
International Multidisciplinary Research Journal

Golden Research Thoughts

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RNI MAHMUL/2011/38595

ISSN No.2231-5063

Golden Research Thoughts Journal is a multidisciplinary research journal, published monthly in English, Hindi & Marathi Language. All research papers submitted to the journal will be double - blind peer reviewed referred by members of the editorial board. Readers will include investigator in universities, research institutes government and industry with research interest in the general subjects.

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HISTORY OF THE MUSLIMS' SETTLEMENT IN TAMIL NADU

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Abstract:-The present study is an attempt to analyse the history of the Muslims' settlement in different parts of Tamilnadu. There are about 3 to 4 million Tamil Muslims in India mostly in Tamil Nadu state and also in neighbouring Kerala. A significant Tamil-speaking Muslim population numbering 1.8 million or more live in the Northern, Eastern provinces and Colombo in Sri Lanka and many other pockets across central, southwest provinces; however they are listed as a separate ethnic group in official statistics. There are around 500,000 in Malaysia and 20,000 in Singapore. Tamil Muslims are largely urban traders rather than farmers. There is a substantial diaspora of Tamil Muslims, particularly in South East Asia, which has seen their presence as early as the 13th century.

In the late 20th century, the diaspora expanded to the North America and Western Europe. The Muslims living in Tamil Nadu are classified into many categories on the basis of their origin, language and the like. Majorities of the Muslims of Tamil Nadu are Tamil speaking and Urdu is the mother tongue of a section of the Muslims. The Muslims enjoyed the patronage of the Hindu rulers. As horse traders, the former had commercial contact with all the Hindu rulers of the Tamil country. Some of the Muslims were appointed to the positions in the Cavalry of the Hindu rulers. The Muslims who had settled in Tamil Nadu identified themselves with the native population. Their constant and continuous contact with the locals enabled them to adopt and follow several Tamil customs. This helped to create an atmosphere of harmony and amity in the Tamil Country. The Urdu speaking Muslims of Tamil Nadu are grouped under several headings namely, the Syeds, Shaikhs, Pathans, Mughals and Navayats. The Sayeds and Shaikhs are of Arab origin and they came to India as warriors.

Keywords: Muslim population, Arab traders, language, Labbais, commercial contact, Prophet.

INTRODUCTION

The Muslims form one of the major social groups and are sparsely settled in different parts of Tamil Nadu. In the beginning, the contact of the Arab traders led to Muslim settlement in some parts of Tamil country. The Arabs had commercial contacts with the Tamil country even from the Pre-Islamic days and developed a lucrative trade. From the Third Century BC they established their monopoly in the Indian Maritime Trade.

During the Sangam Age the eastern coast of Tamil Country possessed a number of Sea Ports like Musiri, Tondi and Korkai through which, the Arab merchants established good business. These commercial activities over time helped them to establish Arab colonies in the port towns of Tamil Nadu.

Originally the Arab traders introduced Islam in the Tamil country during the seventh century. They administered their businesses staying in their colonies. They married local women who gave birth to several children. These offspring of mixed Arab-Tamil origin formed the first Tamil Muslim community. This community found suitable areas for the propagation of Islam. As the Tamil Muslims in the beginning were not contestants for political power, the Hindu rulers of Tamilagam allowed them to carry on their proselytizing activities. With increased contact of the Arab Muslim traders, the activities of the Muslim missionaries and the rule of the Muslim kings, the Muslim population in Tamil Country grew considerably.

The Muslims enjoyed the patronage of the Hindu rulers. As horse traders, the former had commercial contact with all the Hindu rulers of the Tamil country. Some of the Muslims were appointed to the positions in the Cavalry of the Hindu rulers. The Muslims who had settled in Tamil Nadu identified themselves with the native population. Their constant and continuous contact with the locals enabled them to adopt and follow several Tamil customs. This helped to create an atmosphere of harmony and amity in the Tamil Country.

The Muslims living in Tamil Nadu are classified into many categories on the basis of their origin, language and the like. Majorities of the Muslims of Tamil Nadu are Tamil speaking and Urdu is the mother tongue of a section of the Muslims. The Muslims in general are classified into two sections, one being Sunnis or believers of traditions and the other Shias meaning partisans or supporters of Ali, the son-in-law of the Prophet. The Sunni Muslims accepted the four orthodox Caliphs as the rightful heirs to the Caliphate after the Prophet. The Shias asserted the claims of Ali. Among the Sunni Muslims there are a number of denominations such as Labbais, Marakayars, Syeds, Shaiks, Mughals, Navayats and Panchu-Vettis. The present study is an attempt to analyse the history of the Muslims' settlement in different parts of Tamilnadu.

LABBAIS

The Labbais of Arab origin. The Arab merchants who settled in the ports of Tamil country had brought along with them some Arabs as helpers. Who used to respond to the calls of their masters with the word Labbaik which means "Here I Am". Hence these Muslims and their offspring came to be known as Labbais. The Arab refugees who came along with the Arab traders and their children through their Indian wives were also known as Labbais. The word Labbai was also applicable to the Hindu converts to Islam. The Labbais were mainly traders. Some of them were also engaged in agriculture and mat making.

In the erstwhile North Arcot and present Vellore District, the Labbais mostly own the tanning industry, there by breaking the monopoly of the Chakilies. A section of the Labbais speaks Tamil and Urdu is the mother tongue of the others.

ROWTHERS

The majorities of Labbais of Tamil Nadu whose mother tongue is Tamil are known as Rowthers and are mainly connected with the horse trade. As the Muslims of Tamil Nadu were either engaged in horse trading or employed as horse trainers or cavalry men, they were called Rowthers. They were also known as "Guthirai Chettigal" meaning horse traders. The Rowthers were frugal traders who were engaged in both wholesale and retail trade. They were also engaged in agriculture and mat-making.

MARAKAYAR

Marakayar is a word derived from the fusion of the Arabic work Marakab meaning boat and the Tamil word Rayar meaning King, while according to another version, Marakayars is derived from the Tamil word Marakkalam meaning ship and Rayar meaning King. Both, however, indicate that the Marakayars are well-versed in the maritime trade and are also the progeny of the Arab

Traders who married local women. In later years the converts to Islam took the title Marakayar. Tamil was their mother tongue. The majority of the Marakayars lived in the coastal areas of Tamil Nadu like Keelakarai, Kayalpatnam, Nagore and the like and traded in pearls, rubies and chanks.

The Urdu speaking Muslims of Tamil Nadu are grouped under several headings namely, the Syeds, Shaikhs, Pathans, Mughals and Navayats. The Sayeds and Shaikhs are of Arab origin and they came to India as warriors.

PATHANS

The Pathans are known as Banu Afghan or the descendants of Afghans, who migrated to Tamil Nadu along with the Muslim rulers of North India as soldiers. The Mughals are of Mongol origin. They penetrated into Tamil country along with the Mughal army.

NAVAYATS

The Navayats are people who claim to descend from the rulers of Senji. The Panju-Vettis are a group of Muslims who claim to descend from Andhra Pradesh. They are engaged in the profession of cleaning cotton and weaving coarse fabrics.

CONCLUSION

The Muslims could not subjugate India with ease and were never able to rule it entirely. There was a valiant and ceaseless struggle for independence by Hindus to deliver India from Muslim tyranny. The Rajputs, Jats, Marathas and Sikhs led this struggle in North India. In the South this struggle was embodied in the Vijayanagar Empire. This struggle culminated when the Marathas ended the Muslim domination of India.

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