

## Maramon Convention – A review through the years.

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**March 9-18, 1895: First Maramon Convention.** The first Maramon Convention was called Pentecost Convention (name given by Titus I Metropolitan) as the leaders and participants waited and prayed for the Holy Spirit's presence to be present throughout the proceedings of the convention just like in the Book of Acts. It was conducted for 10 days from 9th March to 18th March 1895.

In a circular issued to all the Church parishes, Titus I Mar Thoma Metropolitan entrusted the complete responsibility of conducting the Maramon Convention to the Evangelistic Association. Palakunnathu Madathil Koshykunju (Titus I Metropolitan's elder brother) volunteered to take charge of the Pandal construction with the help of parishes in and around Maramon, Kozhencherry, Kuriannoor and Edayaranmula.

The first Maramon Convention was held at the Parapuzha Manalpuram of the River Pamba (the location fell between the Famous Aranmula Temple and the Maramon Church) about one kilometer away from the present venue. It was a ten day event. The pandal (tent) could accommodate about 7000 people.

Mr. David and Mr. Wordsworth, both missionaries from Ceylon (today known as Sri Lanka) were the main speakers. Mar Thoma Metropolitan Titus I gave leadership for the convention meetings. Deacon Kakkasseri Varghese of Kunnankulam (7 July 1867 – 4 June 1897) translated the messages from English to Malayalam for the audiences to understand.

### **1899-1912: Rev. Thomas Walker Church Missionary Society (CMS).**

Thomas Walker (b. 9th Aug 1859). He was the principal speaker of the Maramon Convention from 1899 to 1912. He was a Church Missionary Society (CMS) missionary from Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu. He emphasized the importance on studying the Word of God (Bible) and to the missionary work of the Church.

His inputs were instrumental in the beginning of many Mar Thoma Missionary projects. His comments on Syrian Christians were: "Syrian Christians are very inquisitive people and they ask queer questions. In Travancore, we see a great mass of people who come to hear the Word of God with the impression that they are saved, but their mode of living is far away from the Bible".

Walker passed away on 26th Aug 1912 and a memorial meeting was held during the 1913 Maramon Convention. A memorial fund was inaugurated on the same day and Rs.800 was collected.

### **February, 1917: Sadhu Sunder Singh preaches at Maramon Convention.**

Sadhu Sunder Singh (3 September 1889-1929) the renowned Indian Christian missionary was one of the speakers of the Maramon Convention in 1918. He spoke in Hindi and the translation was done by Mr. M. O. Oommen, Chief Conservator of Travancore. Sadhu Sunder Singh drew crowds greater than any previous conventions, so much so that before the end of the week the pandal (covered area) had

to be enlarged. It is estimated at the final meeting that about 32,000 people gathered to hear his message.

#### **1916: Night meetings restricted for men .**

From 1895–1916 women used to attend the night meetings (8.00–9.30pm) of the convention. Taking into account the social norms of the day, a ban was imposed in 1917 and night meetings are held only for men. This tradition is still upheld today.

#### **1925: The price of meals**

During the early years of the Convention, restaurants and hotels were not in existence. Tea shops (Kappi Kadas) and Chottu Kadas (Rice shops) were the only available eating joints in the Manalpuram (River Bed). One of the famous chottu kada's was managed by Kunjan Varkey Chetten from Edathua. He would serve 14 full meals for just one rupee and 228 full glasses of coffee (Chakkara Kappi) also for Rs.1 in the early 1920's.

#### **1926: Setting up of Retreat Centre**

In 1926, the land of the present Maramon Retreat Centre was purchased from a Hindu family. Rt. Rev. Mathews Mar Athanasius (1899-1973) constructed an Aramana there with financial help from Dr. Stanley Jones. To commemorate the memory of the greatly respected Ayroor C. P. Philipose Achen (1868-1948) the Aramana was renamed as Ayroor Achen Memorial Retreat Centre.

#### **9 March 1936: C. V. Kunjiraman (1871-1949) speaks at Maramon Convention.**

Most of the Maramon Convention speakers are Christian leaders. At times, even Non-Christian leaders are invited to speak occasionally to express their views. On 9th March 1936, Mr. C. V. Kunjiraman, (ounder of Kerala Kaumudi news Paper) one of the prominent Ezhava (SNDP) leaders was given the privilege to speak at the convention. This was an example of the religious harmony that existed in Kerala.

#### **1940: Land Tax for the Convention Plot.**

The Government authorities were always helpful in the organizing and running of the Maramon Convention. With the help of C. K. Mathen Peshkar, (District Collector), the river bank (venue of the convention) was registered in the name of the Mar Thoma Church and a yearly tax of Rs.100/- is being paid every year as registration renewal fee.

#### **1936: Loud Speaker and microphone introduced at the Maramon convention.**

Until 1936, messages of the main speaker were repeated in relay by designated people standing in between the participants of the convention. It was a time consuming process for the message from the front to pass through thousands of participants to reach the back of the audience.

In 1936, a loud speaker and mike (microphone) set was brought to Maramon from USA by Rev. Dr. Stanley Jones. It was donated to the convention by one of the Christian Churches in USA.

### **1895: Unchanged Final Hymn from the first Convention .**

The Hymn "*Sthuthippin sthuthippin Yesudevane, Halleluiyah paadi sthuthippeen sthuthippen yesudevane*" written by Rev. Yustus Joseph (Vidhuwan Kutty Achen (1835-1887) is sung by the complete congregation at the close of the final meeting of each year's convention. This may be a world record for the same hymn being sung every year at the same time.

### **Rev. M.C George (1874-1923) -Translator and Preacher at Maramon Convention.**

Rev. Thomas Walker (a CMS Missionary) was the main speaker at the Maramon convention from 1899-1912. M.C. George Achen (Maliyekkal House, Kuriannoor- Father of Alexander Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan) was the translator. His voice was well known by the people who attended the convention. Achen's loud voice was audible to all the participants of the Convention (considering there were no loudspeakers in those days).

During one of these years, Rev. Thomas Walker did not come for the convention. George Achen was selected by the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association to speak in that convention. It was the first and last time that an Achen of our Church became the main speaker of the convention. Out of the 21 messages of that year's convention 18 were given by George Achen.

### **February 12-19, 1995: Maramon Convention Centenary.**

In 1995, the Convention marked its Centenary meeting. During the meeting, 100 Evangelists were dedicated for Missionary work to commemorate the milestone.

### **Maramon Convention Site Locations.**

The initial years of the Maramon Convention took place at different venues. The first Convention was held on the Manalpuram (riverbank) opposite the Aranmula Temple (which is about three kilometres from the present location). The venue then shifted to Parapuzha Kadavu near the Maramon Church. It was then held on the premises of the Maramon Mar Thoma Church for a year before being finally shifted to its present location.

### **Accommodation at the Convention**

Earlier, people from Kuttanadan, western parishes would come for the convention in their Kettuvallams (large country boats) on the River Pampa with adequate provisions for a week. Many people would bring specially prepared fish delicacies to serve to the clergy/evangelists camp shed residents. The hospitality of residents of Maramon, Kozhencherry, Kuriannoor and Mallapuzhassery who opened their homes to relatives and acquaintances coming from afar are cherished till today.

### **1905: Women Speakers .**

Right from the initial years, many women speakers made an immense impact on the Maramon Convention. Mrs. F.S. Nicholson and Miss. S.C. McKibbin conducted special meetings and Bible classes for women during the Maramon Convention. They rendered devoted service to the women of Kerala particularly in the education field, including the establishment of the Nicholson School at Kattode, Tiruvalla in 1910. Miss Amy Carmichel (1867-1951), founder of the Donavor Mission, Miss Kellaway

(1887-1972) of Vanitha Mandiram, and Miss Grower are other lady missionaries who encouraged the women folk towards the Lord's work through Bible classes at the Convention.

#### **1918: Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan**

Abraham Mar Thoma (Marettu Kochu Thirumeni 1880-1947) was the first Mar Thoma Bishop to become one of the main speakers of the Maramon Convention. His maiden message was in 1918 and continued delivering powerful messages till his demise in 1947.

#### **1921 -1970: Dr. E. Stanley Jones**

Dr. Eli Stanley Jones was born in Baltimore, Maryland, USA on 3rd Jan 1884. He was faculty at Asbury College when he was called to missionary service in India in 1907 under the Board of Missions of the Methodist Episcopal Church.

He was one of the main speakers of the Maramon Convention from 1921-1970. His messages combined evangelistic challenges with social concerns. In 1936, with the help of friends in USA, he donated a loud speaker to the Maramon Convention. He is also the founder of the Sattal Christian Ashram movement. He died on 25th Jan 1973.

#### **Ban of Tobacco and Paan**

The use of tobacco and paan was a way of life in Kerala during the first half of the 20th Century. It was an essential item at social events such as a marriage. There were tobacco and paan shops all over Kerala and people would attend Convention meetings with beedi and murukkan in their pockets.

Through his messages, Dr. Stanley Jones urged people to refrain use of tobacco products. During one meeting, he asked the convention participants to bury their tobacco (which they were carrying) in the sand on the Pandal floor. In another meeting, he collected all the tobacco products from the people and burnt it near the Pandal in front of everyone. Only then did the people stop using it.

#### **1948: Kozhencherry Bridge**

The Maramon Convention meetings are held on the Maramon side of the river bed of River Pampa. Before the construction of the Kozhencherry Bridge in 1948, people used the ferry services near the Kozhencherry Chanda Kadavu (market) on large Kurruvallams (ferry boats). Preference was given to women, children and Priests while men were asked to cross the shallow river waters by foot.

#### **1951: Dedication service**

Dedication service of children during the Maramon Convention started in 1951. At present, the dedication service for children up to 12years of age is held on Friday and for those above 12 years is held on Saturday at the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church, Kozhencherry.

#### **1953: Use of the Piano Accordion**

The musical instrument Piano Accordion was first introduced at the Maramon Convention by a Methodist Missionary, Dr. John T. Seamands. He was the speaker from 1953 to 1959. He was a gifted singer and could even sing in Malayalam and Tamil.

### 1956: Offertory

Offertory was collected in almost all the meetings held during the Maramon Convention. Much time was wasted by this practice. As per Convention Speaker Dr. John T. Seamonds' suggestion, this practice was stopped in 1956. Offertory is now collected only during four meetings of the Convention. People attending other meetings can deposit their offertory in collection boxes located in the Pandal.

### 1995: Special Postal Cover - Maramon Convention Centenary

To commemorate the Centenary of the Maramon Convention, the Post and Telegraph Department issued a special cover at the Convention Nagar on 17th Feb 1995.

### Translators

The translation of messages during the Maramon Convention is a tedious job. Proficiency in both English and Malayalam is a must, and thorough knowledge of the Bible and Biblical teachings is essential. Rev. W.O. Oommen, Valliyamannil Kuzhikkala, a priest from the CMS Church was the translator for Rev. Thomas Walker. Rev. M.C. George (Maliyekkal 1874-1923), was both the preacher and translator. Rev. C.P. Philipose (Ayroor Achen 1868-1948), Rev. V.P. Mammen (Kattanam 1876-1952), Rev. K.E. Oommen (Kalamannil 1881-1984), Rev. P.I. Mathai (Plavumkal) and Rev. P. C. Zachariah (Poozhikkalayil b.1907) were the other early translators.

### Maramon Convention Choir

Initially, there was no organized choir. There were no printed song books or mikes. Anjilithanam Varkey Upadeshi (T.J. Varkey Asan 1857-1931) and Angadical Ambalavelil Varughese Upadeshi were the choir leaders. They would sing each line aloud and the congregation repeated after them. Through apt repetition line after line of the songs were taught.

Later, Omallur Kozhikunnathu Achen (Rev. K.M. Mathew 1884- 1944) took over the leadership of the choir. The present organised choir was established during the time of Rev. K.P. Philip (1916- 1991).



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