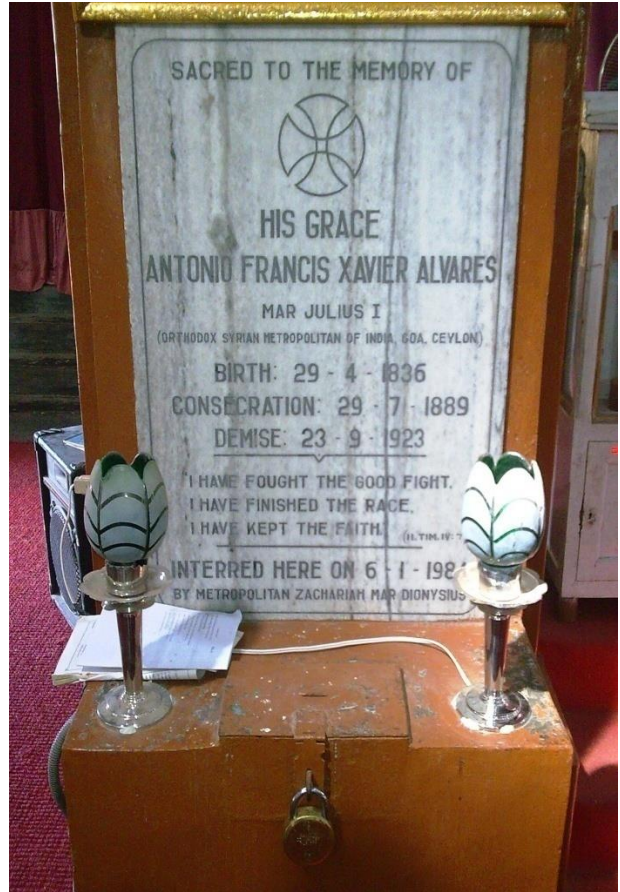


‘Alvares Mar Yulios’ – an unsung hero of Malankara Orthodox Church

(1836-1923) [91st year of departure (September 23rd)]



Alvares Mar Yulios, the self-made martyr of Malankara Orthodox Syrian Church.



The Holy Relics of Mar Yulios, reverently kept in St. Mary’s Church, Ribandar, Goa.

Albert Einstein once said: "Generations to come, it may well be, will scarce believe that such a man as this one ever in flesh and blood walked upon this Earth." Those words were expressed in astonishment by the great scientist after observing and evaluating Gandhiji's unmatched personality for years. The above words shall be fully apt & possible for future Malankara Orthodox Church children to think of late lamented Alvares Mar Yulios metropolitan if we rephrase it as 'generations to come, will disbelieve that such an individual was associated to our Church, with unparalleled fire to serve the downtrodden and unseen, generating almost zero recognition and support to the mission he single-handedly undertook for God's benevolence, with staunch motivation only God Almighty can impart'. We are talking about the saintly and blessed Alvares Mar Yulios metropolitan who had left this earthly arena to His Master's heavenly abode

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90 years ago on September 23, 1923. Though the Holy Church had done comparatively well to venerate the saintly father under the auspices of the 3-year old Brahmawar diocese, one can still sense a lot of space which need to be filled with the spiritual fragrance the devout father had left behind. The Malankara Orthodox Church members' understanding about the life and experiences of the saint for the Church is limited to a few, mostly to Church members settled outside Kerala and more to those in and around Western India. We need to shower more praises to God Almighty on this blessed death anniversary day of Mar Alvares, for blessing our Church with such a divine personality. The whole life of Mar Alvares can be scripted briefly as 'one who was an alien to the Church by birth, but later became a heavenly intercessor by choice' for thousands of believers'. Rather than remembering the holy father just once a year on His Grace' Dhukrono day, we need to implement measures that could shed more light into the 'painfully sweet' experiences Mar Alvares had, in experiencing tests given by His Master before attaining eternity. One who read and analyze the saint's life sketch will surely certify that the saint's life was neither mediocre nor was it namesake done 'for the masses OR public applause' and Lord the Father would have definitely given a unique place in the bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. On this auspicious day of remembrance of the saint, we are trying to highlight a fraction each of the extreme and drastically unlike incidents of Mar Alvares' life shedding sweat and blood, that paved way for the growth of the H. Church.

Early life as a Catholic

As many are not aware, Mar Alvares was one of the very few examples of Church fathers who was born in a different environment but became a pillar against the turbulences the Church faced as per God Almighty's mysterious plans and decisions. We can cite examples like Augen Baava thirumeni, Rene Vilatte (Mar Thimotheos), Geevarghese Mar Ivanios thirumeni etc. and many others who embraced the totally different faith of Malankara Orthodox Church and turned out to be more Orthodox than many who were born as members of the Church. As all mentioned above proved with their lives how steadfast and staunch should be the commitment to God Almighty's Church, Mar

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Alvares also was no different. Alvares was born on 29th April 1836 as the son of a Roman Catholic in the erstwhile Portuguese-ruled Goa. He was made a priest of Catholic Order and then an Archbishop of Goa to administer the Catholics in British India in the early 80's. Though he served the Catholic Church, he was disillusioned by the activities within the Church and was in search of the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The inner conscience of Alvares hurt him so harshly, being a silent partner to the pseudo-spiritual acts of the Church. Taking for granted the fact Goa was a Catholic-dominated area, the Church tried to interfere in the state administration and didn't discourage false devotion and religious exhibitionism by the Church members. Alvares was against this and tried to stand as a corrective force against the 'hidden evil' within the Church, but with very little success. As a priest and a staunch freedom fighter of Goa, Fr. Alvares, served his land till 1887. His philanthropy, patriotism and yearning for freedom from foreign Portuguese yoke, journalistic insight and his aristocratic birth had won a good number of followers for him in Goa and South Canara. Trying to purify the sinful ways of the Church, Alvares went back to his native place. He published some journals through which he condemned the misgivings of the Jesuit Missionaries of that time. The Church with the help of the state administration meted out to Fr. Alvares the most heinous retaliation using ecclesiastical and civil powers. The non-ending persecution against him rose to higher magnitudes as the Church succeeded in turning the majority of the people also against him which eventually forced him to leave the place.

Journalist, writer, Educationist, Social worker & Apostle of Charity....

Fr. Alvares started a number of periodicals like 'A Cruz' (The Cross), 'Vardade', 'Times of Goa' etc. Most of those focused in giving directions in educative and supportive rights for public. As he was a critic by instinct who pursued the corrective stand of the Government, most of them were banned and forced to stop publication in short time spans. He also wrote and published books like "The Universal supremacy of Church of Christ" and "Antioch and Rome".

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He was a great scholar, man of high principles, a great visionary and had an impressive personality. He opened a college where Goan priests taught Portuguese, French, Latin and Philosophy. In 1912 Mar Julius opened an English School in Panaji.

Since Goa was frequently affected by epidemics like Malaria, Typhoid, Small Pox, cholera and plague, Mar Alvares published a booklet ‘Direcoes Para O Treatment Do Cholera’ (Directions for treatment of cholera). He was concerned at the shortage of food to the poor almost a century back, and to cover up for the food shortage, while appealing to people to produce cheaper food, he published a booklet ‘Mandioca’ [to propagate cultivation of Tapioca].

Though dubbed by the Portuguese Government as a traitor, he was considered as an ‘apostle of charity’ by all Goans. In 1871 he started a charitable organization in Panaji to help the poor, beginning with helping beggars, branches of which he started in other parts of Goa also. We can't imagine that this visionary act of destitute care was made possible almost 150 years back, much earlier than what we had heard about what Mother Theresa had done for the poor in the slums of Calcutta. This was even earlier than the charity work handled by Pathrose Mar Osthathios metropolitan through ‘Servants of Cross’ etc or before the lonely struggle by Late lamented Stephanos Mar Theodosius - of Calcutta Diocese - in middle-and-North India and other charity works done here and there, by the Holy Church. Mar Alvares was a visionary and missionary to the core and was a silent example to the masses on ‘how can one follow the footsteps of Jesus Christ’ even while standing within limitations, sufferings and adversities. Even in the last 10 years of his life though in failing health, his fierce determination to toil for His Master didn't at all prevent him from accommodating lepers, beggars, TB patients and scavengers to the dwelling place for them in Panaji.

Reaching the faith of his destiny

Due to the embarrassing attitude and treatment meted out to him, Fr. Alvares left Goa and settled himself in Brahmawar. This was in 1887 and during these periods, Fr. Alvares got chances to meet Malankara Orthodox Church authorities multiple times which paved way for the entry to the Church. Hearing the news of him embracing Orthodox

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Church's faith, the agitated Roman Catholic Archbishop of Goa excommunicated Fr. Alvarez following which the episode of suffering was opened in Fr. Alvarez' life. After a while of landing to Malankara in 1887, Parumala Kochuthirumeni (Geevarghese Mar Gregorios metropolitan) ordained Fr. Alvarez to the monastic order of Ramban. On 29 July 1889, Ramban Alvarez was consecrated as a Metropolitan with title Alvares Mar Julius at the Old Seminary, Kottayam by Malankara Metropolitan Pulikkottil Mar Joseph Dionysius II and Parumala Thirumeni, the first canonized Saint of Malankara. The newly consecrated Metropolitan Mar Julius was appointed as the Archbishop of India and Ceylon for the diocesan area of outside Kerala of the Malankara Orthodox Church.

When Joseph Rene Vilatte was searching for a bishop with orders recognized by the Catholic Church, in order to solicit consecration, he was guided to Alvarez, who, jointly with Paulose Mar Athanasious, consecrated him in 1892 in Colombo, Sri Lanka. This became Mar Alvarez' seat. As Mar Julious I, Alvarez lived at Colombo and Brahmavar-Kalyanpur, a village near the town of Udipi in the Canara Coast, and finally in the town of Ribandar in Goa during his last days.

'An alien by birth, a Heavenly Intercessor by choice'

The aftermath of the ex-communication of Mar Alvarez by Catholic Church had it's toll on even the spiritual activities headed by the holy father. The Church leaders propagated the public shunning of the father which forced many to stay away from Mar Alvarez. Even in such deteriorating situation, Mar Alvarez didn't allow the charitable organization to die down or allow it to be weakened which is why beggars, nomads and orphans thronged to the doorstep where Mar Alvarez remained as the master of the remaining destitutes. Even in his failing health, lack of a regular income forced Mar Alvarez to roam around with a begging bowl to gather the daily means for the inmates, resulting in people embarrassing him in public many times. But the sincere and silent crusader for His Master, Mar Alvarez was willing to take the harassment for himself and convinced the distractors to contribute compassionately in the name of Jesus Christ. It is

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a clear sign of his fervent faith in His Master as well as the fortitude to go along with the sufferings clearly voiced to the world that once he reclines to depths of disappointment, the mission can falter as easily as vapors. The silent, telepathic message Mar Alvares gave his devotees and silent followers then – to find solace and strength from His Master and Holy Trinity - still remains in the environs where he breathed his last and that explains why 'he remains still a Heavenly Intercessor who chose to suffer for this sheep' for people in thousands in and around Goa, Canara, different parts of Karnataka and the northern most parts of Kerala.

His last days were in Ribandar Hospital, a charitable institution, ill with dysentery. It was his wish to be buried by any Orthodox dignitaries, he was specific not to have any Catholic priest for the same. His spirit; razor-sharp with unwavering faith, left the body with weakened health, and flew to His master's abode on 23 September 1923. The citizen committee led by the Chief Justice, arranged a grand funeral. His body was kept in state in the Municipal Hall for 24 hours to enable the people to pay homage. All the newspapers were full of articles and homage about the departed. Though Thirumeni was considered an enemy by the government, the Governor General sent his representative to pay tribute to him. Thousands of people especially poor and beggars paid their last, tearful bouquets of respects. Funeral speeches were made by high dignitaries. The funeral procession winding all the main roads of Panaji was taken and the body was laid to rest in the secluded corner of St. Inez Panaji cemetery on 24 September 1923 without any funeral rites. Though the funeral was done in a Catholic Church cemetery, it is to be noted that Mar Alvares who was faithful to God than any worldly clans, was given a 'burial in pagan land' as treatment meted out to traitors etc. The mother Church of his, the Catholic Church, would have held their head high with the continued treatment out to Mar Alvares also, in same lines what they did during Synod of Diamper and related to killing of Archdeacon Thomas. [The basic trait imbibed from European authoritarian attitude of 'capturing what they desire and annihilating what they don't' remained with the Catholic church authorities during the time of Mar Alvares too. As we glance through pages of history, we could see it got repeated again in a short interval after the demise

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of Mar Alvares, where a spiritual leader joined a new faith with selfish needs, severing a portion of the property and sheep of the Malankara Orthodox Church in the 1930's and in this present age too, where it takes a different mode of clamorous tries to claim to project or capture title of multiple Catholicoses in Kerala]. In all the above mentioned, we can be convinced that even from the time of frailties to mind and body, by the tortures by his mother Church, the final victor would have been none other than the saintly Mar Alvares. I am sure Mar Alvares would have been smiling within his mind for the victory God Almighty had offered him and not for failing in face of the tribulations and supplications.

Brahmawar Mission

Alvares Mar Julius started the Brahmawar Mission at Karnataka in 1888. This mission was started in order to give spiritual leadership and to help them to learn liturgy and catechism of the Church for those people newly joined the Orthodox Church from the surrounding regions. He was the shepherd of over 5000 faithful in Brahmawar who bestowed their allegiance to him. After organizing the community under the able guidance of the Arch Bishop they started the Malankara Syrian Worship and Qurbana. The fellowship lost a father of their own when thirumeni was called to His heavenly abode but just due to the prayers and commitment of the faithful who remained in the Orthodox household till date, the Heavenly Father had blessed them with a blessed decision by the Holy Episcopal Synod. That paved way for the formation of the 'Brahmawar diocese' and the ever ebullient Yakoob Mar Elias thirumeni appointed as it's first Diocesan Head.

Sepulcher of Mar Alvares

After four years (23 September 1927) his bones were collected by his friends and admirers, placed in a lead box, buried in the same place, under a marble slab with the inscription 'Memoria De Padre Antonio Francisco Xavier Alvares', (**Padre Antonio Francisco Xavier Alvares, a great Humanitarian Missionary and a great Patriot**) and a large cross, still the biggest cross in the cemetery and is said to be donated by a very dear Hindu friend of Thirumeni.

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For forty long years nobody visited the grave. Considering the pain Mar Alvares had undergone during his last 34 years, this looks even more painful as for long 40 years his physical remains remained in an unknown sepulcher hardly remembered by the Church he was part of in the end and possible to have no Dhoopaparthanas done in his memory. Some research at the initiatives of late H. G. Philipose Mar Theophilus of Bombay diocese and H. H. Baselios Marthoma Mathews I – himself a metropolitan of BahyaKerala diocese in the past - prompted Rev. Fr. K. M. George and Rev. Fr. T. E. Issac, then the parish priest at Goa, to fish out the location of the burial. The tomb of Alvares Mar Julius was discovered on January 1, 1967 from St. Inez Municipal Cemetery, Panaji, Goa by H. G. Mathews Mar Athanasios. The Holy Relics were transmitted from St. Inez Cemetery to St. Mary's Orthodox Church, Ribander, Panaji by Late lamented Philipos Mar Theophilus on October 5, 1979. When the St. Marys Church was reconstructed in the same place, the relics were shifted to the present sepulchre which was specially made on the side of the Madbaha, at a blessed ceremony led by the Catholicos of the Malankara Orthodox Church H. H. Moran Mar Baselios Mathews II on 6 October 2001.

Legacy

The Holy Relics of the metropolitan has been entombed with reverence at the St Mary's Orthodox Church in Ribander. Although congregation is small, the "Orthodox Church of Goa" has survived almost a century after the death of Bishop Alvares, along with the Brahmawar inhabitants too joining the fray to venerate and intercede through Mar Alvares, the Holy Church has taken a step that could turn a most blessed and foresighted decision that could turn good for the future generations. Through appointing the ever enthusiastic and pious Elias metropolitan to Brahmawar, the Church had flashed a message of strong significance that 'the embarrassment and ignorance suffered by Mar Alvares will never be meted out to the community and their present-day generation. As you can read, see and analyze actions, decisions and spiritual revival sensed in the diocese due to of the present Diocesan head we can be assured that Orthodox Church members including the Brahmawar community's children will be safeguarded by God's Grace. As His Grace is one who follows Psalms 18.29 "With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can

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scale a wall” physically as well as spiritually [as seen during His Grace’s first Apostolic visit to the disregarded Churches of the diocese], we can assure the spiritual ambiance within the diocese be strengthened by intercession, dedication and devotion as Mar Alvares which in long term will bring fruitful and blessed laurels and results to the Holy Church of tomorrow. The St. Marys Orthodox Syrian Church, Ribandar, Panaji celebrates his Dukhrono (Memorial Feast) every year in September, during the week falling 23rd to honor this great Apostle of charity and Martyr. Let us also take strength and motivation from the life of this unsung hero of the Holy Church.



HG Yakoob Mar Elias during his Grace’s 1st Apostolic visit to the diocese.



The Sepulcher where Mar Alvares was laid to rest



St. Mary’s Church, Ribandar, Goa where the Holy Relics of Mar Yulios are reverently preserved.

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In Christ

Ajoy Jacob George,

Kuwait / Pathanamthitta.

Courtesy to:

ICON - Indian Christian Orthodox network, www.theorthodoxchurch.info, ‘Alvares Mar Yulios’, by Prof. Joseph K. Alexander in www.lightoflife.com, ‘Life history of Alvares Mar Yulios’ by Prof. D. Mathew, excerpts from Ovb’s textbook for Juniors, www.alvaresthirumeni.in, various books and articles written by Malankara Orthodox Church fathers etc.

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