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CROSS –CULTURE AND RELIGIOUS HARMONY IN RAMNAD KINGDOM

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Abstract:

The existence of Islam in Ramnad Kingdom during the rule of Setupati Kings is a historical experience which in due course witnessed with the spread of cross-culture of Islam and Hindus. And the enhancement religious harmony which is the basic need for modern days peaceful-co-existence. No doubt, it was the result of historical sequences and developments in Tamil Country which coincided with the advent of the Arab traders in the coast of Ramnad Kingdom. Islam established its hold in Ramnad Kingdom in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. It had its presence because of the arrival of the Arabs who landed for the first time in the coastal area even in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries in the coast of Ramnad Kingdom for the purpose of trade activities. Subsequently, they began to settle in the coastal places like Kilakkarai, Devipa ttinam, Mandapam, Pamban and others. The paper examines the influence of Islam in Tamil Society and the influence of Hindu elements in the Muslim culture in Ramnad Kingdom , and the relations between the Ramnad Setupati Rulers with Mulsims in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries.

KEY WORDS:

Pallivasal, Dargah, Tantoori, Mosques, Setupati, Marakkayar, Endowments, Tomb,

INTRODUCTION

The admixture of the Arab traders with the natives led to the origin of a class of Muslims known as Lebbais also known as Marakayars. During the Sisteenth Century , the word 'Marakkayar' was becoming well known. Ebbai was gradually being used in the Seventeenth Century. W.Francis attributes the term 'Sonagan' to both the Lebbais and Marakkayars. Edgar Thurston applies the words 'Sonagan' to the Lebbais who were sea-fishermen and boatmen , whereas the more prosperous traders were called Marakkayars.1 The Ravuthars and Tulukkar were the two terms in use to denote Tamil Muslims during the early period of Tamil Muslim existence. The Marakkayars and the Ravuthars were two clearly identifiable subdivisions among Tamil Muslims.2 They gradually spread to the places of Kiakkarai , Ramanad, Kakudi, Kamudi, Kadaladi, Abiramam, Panaikkulam, Mudukulattur, Paramakudi, Kottaipattinam, Kilakkarai, Velippattinam, Vedalai, Tondi and Mandapam.3 This spread led to the penetration of Islamic institutions in Ramnad Kingdom.

ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS

The two major religious institutions of Islam in Ramnad Kingdom are Pallivasal and Dargah. The former is the place of worship and the latter is the tomb shrines of Saints . The existence of the institutions of Pallivasal and Dargah in Ramnad Kingdom is known from known records, some of which continue even today.

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The mosques of (pallivasals) Kokkikulam and Nadakulam existed during the period of Kilavan Setupati .4 There were also mosques known as Meesakumar mosque at Karenthal 5and another mosque at Abiramam.6In 1734 A.D. the famous mosque known as Esa Pallivasal flourished at the heart of the Ramanathapuram.7 The mosque was named after the saint Isa Sahib who accompanied Sayyed Ibrahim. The latter was the saint from Madina on his mission to Tamil country (1182 A.D) for proselytization.8 The mosque at Poolangal was in existence during the reign of Muthu Vijaya Regunatha Setupati .9

The Pallivasals were the holy sites of Islamic worship. In contrast to the mosques at other parts of India, the erection of Pallivasals in Tamil country, particularly in Ramnad, was a natural phenomenon allied with the spread of Muslims. On the other hand the history of the Deccan depicts the erections of mosques either on the foundations of the Hindu Temples or with the spoils of the destroyed Hindu Temples.10 These mosques of Ramnad Kingdom became popular to the extent of attracting endowments even from the non-Muslim Setupati Rulers.

The Dargah is another important Islamic institution that existed in different parts of Ramnad Kingdom during Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries. The Dargah at Hanumanthagudi was the holy place where St. Syeed Mohammed Buhari was buried. This Dargah flourished in the reign of Tirumalai Regunatha Setupati (1646-75 A.D.).In 1742, the existence of the famous Dargah at Ervadi is known from record of Muthuvijaya Regunatha Setupati.11

In a record of 1745, a mosque (Pallivasal) at Rameswaram is referred to Abil Kabil Pallivasal. 12 But today, a Dargah by name Abil Kabil Dargah near the Rameswaram Railway Station is a famous institution that attracts large number of Muslims. Actually the people of Ramnad area mixed the names of two institutions. As such many Darghas are also referred to as Pallivasals in the records. Kutbu Sabib Dargah at Lakshmiapuram in Ramnad existed during the reign of Muthuramalinga Setupati .13

Many of the renowned Sufi saints came to have tomb shrines built by their disciples. Many such tomb shrines got transformed into centres of worship and itinerance to both spiritualists and laity alike. This would have been the case in respect of Dargahs in Tamil Country too.

The relations of the Dargahs with the society is understood by the sacred festivals connected with them. The festival of Chandana turusu is one such connected with Dargahs. The celebrations of this festival annually in the famous Hanumanthagudi Dargah was very much known. 14On the occasion a festival car (Chandana kudu) is dragged along the streets which was attended by large number of Muslim and non-Muslim population. 15 It is a clear witness for the influence of Hindu car festival on Islamic religious life. Such a festival was also celebrated at Ervadi Dargah. The above shrines visited were by the Muslims of upper classes and masses to fulfill vows in order to recover from sickness to beget a child and preservation from any calamity and danger.16 In Ervadi Dargah even today the mad are cured of their lunacy. Even leprosy is healed and, blindness cured. Normally miracles are attributed to these Dargahs.

The tantoori festivals at Kokkikulam, Nadukulam and Karenthai are known from the Contemporary sources Kilavan Setupati.17 The same festival at Ramanathapuram Kutbu Sahib Dargah was conducted during the period of Muthuramalinga Setupati.18 On the occasion of the above Kantoori festivals, the procession of decorated cars was a joyful event for the masses.

The festival of Chandana turuse or Kantoori is also common other places where it was famously called the festival of Urs.19 In Tamil Country, this Islamic festival had been influenced by the Hindu system. As a result decorated cars Chandana kudu were dragged

In procession accompanied with merriment and joy of the Muslims and non-Muslims alike. It has been pointed that out the above festivals have no Islamic tenet basis or religious regulations.20

Sources with regard to the organizations of mosque (Pallivasal) and Dargah of the are very scanty. The Pallivasal like any other religious institutions had its own organization. The trustees managing the affairs of the mosque are known from the records. During the period of Tirumalai Regunatha Setupati, Hanumanthagudi Dargah was maintained by a board of trustees which also included Hindus. The functionaries of

Pallivasal and Dargah are not known . However endowments to the institutions were entrusted to individuals who in all probability were also in charge of Dargahs.21

The relations between the above Islamic institutions and the Marava Kingdom were close and continuous . The patronage of the institutions by the state was an interesting aspect. In fact, the Marava Kingdom was the chief patron of Pallivasals and Dargahs. Most of them owed their existence and maintenance to the Rulers. The Rulers established endowments for the maintenance of the above institutions in their dominions.

The Setupatis' endowments to the Muslim institutions began with Tirumalai Regunatha Setupati (1646-75) who made a land gift for the maintenance of Hanumanthagudi Dargah, which also received land

donations from Kilavan Setupati too. The same ruler also gifted lands for tiruvilakku and Kantoori festivals of Kokkikulam and Nadakulam Pallivasal²² and Karanthal²³ Meesakumar Pallivasal.

An instance of an official of Kilavan Setupati , namely, Adinarayana Pillai making lands in Abiramam Village to the mosque of the same place is known from another record.²⁴ In 1734, Kumara Muthu Vijaya Regunatha Setupati endowed Kilavaneri Village (Mudukulattur taluk) to Esa Sahib Mosque for the purpose of food charity for the benefit of devotees visiting the shrine.²⁵

In 1742 , Muthu Vijaya Regunatha Setupati arranged for an endowment of the village of Periyamayakulam to the famous Dargah at Ervadi . The endowed village had both wet and dry lands. The endowment also included a bit of land (sevval manikadu) which was already under the possession of temple at Tiruuttarkosamangai.²⁶ The above king made the whole endowment entrusted to Musafar Nalla Ibrahim. The king made the above endowment after hearing the news that his father - in-law's leprosy was cured. In 1745 A.D. Muthukumara Vijaya Regunatha Setupati donated entire village of Pudukulam, a fertile place to Abil-Kabil Dargah situated at Rameswaram.²⁷ The same King and his successor made endowments to Poolangal village to the mosque at the same place.

Muthu Ramalinga Setupati ordered one panam every day, eight kalams of rice and two male goats to be endowed to celebrate annual Kantoori to Kutbu Sahib Dargah at Lakshmipuram in Ramnad (1769A.D).²⁸ Muthuramalinga Setupati's Endowments to the Kutbu Sahib Dargah at Lakshmipuram, Malunku Sahib Dargah at Tirupuvanam and Tadi Pakkir Dargah at Parthipanur ²⁹were disturbed by the British in the Nineteenth Century.

The imprecations at the end of the copper plates issued by the Setupatis reveal the interest shown by donors in protecting Muslim institutions and their endowments for ever.³⁰ It is stipulated in a record that those who maintained the endowments to Muslim institutions would have the privilege of performing the Haj crore times and those who bring harm to the institutions and misuse the endowments would incur the sins of patricide and matricide and that of destroying the mosques at Mecca.

PATRONAGE TO ISLAM

The Muslims had a prosperous life under Setupatis, the Rulers of Ramnad Kingdom. The social life of the Muslims had reflected in the cultural life of the period. The Setupatis' patronage to Islamic institutions had already been noticed. The social relevance of this patronage is historically significant because the patron were the Hindus and the beneficiaries were the Muslims .³¹

It is to be observed that there had already been cases of Hindu Rulers patronage to Muslim institutions in different parts of Tamil Country. However in Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries Setupati's patronage to Islamic institutions deserve a special mention. Muslims who primarily entered Ramnad Coast as Arab traders were gradually turned in to a native class. They became integral part of Ramnad society during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. The contemporary sources portray how the Muslims mingled with Hindu population and vice versa.³²

The Ramnad coastal Muslims were conferred with Royal honours and titles by the Setupati of Ramnad, and the words, 'Marakkayar' was incorporated as part of these titles. In the Seventeenth Century, the Nayak Rulers of Madurai has vested a leading Muslim trader of the Ramand coast with honorific title, Mudali Pillai Marakkayar' in the form of a copper plate grant which was found in Kayalpatnam.³³

The impact of Islam on society has been reflected in the form of intellectual and educational activities in other parts of India. The Muslim religious institutions in the North and Deccan were great centres of intellectual activity and centres of learning.³⁴ Evidences in the Ramnad country are silent with regard to Muslim institutions as centres of learning . However there had been intellectual activity among the Muslims. The Muslims like Umaru Pulavar and Mir Savvadu Pulavar were great poets who produced scholastic works.³⁵

RELIGIOUS AMITY

The real impact of Islam and its followers could be seen in the evolution of a composite culture in a Hindu State like Marava Kingdom of Ramnad. In Ramnad , evidences of Muslim-Hindu amity, cross cultural practices among the Muslims, and Hindu -Muslim joint venture in the administration of religious institutions are noticed. A look into the above aspects would reveal how society under Setupatis was significant in respect of religious harmony and composite culture.

The cordiality had been the basis for the relations between the Rulers and Muslims in the Ramnad Kingdom during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries.³⁶ The prosperity of Muslims as a sequel to the cordiality is well vouchsafed by the friendship between Kilavan Setupati and Seethakkati Marakkayar. Copper plates explicit in revealing the involvement of Muslims in Hindu institutions and Hindu

participation in Muslim institutions are interesting. In 1659, during the reign of Tirumalai Regunatha Setupati, it was stipulated that the Muslims (tulukkar and sonagar) were also had to pay a regular voluntary contributions of one panam for each loom which they use to the Pujari of Mari Durgai Amman temple at Ramnad.³⁷ This instance is a classic example of not only the Muslim involvement in Hindu institution but also the equal treatment meted out the Muslims on par with others under the Setupati regime. The following is the another instance of such kind. In a judicial committee to solve the dispute between Gurukkal Maha Sabaiyar and Arya Mahajanangal over the right of possession of Lakshmana tirtham in Rameswaram, Alippuli Ravuthar found a place.³⁸

The instance of Hindu participation in the Hindu -Muslim joint venture in the life is not wanting. Hindus were included as members among the trustees of Hanumanthagudi

Dargah.³⁹ Seethakkati's life depicts the Hindu influences on Muslim social life. Umaru Pulavar in his work Seethakkati Tirumana valthu depicts how Seethakkati married in Hindu style. Many Hindu rituals including tying of tali (holy thread) was practiced by him.⁴⁰ Seethakkati's tomb was constructed on Hindu temple style. In this context it must be noticed that the sepulchral monuments known as Pallippadais were the temples on the mortal remains of royal personages of the Hindu dynasties. Such Pallippadais of medieval period are well distributed in different parts of Tamil Country.⁴¹ A Pallippadai of the Kilavan Setupatis consort is found in Ramnad. These Pallippadais had influenced the construction of Seethakkati's tomb. Thus the influence of Hindu institutions on Muslims atleast among the affluent is worth-noticing. Indeed, Seethakkati's friendship with Setupati made him to have cross-cultural practices.

An inscription of Kumara Muthu Regunatha Setupati of (1734 A.D) in its imprecationary portion mentions Hindus and Muslims on equal footing while indicating those misusing endowment to Isa Sahib Pallivasal.⁴²

No doubt that the above factors contributed to the prevalence of religious harmony in the society. Consequently the peaceful co-existence among the Muslims and Hindus became the order of the day in Ramnad Kingdom under Setupati Rulers which eventually

lead to the evolution of the composite culture. Ramnad Kingdom under Setupatis provided an excellent ground for such an advancement.

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