

Kerala DVD review

This professional quality 34 minute documentary is produced by the Christian Musicological Society of India in collaboration with the Carmelites of India and the Kerala Department of Tourism.

Beginning with lovely landscapes and cityscapes of Kerala, the video takes place during the visit of a North American adolescent with his family in Kerala. The boy's grandfather presents a simplified yet insightful overview of the rich and varied history of Christianity in southern India, beginning with the oral tradition of the mission of the apostle Thomas in the first century, through successive contributions of Persian-Syriac, Portuguese, West Syriac and later British Protestant missionaries. The current and vibrant 'family' of diverse Christian communities is generously portrayed.

There are breath-taking visuals of traditional devotional practices and enchanting recordings of Syriac (Aramaic) chants accompanied on Indian musical instruments. A high point is the portrayal of contemporary Hindu-Christian spiritual synthesis, in both visual art and bhajan chanting.

This documentary wets the appetite of the Western viewer interested in this less-well-known aspect of Indian spirituality. Some aspects that further portrayals might explore are:

- the ways young people are introduced to and integrated in their faith
- the roles and degree of inclusion of women
- interfaith relations between Indian Christianity and the many other Indian spiritual traditions

Some comments from an audience of 16 during an Aramaic Christianity workshop:

- Very helpful explanation of the history of Christianity in Kerala, with beautiful music and video, but in contrast, the boy's character and understanding are not as well explained.

- Judging from recent news reports about the mistreatment of women and little girls in India, women do not seem to have any status at all. What is the place of women in this Indian Christian community setting?