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[Back](#)

[Kerala](#) - [Kottayam](#)

Bi-centenary fete of Bible Society

By Our Staff Reporter

KOTTAYAM, MARCH 5. The bi-centenary of the inception of the Bible Society would be celebrated here on Sunday.

It was on March 7, 1804, that the Society, which functions in over 220 nations worldwide today, started in a humble way in London.

Kottayam occupies a special place in the history of Bible, as it was here that the first complete Malayalam Bible was printed by Benjamin Bailey, the Anglican missionary, in 1841. However, the history of bible in Kerala goes further back.

One of the rarest copies of Bible, a manuscript in Syriac, is of Kerala origin. It was given to Dr. Claudius Buchanan, the then vice principal of Serambur college, on his visit to Travancore in 1806. The handwritten book belongs to the period between AD sixth and 12th Centuries, it is believed. It is kept at the Cambridge University Library.

According to Bishop Thomas Mar Themotheos, president, Kerala Auxiliary of the Society, the history of Malayalam bible is closely linked to the evolution of Malayalam printing and print language and even the evolution of the script. The first four books of the New Testament were translated into Malayalam in the early 19th century. In the absence of Malayalam fonts, one of the translators, Thimmappilla, had to go all the way to Bombay to cast Malayalam fonts. He completed the printing in 1811. Again, Dr. Bailey had to create his own wooden press to print his version of the Gospel according to Mathew in 1825.

According Rev. Samuel T .Varghese, the Bible Society is engaged in an effort to publish a re-edited version of the Malayalam Bible now in use to make the language more in tune with the times.

The celebrations on Sunday, will be inaugurated by the Catholicos, Baselios Marthoma Mathews II, the head of the Malankara Orthodox Syrian church. Bishop Themotheos will preside. Bishops, Issac Mar Philexinos, Sam Mathew, Pastor M.M. Zacharia and others would speak. The celebrations will begin with a rally from the statue of Benjamin Bailey at the Municipal Jubilee park at Nagambadom.

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