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HAGIOGRAPHY AS HISTORY: A SURVEY OF MUSLIM HAGIOGRAPHY IN KERALA

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Abstract: Hagiographical documents are valuable source materials to understand the popular culture and local history of a region. So this paper tries to locate and document some of the hagiographical documents produced in Kerala by the Muslims about the Sufis, martyrs and other Gnostics.

Keyword: Hagiography, manaqib, moulid, Baraka, Sufism, Popular Culture.

INTRODUCTION

The Muslims in Kerala are one of the sizable and predominant 'communities' having distinct cultural traits of their own. Even before the arrival of Islam in Arabia, the Arabs had maintained trade relationships and Arabian ships frequented through the ports in Kerala¹. Therefore, it has been argued that Islam must have reached in Kerala through the Arab diaspora during the life time of Prophet Muhammad. Since Arabs were traders and engaged in the commercial activities all over the world they had also functioned as bearers of refined knowledge and novel ideas of the time towards different parts of the world and to Kerala as well. So, the presence of the Arab diaspora in the coastal areas of Kerala after the 6th century AD is remarkable in many respects². For the Arab diaspora was at work in a particular social and political milieu where a hegemonic ideology of Brahmanism was prevalent. As the trade and commerce brought fortune in the day to day life of the land the rulers with the consent of the prevailing ideology had encouraged the foreign traders especially the Arabs who is said to be functioned with the consent of the Brahmanic ideology as the Arabs who took the role of the 'vaisyas' the missing layer in the caste hierarchy of Kerala especially after 7th century AD³. It shows the fact that the Arabs and later the 'Islamised Arab diaspora' had been considered unfavourably by both the hegemonic group and the subjugated populace of Kerala. This constructive approach must have paved the way for the expansion of Muslim settlement at different parts of Kerala at least the adjoining areas of the important ports of Kerala during early period after 7th century AD. It is assumed that the 'Islamised Arab diaspora' must have been economically capable of erecting mosques and other centres like Kanqahs with the support of the immigrant missionaries, especially in the coastal belt of Kerala. However the absence 'solid' sources still remain as a hindrance before the historians to document many things regarding the life and activities of the Muslims during the period between 7th and 11th centuries AD. So, some of the historians are of the opinion that "the corpus of historical writings on Kerala

Muslims is significantly small when compared to that on the Bengal Muslims or any other areas of India. This lacuna in historiography on Mappilas or Muslims in Kerala is due to the fact that much of the source materials related to them is either in Arabic or in Arabi-Malayalam"⁴. So in order to locate the cultural geography of Muslims in Kerala the analysis of these source materials would be very much useful.

The present paper tries to locate and document the historical importance of hagiographical literature produced in Kerala by the followers of different Sufi orders at different periods. There are two types of hagiographical works that can be seen in Kerala- hagiographies of the Prophets and the pious companions of the Prophet Muhammed which are popular and circulated among the public and second type of hagiographical works are about the Sufi Sheikhs of different orders which contain the Silsilah of the respective Tariqas⁵. Therefore, such hagiographical notes would be circulated mostly among the disciples who have been initiated to that order. However, both these hagiographies are popularly known as Moulids or Manqib among the Muslims in Kerala. As the practice of praising the virtues of the Sheikh has been the integral part of the life of the Sufis, most of the hagiographies during the early period in Kerala must have been orally transmitted and later compiled by the followers. It is assumed that the Manqus Moulid composed during the 15th or 16th century by Zainuddin Maqsum ibn Ali of Ponnani is the first attempt to popularise the life sketch of the Prophet Muhammed among the Mappilas⁶. It is composed in prose and verse which was intended to be recited in the public gatherings of the Mappilas. Following the style and composition of the Manqus Moulid many such hagiographical works about the Prophet have been written in Kerala like Moulid-Sharrafal-Anaam, Moulid-Barzanchiet⁷. All these works shared the same pattern and the content is all about the life and glory of the Prophet. It has been noticed that the moulid nabawi (hagiography of the Prophet) has played a very important role in the cultural life of the Mappilas because it was recited in all their auspicious

occasions and whenever trouble haunts their life. The hagiography on the life of the pious Khalifs like Aboobecker, Umar, Usman and Ali are also composed in Kerala and has been recited for getting the blessing (Baraka) or for intercession by reading it. The manaqib praising the virtues of Fathimathu Zahra, the daughter of the Prophet was also popular among the Mappilas even though it was compiled in Arabic language it has been recited in the houses especially the Mappila women folk. It was common among the Mappilas to vow the recitation of Moulid for achieving their mundane ambitions.

Kanzul- Arsh- Fi- Manaqibi- Sheikh- Malik-bin- Muhammed Al- Kurashi is a hagiography (Manaqib) written by Sayyid Hamid bin Muhammed Bukhari (Koyamma Thangal). This manaqib is about the life and time of Malik bin Muhammed Kurashi who takes his eternal rest in the Juma Masjid of Kasargode. It also gives a detailed description about the early history of the advent of Islam in Kerala⁸. Another manaqib entitled as Kashful-Asrar-Min-Akhbari-Malik-bin-Dinar is a hagiographic description by Ahmed Habeeb Muslyar, DarulUloom Dayuband about the life and activities of Malik bin Dinar who reached in Kerala as a propagator of Islam⁹. As he was considered as a Sufi disciple of Hasan Al Basari the author tries to venerate him and prays to the God through the intercession of Malik bin Dinar. This manaqib would recite during annual urus at the Shrine in the Juma Masjid.

KithabulMirham is a hagiographic note about Shaikh Mialawi ibn Ba Alawi whose maqam is located at Kallappalli near Mahe. As per the information given in the KithabulMirham, Kallappalli was built in the land granted by the local land lord where a small Taikkavu was erected by the Sheikh for his meditation and performing his ritual prayers¹⁰. It is believed that Mialawi was a Sufi but there is no reference has given in the hagiography regarding his affiliation to any of the Sufi Tareeqas. However the attachment of the people towards his maqam and the attributes of sacredness to the Kallappallievoke the fact that Mialawi was so influential and must have played an important role in the establishment of a Muslim settlement in this area of Northern Malabar.

AliyulKufi of Peringathore is one of the renowned Sufi who was belonging to Kufa in Iraq. The hagiography of AliyulKufi is entitled as Manaqib Saikh Al Arif billahi AliyulKufi. It is assumed that AliyulKufi played a very important role in the propagation of Islam among the people who lived in the interior areas of Northern Malabar¹¹. The maqbara of AliyulKufi is one of the famous centres of pilgrimage in the Northern Kerala. There are number of popular traditions prevailing in these areas attached to AliyulKufi and his maqbara. The hagiography has recorded some of the popular traditions which would be very useful information for understanding the social, cultural and syncretic practices of people Northern Kerala.

According to the popular oral tradition prevailing in Kerala, the 13th century Chisti Sufi named Fariduddin Ganje-sakar (d 1265)¹² had visited Kerala. The monumental evidence found at Kanjiramattam in the Ernakulam district is now one of the shared sacred spaces in Kerala. The hermitage shrine and cenotaph of Farid Auliya of Kanjiramattam turned

in to a famous centre of pilgrimage where people from all walk of life visits to offer prayer. It is believed that he had lived at Kanjiramattam and had got disciples over there. Al MoulidulMatheen fi Thawassul bi baba Fareeduddin by Elamkulam Bappu Muslyar and another Manaqib written by Karattil Kunhippari Muslyar (Fareed bin Mohiyadden) give ample information about the miraculous life of Baba Fareed Auliya whose influence must have helped in the proliferation of Chisti Sufi ideas among the people of Kerala as early as 13th century AD onwards because Baba Fareed was one of the famous disciple of Qutubuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki of Delhi¹³.

FathulQayyum Fi Manaqibi Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum is a detailed hagiographic contribution about the life and activities of Sheikh Zainuddin Makhdum of Ponnani, one of the leading Islamic learning centres in Kerala. The arrival of Makhdum family in Kerala by the end of 14th century was an epoch making event in the history of Muslims in Kerala because they had played an important role in the proliferation of Islamic knowledge among the people of Kerala. The manaqib has given a detailed description about the life and time of the Sheikh and also narrates the role of the Makhdum in the establishment of Masjid and a big learning centre in Ponnani. Moreover it also throws light in to the spiritual elegance of the Sheikh who was initiated to the Qadir, Chisti Sufi Orders¹⁴. Therefore, this hagiography would be one of the valuable source materials to document the spread of Sufi ideas in Kerala especially Qadiri, Chisti Orders.

The advent of Sayyid families from Tarim, Hadarmouth etc of Yeman had played a crucial role in the propagation Islam in the Asian as well as African continents. They were Sufi as well as missionaries, therefore their interference made far reaching consequences in the history of Asia and Africa. Among these Sayyads the Bukhara Sayyids were very popular though they were not belonging to Yeman¹⁵. Al failu Sari fi manaqibi Sayyid Muhammed by Sayyid Muhammd bin Sayyid Ibrhim Al Bukhari (Padoor Valiya Koyakkutty Thangal) Bukhari illustrates the history of the Bukhara Sayyids in Kerala.

The Sufis had been in the forefront of the anti-colonial struggle in Kerala. When the Portuguese colonialism penetrated in to the serenity of indigenous life of Kerala, the Sufis took the leadership to support the local political authorities and to console the people. The then Zamurin, the ruler of Calicut even requested the Sufi Sheikhs to pray for those who fight against the Portuguese¹⁶. The great Sufi saint of Calicut named Aluddin Himmasi Thangal alias Abulwafa Muhammed had led soldiers against the Portuguese during early period.¹⁷ The Hagiographic note about Aluddin Himmasi of Calicut says that he was the spiritual master of Kunhali Markkar and it was his inspiration and guidance made the Kunjalis to take extreme steps against the Portuguese intruders.¹⁸

It was one hagiographic works on Kunjimarakkar Shaheed, one of the first martyrs in the anti-colonial struggles in Kerala, made the historians to look in to the anti-colonial struggles led by one of the disciples of Zainuddin Makhdum of Ponnani. The Cult of Kunjimarakkar Shahid of Ponnani actually unravels one of the episodes of the direct

influence of Sufis in the anti-colonial struggle in Kerala during the early period¹⁹. As mentioned earlier, Kunjimarakkal was the disciple of Makhdam of Ponnani who was initiated in the Sufi order as well. According to the hagiography of Kunjimarakkal, the young Marikkal fought valiantly against the atrocities of the Portuguese navigators to save a girl who had been kidnapped from the coastal area of Ponnani by the Portuguese soldiers. Kujimarikkal and his men could save the life of the poor girl but he was killed and his body was cut in to pieces and thrown in Arabian Sea.²⁰ There are around 7 maqbaras for Kunjimarakkal at different parts of Malabar because the body parts of Kunjimarakkal was found at different parts of the sea shore after his assassination and the people buried them and erected maqbara in honour of him at these place where they found the body parts of the. According to the 'Kunjimarakkal mala' his martyrdom was an honour of the Almighty and blessings of his spiritual master, the Makhdam of Ponnani²¹. Like Kunjimarakkal Shaheed, Mahin Pokker of Mamba in the Northern Kerala had also in the forefront of the anti-colonial struggles in Kerala. It was a popular practice among the Mappila Muslims of Kerala to venerate Martyrs (Shuhada) who sacrificed their life in the noble course and to compose manaqib (hagiographic notes) about them to be recited to get Baraka (Special Grace from the God). However, these hagiographic texts also contain valuable historic facts which would be useful in the reconstruction of local history. Shifaul Amraduwadawaulasqam is one of the hagiographies in Arabi-Malayalam composed in verse by Kanayannur Muhammed Muslyar about the miraculous life of Hazrat Mahin Pokker Shahid of Mamba²². As observed by the historians that "Kolathnad of Northern Kerala was one of the active theatres of struggles and confrontation during the 16th century. The region was exposed to European expansion and colonial activities on account of the bulk trade in spices and other commodities. Since 1502, the Portuguese erected their factory at Cannanore and tried to capture the profitable trade monopolised by the Muslim traders. As a result the Muslims as a community held cultural and religious animosity against the Portuguese. So the frequent confrontations at the sea between the Portuguese and the Muslim traders became intensified during the 16th century"²³. The hagiography of Mahin Pokker narrates the confrontation between the Portuguese colonialists and Hazrat Mahin Pokker with his companions at a place called Mamba, an interior area of Northern Malabar. The hagiography further narrates that two of his companions killed in this battle along with Mahin Pokker were belonging to the lower castes agricultural labourers but embraced Islam when they joined with Mahim Pokker. There are many popular traditions have been prevailing and sharing both by Muslims and non-Muslims about the heroic life of Mahin Pokker who valiantly fought against the Portuguese atrocities and sacrificed his life. So, he became a cult figure very soon and many popular beliefs developed in connection with Mamba Maqam where he was buried.

Manaqb Waliyullahirabbaniwal Gauzil Samadani Shaikh Abdul Qadir Sani Balafatani compiled by Ponnani Valappil Abdul Azeez Muslyar contains many historical facts regarding the social and religious condition of Kerala during

the 17th century Kerala²⁴. As the Shaikh was the authority of Suharwardi Sufi Order Hamadani branch, the manaqib gives a detailed description about the Sufi masters of this order and how the Suharwardi Order was reached in Kerala. Therefore, this hagiographical work can be considered a very useful source material for those who study the social history of Kerala. It is to be noted that there are hagiographies about all most all the Suharwardi masters who lived and practiced Sufi life in Kerala after the demise of Shaikh Abdul Qadir Balafatani²⁵.

During the early period the Muslim population in Kerala was mainly concentrated in the coastal areas as they were basically traders engaged in the sea born trade with foreign land. But, the arrival of Portuguese Colonialists in Kerala by the end of the 15th century had made things upside down. They had triggered off atrocities against the Arab traders and Muslim merchants both in the land and sea. Consequently the Arab traders could continue their business here and were forced to leave the port. This adversely affected the life of Muslims merchants who had settled in the coastal areas and engaging the trade related activities. When the economy became deteriorated they were compelled to shift their settlement towards the interior areas where they tried their fortune in agricultural activities. Since they were not in a position to possess land in the peculiar social structure of Kerala, all most all the Muslims who migrated towards the interior land became agricultural labourers for meeting their livelihood.

As per the available official data, during the period after 16th century, the number of indigenous people who embraced Islam was also remarkable due to many reasons. So the number of Muslims had been increasing in the interior region after 16th century due to afore mentioned conversion especially from the lower castes and the migration of the Muslims from the coastal areas that made the Muslim settlement in the interior areas of Kerala strong though they were not aware about the scriptural teaching of Islam. It is observed that the conversion had mainly due to the interference of Sufis and also due to the peculiar social set up of Kerala where caste persecutions and graded inequality had been the ruled the society.

One of the most popular Sufis who had greatly influenced the life of the people living in the interior area of Malabar especially in the areas like erstwhile Eranadu and Valluvanadu was Muhammed Shah Thangal, popularly known as Kondotty Thangal (1687-1766)²⁶. The hagiographic work on Muhammed Shah is entitled as Moulid Muhammed Shah ibn Shaikh Ismail Qadiri Chisti Shafi Kondotty was penned by Makhdam Abdul Azeez Muslyar. It is one of the source materials to understand the social and religious position of Muhammed Shah of Kondotty who had been levelled many allegations by the leading Ulemas of Ponnani during that time.

The hagiography of Sayyid Alawi Thangal of Mamburam depicts the process of Islamisation of interior areas of Malabar during the 18th Century. Though the author of the manaqib of Alawi Thangal gives much attention to include the supernatural deeds of the Sayyid Alawi Thangal it indirectly throws light in to various aspects of social life of the people that period. There are number of manaqibs

compiled about Sayyid Alawi and all these hagiographic works directly or indirectly give insightful information about the social, cultural and religious life of Mappila Muslims of Malabar during the 18th and 19th centuries²⁷.

In addition to the Arabic hagiographic works on Sufis, martyrs and Gnostics, plethora of Arabi-malayalam works also compiled which throws ample information about local history of Kerala during the period after 16th century²⁸. In the early period most of the hagiographic narratives must have been transmitted orally among the Muslims but when the printing press was established in Kerala the orally transmitted hagiographic works began to be published and circulated among the people. It could be stated that the popularisation of hagiography played a very important role in the making of the popular culture of Muslims in Kerala.

CONCLUSION:

If we define 'popular culture' as the culture of the majority of the people, the hagiography is one of the very useful source materials to study the society and local history. The historian can derive, with the help of other social science, valuable information about the 'popular culture' of the people from the hagiographies. Though the hagiographic literature produced or compiled by the disciples or the followers of Sufis or eminent Muslim scholars in Kerala indented only to document the influential life of those charismatic personalities for the purpose of Baraka (special grace) and the intercession to God, the texts had also social function that made the social memory alive by recording it for the generation to come. So the hagiographies could be considered as the compilation of social memory of a group of people in a particular geographical region whose socio cultural life had connected with such charismatic personalities.

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27. Karattil Kunhippari (Fariduddin ibn Mohiyiddin) Muslyar, Moulid Sayyid Alavi bin Muhammed (Arabic).

28. There are number of Hagiographic documents found at different parts of Kerala. The title of some of these works is given below:

a) Perumathura Fakiran Moulid (Arabic)

b) Nafhathul Junaidialathur bathil waliyyi Abdurahiman Thangal Uppappa by Aburahiman bin Muhammed (Arabic)

c) Manaqib Abilwafa Samasuddin Muhammed bin Aluddin al Himsi by E. K Aboobecker Muslyar (Arabic)

d) Minhathul Junaidialathur bathil waliyyil thirvathuri by Aburahiman bin Muhammed (Arabic)

e) Thafreehil Jamilsinni bi thashreehi Manaqib waliyyil sherkunni by Muhammed bin Muhiyiddin Moulavi (Arabic)

f) Manaqib Shaikh Aboobecker Kinavakkaliyyi (Arabic)

g) Moulid Noor fi Manaqibi Shaikh Qasim Walyullah by Kandagalath Sayyid Muhammed Qasim alias Mehboob Thangal (Arabic)

h) Minnathul Bari fi Manaqib Shaikh Waliyullahi Zainuddin al mashhoorbithenu Muslyar by Zainuddin Baqavi (Arabic)

i) Manaqibi Kunji Ahmed Sufi Nunjeri by Mamu Muslyar (Arabic)

j) Nailu Raja bi Manqibi Shamsul Ulamaby Basheer Faizi

- (Arabic)
k)MawahibulWaliyuul Akbar AlajamiManaqibilShaikh Ali Akbar (Arabic)
l)ManaqibShaikh Kunhi Ahmed Sufi Naqshabandi by ShaikhMuhammedShaduli (Arabic)
m)MoulidShaikhWaliShahirMuhammed al Bakari al maruf bi Kunjimma Thangal(Arabic)
n)SeerathShaikhSirajuddin Al Qadiriwamanaqibuhuby ShamsulUlema E. K AboobeckerMuslyar (Arabic)
o)Gaunil Bari fi manaqibishaikh al Madavuriby U. P. M Moulavi (Arabic)
p)MoulidShaikhMunawar Shah Waliyullahby Kunji bin KunjiMuhammed (Arabic)
q)ShifaulAsqam fi Manaqibi Sayyid Muhammed Bafaqi Hadramimashoor bi bafaqiKochu Thangal by Abdullahlil Jouhari (Arabic)
r)MawahibulAliyyi fi manaqibiHasani bin Aliyyiby K. Muhammed Kunhi Muslyar (Arabic)
s)Moulid al Manaqibi li shaheed al Kareem al madfoon bi jaril Masjid Beemapalliby MuhammedAbul Kamal Muslyar (Arabic)

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