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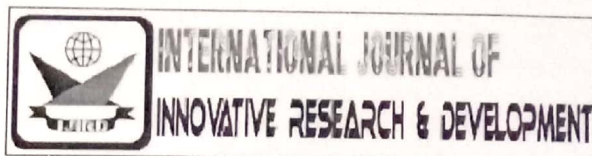
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Islamic Religious Centres in Kanyakumari District

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Abstract:

Muslims constitute an important web in the social fabric of India. While India is the original home of Hinduism which constitutes a system of beliefs and rituals for the great majority of our people, Indian ethos has liberally accommodated other faiths which penetrated, the sub-continent at different points. Several centuries later, Islam was introduced to the people living on the West Coast of India by the Arab traders and this happened much before the Muslim conquest of Sind. These early beginnings make many changes in religion such as Hinduism Christianity and Islam.

1. Introduction

Islam is an Arabian term, means surrendering to God. Muslims built mosques, and minarets for their worship. They have Darghas also. Mosques are places of worship. In Islam, they are called as Dargha. They are found in various places. People come to the Darghas to redress their complaints and wishes to be fulfilled. They render their offerings happily when their wishes are fulfilled. Minaret is a tall tower usually forming a part of a mosque in which Muslims are called to worship. The high towers of minarates take a significant place in the construction work of mosques or Darghas. Minarates are erected as straight from the bottom till the peak. This kind of pillar was first used properly in mosques by "Khalifa Musuvia".¹ There are many mosques in Kanyakumari District. The Muslims who are the third major community in the district form about 5 per cent of the population. From very early times the parts on the west-coast attracted many sea-faring people of world. The first batch of Muslims reached Malabar by about 712 A.D.² They came as traders and settled in the coastal regions. They not only respected the customs and usages of the country but also maintained cordial relations with the native population. They erected mosques at convenient places and slowly made many converts to Islam. The general structure, customs, manners and religious beliefs of the Muslims of the district are basically the same in other parts of the State. The Muslims are fairly distributed in all the Taluks of the District. However, at Thiruvithancode, Thuckalay and Colachel in the Kalkulam Taluk, Thittuvilai in the Thoivalai Taluk and Edalakudy in the Agastheeswaram Taluk there are large number of Muslims mostly engaged in trading activities. The two major sections of the Muslims at this place, are the Shiahhs and the Sunnis.

2. Peer Mohammed Oliyullah Dargha at Thuckalay

Peer Mohamed Dargha is located at Thuckalay which is about 16kms from Nagercoil on the Cape-Trivandrum Highways Road. There is a small village near Thenkasi in Thirunelveli District by name Kaniyapuram where Peerappa is known for the name Peer Mohamed, who lived before 16th Century. He was a great scholar and considered as one among the 18 Siddhars. He was an ordent lover of Tamil literary works especially related to religion. He himself was an eminent writer in Tamil and he has well-versed in Thempavani written by Beski popularly called Veeramamunivar. His literary works are not only Islam, but also other religions like Christianity and Hinduism. His grandfather was also a good scholar and it is seen from Thirumighana Saranool that his name was Vavanchi. His father's name was Sirumalikal and mother Aamina. It is said that he who laid the foundation stone of the Padmanabhapuram Palace.³ The Tamil literary works are many and among them two are more important. The total number of poems written by him was 18,000. This is known from his own work namely 'The Mihurasuvalam'. In memory of Peerappa a mosque was constructed in his burial place at Thuckalay. It is one of the beautiful mosques in Kanyakumari District. The architecture of the mosque is a replica of the ancient architecture of Islam.

3. Malik Mohammad Oliyullah Dharga at Thiruvithancode

There is a Dharga in Thiruvithancode, which is called Malik Mohammed Dharga. His father was Malik Ibnu Habeen, who constructed this Dharga at Thiruvithancode and lost his life their itself. A festival is being conducted every year for 9 days. Jummah Mosque is the first mosque situated in Thiruvithancode.⁴ Beside the mosque is the tomb of Mahan Rali. Even today one can see the symbol of Government as shell symbol ie. Shoulder belt

The king has written a will as grant for this mosque. Malik Mohammed constructed a mosque at Colachel in the year 850 A.D. This building is constructed by making use of black dressed granite stones. As this mosque is constructed entirely by granite stones, it is called Kallu Palli. From foundation to the top of the roof only black granite stones are used. The mosque is very convenient to sit even thousands of devotees at a time for conducting prayer. The tomb of Malik Mohammed is also found very near to this mosque. The memorial of kabarshan is constructed straight forward towards the holy place at Kaba in Mecca.⁵ Very near to this Kaba there is a Kallupalli. Very near to it, there is a big tank, which is filled with water; there are 20 steps in this tank. They are very convenient to the devotees to wash their face, hands and legs, before entering into the mosque.

There is a compound wall around this mosque, which made up of complete stones. The total area of this pallivasal and the compound walls is only 2 acres. Very near to this Kallupalli, there is a memorial in honour of Malik Thenar. It is at the height of 20 feet. Even today there is a small building constructed by stones in which there is a small room where his dead body is buried. In every year festival procession is being conducted from Thiruvithancode to Alazhiyamandapam. Those who participate in the procession will keep the flag in their hands. The flag is green in colour, in which stars are found which is white in colour. Again they all start from there keeping their flags in their hands and return to Thiruvithancode by singing songs, where also flag is hoisted in the Mosque. This festival is conducted continuously for nine days and on all days' discourses are conducted. In which even Hindus and Christians participate.

4. Kaatu Baba Sahib Dharga - Velimalai, Thuckalay

At a distance of 1km from the palace of Padmanabhapuram, there is a small mountain namely Velimalai. It is surrounded by thick forest. There is a story prevalent among the people that Oliyullah was taking penance at this place, His name was Kaatu Baba Sahib. In memory of him there is a Dharga at Thuckalay which is popularly called Kaatu Baba Sahib Dharga. When he was in the Velimalai, people belonging to Hindu and Islam religion used to go to Velimalai to have a Dharshan of Kaatu Babu Sahib.⁶ It is said that, this incident took place some 300 years ago. The place where he remained for penance, there is a banyan tree which is also started growing 300 years ago. In and around the banyan tree thousand years before, there was a Jumma Majid which is recently renovated. Very near to it there are two small mandapams which are used for temporary staying by those who are visiting to the Jumma Majid. Very near to this, there is a natural pond as well as a water falls. The water falls which starts from the mountain reaches the river by name Pazariaaru?

The original name of Kaatu Baba Sahib was Baba Bahurithin Baliyullah. He was a native of Pallinaharam, a village in Pudukkottai District. His grandfather was Sahul Hamid Oliyullah, whose memorial is found at Nagore.⁷ Kaatu Baba who was well known to the Hindus and Muslims of Pudukkottai also often visits the Kaatu Baba Palli Vasal even today.

The father of Baba Sahib was Mohammed Yusub, and his mother Sythan Sulthan Beebi. She was the daughter of a rich merchant by name Kuraja Mahuthum. Baba Sahib was the eldest among the seven brothers of his family. Baba Sahib Married the daughter of one rich merchant by name Baharuthin from Nagore. Baba's father lost his life at the age of 94. At the age of 50, Baba went to Mecca and Medina, the holy places of the Muslims. Then he came to his native place and met his relatives and then dedicated his life for the purpose of his religion leaving his family members at Nagore. Baba who started from Nagore, came to Tanjore, Trichy, Puthukottai, and then reached Tirunelveli, Thenkasi and Thuckalay. Before his arraival there at Thuckalay, it is said that he visited Srilanka.

Reference about the birth of Baba Sahib is found in the poems written by Aribula Navalar. According to him Kaatu Baba Sahib was born in 1570 AD. Because of his honesty and religious affection with other religions, without caste or creed, not only people belonging to Islam, but also people belonging to other religion assemble on the day of his death. This is made mention in the book titled 'Kaatu Baba Sahib Kaaraniham'. It is said that he was killed by the people belonging to Kallar community.⁸ But this cannot be believed because even people belonging to Kallar community will have much respect to Baba.

The Muslims from different village of Kanyakumari District, often visit to the mosque along with their family members. They even prepare food and offer it to the mosque and then they eat the remaining among themselves. The Muslims from Thiruvithancode, Thuckalay and the surrounding places visit to this memorial along with their children and their family members early in the morning to worship Kattu Baba and then they eat food along with the family members. Those who wish to reach the mountain to worship Baba, they used to take bath in the water-falls and thereafter praying Baba then used to take rest under the Banyan tree. The food offered to Baba was taken and given even to the labourers who are working in the Estate. Once in a year, the Muslims from Thuckalay used to visit this Dharga at about 9'o clock in the night and remained there and pray for Peer Mohammed. They remained there throughout the night by singing songs till 6 0'clock in the morning. In the morning food was supplied to the devotees.

5. Thittuvillai Jumma Mosque

The town "Thittuvillai" is located on the road from Nagercoil to Balamore at a distance of 10kms from Nagercoil. It is situated at a distance of 80 kms from Trivandrum Airport which is the Southeast Airport of India. The mosque is situated on the eastern side of the road about 100m, from Thittuvilai Junction.

There is an old mosque, constructed only by stones, dressed architecturally to function as pillars, lintels, cornices, beams, and slabs to form the structure. It is called 'Stone Mosque'. It is said that this mosque was constructed 400 years ago. The size of this mosque is 6.50 m 12.00 m. Adjacent to the "Stone Mosque" there is a Continuous Mosque constructed by using bricks R.C. beams and slabs. It is said to be extended 50 years before. It is called 'Old Mosque'. There were open verandahs on the northern and Southern sides of it 'Stone Mosque' and on the northern side, the 'Old Mosque' combines with Dharga. There are tombs of buried 'bond men' very proximity to the Mosque. Among them some may be 'Suffis' who might have constructed the 'Stone Mosque'.⁹

The cellar is well finished by using brick work wherever necessary, with an entrance on the northern side facing Dharga. Another staircase is being provided on the Northern side facing the Dharga side, to negotiate a height of 1.5m. The door of the mosque, opening to the Dharga may be an access for ladies, while arranging for 'Hadith Manzil' "Tharaveeth Prayer", and "Eid Prayer". For them of course with privacy. Grill works with collapsible gates to suit the environment are provided on both 'extensions' on the bifurcating line between 'Stone Mosque' and 'Old Mosque' for safety and functionary. The finished surface or weathering course made of brick work of 'Stone Mosque' appeared as Tomb. The 'Stone Mosque' might have been constructed similar to that of Hindu architecture, prevailing at that time. The appearance like 'Mandapam' has to be modified for various reasons. The stone pillars, beams, cornices, slabs etc. are disguised as modern structures by plastering works with simple designs to suit the Islamic environment colour schemes are also to be introduced accordingly. The front elevation will be good by introducing minars at the extremities. As the minars have to be taken to a height of 18 metres.¹⁰

It is very much appreciated forming 'Building Committee' for construction activities channeling foreign funds and collection of local donations. The Mosque at Thittuvilai is one of the oldest mosques in the District. The functions of this mosque are considered very holy. Many families in and around Thittuvilai will participate in the festival. They all liberally contribute money and their belongings for the development of this mosque.

The immortal saint's body which has been laid down on the hall in Thittuvillai Jummah Mosque is one of Sheikuthuman Mashajik's. He is in 27th in the line of family tree of Shekuthumaan Moshajik and 14th in family tree of grandson of Muhaideen Abdulkadeer. Saint Shak Uthumaan started journey from Arabian Peninsula and reached Cochi through sea route. He had spent sometime there preaching and practicing Islam moved to Kottar and finally settled at Thittuvilai.

Locals after seeing his humble and immaculate religious life started to call him as "Appatchi Appa". In those times "appatchi" was used to call the person who was most revered. Even now a day some parts of Kerala people are calling dad as "Vaapaachi" and mom as "Ummachi" as the mark of more affection. He was also called as "Uthuman Leppai Sahib" with more veneration. Apart from religious activities leisure time was used to weave blankets and he earned some money by selling those blankets. During this time he constructed a mosque with great efforts. That mosque was built just by wring granites only. He died on Hijri 1191. His immortal body was laid down in the hall itself, which is righten. Every year mosque festivals are conducted to mark his pact in proud way. During death anniversary festival, 'Valiya Nerchai' (great offering) is conducted and cooked rice is being offered to people.¹¹

6. Islamic Prayers and Festivals

The divine law prescribes five times prayer daily fazar morning prayer from 5 a.m. or from dawn of the day to sunrise. Then Zohar, midday prayer between 1.00 and 2.00 p.m., Assar, or after noon prayer from 4.p.m to 5.30 pm or till sun set, Magrib or sunset prayer 6.00 pm to 6.30 p.m. or usually after the sunset, Iysha or prayer before resting to bed 8.00 p.m to midnight. In those days the time was calculated approximately with the help of the bloom of flowers. Before every prayer one has to make ablutions or wuze, i.e., washing of hands mouth, nose, face, arms, head and back of the neck and feat, every time the people are called for prayer by reciting azan or call for prayer, by the mouzzene, an employee of the mosque. On hearing the azan, the people congregate and pray by standing in rows in military fashion without distinction or position, colour or rank. Muslims also train their children to pray five times daily from the very early age.¹²

During the month of Raman, the Muslims undertake the fasting for 30 days from dawn to dusk. Eating, drinking, chewing betel leaves, smoking, snuffing or connubial intercourse are prohibited during fasting time. Zakat or alms giving is obligatory on Muslims possessing property and to give away a part of it every year for the welfare of the poor. Zakath is not an income tax but it is a property tax at the rate of 2 1/2%. It is intended to prevent the destitution of the poor. This will create gratitude on the part of the poor to the rich and the rich will look upon the poor as their comrades, thus making for a socialistic pattern of society.

Generally, the Muslims of Kanyakumari District do not celebrate with pomp and show while, in the Muharrum festival, morning with lamentation of the martyrdom of lhossen and Husein, the grandsons of prophet Mohammed as in the Deccanis and Shias. Odukkathu Perunal is celebrated as a household function on the last Wednesday of the month Saffar. This is not considered as an auspicious celebration. It is celebrated to ward of all misfortunes that befell in the year. The origin of this gods to the indisposition of the month are considered extremely unlucky on account of the prophet having been seriously indisposed during those days and on the thirteenth day some changes the better showed itself in his ailments. The last Wednesday of the month is celebrated as Odukkathu Perunal. It was on this day that the prophet experiencing some degree of its mitigation in the violence of his distemper, bathed but forever after having on the twelfth day of the following month resigned his soul to God (Peace be upon him), on the last Wednesday, it is customary with every Muslim early in the morning, to write on a mango leaf some Quaranic verses with saffron water, wash of the writing in water and drink the liquid in the hope that it may preserve them from afflictions. On the above account it is highly proper on this day to take bath wear new clothes and offer fatheeha in the name of the prophet, eat and distribute food to the poor and a walk in the garden with pleasure and amusements. The Tamil speaking Muslims used to celebrate this day as an unlucky day. Houses and household articles are washed thoroughly, on the night of the previous day. Some black gram unboiled rice and a small quantity of oil, a few Paisa of coins and eggs-one each for each male member of the house are kept in a plate over night.¹³ Ramzan is an important festival among all the Muslims. It is known as id-dhul-ditr and celebrated on the first day of the month of hawwal. Ramzan is celebrated in continuation of the fast for thirty days during the previous month. On the day, the Muslims congregate for the special prayer. Before going to the prayer they distribute the fitra and alms to the poor. It is compulsory on the part of every Muslim to distribute the fitra and a fixed quantity of grain or the cost of it to the poor before the special prayer. It is intended for the poor to feel happy. Almost all the Muslims distribute the zakath among the poor fellow beings to feel happy and hence it could

be called festival towards socialistic pattern of society. On the day of Ramzan Muslims wear new clothes, decorate the body with perfumes and fragrance and merrily walk to the prayer. After the prayer, when they reach their house the women take Arathi. Delicious foods are prepared, usually non vegetarian. Friends and relatives are entertained in a feast.¹⁴ Muslims visit the Dargas during the Kanthoori festival and also on Thursdays and Sundays of the week. The water of the tank in the Darghas is considered holy. Generally dried rose petals and sweets are distributed to the devotees in the Darghas. But in some Darghas sacred ash blessed with verses of the Quran is also distributed. Though the Muslims do not apply to sacred ash their forehead, they receive it with reverence and sprinkle it on the head and take it home for being kept there. Dargha worship is much familiar among the Muslim women. Since there is no separate place for women to worship and plead for the welfare of their families they find it in the Darghas.¹⁵ Muslim women pray for five times in their house itself. In some places like Thengapattanam and Colachel there are separate enclosures for women in the premises of the mosques. But they seldom visit such mosques on ordinary days but consecrate on festival occasions.

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