

Rev. P. John Thomas

Ankola Ashram-North Kanara
(Thomaskutty Achen)

8 May 1916 – 4 October 1990



PALLATHU, KARUNAGAPALLY

Rev. P. John Thomas M.A., B.Ed.



Life Story of Rev. P. John Thomas Co-Founder of Ankola Ashram North Karnataka

Cover Photo: Rev. P. John Thomas and Kochamma Mrs. Chinnamma Thomas

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*“When man listens, God speaks
When man obeys, God acts”*

Till the end of the 19th Century, the Mar Thoma Church was not concerned about sharing the Gospel of Christ to non-Christians. As a result of the reformation movement and revivalism that followed, the Church became aware of the Great Commission given by Jesus Christ *“Go then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples; baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I will be with you always, to the end of the age.”*

The Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association was established in 1888, at Kallissery, a place near Chengannur under the leadership of Rev. Thomas Abraham (Kottarathil Achen) and 11 laymen. They decided to preach the Gospel to the non-Christians. A nearby village – Othara Village- was selected as the first mission field. In 1890, Rev. C. P. Philipose (Ayroor Achen), one of the most able priests of the Mar Thoma Church, became the General Secretary of the Evangelistic Association and continued in that post for the next fifty years. Under his able leadership, mission fields were established throughout South Travancore and North Travancore. Full time Evangelists and Teachers cum Evangelists (*Ashan Upadeshies*) were appointed for mission work. An ashram in Palakkad was established in 1924. Even though the harvest was large, there were few workers to gather it in.

This is the story of a man who can be compared to Moses in the Old Testament of the Bible. *“It was faith that made Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of the King’s daughter. He preferred to suffer with God’s people rather than to enjoy sin for a little while. He reckoned*

that to suffer scorn for the messiah was worth far more than all the treasures of Egypt for he kept his eyes on the future reward.”

Thomaskutty after graduating from the Madras Christian College refused a lucrative Travancore Government job with a good salary, and went for Gospel work with no salary, to work amongst the down trodden people of North Karnataka (Ankola and Honavar).

Birth

Thomaskutty was born on 8 May, 1916, as a member of Pallathu family of Karunagapally (Pallathu family is a branch of the Kunnel family of Perrisserry near Chengannur) Thomaskutty's father P. M. John was a Sanitary Inspector of the Travancore Government and his mother, Sosamma, was a teacher.

Thomaskutty had 2 brothers and 4 sisters. Thomaskutty had his school education in Ponkunnam and Chavara. Then he joined Maharaja's College in Trivandrum and later Christian College in Madras. While studying in Madras, he lost his father, which was a great loss to the family.

Thomaskutty was a student of Madras Christian College when he contracted typhoid. His hostel warden Prof. G. C. Martin took care of him during his stay at the General Hospital. Prof. Martin was a dedicated Scottish Christian. His loving care and prayers influenced Thomaskutty and gave him a new insight on Christian love.

Oxford Group and Thomaskutty

In 1939, while studying at the Madras Christian College, Thomaskutty and five of his friends met together for prayer. They were members of the 'Oxford Group Movement'. While they prayed they felt the burden of evangelizing the Indian villages. They felt guided by God to go and live among the villagers to serve them. But Thomaskutty didn't know where or when to go. He waited and prayed for an opportunity to do mission work.

Mission work in Karnataka

Even though Christians in Kerala received the Gospel in 52 A. D., no one bothered to share the Gospel outside the church. Due to the reformation movement of Abraham Malpan, upon reading the Bible, Christians in Kerala slowly understood the need for sharing the Gospel with others. The Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association was established in 1888, to propagate the gospel. During its initial stage, this Association was not financially stable to send paid missionaries to places.

In 1910, the first mission field outside Kerala was established in Karwar in North Karnataka. In 1919, the Mar Thoma Church had taken over the Honavar High School run by the German Basel Mission. But to continue work in North Karnataka more people were needed. Thus the Church was looking for people willing to go in faith without expecting any remuneration from the Evangelistic Association.

Camps and Summer Classes.

Bishop Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan used to conduct camps and summer classes for the students and youths. Camps used to run from two to fifteen days. Topics such as Worship, Sermon Preparation, Missionary work, Church History were taught by him during these camps. He made friends with each and every participant of the camps. He used such occasions to find individuals who would have the call to be priests and missionaries of the Church.

Thomaskutty's call for Karnataka

While attending Students' Summer Camps, Thomaskutty was influenced by Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan who encouraged him to go for Gospel work. After obtaining his B.A. degree he stayed with the Bishop for few days for prayer and meditation. Being the eldest son of the family it was the responsibility of Thomaskutty to look after his widowed mother and younger siblings.

He waited for an almost confirmed lucrative job offer in the Travancore Secretariat, but when the call to Karnataka came through Abraham Mar Thoma Tirumeni, he was ready. He requested the Bishop to speak about this to his mother. Thomaskutty's mother was a very God fearing woman who prayerfully accepted the request of the Bishop and sent her son to North Karnataka.

Three more people also volunteered to go to Karnataka. They were: Very. Rev. P. J. Thomas (the then vicar of the Jerusalem Church in Kottayam), his wife and Dharmishtan (Philip Oommen – who later became Philipose Mar Chrysostom Metropolitan). The four of them reached Ankola (a place near Karwar, North Karnataka) on 28 September, 1940.

In those days travel was very tedious. The early travellers had to travel from Cochin to Karwar by ship and then to Ankola. Others who followed them traveled in bullock carts from Mangalore by crossing many ferries. It took many days to reach Ankola.

Sosamma John – Thomaskutty's mother

Sosamma John stands out as a great Christian mother and her interest in the missionary work of our Church is unquestioned. When her husband P. M. John died, she became dependent on her eldest son Thomaskutty, who later graduated from Madras University. As per the Syrian Christian custom it was the duty of Thomaskutty to look after his aging mother and the younger siblings. Thomaskutty eagerly waited for his appointment at the Travancore Secretariat which would make his family financially sound. But when the call to Karnataka came through Bishop Abraham Mar Thoma she was willing to send her son. She told Thomaskutty “*Son, you may go. The Lord has asked me to send you for His ministry*”.

The Good Lord who cared for the widow of Zarephath was faithful to Sosamma also. God provided for all her needs including the education and marriage of all her children. Her faith in God is a challenge to all Christian mothers.

Even on her death bed, she was an example to others. She had instructed her children not to make any tomb for her, but that the money should be used to make houses for the homeless. When she died Thomas Kutty Achen was at the Honavar mission and couldn't attend the funeral (those days communication system was very poor). Most Rev. Philipose Mar Chrysostom conducted her burial service; he considers that ceremony as a very touching incident in his life.

Better to serve His Majesty than to serve his majesty

Two months after reaching Ankola, Thomaskutty received the appointment order from the Travancore Secretariat. In those days a government job was a covetable profession with good salary and other benefits such as pension etc. But Thomaskutty didn't have any difficulty in saying no to the Travancore King's job in his Secretariat. He knew that it was better to serve the King of kings than the King of Travancore.

“Nearly two months after our arrival at Ankola. I received an appointment order to join the Government Service. It was promptly declined, since I had already been employed in a greater mission for the Kingdom of God in Karnataka” - Rev. P. John Thomas; from an article in the 'Golden Jubilee Souvenir'.

Early days of Ankola Ashram

The early days of the Ankola Ashram were not easy. There was no permanent income or salary. They had to live on faith and faith alone. The Lord who provided food to Prophet Elijah through the ravens was faithful to them as well. Thomaskutty and Dharmisttan (Philipose Mar Chrysostom) stayed in a shed with limited facilities. They used to receive small amounts of money during their house visits as donation. To earn their livelihood they went with local people to the forest to collect firewood to sell it in the market. They even went with the local people for fishing. They stayed together for six to seven long years.

Influence of Abraham Mar Thoma and Very Rev. K. E. Oommen

“I am deeply indebted to the late Dr. Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan Thirumeni for his inspiring guidance. The Very Rev. K. E. Oommen Achen was my Guru. Gone ahead of me beyond the veil they are ever beckoning me to tread the trail to glory. Rev. Philip Oommen (Now Rt. Rev. Dr. Philipose Mar Chrysostom Metropolitan) and his father, late Very Rev. K. E. Oommen have done a good deal to mould me and my missionary vision. While the former had pleaded with me and prayed for more than an hour on a hilltop in Karwar to help me accept orders to become a minister of the church, the latter helped me and my family to grasp the missionary vision in a deeper and wider measure. - Rev. John P Thomas, Golden Jubilee Souvenir C. M. Ashram.

Divine Healing

Here is an incident in Achen's own words published in the Golden Jubilee Souvenir of the Christa Mitra Ashram, Ankola:

“We tilled the virgin soil for planting tapioca and growing vegetables. I don't know for certain, whether our enthusiastic physical exertion had undermined our health. Darmishtan and I fell ill with malaria. My colleague was called home by his father for a course of Ayurvedic treatment. I preferred to stay behind under the loving care of Rev. & Mrs. P. J. Thomas. All alone in my room, I had fits of malarial fever on alternate days, which could not be healed by increasing doses of Quinine. Shattered in health, crushed in spirit, and sinking to the depths of gloom, I began to complain to my Lord Jesus in prayer.

It was 9 p.m. My temperature began to rise as usual to 103 degree F. All of a sudden, I felt the presence of someone in my room. Jesus my Lord had come without opening the closed doors. There was no visible form. But his gracious presence was real. Like a mother, who comforts her ailing baby, he took me in his arms. I began to pour out my complaints all the more vigorously about my pitiable condition. Jesus surprised me with a searching

question. ‘Why did you hurt the feelings of your visitor the other day?’ I confessed that I had erred, and promised Him that I would ask his forgiveness at the earliest opportunity.

“Malaria will leave you for good tomorrow morning” He said to me. “But don’t expect protection from any other illness hereafter. You will have to pass through many other difficulties”. Malaria has not visited me till now. His healing lasted for the last five decades.”

Karwar Mission and Honavar High School

The first foreign mission field of the Mar Thoma Church was established in the Karwar district of North Kannada in 1910. Mr. P. S. Mathai, Rev P. T. Varghese, Mr. K. K. Kuruvilla and Mr. P. O. Philip were the first workers.

In 1919, the Honavar (55 miles away from Ankola) High School was handed over to the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association by the Basel Mission and Rev. M. P. Philipose took over as Principal. In 1948, when Rev. M. P. Philipose retired from the school, Thomaskutty was transferred from Ankola to the Honavar School as teacher.

Priest

On 29 May, 1951, the Church ordained Thomaskutty as a deacon and priest on 24 May, 1952, He was appointed as the vicar of the Honavar and Kumta parishes. He also took initiative in conducting regular worship services in Mangalore, Manipal, Kuthramukh and Goa.

Marriage

In 1949, Achen married Chinnamma (Mrs. Chinnamma Thomas M.Sc., M.Ed) daughter of Rev. M. Mathai, Karimpanammannil, Anikkadu, Mallapally. Kochamma was also a teacher, and she was a strong supporter of Achen in his Mission activities.

Children of Rev. P. John Thomas M.A.,B.Ed.

1. Susy
2. Suma married to Rev. C. A. Varghese
3. Usha, married to Easow Jacob
4. Uday, married to Sherly
5. Navin, married to Asha

Linguistic Expert

Achen was well versed in Malayalam, English and Kannada. He had a good command over these three languages and was able to give thought provoking sermons. Achen was a member of the Kannada Bible (new version) translation committee.

Achen did the translation of many of the hymns and songs in the Malayalam worship Books to Kannada. He was the translator for all our Bishops and evangelists who visited parishes in North Karnataka. His messages were simple with lots of illustrations.

Gospel Camps

As a part of the silver jubilee celebrations of Kumta Mar Thomas Parish, Achen started Gospel camps in 25 new villages where there was no mission work. It turned out to be a big success and these types of camps still continue in North Karnataka.

Boat Mission

The Boat Mission was a new innovative idea of Achen. Achen and the gospel team members traveled in big country boats in the rivers of North Karnataka and visited villages on the banks of the rivers for missionary work. During those days, there were no proper roads and the boat mission was a very effective way for gospel work. In most villages, Achen's old students received him and his team.

A Man of Humility and Charity

Achen was a man of humility. Here is an example *“On a Sunday I was cleaning the Church floor Thomas Achen came a bit early that day. He took off his cassock and began to clean the church with me”* - Mr. K. T. George, Kumta.

Even when he was a very senior priest he used to receive all his visitors with great respect and reverence He believed that it is better to give than to receive. A good portion of his pension was given for missionary work.

Heavenly Home

After Kochamma’s (Mrs. Chinnamma Thomas) retirement from the Honavar School, Achen did not go back to his native place in Kerala or to stay with his children in Bangalore. He wanted to be with the people of Ankola for whom he toiled many years. He returned to Ankola Ashram and remained there as a member of the Ashram till his death. Many of his friends and relatives advised him to build a house of his own. But he always said *“my home is in heaven, a house with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”*

Final Days

In 1990, our Ankola ashram celebrated its golden jubilee. Achen was the convener for the golden jubilee souvenir. The final meeting of the Golden jubilee was held on 30 September 1990 under the Leadership of Most Rev. Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan. Achen translated the message of the Metropolitan from Malayalam to Kannada. All the celebrations went on well.

On 4 October 1990, Achen and Kochamma came to Ankola ashram Chapel for their usual morning prayer. While leading the prayer Achen quoted the verse *“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness. Which the Lord,*

the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day"2 Timothy 4:7-8. Achen stressed the verse and said that the crown is waiting for me. But no one in the audience realized, that it was really going to be the end of his race. On the same night while he was going to bed after dinner and prayers, he had a massive heart attack and he passed away peacefully.

Achen's body was kept in the ashram to pay final homage. His students from the Honavar High school, Co-workers, Priests, Evangelists, and members of the North Canara Churches and relatives came to Ankola to offer their final tribute to Achen. On 6 October 1990, the burial service was conducted in our Church in Ankola. Diocesan Bishop Gheeverhese Mar Theodosius gave the leadership for the burial service. A large crowd attended the burial service. He was buried in the Mar Thoma Church cemetery in Ankola.

From the Condolence Message

"The Rev. P John Thomas M.A., B.Ed., was one of the four who started the Christa Mitra Ashram at Ankola in 1940. He continued to work here for a period of 7 years. He has rendered valuable services in Ankola, Karwar, Honawar, Kumta, Goa, Sirsi and South Kanara. He was an efficient teacher and scholar. He taught at St.Thomas High School Honavar for 28 years. He served as the missionary of Honavar- Kumta mission for 30 years. He was filled with the zeal of evangelism. He laboured selflessly in the villages of North Kanara preaching the message of forgiveness and salvation through Jesus Christ.

After his retirement from the school, he and his wife Mrs. Chinnamma Thomas decided to reside at Ankola. They have been involved wholeheartedly in the different activities of the Ankola ashram since 1983. Achen served as the Vicar of Ankola Parish for a period of six years and Karwar congregation for a period of five years. He was a very good Bible teacher, advisor, guide, counselor and above all a kind and loving father to all the workers of the Ashram as well as the members of the St.Paul's Marthoma Church, Ankola. All those who knew him, loved him very much.

He was admired by all as a very efficient orator in Kannada, Malayalam and English.

He was a man of deep devotional life, prayer and faith. In spite of his physical ailments his deep trust in God enabled him to work relentlessly in the different responsibilities till the last hour. He served as the Vice President of North Kanara Mission from its inception in 1976. He was instrumental in organizing and conducting gospel camps of the North Kanara Mission in different villages of Karnataka. He is one of the pioneer Achenes of the Mar Thoma Church to dedicate his life and ministry for the building up of the Kingdom of God in the Karnataka region. His life now remains as a great source of inspiration for all the clergy and missionaries of the Mar Thoma Church.” *(From the condolence message- Prepared and read by Rev.Dr.K.M.Samuel on 7 October 1990 during the condolence meeting in the St. Paul’s Mar Thoma church, Ankola)*



Main events during the life time Rev. John P Thomas

1909		First call to Mission work in Karnataka (Kanara)
1910		Beginning of Karwar Mission- Karnataka
1916	8 May	Birth of Rev. John P. Thomas
1917	27 Jan	Kovoorachen – Ipe Thoma Kathanar passes away
1917	27 Dec	Consecration of Abraham Mar Thoma
1919		Mar Thoma Church takes over Honavar High school from Basel Mission
1919	14 Feb	Formation of Sevika Sanghom
1924		Formation of Voluntary Evangelistic Association
1926		Establishment of Mar Thoma Theological Seminary at Kottayam
1933		Formation of Yuvajana Sakhyam
1937	30 Dec	Consecration of Juhanon Mar Thoma and Mathews Mar Athanasius
1939	Sep	Beginning of Second World War
1940	28 Sep	Beginning of Ankola Mission.-North Karnataka
1944	4 Jul	Titus II Mar Thoma passes away.
1944		Abraham Mar Thoma becomes Metropolitan.
1945	30 Nov	Sadhu Kochoonju Upadeshi passes away
1947	27 Jun	Beginning of Hoskote Mission, Karnataka
1947	14 Jul	Punchamannil Mammen Upadeshi passes away.
1947	15 Aug	Freedom for India.
1947	1 Sept	Abraham Mar Thoma Passes away.
1948		Rev. John P Thomas becomes Teacher in Honavar St.Thomas School
1949		Marriage of Rev. John P Thomas
1951	29 May	John P Thomas becomes Deacon
1952	24 May	Deacon John P Thomas becomes priest.
1965		Establishment of Sevamandiram (Destitute Home) in Ankola
1990	4 Oct	Rev. John P Thomas passes away.

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4. Mar Thoma Syrian Church- Clergy Directory – Malayalam- 1999 Notes



Notes:-

Oxford movement

Oxford movement is the name given to a revival in the Church of England (Anglican Church) began in 1833 at Oxford. This movement increased the importance of prayer and sacraments in the Church. It gave a new enlightenment to the Church to work among the poor of the society.

Basel Mission

On 12 February 1834, three Missionaries from Germany came to India to establish the Basel Mission Stations. They were Johan Christopher Lehner, Christian Lenhard Greiner, and Samuel Hebich who set out on 31 March 1834 and landed in Calicut on 21 August 1834. They came to Mangalore on 30 October 1834, where they were joined by four more Missionaries. The Missionaries felt that the best way to fellowship with the converts was to keep them well occupied in some productive work, hence they got involved in the Industrial Sector in Mangalore (South Kanara) and afterwards they established a school in Honawar. During the World Wars, German Missionaries were asked to give up their mission fields by the British India Administration as Germany and Britain were at war with each other.



Map of North Karnataka



The End

Note From Author

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All For His Glory

