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THE LIFE AND WORK OF MAR ABIMALEK TIMOTHEUS

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ABSTRACT

His Grace Mar Abimalek Timotheus was born on 28th August 1878, in Iran. Mar Timotheus was the Metropolitan of Malabar and India. He was ordained a deacon in 1903 and made a priest and Archdeacon in 1904 by Patriarch Mar Benjamin Shimun XXI. He was ordained as a Bishop and elevated as Metropolitan of Malabar and India by the same Patriarch in 1907. He arrived at Trichur on February 27th 1908. Mar Timotheus was a divine man who truly served God. He ruled the Church of the East in India for 37 long years. He had so much discernment and he also had power to heal the sick. The Assyrian Church of the East locally known as Chaldean Syrian Church is flourishing in India because of his tireless effort. There are 30,000 members in India mainly in Thrissur and Kerala. There are 400,000 members throughout the world. We are learning about this ancient church which even our forefathers did not know.

KEYWORDS: Church, Patriarch, Chariot, Cape Comorin, Christian.

INTRODUCTION :

Mar Abimalek Timotheus was the Archbishop of the Chaldean Syrian Church¹ in India. He was ordained as a priest and sent to Malabar and India by his friend Patriarch Benjamin Mar Shimun. Mar Timotheus also took part

in the freedom struggle.

EARLY YEARS

Abimalek De Kelliatha was born as the son of a priest named Eshai in the little Village of Mar Beesho near Lake Urmia in Persia² on August 28th, 1878, which happened to be the death anniversary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, mother of Christ.

From his childhood, Abimalek spent his life in prayer and meditation. His interest was to live a godly life. The missionaries of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Assyria Mission³ at Urmia in Persia educated him. They trained him for greater responsibilities of the Church.

In April 1903, the 16 year old Benjamin

Shimun assured his duties as Patriarch and asked his long time friend Abimalek De Kelliatha to become a deacon. He became an Archdeacon in 1904. He studied English from W.H. Browne along with Benjamin and Surma.⁴ The young Archdeacon served as the special representative of the Patriarch till December 1907.

In December 1907, Patriarch Mar Benjamin Shimun consecrated Archdeacon Abimalek as Bishop and Metropolitan for Malabar and India at Mar Shallitha Church at Qudshanis⁵ and sent him to India. On December 15, 1907, he set on a tedious and dangerous journey to India via Mosul, Iraq.

Mar Timotheus had to disguise himself as an Arab shepherd as he was afraid that some people would kill him on the way if his identity was revealed. From Mosul, Mar Timotheus



travelled to Baghdad. Then he sailed from Basra and reached Muscat on February 12, 1908. He sent a telegram from Muscat to the anxious and eagerly waiting congregation at Trichur. He reached Bombay on February 16, 1908.

On the 27th of February 1908, he was given a grand reception at the Trichur railway station and taken Valiapally⁶, through Civil Hospital Road and Central Main Road along with a crowded procession accompanied by drums and music enthroned in a specially constructed and decorated Pandal⁷. The Metropolitan was taken in a chariot drawn by a horse at Trichur. However, while the procession was approaching the Big Church, the young and educated men drew the chariot themselves instead of the horse.

The congregation loved their new Metropolitan. Mar Timotheus began to celebrate Holy Services at the Mart Mariam Big Church, but he did not celebrate Holy Services on the altar because of images kept in the church. Mar Timotheus made a good impression in the minds of the non – Christians on the day of his arrival. He shook hands with non – Christians and chatted with them freely. He spoke in Syriac and English as he did not know Malayalam at that time.

FIRST DECADE

Mar Abimalek Timotheus had to face a lot of court cases. In 1911, Michael Augustine, the Cor - Episcopa insisted that Mar Timotheus could only function as his successor only after his death. The Michael Augustine died in 1911.

SECOND AND THIRD DECADES

In the second and third decades, Mar Timotheus went to Baquaba Refugee Camp in Iraq and ordained a 17 year old boy called Mansur Darmo⁸ as a deacon who later succeeded him as Metropolitan. Mar Timotheus went to Britain and United States in 1924. He built many churches and the Metropolitan's Palace next to the Big Church in 1927.

In 1931, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru⁹, who later became the first Prime Minister of India along with his wife Kamala and daughter Indira visited him and stayed with him for a few days.

Mar Timotheus stood up to the British to show he is a true Christian. He took part in the freedom struggle. Mr. C. W. E. Cotton, the British Resident awarded the Big Church to Mar Timotheus in 1925.

Then in January 1934, Mohandas Gandhi visited Mar Timotheus and they both sat on the floor. Gandhi was impressed by the simplicity of this foreign Metropolitan and his love for India. Mar Timotheus also wore Khadi¹⁰ which is a hand spun cloth.

FINAL YEARS

During this period, Mar Timotheus ordained a new batch of deacons on his 61st Birthday in 1939. He ordained four deacons. Prominent people like Mr. N. O. Inasu who was chairman of the Municipal Corporation moved away from the Metropolitan and joined the Roman Catholic Church. A young trustee, Mr. M. O. Thoma Kutty¹¹ who happened to be N.O. Inasu's son-in-law remained close to the Metropolitan.

In 1934, the government appealed for funds for the earthquake relief. Mar Timotheus sent Rs.610/- In July 1941, Mar Timotheus collected Rs.70/- from his congregation towards the Cochin State Cyclone Relief Fund. It was gratefully acknowledged by the Diwan of Cochin, Perskhar. On February 17, 1944, Mar Timotheus sent Rs.101/- for the Greek Relief Fund. The sunny summer heat of Trichur was unbearable for Mar Abimalek Timotheus. He went to Coimbatore, Madanapalle, Bangalore, Coonoor etc to recoup for his health. He was brought up in the cooler climate of Kurdistan.¹²

On 25th of December, 1940, he bequeathed his personal amount of money to his nephew Dr. Eshai De Kelliatha who was a medical doctor who studied at Madras Medical College.

DEMISE AND FUNERAL

In February 1945, Mar Timotheus went to Cape Comorin¹³ in the Southern tip of India. He went there to rest. From there he proceeded to the Mission Hospital at Neyyur near Nagercoil.

In April 1945, he returned to Trichur after his treatment. He stopped at the Travellers Bungalow at Ernakulam on his return journey. They local church members met their beloved Metropolitan. He looked very happy. He carried

some shells which he picked up from Cape Comorin for children at Trichur. He was always fond of children who flocked to the Metropolitan's Palace with respect for the old man with the beard.

On April 20, 1945, Mar Timotheus reached Trichy accompanied by Deacon M.O. Verghese reached Trichur. On Sunday, April 22, Mar Timotheus conducted Holy Qurbana¹⁴ at Mar Yohannan Mamadhana Church. He wanted to be in the horse cart for Palm Sunday. His doctor, Dr. P. N. Krishna Iyer gave him the treatment.

The Palm Sunday on April 30, 1945 was a special day. One to his sickness, he could not be in the Palm Sunday procession. He saw the Sunday school children singing songs in Syriac. On Palm Sunday, he talked with a few people. He was still conscious. He went to bed after 9 pm. He died at 9:45pm. There was a Halo on his head. The next day, his dead body was taken to the Big Church where it lay in state until Wednesday. He was buried in the sitting pose. Many Hindus, Christians and Muslims visited the Big Church.

CONCLUSION

Mar Abimalek Timotheus was a divine old man. He had the God given power to heal the sick and pray for women to have children. He showed love to everyone. He was loved by all the people of Trichur. Too bad he could not see India as an independent nation.

END NOTES

1. Chaldean Syrian Church is the Indian Branch of that Assyrian Church of the East, Aprem, Mar, Moran Etho, The Assyrian Church of the East in the 20th Century, pp.95-100.
2. Persia was renamed Iran in 1935, New Book of Knowledge, Grolier & Company, 1985.
3. Archbishop of Canterbury sent the first organized mission to the Assyrian Church in 1886, Aprem, Mar, Mar Abimalek Timotheus, Mar Narsai Press, Trichur, Kerala, pp 6-7.
4. Lady Surma D'Bait Mar Shimun was the elder sister of Patriarch Mar Benjamin Shimun,. Surma D' Mar Shimun. Assyrian Church Customs, Turlock, U.S.A. 1983.
5. Mar Shallitha Church at Qudshanis was where the Patriarchate was in 1907. Mar Aprem, Mar Abimalek Timotheus, Mar Narsai Press, Trichur, India, 1975.
6. Valiapally means Big Church, Aprem, Mar, Mar Abimalek Timotheus, Trichur, 1975.
7. Pandal means Sharmiyana.
8. Deacon Mansur Darmo later became Mar Thoma Darmo, Mar Aprem, Mar Thoma Darmo, Mar Narsai Press, Trichur, Kerala, 1974, p.5.
9. Nehru, Jawaharlal, An Autobiography, London, 1936. pp, 273 – 274.
10. Khadi is hand spun cloth which is weaved. Rajmohan Gandhi, Mohandas, Penguin Viking, 2008.
11. M.O.Thoma Kutty was an M.L.C. in the Cochin Legislative Assembly.
12. Kurdistan is currently situated between Iran, Iraq and Turkey. Mar Aprem, Mar Abimalek Timotheus, Mar Narsai Press, Trichur, 1975.
13. Cape Comorin is now known as Kaniyakumari situated in Tamil Nadu.
14. Holy Qurbana means Holy Communion, Surma D'Bait Mar Shimun, Assyrian Church Customs, Mar Shimun Memorial Fund, Turlock, California, U.S.A., 1983.

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