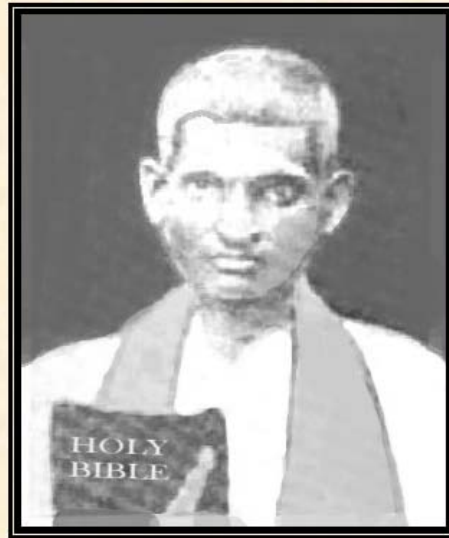


Sadhu Kochoonju Upadesi

Life story of Evangelist Sadhu Kochoonju Upadesi

(Muthampakkal Kochoonju Upadesi, Edayaranmula)

1883-1945



Sadhu Kochoonju Upadesi Biography

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"Look at the birds: they do not sow seeds, gather a harvest and put it in barns yet your father in heaven takes care of them!"
".....Look how the wild flowers grow: they do not work or make clothes for themselves..... It is God who clothes the wild grass..... grass that is here today and gone tomorrow..."
Matthew 6:26-30

This is the true life story of a man who fully believed the above scripture portion, taught and practiced it in his personal life. This was not only his story but his song all through his earthly life. So with out a shadow of doubt he could proclaim it to the world....

"Kaakakale vicharippeen,vidhayilla koythummilla
Daivam avaykkayi vendathe ekunnu
Lilly pushppangalkkum avan shobha nalkunnu"

Kristheeya Keerththanangal 248 (226)

St. Thomas an apostle of Jesus Christ brought Christianity to India in 52

A.D. St. Thomas landed at a place called Cranganore in North Kerala and converted many Hindus. From the early centuries, Christians in Kerala were having connections with Syrian churches. Till the middle of the 19th century Kerala Christians were not having the Bible in their own language. Worship services were held in Syriac language, which was unknown to most of the people. With the arrival of the foreign missionaries, the Bible was translated into Malayalam.

The Malayalam New Testament was published in 1829 and the Old Testament in 1835 and the complete Bible in 1841. Reading of the Scriptures in their own language made people aware of the evil practices in society which were considered as correct practices due to ignorance.

Due to the light received through the Gospel truths, a reformation took place in the Church. A group of people under the leadership of a priest called Abraham Malpan took the initiative of reformation. The reformed party was called "The Mar Thoma Syrian Church of Malabar." Even after the reformation many revival movements took place in the Church. Devoted Christian preachers from Tamil Nadu visited various parishes and gave leadership for the revival movements. People were made aware of the Gospel truths through sermons, hymns and spiritual songs.

Sadhu Kochoonju Upadesi was one of the revival leaders who revitalized the spiritual life of the church members. He was a Voluntary Evangelist who spent his whole life for the proclamation of the Gospel to the people of South India and Sri Lanka. According to him the Bible is not a book to be read but an instruction book which should be followed in day to day life.

Kochoonju was born in December 1883 in a village called Edayaranmula near Chengannur in Central Kerala. The name of his house was Muthampakkal. His father Itty was a simple hearted and devoted Christian. His Mother Mariamma was a God fearing, kind hearted and generous person. The first child of Itty and Mariamma was a son who was drowned accidentally in the River Pumba which flows very near to

their house. Later they had six daughters and Kochoonju was the youngest and the eighth child in the family. His parents and elder sisters were very keen in looking after Kochoonju and giving him training in Bible reading and prayer. He was brought up under strict Christian discipline of his parents. Kochoonju had his primary education in his village school and his official name in the school records was M. I. Varughese. Right from his childhood he had a keen interest for reading. He had a classmate named K. V. Simon who later became a famous Christian poet and Church Leader.

Child marriage was common during those days. At the age of twelve while he was still a student Kochoonju married Aleyamma of Vattapara house, Kuriannoor. After his marriage he studied two more years in the Poovathoor English School. At the age of fourteen onwards he started helping his father in agriculture. But the thirst for reading was always within him. He used to carry Bible portions with him where ever he traveled.

At the age of eleven he accepted Jesus as his personal saviour during a meeting held in his home parish. While he was 15, his mother died and the burden of looking after his sick father fell on him. Income from the agriculture was not at all sufficient for their living. So he had a hard life and was forced to do many small jobs to make both ends meet. He did textile business, and for some time he taught in a school. His wife's parents were very helpful.

He was a Sunday school teacher for many years. At the age of 17, Kochoonju started his gospel work, which was mainly centered in and around his home parish as he had to look after his sick father. After a day's hard work in the agricultural fields, he used to visit houses in the evenings with a lantern lamp and a Bible in his hand. He arranged area prayer meetings and children's meetings. His parish priest Rev A. G. Thomas and his classmate Mr. K. V. Simon were his strong supporters. Kochoonju was the secretary of an association called Edayaranmula Christian fellowship. Bible study classes and open air meetings were held under the auspicious of this association in the neighboring villages and parishes. While he was 20 he lost his father.

Kochoonju was a very distinctive person in appearance. He always wore a white shirt and a white dothi. He was 5 feet 9 inches tall and had a very thin and frail body. His eyes appeared to be meditative and his forehead was frowned as though in deep eternal thought. He always carried an umbrella and his favourite Bible where ever he went. His saintly life, self control, self denial, and commitment for social service made him a unique person. He liked to spend time alone in meditation. Much of his time he spent in reading the Holy Scriptures and devotional books. After many days of solitary confinement, meditation and prayer in

his house, he committed his life, his wife, children, all his property, possessions, responsibilities, time, future and all his desires to God. He decided to serve the Lord as a full time evangelist on behalf of his home parish, Lakha St. Thomas Mar Thoma Parish, Edayaranmula. His commitment to the Gospel restrained him from all worldly pleasures.

Kochoonju wanted all his three children to follow the Lord. He wanted his first son Varghesekutty to be a full time celibate evangelist and his second son Samuelkutty to be an agriculturist to look after his property and his daughter Mariamma, to be a lady evangelist. But unfortunately his second son Samuel died at the age of nine. The death of his son was a big loss in his life which inspired him to write the immortal hymn

*“Dukhaththinte paana paathrram karththavente kayyil thannaal Santhoshaththodathu vaangi Halleluiah
paadeedum njaan.”*

Sadhu Kochoonju was a person who strictly followed self control and self denial. He lived sometimes on only 14 to 19 meals per month. All through the day he fasted and had a meal at night. Every tenth day he avoided solid food, and took only water at night. He was a strict vegetarian most of his life. He could live and work with this type of food pattern for almost thirty years. A divine power gave him strength which is beyond our understanding.

In 1912, he spent much time in fasting and prayer to know the will of God concerning Gospel work. He was burdened by the death of his second son, poverty, responsibility of caring for his wife and children, illness in his own life and inward conflicts regarding different types of Christian faith and practices among the contemporary believers. He had a vision of the Lord Jesus like that of Sadhu Sunder Singh the famous Evangelist. Kochoonju was convinced in his vision that he had to continue the Gospel work for the Lord.

He was one of the few evangelists who fully depended on God for all his needs. Once while conducting a gospel meeting, the parish members presented to him a gold ring. He returned the gold ring saying that he was serving the Lord for things much more precious than gold. His home parish people were willing to pay him a monthly salary but he refused that too. He could not think of such a thing. He considered Gospel work as his duty and for which he was not willing to take any remuneration or salary. In 1915 the Mar Thoma Metropolitan gave him the authorization to preach and to do gospel work in all the Parishes of the Church.

In the beginning, his meetings were not well attended. Once while conducting a ladies meeting in his home parish there was only one old lady to hear his sermon. But God used this same man to preach to the millions all over South India and Sri Lanka for almost thirty years.

Upadesi always wore simple white clothes as a symbol of his holiness. He always used to carry his Bible holding it close to his chest. He was particular that Christians, especially Christian women should be modestly dressed and should not follow the worldly examples.

He became a popular evangelist very soon. His meetings were held in many places in Kerala. He even went to Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Sri Lanka. Irrespective of creed and caste, people used to attend his meeting. During the Cholera epidemic of 1928 which killed thousands in South Travancore (South Kerala) he worked as a volunteer. Mr. C. M. John who later became the Metropolitan of the Church (Youhanon Mar Thoma) was another volunteer who worked with him. He used to conduct parish conventions from Thursday to Sunday and for almost thirty years he followed this form of preaching.

He always considered himself as a foreigner and sojourner on earth. He was a pilgrim. He had a special relationship with God and God was his one and only refuge and trust. His relation with God was so intimate that he used to call God, Appachen (which means Daddy). His messages were very simple and easy to understand. He showed the common man the greatness of the Cross in the Calvary. He was a sharp and powerful instrument in God's hands. His life itself was his sermon. He could spread the love of God to all who heard him. His life was an open book. He used to speak 2-3 hours at a time. He used to quote parables and examples from every day life in his sermons. He was humorous too. His deep knowledge in the Scriptures made his words more powerful than a strong hammer. He taught new Hymns during his sermons. Millions were saved from their evil ways through his messages. His presence itself was a blessing to many of them. He had a large group of disciples. With the courage of a prophet, he fought against the social evils of his time. He had a deep concern for the unsaved.

The main points of his messages were:

God is a loving father who takes care of all our needs and there is no need to worry about tomorrow.

We are all pilgrims in this world and our permanent home is in heaven.

We are a chosen community and our life, life style, food patterns, dressing patterns should be a model for others. Action speaks better than words.

We must put our trust in God who is our refuge and strength.

He believed that faith without action is dead. So he gave leadership for the formation of organizations like

the YMCA, the Anti dowry movement, the Free School for the Poor Children and the Bible School to train evangelists. He did not stop there. He established a Prayer Hall near his house, orphanages in many places, old age homes, ashrams and a prayer hall cum guest house for traveling evangelists.

Even though Sadhu had little education, he wrote 11 books in prose and poetry and published three weeklies. His books were appreciated by all contemporary writers and critics. Through his books he attacked the social evils of the day. He wrote against the dowry system which made life of many Christian families miserable. In another book he wrote in detail how a Christian should do business. He was always faithful to his Church and his writings never went outside the parameters of the mother Church.

Sadhu Kochoonju Upadesi is always remembered through his Hymns. He wrote a book named "Aaswaasa Geethangal" (Songs of Consolation) in which 210 of his hymns are included. As the name indicates, his Hymns still give comfort to thousands who are broken hearted and in grief. Within 25 years of its publication, more than 50,000 copies were sold. Almost all the Christians irrespective of their differences in faith and creed use the Hymns of Kochoonju Upadesi in their prayer and worship books. His hymns have a divine power and are still sung all over the world in Malayalam worship services and family prayers. His hymns have the power to give hope for the dejected, cure and comfort to the broken hearts, assurance to the faithful worshippers and salvation to the sinners. Most of the hymns are the outward manifestation of his deep spiritual life and experiences. Seventeen out of the 427 Hymns in our Kristheeya Keerththanangal are written by him.

Some of his popular Hymns are (All Hymn Nos. are from the Transliterated Version of The Order of The Holy Qurbana & Christian Hymns – Mar

Thoma Sabha Publication) :

1. Krushinmel krushinmel kaanhunnath- aaritha!	Hymn 93
2 Ente sampaththennu cholluvann-verreyillonnum	Hymn 150
3 Ente Daivam swargga simhassanam thannil	Hymn 154
4 Ponneshu thampuraan nalloru rakshakan	Hymn 169
5 Aaru sahaayikkum? Lokam thunhakkyumo?	Hymn 221
6 Aashwaasame enikkerre thingeedunnu	Hymn 225
7 Baalar- aakunna njaangalhe yeshu thampuraan	Hymn 236
8 Dukhaththinte panapaathrram karththavente kayyil	Hymn 283

Kochoonju Upadesi was the General Secretary of the Mar Thoma Voluntary Evangelists' Association from

1924 to 1945. He was also the Manager of the Edayaranmula English Middle school for some time.

People of all religions loved and respected him. He practiced what he preached. He had absolute faith in God. He never earned any worldly riches for his children. The glowing Grace in his face was sufficient for his audience.

His continuous travels and restless gospel work made him sick many times. But in 1945 November he became very sick. He was aware of his home call. He was sure that he was going to his 'Daddy's' home. He requested his relatives not to cry when he is called home. He was never afraid of death. As he wrote in his Hymn

"Cherneedume vegam njaanum aa koottaththil

Shuddharodo-nnichchang- aanandippaan

Lokam venda enikkonnum venda-Ente

Naadhante sannidau chernnal mathi"

(Soon I am going to be with the saints to rejoice with them. I don't want the world or anything in it. I want to be in the presence of my Lord)

He was called home at 8.45 am on Friday 30, November 1945. He was buried in the Lakha St. Thomas Church Cemetery on Saturday afternoon 1 December, 1945. The funeral service itself was a great honour for him. Two Bishops, more than 100 priests and more than 40,000 people participated in the funeral service.

The Epitaph on his tomb read as follows: - (English Translation of Malayalam Text)

**This is the earthly tent of
Edayaranmula
Sadhu Kochukunju Upadesi**

*Soul gone beyond the stars to
Welcome the Lord.
We will meet again at the glorious
second coming of our Lord.*

Birth 1059 Virchikam 14 (1883 November 29) Death 1121 Virchikam 15 (1945 November 30)

Notes

Date of Birth: We are not sure about his date of birth. Some records shows it as 22 Virchikam 1059 (December 7, 1883) but in some other places including on his tomb stone it is given as 14 Vichikam 1059 (November 29, 1883).

Edayaranmula: Edayaranmula is a small village near the famous Aranmula Hindu temple. The world famous Maramon convention is held very near to this village.

Kuriannoor: Kuriannoor is a village on banks of the river Pumba, on the eastern side, about 10 kilometers away from Edayaranmula by road.

Kochoonju/Kochukunju: Upadesi's name in Malayalam is written in both ways. His biographer Dr. K. M. George who was also from Edayarnamula – Upadesi's native place wrote the name as Kochoonju. But another biographer Rev. Dr. Mathew Daniel writes the name as Kochukunju. In many Hymn books, his name is given as Kochukunju.

Upadesi: Upadesi in Malayalam means a person who gives advice. But in Christian literature Upadesi means a gospel preacher - or an evangelist.

Voluntary Evangelist: A person is a person doing the gospel work without receiving any salary or remuneration.

Sadhu: Sadhu means Sannyassi/Saint.

Reformation: Reformation is a process of reforming for the better. It can also be an improvement.

Revival: An awakening or increase of interest in religion

Hymns of Kochoonju Upadesi given in "Kristheeya Keerththanangal" the official Hymn of the Mar Thoma Syrian Church

Hymn Nos. are: 4 (old No 4), 6 (6), 17 (15), 27(25), 32(30), 146(137),
148(139), 245(223), 323 (317), 336(336), 354(244), 372
(255), 412(321)

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Note from the Author:

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All for HIS glory

Your's in Christ,

John Joseph

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