed, are corroborated in the ‘Liturgy of Funeral Service’ of the Malankara Orthodox Church. The same is found in all prayers for the dead. The prefatory prayer of the fourth service for men is an example for this:

“O Lord Jesus Christ! Let this soul that has departed from its temporary life in this inconsequential world be led by your angels into places of comfort, happiness and relief. Let them reside there till the day of Resurrection and greet you with a beaming countenance.”

Another prayer from the fourth service reads:

“O Lord accept the soul of this person by virtue of the Angels of peace who take the soul from this Earth and lead it to the heavenly abode. O Jesus Christ save the soul of this person from the captivity of evil souls. Let he be provided with heavenly hosts who surround those who are Your devotees and who observe Your will... Save him from the terrible hide outs of devils... O Christ be a fortress, guard, helper and accompanying guide to this servant till he reaches the blessed abode for your devotees.”

The worlds of Souls seen by Sundar Singh and the saintly Fathers were one and the same. The details of this Spiritual World envisioned by Sundar Singh are reflected in the liturgical book as well.

We keep traditional beliefs about the departure of St. Mary from this world. When her hour arrived, Jesus Christ himself came down to receive her soul and lead it to Heaven. The vision of Sundar

Singh corroborates this traditional view. This book convinces the modern society that doesn't believe in 'hell' about the reality of the 'torture of Hell.'

The preface of this book is written by Sundar Singh's friend and former Anglican bishop of Coimbatore Rt. Rev. A. J. Appa Swamy. The bishop quotes a few lines from an article by former Archbishop of Canterbury Rt. Rev. Fisher published in 'Church Times' on 23 September 1966.

"I cannot imagine that a friend who is dead is sleeping peacefully. I do not think, as these words indicate, that he has entered a state of lifelessness. I am sure that he has passed into a state with more life force and more possibilities of action, an increased spiritual consciousness and action. When St. Paul stated "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21) he also thought in these lines. The words said by Jesus Christ to the repentant thief on the cross means the same."

Sadhu Sundar Singh concludes this book with the following words: "The time when the readers enter the spiritual world and see all these things with their own eyes is not far away. Before we reject this world for ever in order to go to our eternal abode, we should do the work delegated to us faithfully. We should do it with the help of God's grace and in the spirit of prayer. Then the purpose of our life will be realised and we will enter the eternal joy of the Kingdom of the Heavenly Father without any trace of regret.

### **Real Life**

In the preface of this book, Sadhu says that he has included real life experiences in it. These events happened in different parts of the world at different times.

Sadhu says: "The wonderful events in this book are the invaluable and novel experiences in the worldly life of those who interacted with me in my spiritual vision."

The book contains five stories. The theme of the first story 'The Truth Seeker and Melchizedek' is the instability of the world. It

points out that a stable and unchanging God lives in an unstable and changing world. The story 'The Saint and the Philosopher' teaches us that real life is in keeping communion with God through incessant prayer, rather than in wasting one's life in worthless philosophical thoughts and speech. He proves with example that spiritual experiences are not merely an imagination but they are a reality. The story 'The king and the Farmer' deals with the sorrows encountered by a poor farmer. Still that good farmer tells the king: "I am trying to remain happy in any circumstance my God has placed me. He who has God's peace in his heart is a fortunate man." This story points out that God teaches man great lessons through tribulations. The theme of the story 'The Prince and the Thief' too is more or less the same. God showers goodness on wicked people even without their demand for it. ... God knows their ways. They are condemned to eternal hell because they never repent. Hence God will give them whatever they ask for in this world. But at the end of age, goodness will save the good and they would produce a lot of fruit. Similarly wickedness will sooner or later trap and destroy the wicked.

In the story 'A Lover and his Beloved' a young man belonging to the higher caste falls in love with a woman of the lower caste. They overcome several difficulties and get married saying: "The problem of caste is an incurable curse. It was created by selfish and proud people to keep man away from man. As children created by God in his own image and semblance, we are all one." They lead a happy married life. When they talk after reaching home, they speak of the foundation of an ideal Christian family life.

"If we love God, in the same way as we love each other and are ready to sacrifice our lives for one another, we will become greatly blessed. Let us love our God with our entire strength and also love our neighbours as we love ourselves."

The theme of the final story 'A Traveller' is how a man's love of money will destroy him.

The stories resemble the ideas of the Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy. They are small but full of meaning. Sadhu explains that the basis of these stories is the knowledge he got from the spiritual world.

## Sadhu's Disappearance

Sadhu who returned from Europe desired to go and reside at his favourite place Subathu. After taking rest for a certain period, he preached the gospel in the North Indian cities. He paid a visit to his old father. The father had apportioned half of his land and money for Sadhu Sundar Singh. The Sadhu accepted the money, in order not to bring sorrow to his father. He gifted his share of land to his brother. He bought a portion of a mission house using a part of the money he took. He deposited the rest of the money in a bank. This gave a whip in the hands of his critics. They criticized that Sadhu was giving up his ascetic vows by purchasing a house. Sardar Sher Singh died in 1924. Even though Sadhu went to Tibet for preaching the gospels, he became ill on the way and came back. During this period a rumour that Sadhu Sundar Singh died spread around. This news made his several friends in Europe and India sad.

What made this rumour get around? Sadhu developed diarrhea during his journey to Tibet. Somebody carried him in a stretcher to the neighbouring railway station. The story of his death was spread either by those who saw this event or by his enemies. A remembrance meeting was organised at St. Thomas Church, Shimla where he had preached and had his baptism. Later Sadhu came to know about this meeting and went to preach at this church once again.

From 1924, he preached the gospels in the North Eastern states. During this period he had been receiving invitations from several countries in Europe. But Sadhu refused these invitations because his goal was to preach the gospels in India and Tibet for the rest of his life.

By 1925, Sadhu who had been weak, fell ill. First he lost the sight of one eye. By next year, he developed pain in the chest and heart. He felt that the hour of his departure from this world was arriving. But he wanted to travel once again through his favourite fields of mission work in Tibet. He used to share this desire with his friends. Sadhu earnestly desired to suffer martyrdom in Tibet.

In a letter written to his friend Rev. Riddle on 18 April, 1929 Sadhu wrote that he was going to Tibet. "I want to complete my race and the duty given by Christ to bear witness to the gospel of God's mercy. ... If I return in the beginning of June I would like to bring two Tibetan Christians too along with me. ... If you do not hear anything from me or about me, go to Subathu in July and look after the affairs of my household." Before his journey he wrote a will bequeathing his bank deposit etc for various christian activities.

Just before his journey, he met his dear friend Doctor Watson, who was the doctor at the Leprosy hospital, Subathu and bid him good bye. It was a sorrowful scene. A gospelist named Sannulal accompanied Sadhu till the Calcutta Railway Station. Sadhu took ticket to Rishikesh. He wanted to reach Badarinath first and from there go to Tibet through the mountain path. He had told his friends that he also wanted to visit some Christians living in Rasar, east of Manasarowar Lake. He also told them that he would return by the month of June.

Days, months and years passed by. There was no news of the Sadhu. His friends enquired about him in places he was likely to visit. They couldn't get any information about him. Did he die of illness on the way? Was he trapped in the snow during his journey through the mountain path? Was he taken up to heaven like Hanok who walked with God? Did he attain martyrdom in Tibet as he had desired? Who knows?

Four years after the Sadhu's disappearance, 'The London Times' on 25 April 1933 published an announcement: "Sadhu Sundar Singh had gone to Tibet. Since there is news about him, the Government of India has officially concluded that he is certainly dead. Hence his will is given official approbation in India."

## Conclusion

There is no doubt that the invaluable and boundless radiance showered by these two saintly spiritual lamps on this world will remain for ever without fading. Even though years have elapsed, their memory still lingers in human hearts. What was the secret of their success? Can ordinary people follow their path of life? Where did their peculiarities originate? All these questions have to be subjected to detailed study?

Sundar Singh, after his vision of Christ at the age of fourteen, till his disappearance lived in ‘madness about Christ.’ His father and brothers at first, thought that he was actually mad. Sundar Singh did not view Christ in the same way as great philosophers, religious scholars or religious authorities looked at Christ. He decided that he should transform his life exactly as Christ had taught. Wherever he went to confess Christ, he had only the dress he wore, a blanket and a Holy Bible written in Urdu with him. Since he walked bare-footed, his feet used to bleed. The money he inherited from his father towards the end of his life was set apart for mission activities.

He used to say “My life is Jesus Christ: Christ is everything for me in Heaven and earth.” He was a typical Indian ascetic. He had adopted the life style and style of meditation of Indian ascetics. He was able to remain in prayer and meditation for hours on end. He could commune with Christ and saints. Christ was the focal point of his life. He had conviction about Universal Salvation. He believed that even wicked souls living in Hell could be brought to Salvation. But he was hesitant about declaring this faith openly. Sundar Singh loved all churches. He never tried to find fault with or scold other religions. He believed that Christian faith was the fulfilment of Hinduism. Even Hindus have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. One can find several beautiful things in Hinduism. But he believed that the

world received its greatest light only from Jesus Christ. He was able to give an Indian orientation to Christ centred piety. Sadhu's goal was to order his life and mission in the fashion of Jesus Christ. He used to say that, what we need today is not doctrines of faith but a living Christ. He was not opposed to doctrines. But he thought that the doctrines that didn't contain Christ were meaningless.

Even though Sadhu had several friends across the world he didn't suggest anyone as his successor. Neither did he accept anyone as his disciple. It might be because his calling had been unique that he didn't permit anyone to become his disciple. Every moment of his life was for Christ. We are not sure whether a Christian Church exists in Tibet as a testimony of his tribulations, even though it had been his favourite gospel ground. He didn't do anything to retain his memory in this world. He didn't leave even his corpse for this world.

What retains Sadhu Sundar Singh's memory are only the memories about him.

Mar Gregorios of Parumala had efficient successors. Many of them led this church for a long period of time. The most prominent ones among them were St. Geevarghese Mar Dionysius of Vattasseril and Catholicos Baselius Geevarghese II. He had a large number of disciples. He transformed this church into one with a spiritual vision and an evangelical mission. He prepared people for the process of spiritual renewal through educational institutions. He attracted several people to Christ and made them members of the church. The Metropolitan understood that he could facilitate material growth along with spiritual growth. He conserved the growth of the church in the world and lived for it under the belief that church is the body of Christ. He never deviated from his communion with God. The Metropolitan lived every moment of his life in the grace of Holy Spirit.

Parumala Church, where the mortal remains of Mar Gregorios are interred, is a holy place for Orthodox Christians. They consider it a great blessing and honour to visit and pray at the tomb of the

Spiritual King of Orthodox Church, Mar Gregorios of Parumala, something similar to the visits and prayers made at the tomb of Israel's King and Prophet David on Mount Zion by all those who visit the Holy Land.

The life of Mar Gregorios was fully centred upon and dedicated to Christ. Let the feasts and other festivities commemorating this saint be Christ centred, producing good results for the goodness of humankind and strengthening man's relationship with God. They should not end up as mere observances. Since the saintliness of Mar Gregorios was got from his constant communion with God, let the focal point of his tomb too be Christ. Let Christ's wounded palms shower boundless blessings on those who pray there.

## **Appendix 1**

# **Mar Gregorios of Parumala: Chronology of events**

15 June 1848 - Born as the youngest son of Kochumathai and Kochumaria of Chathuruthy House, Mulamthuruthy.

26 September 1857 - Mathews Mar Athanasius of Palakkunnathu ordains him a 'Korooyo' (an initiated deacon) at Karingachira Church.

Oct. - Nov. 1864 - Yuyakkim Mar Coorilos Ordains him as Full deacon and priest.

Nov. - Dec. 1864-77 - Vicar of Kandanad and Mulamthuruthy parishes and secretary to Yuyakkim Mar Coorilos.

7 April, 1872 - Joseph Mar Dionysius V ordains him Ramban upon the recommendation of the general body of Mulamthuruthy parish.

July 1872 - Gets 2 acres of land at Parumala. Builds a wooden cottage (Azhippura) there.

September 1873 - Meeting of church representatives at Parumala presided over by Yuyakkim Mar Coorilos.

1875 - 77 - Secretary to Patriarch Peter III who visited Kerala.

27 - 29 June 1876 - The translator of Patriarch Peter III at the Synod of Mulamthuruthy.

27 August 1876 - Consecration of Holy Chrism at Mulamthuruthy.

10 December 1876 - Consecrated metropolitan of Niranam diocese under the name Geevarghese Mar Gregorios, at North Paravur Church by Patriarch Peter III.

5 May 1877 - Assumes charge as metropolitan of 22 churches of Niranam diocese.

June 1877 - Begins administration of the diocese from the wooden cottage at Parumala.

1884 - Assumes charge of Thumpamon diocese and Later of Kollam diocese.

1888 - Tour of Ceylon.

Monday 29 July 1889 - Assists in the consecration ceremony of Alvares Mar Yulios at Old Seminary, Kottayam.

Sunday 29 May 1892 - Assists in the consecration of Reni Vilathi Mar Thimothios at Our Lady of Good Death church at Colombo.

May 1892 - Honoured 'Commander of the Crown of Thrones' at Ceylon.

1892 - The meeting of priests of southern dioceses of Kerala at Parumala.

Sunday 27 January 1895 - The temporary consecration of Parumala Church.

Monday 28 January 1895 - Went from Parumala to Jerusalem.

Wednesday 20 March 1895 - From Bombay to Jerusalem.

Thursday 4 April 1895 - At Port Zaid.

Sunday 7 April 1895 - At Yoppa Port - In Holy Land.

14 April 1895 - Easter

Thursday 25 April 1895 - Voyage from Yoppa.

Friday 26 April 1895 - At Port Zaid.

Tuesday 30 April 1895 - Started for Bombay.

Monday 13 May 1895 - At Bombay.

Friday 17 May 1895 - Reached Shornur after visit to Jerusalem.

4 June 1895 - Royal reception at Kottayam town and old seminary on his return from Jerusalem.

6 June 1895 - Return to Parumala.

June 1895 - Speaks at the reception hosted by the people of Parumala. This speech is known as 'A Devotee's Words.'

July 1895 - Publishes 'Journey to Jerusalem' the travelogue of his visit to the Holy Land.

August 1895 - Finds an English school at Thumpamon.

1899 - Finds Mar Ignatius school at Kunnamkulam.

1900 - Gives the name 'St. Mary's School' to Parel Angadi School, Kunnamkulam.

23 January 1901 - Begins the Thumpamon School in the school building.

January 1902 - Photographed at St. George Church Thiruvananthapuram for the Travancore State Manual.

October 1902 - Grows Physically weak.

Sunday 2 November 1902 - Receives Extreme Unction and Holy Communion.

Monday 3 November 1902 - Passes away at 1 am.

Tuesday 4 November 1902 - His mortal remains interred at Parumala Seminary Chapel.

2 November 1947 - Mar Gregorios declared Saint of Malankara Orthodox Church.

## Appendix 2

# Sadhu Sundar Sing: Chronology of events

1889 – Born at Rampur Kataania, Ludhiana, Punjab

1903 – Conversion

1904 – Cast out from home

1905 – Baptised in Simla; begins life as a sadhu

1907 – Works in leprosy hospital at Sabathu

1908 – First visit to Tibet

1909 – Enters Divinity College, Lahore, to train for the ministry

1911 – Hands back his preacher's license; returns to the sadhu's life

1912 – Tours through north India and the Buddhist states of the Himalayas

1918 to 1922 – Travels worldwide

1923 – Turned back from Tibet

1925 to 1927 – Quietly spends time writing

1927 – Sets out for Tibet but returns due to illness

1929 – Final attempt to reach Tibet

1972 – Sadhu Sundar Singh Evangelical Association formed

### Works by Sundar Singh

Sundar Singh wrote eight books between 1922 and 1929. His manuscripts were written in Urdu, and later translated into English and other languages.

At the Master's Feet (London: Fleming H. Revell, 1922).  
Electronic versions: Google Books and CCEL.

With and Without Christ (London: Cassell; New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929).

The Real Life (published posthumously; Madras: CLS, 1965).

The Real Pearl (published posthumously; Madras: CLS, 1966).

Reality and Religion: Meditations on God, Man and Nature (London: Macmillan, 1924).

The Search after Reality: Thoughts on Hinduism, Buddhism, Muhammadanism and Christianity (London: Macmillan, 1925).

Meditations on Various Aspects of the Spiritual Life (London: Macmillan, 1926).

Visions of the Spiritual World (London: Macmillan, 1926).

A number of his works were compiled and edited by others:

The Cross Is Heaven: The Life and Writings of Sadhu Sundar Singh, edited by A. J. Appasamy (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956). – A collection of short articles by Sundar Singh.

Life in Abundance, edited by A. F. Thyagaraju (Madras: CLS, 1980). – This is a collection of transcripts of his sermons, preached in Switzerland in March 1922, as recorded by Alys Goodwin.

The Christian Witness of Sadhu Sundar Singh: A Collection of His Writings, edited by T. Dayanandan Francis (Madras, India: The Christian Literature Society, 1989).

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadhu\\_Sundar\\_Singh](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sadhu_Sundar_Singh)