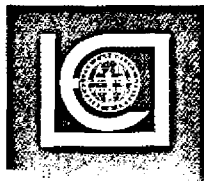


Viagens de Longo Curso  
Roteiros e Mapeações

*Long-distance Travels*  
*Routes and Mappings*

organização Anabela Mendes



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## **The Book of Tidings – Varthamanappusthakam: An 18th Century Travelogue**

KOSHY THARAKAN<sup>1</sup>

In my own journeys, I have been enticed by romantic monuments and depth of historical interest rather than by geographical marvels; and yet what charm is equal to that of ports and ships and the thought of ceaseless comings and goings, by which our daily needs are supplied? The most prosaic objects, the most common people and incidents, seen as a panorama of ordered motions, of perpetual journeys by nights and day, through a hundred storms, over a thousand bridges and tunnels, take on an epic grandeur, and the mechanism moves so nimbly that it seems to live. It has the fascination, to me at least inexhaustible, of prows cleaving the water, wheels turning, planes ascending and descending the skies: things not alive in themselves but friendly to life, promising us security in motion, power in art, novelty in necessity.

Santayana, George. "The Philosophy of Travel"  
*Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 40, 1964.

Santayana wrote "The Philosophy of Travel" sometime in 1912, but I believe he must have written it earlier to 15 April 1912 – the black day on which the *Titanic* sank in the North Atlantic Ocean. No doubt, the invention of modern vessels, particularly steamers, made travel much easier and comfortable than the earlier voyages where the traveller was never sure of reaching back home as the journey was totally dependent on the favourable forces of Nature. Thus, Santayana is not at fault in referring to the modern modes of transport as "things not alive in themselves but friendly to life, promising us security in motion..." However, as I belong to a period in history where shipwrecks or plane crashes are nothing new, or for that matter the travelling per se does not promise any security as there could be terrorists' high jacks or suicidal attacks, I am not so much sure of the modern modes of travelling as "friendly to life". Be it as it may, given the fact that long distance travelling in 18th C never had the comfort and security that we moderns have, it is indeed an adventure to undertake such a long travel by sea.

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<sup>1</sup> Professor, Department of Philosophy, Goa University, Koshy@unigoa.ac.in

*Varthamanappusthakam* (AD 1785) a travelogue in Malayalam, the language of Kerala, a southern most state of India is about the journey of two native Syrian Catholic priests, Paremakal Thoma Kathanar and Dr. Joseph Kariattil to Lisbon and Rome in AD 1778. The two priests accompanied by two youngsters seeking admission for theological studies at Rome had undertaken such a risky trip to Europe from Kerala during the times when there is no certainty of returning alive from a voyage. In fact they were sent to Europe by the Syrian Catholics of Kerala to represent their case before the Church hierarchy. The Syrian Catholics of Kerala wanted the 'Padroado' (Head Quartered in Lisbon) and the 'Propaganda Fide' (Head Quartered in Rome) to redress their grievances. *Varthamanappusthakam* thus gives us a detailed account of their sojourn in Lisbon and Rome before they returned to Goa in AD 1785 from Lisbon. The book though is primarily a chronicle of the trials and tribulations they underwent for the period of seven years in Europe— representing the case of Malankara Catholics before the European hierarchy, also provides a historical narration of the socio-religious conditions of the Malankara Nazranis.

Travellers of course have different motives that ranges from exploring alien landscapes, cultures; acquainting oneself with the customs and values of different communities; to undertake new commercial ventures; as part of an academic programme or purely for leisure or vacationing. Whatever be the motive behind one's travel, in writing a travelogue, (s)he provides us with an account of the places and the people (s)he encountered during the travel – an image of the natural and human terrains (s)he came across. A travelogue is thus an "*imagologia*". According to Eduardo Lourenço an *imagologia* has two levels. At one level it provides the image of a country or a collective entity which allows itself to create that image. At another level the *imagologia* moves around certain visuals or notions that offer different horizons of meaning which are "fixed in the imaginary" by artists and thinkers thereby effecting the image to provide a self knowledge.

Taking the cue from Lourenço, I attempt to read *Varthamanappusthakam* as an *imagologia* operating at two levels: first as an 'image' eighteenth century Lisboa and Roma offered to Paremakal Thoma Kathanar – the author of *Varthamanappusthakam* and at a deeper level how the Syrian Christians of Kerala – the community to which the text was originally addressed to had reinforced their self knowledge as an 'other' to the Western or Latin form of Christianity.

### The Journey: Imagologia First Level

During the journey from Kerala to Chennai passing through other Indian territories they were warmly received by many Goan priests as well as the local Tamil laity. However, some foreign priests who were the Vicars of some of the churches did not receive them well. After staying at Tharangambadi

(Tranquebar) for more than a month, they realized that due to the ongoing English-French war (1778 June-September) getting French ship from Tharangampady would be a near impossibility. As the chances of getting a ship from Chennai were more, four of them, namely Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar, Dr. Joseph Kariattil and two students seeking admission to the theological seminary in Rome left Tharangambadi for Chennai by land. In Chennai, they got the information through a catholic priest by name John de Souza that a ship has arrived from Lisbon at Chennai and would be returning to Lisbon after a while.



The ship named “Esperança” (Hope) belonged to four merchants of Lisbon. They had bought salt from Kovalam and sold at Bengal at a good profit, bought other goods from Bengal which they sold at Bombay, again loaded the ship with many goods to be taken to Europe and went to Goa to take the necessary travel documents for Lisbon. Having obtained the papers for travel, the ship came to Chennai and bought Indian Textiles. On the whole the business was of 5 times more than what they brought from Lisbon! (For 1.5 lakhs Kursad they now had 7.5 lakhs Kursad worth goods). However, the initial attempts at getting a place on board did not meet with success. When the travellers approached the Captain of the ship, Mr. Manuel Nascimento da Costa, he expressed his helplessness by saying that they should approach the owners two of whom were already there with him. However, the owners, namely Antonio Dorthy and Ventu de Vale categorically told them that there is no place in the ship for any passengers. However, Dr. Joseph Kariattil pleaded with them that they have to go to Europe for the purpose of *strengthening the catholic faith*. The owners replied that since there are many highly qualified priests in Europe, no purpose would be served by taking the two native priests to Europe. Moreover, while taking priests on board they have to be accorded the proper respect, if not the people would hold them responsible for ill-treating the priests. Dr. Kariattil told the owners that they are planning to go to Europe not for the sake of the faithful of Europe but for the betterment of the native Syrian Christians and they do not require any special considerations as priests on board except a little space in some corner of the ship. Perhaps, this statement that their visit to Europe is not for the benefit of the Europeans but for the spiritual uplift of the native Catholics might have touched a chord with the owners so much so, after much pleading with the owners they finally agreed to take all the four on board though earlier they said that there was not any space for even a single passenger! It may be pertinent to recall here that Europe had taken upon herself the onerous task of caring for the improvement of the conditions of the “moral and material well-being” of the colonized natives. This self justifying belief was so widely prevalent that every

common man of Europe worth his salt thought it as his moral responsibility to do his bit towards the same. Thus it was not without significance that George Grey's *Journals of Two Expeditions of Discovery in North-West and Western Australia During the Years 1837, 38 and 39* carries a subtitle "With Observations on the Moral and Physical Condition of the Aboriginal Inhabitants". Thus, the owners of the "Esperança" too thought of doing their bit to the moral well being of the native Syrian Catholics by obliging the request of Dr. Kariattil.

On 14 October 1778, the "Esperança" left Chennai port. After eight days, the owners began to be friendlier with Thoma Kathanar and Dr. Kariattil. They were now given a cabin with two beds. Two weeks later they got infected with scabies, and the food available on the ship not agreeable to their tastes only added to their woes. However, two men in the ship, namely Christopher and Jenman who were carpenters were very helpful to them. After travelling for about four months, they reached Benguela (in Angola) on 17 February 1779.

The Portuguese had taken possession of Benguela as it was a good halting place for their ships going to India besides providing the Portuguese an entry into Africa. Otherwise, the geographical nature of the land is nothing commendable as it is full of grass grown over laterite soil and devoid of large trees and forests and has got quite hot climate (Thoma Kathanar 134). Soon after reaching Benguela, many from the ship stayed on land as they were on the sea for a long time. Dr. Kariattil and the team bought provisions like sugar, wheat breads, sweets, fruits and chicken after secretly selling through Christopher and Jenman some cotton textiles they had carried from Chennai. They had to take the help of their Portuguese friends to sell these goods because there was a ban on selling goods carried from India anywhere before reaching Portugal.

After being anchored at Benguela for two weeks, the ship started sailing directly towards Portugal. However after sailing for about ten days, many of those who were manning the ship fell ill. These were the ones who stayed on land while the ship was anchoring at Benguela. Fifteen of them died because of the fever and another 49 were taken ill. It became impossible to sail directly to Portugal without recruiting more helpers. Thus, the ship was forced to sail to Bahia in Brazil. The ship reached Bahia on 3 April 1779. While people were forcefully sent as exile to Benguela as a punishment for their crimes, in Bahia many were willingly settled down from Portugal owing to the good climatic conditions. Bahia's soil is suitable for agriculture and fruits like grapes, guava, and pineapple are grown there besides the commonly seen fruits in Kerala like jackfruit, mango and coconut. Thoma Kathanar writes that the original inhabitants are red skinned with needle like hair. Because of their association with the Portuguese, many of them became Christians. At Bahia, the Metropolitan Joachim Borgeo de Figaro received them well and accommodated them in the Bishop's

house. He also allowed them to offer the Holy Mass in all the churches in his diocese. Antonio Oscalda, the master repairer of cannons and guns, became a friend and they visited him many times on his invitation. On 1 May 1779 they started to sail towards Lisbon. During the journey to Lisbon, they prepared the memorandum to be submitted to the Queen of Portugal and read it out to both Antonio Dorthy and Ventu de Vale, the owners of the ship. The ship reached Lisbon on 18 July 1779 after sailing for about two and a half months from Bahia. They were allowed to disembark only the next day after the inspection by the royal officials. Soon after, they went to meet the Papal representative and he sent them to the Benedictine Monastery nearby.

Lisbon, the capital of Portugal, was a small town earlier. However, after becoming the capital city, Lisbon has attained the status of one of the well known cities of Europe. The city of Lisbon is at least two "kaadham" that is about 2.33 Km (1 kaadham is about 1.167 Km) of road length and has about one and half "kaadham" width (1.75 Km). The houses and towers in Lisbon are two to four storied but not as tall as those in Genova and Rome<sup>2</sup>. The city seemed to have developed after becoming the capital as also with the increase in the volume of trade. This is evident from the disordered way the city has expanded. However, there are many good and straight inner roads that connect with the main roads, observes Thoma Kathanar.

In Lisbon there are many churches and monasteries as well as convents. There are also small churches and chapels attached to these religious houses. Thus, on the days of festivities, the city reverberates with the chiming of the church bells. Besides the monasteries like that of the order of Benedict, Francis, Dominicans, Augustine, Caetano and Carmelite, there are also houses for the orphans known as Misericordia. Towards the north of the Praia (praje) da India square, there is a big warehouse to keep the goods from the ships coming from India. At the centre of the square, there is a beautiful copper statue of the king with his crown and holding the sceptre mounted on a horse facing the sea. The statue is placed on top white marble steps. On the right hand side of the king's statue there is another horse sculpted in stone along with soldiers and on the left hand side of the king is the statue of an elephant in stone. In front of this statue there is a model of a ship in copper. The houses near the square are constructed anew after the earthquake and are arrayed on a straight line. The rich businessmen reside here. The royals stay at the southern end of the city known

<sup>2</sup> Paremakal Thoma Kathanar has written the book Varthamanappusthakam on his return trip to Goa from Lisbon that is between 20 April 1785 and 1 May 1786; thus the comparisons with Genova and Rome while talking about Lisbon.

as Ayuda. Like the “Edathakans”, “Pannikars” and “Menons” assisting our king in Travancore, there are Dukes, Earls, Counts Viscounts etc to help the ruler. The present ruler is Queen Dona Maria Francisca. Soon after she ascended to power, she appointed four officers dividing amongst them the administrative responsibilities. Thus, Viscount de Ponta da Lima looks after the affairs of Portuguese localities in Europe, Martin de Mel for India and America, for other European states, there is Ayra de Sa and Marques Angela looks after the affairs of the treasury. The population of Lisbon is about 4 lacs, i.e. four hundred thousand.

After residing in Lisbon for about three months, they proceeded to Rome on 6 October 1779. Sailing for about a month, the ship reached Genova on November 8th. The city though not spread over a large area has many inhabitants. Mother Mary is considered as the saint and saviour of Genova. In Genova, the buildings are seven or eight storied. Since the inner roads are too narrow and the buildings are so high rising, even while it is noon time, you feel it is already dusk. The rich travel by palanquin instead of chariots as the streets are narrow. After 31 days of stay in Genova, they left for Rome around December 10th. On the way near Porth the strong winds in the opposite direction forced them to anchor the ship at Porth. The people of Porth are poor; the food is not good though costly. They arrived at Lericha, a small town, on 25 December 1779 travelling through Leventu and celebrated the Christmas at Lericha. Next day in the morning they reached Liberno. The priest at Liberno, Fr. Patricio Esthapanepoli was a fellow student of Dr. Joseph Kariattil at the Propoganda Seminary at Rome. He was too glad to receive them. After staying for two days at Liberno they continued travelling and reached Pisa and finally Rome on the 3 January 1780. The winter in Rome was extreme and they felt very cold. On reaching Rome, they straight away went to the Propaganda Seminary and met Msgr. Borgia who in turn directed them to Cardinal Castelli as Msgr. Borgia was told about only two students’ arrival and for the rest they need to take the permission of the Cardinal to spend the night there.

When they met Cardinal Castelli, the Prefect of the Propaganda, he was too angry with them and scolded them for a while accusing Paremakal Thoma Kathanar as the one who creates problems for the Malankara Catholics. The Cardinal behaved in an inhumane manner by sending both of them out in the cold winter night telling them there is no place for people who are not invited. They may go wherever they want and stay but not at the Propaganda house!

After thus being shunted out, they came back to the Propaganda Seminary to take leave of the two students who had accompanied them from Kerala. There they happened to meet another priest by name Philiposa Vyagoli who was at the Propaganda Seminary during Dr. Kariattil’s student days. Fr. Vyagoli consoled them and told them he would take them to a home where they can spend the



night. However, Dr. Kariattil requested him to take them to the home “Santa Antoni”, owned by the Portuguese and Fr. Vyagoli obliged him.

Fr. Brendam received them at Santa Antoni on the recommendation of Fr. Vyagoli. Later Fr. Brendam took them to the Representative of Portugal at Rome who asked Fr. Brendam to take care of them at Santa Antoni during their stay at Rome. However, after 11 days of stay at Santa Antoni, they were invited to stay at the Propaganda by Msgr. Borgia. They stayed almost six months at Rome and returned to Lisbon on 20 June 1780 realizing that their mission does not evince any favourable response from Rome.

When the news of the cold reception given to them at Rome reached Lisbon, the Portuguese rulers decided to extend all help towards them<sup>3</sup>. The Queen of Portugal was highly impressed by the scholarship of Dr. Kariattil and made all necessary arrangements to ordain him as Bishop of Cranganore (Kodangallur). Dr. Kariattil was consecrated as Bishop on 17 February 1783. Thus, the mission accomplished they were finally able to start their return trip to Malabar from Lisbon on 20 April 1785 and reached Bhaia on June 23rd. The newly ordained Bishop Kariattil was given a rousing welcome at Bhaia. The ship then sailed towards Goa via Ceylon and reached Goa on 1 May 1786. In fact the account of the travel abruptly ends here.

Bishop Kariattil passed away in Goa before reaching his native place in Kerala succumbing to a mysterious fever. It was a great misfortune that befell on the entire Syrian Christian community as his Bishopric would have strengthened the native church both spiritually and culturally.

### The Syrian Christian Identity: Imagologia Second Level

The Syrian Christians distinguish themselves from the Latin Christians who were converted by the Portuguese. The Syrian Christians are often referred to as “Nazranis”—meaning the followers of Jesus of Nazareth or “St. Thomas Christians” as they trace their origins back to the apostolic work of St. Thomas in the first century AD in India<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> The Charter of 2 April 1761 accorded all Indian vassals of Portuguese Asia, if they are Christians, the same privileges as those of the Portuguese Kingdom. Also, the preference for the locals to the Reinícolas (those born in the Kingdom) made it possible for the locals to gain access to the ecclesiastical cadres (Lopes 42). The Charter does not directly apply to the Syrian Christians of Kerala as they were not the subjects of Portugal unlike the Goans but either subjects of the Kingdom of Travancore (1729-1947) an independent Kingdom that later became an ally of the British in 1805, or Subjects of the Kingdom of Cochin which was a Portuguese protectorate (1503-1663). From 1663 to 1795, Cochin was with the Dutch East India Company and later came under the British. However, I am inclined to think that the same spirit of the Charter of 1761 influenced this decision of the Portuguese rulers in ordaining Dr. Kariattil as the Bishop of Cranganore in 1783.

<sup>4</sup> Though many historians have expressed their reservations on the legend of St. Thomas, the



Syrian Christian Church that grew up in the fertile and thus contentious soil of Kerala's social history has attained a distinctive identity of its own over the many years of its existence. The formation of a community's identity often than not, is dependent on the "other" community as is the case with an infant discovering her "own self" as distinct from others around her. In contrast to an "otherness" (alterity), the self forms its own identity. Thus, in defining the identity of the "Syrian Christians" of Kerala, the legend of St. Thomas preaching to and converting a section of the natives of "Malankara" (part of the present day State of Kerala) to Christianity has a great significance. Just like all other origin myths that were handed down through generations recounting the story as authentic, the story of the apostle St. Thomas planting the Church amongst the natives of "Malankara" is an integral part of the belief system of the Syrian Christians and is an identity marker of the community. But the pertinent question here is: "Who was the 'other' in contrast to which Syrian Christians marked their self identity?"

A glance at the Socio-cultural lives of the Syrian Christians of Kerala would attest to the undisputable fact that the syncretistic cultural traditions of this ancient Syrian Church were greatly influenced by the native community. It was primarily these cultural traits along with other doctrinal differences from the Roman Catholicism that were sought to be obliterated in the Synod of Diamper (Udayamperoor). The Synod presided by the Archbishop of Goa, Aleixo de Menezes<sup>5</sup> in AD 1599 was aimed at the Latinization of this ancient Church by bringing it under the Catholic faith. For example, Decree 25 of Session VIII of the Synod explicitly states that henceforth "Churches to be dedicated to none except Roman Saints" and Decree 41 of the same session declares that "the Syrian Christians to be bound by the constitutions of the Bishopsrics of Goa". The Decrees 1 to 23 of Session IX of the Synod deal with the reformation of the social customs of the Syrians which had many commonalities with the caste observances of their Hindu counterparts, especially the Nairs<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, many of the

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Syrian Christian tradition believes that St. Thomas landed in Muziris (speculated to be the present day Cranganore) in AD 52. The Bishopric of Dr. Kariattil, the Bishop of Syrian Catholics, was thus named after the place where St. Thomas is believed to have landed first in Kerala. The first native Syrian Catholic to officially become a Bishop however was Parambil Mar Chandy (Bishop Alexander de Campo) who was the Bishop of Cranganore during 1663 to 1687. One of the demands of the Syrian Catholics in sending the delegation comprising Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar and Dr. Joseph Kariattil to Lisbon and Rome was to restore the Bishopric of Cranganore which ceased to exist after the demise of Bishop Parambil Mar Chandy.

<sup>5</sup> Aleixo de Menezes later became the Archbishop of Braga, Portugal in 1612.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Bayly points out that many earlier European observers did not make sharp distinctions between Nairs and Syrian Christians. There are also some evidences to suggest the preva-

Decrees of the Synod of Diamper imply that Syrian Christians never conceived themselves as different from their Hindu brethren. The Hindu community too seemed to have reciprocated the same sentiment, imagining the God of the 'Nazranis' as yet another incarnation of the same God. Through the enactment of various Decrees, the Synod succeeded in subjecting the Syrian Christians to the Latin Church under the Portuguese 'Padroado' for about half a Century.

Rev. James Hough, the former Chaplain to the East-India Company at Madras, in his book *The History of Christianity in India* (Vol. 2), gives a detailed account of the deeds of Archbishop Menezes in Malabar during the period of the Synod as well as for about another ten months of his stay there visiting various churches in Malabar. The visits of Archbishop Menezes are also described by Antonio Gouvea, an Austin friar and Reader of Divinity at Goa and a close confidante of Archbishop Menezes, in his work titled *Jornada*. A discerning reader of these works can see that though the Nazranis gave their consent at the Synod, it was not given in freewill but under coercion. No wonder then the simmering dissensions amongst the Malankara Nazranis were increasing over the time. Thus, a group of Syrian Christians revolted against this forceful subjugation by denouncing the Catholic faith and proclaiming that they have nothing to do with the Jesuits or their Church by undertaking an oath at the Bent Cross (*Coonen Kuris*) in Mattancherry near Kochi in AD 1653. The immediate provocation for the strong opposition to the Catholic Church as evidenced by the oath was the news of the Portuguese murdering the Syrian Bishop, Mar Ignatius Ahtallah at Kochi. He was visiting the Malankara Nazranis to provide them the much needed religious succours. The group that undertook the oath formed the nucleus of the various non-catholic denominations of the Syrian Churches of contemporary Kerala.

What prompted the Syrian Christians in vehemently asserting their identity as distinct from the Latin Church, apart from the doctrinal differences, is their strong identification with the native culture even while practising the Christian faith. These cultural and doctrinal differences they spelt out in recognizing their faith as "Marthomayude Margamum Vazhipadum" (the way and the practice of St. Thomas) as against the law of the Catholic faith that derives from St. Peter. Though the Synod of Diamper made great efforts in convincing the Syrian Christians that both these seemingly different traditions of St. Thomas and St. Peter are one and the same, as both were disciples of the Lord Jesus, the overzealousness of Dom Aleixo Menezes in negating all that were identified by the Syrian Christians with the Thomas' tradition betrayed the former's cultural

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lence of intermarriages between Nazranis (Syrian Christians) and Nairs till the end of the 16th century (Bayly 252, cited in Kurien 395).

arrogance as well as dogmatic adherence to Roman Catholicism. The great oath at Mattancherry before the “Coonen Kuris” was thus, a reclamation of the cultural and religious independence of Malankara Nazranis.

The subsequent developments within the faction of the Syrian Church that remained with the Catholic faith even after the great oath in front of the “Coonen Kuris” in AD 1653 in fact reflect the same sentiments. Paremmakkal Thoma Kathanar’s *Varthamanappusthakam* (AD 1785) is a veritable historical account of these developments as well as the resentments amongst the Syrian Catholics against the Roman Church. *Varthamanappusthakam* fearlessly exposes the hostile attitude of the European clergy who were part of the ‘Padroado’ and ‘Propaganda Fide’ in Malankara and elsewhere in India towards the native Christians and the clergy. Especially, Chapter 72 of *Varthamanappusthakam* is a strong attack on the European clergy and their attitude towards the natives, though the same sentiments are expressed in many of the chapters of the book. For instance, Thoma Kathanar writes:

...Whenever you [European clergy] visit our Churches, we show great respect and devotion to you; carrying you on the palanquin, both the native clergy and laymen accompany you in procession. When you see all this respect and admiration shown by us, you think the Malankara Nazranis owe it to you because of your racial supremacy ... Your [European clergy] deeds make us to think so. Even when a white-skinned cobbler comes to you, you offer him a seat and treat him well while the prominent amongst us like the Tharakans and the Priests visit you, you don’t extend the same courtesy and make them stand before you. If some amongst them sit before you, your displeasure is evident and seen on your gloomy face. (Thoma Kathanar 408-409)

In contrast to the ill-treatment by the European clergy in India, the author in Chapter 18 concludes his reflections on the friendly and favourable attitude shown by the people as well as the Goan priests along the Indian territories on their way to embarking the ship from Chennai sailing to Lisbon. He says the native priests and people were well disposed to them because “. . . we were all one and the same—Indians and their hearts were stirred up by this natural love for and affection towards the same folks.” (Thoma Kathanar 95).

## Conclusion

*Varthamanappusthakam* as a travelogue provides the first level *imagologia* in its detailed descriptions of the landscape and its people that the author travelled to. The vivid descriptions of the cities like Lisbon and Genova take every reader of the book to those places in his or her imagination. Here it is worthy to point out

that the author usually gives a detailed description of the place he has reached as soon as he mentions about the arrival in a particular place as has been seen in the case of Benguela, Bhaia, Lisbon and Genova. However, he forgets to give an account of Rome in the same fashion (Joseph 36). In Chapter 45, he mentions about their arrival in Rome, but the cold reception and antagonistic attitude of the Church in Rome made him nearly to forget the landscape! Later in Chapter 53 he gives a detailed description of the landscape of Rome.

The travelogue also succeeds in reinforcing the cultural and religious identity of Syrian Christians of Kerala. In doing so, it invokes the second level of the *imagologia* by focusing on the notions of 'Syrian Christian self' and its 'other' and offers different horizons of meaning of identity thereby providing a self knowledge of the Malankara Syrians. The encounter between the 'Syrian Christian Self' and its 'other' had continued to play over for more than half a Century before Europe finally came to appreciate the dignity and ingenuity of India with the onset of global decolonization. Over the years, the Syrian Christian self also learned to respect the 'otherness' of the other. Thus, the many factions within the Syrian Churches though do not share a common mode of worship as well as ritual practices accept the other in its otherness. This acceptance is more evident in the quotidian practices of the Syrian Christian laity though the Church hierarchy is cautious and slow in responding to it.

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*Varthamanappusthakam* by Paremakal Thoma Kathanar, a native Catholic priest from Kerala, was published in AD 1785 and is the first travelogue written in Malayalam, the native language of Kerala. The book is about the travel he along with another native priest Dr. Joseph Kariattil (later was ordained as Bishop of Cranganore, Kerala in Lisbon in AD 1783) undertook in AD 1778. They wanted the ‘*Padroado*’ (Head Quartered in Lisbon) and the ‘*Propaganda Fide*’ (Head Quartered in Rome) to redress the grievances of Syrian Catholics of Kerala. *Varthamanappusthakam* thus gives us a detailed account of their sojourn in Lisbon and Rome before they returned from Lisbon in AD 1785.

Travellers of course have different motives that ranges from exploring alien landscapes, cultures; acquainting oneself with the customs and values of different communities; to undertake new commercial ventures; as part of an academic programme or purely for leisure or vacationing. Whatever be the motive behind one’s travel, in writing a travelogue, (s)he provides us with an account of the places and the people (s)he encountered during the travel – an image of the natural and human terrains (s)he came across. A travelogue is thus an “*imagologia*”. According to Eduardo Lourenço an *imagologia* has two levels. At one level it provides the image of a country or a collective entity which allows itself to create that image. At another level the *imagologia* moves around certain visuals or notions that offer different horizons of meaning which are “fixed in the imaginary” by artists and thinkers thereby effecting the image to provide a self knowledge.

Taking the cue from Lourenço, I attempt to read *Varthamanappusthakam* as an *imagologia* operating at two levels: first as an “image” eighteenth century Lisboa and Roma offered to Paremakal Thoma Kathanar – the author of *Varthamanappusthakam* and at a deeper level how the Syrian Christians of Kerala – the community to which the text was originally addressed to had reinforced their self knowledge as an “other” to the Western or Latin form of Christianity.