

Syro-Malabar community in the United States:

During the 1970's and 80's a large number of Christian immigrants migrated to the US and settled in major cities like Chicago, New York, Houston, Dallas and San Jose among others. A large number of them were Catholics who hailed from the southern state of Kerala, India. They belong to the Syro Malabar Rite of the church under the Oriental Congregation for Eastern Churches, a wing of the papal hierarchy. Among them is the Knanaya community from the Kottayam area of Kerala State belonging to the same Syro-Malabar Rite. This community claimed to be descendants of a group of people from Mesopotamia, currently Iraq, and identified themselves as a separate Syro-Malabar community.

Organization Knanaya Association of North America (KANA):

The immigrant community of Knanaya people showed interest to come together on a social basis to foster friendship among all Knanaya people regardless of their religious belief or their marriage affiliation. Thus the organization Knanaya Association of North America (KANA) the first and the oldest Knanaya organization in the US was founded in Chicago in 1979.

Syro Malabar Church Ministry:

Like other immigrant communities the Syro Malabar Christians wanted to have worship in their own Rite rather than melt into the main stream catholic churches of the US. As there was a large concentration of Oriental Catholics in the Chicago area, a request was made in 1983 to the late Cardinal Archbishop Joseph Bernadin of Chicago to establish a separate Church ministry for the Syro Malabar Christians. A separate ministry was also established for the Knanaya community in Chicago, also of the Syro Malabar rite.

Knanaya community in India:

The Knanaya community's claim to special identity is based on **racial purity** and the practice of **endogamy**. They discriminate against and ostracize those with non-endogamous spouses. Such discrimination is practiced not only on the social level but also at the Church level in Kottayam, Kerala, India. The diocese of Kottayam expels anyone who marries outside of the community, forcing them to leave their parish and diocese. This diocese refuses to conduct their marriages in their native parishes, refuse to baptize and register their children in their parishes and even to bury them with their kith and kin. Such practices amount to **racial discrimination and destroy their human dignity**. While Rome had established a separate diocese of Kottayam for the Knanaya people in Kerala, India, it was not aware of its discriminatory practices.

Knanaya community in the USA:

Some of the Knanaya community immigrants wanted to maintain the racial purity and the practice of endogamy in the United States. They wanted to import the same unchristian practices of Kerala, India to the United States of America. A

fanatic group called Knanaya Catholic Society (KCS) was established with that ideology.

Many enlightened endogamous and non-endogamous Knanites protested against this evil practice in the Knanaya church mission established in Chicago and refused to be excluded. There was difference of opinion in the Knanaya church regarding membership in the mission. In 1985 Joseph Cardinal Bernadin of the Arch diocese of Chicago was approached to by members of both organizations to resolve the membership issue in the Knanaya mission. Cardinal Bernadin appealed to Rome to settle the dispute. Rome, obviously unaware of the practice of racial qualification of the church membership, through its congregation for the Eastern Churches, by its Prot # N 124/83 of 30 January, 1986 affirmed that **“the special ministry for the Knanaya Community can be conducted only on the basis that those Knanaya Catholics who married Non-Knanaya spouses may enjoy equal status in the ministry. This congregation does not accept the customary practice followed in Kerala of excluding from the community those who marry non-Knanaya spouses, is extendable to the United States of America”**. The mission was allowed to continue based on the norm established by Rome. The fanatic faction made a subsequent appeal to Rome and it was again rejected through another Prot issued on October 3, 1997. The Congregation also went on to point out that the Bishop of Kottayam has no authority over the faithful outside of his territory.

St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago:

Meanwhile the Syro Malabar Christians increased in North America. On July 1st 2001 Rome established a separate diocese called St. Thomas Syro-Malabar Catholic Diocese of Chicago with Bishop Mar Jacob Angadiath as the bishop for all Syro Malabar Christians in North America including the Knanaya Community. The bishop allowed separate missions for the Knanaya community with the injunction to include non-endogamous members as is directed by Rome based on “rescript of 1986”.

Current Knanaya Catholic Church mission Activities:

The Knanaya Catholic directors flout the directives of Rome and refused to give membership or include the non-endogamous on any committees. The directors openly incite people to defy Rome’s Prots and are on a warpath to try to establish a separate diocese so as to perpetuate the **practice of discrimination**. Most mission directors are granted religious visas, but the Knanaya mission directors are more concerned with promoting a **discriminatory and racial agenda**, as is evidenced by a sample of a mission director’s message to the community. Fr. Abraham Mutholahu, Vicar General of this church group, is spreading hatred among his flock towards catholic community in the USA, which is leading **communal tensions**. Non-profit organizations should be banned from indulging in such activities.

Web Sites for reference:

<http://www.kanachicago.com/Articles.html>
<http://members.aol.com/smalabar/index.htm>
<http://www.stthomasdiocese.org>
<http://www.angloindians.com/the-church/catholic-church/knanaya-catholics.html>
<http://www.knanayaregion.us/chicago/>
<http://www.knanayaregion.us/chicago/bulletin.htm>

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