



CHRISTIAN
MUSICOLOGICAL
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INDIA IN 1500AD

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**THE NARRATIVES OF
JOSEPH THE INDIAN**

ANTONY VALLAVANTHARA C.M.I.



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No. 76

Oriental Institute of Religious Studies
Vadavathoor, Kottayam 686 010, Kerala, India
1984

www.TheCMSIndia.org



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INDIA IN 1500 AD
The Narratives of Joseph the Indian

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Originally published as
Kerala Documents Series - 1
by

Research Institute for Studies in History (RISHI)
Mannanam, Kottayam - 686 561
Kerala, India.

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MUSICOLOGICAL
SOCIETY OF INDIA

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Price Rs. 80.00 (India)
\$ 15.00 (Abroad)

Printed at the St. Joseph's Press, Mannanam, 1984

www.TheCMSIndia.org



PREFACE

Love for documents and a sense of criticism are authentic signs of true search for history. Though the Indians in general and the people of Kerala in particular do not have the habit of preserving documents of the past, today many people and centres are interested in collecting and preserving historical documents. Unlike in the recent past more and more people are making critical study of history with the help of authentic documents. Care for the past and the practice of documented criticism was lacking in studies on Kerala history in general and history of Christianity in Kerala in particular. Writing of history of Kerala, especially of the Christian communities, has to take a new turn of becoming more documented. Many people have realised the need for such a change in writing history. Many have moved in those lines. It is in pursuance of this target that I decided to make an in-depth study of the Narratives of Joseph the Indian, a magnificent description of India in 1500 AD, as it came from the lips of an Indian and recorded by a European.

This study is the result of three years of research. I have conceived this study as a first step toward the realisation of a cherished plan for publishing what I used to call the *Documenta Malabarica*, a series of publications of historical documents of Malabar or Kerala origin. My researches into the sources of the Liturgical Year of the Thomas Christians, made me conscious of the value of Malabar documents, both in print and in manuscript, for the study of the history. It was in 1979 that I first began to think in this line and I worked on the Narratives of Joseph the Indian to publish this document as the first in the series *Documenta Malabarica*. Now after five years I have great pleasure to publish this as the first in the first series called



"Kerala Documents Series" published under the auspices of the *Research Institute for Studies in History (Rishi)*, Mannanam, an Institute for the study of socio-cultural and religious history of India, especially of Kerala.

This work was presented at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, for obtaining the degree of Licenciate in Historical Sciences. Many people have helped me in this work. First of all I express my gratitude to Professor Roger Aubert, of the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium, who guided me in this work. I remember with gratitude Professor Bahna de Andrade of the University of Portugal, who was good enough to put at my disposal all the knowledge and documentation he had on the topic, even the manuscript of his own translation of the documents. I remember with thanks Fr. Jose Bacelar Oliveira, Rector of the Catholic University of Portugal and the Jesuit fathers of the Provincial House, Rua da Lapa, Lisbon. It was at the Jesuit house at Rua da Lapa that I wrote the first draft of this work. I thank very cordially all my friends and colleagues, especially the members of my community, who have helped me to realise this work.

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Fr. Antony Vallavanthara CMI

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Search into the Sources

The Narratives of Joseph the Indian have come down to us in different languages. We have them today in Italian, Latin, French, German, Dutch, Portuguese and English. The various versions of the Narratives can be traced back to three main sources, one in Italian, another in Latin and the third in Dutch. All the known sources are found in print. We have not yet come across any text of the Narratives of Joseph the Indian in manuscript. Perhaps, there is a fourth source mentioned by some authors.¹ We have not, however, succeeded in tracing any copy of it.

1.1.0. Preliminary survey of the three sources

Of the three known sources, the earliest is Italian. It was first printed and published from Vicentia, in Italy, in 1507 with the title *Paesi Nouamente Retrouati*.² It is a collection of voyages of the great discoveries of the "new world" at the end of the 15th and the beginning of the 16th centuries. The second was published in Latin from Milan, in Italy in 1508, seven months after the publication of *Paesi*, under the title *Itinerarium*

1. Discussed elsewhere. Cf. 1.1.4.

2. Hereafter *Paesi*. For further details Cf. 1.1.1., 1.2.0.ff, Appendix I.



Portugal. After two and a half months' voyage they came to the Cape of Good Hope on Palm Sunday, the 4th of April. And at the end of the month of June 1501, Cabral's ships reached Lisbon.

2.2.2. Joseph travels to Lisbon with Cabral and visits Rome and Venice.

We have said above that it was when Cabral's ships were in Cochin and Cranganore that Joseph and his companion approached Cabral. We have several witnesses to this. The Narratives of Joseph the Indian describe it in the following words:

"As we tarried there doing our trade, as already mentioned in the chapter lxxviii of Book three, two brothers, Indians as well as Christians, came from the town called Caranganora, about twenty miles from Cuchin. They said that they greatly desired to visit the western countries, especially that they vowed to go to visit Rome and the holy city of Jerusalem. Therefore they came aboard our ships and travelled with us."⁴⁸

Here the reference is to the discussion of this fact in the *Anonymous Narratives* as found in chapter lxxviii of Book III of *Itinerarium* and *Paesi*. We have cited above⁴⁹ the English translation of the relevant passage of *Paesi* given by W. B. Greenlee. Here we cite the English translation of the Latin text found in *Itinerarium* and *Novus Orbis*.

"Therefore we remained there about 15 days loading the ships not far from the city of Cuchin where there is a port which is called Carnagallo, where we find Christians... two Christians who said they wanted to go to Jerusalem and from there to Rome (approached the Captain), which pleased the captain."⁵⁰

48. *ibid.*

49. Cf. 2.2.1., p. 73, note. 46.

50. *Novus Orbis, Basileae, 1532, p. 85, (translation is mine).*

None of these texts mentions the name of Joseph's companion. But De Barros, Goes, Gouvea, Geddes and Soledade give the name of Joseph's companion as Mathias. Describing how Joseph approached Cabral, Goes tells us that two Indian Christians named Joseph and Mathias, both of them brothers and natives of Cranganore, came to Cabral asking him to take them to Portugal from where they could go to Rome and Jerusalem. Cabral was very pleased at their idea and sent them to be accommodated in the ship.⁵¹

De Barros gives some more details in the *Da Primeira Decada*, which we reproduce here, as paraphrased by Mundadan:

"He says that the Portuguese after having established friendly relations with the king of Cochin, were loading their ships in twenty days' time in the river of Cranganore five leagues from Cochin. In this port of Cranganore the Portuguese were approached by many Christians of St Thomas. Of these Christians two brothers named Mathias and Joseph, who had been educated by the Armenian Bishops who resided there, wanted to go with Cabral to Portugal and Rome, and from there to Jerusalem and Armenia to see their Patriarch."⁵²

Faria y Sousa referring to Cabral's voyage says:

"At Cranganore were found some Christians of St Thomas, under Armenian Bishops. Two were brought to Portugal, one died and the other returned."⁵³

The Narratives of Joseph the Indian tell us that Joseph the Indian met Cabral at Cochin coming from Cranganore: (he) "came from the town called Caranganora about twenty miles from Cuchin."⁵⁴ But Goes, Barros and the author of the *Anonymous Narrative* mention Cranganore as the place where Joseph approached Cabral.

51. Goes, I, 135, cited by A. M. Mundadan, *Thomas Christians*, p. 58.

52. A. M. Mundadan, *ibid.* p. 58; Barros, *op. cit.*, Bk. V, ch. viii.

53. Faria y Sousa, *op. cit.* p. 59.

54. Latin Text, ch. 1. in Part IV.



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