

Mrs. Kandamma Varghese

1876 – 1964



Life Story of
Mrs. Kandamma Varghese
(Mar Thoma Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom)
Cheruthuruthiyil, Thumpamon

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June 30, 1876 – November 9, 1964



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Biography

“Mar Thoma Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom owes much to the self sacrificing work of Mrs. Kandamma Varghese who worked untiringly as the Organizing Secretary for over 20 years, traveling far and wide, organizing branches in the parishes, doing evangelistic work among Christians and non Christians, and building up the work in parishes.”

- The Mar Thoma Church, Heritage and Mission - Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan

Christianity was brought to India by St. Thomas an Apostle of Jesus Christ. St. Thomas landed on the Malabar Coast in 52 A.D. and converted many high caste Hindus and established 7 Churches. We do not know much about the history of the Christian Church in the first few centuries. Many visitors had recorded in their travel records the existence of a very active church in Malabar. Records are available about the visits of many church leaders from Asia Minor, Palestine and Persia during this period of time. The Malabar Church always welcomed foreign leaders without enquiring much about their faith and practices. But the Church in Malabar remained an isolated church in terms of evangelism.

The Malankara Church was an Independent Church even though it had relationship with the Syrian churches. It was not under the supremacy of any foreign Bishop or Church. The Portuguese sailor, Vasco de Gamma, arrived in Malabar in 1498. He was a member of the Roman Catholic Church which owed its allegiance to the Pope in Rome. The Portuguese people under the leadership of the Archbishop named Alexio de Menezes convened a meeting of all church leaders in a place called Diamper (Udayamperoor) near Ernakulam in 1599. The Archbishop succeeded in bringing the Malankara Church under the domination of the Pope. This state of affairs continued for 54 years. But the people who objected this movement - those who wanted the church to remain independent - assembled in a Church compound in Mattancherry (Cochin) in 1653 and took the oath severing all connections with the Roman Church. This oath ceremony is known as the “Oath of the Coonen Cross”. Thus once again the Church became independent, but a portion of it remained with the Roman Catholic Church. After the Oath of the Coonen Cross, the Malankara Church continued its relationship with the Patriarch of Antioch.

Visit of Claudius Buchanan, Chaplain of the East India Company

Claudius Buchanan, a chaplain of the East India Company, visited Travancore and Cochin in 1806-7. He was very interested in the ancient Church of Malabar and published a book in England entitled “*Christian Researches in Asia*”. It was by reading this book that CMS missionaries got interested in the Malabar Church. Buchanan took the initiative to translate the four Gospels into Malayalam. These were printed in Bombay in 1811.

Help from the Church Missionary Society (CMS)

The Church Missionary Society (CMS) is an organization established on 12 April, 1799, in London for the propagation of the Word of God around the world. Colonel Munro (Resident of Travancore from 1810 to 1819) requested the CMS to improve the religious condition of the Kerala Christians. The first CMS Missionary, Rev. Thomas Norton, came to Alleppey in 1816. At this time Alleppey was a famous sea port, known as the Venice of the East. Three more missionaries, Rev. Benjamin Bailey, Rev. Joseph Fenn and Rev. Henry Baker came after Rev. Norton. With the help of these foreign missionaries, the Bible was translated into Malayalam. The New Testament was published in 1829, the Old Testament in 1835 and the complete Bible in 1841. Reading of the Scriptures in their own language enlightened the common man. Missionaries even started a Theological College (Old Seminary) in Kottayam to train priests.

Abraham Malpan and Kaithayil Gheeverghese Malpan were teachers in the Old Seminary in Kottayam. Both of them tried to restore the church to its original purity by casting away the wrong teachings and evil practices which had crept in by its association with other churches and religions in the course of time. In 1836, Abraham Malpan and 11 other priests submitted a memorandum to the British resident Col. Fraser, requesting him to do the needful to make the necessary changes in the Malankara Church. But the resident couldn't do anything. As all alternatives lead to a dead end, Malpan decided to lead the reformation in the church without leaving the church. Those who followed the reformation of Abraham Malpan are called 'The Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar'

But due to some disagreement with the Malankara Church, the CMS continued their work independently, among the non-Christians, along with some members of the Syrian Church who supported their reforms. Churches were established in Mallappally and Mavelikkara and the Anglican Diocese of Travancore and Cochin was formed in 1878.

Revival Movement

Revivalism is a special approach to religion or one's faith that gives importance to individual religious experience rather than the main doctrines. It is always associated with fervent emotional singing, preaching, confessing, dancing etc. We have experienced many revival movements in Mar Thoma Church. Tirunelveli in the Tamil Nadu state was the birth place of revival movements in South India. It started in 1860, by CMS Missionaries and came to Travancore through an unknown preacher called Mathai Upadeshi and was carried on by Vidhuwan Kutty Achen (Rev. Justus Joseph). In 1864, Mathews Mar Athanasius Metropolitan allowed Ammal, the daughter of a famous Tamil convert, Vedanayaka Sastri, to visit churches and inspire people through her Christian Songs. In 1873, Vidhuwan Kutty Achen became the leader of this revival movement. By 1894, Tamil preachers David and Wordsworth took over the leadership of revivalism. The Maramon convention started in 1895, by the Mar Thoma Syrian Church. Later the spirit of revivalism was continued by blessed leaders like CMS missionary Rev. Thomas Walker from Tirunelveli in Tamil Nadu, PUNCHAMANNIL MAMMEN UPADESHI and MUTHAMPACKAL KOCHOONJU UPADESHI.

Birth of Kandamma

Kandamma was born on 30 June, 1876, as a member of the Kalleli family of the Kollakadavu East CMS (Church Missionary Society) Parish near Mavelikkara. Kollakadavu was an important parish, in terms of spiritual activities. Kandamma did her education in the CMS School. Many of her teachers were dedicated missionaries, and inspired her to go for Gospel work. She was an exemplary student and used to conduct prayer meetings with class mates in schools.

Marriage

After her schools education, at the age of twenty, Kandamma got married to Varughese Vadhyar (teacher) of Cheruthuruthiyil family of Thumpamon. Varughese was a devoted and God fearing man. Their family was a model family. They attended Church regularly and participated in all activities of the parish. They were very generous in providing financial help and assistance to the needy members of the parish. They were known for their hospitality in entertaining Gospel Workers in their house.

But this blessed family life lasted only for ten years. Varghese passed away in 1906, leaving behind Kandamma and their three little children., Sosamma, Achamma and Koshykunju. But she did not grieve much like those with no hope. She was sure that her husband was in heaven and believed that God could turn tragedies into triumphs, poverty into riches, pain into glory and defeat into victory.

Divine Call

Kandamma spent lot of time in prayer to know God's will. She was sure that ***“God causes all things to work together for good, to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”*** - Romans 8:23. Once, while she prayed, she heard a voice telling her ***“Go for My work and do not worry about your children I will take care of you and your children”***. She took it as a divine call and started mission work.

Initial Stages of Her Mission Work

In the early years of the twentieth century women evangelists were not common and there were no societies or association to sponsor them in their work (The Mar Thoma Sevika Sanghom was established only in 1919). She started her work in her neighborhood and home parish. Early each morning she would get up for her personal prayer and for family prayer with her children. After she sent her children to school and was done with her chores, she would visit houses in her parish and spend time with house wives in prayer and self examination of their spiritual lives.

A Strange Scene

It was a strange thing in those days, for a lady to speak in a church during the service. But Kandamma was a regular preacher in churches, at road junctions and market places. People had great respect and reverence for her and priests (vicars of various churches) and people whole heartily supported her in her work. She even distributed tracts during her house visits and meetings.

Revival in the Mar Thoma Church

During the early years of the twentieth century, the Mar Thoma Church was privileged to have famous revival preachers like Punchamannil Mammen Upadeshi (1868-1947) and Mothampakkal Sadhu Kochoonju Upadeshi (1883-1945). Through their messages they could help thousands to continue in their spiritual joy and sacrificial living. Their revival movement created a favorable atmosphere for Kandamma's work.

Mrs. Nicholson and Miss Maccabin

Two Missionary women, Mrs. Nicholson and Miss Maccabin came to Kunnamkulam near Trichur for missionary work. They were allowed to preach in The Mar Thoma churches. Their messages paved the way for revival among the women of the Church. The Church began to encourage the participation of women workers in mission work.

Open Air Meeting in Pathanamthitta

Kandamma was not ashamed of the Gospel. She believed that she had an obligation to all people, to the educated and the illiterates, to the Christians and the non Christians. She was eager to preach the Gospel where ever possible. She had complete confidence in the Gospel.

During the 1920s, it was not at all a common thing for a young lady to speak in a market place. But for Kandamma, she took it as a challenge. She used to preach standing at road junctions in Pathanamthitta Town without shame. She did not aim to amuse but to glorify Jesus Christ. This was always her goal and ambition in preaching. Her sermons were characterized with brevity. They were filled with illustrations to maintain the attention of the listeners. Everyone was amazed to see the young, Syrian Christian lady wearing a pure white chatta and Kachamuri (traditional clothes of the Syrian Christian women) sharing the divine Gospel. She was a living witness to her listeners. She even knelt down in street corners and roads, and prayed for her listeners.

Meeting with the of King of Travancore

Kandamma had a great desire to preach the Gospel to the King of Travancore, H.R.H. Sri Moolam Thirunal. During one of the Kings royal visits to Pandalam, Kandamma stood in a place away from the crowd to get a clear view of the King. When the King's car past by her she shouted out *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your*

family". The King heard and acknowledged her message. It was day of great joy in her life.

Formation of Sevika Sanghom

Bishop Abraham Mar Thoma infused new spirit and vigor into the evangelistic work of the Church. He traveled throughout India and was a known figure in all the missionary circles as a great evangelist. With his western education, he was aware of the importance of women in the mission work of the Church. He believed that every Marthomite is an evangelist. His vision and far sightedness led to the formation of Mar Thoma Suvishesha Sevika Sanghom in 1919. Sevika Sanghom was officially established on Friday, 14th February, 1919, in the Maramon Convention by Abraham Mar Thoma Suffragan Metropolitan. The first committee consisting of 12 members was formed for the administration of the new association. Mrs. Kandamma, who was well known lady evangelist by that time, was the first "Traveling Secretary" of the Sevika Sanghom.

Since there were no proper roads she had to travel by foot and bullock cart to visit parishes. In her first year, she established 50 branches of the Sevika Sanghom. She even encouraged young women to become evangelists.

Co-workers of Kandamma

Kandamma knew how to get the best out of her co workers. Her natural simplicity attracted them. They saw her openness and felt her genuineness. She was never high minded.

The first committee of the Sevika Sanghom had 15 members. Polachirakkal Puthiyaveettil Mariamma, Maramon Anjilivelil Rahelamma were the first secretaries while Kandamma was the traveling secretary. Pallikkal T. M. Annamma, Konny Mariamma, Kollamala Aleyamma were also very active members.

Vanitha Mandiram in Tiruvalla

Mrs. Kandamma was one of the main people behind the establishment of the Vanitha Mandiram at Tiruvalla in 1925. At the Vanitha Mandiram women were given training in Mission work, home science and home management, kitchen gardening, etc. in addition to Biblical studies. An Australian missionary Miss Kellaway was the principal of this institution for 20 years. During the early years many women were trained for Missionary work and sent to various places outside Kerala. Sister Chechamma (Mathilunkal, Kuttapuzha, Tiruvalla), Miss K. J. Aleyamma, Miss P. O. Sosamma, Miss Mariamma John, Miss P. G. Aleyamma (Sihora Ashram) and Mrs. Mariamma Joseph (Manon, Maramon – one of the co-founders of the Hoskote Mission) were students of the Mandiram. Kandamma worked with Miss Kellaway in the running of the Vanitha Mandiram. The main mottos of the Institution are Prayer, Worship, Study, Witnessing, and Discipline. In 1946, Miss Kellaway went back home to Australia.

Visit to the Maharani of Travancore.

After the death of the Travancore King H.R.H Sri Moolam Thirunal, Maharani H.R.H. Sethu Lakshmi Bhai Thampuratti became the ruler. Kandamma desired to visit her as well. An interview with the Maharani was arranged, through her sister's son Mr. M. O. Oommen, who was a Forest Conservator in Trivandrum. On the appointed day, Kandamma went to the Trivandrum Palace and had a long talk with the Maharani. Kandamma answered all the Maharani's quires regarding the work of the Sevika Sanghom, the Vanitha Mandiram and the orphanages. Kandamma shared the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. Then Kandamma presented the Maharani with a gold gilded Bible and requested her to read it. The Maharani gratefully accepted it and was highly impressed.

Mrs. Kandamma –A Gifted Fund Raiser

The early years of the Sevika Sanghom were not financially sound. Many of the Church members were agriculturalists and the women were mainly house wives. So it was a very difficult task to get funds for the smooth running of the Sanghom. At that time, there weren't any foreign parishes supporting the work of the Sanghom, and fund raising was part of the duty of all the office bearers.

Kandamma used to collect money for the Sevika Sanghom where ever she went and even collected money from sister churches. Proper receipts were given for all collections and the money was remitted to the Sevika Sanghom office in time. She was very faithful in all money matters. Her appeals for money were never for herself. That is why she was never met with a refusal. People knew her work and responded accordingly.

Sowjanya Dana Piruvu (a collection of free will donations in cash or kind from the women of the church) in aid of the Swadeshi Mission was introduced by Kandamma.

Personal Evangelism

Kandamma gave importance to personal evangelism. She never let an opportunity pass without speaking of salvation to the lost. She usually shared the word of God with her co-travelers during train journeys. On one such occasion a co-traveler who was a government official, was smoking and paid no attention to her message. Kandamma reminded the man of the consequences of smoking and requested him to quit smoking.

A month later Kandamma received a money order for Rs.25/- from the man with a note ***"I have stopped smoking. This is the amount that I used to spend for cigarettes; you may use this for your mission work"***. The man never smoked again and continued to donate that amount for charitable purposes.

Mrs. Kandamma was a modest person in wearing jewellery. She used to request people who had more than one gold chain to donate the second one for gospel work. Due to Kandamma's loving approach to the wife of Diwan Bhadur Dr. V. Varghese sold her

ornaments and donated the money for the construction of the Salem Orphanage in Tiruvalla. Dr. Varughese also helped in medical care of the children at the Salem orphanage.

What ever Kandamma got, she gave to the Mission work. The early years of Evangelistic Association were not financially sound. On many occasions the authorities found it difficult to pay the salaries of the evangelists in time due to lack of funds. Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan used appeal to the parishioners for funds. Once Kandamma heard of such an appeal in her parish, and donated her children's ornaments to the Evangelists Association.

Once Titus II Mar Thoma Metropolitan, who was visiting the Thumpamon parish spoke about the poor financial conditions and the debts of the Evangelistic Association. On hearing this Kandamma brought her furniture to the church compound (table, chairs, cot and almarah) for auctioning in the church to raise funds for the Evangelistic Association. Metropolitan Titus appreciated her eagerness to help, but did not auction it. She had only one aim in her life and that was to proclaim the Gospel of Christ where ever and when ever possible.

A Woman of Simplicity

Kandamma was a woman who believed in simple living. She was never a burden for hosts. During her parish visits she used to have only one meal a day. She was willing to stay in any house of the parish. She never preferred to stay with the rich.

Kandamma - Traveling Secretary of the Sevika Sangham

In those days as there were no proper roads in our country. Mrs. Kandamma had to walk miles to her work and she used bullock carts to visit distant places. One of her annual reports submitted to the Sanghom reads like this: *“Visited Puthen Cavu, Kundara... (Names of so many parishes are given), etc. Conducted 101 special meetings for women, 38 meetings for girls, visited 236 Christian homes, 70 non Christian homes, personally interacted with 415 people, distributed 700 tracts, 90 gospel portions etc...”*

Mrs. Kandamma – General Secretary of the Sevika Sanghom

After serving many years as a Traveling Secretary, she became the General Secretary and she continued for 12 years in that post. It was through her hard work that the Church received the land property for the construction of the Salem Orphanage, the Vanitha Mandiram and the Sevika Sanghom Office. She placed a firm foundation for the smooth running of various departments of the Sevika Sanghom.

Salem Children's Home

When the Sanghom started the Salem Bhavanam (Orphanage) in 1923, Kandamma took up that responsibility as well. She adopted orphan children who were previously looked after by Mrs. Sosamma Eappen of Kotturethu Chengannur. 'Deppi Piruvu' in aid of the Orphanage was a novel idea from Kandamma. Small collection boxes were given to all the members of the Sevika Sanghom for collecting coins / money for the running expenses of the orphanage.

Medical Work and Mission Work

While Kandamma was the Traveling secretary, the Sevika Sanghom started a hospital in Cheriyazhikkal (near Thrikunnapuzha) in 1921. Another dispensary was working in a nearby place called Puthuppally. For many years this work continued till the formation of the Medical Board by the Mar Thoma Church. During Kandamma's time women evangelists were sent to the Palghat Mission, North and South Travancore Mission fields.

Felicitations from Mahakavi Vallathol

Mahakavi (Great Malayalam Poet) Vallathol was one of the speakers of the meeting held on 13 Dec, 1923 in Kottayam in connection with the Silver Jubilee celebration of the consecration of Titus II Mar Thoma Metropolitan. Just before the meeting Kandamma got an opportunity to speak with the Vallathol. Kandamma having her Bible in her hand had a long conversation with him about the spiritual matters.

During his message in the meeting Mahakavi spoke highly of Kandamma and praised God for such great women in the Mar Thoma Church.

Secret of Kandamma's Fruitful Life

Kandamma's life was a life spent for God. She spent hours in prayer. There was a special room in her house set apart for prayer. She used to get up at 4 in the morning to pray. She attempted great things for God which are beyond human understanding.

Fasting was part of her life. The last Friday of every month was set apart for fasting and praying. From dawn to dusk, she spent time in prayer and Bible reading. Family prayer was a must in her house. All members including the servants participated in the prayer. She regularly used the Bible reading notes in "Our Magazine" during family prayers. She had a long list for the intercessory prayer. In their prayers they remembered all the Tirumenis, priests and mission workers. Through prayer she got the strength and ability to do things that she could never have done by herself. It is reported that many youths were brought to mission work through her prayer and fellowship.

God provides place for the Sevika Sanghom Office

During the early years of the Sanghom, all were trying for a plot of land to construct the headquarters and central office of the Sanghom. As per the instruction of Abraham Mar Thoma, Kandamma prayed publically during the Maramon convention meeting for this special need. God answered her prayer, and in a few days they got a very convenient place in Tiruvalla, close to the Church Head Quarters.

Kandamma did not have any theological qualifications from any college or institute. But her Bible knowledge and practical experience gained through years of hard work were far better than the current university degrees. She could recite many verses by heart from the Bible.

Children of Mrs. Kandamma

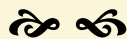
Kandamma's husband, Varughese died in 1906. They had two daughters and a son: Sosamma married to Rev. C. K. Varughese of Cherukara, Ayroor. Their son is Senior Vicar Gen. Rev. C. G. Alexander.

Achamma married to Rev. K. C. Mathew Kolathu, Kozhencherry. Their son is Dr. K M Alexander a retired dean of Kerala University.

Late Mr. C. V. Koshy was the headmaster of the Perumbavoor Ashram High school for many years. He married Mariamma Thenmalil, Maramon who was also a teacher at the Ashram High School for many years. Dr. George Koshy D. M. an eminent Cardiac Physician, now in Australia, is their only son.

Final Days

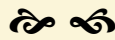
Kandamma spent her final days in Perumbavoor with her son Mr. C. V. Koshy who was the headmaster of the Ashram High school there. When she died on 9 Nov, 1964, at the age of 88, she left behind a glowing legacy of her work in Kerala. Her greatest attribute was her ability to inspire others for Mission Work. In her memory, the Sevika Sanghom collected a Memorial fund (Kandamma Memorial Endowment For Higher Education of Christian Workers) of Rs.15, 000 (this was a big amount in 1964) and the interest collected from this fund is still being used for the Theological education of the women who are dedicated to do full time Gospel work.



Main Events during the time of Kandamma Varghese

1876	30 June	Birth of Kandamma
1876		Synod at Mulanthuruthy
1877	15 July	Mathews Mar Athanasius Metropolitan passes away
1877		Thomas Mar Athanasius as Metropolitan
1880	30 October	Birth of Abraham Mar Thoma
1883	29 November	Birth of Sadhu Kochoonju Upadeshi
1888	5 September	Formation of Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association
1890	22 March	Launch of Manorama Newspaper
1892		Salvation Army starts work in Travancore
1893	7 August	Birth of Dr. Juhanon Mar Thoma Metropolitan
1893	10 August	Thomas Mar Athanasius Metropolitan Passes away
1894	18 January	Consecration Titus I Mar Thoma
1898	9 December	Consecration of Titus II Mar Thoma
1905	25 February	Formation of Mar Thoma Sunday School Samajam
1906		Varghese Master (Kandamma's husband) passes away.
1909		First Mission field outside Kerala – Karwar Mission, Karnataka
1909	20 October	Metropolitan Titus I Passes away.
1909	5 December	Consecration of Titus II as Metropolitan
1910		First Mar Thoma Students Conference
1914	28 June	Beginning of First World War
1917	27 January	Kovoorachen – Ipe Thoma Kathanar- passes away
1917	27 December	Consecration of Abraham Mar Thoma
1918		Sadhu Sunder Singh visits Maramon Convention
1919	14 February	Formation of Sevika Sanghom
1919	28 June	First World War ends
1921	June	Establishment of Union Christian College in Alwaye
1923		Establishment of Salem Children's Home, Tiruvalla
1923	13 October	Rev. M. C. George (Father of Alexander Mar Thoma) passes away
1923	13 December	Silver Jubilee celebration of Consecration of Titus II
1924		Formation of Voluntary Evangelistic Association
1925	25 February	Inauguration of Vanitha Mandiram
1925		Beginning of the Malayalam wing of the Christian Literature Society (CLS)
1926		Establishment of Mar Thoma Theological Seminary at Kottayam
1927		Birthday offertory during the church service introduced by Titus II
1928		Establishment of T. A .M. Press
1929		Wall Street Crash. The beginning of the Great Depression
1930		Medical aid fund for sick clergy - Introduced in the Church by Titus II
1931	19 July	Kottarathil Thomas Kathanar - Co-Founder of Evangelistic Association passes away.
1933		Formation of Yuvajana Sakhyam
1936	27, 28 Dec	Centenary Celebrations of Reformation in Maramon Mar Thoma Church

1937	30 December	Consecration of Juhanon Mar Thoma and Mathews Mar Athanasius
1939	September	Beginning of Second World War
1940		Beginning of Ankola Mission.-North Karnataka
1944	4 July	Titus II Mar Thoma passes away. Abraham Mar Thoma becomes Metropolitan
1945	2 September	End of the Second World War
1945	30 November	Sadhu Kochoonju Upadeshi passes away
1947	27 June	Beginning of Hoskote Mission, near Bangalore Karnataka
1947	15 August	Freedom for India
1947	1 September	Abraham Mar Thoma Passes away
1964	9 November	Kandamma Passes away.



Notes

Maramon Convention: A mammoth religious convention of Christians, (started in 1895 by The Mar Thoma Church but attended by people belonging to all communities), is held at Maramon, every year on the vast beds of River Pumba. The convention takes place in February / March in an atmosphere of devotion and lasts for a period of eight days. Addressed by speakers of international repute and attended by innumerable devotees, this is the largest Christian convention in the world.

Resident Formerly, a representative of the British Governor General of India or British King / Queen at a native court in India. British Resident for Travancore stayed in Trivandrum.

Chatta and Kachamuri- Chatta and Kachamuri are the traditional clothes of the Syrian Christian women during the time of Kandamma.

Reformation: Reformation is a process of reforming for the better. It can also be an improvement. Reformation in the Syrian Church was started by a priest called Abraham Malpan, (1796-1845) of Maramon.

Mahakavi Vallathol (Vallathol Narayana Menon) (1878-1958) was a great poet of Kerala. He wrote “Magdalanamariam” (Magdalanamariam is a dramatic rendering of the spiritual on version of a professional courtesan into the Christian way of life through prayer and penance).

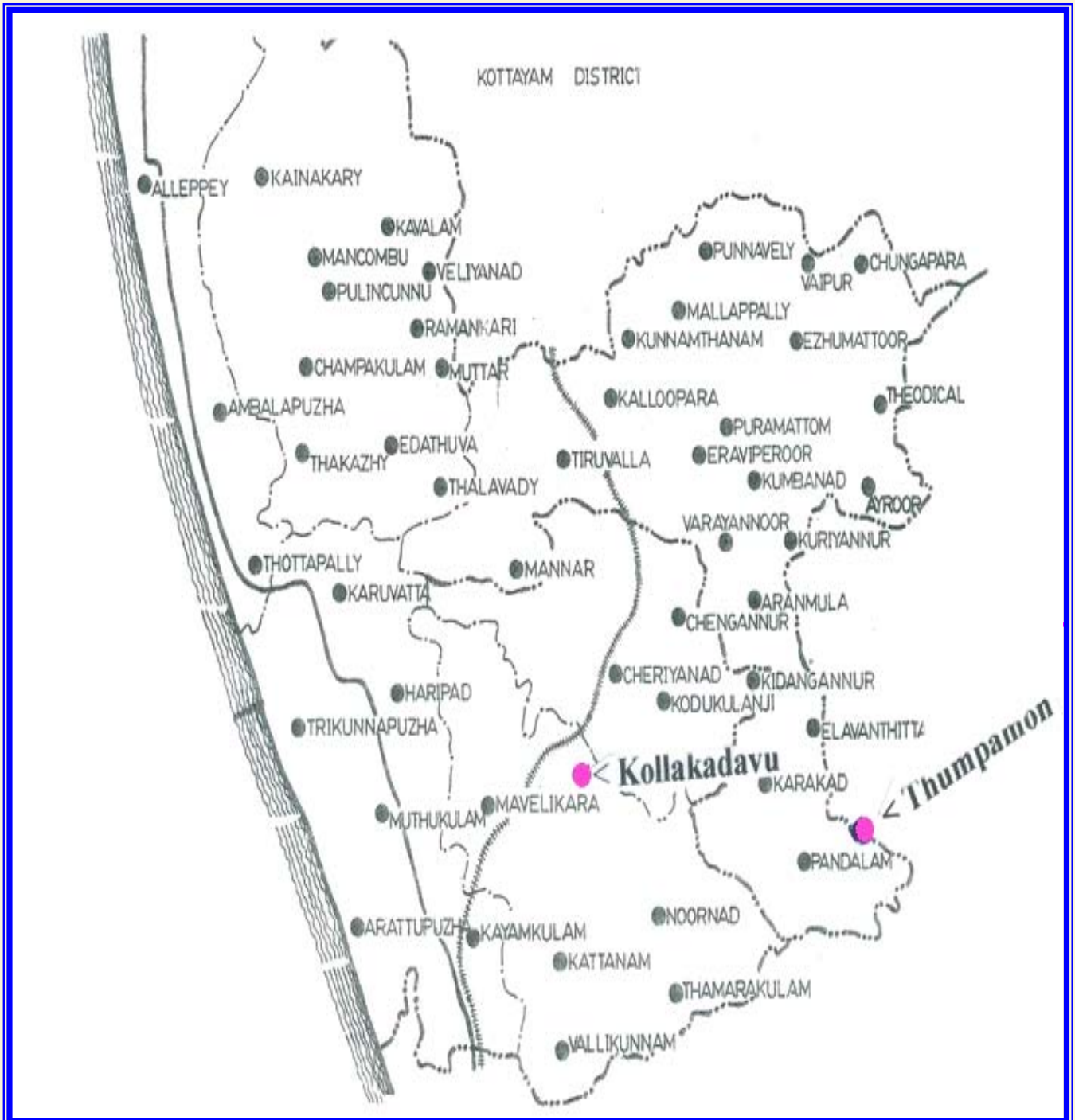
H.R.H. Sri Moolam Thirunal .Moolam (Mulam) Thirunal was the King of Travancore from 1985 to 1924

H.R.H. Sethu Lakshmi Bhai Thampurati. Lahshmi Bhai was the Regent of Travancore from 1924 to 1931.

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The End

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All For His Glory

