

Documenting the Last Remnants of the Aramaic Language and Music among the Syro-Malabar Catholics in Kerala, India

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The Aramaic language in which Jesus and His disciples preached the Gospel reached South India in the early Christian era. Until the 1960s, the St. Thomas Christians in Kerala, who trace the origin of their faith to Thomas the Apostle, celebrated liturgy in this language. Since the vernacularization of the liturgy, the language and the melodies are on the verge of extinction. The purpose of this project is to locate as many singers as possible among the Syro-Malabar Catholics (about 3.25 millions) in Kerala, who were born in the 1950s or earlier, and record their memories of the language, melodies, and experiences in order to preserve them for posterity. An edited version of these recordings may be used to produce a 60-minute documentary film in English with the title *Jesus and India: A Connection through Language and Music* that could be made available for broadcast by Public Television stations.

The project is **time-sensitive** because of the advancing age of the resource persons. The sound and the memory of the language, as well as the rich and varied melodic repertory will soon die with them. Preserving these aspects of this Semitic language is important not only for the history of Christianity in India, but also for the history of Christianity itself. Also, the project will draw attention to the Christian dimension of India which is generally understood as a Hindu country (there are about thirty million Christians in India who form about 2.5 % of the total population).

The project will be executed in two phases. **Phase I:** Preparations will begin in June 2013 with the appointment of a research assistant. I will spend the summer of 2013 in Kerala for fieldwork and recording.

Phase II: A team of experts will review the recordings made during the first phase to finalize a script for the film, and to chart plans for phase II. I will spend the summer of 2014 in Kerala for further interviews and recordings. This will be followed by the production of the film.

Please send suggestions and recommendations to <info@thecmsindia.org>