Chapter VII

SOCIAL CUSTOMS

Social history primarily concerns itself with the daily life of the people and the character of family and household life. It also comprises of human and economic relation of the different classes to one another, the social stratification of groups, occupation, culture, arose out of these general conditions and the reflection of this culture on religion, literature, arts, architecture, learning and thought. Intimately connected with this there appears the history of ideals and aspirations of manners, customs and beliefs and superstitions.

In Coromandel Islamisation at the very inception of Islam was interlinked to the commercial enterprises of the coast. The Muslim colonies swelled through intermarriage of the native women to the Arab migrants and merchants and multiplied by conversation of the local population by the influence and efforts of the merchant missionaries and Sufis, the Muslim mystics who enjoyed the liberty of preaching the faith.

The activities of the zealous Muslim missionaries, the Sufi Mystics, flourished on the evils of the Hindu society. When Islam stepped into the peninsular India, there was a rigid caste system in the Hindu social order. The caste system divided the Hindu society into a number of inaccessible and distinct castes which practically prevented any free social mobility among them. The caste system also inflicted inequality, injustice, inequity, on the so called low caste people. They were meanials never to rise in economic and social status and they were treated as untouchables, unapproachables and often harassed by higher caste Hindus. In this social calamity the teachings of Islam produced a profound effect on the social and political structure and attracted the population towards its fold.

The Tamil country has always been the meeting ground of various cultures either due to wars or friendly contacts, cultural and commercial. And hence the Tamil culture has always been one of the synthesis and continuity. The process of assimilation had no serious difficulties with regard to the people of different region but with same religious practices. But they had totally different experience when Islam stepped into this soil. It's simple but definite creed like equality of all men was a challenge to the Hindu set up which in actual practice was an antithesis to such a creed. Interaction between the two led to conversion and as a result two dissimilar and different cultures attracted each other and led to fusion and mingling of population.
The Arabic word Islam connotes submission, surrender and obedience to the Omnipotent, Allah. He is one. He alone is to be worshipped. There is no priesthood in Islam. Islam offers a complete political and social system. Democracy is it’s key note. Individual is protected in the collective society. Private property is sanctioned and safeguarded. A certain portion of the income of a man must be given to the poor and down-trodden. Usury is forbidden. Drunkunness, gambling and hoarding declared as antisocial. It gave freedom to human intelligence. Islamic brotherhood is an institution. The sacred law is one for all. It abolished all distinction of caste, colour and gave the lowliest and most degraded, the status of equality with the highest. The prayer in the mosque was in equal terms without colour, rank or social superiority.

The three major aspects of Islamic culture which clashed with the cultures in India were (1) the unshakable faith in monotheism, (2) the broad outlook of universal brotherhood and (3) the life is not an illusion but a life to be lived in all seriousness. But the assimilative power of India succeeded in fusing the culture into a unity and Islam stood as a product of assimilation. To the natives, particularly to lowest class, conversion to Islam symbolised emancipation, equality and prosperity. With conversion they entered the brotherhood of Islam with freedom from bondage and opportunity for uplift.

The laws of Islam governing the woman was intended for her benefit, for her health and happiness and for the betterment of her material and social postition. In this Hindu widows who were subject to humiliation and indignities and deprived of all worldly pleasures, were shown liberty. A widow became a bride once again. An untouchable drew water from a common well to which he had been denied access earlier. Thus human dignity was assured in Islam. In Malabar 'A Muslim could sit by the side of a Nambudiri Brahmin, a privilege denied even to a Nair, and his Imam or religious leader known as Thangal could ride in a palanquin, besides the ruler. Thus the process of voluntary conversion brought large communities into the Islamic fold in peninsular India and Islam was not spread with sword as commonly believed and written.

Though the woman, the Arabs consorted with and the converts belonged to the different regions and languages, Islam unified them. Because of this, we find a confused picture about the Muslims of Coromandel, their origin and the groups of numerous linguistic, territorial and occupational subdivisions. As we have put it earlier the Muslims of Coromandel are known by the following names, the Marakkayars, Labbais and Rowthars and Deccanis.
A few words about the main sects of Islam will not be out of place here and it will facilitate a better understanding of Islamic society. Though Islamic society is only one and an indivisible social organisation as recognised by the Cannon Law, still arose some divisions on the basis of Khilafat (political) movements. The two main sects of Islam are Sunni and Shia. The former is principally an Arabian phenomenon, the later Persian. Each sect has acquired its own individual characteristics by incorporating different values and customs to the basic Islamic philosophy. Though these sects have originated from the same source yet they have difference in their rites and customs. There are also many other small dissident sects, and subsects spread throughout the world.

The people professing Sunni faith are called Sunnis, meaning a traditionist, a term generally applied to the large sect of Muslims who acknowledge the first four Khalifas as the rightful successors of Prophet Mohamed i.e. Hazrath Aboobakkar, H.11-13/632-634 A.D., Hazrath Umar H.13-23/634-644 A.D., Hazrath Usman H.23-35/644-656 A.D., Hazrath Ali H.35-40/656-661 A.D., Khalifa being the title of the president of the Islamic democracy in Arabia after Prophet Mohamed. A Sunni Muslim belong to any one of the four schools of jurisprudence, Hanafi, Shafi, Maliki, Hanbali which were founded by Imam Abu Hanifa, Imam Ash Shafi, Imam Malik and Imam Abu Hanbal respectively. The Sunnis are by far the most predominant sect of the Muslim world.

Islamic society follows the Cannon Laws, the Shariath, from two sources, the Holy Quran, and Hadeesh. It is the belief of all Muslims that in addition to the revelations contained in the Holy Quran, Prophet Mohamed received Wahy (an unread revelation) whereby he was enabled to give authoritative declarations on religious questions either moral, ceremonial or doctrinal. Prophet Mohamed's traditions are therefore supposed to be the uninspired record of the inspired sayings, known as Sunnah. The Sunnis follow the Sunnah, a term used to express the customs, and manners or Islamic life. Hence the tradition which records either the sayings or doings of Prophet Mohamed, what he did, enjoined and what was done or said in his presence, which was not forbidden by him, are the traditional law which is handed down as the Hadeesh. The Arabic word for tradition is Hadeesh. Later the theologians included into the Hadeesh, the authoritative saying and doings of the companions of the Prophet Mohamed also. The principles of Shariath are oriented in such a way that these could be classified into five categories. 1) obligatory, 2) prescriptive, 3) permissible, 4) disapproved, 5) tabooed. The difference in the interpretation of
the Shariath by Ulamas and Alims lead to the formation of various theological schools of Islamic jurisprudence the works and activities of which are responsible for the emergence of subsects resulting in diversity and heteroginity with in the Muslim society. Social standards and practices prevalent in a particular locality, different political affiliation on fundamental thelogical questions were the factors which helped to shape the divergent legal doctrines. As a result there eventually came into existence several schools of versions of Shariath laws.

Without changing the basic ideas and principles of the sources of Cannon law, it was expanded and amplified by the judicious interpretations in the later periods. Islamic jurisprudence plays an important role in the main school of Islamic Sunni sect. Based on the schools of jurisprudence, the Sunni Muslim society is divisible into four madhhabs, as it is called, the Malikia, Hanbalia, Hanafia, and Shafia. Malikis are a judicial religious group of orthodox Muslims who adopted the doctrines of Imam Malik-ibn-Anas of Medina, 711-791 A.D. Hanbals are the followers of the school of theology, law, morality which grew up from the teachings of Imam Ahmad-ibn-Hanbal of Saudi Arabia 780-855 A.D. A great number of Hanbals are Sufis. Hanafis are the followers of the school of religious law Hanafia, named after it's founder Imam Abu Hanifa of Persia, the great Sunni Imam and jurisprudent 699-767 A.D. Shafis are the followers of the school of jurisprudence founded by Imam Mohamed Ibn idris-Ash-Shafi of Syria 767-820 AD. The followers of the four Madhhabs are spread all over the world. Without changing the main principles of teachings of Sunnah and the Holy Quran, the founders of the four Madhhabs, have interpreted the Islamic laws according to their readings, according to which there are some minor differences in their customs, ceremonies, prayer and food habits. However these madhhabs do not constitute a caste or class.

Shias are the followers of the fourth Khalifa, Ali, the first cousin of the Prophet Mohamed and the husband of his daughter Fathima. The Shias maintain that Ali was the first legitimate Imam or Khalifa or successor to the Prophet and therefore reject the first three Khalifas of the Sunni faith as usurpers. The Shias maintain that they are the orthodox Muslims. They consider that the Khalifa is divinely appointed leader. They have profound veneration to Ali and regard him as the incarnation or divinity. The Shias observe Moharrum in commemroation of Ali Hasan and Ali Hussain. The Shia school of jurisprudence is the earlier one. There are many differences in their ceremonies and Civil Laws when compared with the Sunnis.
Among the Muslim population of Coromandel the Marakkayars belong to the Sunni-Shafi madhhab, who also claim a descent from the region’s early Arab migrants. The Labbais, Rowther and Deccanis belong to Hanafi Madhhab. But Jaffur Shurreef ascertains that the Shafis in some coastal towns of Coromandel were also called as Labbais and Navayets. But the sub sects of the Coromandel Muslim society merge with each other. The identity of a particular subsect is based on the place of residence and occupation.

IS THERE A CASTE SYSTEM IN COROMANDEL ISLAMIC SOCIETY?

There is no place for caste or class in Islam. Caste, as it is, ordinarily a distinctive institution of Hinduism. Social incompatibility with regard to either intermarriage or interdining, whether due to difference in race or occupation or geographical positions is one of the most essential attributes of caste. But as such Muslims are endogamous. Islam implicitly emphasises equality and universal brotherhood. In theory Islam does not recognise any social distinction or discrimination based upon ethnicity, lineage and occupation. The idea of equality and brotherhood was established during the early days of Islam by its democratic form of political organisation. Inequality based on birth and descent is supposed to have no relevance in Islamic theology. Any ranking and divisions based on heredity, occupation etc. have no place in the ideal pattern of Islamic society.

However, prejudices like those of castes are most commonly found among the Muslims of Coromandel which leads one to think there exists a caste like institution. For instance, the Deccanis look down on the Marakkayars and other Tamil speaking Muslims. They claim to be of more honourable birth than the mixed races. They also claim to be the descendants of Mughual and Turkish origin. While the Deccanis hold themselves socially superior to the Marakayyars, the Marakayyars consider themselves better than the Labbais. However, there is no religious bar to intermarriage between these different sects and subsects and such unions are brought about by the offer of strong financial inducements. In Muslim strongholds several subsects are assigned separate street to live in. There are separate mosques for Hanafs and Shafis, though no bar to worship in each other’s and living intermixed.

Islam does not formulate any caste system, (Jathi) still the Muslims of South India particularly of Coromandel will look as if affected by the influence of the Hindu social systems. However, the Muslim subdivisions in Coromandel are not hierarchically ranked. All sects, sub sects or sub divisions are approximately of
equal status. Ranking as in caste system does not occur at the level of sects or subsects as one expects. But ranking exists on the level of individuals and is based primarily on the individual conduct, his age, wealth, personal character and religiousness. Some occupations are considered undesirable and those who perform them are ranked low. There is no continuing stigma attached to the person who once having performed them have turned to different profession. This kind of social mobility is very common in Islamic society. There is no untouchability among the Muslim groups. Interdining freely occur at feasts and functions with all participants sitting shoulder to shoulder.

Islamic society is highly egalitarian. Members of the sects have equal economic opportunities. But the egalitarian ideology does not apply in the realm of matrimony among the Coromandel Muslims, most of them consider sect and subsect identity is to be an important factor in selecting a spouse. In opting for intersubsects, the overriding concern is not however one of trying to maintain purity of blood as in Hindu caste ranking. The concern is for matching spouses who have the same economic background and same cultural and religious traditions since religious and social practices widely differ among the sects. Nevertheless intermarriages occur. As rightly pointed out by Mattison Mines the mixed couples and their children are not ostacized.

Thus the Coromandel Muslims are endogamous, not socially ranked and there is no bar for interdining. These essential features of a true Islamic society are being followed for generations. All these facts will go to show the absence of caste or class among the Muslims at any point of time.

The Tamil speaking Muslims identify closely with the Hindu Tamils, and they are different from that population only in ethos and social structure. Their customs, dress, food and manners have been influenced by the larger society. Islam seems to have affected its followers here only to certain extent in this respect. For the rest they remain indistinguishable from the unconverted members of their previous order. Customs continued to be practised in the age old way having most often nothing to do with those prescribed by Islam. Thoburn laments that "one third of the Muslims are only Muslims in name". But the Marakkayars claim more closeness and admixture of Arab blood than the other sects like the Rawthars and Labbais. The Marakkayars also speak a variety of Tamil which contain a smattering of Arab words and terms.
MANNERS

The Muslims are taught and trained in the Holy laws, manners and etiquittee. Basic instructions are given in Arabic to read Holy Quran. As soon as the child starts speaking it is taught to recite the Kalima, to memorise it and to understand its meaning. From an early age boys are encouraged to go to mosque for prayer. Every Muslim has some obligations towards another fellow Muslim. While meeting a fellow Muslim they greet saying 'as-salamu-alaikkum' (may peace be upon you) in reply to the greeting as "wa-alaikkum-salam" (similarly, peace be upon you). When a fellow Muslim cries for help, the other should assist him. When a Muslim falls sick his fellow members should visit and enquire about him. When a Muslim dies others should attend his funeral. On occasions of happiness they congratulate others saying Masha-Allah (All Praise to Allah), while fixing an appointment or programme or function they say In Sha Allah (if Allah wishes). Similarly for each and every act they recite same verses in the name of Allah. Tutored and bred in this way such practices became routine and a second nature with them.

MARRIAGE

Islam discourages celibacy and enjoins marriage on men and women as an obligation. Procreation is indeed is one of the main objectives of marriage. Islam lays down rational and just laws about marriage and divorce which satisfy the human heart and brain. Marriage in Islam is a social contract entered into by the parties on a footing of equality and by free consent of the parties. At the time of marriage the bridegroom has to make a settlement of dower or Mahar on his wife which is regarded as a debt on his part.

But the marriage ceremonies and practices differ among the sects. Muslim marriage is a simple process in that the ingredients are the consent of the bride and bridegroom, payment of Mahar or Dower, a sum to be given by the groom to the bride in the presence of a Vakil usually the father of the bride or her close relative and two witnesses, a Khazi. Solemnisation of the marriage becomes complete by reciting the Kuthba by the Khazi followed by a feast. In Muslim marriage alliance the prohibited degrees are mother, step mother, daughter, step daughter, sister, paternal and maternal aunts, sister's daughters, niece, foster mother who suckled the individual, foster sister, wife's mother, wife's daughter, father's wife and daughter in law. Union with the above categories of women is unlawful in the case of all sects.
The elaborate rituals and ceremonies that are being followed in the marriages of the Tamil Muslim subdivisions, are due to the influence of the larger Hindu society. Most of the social customs followed by the Tamil Muslims are not strictly in consonance to Shariat, the Islamic social law. Still they have become the part of their regular life and have rooted deeply. To quote a few such customs, betrothal, planting of muhurthakkal or muhurthakombu, tying of marriage badge (thali) with string of black beads; decorated pandal, distribution of sandal, pansupari and coconut to the assembled, Kuluvai or Kuravai (a musical roar by women), not celebrating the marriage in certain months and on certain days, considering certain days and dates as inauspicious and the practice of taking arathi. And still there are many more. According to Islamic Shariat law, it is the bridegroom who has to pay dower or Mahar to the bride to marry her. But the Muslims have fallen victims to the much reprehensible custom prevalent among the Hindus who demand dowry from the bride.\textsuperscript{24}

The parents of the grooms search for suitable match. Among the Marakkayars it is usually between the siblings in the same house or street or at the most in an adjacent town. Close kinship overrides other considerations in the choice of bride and bridegroom. When an acceptable girl is chanced, the women of the groom's family go to see the suitability of the bride. The would-be bridegroom is not allowed to see the bride. Horoscope is not consulted on both sides (except few, the muslims generally do not maintain horoscope). The parties settle the amount of money which the bride's father will give to his daughter and this sum - the dowry - called Kaikuli or price of bride's hand, and also jewels and household articles. Dowry or Kaikuli was very high in Coromandel Islamic society. An inscription of sixteenth century from Kayalpattanam states that even the rich among the residents of the place found it difficult to pay the dowry amount for their daughters. Because of this many teenaged girls remained unmarried. Hence the residents decided a ceiling on the amount of dowry or kaikuli to be paid to the bridegroom. This inscription gives a very valuable information about Islamic society of the period, no wonder it is being continued to this day\textsuperscript{25}.

The betrothal takes place on a fixed day. The relatives of both the parties are invited and the ceremony is held at the residence of the bride, where the part or full amount of dowry or kaikuli is paid to the father of the bridegroom in the presence of the members of the Jamath. The acceptance of the money by the bridegroom's father constitute an inviolable betrothal. The father of the bridegroom declares that the 'bride is ours' and the father of the bride saying 'the groom is ours'. In some places it is verbal, but in some places the whole agreement is recorded with the signatures of the parties and witnesses. This is just like the 'Muhurtha Olai', or marriage agreement paper of the Hindu marriages. Fatheeha is recited and a feast is offered, the sugar offered in the Fatheeeha is given to the bride. The bride is decorated well.
and seated, the elders and relatives put the sugar in her mouth and bless her. Similarly the sugar is taken to the bridegroom and the groom dressed well and seated, the relatives and elders put the sugar in his mouth and bless him. This is called 'Seeni Poduthal' (Sugar feeding). In view of this the entire ceremony is known as 'Seeni Poduthal'.

The day of the marriage is fixed on mutual convenience of both the houses on an auspicious day and time. Certain months of the year, certain days of the week are considered as inauspicious. Some time the local sooth sayer or astrologer is consulted. The relatives of both the sides are invited individually or jointly for the marriage ceremony. In those days of non development of printing industry, invitation was extended personally or through messengers. A few days before the marriage, a pole called muhurthakkal or muhurthakombu or auspicious marriage pole are planted in the court yards of the houses of both the bride and groom (the pole is usually bamboo in which some yellow cloth soaked in turmeric water is twisted round and in the top of which is tied a bunch of mango leaves. The frontage of the houses are adorned with pandal with plantain trees and coconut, and mango leaves. These practices are very much in the Hindu fashion.

On the prior night of the marriage day, the bridegroom and the bride are anointed with henna paste in feet and hand in an auspicious ceremony called 'Nalangu', in their respective houses. During nalangu ceremony the important relatives particularly women congregate and decorate the bride and the groom in their respective houses and bless them and to ward off from evil spirits. Before the approach of dawn the bridegroom is dressed in his best, seated in a chariot drawn by horses or seated on the horse back itself and taken round the town in procession to the bride's residence. (In modern times the groom is taken in procession in an open car) Francis while giving a picture on Marakkayar marriage at the beginning of this century writes that the groom is conducted in procession to the bride's residence, whereas in Arabian countries it is the bride who is conducted to the groom's house in procession. In olden days lighted torches which burn with oil called deavattis were taken in the procession for lighting at the head of the procession. Islamic songs in praise of the Prophet and his companions are sung by the troupe of singers with small drums in their hands. This music party is called 'Thabs'. The procession is always routed through a mosque or a dargha where Fatheeha is offered by the marriage party. The relatives of the bridegroom stop the procession in front of their houses and offer him milk and presents.
On arrival at the bride's residence, the bridegroom is given a red carpet welcome. To ward off evil spirits, arathi is taken (arathi is turmeric water mixed with lime-orange in colour - in a plate with pieces of betal leaf, charcoal and chilles). The plate is waved round the head of the bridegroom three times clockwise and three times anti-clockwise and he is asked to spit in it three times and this water is poured in the centre of the road, in front. Arathi is generally taken by a male related to the bride. Apart from arathi, a plate containing rice, eggs and goat's head, also waved round the head of the bridegroom and it is given to the family dhobi (washer). The groom is conducted to the stage where the Khazi, the muthavalli (Head of the janmath) of the mahalla and other relatives are assembled. The bride is adorned with jewels and marriage saree provided by the bridegroom and seated separately in the ladies apartment.

The details of money, jewellery, other household utensils and properties given by the father of the bride and the mahar amount given by the bridegroom are announced to those who have assembled. The father of the bride or in his absence a near relative of her, acts as Vakil and offers the bride in marriage to the bridegroom in the presence of two witnesses and before hand the consent of the bride is obtained and announced in public. (But from the later years of the nineteenth century the entire proceedings of the marriage, was recorded in a note book called Nikhanama, which is being maintained in every Mahallah. The names of the couple and their fathers, witnesses and the Khazi who solemnised the marriage are entered and their signatures obtained and the details of the mahar, jewellery, presents and other properties are also entered there in. This practice is followed even to this day and this register has social and legal value in the life of Muslims). Then the father of the bride puts his hand on that of the bridegroom with the help of the Khazi and says,"I give in marriage of my daughter, by name, to you, in the presence of the said two witnesses, for such an amount of mahar settled upon her, do you consent of it". The bridegroom replies, "with whole heart and soul to my marriage settlement made up on her, I consent, consent, consent". The Khazi offers some milk to the bridegroom. After this the Khazi offers up a supplication to the heaven, saying "Oh! Great God, grant that mutual love and reign between this couple and that existed between the Prophets of Allah and their wives". Thus the solemnisation of the marriage is over. When the Khazi is reciting the supplications one of the eldest lady related to the groom or the eldest sister of the groom ties a string of black beads in the neck of the bride amidst chanting of kuluvai (a musical roar in chorus by the women). This string of black beads is provided by the bridegroom's side. The residue of the milk given to the bridegroom is given to the bride and the women chant kuluvai again. The bridegroom offers salam (salutation) to the gathering and the near relatives hugs him. Friends and relatives offer presents.
The tying of black beaded string to the bride is similar to the tying of the thali or mangalyasutra in Hindu marriages. This custom has crept in to the Muslim society due to the influence of Hindu culture. A researcher has come out with a finding that there was no black bead tying in the marriages of the family of the Nawabs of Arcot. A scholar opines that the practice might have been copied by the Tamil Muslims from the Marathas who migrated and settled in this part of the peninsula. On the fortyth day after the marriage, the black beaded string is removed and retied with some gold pendants.

Though after the completion of nikah formalities, the bride and bridegroom are considered to be husband and wife, the bridegroom is taken to the bride's apartment by a learned elderly man, who joins their hands together and blesses them. This is called Kaiazhithuviduthal or Kaiserthuvidal (joining the hands) and is an exclusive custom among Marakkayars.

The nikah ceremony is followed by the feast (walima feast) offered by the bride's side. It is usually non-vegetarian food, either rice cooked with meat (biryani) or Pulavu (ghee fried rice) with separate meat sauce. This food is supplied in big plates called 'Sahan' and a group of four persons seated round the plate take the food. This practice might have been copied from the Arabian society, where it is still followed. Serving meals in sahan is the practice in almost all the Marakkayar settlement towns in the coastal region of Coromandel. In some places like Kilakkarai, Tondi and Kayalpattanam even a group of six persons eat in a plate. Of course, individual small plates or leaf is also offered to the friends from other religious groups. Sahan meals is a type of joint feeding in Muslim society. But in the hinterland, in Muslim marriages, whether Marakkayar or Labbai or Rowthar, food is served only in individual plates or leaf. After the feast betal leaf (pan) is offered.

After the ceremony of joining the hands the bridegroom and the bride are seated side by side. To create mutual affection and understanding amusing plays are arranged. The paparakkolam, Pallankuzhi vilayattu are some of the items. Paparakkolam - as described by Thuston, the bride is dressed like a Brahman woman and holds a brass vessel in one hand and a stick on the other. Approaching the bridegroom she strikes him gently and says did not I give you butter milk and curd? Pay me for them. The bridegroom then places some tamarind seeds in the brass vessel but the bride objects to this and demands money, accompanying the demand with the strokes of the stick. The groom then places some copper, silver and gold coins in the vessel and the bride returns in triumphant. This ceremony is peculiar to the Marakkayars alone. But the origin and meaning of this ceremony is obscure. However this practice has disappeared in Marakkayars marriages.
at present. In many families among the Marakkayars, the groom ties a chain in the neck of the bride. This is another ceremony equal to thali tying by the bridegroom himself. This practice is in vogue even to this day among Marakkayars, though not sanctioned in Islamic culture.

Among the Marakkayars after the marriage the wife stays with her parents in the house given by her parents, but all of them eat together. It may be a separate house or a portion of the house of her parents. Gift of a house to the bride is not met in any other part of India or in Arab countries, and also among other sects and subsects of Coromandel Muslims. The husband visits her and takes food and pays a sum to meet the expenses, a sort of paying guest husband and not as a veettu mappillai (the groom who stays permanently in father in law's house leaving their parents) of the Hindu household.

This practice of the wife living with her parents is closely allied to the matrilocal residence found among the Arabs of the pre Islamic times. Most probably this practice originated from the circumstances of the Arab husband being away for a long period on business in far off lands. The practice of house gift came to be followed in the Coromandel Muslim Marakkayar society from the fact that the early Arab settlers here had no house of their own when they came here as traders. Naturally they had to stay in the house of the wives after marriage. Whenever they ventured into sea for trade opportunities, for months together they left the wives in the safe custody of their parents. Thus perhaps in the Marakkayar society arose the practice of bride remaining with her parents and the husband visiting her at her parent's house. The house gift and matrilocal residence are simply the continuation of the custom which had some utility and necessity when the sea faring husbands were away from their families for a long duration of time. When Islam spread in the west coast, first, the practice of matrilocal residence of the Malayalam society coincided with that of the Arabian customs and hence was well received and then this custom entered the Coromandel Muslim society.

The matrilocal residence became a social necessity in the interest of the two families. It does not create any impact in the economic activities. This custom also does not create any joint venture. Both the families run their business with their own interest. It is very often said that in this type of residence, the husband becomes henpecked.

The Marakkayar family system is very peculiar in this respect. It is a combination of joint and independent family system. It is joint in the sense that they include married daughters and their children and that brothers and sisters are
coowners of the family properties and partners of business firms. Independent in the sense that each family has a house or portion of a house of its own and independent source of income. A recent statistics in a Marakkayar town shows that 80% of the houses are in the name of women. This is because of the house gifts to the women.

Parallel cousin marriage or marriage between the sons and daughters of brothers is usual one among the Marakkayars. It outwits all other considerations. This type of alliance is not common among the other Muslim sub sects like Rowthar, Labbai and Deccanis and rarely practiced. (But majority of the Labbai and Rowthar families practise the cross cousin marriage (muraimappillai) much in Hindu fashion.) A scholar is of the view that the most probable reason for this sort of matrimonial alliance is that siblings among them yearn for remaining among themselves close to each other and hence they want their children to intermarry and give the demonstration of sibling solidarity. Some think that the parallel cousin marriages are concluded to keep the blood ties and property intact. But it is probable that this is an inheritance from the early Arabian society. This type of marriage was also practised in the family of Prophet Mohamed. Scientists are of the view that the marriage among the close relatives may lead to childlessness or mentally or physically retarded children. The Marakkayar population neither approve or disapprove this thesis, though childlessness and physically and mentally affected children are in excess of its quota among them. At the same time there are Marakkayar families with good number of children who are physically and mentally robust. The Muslim of a particular sect is not averse to matrimonial alliance with other sect and subsect or segment and there is no religious bar also. The overriding consideration in such cases is frequently being financial, economic or social status or superior accomplishments. There are instances of the Marakkayar bride marrying a Labbai, Rowthar or Sheik or Deccani bridegroom, vice versa and the like.

Generations back Muslim marriages were celebrated for eleven days, later the duration was reduced to seven days and further to three days. But in modern times it is a one day wonder. In earlier times Muslim marriages were solemnised in predawn hours. At present marriages are celebrated during day time either forenoon or afternoon.

Thus we find that most of the ceremonies connected with the marriage of the Muslims are influenced by Hindu customs and culture. But these customs are in usage for a very long period and handed down from generations to the present day. We find authentic evidence in an Islamic Tamil literature of the seventeenth century by name Saithakkathiru Marakkayar Thirumana Vazhthu, which describes the marriage of Vallar Seethakkathi (Periathambi Marakkayar) of Kilakkarai. The poet 'Umarkathab', a contemporary of Periathambi Marakkayar had seen the marriage in person.
and has described about each and every ceremony in great detail.\textsuperscript{35} Betrothal in bride's residence,\textsuperscript{36} planting of muhurthakkal,\textsuperscript{37} pandal (shamiana) arrangement for marriage, decorated with flowers, coconut bunches, jack fruit, plantain fruits, sugarcane, and areca bunch,\textsuperscript{38} lighting of kuthuvilaku,\textsuperscript{39} decorated stage for marriage,\textsuperscript{40} keeping of coconut flower bunch in a pot in the marriage dias (much in Hindu fashion),\textsuperscript{41} decoration of the bridegroom with silk cloth, ornaments made of precious stones, fragrances and flower garlands,\textsuperscript{42} kulavai or kuravai, the roar in chorus by women,\textsuperscript{43} procession of the bridegroom in an elephant,\textsuperscript{44} different kinds of musical instruments taken in the procession,\textsuperscript{45} lighting arrangement in the procession by theevati - open oil lamps,\textsuperscript{46} alathi or arathi to the bridegroom,\textsuperscript{47} bathing the bride with turmeric water,\textsuperscript{48} decoration of the bride,\textsuperscript{49} mahar was fixed and the marriage of the couple with their names and names of their parents was recorded,\textsuperscript{50} the bridegroom and the bride seated side by side and the bridegroom himself ties mangalyam - black bead in the neck of the bride,\textsuperscript{51} gift of house to the bride by her parents,\textsuperscript{52} are some of the marriage customs that find reference in this literary work. As such it gives a vivid picture of the Muslim society in the seventeenth century and this literary work can be called as a social document of Muslim society of seventeenth century. Seerapuranam, the important Islamic Tamil Literary work of seventeenth century which describes life sketch and deeds of the Prophet Mohamed in Tamil literary tradition also throws light on the customs of Tamil Muslims. Though it is the biography of Prophet Mohamed, it is entirely written on the natural and cultural settings of Tamils. We find a reference as to that the Prophet Mohamed was taken in procession on a horse back,\textsuperscript{53} and tied thali to the bride. All the above customs are handed down to generations and are in practice even to this day.

BIRTH

Procreation is indeed one of the main objectives of marriage. Pregnancy is an eagerly awaited one in the life of the couple. To ensure the safe delivery and a healthy child, several precautions are taken. The mother avoids new clothes and ornaments since all these will attract the evil spirits, the jinns. The pregnant woman do not eat during the lunar eclipse.\textsuperscript{54} A ceremony similar to Valaikappu (of the Hindu custom) is performed during the seventh or ninth month of pregnancy. Valaikappu or bangle wearing ceremony is believed to possess virtues toward of evils from the evil spirits hovering about a pregnant woman since she is considered to be more susceptible to the influence of the evil spirit than others. During this auspicious ceremony the pregnant woman is decorated with a large number of glass and lac (Kankanam) bangles and elderly women bless her for a safe delivery).
Gone are the ages of female infanticide. Yet birth of a male child is preferred. As Jaffur Shureef writes, "though the desire for a male offspring does not influence the Muslims to the same extent as Hindus who believe that it is only a son who can perform the funeral rites which admit the spirit of his father in the company of his sainted ancestors, still among the Muslims the craving for a male heir is often intense". To the Muslims a female child is indeed an expensive luxury. Once born the girls are brought up with love and affection.

As soon as the baby is born azan (general call for the prayer) is recited in the right ear and igamath (call for jamath prayer) in the left ear by a Khazi or a learned man. The idea behind this practice is that from the very beginning of it's life the child should imbibe the name Allah and the Muslim confession of faith. After this a drop of honey is given to the child by the Khazi.

The fifth day of birth is celebrated with pomp and show in the (child's) mother's house. Relatives and friends are invited for a feast. The women folk sing lallabay in the name of Prophet Mohamed, Nagore Andavar and other holy persons.

On the seventh day or on a suitable convenient day, the child's head is shaved ceremoniously in it's mother's house. On this occasion one goat in the case of female child and two if the child is male (as per Shafi school) are sacrificially slaughtered. The sacrificed animal is divided into three equal parts, one is given to the baby's nurse one to the orphans and poor and the other is used by the members of the household. This sacrificial offering is called "Akika", and is meant to safeguard the child from the influence of evil spirits and all sorts of misfortunes. The hair of the child is weighed and an equal weight of silver is given to poor or the religious mendicants. These practices are widely prevalent among the Marakkayars and not with other sub-divisions of Tamil Muslims.

Like the namakaranam or naming ceremony of the Hindus a customary ceremony is held to give a name to the child. This ceremony is generally held on the forthyth day after the child's birth. But in Marakkayar families in places like Karaikkal, traditionally naming of child takes place within half an hour after the birth. Muslims mostly give Arabic traditional names prefixing the attributes of Allah, the name of the Prophet and his distinguished companions and the members of the family of the Prophet and also the names of Aulias, saints who are entombed in the respective areas. Female children often receive the names of the wives and daughters of the Prophet and his companions. The names help to preserve
the identity of the Muslims and to strengthen the individual's faith. But we find so many Hindu names and terminations among the Muslims like Chinnathambi, Periathambi, Nallathambi, Ambalam, Servai and Muslim names with Hindu terminations like Allahpitchai, Kuppai Mohamed, Fakirappa, Seenappa and so on. Such names were accepted as Muslim personal names due to the influence of Hindu culture and shows the humanitarian affection and bond between the different religious groups which set a foundation for the unity in diversity. A scholar in his recent book has written that Muslims began to use Hindu names and terminations to conceal their identity to escape the attack and wrath of the Portuguese. This is totally misconceived.

On the fortyth day function, which is considered to be the end of the period of pollution, the mother and the child are bathed and the mother offers prayers. Sweet candy is prepared and distributed to the relatives. A grand lunch feast is offered to the friends and relatives by the mother's household. Jewels and decoratives are offered to the child by the father in the case of Marakkayars and by the maternal grandfather of the child in the case of other subsects. The child is placed in a new cradle and songs of Islamic themes are sung along with the roar of kuluvai. The functions are very elaborate for the first child and lesser to the subsequent ones.

In the birth ceremonies many Hindu customs and beliefs have crept into the Muslim society. When a woman is pregnant she appeals to the saints for the safe delivery and vows to contribute her mite. The movements of the pregnant woman is restricted during lunar eclipse. A period of pollution for forty days is observed after child birth, to prevent the approach of evil spirits. Some people prepare the horoscope for their children. In the event of successive deaths of children, the new born is sold to the father of many children and named like Kuppai (waste) and repurchased from him on payment of some quantity of rice barn. The mother is bound by self denial for forty days and not allowed to pray or fast, and cannot touch the Holy Quran. Among the Muslims such customs are found in no other country.

**KHATHNA**

Khathna (circumcision) among the Muslims is directed to be performed between the age of seven and fourteen, though occasionally it is done either before or after that period.
Should an adult of a different persuasion be desirous of embracing Islam but at the same time dreaded undergoing the operation, it is not essentially necessary that he should be circumcised. The divine canard is that he be initiated into the tenets of the faith. A Muslim traveller of tenth century writes that the people of India were not circumcised.

There is neither an injunction nor it is a Quranic law to do circumcision, but it is a tradition, Sunna. Further there are no original sources to trace the origin of Khathna or circumcision in Islamic society. Circumcision was practiced by the Jews and Arabs in pre-Islamic times. In the Old Testament it is stated "And Abraham circumcised his son Issace being eight days old when his son was born on to him." In popular parlance circumcision is called Sunnath or Khathna. In olden days circumcision was performed by the family barber and the medicines for healing was administered by him. (But in modern times it is being done by professional medical men). Among the Tamil speaking Muslims this ceremony is known as "Markkakalyanam", a sort of initiation ceremony into the religion much in Hindu fashion. When a person embraces Islam, circumcision is obligatory. Muslims celebrate this private domestic function with much fanfare. Now a days invitation are printed to invite the relatives and friends like that of the marriage. Feast is arranged to the invities. Friends and relatives offer presents to the child to be circumcised.

If there is a girl in the house, the ear boring ceremony is also held along with circumcision ceremony. In that case the maternal uncle has to present the earlets. In circumcision ceremony we also find the influence of Tamil or Hindu culture in all aspects. This custom is also handed down from generations and being followed to this day, of course with minor changes. It is interesting to note that some of the caste Hindus like Piramalai Kallars (Madrurai district) have copied and practical circumcision to their children.

PUBERTY CELEBRATION

In a Muslim family when a girl attains puberty, the relatives are informed by the parents of the girl. It is a way of conveying the message that a girl is ready for marriage because in those days the girls were married at a very early age. On the day of attaining puberty, the girl is bathed ceremonously in the presence of the close relatives. The maternal uncle sends eggs, milk, fruits and sweets. In the case of Marakkayars the father's household sends eggs, gingelly oil, black gram, coconut, etc. since the girl lives with her mother's family. A food stuff called 'kali' (a combination of rice and black gram flour) is prepared and given to the girl for a few days.
Puberty ceremony is generally celebrated on the seventh day or eleventh day or in a day convenient. Relatives and friends are invited to the function. The girl is bathed ceremoniously, decked with new cloth and flowers and is taken to a decorated dias. In the case of Marakkayar girl she is conducted to the dias by the parallel cousin. The ladies and elder male members bless the girl by applying sandal in her cheek and also offer presents. A feast is given. Pan, fruits, and rice flower mixed with sugar called ‘malida’ are also distributed to those assembled. The celebrations connected with puberty is due to the influence of Hindu custom and usages. Jaffur Shureeff says that this celebration is a preparatory function for marriage, among the Muslims. Quadir Hussain Khan writes that puberty celebrations are not found in the Islamic society of any other country.

DEATH

Every Muslim aspires to die with the Kalima (the confession of faith) in his lips. A man in death bed is exhorted by those around him to recite the Kalima. When a man or woman is about to die Quaranic verses are recited loudly in order that the spirit of the man by hearing it may experience an easy concentration. On the point of death the relative pour some drops of water down the throat to facilitate the exit of the vital spark. The moment the spirit has fled, the mouth is closed, the two great toes are brought in contact and fastened together with a thin ribbon. The corpse is called ‘Zanaza’ or ‘malyathu’ (in Tamil). As soon as the death occurs the body is bathed in hot water. This is called kasappumatal. The relatives and friends are informed in those days through the barber. The dead is buried at the earliest. Before taking for burial, the zanaza is washed thoroughly, camphor and scented materials are sprinkled and wrapped in a new white cloth called kaffan. Permanent bier called sandack are kept in every mosque. It is brought to the house of the dead and the zanaza is placed in the bier and taken in procession to the mosque, where a special funeral prayer is offered and the bier is taken to the burial ground. The body is placed in the grave pit dug for this purpose, in north south direction with face turning to the west the direction of kaaba in Mecca. The mourners throw handful of mud or sand into the grave. Some bamboo sticks are placed in slanting position in the pit, pulmyrah mat is placed as a cover over it and the pit is filled with mud so that the mud cannot fall directly on the dead body. The whole grave is piled with muddy earth. Fatheeha is offered for the eternal peace of the dead. After the burial rice, salt, bread and coins are distributed to the poor in the name of the dead. The processionists return to the house and again Fatheeha is offered and the mourners disperse offering condolence personally to the members of the family. As a general rule among the Muslims the dead are buried. But Lakshmi quotes incidence of burning the dead among the Tamil Muslims in some parts of Sri Lanka. Nowhere we hear such an information.
Some among the relatives take up the food arrangements on the day of burial. Usually the third day is called ziarath day during which day the burial place called kaproo is decorated with flowers and sandal paste and after a Fatheeha there, sweets are distributed to the gathering. Feast take place on the fifth, seventh, twentyfirst, thirtyfirst and fortyth days. The feast on the fortyth day is a grand one. It is believed that the soul of the dead leaves the house on the fortyth day and if already left returns on that day and makes a survey of the article, offered at the Fatheeha and takes a smell of them and departs. A moulavi or a learned man reads the Holy Quran in instalments for the forty days in the house of the dead. A tumbler of water and a lamp are kept for the forty days at the spot in the house where the spirit of the body left, and the water is poured in some green tree in the morning. The death anniversary is also observed by offering the food and drinks used by the dead and this traces the anismatic ideas of the soul that suffers for the necessities it felt during sojourn in the mundane world. Feast is offered to the friends and relatives. Ziarath, fortyth day celebrations and death anniversary are not part of orthodox Islam and all these are innovations and unlawful. Still these practices are widely prevalent in the South Indian Muslim society.

There are no festivities in the house of the dead and the family members do not wear new clothes on festive occassions for a year. At the death of the husband, the wife (widow) removes her thali (black beaded string) breaks the bangles, removes the toe ring, nose ring etc., in Hindu fashion. The widow observes iddat seclution and confinement and abstenance for four months and ten days, during which time she is prohibited to remarry. Though Islam permits the remarriage of widows it is not practised universally but occasionally in Tamil Muslim society.

Islam does not permit any permanent structures, the samathi like form of the Hindus in the burial place of the dead. However, mousoleums, tombs and darghas have been constructed over the graves of martyrs, missionaries and men and women of eminance.

FOOD HABITS

The Muslims are good eaters and are expert in culinry art. Their food is rich, nutritious and varigated.

In Coromandel areas customary breakfast is idly, dosai and idiappam, rotti, appam, vattalappam, julur etc., made of rice flour, egg, ghee, coconut milk and sugar and are the delicious special foods in breakfast. These food items are similar to those prevalent among the Moplas of west coast.
Lunch and dinner is mostly rice. Non-vegetarian foods are preferred. Mutton, chicken, egg are cooked, fried, roasted with masala of cashew, badam, bista, almond and a variety of spices. Pulavu (ghee fried rice) or biriyani (rice cooked with meat) is a must in feasts. Fish, prawn and dried fish occupy a pride of place in the kitchen. Most of these preparations of non-vegetarian foods have the influence of Iranian and Turkish cuisine in that biriyani is significant one, which has become the favourite non-vegetarian food of people in India irrespective of religion. Different sweet varieties are also taken. Sherbath and tea are their favourite beverages.

It is lawful to eat the flesh of sheep, goat, deer, hare, rabbit, cow, bull female and male buffalo, camel, heron, duck, partridge, goose, snipe, pigeon etc. These animals and birds have to be cut in throat with the recitation of thakbir (Quranic verse) and only such meat has to be taken. The meat obtained in this way is called "halal" (permissible). It is unlawful to eat the flesh of alligator, turtle, frogs, crab, hog, wolf, tiger and the like and birds like hawk, kite, crow and vulture. Shrimps can be taken since it is only makroo (abominable) Fish found dead in the water is unlawful, but if it is taken out alive and dies afterwards it is lawful to take. It is unlawful to take intoxicating liquors and substances like ganja affin (opium) Achupaniyaram, inchikothupaniyaram, vellaiappam, kooval, agar agar, nanahath, thamroti, feerni, sheerni, naan, and kabaab, halwa, and jangiri are special types of sweets liked by Muslims.

Because of the influence of the food habits of the Muslims the names of a number of food articles have mingled in Tamil such as kurma, sherbat, salna, masala, halva, and jangiri to quote a few.74

JEWELLERY AND ORNAMENTS

Muslim women are madly fond of jewellery and ornaments. This is not only for decoration and ornamentation but to serve as a parameter of the financial status of the family.

We find reference about the various ornaments and jewels made of gold, silver and other precious stones which were in use in Tamil society in the Sangam and post Sangam literatures and inscriptions. A visual representation of all these ornaments and their designs can be seen in the temple sculptures, bronze figures and ancient paintings. The Tamil Muslim women also wear such ornaments besides some special types of their own. Sonakan sidukku, an ornament mentioned in Raja Raja's inscriptions at Thanjavur Big Temple is
worn on the head and might have introduced by the Muslims. The Muslim women wear different kinds of gold and silver ornaments (like Hindu women) in their ear, nose, neck, arms, fingers, waist, feet, ankle and toe. Most of these jewellery are in Hindu pattern, differing in details and designs. Muslim women bore ear and nose much in the Hindu fashion. Apart from the conventional ear ornaments, the Marakkayar, Rawthar and Labbai women bore their entire ear lobes and wear a gold ornament called vali arasalai or alarkothu which consists of rings made of thin wire with leaf design of peepal tree hanging from it. Arab and Persian women do have such bores in their ear but they never bore nose. So boring of the nose is copied by the Muslim women from the Hindu society.

Muslim women wear different types of ornaments like thodu, (earlet), thongattan (pendent from ear) mattal, (worn with ear stud and tukked in hair to counter the weight). Vali arasalai or alarkothu for the ears; mookuthi (nose stud) of different patterns, bangles, fingerrings and kadagam in arms; parumani, gothumaaimani, padakkam, attiyal, kasumalai, governor malai, thali chain, black beaded string (Thali) studded with gold beads and precious stones; sarappalli, kothu vadam kantasaram, mutharam, (pearl pendent) and many other types of chains and pendants in the neck; Jadaipillai, Thalaivattam, pirai, and kondaippoo on the head; ottiyanam in the waist; thandai, silambu, and golusu in the ankle; and toe ring for the toes. In some rich families, the ornaments worn in the ankle are all made of gold. Most of the married Muslim women wear toe ring in the second toe or some times in the third and fourth also to signify the marital status as in the case of Hindu women. But among the Marakkayar women in some places like Adirampattanam wearing of toe ring is not found. In all these ornaments no figures of any kind is engraved but only floral designs, Lunar and star designs and Arabic letters are found.

Islamic Tamil literatures give a long list of ornaments worn by Muslim women. Saithakkathiru Marakkayar Thirumanavazhthu (referred supra) excel in this respect
where we find references to the ornaments and jewellery of the Coromandel Marakkayar women in 17th century of which a special mention can be made for the nose stud and metti toe ring. Almost all the ornaments described in this literary work are in use to the present day.78

Islam forbids decoration of menfolk with gold ornaments. But due to the influence of Hindu culture men also wear rings in their fingers and chains in their neck. Saithakkathiru Marakkayar Thirumanavazhthu also gives a long list of ornaments worn by men of course the affluent79.

STATUS OF WOMEN

The status of women in Islamic society is a subject of much interest and debate ever since of the birth of Islam. But it was Islam that acknowledged a separate and independent human status to women and a honourable and noble position in the society. As a fundamental principle of it's system, women and men are quite equal to each other and entitled to equal rights. Islam gave her the right to life and property like men. Liberal provisions are found in the Holy Quran about the rights and dignity of women. Though marriage is a social contract in Islam, in essence it is the union of two souls, which is one of the sacred Sunnats of the Prophet Mohamed80. This contract is entered into by the parties on a footing of equality and by the free consent of parties. Prophet Mohamed has expressed the opinion that the women should be consulted as to the choice of the husband that if a virgin is too shy to speak, her silence has to be taken as consent81. The dower or mahar signifies the giving of some thing willingly of one's own accord in consideration of the contract, the marriage. Further, mahar is a debt on the husband. A widow can remarry if she is willing.

If a husband does not find his wife, a suitable companion, he can divorce her. According to Quranic law, he has to pronounce his intention to divorce her (Thalak) at the intervals of one month each for three times during which period the couple
can reconcile so that the divorce can be avoided. If no reconciliation takes place, the divorce become absolute and both parties are free to contract another marriage. Similarly the wife is not satisfied with the husband she can obtain divorce from him (Khula) on condition of giving her right to mahar.

Polygamy is not an institution of Islam. It is an allowance made for the ardent human nature. The Holy Quran does not enjoin it but recommends in certain circumstances as better than leaving women helpless and without protectors. So Polygamy is an emergency law in Islam. It does not at all represent the fundamental principles of Islamic law. Holy Quran says "Marry a woman who seem good to you, two or three or four and if you fear that you cannot do justice (to so many) then one only." The Prophet has made it clear that if a man marry more than one wife he has to treat them with equal status socially and and economically. Thus the injunction virtually comes to imply that one should contract with one wife only. Thus the Islamic law favours in normal life monogamy rather than Polygamy. During the life time of the Prophet Mohamed, in the wars (especially at Badr and Uhadh) a large number of men were decimated and the balance of sexes was seriously shaken. In such circumstances polygamy became a social necessity as it may save the society from sexual anarchy that follows the decimation of (men) life partners. So the Prophet Mohamed encouraged men to marry the poor widows in addition to one wife. Thus perhaps the institution of polygamy was instituted in Islam. But in later times men married more than one wife in the case of over active sexually, cronic disease and sterility. But a majority of the population continued to be monogamous.

In the Muslim society of Coromandel Coast, the influence of the Hindu culture infiltrated into this field also and most of the muslims considered the marriage as a sacrament. They want to be monogamous. The incidence of polygamy was at a very low percentage only. This is true even in the present day society.
The purdha system is widely in practice among the Muslim women. In the northern districts of Thanjavur, South Arcot and Chengalpat the women come out covering the entire body from head to feet with a big white loose mantle. In Thanjavur district, it is more strict. But in the northern districts like Ramanathapuram and Thirunelveli, the women do not veil with a separate big cloth like the women in other districts but they come out with just a veil over the head, that even from the end portion of the saree. However, the veiling is an accepted custom among the Coromandel Muslims.

The Islamic tradition, the pure Arabic tradition enjoins the veiling the hair and neck and modest conduct of Muslim women. The veiling of face by women itself is not an Islamic custom. It was prevalent in many cities of the east before the coming of Islam but not in the cities of Arabia. The purdha system as it is now existing in India was quite undreamt by the Muslims of the early centuries who had adopted a face veil and some other fashions for their women. The women folk when they came into the cities of Syria, Mesapatomia, Persia and Egypt, they appeared with a veil as a protection for not being misunderstood by the people. The people associated unveiled women with loose character. Later on it was adopted even in the cities of Arabia as a mark of civilization and township. Purdha has never been the universal custom. The great majority of the Muslim women in the world are peasants who work with their husbands and brothers in the fields. For them, the face veil would be an absurd encumbrance. The head veil on the other hand was universal. The Egyptian, Syrian, Turkish or Arbian peasant women veiled their face only when they had to go into the town and then it was a half veil that they wore. In no other country besides India, the custom adopted by wealthiest Muslim women for distinction was adopted by all.

Thus the purdha system is neither Arabic nor Arabian in origin. It is Zoroastrian Persian and Christian Byzantine in origin. It has nothing to do with Islam and for practical reason it has never been adopted by great majority of Muslim women. So long it was applied only to the women of great houses who had varied interest in life.
It was never applicable to every class of society and when applied to every class as now in India it is a positive evil which the sacred law ever sanctioned. Hence the purdha system is not a part of Islamic law. It is a custom of the court introduced after the Kilafat had degenerated from the true Islamic standard under Persian Byzantine influence and had become mere oriental despotism. It comes from the source of weakness of Islam and not from the source of strength.

The following injunction is enjoined in the Holy Quran, "O, Prophet! Tell Thy wife and daughters and the women of believers to draw their cloaks down their face. That will be better so that they may be recognised and not annoyed." So it will be seen that the face veil alone is sanctioned. The peculiar purdha system practised by the Coromandel Muslim women probably originated to distinguish them from the women of other religious groups and became universal in the course of time.

Long before the onset of puberty, the Muslim girls in the Coromandel are trained to cover the head and upper part of the body with the scarf. When they attain puberty, they are secluded within the four walls of zenana. When they have to go out, they wrap the whole body from head to foot exposing only the eyes and nose with a white mantle (called dupatti) which is very unwieldy. This cloth is very heavy in Thanjavur district. This type of purdha is peculiar to the Marakkayar, Labbai and Rawthar women in the coastal belts. However, this type of purdha has the advantage of an exterior cloth which can be worn or discarded with ease without disturbing the regular dress inside. Muslim women are accustomed to this for generation and it is being followed to this day.

In spite of all these religious sanctions and Quranic injunctions the position of Muslim women was not good during the period of our study. Many of them were in letter and not in spirit. The women were suffering from several social disabilities.
The girls were married at a very early age immediately after puberty, unlawful form of divorce was thrust on them. They were subservient to men. They were ignorant, uneducated and shunned in four walls. At the end of nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth, the school going female were only 0.4% of the total school going children among Muslims. No female students were found either in colleges or in upper secondary schools. (It is interesting to note that for the first time a Muslim lady joined a college in Madras only in 1923). Their economic role was very insignificant. However, they were taught Arabic and to read the Holy Quran. They were seldom allowed to learn languages like Tamil and English. But however, some of them learnt the newly developed script, the Arabic Tamil, i.e. Tamil language in Arabic character, to write the accounts of the household and other related matters. In marriage the consent of the bride was a formal one and majority of them had little or no say in the choice of their life partners. Some elders observe that the payment of mahar was only in theory in most of the cases. Though only mahar is enjoined in Islam, the social evils of dowry, perhaps a continuation of Hindu practice was almost universal among the Muslims and proved to be an ulcer to the society. Inspite of Islamic dictation of woman's share in parental property, they were deprived of getting their respective shares for various reasons. Due to ignorance and isolation women were not accounted with their legal rights. The isolation and segregation the Muslim women brought very little social contact with the external world. There were instances of misuse of the sacred provisions of divorce and polygamy here and there. Islam cannot be blamed for acts of contradictions of it's teaching or bar the way to the implementation of it’s law; but the behavioural character of the individuals and their cover under fundamentalistic ideas are alone at fault. But the Muslim women in Coromandel, a vast majority of them being the descendants of converted society had their own sacred concept about the marriage like their fellow Hindu women. They were never willing to part with their husbands. Inspite of the religious sanction for remarriage, most of the widows remain unmarried in reverence to the departed husbands.
RELIGIOUS LIFE

There are mosques in all the Muslim settlements. In the coastal towns of the Coromandel we can find some earliest mosques. In most of the mosques in the coastal towns prayer is conducted according to Shafi madhhab. There may be separate mosque for the Hanafi faith. The people living adjacent to a particular mosque constitute a group called Mahalla and they elect themselves a Muthavalli who will be the head of the trustees of the mosque. He is more or less a leader of the community in that particular area. The Mahalla committee under the presidentship of the Muthavalli is responsible for the administration of the mosque and its properties. This committee also takes care of the religious and social functions of the people of the area. The committee maintains the records of the marriages that takes place in the families of Mahalla. If a party of the bridegroom or bride go to another town to contract a marriage the Muthavalli of the Mahalla issues a certificate to the bonafideness of the party without which marriage would not be solemnised in another town. In the event of a marriage celebration or other social functions or death in a house within the Mahalla all the members of the Mahalla congregate there.

The Mahalla committee also acts as a caste panchayat organisation and settles disputes relating to properties, divorce and other social matters. The Mahalla appeals for donation from the philanthropists to build and repair or maintain the mosque, to help the marriage of poor girls, to support the orphans and for institutions of Arabic learning. The Muslim philanthropists vie with one another in offering donations in cash or kind for such religious cause and social upliftment. The funds so collected is maintained by the Mahalla committee.

The mosques and darghas built by the Muslim philanthropists right from the earlier centuries to the present day can be seen in various coastal towns in the Coromandel region. Among which the mosques and darghas in Kilakkarai, Kayalpattanam and Nagore deserve special mention. These mosques and darghas are constructed in typical Dravidian style with the combination of Islamic architecture.
The Muslims attach much importance to the spiritual life and duties. Their faith in the fundamental principles of Islam is unshakable. Most of them are punctual in their daily five time prayers and Friday mass prayer.

Islam comprises of five divine commands. 1) Kalima or confession of faith,
2) Namaz or five times prayer, 3) Roza or fasting for thirty days during the month of Ramzan, 4) Zakath or alms giving, 5) Haj or pilgrimage to Mecca. These are the five pillars of Islam.

Every Muslim has to confess his faith in Allah, the Almighty, with the recitation of the first Kalima, La-il-la-hah-il-lul-la-hu-Mohamad-oor-Rasoola allahi, which means there is no other God except the one true God, and Mohamed is the Prophet or messenger sent by Allah.

The divine law prescribes five times prayer daily. 1. Fazar or morning prayer from 5 a.m. or from dawn of the day to Sunrise. 2. Zohar, midday prayer between 1.00 and 2.00 p.m. 3. Assar, or afternoon prayer, from 4.00 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. or till Sunset. 4. Magrib or Sunset prayer, 6.00 p.m. to 6.30 p.m or usually after the Sunset. 5. 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 position of the sun, stars, call of the birds and by the bloom of flowers. Before every prayer one has to make ablutions or wuzu, i.e., washing of hands mouth, nose (inside), face, arms, head and back of the neck and feet. Every time the people are called for prayer by reciting azan or call to 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 of position, colour or rank. Muslims also train their male children to pray five times daily from the very early age.

During the month of Ramzan, one has to undertake fasting for 30 days from dawn to dusk. Eating, drinking, chewing betel, smoking, snuffing or cannibial intercourse or embrace of women are prohibited during fasting time (i.e. dawn to dusk.)
On the termination of the fasting on thirtyth day, before going to the Ramzan prayer (Id-dhul- fitr) fitra, the fast offering, is to be given to the poor and needy from their earnings which consists of two and half measures of wheat or money equivalent to it, per head in the family. Prophet Mohamed has said those who fast during Ramzan shall be the privileged persons who at the Last Day will have the honour of entering the celestial city, The Heaven.

Zakath or alms giving is obligatory on Muslims possessing any property and to give away 1/40th part of it every year to the State for the welfare schemes to 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 alleviate the destitution of the poor. This will create love and gratitude on the part of the poor to the rich and the rich will look up on the poor as the comrades, thus making a socialistic pattern of society. In olden days, in the Islamic States, the Zakath was compulsorily collected and deposited in the Baithulmal (the State treasury). But in the later political administrative settings, the individuals themselves began to distribute the Zakath amount to poor people of their choice. Most of the Muslims calculate the Zakath share faithfully in tune, to their properties and distribute it to the poor and destitutes, during the month of Ramzan.

Haj or pilgrimage to Mecca, is the divine command to undertake pilgrimage once in their lives to those who have sufficient means to meet the expenses and exegencies. The poor are not obligated to perform it but fortunately for the poor, the charitable minded opulent natives in the coastal towns had operated ships named "fyz-e-billah" (God's grace of bounty ship) for pilgrimage to Mecca and transported the poor people bearing all expenses themselves. Labbai Naina Marakkayar of Kilakkarai, a descendant of Seethakkathi (in the third quarter of the eighteenth century) took a large number of pilgrims to Mecca in his ship Hydroos at his own expense. Nawab of Arcot, Mohamed Ali, despatched every year two ships Safinatullah and Safinathul Rasool with pilgrims to Mecca at the expense of the State. He also sent presents to the exalted pious nobles in Mecca.
and also to the poor in Mecca and Medina. During eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the Coromandel Marakkayar ships transported Haj pilgrims to the west coast, in their mercantile vessels, from where they took ships for Arab coasts.

Pearson gives a very interesting account of Haj pilgrimage from Indian coasts. The journey from India to Mecca was very expensive and dangerous. In spite of that there were regular large scale passenger movement by sea for Haj. 15,000 people performed Haj, from India, every year in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Most of the pilgrims were urban dwellers. The Mughal emperors provided all facilities to the pious men and fakirs to perform Haj. Intending people from various parts of the country (perhaps including those from Coromandel) assembled in the port towns of Mughals to take this opportunity. Political opponents of the Mughal rulers were sent on Haj, never to return. Women also undertook Haj pilgrimage. Trade was not the motive for most of the pilgrims. However they carried some goods with them. This was not intended to be sold for profit but rather sold on the way or in Mecca in order to provide expenses of the voyage. Thus, Mecca became the centre of exchange for Middle Eastern pious products.

FESTIVALS

Generally, the Marakkayars, Labbais, and Rowthars do not celebrate with pomp and show the Muharrum festival, the mourning and lamentations of the martyrdom of Hossein and Hussain, the grandsons of Prophet Mohamed (in the fourtyeighth year of Hijira) as the Deccanis and Shias of Coromandel. In some households a fatheeha is offered for the eternal place of the martyrs. The Islamic calendar month begins from the month Muharrum, consisting of 355 days.

Odukkathu perunal (festival) 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 off all misfortunes that befell in the year. Origin of this celebration goes to the indisposition of the Prophet Mohamed during this month.
(in 11th year of Hijira) and to thank the Almighty for his recovery. The first thirteen days 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 for the better showed itself in his malady. The last Wednesday of the month is celebrated as Odukkathu perunal. It was on this day that the Prophet experiencing some degree of mitigation in the violence of his distemper, bathed but never, after, having on the twelth 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, cause 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, enjoy peace and happiness. 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, to enjoy a walk in the garden with pleasure and amusements.

The Tamil speaking Muslims celebrate this day as an unlucky day. Houses and household articles are washed thoroughly on the previous day. On the night of the previous day, some black gram, unboiled rice and a small quantity of oil (in a cup), a few paise of coins and eggs, one each for each male members of the house, are put in a plate and kept over the night. On the next day morning after bath, the plate is waved three times around the heads of the male members of the family and is given to the poor or some fakirs. Usually a cock is cut on this occasion cooked and fatheeha is offered. In the evening the ladies in particular go to the seashore or to gardens or groves and enjoy a pleasure time. The Marakkayar women preserve the garlands that were worn by the bridegroom and bride (if there had been a marriage in their house during the year) and take with them for being thrown into the sea on this occasion. But most of these practices have no sanction and these new customs seems to have been introduced by the womenfolk.

The twelth day of the month of Rabee -ool-awal, the day, the Prophet Mohamed departed this life is celebrated praising and eulogising the Prophet as contained in the Hadeesh. Food stuffs are prepared and distributed to all.
The Mira) or Mihura) night is considered to be an auspicious night which falls on the sixteenth day of the month of Rajab. On this night only, the Angel, Gabriel, conveyed his holiness the Prophet Mohamed to the Almighty, mounted on a booroq. Muslims regard it an important religious occasion and sit all the night in prayer and reading Quran and in dikir (verses in praise of God). (Booroq is a celestial animal like a mule with a human face, wings of a peacock with a speed of burg (lighting) hence named as Booroq). But the prayer connected with this celebration is known to the elite only. The Tamil Muslims observe this night faithfully by participating in special prayers.

Ramzan is an important festival to all the Muslims. It is known as ld-dhul-fitir and celebrated on the first day of the month Shawwal. 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 in a maidan (idhgah maidan) of the town. 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 - a fixed quantity of grain, or the cost of it - to the poor before the special prayer. It is intended the poor feel secure and happy. Almost all the Muslims distribute the zakath amount to the poor and needy prior to this festival, thus making the poor fellow beings to feel happy and hence it can be called as a social festival.

On the day of Ramzan celebration the Muslims take bath apply soorma (galena) to the eyebrows, 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 and it is waved round the heads of the male members and thrown in the street. Delicious foods are prepared, usually non-vegetarian. Friends and relatives are entertained with feast.

Baqr-eed or Eed-oool-Zoha is another important festival which is celebrated on the tenth day of the month Baqreed or Zilhujja. Pilgrimage to Mecca takes place during this season. During this festival the opulent among the Muslims offer quorbanee,
the sacrifice of goat or camel or cow in memory of the sacrifice of his son done by Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) at Mecca. The Muslims sacrifice as many number of goats or other animals according to their means. The poor are always exempted from such provisions and it is obligatory on those who can afford to it according to the norms as laid down in the Hadeesh. One portion of the flesh of the sacrified animal is taken by the sacrifice himself, the second is distributed to the poor and indignant, the third to the relatives and friends. During this festival also the poor are taken care of in that those who cannot afford to buy a piece of meat enjoy it through this alms giving. During this festival also the Muslims wear new clothes and celebrate it merrily. They congregate for a special prayer in the idgha maidan and share their joy with friends and relatives. Delicious foods are prepared and taken with family and friends.

Apart from the above Islamic festivals the households of Muslims wear a merry look during the Hindu festivals also. Muslim children crack crackers and light sparklers in their houses during Deepavali. The Muslims gladly accept and relish the Deepavali sweets offered by the Hindu neighbours. They cook pongal (sugarcandy) like the Hindus during Pongal, the universal harvest festival. The Muslim industrial and trade establishments also wear festive look along with that of the Hindus during Ayudha Pooja, of course the poojas are performed by their Hindu employees. Thus the influence of many of the Hindu festivities also have penetrated into the Tamil Islamic society.

DARGAH WORSHIP AND BELIEFS

Dargahs or Tykhas are the tomb shrines of Muslim holy men who are known as Wali, Aulia or Andavar (Lord). In the earlier phase these shrines served as a force in the expansion of Islam. Within these shrines the Muslim religious life is more flexible and accommodative rather than at the mosques. Further these shrines have moved between the high Islam and the supposedly humble folk traditions of Muslim masses.
The worship that takes place in these shrines tended to draw upon the local religious vocabulary and local style of verse, music etc., transmitting Muslim teaching in a form which can most easily transcend the frontal boundaries of the sect and community.

Many such cluster of dargahs are found along the coastal town of Coromandel as well as in the hinterland; among which the dargahs at PortoNovo, Nagore, Karaikal, Muthupet, Kilakkaral, Ervadi and Kayalpattanam are very sacred to the Muslims as well as the Hindus. Some of the earliest dargahs in places like PortoNovo, Kovalam and Kolachal are associated with the contemporaries and companions of Prophet Mohamed.

The dargahs are revered as a place of power, a repository of barakath (blessing) and boons and a source of miraculous cure and a resort of pilgrimage. The Awlia entombed in a particular shrine may be a learned man, a scholar, a teacher, a missionary, a polemicist, a poet or a Sufi, whose original teaching place became a place of devotion and pilgrimage after his death. It was believed that apart from being a learned holy man and the missionaries such saints were also great hakims (physicians) and masters in occult science and had powers to perform Karamath (miracles). The character of such saints attracted the masses.

Most of these dargahs are recent foundations. But the pirzadas (trustees) of the shrine claim a long antiquity and have created thirteenth or fourteenth century date of foundation, in order to link the shrines to one of the great founder figures of Sufism such as Jalaludin Rumi or Ibn Al Arabi. Most of the region's historical Sufis were from Deccan who fled to the Tamil region following the collapse of Deccani Sultanates. But all the tomb shrines in Coromandel coastal towns do not belong to such Sufis. Majority of them were Muslim saints of Tamil origin and they were literary laurates and missionaries.
Sufism or Tassawaf is Muslim mysticism. A Muslim mystic is called as Sufi. The Sufi spiritual leader is called Peer, in Persian. Such individuals belong to one of the Sufi order or Thariqua. Most of the Sufis of South India belong to Quadiria Tariqua, founded in Bagdad by the famous Sufi, Abdul Quadir Jilani in the twelfth century A.D. The essentials of the Sufism are self discipline, adoration of Lord, love in Supreme Beauty, virtue and intention. Their spiritual policy was peace with all. To the Muslims and Hindus they preached alike on equal terms. In the Tamil region Sufism is said to be a mixture of Arabic, Persian, and Indian mysticism. The teachings of the Sufis were akin to those of Tamil Siddhars (mystics) and many of the Muslim Sufis were included in the order of Tamil Siddhars, the mystics of Hinduism. In the Coromandel regions a large number of of Sufis were Tamil poets and they enriched the Tamil language and spiritual literature by their literary works. Peer Mohamed Aulia Sahib of Takkalai, Sadakkathullah Appa of Kilakkarai were the prominent Tamil Sufi poets who lived in the last quarter of the eighteenth century and in the beginning of nineteenth century. Mastan Sahib was the well known Sufi the Tamil poet among masses who was born in Tondi and buried in Madras and there are many more such Sufis. The tradition of Sufism continued in the Coromandel region and there are many more such Sufis. Their sayings and doings were responsible for the spread of Islam and its enlightenment. The tombs of such Sufis also came to be venerated by the masses along with that of other saintly persons.¹⁰⁰

According to Islamic tenets, the Muslims can venerate such saints and missionaries since they were seen and shown as dear to Allah. In that a Muslim can perform a ziarath (homage to the dead), in the shrine of the saint by reciting some verses from the Holy Quran (i.e. to plead with the Almighty to give an eternal, peaceful life to the saint). It is said that Prophet Mohamed himself has performed such ziaraths to his elders.¹⁰¹ But in due course of time the saints and Aulias came to be regarded as men of God and their birth and death anniversary came to be celebrated as Kanthoori and Urus.

The celebration of the annual festival to the Aulias (holy persons) was in practice among the Arabs of Middle ages. It was known as moulid (eulogy).
Such festivals were celebrated with pomp and show with song and music and story telling. The writings of Islamic scholars of the period condemn such practices since it was inconsistent with the spirit of Islam, vain, ignorant and erroneous, not ordered by Quran or tradition of the Prophet but invented by those Isrelites who worshipped the Golden Calf. Any how with all these varied opinions among the theologicians and scholars, the belief in saints and worship of their shrines is not peculiar to Indian Islam. In fact, this came ready made to India along with the Afghans, Persians and Arabs to which the Indian culture also added it's great share.

Almost all the celebrations in the Dargahs here are much in the Hindu fashion. The influence of Hinduism on Islam is an interesting subject for study in this connection. The Dravidian form of worship seems to have appealed to the Muslims of South India. The reason for this is that most of them are converts from Hindu Dravidian faith and such practices and worship (in Dargahs) well suited the heritage of the majority of the converted Muslims and naturally it was more Hinduised.

The urus festival was introduced in South India during the reign of Bhamini Sultan Ahamed Shah I (1422 - 36) but it was celebrated as the death anniversary of the king. In the course of time, it became a festival for the Muslim saints also and variously called as Kanthoori, Urus, Santhanakoodu festival (Sandal anointing festival) much in the fashion of the Guru Poojas to the Hindus savants. Kanthoori (Kanduri, kandri) is a Turkish word and appears for the first time in the Islamic Tamil literary work, Yakobu Siddar Padal of seventeenth century, where it is described as a festival to feed the poor on the birth or death anniversary of a saint. In Tamil region, in the later periods the celebrations were subjected to more Hindu influence. During the celebration a pot of sandal is carried to the Dargah in a decorated car in procession, with music and fire works, and people on the way pay respect to the sandal pot. This is much in the fashion of the ratham in which the Hindu deities are taken around the streets for the worship of the devotees.
At the close of the procession, the sandal pot is received with respect in the Dargah and the sandal is anointed to the tomb of the saint. This custom might have been introduced in the Dargah worship in Tamil region at a very late period\textsuperscript{107}.

The hagiology of Muslims in India is abundant and diversified which is probably due to the Hindu influence. As in all the hagiographic literatures we find not only the historical personages have been cannonised but legends have grown up around such names for which there are no authentic records. It is not always possible to decide whether a saint associated with a holy place had existed or not. The belief that the saints have not left any issues and the names given to them such as Sidi Mimum (My Lord of good luck) Sidi Bukarma (My Lord the master of fig tree) Sidi Burja (My Lord the master of hope), suggest their legendary origin. A very popular name for the dead saint is Sidi - i - Mahfi. (My Lord the hidden one or unknown). Sometimes it is said of a holy place, a saint is buried there, nobody knows his name. If questioned the popular version of the residents of the area is that a saint from Arabia is buried there. For instance the saint at Nagore is given many names, he is popularly known as Nagore Andavar (Lord at Nagore) not many know his name i.e. Shahul Hameed water. The fact that he left no issues also suggests a legendary origin\textsuperscript{108}. It is seldom possible to find any historical foundation for legends about the saints\textsuperscript{109}.

The local Hindu rulers liberally endowed the construction and maintainence of such Dargahs. Pratap Singh the Maratha ruler of Thanjavur had endowed fifteen villages to Nagore Dargah and took keen interest in its maintainence and administration\textsuperscript{110}. The Sethupathis of Ramanathapuram also endowed liberally the Dargahs at Rameswaram and Ervadi\textsuperscript{111}. The Dargahs in the Carnatic region received the maximum attentions of the Nawab of Arcot. International trade of the earlier times fostered such Dargahs along the coastal region. Ibn Batuta says that the agents of the shrines will meet the incoming vessels and collect the offerings which have been pledged by those on board for protection against storms, pirates, and other perils\textsuperscript{112}. Much the same system of organised pledges and chief collections seem to have operated along the South Indian coast during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Thus the process of community functioning was associated with the growth of international trade\textsuperscript{113}. 


The devotees, be it Marakkayars, Labbais, Rowthars or Deccanis without exception, flock to these dargah shrines like the bees to sip the sweet honey, where (it is believed that) mental and physical afflictions are soothed and healed and all supplications are met. They sing upon the saints, "You who are beloved of God and his Prophet, rid me of my disease, shower your grace upon me."\textsuperscript{114}

Dargahs attract both Muslims and Hindus who believe that the miraculous power of the Peer, entombed there will cure ailment of the mind and body including afflictions such as infertility and possession of malavalent demonic forces. Many of the Dargahs in Coromandel have become the assylum for psychiatric patients. It is interesting to note that the parallel between the Muslim saint cults and Hindu Goddesses traditions involves more than a superficial similarity between the healing function performed at the dargahs and Hindu Amman shrines.

The Thazkiras (hagiological texts and legends) on these shrines and dargahs are full of maimings and other acts of destruction wrought by the Aualis. As a protector the saint is portrayed as a figure of terror and destroyer of evils, like the blood taking Dravidian Tamil Goddesses. Susan Baily who has undertaken an indepth study on the aspects of Muslim saints of Coromandel argued that the association of certain animals and weapons, as described in the Thazkira literatures, are similar to the motifs found among the Saivaitic and Vaishnavaitic Gods, with the help of which they destroy the evil spirits and demons. For example, Baily suggests that the association of Natharwali, the famous Aulia entombed at Tiruchirapalli, with lion, is similar to that of the vehicle of the Goddess Durga. She adds that a common item of regalia to be found in dargahs is a wand made of peacock feathers bound at the base with some ornamental silver band. This is considered to be an emblem of power and kingship. The officient at the dargah administers a ceremonial knock on the head of the devotee who make offerings to the shrine. This is considered to be a spiritual way of submission to the Peer or Aulia. This connects the Muslim saint cult with the divine Lord Subramanya - Karthikeya - whose vehicle is peacock\textsuperscript{115}. 
(Though this is a good study to interlink the different cults, I am of the view that the use of peacock feather wand in dargahs can be similar to the Hindu practice, where the Poojaris in the temples of village Gods, use bunch of margosa leaf with which he strikes and waves on the face and head of the devotees to ward off evil spirits. To keep a permanent and honoured material in lieu of margosa leaf, the officiants in the dargahs might have invented the peacock feather wand. Further I have also seen that the learned Muslims officients in dargahs use margosa leaf instead of the peacock feather wand).

Muslims visit the dargahs during the Kanthoori festival and also on Thursdays and Sundays of the week. They offer fatheeha with flowers and incense and sweets and plead for the fulfilment of their desires. They offer money and various kinds of votive offerings such as miniature of a cradle in pursuit of a child, miniature models of the body in metal (usually tin, but at times silver and gold) such as leg, hand, eye, nose, ear, abdomen etc., to get cure of the ailments in those parts. Children are brought to the dargahs and tonsured ceremoniously. Almost all the devotees vow to contribute their mite and visit again the shrine if their desires are met. Some vow to tonsure. Some conduct grand feast to the poor in the dargah premises. Psychiatric patients are taken to the dargahs for cure. Some dargahs like Ervadi, Kayalpattanam, Nagore and Papavoor (near Nagore) are considered more fruitful than the mental clinics and psychiatric patients are made to stay months together to get cure of their mental afflictions. Both the Muslims and Hindus have strong faiths in the cure of the psychiatric patients in dargahs. After the harvest many of the farmers offer some grain to the dargah. The first yield of a coconut or fruit bearing trees are offered to the saint. Pegions are offered when one recovers after a struggle for life. Thus the list of offerings runs to a great length. The water of the tank in the dargahs is considered holy like that of a temple tank. Generally, dried rose petals and sweets are distributed to the devotees in the dargahs. But in some dargahs sacred ash blessed with verses of Quran is also distributed. Though the Muslims do not wear the sacred ash in the forehead, they receive it with reverence and sprinkle on the head and take it home for being kept there.
Knotted black threads blessed with holy verses are distributed to the devotees on payment. Such threads are worn on the different parts of the body such as neck, arm, ankle etc., both by men and women, to get away from evil spirits.

Though all these practices are unislamic still they are widely in practice. Most of these customs are followed by the Hindu devotees also who visit the dargahs. The Hindus also have a strong faith in the barakath and power of the Muslim saints and in fact in some dargahs like Nagore the Hindus out number Muslims. Thus the dargahs serve as the symbol of peaceful co-existence of masses irrespective of religious faith and as a symbol of National Integration. The time honoured religious customs and practices of the region, thus, have crept into the Muslim society due to the Hindu cultural contacts. Though Islam and Hinduism cannot go together in the basic ideologies of monotheism and universal brotherhood they identify closely in the matter of rituals and ceremonies. Thus we find a total cultural synthesis in the dargah worship.

The details of Kanthoori festival differ from place to place. Generally the festival lasts for ten to twelve days. In the Nagore dargah of Shahul Hameed Aulia, it lasts for twelve days. The festival starts with flag hoisting. Special ceremonies takes place at night times everyday. On the tenth day a sandal pot is carried to the dargah in a decorated chariot in procession from Nagapattanam with music and amusements. Devotees both Muslims and Hindu throng the route of the procession and pay homage to the sandal chariot, when the chariot reaches the dargah at Nagore, the sandal is received with reverence and anointed to the tomb. There will be scramble to receive a bit of this sandal paste. Sweets are distributed to the devotees. By the begining of eighteenth century the leading role in the sandal anointment rituals of many great shrines were shared between elite Muslim Pirzada lineage and representatives of important local Hindu caste group and communities.
Dargah 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 dargahs. (Muslim women pray for five times in their house itself. In some places like Kilakkarai and Kayalpattanam though there are separate enclosures for women in the premises of the mosques, they seldom visit such mosques on ordinary days, but may congregate on festival occasions.) A Muslim woman who comes to know about the blessings said to have been showered on her Hindu sister because of her worship and pleadings in the shrines of Gods and Goddesses, naturally she wants a similar soothing place where she can plead, for the betterment and welfare of her family and relatives. She copies such practices and votive offerings of the Hindu shrines in the dargah when she visits there. Thus, to the Muslim women, a dargah is a place to ventilate their emotions and stress of mind since they conceive it as a power centre. Hence Muslim women very often visit dargahs than the men and they are more pious in this respect.

The orthodox Muslims claim that what is accorded to a saint is not a worship, as per Quran and Sunna. This is understandable to the elite but the majority of the Muslims regard the Aulias as being the proper objects of worship and in himself they feel the source of blessings. It naturally comes into conflict with the fundamental concept of the unity of God in Islam and leads to the association of other objects with Him in worship. The effect of Wali cult has fostered superstitions and beliefs in magic among the ignorant classes. The cult of local saints can often be shown to be the survival of an earlier faith which has passed on into Islam under another guise. Thus there exists a compromise between Islam and Hinduism. The propitiation of disease godlings, worship of patron saints and local deities, veneration of relics, preachings of black art, divination of the future, are more attractive to the rural Muslim population. The festivals in the dargahs and pilgrimage to these shrines have become a recreation for the people. Any interference with the festivals connected with the saints and shrines or their abolition creates outbursts. The attempt to check saint worship has been a failure nor will it even succeed as long as Islam continues to be what it has been for nine hundred years past and a collective sentiment is demonstrated in this respect.
The Marakkayars, Labbais and Rowthars are monolinguals. Tamil is their mother tongue. They are trained to read and write Arabic. They think, speak and write in chaste Tamil. But in the spoken dialect and kinship terms among the Marakkayars we can find an admixture of Arabic words. This helps for their individual identity. From the earlier times the Tamil Muslims also wrote Tamil in Arabic script and this new language was known as Arabic-Tamil. Europeans like Portuguese, Dutch, Danes set up colonies mostly in the coastal towns and the Coromandel Muslims had opportunity to move with them directly and some of the words of their language are exclusively in use among the Marakkayars and Labbais in the coastal towns.

Muslims all over the world have inherited Islam along with it's language, Arabic. The religious terms and theological phrases of Islam are indispensable for every Muslim for the proper performance of his religious duties which are interwoven with his day today life. It is difficult to translate the Arabic terminologies into an indigenous language. This resulted in the absorption of the indispensable Arabic words into the indigenous languages and such words came to be written in Arabic script.

With the advent of Islam in peninsular India, a parallel development took place in the region. The contact of Islam with the language of the region had changed the character of the languages by imposing Arabic script on them adding new dimensions to them. This resulted in the growth of Arabic-Telegu, Arabic-Malayalam and Arabic Tamil, by which the Muslims used to write the respective language dialects in Arabic script.

Arabic is considered to be a sacred language to the Muslims. They are familiar with the Holy Quran and as a result they are acquainted with Arabic script. This makes them to read easily any thing in Arabic script. Scholars and missionaries who wanted to communicate with the local Muslims of the average standard found it easy to express the ideas in the indigenous languages. Even those who are not competent enough to read their
indigenous languages can understand if anything is expressed in the indigenous language written in Arabic script. Thus the use of Arabic script to write the indigenous language helped both the scholars who wanted to convey the ideas and the people for whom these ideas were meant. In the Coromandel region, thus grew, the Arabic Tamil.

The origin of Arabic Tamil goes beyond eighth century A.D. and it fills the vacuum found in the literary history of Tamil speaking Muslims. The Arabs who stayed in the coastal region consorting with native women and learnt to speak Tamil, might have started to write Tamil in Arabic character for the purpose of their trade and accounting. This helped the local merchants to communicate with their Arab counterparts.

Though Tamil was the mother tongue of the converts to Islam, most of them from the middle and lower strata of the society, were illiterates. To them anything written in Arabic script was sacred. Because of their practice to read the Holy Quran they could understand Tamil in Arabic script. Thus they were able to understand the Islamic theology written in Arabic script. Islamic Tamil literatures at the earlier stage were also written in Arabic Tamil. Tamil had its own script and Arabic Tamil did not replace it, but existed side by side. Whenever the Arabic letters were inadequate to express in Tamil, new letters and consonants were devised to enrich the Arabic Tamil writings. Thus a person who is familiar with the reading of the Holy Quran and at the same time understand Tamil will be able to understand the themes of Islamic Tamil literatures written in Arabic Tamil.

Many of the Islamic Tamil works now in Tamil script might have been in Arabic Tamil. Later on when necessity arose, they were originally produced in Tamil itself. A large number of literary master pieces on Islamic themes, commentaries on Holy Quran, dictionaries, poetry, prose works on Islamic mysticism can be seen in Arab Tamil character even to this day.
In Arabic language the term Arvi (Lisenul Arvi or liscenul Arvi) is used to indicate Tamil language. In Tamil the Arabic Tamil was also called as Muslim Tamil and in Ceylon Sonakar Tamil. Arabic Tamil was used even in correspondence among the Muslims of Coromandel and Ceylon. There were occasions when people printed invitations in Arabic Tamil. Further, it was familiar to Muslim women who were virtually lacking the writing knowledge in Tamil. From linguistic point of view, it may appear to be a different dialect coming out of the mixture of Arabic and Tamil but not a separate language. It was only a language of script. Only those who can read Arabic can read Arabic Tamil. Some of the scholars are of the view that like Sanskrit to the Hindus, Latin to Christians, Arabic Tamil was the language of the Muslim elites and was not a popular one. The Arabic Tamil began to decline by the end of the nineteenth century.\(^\text{121}\)

The Muslims along the coastal region speak chaste Tamil even to this day. Original and antique Tamil words, unmutilated are in use among them in day today life. Tamil is the language in every sphere of their life. Thus the Tamil Muslims live as Tamils in the main stream, like any other religious groups of people of Tamil region.

The kinship terms of the Marakkayars are peculiar of it’s kind and not prevalent among other sects of Muslims. This may be due to the Arab ethnological connections. A few terms that are in use in the Coastal region will go to show this fact.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kinship term</th>
<th>Marakkayar</th>
<th>Labbai</th>
<th>Rowthar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Vappa</td>
<td>Atha</td>
<td>Atha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>Umma</td>
<td>Amma</td>
<td>Amma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s father</td>
<td>Vappappa</td>
<td>Appa</td>
<td>Appa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s mother</td>
<td>Vappamma</td>
<td>Athamma</td>
<td>Athamma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s father</td>
<td>Kannuvappa</td>
<td>Appa</td>
<td>Appa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother’s mother</td>
<td>Kannamma</td>
<td>Nannima</td>
<td>Nannima</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
It will be seen that the kinship terms of Labbais and Rawthars are in Tamil form of kinship terms\textsuperscript{122}.

Due to the constant contact of the Muslims with Westerners like Portuguese and Dutch, a number of voccables of their respective language came into use among the coastal Muslims and a few such voccables are exclusively still in use among the coastal Muslims, (apart from many other words which are common to all).

### PORTUGUESE VOCABLES\textsuperscript{123}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Local usage</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen</td>
<td>Kusini</td>
<td>Cozinha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lantern</td>
<td>Lanthar</td>
<td>Lanterna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saucer (Porcelin)</td>
<td>Peers</td>
<td>Pires</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Room</td>
<td>Kamara</td>
<td>Camara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A hand spike</td>
<td>Alavanku</td>
<td>Alavanca</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hand kerchief</td>
<td>Lenchi</td>
<td>Leno</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flat dish</td>
<td>Pingan</td>
<td>Palangana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shirt</td>
<td>Kamis</td>
<td>Camisa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A small basin</td>
<td>Koppal</td>
<td>Copa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### DUTCH VOCABLES\textsuperscript{124}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Local usage</th>
<th>Portuguese</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A sauce</td>
<td>Sambal</td>
<td>Sambli</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Detailed linguistic study on the Coromandel Muslim society may yield many more interesting materials.
**Literature** is the mirror of the society of its creation. It narrates the higher ideas of the people who inherit it. It promotes arts and culture. All the leading religions of the world have contributed to enrich the Tamil literature, on this the contribution of the Muslims is by no means small.

Islamic Tamil literatures are literary works in Tamil on the Islamic themes. In Islamic Tamil literature, Arabic and Persian words are freely used to express the Islamic ideologies. Many a literary masterpieces have adorned the Islamic literature since of yore.

Epics and minor epics many in number were produced right from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, by Muslim poets in Tamil and as well as in Arabic Tamil. Many of the Tamil Muslim poets were Sufi mystics. All the grammatical and literary forms of Tamil were experimented in these works. Some new literary forms were also innovated and introduced into Tamil literature, like, Padaippor, Munajath, Machala which have no parallel in other non Muslim forms of literary works. Minor classical literary forms like Arruppadai, Anthathi, Pillaitamil, Kalampakam, Sathakam etc., were also produced on Islamic themes. The life of Prophet, progress of Islam etc., are Arabian in conception yet they are Tamilised in these literary works to make the Tamils to identify themselves closely with them. Holy Quran and books on Islamic jurisprudence were translated into Tamil. Altogether more than 2000 literary works have been identified which emerged during the period of our study. The mystic poems of Mastan Sahib, Peer Appa, Habeeb Arasar and other Sufi poets have accelerated the fusion and culturisation of the Muslims and Hindus.

The Muslim philanthropists encouraged and patronised poets to produce fine literary works in Tamil as we find in these works. Right from sixteenth century, Kilakkarai, Kayalpattanam, and Nagore, were important Islamic Tamil literary centres. The Kilakkarai maritime magnate Periathambi Marakkayar’s philanthropy was a boon to Islamic literature. It is said that he was responsible for the production of many literary works including the celebrated Seerapuranam of Umaru Pulavar. (But it is strange that his name is not at all mentioned in the poems of Seerapuranam, instead the name of one Mohamed Kasim Marakkayar is portrayed as the donor patron of the poet Umaru It is possible that the work commence with the patronage of Seethakkathi, might have continued by Mohamed Kasim Marakkayar and he may be close friend or relative of the farmer). Many more maritime trading Marakkayars were instrumental for the production of a number of Islamic Tamil literary works. Thus the Muslim Tamils loved and patronised Tamil language and their contribution to the progress and richness of Tamil literature has honoured place in the linguistic history of the Tamil society.
Muslims have enriched the vocabulary of Tamil language by adding Arabic, Persian and Urdu words. These borrowed words, about 5000, have been mixed inextricably with Tamil language and are in usage in day to day life. These borrowed words are cultural indices and indicates intense interaction that has taken place between the two religions in this land.

The Muslims introduced the Unani system of medicine, (medicinal system of Arabs), into Coromandel region. The men who practised it, called Hakims, even attracted masses towards Islam. The influence of Islamic music is responsible for the introduction of two ragas (musical notes) namely, Arabi and Hussaini, in Carnatic music.

Islam also short a fresh woof into the warf of Indian architecture. Islamic architecture was introduced in North India, in the twelfth century by the early Muslim conquerors. Islamic architecture in all it’s true form was introduced in the Coromandel region only in the later part of seventeenth century, though the process of Islamisation started very early. The indigenous Tamil building style is called "Dravidian style". The Muslims of Coromandel coats adopted this style in the construction of their worshipping place, the mosque, the best example of which can be seen in Kilakkarai and Kayalpattanam. When Islamic architecture was introduced in South India the Hindus also adapted the style in their buildings, and thus a new style emerged. "The Indo - Islamic architecture". When Islamic architecture gained access in Coromandel region the Dravidian style mingled freely with it and the Coromandel muslims thus innovated yet another new style "Indo - Dravidian - Islamic architecture".

The macro level study of the social customs and practices of the Muslims demonstrate that the time honoured customs are handed down from generation to generation. However, a detailed examination of the social customs of the Muslims of the Coromandel region will yield very interesting materials for the sociological reserarch and study. In view of our limitations of the subject, a macro level study is attempted here which will attract the attention of the scholars.
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