

Maramon Convention, 1947: Joseph's call to Karnataka

- Adv. John Joseph, Mar Thoma Parish, Kuriannoor



Mrs. Mariamma Joseph & Mr. M.T. Joseph

*“The Lord said to Abraham: Leave your country,
your relatives and your father's house
and go to a land that I am going to show you.” Genesis 12:1*

M.T. Joseph was born on 21st October 1910, in Manon House, Nedumprayar, Maramon, one km away from the Maramon Convention site. His parents, Manon Thomachen and Rachelamma, were agriculturists with limited education. They were members of the Maramon Mar Thoma Parish. Joseph had 5 brothers and a sister.

Joseph did his primary education from Maramon. Joseph then joined St. Thomas School, Kozhencherry for high school and M.G. Chandy (later Alexander Mar Thoma) was his class mate. He taught Sunday school and Mar Thoma Metropolitan Joseph Marthoma was his student. After graduating from high school, he got a job in the British Army in Pune as a civilian clerk. It was while he was undergoing training for sentry guard duty with a rifle in his hand that a thought went through his mind, *“Here I am serving His majesty the King of England as one of his loyal soldiers. How great it would be to serve the King of kings and the Lord of lords”*. And so he resigned from the Army and went back to Kerala where he joined the Travancore Anchal Service and became Anchal Master in Maramon.

Great grief struck Joseph when he lost his life partner, his beloved wife, to her first child birth. It was a severe blow and his first endurance test. He did not allow his mind to be crushed by grief and sorrow rather he overcame triumphantly. God blessed him with another life partner who was preparing herself to be a warrior for the Lord.

Mariamamma (Pennamma) was the daughter of Mammen Mammen of Manalukkalayil, Kumbanad. She completed her schooling at Kumbanad, Eraviperoor, and Vennikulam. She did a Teacher's Training Course (TTC) from Peringara School near Tiruvalla, after which she taught at Marthoma Corporate schools in various places. She had the privilege to be trained under CMS Missionary, Miss Kellaway, of Vanitha Mandiram. Pennamma was greatly influenced through the life and testimony of Miss Kellaway. She had lost her parents early in life and her brothers would not agree to send her unmarried to do mission work. However, her desire was fulfilled after her marriage to M.T. Joseph, who had too had an earnest desire to work for God.

In 1940, Very Rev. P.J. Thomas, then Vicar of Maramon Parish, heard God's call and set out with his wife Chachiamma to start the Christa Mitra Ashram in Ankola. Their calling and obedience left a deep impression on Joseph and it challenged him.

It was during the 1947 Maramon Convention that Joseph heard a definite call from God to go to Karnataka and so he dedicated his life and waited for the right time. While he was working in the Anchal office at Maramon he met A.C. Zachariah, who was teacher in Kuriannoor and Kottayam. Zachariah told him of his plans for the future, about how he was in search for a co-worker to start work in Hoskote. Joseph responded immediately, without any hesitation or bargain with God. Zachariah praised God that he had found the right co-worker to go with him to Hoskote.

Obedience to God's call meant resigning the promising and stable careers in Pune and Maramon. Obedience to God's call meant sacrificing the comfort of a home, leaving parents, loved ones, relatives, job and father's house. Joseph was prepared for 40 years. And he was ready to be sown in God's field.

And so they resigned from their secure Government jobs, bid farewell to their dear ones, especially their parents and turned their backs to everything they considered near and dear. Joseph, his wife and their one year and three month old daughter; and Zachariah Sir, his wife and their three daughters were the pioneering team of Hoskote Mission. The two families left Kerala on 26 June, 1947. They were sent with prayer and blessings by Abraham Mar Thoma Thirumeni. The families reached Hoskote on 27th June, 1947.

The Cubbon Park Prayer Fellowship (Bangalore Parish) led by Vicar Rev. M.G. Chandy, were very earnest in prayer asking God Almighty to send labourers to work in God's Vineyard at Hoskote. They were elated when the two families came as an answered prayer. The Brethren Mission had an orphanage in Hoskote town and they heartily welcomed and accommodated both families till other arrangements were made. Houses were then rented in the town at a monthly basis of Rs. 6/- for the two families. In 1945, Abraham Mar Thoma Thirumeni visited Hoskote on his way back from Bangarapet South India Biblical Seminary and claimed the Land in the Name of Lord Jehovah. "*Only ask and I will give you the ends of the earth as your possession.*" (Psalms 2:8. N. L. T.)

The early years of Ashram life was real tough. There was no regular income and survival was the main concern. There was no water for drinking or for irrigation. Converting the hard

ground into land for cultivation took years of toil, sweat and hard work. Hard physical labour was the only way to make a living. Both families worked together, “...*they were one in mind and heart. None of them said that any of their belongings were their own, but they all shared with one another everything they had.*” (Acts 4:32)

The new missionaries accepted the name Christa Sakshya Sangha which was very true to its name and adopted the Ashram way of life, sharing all responsibilities as well as financial contributions received from friends and well-wishers. The Lord God guided them through *a pillar of fire by night and in a pillar of cloud by day* (Deut. 1:33). The only road was the old Madras road which was at a distance and the Akasha Vani red light was a land mark for travellers.

The first kind offer by the local community was to fetch them drinking water from the Panchayat President’s residence (Shri. Chenna Byre Gowderu). The families were very grateful to this family for their kindness in God’s providence. The second offer was to allow them to buy the 9 acres of land for the Christa Sakshya Sangha work. Thus the land, where the present Headquarters of the Mission is situated, was bought in 1951-52 for a price less than Rs. 5000.

In 1953, Alexander Mar Theophilus Thirumeni collected funds for the construction of two quarters, a chapel building and a camp shed. Joseph and Zachariah honourarily took up watchman duty to guard the construction materials for the building of the pioneer buildings in the campus in a thatched hut. It was a habitat for Cobras and scorpions and there was no light or electricity except for a flickering kerosene lamp. They were in utter darkness with no one except God Almighty as their refuge and comfort. They were able to prove that if you make *the Lord your defender, the Most High your protector, he will protect you wherever you go* (Psalms 91:9-14).

And when the work was complete, the two families shifted residence from rented houses in the town to their own houses in the Mission Compound. The people of the town were in awe of a Living God who lived with these families keeping them safe from the powers of the Evil One.

Daily prayer and intercession; first-aid, health awareness on personal hygiene, food and nutrition, adult literacy, personal interaction with families around the area created warmth and fellowship with the society. Joseph’s children, who studied in Kannada medium schools with local children, brought in many more close contacts.

The Mission Field was a centre for all Christian and non-Christian communities regardless of creed colour or cast. It was a worship and retreat centre for many years and God’s presence was always felt and experienced.

Meanwhile, Zachariah went on to be ordained as Deacon on 25th December 1948 at M.T. Church, Kuriannoor and as Kassessa on 29th September 1949 at Bangalore. By 1961, Rev. A.C. Zachariah was transferred to the Bombay Parish.

Mr. and Mrs. Joseph continued their services even when the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association that had taken charge of the Mission field in 1965. All the resident staff of the Evangelistic Association were asked to vacate their houses in order to accommodate the new medical mission staff and families. This was a painful blow to the residents as the campus was dearly nourished and cherished. However, God enabled Joseph to construct a house of his own opposite the Mission Field by selling his property in Maramon, Kerala.

On 11th July 1965, the Medical Centre was inaugurated and Rev. E.J. George and Dr. (Mrs) Sophy George had arrived as the Missionary In-charge of the Mission and Medical Superintendent respectively. Joseph and Mariamma continued their work along with Rev. E.J. George and Sophy Kochamma with the same zeal and dedication for 14 years.

Yet another blow to Joseph's work was his own ill health of rheumatism of the hip joint. This was most likely induced by walking long distances of 14-16 miles on difficult rugged paths to villages in and around Hoskote to spread the Gospel's Good News. He was treated by the famous Kolathu Vaidyan and later by Sophy Kochamma.

Joseph had showed others how to face life in an excellent way. When he was faced with hardships throughout life; he would confidently say that the commission is from above and no one can thwart the call and purpose of God. He never gave chance for self-pity, never grumbled or murmured, never questioned God, was never greedy, but was always cheerful and content.

Mariamma was a great spiritual strength and support to her husband in the mission work. On 19th June 1986, she was very aware that God was calling her. So she requested Joseph to pray. With all their children and grandchildren gathered around her bed, she went to be with her Lord and Master in perfect peace at her home in Hoskote. According to her wish, she was buried in Gonakkanahally Village cemetery near Hoskote.

Joseph continued voluntary service in the Mission Field till 1995. There is no retirement for those who are called by God. . On the morning of 18th February 1995, at 5:40a.m., he was called home to Eternal rest and peace at the Mission Hospital at Hoskote. That very same morning was the beginning of the Centenary meeting of the Maramon Convention. Joseph's home call was announced by the General Secretary of the Evangelistic Association to everyone gathered. And amazingly, in God's divine timing, Most Rev. Alexander Mar Thoma went on to conduct the dedication ceremony of one hundred newly trained evangelists. When God calls 'one' home, He sends 'one hundred' in his place!

Joseph wanted to be with the Christian believers of the Hoskote Mission who were their own. He too was buried beside Mariamma at Gonakanahally. Their tombs in the Gonakanahally village stand as a challenge to other Christian workers. Mr & Mrs M.T. Joseph had four children, one boy and three girls; all are married, settled and abundantly blessed. They are all a living witness to the Lord.

When Joseph heard the call of God to go to Karnataka at the Maramon Convention in 1947, there were not many people willing to go for Gospel work outside Travancore. Even today,

there are not many people willing to spread the Gospel. There are countless number of villages in India yet to be reached. God is calling young people to carry the light of the Gospel to those who are still in darkness. Are you willing to go? May this year's Maramon Convention be a calling to many more faithful workers.

“God honours those who honour Him”
