

Maramon Convention: Glorious 130 Years

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March 9 (Saturday)- 18 (Monday), 1895: First Maramon Convention.

The first Maramon Convention was called “Pentecost Convention” (a name given by Titus I Mar Thoma Metropolitan (1893-1909) as the leaders and participants waited, fasted and prayed for the Holy Spirit’s visitation, to take full control of all the events, and a rich pouring down on all gathered just as witnessed in the New Testament, Book of Acts, second chapter.



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 (1893-1909) entrusted the complete responsibility of conducting the Maramon Convention to the Mar Thoma Evangelistic Association (Estd. 5 Sep.1888). 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 Edayarannamula – in the Pathanamthitta District of Kerala, India.

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 kilometre away from the present venue. It was a ten-day event. The thatched 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 Kunnamkulam (7 July 1867 – 4 June 1897) translated the messages from English to Malayalam for the audiences to understand.

Kutti Pandal (Tent for Parents attending convention with children below age 5)

A special Tent (Pandal) adjacent to the main Pandal was thoughtfully and conveniently constructed from early years of convention, from its inception to accommodate the Kutty Pattalam (children’s party), to spend their time at ease with their parents and guardians. Parents attending the convention with children below age 5 were not allowed to sit in the Main Pandal during meeting time.



Special Meetings for Kids (Children) (7.30am to 8.30am)

In 1922, Mr. Edmund Clarke from the Children’s Special Service Mission (CSSM, Estd. in 1867 in UK) started meetings for children in Kutty Pandal with good songs, musical accompaniments and other interesting programmes. After Mr. Edmund Clark’s years of valuable service, his associates Messer. A. V. George, K. A. Mathew, C. K. Varughese, and V. T. Kurian and others continued this great work.

Workers from CSSM and Scripture Union give leadership for these meetings. During the early years meetings were held in the premises of the St. Thomas Mar Thoma Church Kozhencherry and Kutty Pandal. At present, meetings for children are held in Kutty Pandal (children’s tent). All children staying in and around Maramon area attend these meetings with their parents.

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 of studying the Word of God (Bible) and fulfil the social responsibility of every individual by carrying, the light of the Gospel and remain as salt of the earth.



His inputs were instrumental in the beginning of many Mar Thoma Missionary projects. His comments on Syrian Christians were very interesting “Travancore is a very fertile ground for the sprouting and development of all kinds of Heresies”. “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 1918: Sadhu Sunder Singh from Punjab 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’s live witness of his transformation after having met Christ the Lord and Master, 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 Women

From 1895–1916, women used to attend the night meetings (7.00 pm–8.30pm) of the convention. Taking into account the social norms of the day, a ban was imposed in 1917 and night meetings were held only for men. This tradition continued till 2018. In 1919, the timings of the existing Afternoon Meetings were rescheduled and instead of Night Meetings (7.00 pm to 8.30p.m) an alternative Evening Meeting (5.00p.m-6.30p.m) was introduced and all were allowed to attend this meeting with No restrictions.

1925: The price of meals

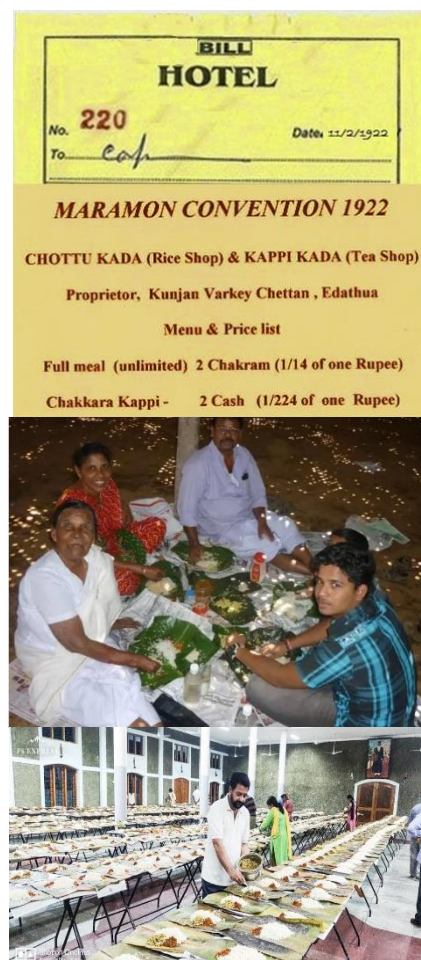
During the early years of the Convention, restaurants and hotels were not in existence. Tea shops (Kappi Kadas) and Chottu Kadas (Rice shops) were the only available eating joints in the Manalpuram (River Bed). One of the famous Chottu Kadas was managed by Kunjan Varkey Chetten from Edathua.

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. In the early days rice meals were packed in banana leaves leaving behind only biodegradable waste.

At present, food stalls are run by the Dharma Giri Mandiram - Kumbanadu, and Carmel Agathimandiram - Ayroor, on the Manalpuram. In addition, mess halls are functioning in Retreat Centre (reserved for convention guests, speakers and leaders). There are special food stalls functioning at the premises of the Pandal for clergy, Evangelists, and convention volunteers.

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 (Eli Stanley Jones was an American Methodist Christian missionary). To commemorate the memory of the greatly respected Ayroor C. P. Philipose Achen, (Cherukara Naranathu Paruvelithundiyl) (25 May, 1868-2 Feb 1948).) The Aramana at the Maramon Retreat Centre was renamed as Ayroor Achen Memorial Retreat Centre.

9 March 1936: C. V. Kunjiraman (6 February 1871 – 10 April 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, (founder of Kerala Kaumudi newspaper) and one of the prominent leaders of the Ezhava Community - (SNDP - Sree Narayana Dharma Paripalana Yogam) was given the privilege to speak at the convention. This was an example of the religious harmony that existed in Kerala.



1940: Land Tax (Ground Rental Tax) for the Convention Plot.

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 for conducting the Convention and a yearly tax of Rs.100/- is being paid every year as registration renewal fee. It is not a sale deed. From a study of the Kingdom of Travancore Archives we know that the tax was being paid from 1926 or even before.

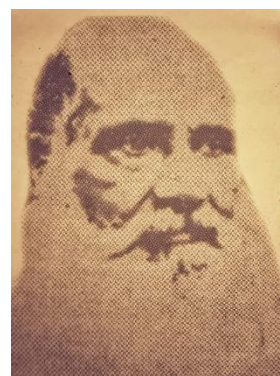
About Pandal (Tent)

The Pandal is constructed on the Banks of River Pamba at present on the Kozhencherry side - the River flows through the Maramon side. Three temporary bridges are constructed on the Maramon side to make a path for attendees to the convention ground. The Pandal covers an area more than two acres of land. About Ten Thousand or more chairs and few benches are provided inside the Pandal on payment basis. Others can sit in the ground and attend.

Thottavallil Narayanan Asan (Ayroor) was a very broadminded and generous man. Ayroor Achen (Very. Rev. C.P. Philipose Kasseesa 1868-1948.) was an intimate friend of Narayanan Asan.

Asan generously donated the pillars and beams for the Maramon Convention during the early years. Coconut trees from his coconut plantation were cut and made into poles and beams and sent to Maramon through river Pamba. He even provided other wooden items free of cost. A clear example of the religious harmony existed in our community during those days.

The Pandal is made by using wooden poles, wooden beams, and bamboo cross beams and thatched with braided coconut leaves. The thatching of the Pandal is done voluntarily by the Mar Thoma Parishes around the convention area. During olden days, after the convention the braided coconut leaves were taken back by the parishes and prayer groups to thatch their Church Buildings, Schools and Prayer Halls making it a sustainable practice.



Rev. C. P. Philipose
Kasseesa, Ayroor
(Top) and Thottavallil
Narayanan Asan,
Ayroor (Right)



1936: Loudspeaker 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. E. Stanley Jones. It was a donation from one of the Christian Churches in USA.

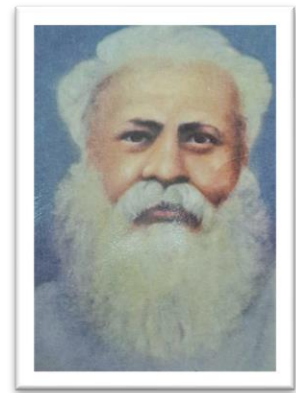


1895: Unchanged Final Hymn from the first Convention.

The Hymn “*Sthuthippin sthuthippin Yesudevane, Halleluiyah paadi sthuthippeen sthuthippen yesudevane*” written by Rev. Yustus Joseph (Vidhuwan Kutty Achen (6 Sep 1835-1887) is sung by the complete congregation at the closing session 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 for nearly 130 years.

Rev. M.C George (17 April 1874 – 13 October 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 Late Alexander Mar Thoma Valiya Metropolitan) was the translator of Rev. Walker. 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 (priest) of Mar Thoma Church became the main speaker of the convention. Out of the 21 messages of that year convention 18 were given by George Achen.

Maramon Convention Platinum Jubilee. 1970

Maramon Convention celebrated its Platinum Jubilee in 1970. In addition to the regular jubilee programmes, it was decided to publish a Souvenir. Rev. Dr. C.E. Abraham and Very. Rev. P. J. Thomas were the main editors. Souvenir contains a lot of historical materials and details about the Convention right from its beginning.

February 12-19, 1995: Maramon Convention Centenary.

In 1995, the Maramon Convention marked its Centenary meeting. During the meeting, 100 Evangelists were dedicated for Missionary work to commemorate the milestone. 15 New Mission fields were opened during the centenary year.

1995: Special Postal Cover - Maramon Convention Centenary

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



Hoskote Mission and it’s Maramon Convention connection

It was during Maramon Convention of 1945 that God called M.T Joseph Sir and family to go to Karnataka with the Good News of love, peace, joy, hope, deliverance over the powers of darkness satan and victory over sin, and death. He was an Anchal Master (Postmaster) under the Travancore Government at Maramon. He was a member of Maramon Parish, a member of Palakunnath family. As per Genesis 12:1 he left his parents, kindred, home, obeyed God and went to an unknown land following the example of Patriarch father



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

Abraham in the Old Testament, as Co-founder of Mission Medical Centre, earlier known as Christa Sakshya Sangha with then A.C. Zachariah Sir, in the year 1947/June/27th.

On the morning of 18th February 1995, M. T. Joseph Co-founder of the Hoskote Mission (Estd. 1947) was called home to eternal rest. 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!

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 memories till today.

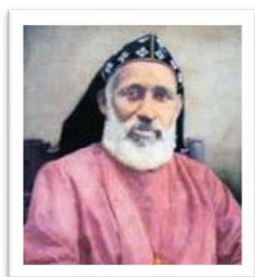
1905: Women Speakers.

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 (16 December 1867 – 18 January 1951, founder of the Donavor Mission (Dohnavur is situated in Tamil Nadu, 33 km from Tirunelveli Town) Miss Kellaway (Gwen Kellaway (19th August 1887- 28 Aug 1972) of Vanitha Mandiram, and Miss Grower are the other lady missionaries who motivated and encouraged the women folk to take up the Lord's work through Bible classes at the Convention.



Mrs. Nicholson

Miss. McKibbin



1918: Abraham Mar Thoma Metropolitan (30 Oct 1879 – 1 Sep 1947)

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. Eli Stanley Jones (3 Jan 1884- 25 Jan 1973)

Dr. Eli Stanley Jones was born in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. He was faculty at Asbury College when he was called for missionary service to 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 was also the founder of the Sattal Christian Ashram movement (founded in 1930. Sattal Christian Ashram is located in Nainital town in the Nainital district of Uttarakhand State).



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 marriage. There were tobacco and paan shops all over Kerala and people would attend Convention meetings with beedi and *murukkan* (a traditional delight made with Tobacco, aromatic betel leaves, slaked lime, areca nut etc) in their pockets.

Through his messages, Dr. Stanley Jones urged people to refrain from the 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. That put an end to the use of tobacco products.

1948: Before the Kozhencherry Bridge

The Maramon Convention meetings were 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 Kettuvallams (ferry boats). Preference was given to women, children and Priests while men were asked to cross the shallow river water 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 12 years 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 in 1953 at the Maramon Convention by a Methodist Missionary, Dr. John T. Seamands (b.15 Nov 1916- d.29Aug 2004). He was the speaker from 1953 to 1959. He was a gifted singer and could even sing in Malayalam and Tamil.

1956: Offertory (Monetary Donation)

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.

Self-Discipline of the Believers

Right from the beginning of the Convention in 1895, self-discipline is maintained by the participants of the convention. Discipline is not enforced from outside but from within by appeals made to the good sense and spirit of the people coming to the meetings. For crowd control, Police assistance is never sought in the Convention area. Vigilance committee members from Kozhencherry and Maramon Parishes help in guiding the attendees cheerfully. However, police personnel in large numbers can be seen on the roads leading to the Convention Nagar helping to control the traffic.

Eco friendly Convention

Plastic bags, and flex banners are banned in the Convention area. Only cloth banners are allowed. Immediately after the meetings, wastepaper and other materials are cleared and disposed as per the regulations and direction of the concerned Government Departments. After the convention the area is cleaned and cleared and restored to its natural state as it is a riverbed to be preserved for future generations.



Early 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 (b.19May 1890) and Rev. P. C. Zachariah (Poozhikkalayil (b.27 Sep 1907-24 Nov 1992) were the other early translators.

Maramon Convention Choir

Initially, there was no organized choir. There were no printed song books or microphones. 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 continuous repetition - line after line - the songs were taught to the large assembly.



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).

Later, Rev. K. T. Jacob, Rev. V. M. Mathew, Rev. Sajan P Mathew, Rev. Abraham Lincoln, Very Rev. Thomas Cherian, Very Rev. Sacriah Abraham, Rev. T. K. Viji, Rev. John Mathai, Rev. Ashish Thomas George have served as the Convention Choir leaders. At present Rev. Oommen K. Jacob is the choir leader.

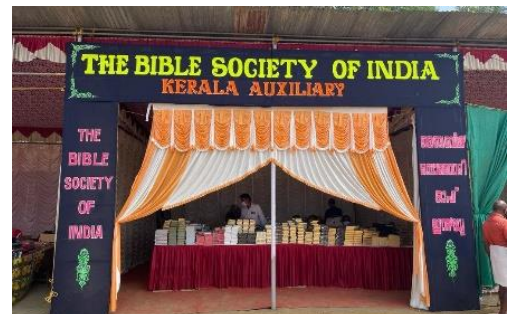


Song Books in Malayalam and English (Transliterated version)

Around two hundred thousand song books are printed and distributed to the participants of the convention at a nominal cost. Printing and sale of the song books are done by the Evangelistic Association.

Book Stalls functioning in the Manalpuram

The Mar Thoma Syrian Church is a strong supporter of the Bible Society of India. A prominent place is allotted to their stall. Bibles in various languages and versions and other Christian literature is available. Different versions of the Children's Bible to suit the different age of children and Biblical story books of different languages are available.



The CSS Book shop also make available a large collection of Christian Books and biographies in different languages. The Mar Thoma Sabha Book Depot have with all types of Hymn Books and Worship books.

The CSSM book stall also keep children's devotional books. The Sunday School Samajam Book Stall keep Sunday School Textbooks, Song books, Sunday School Materials and other resources.



DSMC (Department of Sacred Music and Communications)



During the time of Alexander Mar Thoma Metropolitan, in 1993, a separate building was constructed in the Mar Thoma S. C. Compound Tiruvilla for the Department of Sacred Music and Communications (DSMC). At present the DSMC is in charge of selecting choir members, selection of convention songs etc. In addition, they are also responsible for covering all the main events of the Mar Thoma Church through live telecast, live streaming and bringing out music albums.

Live Telecast

Keeping with the times and technology, Live Telecast of all the meetings and main events of the Convention are done by the DSMC. Large Video Screens are installed in various parts of the Pandal and outside to

make the meetings and events inclusive. The DSMC also livestreams sessions on their official YouTube channel along with several other media partners.

Different Vernacular meetings

From 2023 onwards, different vernacular Meetings (Mission Fellowship Meetings) in Hindi/ Marathi, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada are held on Wednesday to Saturday (Timings 7.00 -8.30pm). These meetings cater to and are well attended mainly by the non-Malayalam speaking members of the Mar Thoma Church attending the Maramon Convention.

Maramon Convention – Gathering of Offices

The offices of all the organisations of the Mar Thoma Church, Offices of all the church publications, counters actively function at the convention (Subscriptions can be paid at the abovesaid counters). Offices of Mission fields, Diocesan offices, and other Christian Organisations are also present in the Convention Nagar. There is even a Bank ATM installed in the official premises. Drinking water is provided by Government Water Department in many booths around the Pandal.



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