CHAPTER IV

FESTIVALS AND FAIRS AND ROLE OF DARGAHS IN FOSTERING COMMUNAL HARMONY

The festivals or celebrations like rituals in dargahs are pertained to remember the life, death or the existence of the abodes of Sufis who preached the gospel of Islam with remarkable devotion establishing various orders under challenging circumstances. The Sufis of Tamil Nadu were not the founders of their own orders but the followers of the orders founded in Middle East and yet, the rituals and customary practices performed in their shrines were evolved as local traditions. The ceremonies at the shrines were started only after the tomb structures were raised over the grave and since then it attracted a large number of devotees including the local kings and prominent saints of various orders. There came khadims or mujawirs as priestly attendants to look after and guide the rituals on ordinary days, the pirzade took over the responsibility of annual festivals like Urs along with the khadims.

It appears that the khadims laid down certain rules and regulations based on Sufi tradition and custom, to maintain discipline and orderliness among visitors, particularly during the performance of the annual ceremonies. This unwritten code of behaviour prescribed for devotees in the beginning was concerned with the manner and style of performing rites, making prayers and reciting the fatiha within the tombs of the saints. Later under the pervasive influence of local cultures and tastes a new system of ceremonial rules and practices was established which assumed the definite form and pattern of a well-organized institution, linked administratively and financially with the local funds and necessities.\textsuperscript{164} The various customs and ceremonies that developed under

the patronage and control of the Muslims most of whom were the new comers to Islam either from the neighbouring regions or newly enrolled ones generated an atmosphere of mutual understanding among different sections of society and gave stimulus to the growth of cultural affinity and a spirit of cordiality between Hindus and Muslims of Tamil Nadu. The system of *kalid baridar*, the key keeping of the shrine, opening in the evening and closing at night the main shrine in all the *dargahs* and also opening in the morning in some *dargahs* is based on the arrangement of Muslim rule. The setting of the *qawwali*, the musical concert during the *urs* days, the use of *dal badat*, special tent over the heads of dignitaries, the services of *mashalchis*, the torch bearers; *chobdars*, the macebearers, was directly borrowed from the court etiquette of the Muslim rule, perhaps an influence of the Madurai Sultanate or from an imported group of the North India. The frequent use of the terms in the daily working of the shrines namely *toshak khana*, the store room; *nima*, the inner cloth sheet; *ghulam gardish*, the covered passage for attendants, *chanwar* and *farrashas*, the cleaners and sweepers made of the peacock feathers and *bangla*, the typing of floral net around *mazar*, the grave, indicate how deep rooted was the Muslim rule which extended the Persian and Urdu cultural influence in the daily affairs of the *dargahs*. The system of cooking food in a big *deg*, the cauldron was first introduced by the Mughal Emperor, Akbar and since then, the customs of preparing a large quantity of food of different kinds cooked at night and is distributed among the people after the *isha*, the night prayer or *fajar*, the morning prayer was allowed in the *dargahs* of North India but slowly it passed on to the *dargahs* of Tamil Nadu with a name *Kanthuri*.

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166 The proper name of this misspelled word is "Konthri" in Urdu.
Undoubtedly the Khadims, who are attached to dargahs since their inception played a key role in the smooth functioning and in keeping strict discipline in the performance of these rituals and ceremonies. But they often invite the ill will and wrath of pilgrims and officials. But their genuine concern and enforcement of established customs and rituals showing strict adherence to the humanitarian approach of the saint was always upheld by the authorities. Even till now the approval and consent of the khadims was considered necessary whenever an event, special or ordinary, and a celebration takes place in a shrine. The khadims are regularly or alternatively are assigned themselves for serving at the tomb for collecting shares or full of nazars, the offerings made by the pilgrims. It is a known fact that the khadims are the backbone of these traditional practices and customs in the shrines.

The customs and practices observed in the dargahs are daily, weekly, monthly and annual. Rituals which are regularly performed on ordinary days either fixed or not and can be changed according to convenience are weekly and monthly and those which are exclusively performed on the death day of the saint are called the "urs" ceremony. The functions during the "urs" are entirely different from other three categories.

**Daily, Weekly and Monthly Rituals**

The daily events that take place in a dargah can be called Khidmat, the routine service done in the main tomb and it includes opening and closing, lighting, visitors' prayers etc. In some of the Tamil Nadu dargahs, the main shrine is opened a little after dawn or at about 9 a.m. and closed at noon but the doors of main shrines in all the dargahs are opened between 4 p.m. and 5 p.m. When the door is to be opened, the key keeper unlocks it which is generally made of metal and rarely wood.
One of the elderly *khadims* performs *fatiha* outside the main door before opening and enters the shrine and re-closes the door from inside so that the cleaning work may not be seen by any other from outside. The elderly *khadim* obviously allowed by the *baridar* moves closer to the inner shrine, softly removes the well-knitted floral garland called *sej* from the *mazar*, the grave and puts it in a basket. Removing the cloth sheet from the grave he cleans it. Then he starts sweeping flowers from both sides towards the food-end of the grave, where some of the waiting persons collect these flowers in baskets and carry them out into a courtyard to be assembled there. From there, other *khadims* or persons assigned to it take these flowers and distribute them among the pilgrims and devotees. In between the sweeping of flowers from the tomb, some of the *khadims* standing outside the inner shrine assisted by the long handle *chanwars*, thoroughly clean the tomb from all sides, leaving nothing on the lower circle. Then, led by the same *khadim*, they all recite *fatiha*, pray and invoke the blessings of God in the name of the saint and place the cloth sheet in the usual manner. Then they put upon it a fresh floral *sej* and sprinkle perfumes and when this service of cleaning and making afresh the inner room is over, the door is opened. During the course of this work no one except the *khadims* or the persons on assignment is allowed to enter the tomb room.  

In *dargahs*, where the main shrine is opened two times morning and evening, the door is opened again for the evening *khidmat* at about 4 p.m. and the whole process done in the morning is repeated. It is on this occasion that some male pilgrims are allowed to observe the performance of service outside the main shrine as silent spectators. The upper part of the grave is pasted with sandalwood powder and if needed, the cloth sheet of the grave is changed. The change in the duty of *baridar*

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167 Personal visit to the select Dargahs on 11.02.2007, 18.02.2007 and 25.02.2007.
in some of the *dargahs* for next twenty four hours also takes place after this *khidmat*. The whole process ends in half an hour and in *dargahs* where it is opened in evening only, the *khidmat* at about 4 p.m. only is done. In the period between the two services pilgrims gather inside the tomb to pay homage to the saint, pray and recite the *fatiha* and offer flowers and cloth sheet. They are generally guided in their rituals by *khadims* who also recite *fatiha*, pray for them and place a portion of the cloth sheet on the head of the visitors and extend a helping hand in the offering of flowers. Not all the visitors give cash offering called *nazar* to the *khadims* for their guidance nor every *khadim* insists on such payment. However, some of the *khadims* sit at the doorstep of the tomb only in the hope of the getting cash offering from the devotees.168

One of the daily rituals is *roshni* which means light and refers to the ceremony of illuminating the main inner chamber of the tomb at dusk. It is one of the oldest ceremonies and it is held daily in the evening after the evening prayer. A plate containing sweet scented sticks and small round pieces of aloe wood called *ud* is brought and placed by a *khadim* in the middle or at the side of the tomb. Other *khadims* who sit outside the tomb, light the incense sticks to begin the *fatiha* and in some *dargahs* they start the drum beating a few steps away from this place. On their way to the shrine they are received by the pilgrims standing in rows hoping to have the events to be done along with them. In the shrine, visiting people gather and all male pilgrims being allowed to attend it. As the general illumination inside the tomb begins, the *Roshni* ceremony comes to an end.

*Karka* is the ceremony which is connected with the closing of the door of the shrine for the night. It takes place generally between 9 and 10

p.m. Except the inner part of the shrine, the whole tomb is cleaned by *khadims* with *chanwars* obviously permitted by the *baridar* and followed by each other with an interval of a few minutes. Pilgrims are not permitted to enter the shrine but are allowed to stand outside the tomb in rows, giving way to the *khadims* who come out from the tomb one by one at short intervals. They carry the *chanwars* in their hands and touch them over the heads of the devotees whilst moving towards outside. After the *khadims* are engaged in cleaning the floor surrounding the four sides of the main shrine, the door of the shrine is closed, people perform the last minute rites and the ceremony comes to an end.\(^{169}\) It is not a custom in the *dargahs* of Tamil Nadu to prepare langar, free meal, as done in the popular *dargahs* in the North as a mark of opening and closing of the shrine everyday. With regard to the main daily rituals, the *khadims* are in charge and it is rare that outsider has the right to join them in their hereditary and independent status to perform the daily ritual.\(^{170}\)

The symbiotic relationship between a devotee and a shrine is maintained through regular rituals confirming their mutual dependence. Rituals are the practical and regular reaffirmations of the relationship between devotee and shrine. These rituals may be performed daily but are considered more efficacious if held on Thursday and Friday.\(^{171}\)

In every *dargah*, weekly and monthly functions get a special significance. On the night that falls between Thursday and Friday a special *mahfil* which means gathering is arranged near the tomb or outside it. A small flat cushion is placed for the officers like *mutawalli*.


\(^{170}\) Personal visit to the *dargahs* in Tamil Nadu on 11.02.2007, 18.02.2007 and 25.02.2007.

the superintendent of the *dargah* and the *khadims*, while for the general public a sheet of cloth or mat is spread. The function starts and ends with the recitation of the *faliha* and this is followed by the distribution of *dalis*, small sweet balls, first among the *khadims* and officials and then the general public. The *qawwals*, the religious singing, then start with devotional songs mainly in praise of the saint buried there and continue till the doors of the shrine are closed for the night. During the holy month of *Ramzan* the audition generally remains suspended and only the recitation of *fatiha* is observed on these nights. Besides these, a number of other celebrations and death anniversaries of great saints are observed throughout the year. The mourning of Ashura on 10 Muharram according to Islamic calendar, the celebrations of Milad ud Nabi on 12 Rabi ul awwal, the death anniversary of world renowned *Sufi* saint, Abdul Qadir Jeelani on 13 Rabi ul akhir, Shab e Mihraj on 27 Rajab, Shab e Bharath on 15 Shabaan, Id ul Fitr on 1 Shawwal and Id ul Zuha on 10 Dhul Haj are noteworthy to be observed in every shrine. Observation of *fatiha* and praiseworthy songs continuously for twelve days in the name of the Prophet for his birthday called Milad ud Nabi and eleven days in the name of Abdul Qadir Jeelani for his death day called Gyarveen are specially significant. Thus during the whole year one kind of ceremony or the other takes place in the *dargahs* and the religious activities and rituals are carried on in a manner which in one way, tend to overshadow the true spirit which underlies the philosophy and thoughts of the buried saints. At the same time these activities keep the pilgrims busy in devotional activities and in one sense keep the people to make alive the Sufi spirit and their ideals.

**Ceremonial functions during Urs**

*Dargahs* contain *mazar*, the tombs of some Sufi saints where people gather specifically on Thursdays and pay reverence to the departed
pir. More than eighty per cent Muslim population of Tamil Nadu follows this Sufistic movement, going to local dargahs and treat them as pilgrimage centres to attend the annual "urs". This is happening since medieval times. Dargah veneration became more and more popular with the Muslims in Tamil Nadu because of gathering in mass number on the day of death of the saint which is celebrated as "urs". The festival of urs is held in dargahs with different events and the beginning of the festival starts ten days or three days before the day of death and in some dargahs only one day event - the anniversary day of saint's death is happened.172

On the evening of the fixed day and month when the saint died, the festival of urs, remembrance of death anniversary is held with reverence and devotion. A few days, for instance, ten days, before the start of the urs, the nishan janta, the flag hoisting is held. People generally in new clothes gather in the courtyard on the festival day. Also on the same day, qalandars and faqirs arrive from other dargahs to offer homage to the shrine. Drums are beaten to herald the commencement of the annual ceremony. The permanent troupe of qawwals arrive and after the sunset prayers they sit in front of the shrine and repeatedly sing in praise of the saint. From the first day the entire schedule of opening and closing the tomb undergoes a change. During the festival days following that date, the tomb is cleaned and washed twice a day. The name of this cleaning ceremony is ghusl, the bath of the grave. The first washing is generally performed after morning prayer and only khadims participate in it. They first sweep the flowers from around the tomb in the same manner as is done every day and then wash the mazar with perfumed water. The essence of flowers is sprinkled on the grave and inside the shrine. Afterwards, the khadims recite the fatiha and prayers

172 Personal visit to specific dargahs in Tamil Nadu on 11.02.2007, 18.02.2007 and 25.02.2007.
of petition and then open the doors to the public. The second ghusl takes place after 4 p.m. attended by the khadims or specially nominated persons. During the festival days, the main shrine is not closed from morning to late 11 p.m. in order to enable pilgrims to visit the shrine during the whole day.\textsuperscript{173}

The second feature of the annual ceremony is the audition gatherings which are continuously held all these days in the particular place at the courtyard. Spiritual and devotional songs create an atmosphere of love and respect towards the dead saint. The sitting arrangement, the protocol observed in these mahfils, the mode of giving cash to the qawwals and the rules and discipline of such gatherings are some of the characteristic features of the audition held daily. This betrays the impact of Muslim court etiquette. The pirzade dressed Mughal fashion introduced by the Muslim rulers of their invasions represent in fact the Mughal king rather than a religious dignitary and come escorted by the khadims who too wearing Mughal costumes but these fashionable Muslim customs are seen only in a few dargahs like the Nagore shrine. A few mace bearers remain standing by the side of the main pirzada, khadin or the main person who leads the urs to maintain discipline in the gathering and perform other petty jobs. The party of singers attached to the shrine is from time immemorial, allowed first to perform its art. Devotees may be seen reciting the Quran, performing personal requests, praying and listening to the religious songs. One of the features of urs is the unending stream of visitors gathering from different parts of Tamil Nadu. These crowds come to pay homage each with garlands, a bunch of flowers, a cloth sheet or some other expensive offering. Several get their heads shaved or offered themselves

\textsuperscript{173} Personal visit to the specific Dargahs in Tamil Nadu on 11.02.2007, 18.02.2007 and 25.02.2007.
in eatable items like sugar, ghee or fruits. Throughout these days of urs, the evening illumination takes place all over dargah premises with the same elaborate code of rituals as is carried out inside the shrine. Every morning and night the food is prepared and cooked by a particular group of devotees and served to the poor. The cost of the food and cooking is met by anyone who expects by this means to approach spiritual salvation. Heads of different dargahs called sajjadah nashins and spiritual mentors of various mystical orders also gather on this occasion accompanied by their followers in order to receive the blessings of the saints and to attract people to their own circle. Professional beggars from other places come to the dargahs. They too crowd the streets around the dargahs. The khadims remain extremely busy not only in performing rituals and guiding pilgrims to the shrine but also in taking care of the board and lodging of devotees at various places. The Friday prayer is the other important gathering during these days. On that day the whole dargah precincts seem to bow in reverence to the greatness of God.¹⁷⁴

On the night which falls on the day of death of the Sufi, the celebration attains its peak of excitement and exultation. The sacred precincts of the dargah are crowded with thousands of people in popular shrines, all occupied with performing rites, reciting the Quran and listening to qawwalis arranged by the dargah officials. This day at about 9 p.m. when the final arrangements are prepared inside the main shrine pilgrims are not permitted to enter it. The khadims dressed in their best clothes approach the shrine carrying flowers, flower essence and sweets. After laying dastars, the turbans on their heads, they start to perform the rituals as a tradition. After reciting of shajara, the spiritual pedigree of the saint, by the khadim and other eulogizing verses, they announce their allegiance to the saint and humbly ask for the gift to repent of their

¹⁷⁴ Christian W.Troll (Ed.), *op.cit.*, p.73.
sins. They pray for all the pilgrims and for peace and prosperity of mankind and remain engaged in the recitation of verses of Qur'an till the start of the procession with Chandankkoodu, a pot of sandalwood paste. The sandalwood pot or even the procession is not taken out in some of the dargahs in Tamil Nadu since it is not permitted according to Islamic principles. The procession starts at midnight and ends at about 4 a.m. with the sprinkling of sandalwood water on the graves. Then the khadims first visit their respective places within the shrine premises where they bless the waiting pilgrims before proceeding to their homes and offer fatiha over the food prepared for distribution among the devotees and the poor. After the end of the urs, the pilgrims start leaving the dargah and the khadims supply them tabarruk, some eatables from the dargah, flowers and even threads.

These rituals and rites during the urs are not laid down in the written annals of the shrines in Tamil Nadu but form an essential part of the reality of the shrines. They are carried out unconditionally and without alterations. Some of the rituals may be traced to the period of the early non Muslims while others were introduced by the Muslim rulers. However a few of them reflect local traditions and cultural influences. The significance of the annual urs is that when it is celebrated, the visitors come in crowds from far and near to his tomb and reaching there, they perform more devotions than they do for obligatory rituals. To solve their worldly problems, they address their supplications to the tombs, they pray to the saint in his tomb to ask for children and food, they offer costly veils for the tomb, sprinkle perfume on it, burn incense thinking it meritorious to adorn the tomb, light lamps and they think that with this superfluous expenditure they will please the saint who lies in his tomb and will reach his proximity. The tomb visitors kiss it and

\[175\] Ibid., p.75.
circumambulate them reciting vocal or silent dhikr, they make vows to them and sacrifice animals in their names. They consider the water available in bottles inside the main shrine to drink as a benediction. The visitors think that it is better to worship in the mosque attached to the dargah. The coming of pilgrims in procession with standards, musicians, fairs, recitation of canonical prayers at the tomb and taking away parts of the offerings as relics are considered to be significant among the devotees.\textsuperscript{176}

Niyaz in Dargahs

The ritual performed any day in the dargahs totally depends upon niyaz which means an offering, desire or supplication. It is made by the pilgrims on any day - daily or on the day of urs but generally it is a specific wish of the people to make it whenever they visit the abodes of the saints. It can be a humble prayer or humble request to the saint who should take it to God and get fulfilled with God's wishes. Niyaz can refer both to the ritual as well as to the food associated with it. The niyaz is a simple situation in which verses of the Quran are recited and a supplication is made to God that the merit which accrues from reading these verses be shared with the person in whose name the niyaz is being done. The ritual builds on the idea that the merit from reading the Quran can be transferred or shared with the dead. It is therefore typically done on the occasion of a death anniversary most often of a wali - a saint from the Sufi tradition. The merit is shared with the Prophet whose name is significantly remembered, the wali, such as Abdul Qadir Jeelani, the most popular Sufi saint, all pious Muslims and finally one or more specific for whom the ritual is being done.\textsuperscript{177}

\textsuperscript{176} Ibid., p.211. \\
\textsuperscript{177} Nadeem Hasnain, \textit{Islam and Muslim Communities in South Asia}, Serials Publications, New Delhi, 2006, p.117.
The procedure for performing the *niyaz* is the same whatever the purpose for which it is undertaken. Since the ritual is connected with the dead some incense is always burnt since it has a good perfume and is supposed to be pleasing to the dead. The person doing the *niyaz* keeps some water and some food, usually something sweet while reciting the *Quran*. By association with the recitation of the *Quran* the food is considered to be sacred and is shared with the members of the household or even those who are present and it may even be sent to relatives and friends. This sacred food *niyaz* is subjected to some prohibitions and prescriptions particularly in *dargahs* where it is done before the tomb of the saint. It is always treated with care and always kept away from anything that is polluting. For instance menstruating women do not eat *niyaz* and it is never simply thrown away. Whoever eats *niyaz* is considered fortunate since *niyaz* is associated with *barakat*, the blessing. Since it is not textually prescribed ritual, there are no stated recommendations or prohibitions regarding the foods that can be used for *niyaz*. By convention, people did a *niyaz* with something sweet or something made of milk which can be easily distributed with the visitors in *dargah* or in houses. Usually no meat or vegetable is used but it could be used during *kanthuri* dinners and that too not near the tombs.

The *niyaz* is performed on a number of calendrical occasions. Among the Muslims who pay homage to *dargahs* in Tamil Nadu doing a *niyaz* is a regular and important activity. Different women or families followed different cycles of *niyaz*. Practically every month is associated with a *niyaz*. In the first Islamic month of the year, Muharram *niyaz* is done for the grandson of the Prophet who was martyred at *karbala* followed by the birth day of the Prophet, death anniversary of Abdul Qadir Jeelani, remembrance of Imam Jafar Sadiq and remembrance of deceased kins during the months of Rabi ul awwal, Rabi ul akhir, Rajab
and Shaban respectively.\textsuperscript{178} The \textit{niyaz} for \textit{wali} specifically Abdul Qadir Jeelani is involved with special additional features. His \textit{niyaz} for eleven days is done with the recitation of the \textit{Quran} eleven times and some visitors put aside eleven coins every day so that they would earn money throughout the year. \textit{Niyaz} is partly a commemorative ritual for it is done on death anniversary of a holy person as a means of remembering him and sending him merit. However, a major idea expressed regarding the \textit{niyaz} was that doing \textit{niyaz} regularly helped to maintain a state of well being in the household. Sometimes \textit{niyaz} is done as a domestic ritual by an individual to commemorate the saint. The \textit{dargah} visitors prefer Thursdays to do this \textit{niyaz} ritual as days of auspices.

Apart from these occasions, \textit{niyaz} is done on special occasions that call for thanksgiving such as when a child takes its first step, sometimes a person in a family recovers from an illness or a circumcision is completed. One of the common ways in which people deal with the ex-genesis of everyday life was to make a vow to do a \textit{niyaz} and read a \textit{niyaz namah}, the story of the ritual, if some problem is solved and this is done by the individual or family within the precincts of the \textit{dargahs}.\textsuperscript{179}

\textbf{Significance of "urs" in Tamil Nadu Dargahs}

The festival of "\textit{urs}" considered most significant among the events of a \textit{dargah} is celebrated to remember the death of the saint and in every \textit{dargah} in Tamil Nadu, this death anniversary is observed with procession carrying out a pot of sandalwood paste called as \textit{chandanakkoodu} in Tamil language and \textit{basant}, the fairs or only a \textit{kanthuri}, a public dinner when the \textit{dargah} authorities do not permit the holding of the procession since it is unIslamic. This annual festival has been held since the

\textsuperscript{178} \textit{Ibid.}, p.118.
\textsuperscript{179} \textit{Ibid.}, p.119.
beginning of tomb veneration because the graves became a source of ideological and symbolic society of the local Muslims and thus the sacred graves of Muslim Sufi saints attracted both the Muslims and Hindus. The system of belief which shaped the way in which the Islamic tomb itself was constructed could be influenced by other symbolic needs of society. The *Sufi* tradition upon which the *dargah* tradition was established was followed by its devotees with spiritual and ritualistic grounds right from medieval India and among the rituals, the annual one dominates the precincts of the shrines and minds of the pilgrims who crowd the *dargahs*.

Among the *dargahs* of Tamil Nadu, the *dargah* of Nathar wali located in the heart of Tiruchirappalli emerges first to celebrate the "*urs*" festival on 14 *Ramzan* according to Islamic calendar and this shrine has further got its significance for having celebrated 1000th anniversary in January 1998. The celebrations of this *dargah* are little different from other *dargahs* from the start to the end of the *urs*. The fourteen days festival starts with flag hoisting on first day of the month of *Ramzan* and the fast observing *dargah* authorities during this month do not tire of making arrangements and they hold together in the work of festival for all these days. The Muslims of this town take this an opportunity to show their spiritual enthusiasm and reputation to the Sufi saint, 'Thable Alam Badhusha Nathar Wali Aulia' and the place of his death and it is significant that devotees from different parts of Tamil Nadu and even from other states belonging to different faiths come here to witness the tomb festival of the first popular Islamic missionary who visited India but got buried in Tamil Nadu. The way, the festival held and the great respect the pilgrims give during the events may show how the Sufi, relinquishing his royal honours, led a spiritual life in the path of God to

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spread the religious message and render humanly service to the people of whom, the people of Tamil Nadu were the most benefited.

It is a well established custom in his dargah that priority is given to the hereditary Khalifas to lead the urs festival which includes the anointing of sandalwood paste on the tomb of the saint. The highlight of the annual festival at this dargah is the ceremony of 'turbat dhulayi' the sacred washing of the tomb with Cauvery river water. The khalifas, the direct descendants of the saint along with the dargah khadims and people from various walks of life proceed to the river in a procession from the dargah in the wee hours of thirteenth day of the festival and bring water in pots and wash four graves of Nathar Wali and other Sufi saints there. Without letting water spill on the floor, they carefully collect the water flowing down the tombs in glass jars. The water stored in the jars and believed to have healing properties, is given as holy water in small doses to the pilgrims beset with illness. The reason behind washing the tombs with Cauvery water is that Nathar Wali got his name Thable Alam by beating his drum in happiness in front of the flooded river which receded without collapsing the neighbouring town and its residents. After washing the tombs of Nathar Wali and others, the urs festival begins at night. The pots containing the sandal paste are brought in a procession in decorated chariots from Gandhi Market in the early hours of fourteenth day. At the dargah premises, the hereditary Khalifas take the responsibility of anointment of tomb. Five jamas, the spiritual groups namely Sha Banwa, Sha malang, Sha Tabkhat, Shal Jalal and Sha Rifayee residing at various places of Tamil Nadu spreading the mystic principles of Sufi saints and stressing all to live in social harmony come to the dargah of Nathar Wali in view of the annual celebrations and pay homage by participating in the anointment of the grave after the khalifas. The faqirs
of these *jamas* recite special *fatiha* and offer special dua, a request to God at the end for world peace.\(^{181}\)

Recital of Maulud Sharif, the event of singing poems in praise of the saint and rendering the *qawwali* songs with devotional thoughts mark the occasion. Famous *qawwals* Zahid Mastana of Mysore, Chote Jani Babu from Bangalore, Zeba Tarannum of Nagpur and Chand Sultana of Chennai render *qawwalis* for two days. Singing of devotional songs in Tamil and Urdu as a form of group *qawwalis* is noteworthy in the shrine of Nather Wali. Another spiritual importance in the shrine is that one *pir* of any one of the *jamas* observes penance for seven days starting from the ninth day of the events till the next day of the *urs*. He is allowed to sit in a secluded room within shrine's precincts. The observer is a bachelor reciting the names of God and the saint Nathar Wali without coming out of the room. After the penance is over, three *jamas* leave the *dargah* two days after the *urs* and other two *jamas* would leave the shrine fifteen days after the end of Ramzan festival. One important feature of this *urs* festival at this *dargah* is that the genealogy of the direct descendents of the Sufi saint who were assigned the right of conducting the annual festivities has been carved on the main wall of the *dargah* and the name carving would continue in vogue to honour the saint's *Khalifas*.

The death anniversary on 23rd in the month of Dhul Hadha is observed at Ervadi and celebrated as an annual feast for the martyrdom of Syed Ibrahim. The graveyard of the saint and his disciples not known to many was brought to light to the Muslims and others of Tamil Nadu by one Ibrahim, a grandson of the saint in fifth generation who was fondly called by the locals as Nalla Ibrahim, a "good" Ibrahim. It is believed

\(^{181}\) Interview with the Khalifa, Syed Ishaq Khalandar Hussaini Suharawardi, Tiruchirappalli on 4.11.2004.
that he should have constructed the stone structure of the inner shrine by replacing the old tent or thatched sheds. It is further presumed by the Muslims that the festive activities inclusive of urs should have started during his lifetime only and the grant of land surrounding the graveyard made by the king of Ramanathapuram to this Nalla Ibrahim might have been helpful to meet the expenses of the festivals and extend the dargah structures. The urs festival begins with the flag procession on the evening of 10th of this Islamic month from the Ervadi village located one km off the dargah passing through Thanneer Pandal and reaches the dargah and the flag carried in a silver box on an elephant is hoisted on the shrine's flag pole. The urs procession with its chandanakkoodu starts on 23rd from the Ervadi village at midnight. Though the pot of sandal paste is prepared by the dargah's administration, the chariot carrying the pot is made by the Asari community members, the right to decorate the chariot is given to the community of Yadavas and the main shrine is washed with water carried by the members of Mutharaiyar community. The flaming torches are carried in hands by the washer men and the torches are oiled by the members of Adi Dravidar community and the way long pot procession is helped by the members of other faiths. Some members of Nadar community supply materials for the festival while those of Yadava and Ambalakarar communities carry the chariot with the pot one after another. Harijans, as a mark of respect to the revered saint, carry one thousand green flags along the possession. Elephants of Sethupathi Maharaja still participate in the urs to remember the royal coordination, the king had in those days, extended to the Ervadi shrine. When the pot procession reaches the dargah at about 5 a.m. three groups of families of the three sons of Nall Ibrahim which have been administering the shrine since his death forming only three groups do anoint the graves of the saint, his family members and his disciples. The

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182 Interview with the Secretary of the dargah, P.S. Siddiq, Ervadi on 30.11.2004.
*huqdars*, the other heirs of the saint, then anoint the tombs followed by the pilgrims. Sweet rice is supplied to all the pilgrims immediately after the anointment in the early morning. It is a specific event that the flag hoisted on 10th of Dhul Hadha is lowered only seven days after the urs is completed. All the twenty-three days from 1st of the month to 23rd, Maulud Sharif is recited. A long garland made of neem leaves is arranged on the two sides of the way between the *dargah* and the village by the Harijan people in belief that the neem having medicinal property, may cure the pilgrims of diseases in the crowds. On the day of flag lowering, a special ghee rice is prepared to supply to all the pilgrims present in the shrine.

Special arrangements are made to maintain the smooth functioning of the events. Apart from the *dargah*, the local panchayat and district administration take steps to ensure safety among the pilgrims. Since it is a government notified function, the district is allowed to avail a local holiday on the day of urs. A significant feature of this shrine is that most of the pilgrims visiting here come from the neighbouring state of Kerala on ordinary days and the day of urs does not exempt itself from crowding the premises. Individuals and families prefer these fourteen days of festival and more remarkably the anniversary day to cook food within the shrine's courtyard and serve the poor with the requests to God and the saint that they be relieved of the distress that they have in families. The visiting participants disperse from early morning after the urs with some eatables and flower petals to their fullest satisfaction that they have been with the saint's spirituality and paid homage to their departed spiritual leader.183

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183 Personal Visit to the *dargah* at Ervadi during the *Urs* festival.
The death anniversary of the saint, Ala ud din is celebrated on 16 Rabi ul awwal at Goripalayam, Madurai with full spirit and fervour. The saint who came as a spiritual guide and became a short term ruler in the dynasty of Madurai Sultanate and lies buried near the bank of the river Vaigai is revered as a person of spiritual power by the people of Madurai and the surrounding places. The urs festivity held in his name every year is an evidence to speak volumes of his services, religious, social and even royal. The events begin ten days before the day of anniversary with the chanting of Maulud Sharif in the name of the Prophet and then the saint. The cleaning of the dome is special feature in this shrine because the large sized stone dome was acquired by Ala ud din himself when it was, according to local ballads, carried by the men of the Pandya king to present as a gift to the king's daughter during her marriage perhaps for a decorative purpose of a royal building. The king too kindly presented this round shaped stone to the saint as a mark of gratitude that he cured the stomach ailment of the king during his religious service he was rendering from the same place where his tomb is now located. The flag hoisting ceremony held on the evening of the same day when urs is started is done with distribution of sweet tabarruk to the pilgrims present and this is also served to the houses of the huqdar and members of the dargah committee. That the car carrying the pot of sandal paste bears the name "Ghori" written on it reminds us that this saint was born in the place Ghori, a small principality in Afghan region. The sweet flour, malitha served in the morning after the urs is complete and sandal paste anointed on the graves is a different sweet item unlike in other dargahs. The tomb of Shams ud din Adil Shah, also a king of Madurai Sultanate, is located near the grave of Ala ud din and though it is equally treated on the day of urs, the day of the death of Ala ud din only is accounted for celebrations not of Shams ud din who died on some other day and year. A special fatiha in public burial ground located
inside the *dargah* premises is performed on the morning of the closing day. One more specific and interesting feature of this *dargah's urs* is that the flag hoisted as a symbol of the beginning of annual festival is lowered only on the day of *urs* next year and the hoisting of new one is done for the ensuing one. The year long furling of green flag on a thirty feet high flag pole is a remarkably significant one which can not be seen in any other *dargahs*.  

A few Sufis lie buried on the top of hills in Tamil Nadu and Sikandar Shah is one among them whose mausoleum is located on the hill top at Tirupparankundram near Madurai. The last ruler of Madurai Sultanate whose martyrdom was caused by his enemies on this hill where he had hidden is revered for saintly cause and his death anniversary is observed on 16 Rajab. The nishan junta, the flag hoisting is done in front of the tomb on the hill on 1st of this month to make this festival to be celebrated from the beginning of the month. The urs festival starts with Islamic songs. The steps at the bottom of the hill is chosen as the starting and ending point of the *urs* festivities. The pot of sandal paste placed in the vehicle is taken around midnight in a procession from the starting point and after passing through the Mela Ratha Street, Keela Ratha Street, Periya Ratha Street and Southgate Pettai and returns in the same direction to reach the starting point at the end. The sandal pot is then carried to the tomb on the hill after the morning prayer. Devotees who climb the rocky hill perform *fatiha* near the tomb but those who could not go to the top perform it at the foot of the hill. The *chiraghi*, the lamp lighter takes more responsibility on this day to take care of the *dargah*, opening it in the early morning but not closing the tomb for the

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184 Personal visit and eye witness in the *dargah*’s annual *urs* festival at Goripalayam, Madurai.

185 Interview with S.Basha Khan, Managing Trustee of the *dargah*, Tirupparankundram, Madurai on 10.3.2007.
night of the urs unlike daily routine closing at the night. The climbing of this dry hill which has no proper steps, path or tree shade for rest shows how the visitors have the habit of adab, respect with humble behaviour towards the buried leader on his death anniversary. That the devotees' preparation of food near the mausoleum to serve the poor after fatiha for which the preparatory materials are carried to the hill top is the symbol of confidence in the rituals they perform for the departed leader. The veneration in a mausoleum or participation in its annual celebrations on a big pathless rock is a spiritual experience. The tomb of the political hero is revered as a shrine of a saint simply because of his shahid position he met at the hands of war enemies and his death and burial and erection of a tomb on the hill itself brings him a name "pahadi auliya", the mountain saint. 186

The 10th of Jamad ul akhir, the death anniversary of the saint Shahul Hameed at Nagore is the day of congregation which is attended not only by the people from different parts of Tamil Nadu but also by some devotees of Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Burma and the Gulf countries. Kanthuri festival, as it is otherwise called for the annual festivity is meaningful as the poor being fed in the commemoration of the saint's death. The Nagore's main dargah and its associated shrines at Vanjur and Chilladi where the saint observed penance for forty days are combined together to celebrate this annual feast. The flag hoisting function is held on 1st of Jamad ul akhir and the first flag is hoisted on the taller minaret which stands outside the shrine followed by the hoisting of flags on other four minarets standing on the four sides of the main shrine. While flag is hoisted on a separate pole in other dargahs, it is the minarets which bear the flags in Nagore shrine. A special feature of this dargah festival is that one Pir, a spiritual person who came in the

186 Personal visit to the dargah, Tirupparankundram, Madurai on 11.03.2007.
group of the saint's disciples observe penance for three days from ninth day in an old structure now called 'pir mandapam' where the funeral prayer was held for the saint Shahul Hameed after his death. The followers of the saint who, after his death, formed four groups, Banva, Malang, Madhari and Jalali and dispersed to spread the spirituality of him but had decided to meet every year on the death anniversary and even now their disciples come to the shrine and grace the urs. The decorated sandal pot is carried from the Nagapattinam town on the late night of 10th of the month and reaches the dargah on the early morning. The sandal paste anointment is performed on the Rawla Sharif, the tombs of the saint and others. A white cloth sheet is placed to cover the grave of the saint and this custom of using white cloth is to remember the first one which was used by his adopted son on the first anniversary day of the saint, Shahul Hameed. The musical concert is organised with instruments from the first day but performance of concert within the premises of the shrine is not Islamic. While the commencement of the procession for flag hoisting is the Meera Pally in Nagapattinam with a chariot carrying the flags, the grand procession on tenth day with Chandanakkoodu starts from 'Kootadi' an open ground solely retained for this festivity in the same Nagapattinam town. On the fourteenth day the flags are lowered and removed. It is the rightful remembrance on the days of the urs festival of one Syed Mohammed Hussain Alim Sahib Washathari who lived from 1909 to 1982 and claimed himself a descendant of the saint and the pilgrims visiting the shrine, regard him as a great pir for his activities in the dargah's maintenance and rituals including his work to register the shrine as a dargah trust and his significant role in propagating the tales of miraculous deeds of the Nagore saint are called back during these festival days. The pilgrims celebrating the urs take a holy dip in the pir kulam, the holy pond located behind the dargah.

where it is believed that the running water used for cleaning the dead body of the saint at the Ya Hussain prayer mosque was drained here and it was later made a big pond and given spiritual significance. The pilgrims who tonsure on the day of urs and even on ordinary days consider taking bath in this pond as a spiritual bath. With the participation of Hindus in large numbers, the saint's death anniversary celebrations for fourteen days come to an end. As some of the pilgrims also visit the nearby Velankanni church and Tirunallar temple, this region is referred to as the shrine triangle. That the saint died in Nagore the same month, the same day and same time happened to his birth also adds a divine will to this festivity.

The month of Rabi ul akhir is the month of annual festival to the people of Pallivasal near which the grandson of Nagore Shahul Hameed breathed his last and thus his death anniversary is held on 14th with the flag hoisting function on 1st of this month. The urs festival of Kattu Bava is celebrated with two Chandanakkoodus, unlike other dargahs, one prepared by the Kallar community and other by the dargah's Muslim community. The Kallar people still remember the sacrifice of the saint's life at their hands by preparing this sandal pot in his name as a mark of apology. In the procession of sandal pots, the Chandanakkoodu of the Kallars called "Kallankoodu" leads first followed by the other. The Muslims and others of this small but neatly formed village pay their respect to these sandal pots. The entire procession ends very shortly since this is confined to limited area. The Shahid parai on which the saint was killed during the course of his prayer is visited by the Muslims and dargah authorities to remember the killing of Kattu Bava. Three days after the anointment of sandal paste on the tomb, a special dinner called "Aranmanai Kanthuri" is arranged by the dargah administration for all, Muslim and Hindu from surrounding villages irrespective of caste.
This is perhaps done as a remembrance of the social and religious service rendered by the Sufi saint in the forest areas in those days. From the homage paid till today by the descendants of the Brahmin girls whom Kattu Bava saved from the gruesome hands of the Kallars, it is realized that none other than Kattu bava has received acknowledgement for social protection that he gave for others.188

The death anniversary of Peer Muhammad celebrated on 14 Rajab is a festival of a different feature. The Anjuvannam Peer Muhammadiya Muslim Association founded by the disciples of the saint, Peer Muhammad propagates the principles of him through the simple and religiously accepted ways on the day of festival for which people from the neighbouring state of Kerala participate in larger number than from Tamil Nadu. Singing of his Tamil poems during the festival days is significant. Though the dargah rule does not permit to recite fatiha, the visitors' desire of reciting this type of ritual is not prohibited. The dargah is very much cautious of not allowing anti religious ideals and ceremonies in the dargah precincts especially during the festival day. The uncovered portion of the saint's grave on the top, only a covered area for the pilgrims' stay in front of the grave, simplicity in the weekly, monthly or annual festivities and restrictions to the unIslamic practices are the examples that the dargah monument still exists to speak the volumes of the saint's Tamil fervour and his Islamic spirituality.

Fourteenth Safr is the urs day in the dargah of Rowther Sahib at Kottaipattinam with the flag hoisted on 5th of the same month. The small seashore village pays homage to the chandanakkoodu when carried in procession. Some specific aspects which are seen in the sandal pot procession are that fifteen families which have been paying reutures to the

188 Interview with the Dargah Khadim at Pallivasal on 6.11.2004.
pot are permitted. These families are not the huqdarṣ or descendants to claim the right over the shrine's administration or the assets. The first family to pay the repute is the family from non-Muslim community and this family has been respectful to the dargah festival from the inception of the events. As the temples and dargah co-exist in the atmosphere of social cordiality in Kottaipattinam, a temple of Munneeswaran God gets reputed during the urs festival of the dargah by getting permission to attend and participate in the festival day events. The temple trustees also extend their co-operation and wishes to the religious ceremony of the dargah. It is just like what is done by the Kattu Bava dargah to the Kallar community in Pallivasal village. It has been a custom in the shrine that maulud sharif is recited in the name of the Sufi saint from 1st of the Safr month till 15th Sandal paste anointment takes place on the early morning after the urs procession ends but the flag lowering is done on the last day of the month.189 These celebrations are a symbol and gratitude shown to the spiritual services and social interactions of the saint.

The coastal village Pasipattinam remembers the Sufi spirituality of the saint Naina Muhammad by observing the death anniversary of 14 Muharram. The ten day events from flag hoisting on 5th of the month are participated by the Muslims living in a neatly formed village and the fishermen of Vanniya Padaiyatchiar living in the fishing hamlet. The procession carrying the flag in a vehicle goes around the nearby villages Kalianagari, Manavanagari Stanicanvayal and S.P.Pattinam and arrives at the dargah at about 7 in the evening and the flag is hoisted. A special feature of the urs celebrations is that from the 1st day of the month till a day before urs, a special dinner named 'mandapā padi' is arranged for the pilgrims by some families who have been serving traditionally but

189 Personal visit to the dargah at Kottaipattinam, on 22.10.2006.
these families are not related to the heirs or descendants of the dargah's spiritual leader. This is to maintain the social relationship among the people of the seashore hamlet. The dinner served constantly by the same families, each at one night, is brought to an end by a dinner served by twelve huqders jointly. Devotees who wish to provide dinners or serve tabarruk to the visitors are asked by the dargah administration to set aside one back leg of the sheep, one kg of rice and rupees eleven and paise twenty five and place them in front of the main door of the dargah. This custom has been in vogue for years to remember the respectable services of the spiritual pir buried in the shrine. At a later period, one ruler of Sivaganga, Muthu Vijaya Ragunatha Duraisingam erected the pedestal for the flag pole and issued an order to sanction rupees twelve and annas seventy five for flag expenses and rice of five kalams for urs festival annually. The flag is lowered on 29 Muharram the last day of this month to mark the end of urs celebrations. Since the saint Naina Muhammad was the son of Rowther Wali of Kottaipattinam, there has been an interaction between the two dargahs on the urs festival day and exchange of suggestions and participation among the two still exist there. The dargah representatives of each one visit the other shrine to honour the rituals and ceremonies. Even those Muslims living in two coastal villages are desirous of visiting the shrines particularly during the death anniversary with a view that the two Sufis are father and son. The urs festivals celebrated in these two dargahs occur in the months of Muharram and Safir, the two consecutive months in Islamic calendar which facilitate the visitors to grace the functions and honour one after another. The annual death anniversary and the existence of two shrines of father and son located between a few kilometres on coastal line are the two symbols for the unity of Muslims along with the coastal fishermen of other communities.¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ Personal visit to the dargah at Pasipattinam on 21.01.2007.
Rabi ul akhir 10 is the day of the death of Mohideen Abdul Qadir Jeelani whose memorial is found at Pottalpudur and this day of festival is considered to be greater next only to the Nagore shrine. Though buried in Baghdad his visit to Tamil Nadu and the sites where he observed penance here are treated with saintly expression and thus the Pottalpudur memorial has emerged most significant among all the memorials in view of the annual feast. Even the memorial located at South Gate in Madurai where hundreds of people gather to witness the death day celebrations for the whole night altogether with the musical concert arranged in the Kazimmar Street is given secondary place among the Sufi memorials in Tamil Nadu.\textsuperscript{191} The Pottalpudur memorial has gained spiritual significance with his festivity because the Muslim population might be the impact of the visit of the saint with the spread of his spiritual message. The memorial celebrates this death day by hoisting two flags, first one on a tree standing on the northern side of the shrine on 1st of the month and the other one on a tree on the southern side on 10th of the month. On the same day after the hoisting of second flag, the events of \textit{Chandanakkoodu} begin with the procession from the village of Ravanasamudram located one km from Pottalpudur and reaches the \textit{dargah} early next day morning. The sandal paste is anointed on the site where the saint is said to have observed penance and this paste is especially served to the pilgrims. In this memorial a different feature is followed with the distribution of holy ashes obtained from tamarind tree bark, ghee and flowers to the devotees. Sheep and fowls are brought by all the sects of people to be sacrificed before the monument in the name of the saint but nowadays people offer fruits also for their reverence.\textsuperscript{192} A special \textit{kanthuri} is arranged in the saint's monument by the authorities on

\textsuperscript{191} Personal visit to the memorial at South Gate, Madurai on 08.02.2007.
\textsuperscript{192} Interview with K.Mohideen Pitchai Lebbai, the hereditary \textit{Khadim} at the memorial, Pottalpudur on 25.12.2004.
the eleventh day of the celebrations and it is therefore called eleven day *fatiha* as 'Gyarveen' and this month of Rabi ul akhir is even called with the name Gyarveen month or Dastagir month in his alternative name Dastagir. On the twelfth day a special lighting performance in soil made small utensils with oil is done on the roadside place called sandai pottal in front of the memorial where both Hindus and Muslims take part. For all these events during the *urs* day and special *kanthuri* arrangements, the memorial of the saint is fondly called as *dargah* by the Muslims knowingly or unknowingly but spiritually as if he lies buried there.

The death of Yusuf Khan is remembered with the *urs* celebrations on the day of killing on 2 Shawwal. Though he did not live like a saint, this mausoleum of burial is treated as a *dargah* by the Madurai Muslims since he met a torturous death at the hands of his own Muslim enemies which evoked popular sympathy to observe his day of death as the day of *urs*. This celebration in this mausoleum is not a grand one as a decorated *Chandanakoodu* usually in other *dargahs* is not taken in the tomb events and only a pot with sandal paste as a mark of respect is carried in a rickshaw which passes through the main streets of Sammattipuram, Madurai. Both flag hoisting and *urs* procession take place on a same day and the festivity comes to an end within a short time at the night. Since this day falls on the day next to Ramzan festival most people though feel tired attend the function with inspiration. Among the visitors to the mausoleum on *urs* day or even ordinary days, women outnumber men in indulging in rituals, or getting blessings from the tomb *khadim*.¹⁹³

The month of Jamat ul awwal is the month of *urs* celebrations of the saint Kunangudi Masthan who, being a poet saint lived a life of austerity. As the flag hoisting is performed on 1st of the month the

¹⁹³ Personal visit to the Mausoleum of Yusuf Khan, Madurai on 30.04.2007.
**Chandanakkoodu** is taken in procession on 13th with maulud sharif recited all these thirteen days. The procession comes through the entire Royapuram Muslim area in Chennai and reaches the *dargah* at late night for sandal paste anointment on the Rawla Sharif. While the day of **Chandanakkoodu** is otherwise called *urs* festival in all the *dargahs*, the *dargah* of Kunangudi Masthan observes the next day after the procession and anointment as the day for *urs*. On the night of 14th day, a sama, musical concert is arranged to sing devotional songs in both Tamil and Urdu languages. The lack of fund or lack of additional income makes the *dargah* administrators not to hold the festival in magnificence and therefore a small sized *taziya*, the decorated sandal pot is carried. The festival preparations and rituals during other days are done by the three female heirs, since there is no male heir of matured age. The *dargah* celebrations which were held by the efforts of A.Mohammad Hussain were taken over by his three daughters after his death as he had no male heir. Perhaps this is the only *dargah* in Tamil Nadu as on the date in 2006 to be administered by the female descendants of the previous male *huqdar* and it is noteworthy that their father the A.Mohammad Hussain and his forefathers have been celebrating the *dargah* festivities since the death of the saint or the establishment of the *dargah* monument.

Kottar, the ancient historical place in Nagercoil celebrates the death anniversary of the saint Fasil Shah with flag hoisting on 8 Rabi ul awwal. The very simple function is the *Kanthuri* arranged in the *dargah* precincts on 9th and distributed to the visitors. The flag is lowered on 10th to mark the end of anniversary celebrations. The once magnificently celebrated *urs* festival years back turned into a simple one after the State Wakf Board interfered and took over the administration of this small

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194 Interview with Mahmooda Beebi, the first share holder of the dargah, Royapuram on 28.9.2006.
shrine. As the annual festival is not encouraged now, people attending the events are very few. Now a tabarruk which is served to the visitors is reverently accepted by those most of whom are the descendants of the saint who are still residents of the Muslim Mohalla around the shrine but it is not eagerly taken by the visitors in large number.\(^{195}\)

The most popular female Sufi saint in Tamil Nadu whose tomb is located at Attankarai is remembered on 27 Rabi ul awwal. The urs with kanthuri starts with sandal pot carried on an elephant from the nearby village Pulimankulam. Earlier the elephant is allowed to be bathed on the previous day and made to be prepared for carrying the pot. The chandanakkoodu decorated in the century old building in that village reaches the dargah and a washerman is officially permitted to lay a long size while cloth sheet a few metres from the dargah to its entrance and the trustees of the shrine walk on the white cloth bearing the sandal pot on their shoulders. The tradition behind the laying of the cloth every year on urs day is that, the disciples believed, a washerman's grievances were solved by the female saint with the grace of God and the custom of laying the white cloth by him as a gratitude has been in vogue in his family heirs. The anointment of sandal paste on the graves of the female Sufi and her husband is witnessed by the visitors including women who include Keralites in much number. Women are allowed near the grave in this shrine, since the Sufi being a female. Recital of Quranic verses in a loud voice in the inner shrine is seen in this dargah only on the day of urs festival and other days whereas the recital is allowed in slow voice in other shrines. Using the water of the nearby well is considered to be a sacred one since this was, according to local belief, used by the female saint during her short stay here. The spirituality of the dargah is

\(^{195}\) Personal visit to the dargah of Fasil Shah, Nagercoil on 03.05.2007.
remembered every year both by Muslims and Hindus to the possible extent to recollect the services of the female Sufi leader.\textsuperscript{196}

Syedani Beevi is another female Sufi lying buried in the heart of the Vellore town to be remembered on 25 Rabiul awwal. A very simple urs function with a fatiha and free meals to the visitors is held in her name to remember her spiritual work and a special medical aid with Ayurvedic herbs is arranged for the patients to call back that she had done the herbal medical service to the society. A different feature of this shrine's annual festival is that no significance to chandanakkoordu celebrations is given in places like Vellore, where the abodes of Sufis are not considered remarkably important. Yet the small shrine of this female Sufi speaks the involvement of spirituality among women and even now the women are a majority group to visit this holy abode.\textsuperscript{197}

At some shrines urs ceremonies take the form of sober maulud and Quanic recitations only. At other Sufi centres urs rites have come to feature the parading of ceremonial chariots and cult objects as well as ecstatic dancing, singing and cock sacrifices and all these superstitious and unIslamic practices have been condemned by the Islamic purists. But in Tamil Nadu Kanthuri rather than urs is the term used most frequently for these festivals and over many centuries, the Muslims of Tamil Nadu have evolved their own distinctive variant of the Sufi death anniversary commemoration. Kanthuri which really means a feast for social gathering is not totally observed in Tamil Nadu dargahs. Except one or two, most dargahs serve a small quantity of tabarruk in the name of Kanthuri, a term of exaggeration during the festival. But in all the Sufi establishments in Tamil Nadu, the central act of the Kanthuri has been a set of rituals known as the sandalwood paste anointing. As the name

\textsuperscript{196} Personal visit to the dargah at Attankarai on 07.05.2007.
\textsuperscript{197} Personal visit to the dargah at Vellore on 23.09.2007.
implies, the *dargah* members anoint the grave site and distribute the sandal as well as propitious substances such as rock sugar, malida, the sugared flour or flower petals to the massed crowds. Those rites can be observed today in almost every Tamil Nadu *dargah* but the procession of sandal pot as a decorated *chandanakkoodu* may not be followed in some *dargahs*. All these have been an established feature of Tamil Nadu shrine cult in the precolonial period and were observed by a number of European and Indian travellers. In his report of 1823, the British surveyor Thomas Turnbull mentions the seventeenth century *dargah* memorial of Mohideen Abdul Qadir Jeelani at Pottalpudur and describes the cult activities taking place there to be worthy as the most powerful healing shrine in Tamil Nadu. The importance of sandalwood paste to be used on the grave or by the pilgrims is that it is perceived as possessing inherent cooling qualities. In the system of indigenous medicine practiced in Tamil Nadu, for example, the substance is applied as a remedy for skin eruptions and other heating disorders including tonsured heads in *dargahs*. Thus in times of disease or calamity, the Indian Muslims use it as medicinal agent and as an adjunct to their religious rites in Sufi shrines.\(^{198}\)

The most important ceremonial among the visiting pilgrims is the offering made in the *dargah*. The offering is of different varieties. The eatable with incenses produced before the *khadims* is one variety and this is fulfilled with getting back a portion of the eatable called *nazrana* by the devotee. Offering made in largest quantity to be served to the poor or other pilgrims is another variety and this is sometimes done as a large public gathering is invited to the *dargah* to participate in the feast. This kind of feast with requests made to the saint is otherwise called *nerchai*.

in the areas like Kanyakumari district and Pottalpudur.\textsuperscript{199} The focal point of nerchai is the reverence shown to the Sufi and it is to make a vow at a shrine to get the blessings of the saint. The basic ritual of each nerchai is the presentation of offering at the tomb of a Sufi saint. This ritual is organized by the leaders of the shrine or individuals or families. The people at the \textit{dargahs} spiritually call it 'nerchai meals' if the offering is prepared with rice.

The festivals in \textit{dargahs} depend more on the performance of the rituals than mere visit to the \textit{dargah} environment. No visitor going to \textit{dargah} leaves it without indulging in a ritual. The rites are considered important by men and women. Men perform both inside and outside of the main shrine but women perform only outside the inner shrine as they are not permitted to enter the grave room except in the shrines of female saints. It is a good deal to realize the important role the saint and \textit{dargahs} have played in the lives of Muslim women, and in India, in the lives of non Muslim women also. In fact, the visitation of the saints' shrines have had a special meaning of Muslim women. The \textit{dargah} is a place, in which women can be together, or alone, can be in communication with a personage of their family considered in some senses to be able to help them with the kinds of personal problems in which the high God may seem too remote to be interested. This is not the only religious experience that draws Muslim women to the \textit{dargahs}. An equally important factor is social structural. The segregation of the sexes has prevented Muslim women from participating fully in public prayers and worship. There, therefore, had to be substitute for the mosque and the \textit{dargah} is the functional alternative.\textsuperscript{200} An additional social structural reason for women's strong faith in and devotion to saints arises out of the

\textsuperscript{199} Personal visit to the \textit{dargah} at Pottalpudur on 25.12.2004.

\textsuperscript{200} Christian W. Troll, (Ed.), \textit{op.cit.}, p.254.
insecurities and anxieties to which women are prone on account of their deeper involvement in the recurring crises of family life. This sociological dimension of respect shown to the Sufi shrines is in one or other aspect, more significant than its religio-mystical aspects.

**Role of Dargahs in Fostering Communal Harmony**

The *dargahs* in Tamil Nadu have played a significant role in fostering communal harmony with the people of other faiths what the Muslim kings and Muslim dynasties could also do to large extent. The attempt of Sufi saints, while spreading the Islamic message among the people of all religions, to keep the society intact with unity was continued by the *dargahs* where they were interred. While the Muslim kings in India and the Nawabs of Arcot in Tamil Nadu extended in making land grants to the institutions and for religious causes of other religious members, it has been the phenomenon of the saint and *dargah* veneration which has nourished the sociological-existential dimensions along the way of religio-mystical ideals since the Sufis had no rich property of wealth or relinquished their rights of ancestral assets for the simple life towards religion. It was the local kings, chieftains or philanthropists of both Hindu and Muslim community who helped the shrines of each other as a mark of social and religious unity.

The role of Sufis during their lifetime to establish a communal amity as an inter-religious act depended upon their social behaviour, and the local environment. The Sufi way of living and their approach towards the social set up in seeking religious answers attracted a mass number. Their efforts to eliminate social disparities among downtrodden and tribal people made them realize that the saints were the appropriate leaders to harmonize with each other. Their service to the society was even praised by the then rulers who did not resist them to carry out the enthusiastic
work in the fields of religion and social advancement. The political and social environment of dynasties in Tamil Nadu too was a favourable condition for the Sufis’ participation in social harmony through the support extended by the kings and especially the Pandya kings and later the Nayak dynasty of Madurai and Tanjavur were the favourites of Sufi saints. They did not hesitate to get the blessings of the Muslim saints for various personal reasons. Their heartfelt grants of land to Sufi Khanqah or to the shrines after their death have been recorded in the copper plates and inscriptions. The fact that the shrine of Nathar Wali at Tiruchirappalli received some lands as a grant by Mangammal, the Queen of Nayak dynasty of Madurai is considered a sign of amity shown to Muslims by the Hindu kings. It can be praiseworthy to admit that the queen extended this help in admiration of the dargah’s communal services and presumed that the Sufi’s words and deeds brought pervasive influence of common brotherhood and social harmony. The shrine at Ervadi of Syed Ibrahim and his harmonious living were remembered by the Sethupathy king of Ramnad, Muthukumara Vijaya Raganatha Sethupathy who granted a vast stretch of land surrounding the dargah during the eighteenth century. For the birth of child to his wife and the recovery of his father-in-law from illness, the royal family of this Sethupathy’s even today is grateful to send the royal elephants for the urs festival. The shrine of Sultan Ala ud din in Madurai stands as a model for social harmony right from the beginning. The Sufi, when he was alive, had the royal contact with the Pandya king of Madurai who had appreciation in his mind for the saint and even after the Sufi’s death his shrine remained a healing centre. From the day people came to know about the divinity of the place and experienced love showered on them, it has found place in their hearts and remains there for ever. Even now the dargah authorities give equal importance to Hindus and one such Hindu family has been honoured with the post of 'thandalkarar' for years together and the present holder of the
post in the ninth generation is proud of beating drum when the sacred sandal pot is carried around the streets of Goripalayam. It can be seen at the shrine that many Hindu brethren frequent here to get relieved of psychological problems. With this sustained service and deep sense of commitment for the community, this Goripalayam dargah stands as a model for Hindu Muslim unity and peaceful coexistence.

The grant of land made by the king Achutappa of Nayak dynasty of Tamil Nadu around the present dargah of Shahul Hameed of Nagore is the best recognition to this Sufi's spiritual phenomenon which the king sought from him and the king's royal grant is a symbol of social harmony among the royal government and the Sufi leader. The big minaret standing on the western roadside in front of the shrine speaks the magnanimity of the king Pratab Singh who erected it in praise of the dargah's role in fostering harmony after the Sufi's death. An outstanding example of community participation of the Nagore dargah is the disaster management handled by the dargah committee as a rehabilitation work to the victims stranded by the tidal wave, Tsunami on December 26, 2004 which caused death and calamities to many. As a gesture of relief measures the dargah authorities came forward to provide four acres of dargah land for construction of shelters to the survivors belonging to all religions. It also provided the dargah premises to use as shelter for 5000 affected people immediately after the natural calamity. Nearly 1000 victims were fed by the dargah for some days. The retrieval of dead bodies were handled by the dargah people along with Muslim members outside the dargah and also other than Muslims. Burial of hundreds of bodies irrespective of caste and religion in the graveyard of the dargah is

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201 Personal visit to the dargah at Goripalayam on 19.05.2007.
one of the examples that the *dargah* showed a humanitarian attitude to all communities.\(^{202}\)

The shrine of Tamil Sufi poet, Peer Muhammad at Thuckalay serves the purpose of communal harmony and the Sufi right from his childhood had a friendly communal relationship. His family's contact with the silk weavers from Hindu community was the first stone in laying the path of harmonious attitude in Tenkasi. His contribution to start the work of Padmanabhapuram fort by placing the first stone can be reviewed as a symbol of harmony and how the king of Travancore had a great reputation to a Muslim poet. Being a religious saint poet, his usage of terms other than Islamic explicitly evokes admiration from all faiths.\(^{203}\)

The community surrounding the village of Kottaipattinam irrespective of caste or religion extended the humanely help to the saint of Kottaipattinam. Only with the propagation of the saint's religious message, the socially backward residents of the villages were attracted towards him and they further helped for his living, the simplicity of which made them become new Muslims and the Sufi treated the Muslims and Hindus with equality and blessed them at his hospice.\(^{204}\) His son and the saint who lies buried at Pasipattinam followed the footsteps of his father and his blessing gave a male child to the king Kilavan Sethupathy of Ramanathapuram. He was very much satisfied when the lands granted to him by the king as a gift of gratitude were given to a temple as he refused to own for himself or his *Khanqah*.\(^{205}\) The memorial at Pottalpudur in the name of world renowned saint Abdul Qadir Jeelani is one of the specimen shrines in Tamil Nadu to speak the qualities of social

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\(^{202}\) Personal visit to the *dargah* at Nagore on 08.06.2007.

\(^{203}\) Personal visit to the *dargah* at Thuckalay on 04.02.2007.

\(^{204}\) Personal visit to the *dargah* at Kottaipattinam on 22.10.2006.

harmony. Some of the rituals performed in the memorial during the festival days are similar to that of Hindus. The sacrifice of sheep and fowls done here is just influenced by the Hindu practices. That the sandal paste pot prepared at the memorial and sent to Ravanasarudram, a Hindu dominated village from where it is brought back to this shrine on the day of urs is an example for Hindu Muslim amity. The architectural style of the memorial with roofed and floored open space along the eastern and northern sides of the main shrine is a typical example like in Hindu temple. The use of oil lights in front of the memorial's main gate two days after the annual festival is purely a Hindu custom and it has been following to maintain the tradition of Hindu Muslim cordiality.\textsuperscript{206}

Born as a Hindu, lived as a Muslim and died as a guardian of Hindu and Muslim soldiers, Yusuf Khan, though not a Sufi saint behaved himself as a symbol of social ideals of Hindu Muslim society. His service to Hindu Muslim society is still remembered by having his name to one street and one locality, Khan Sahib Mettu Street and Khanpalayam respectively. The reverence shown by Hindus rather than Muslims is a respectful mark to his mausoleum which is reverentially called dargah. A Sufi poet, Kunangudi Masthan's shrine in Chennai is another example for communal harmony. The usage of the Hindu religious names attributes the secular ideas and poetic spirit he showed in his poems. He used his Tamil knowledge of poetry in praising the Islamic faith, Islamic saints as well as Hindu principles. The dargah of Fasil Shah at Nagercoil played as a shrine of Hindu Muslim harmony and on the eve of the annual festivities it was a grand function with the participation of even non Muslims in sizeable number before the administration of the dargah was taken over by the State Wakf Board and even now during the Kanthuri feast on the annual day, Muslims and

\textsuperscript{206} H.R.Pate, \textit{Tinnevelly District, Gazetteer of India}, Tamil Nadu State, 1993, p.360.
people of other faiths take part and carry with them adequate food and they treat it a sacred nerchai given in the name of the saint.\textsuperscript{207}

The popular Sufi at Attankarai attains the first place among the female Sufi saints and her shrine is revered by men and women and the visit of pilgrims from the neighbouring state, Kerala is a mark for communal harmony since many of the visitors from Tamil Nadu and Kerala are those from other faiths. Even these pilgrims take water for bathing purpose from the well within the shrine's courtyard as they consider this as sacred water because of the belief that the Sufi and her husband themselves used this well water. Healing by the female Sufi Syedani beevi, Vellore during her lifetime with the herbs is still done at her shrine for Muslims and non Muslims. Among the visitors to the dargah, female pilgrims especially Hindu women pay specific reverence during ordinary days and also on the annual day. The important factor as regards the construction of the dargah is that it was built with the fund collection made by one merchant Vi.Tha.Lakshmana Mudaliar who along with other donors laid the foundation stone and completed the work of construction. This small dargah building which serves all irrespective of religion with herbal medicinal aid free of cost is a boon to the people of Vellore town.\textsuperscript{208}

The Sufis and their shrines raised the whole level of religious thought and action in Islam to a higher plane of consciousness and purpose through which they strove to develop the peace and unity in the society. The propagation of religion by Sufis is quite different from the tall talk of the fanatics of religion, because for the Sufis, religion is righteousness, honesty, patience and perseverance. Their devotion,

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\textsuperscript{207} Personal visit to the dargah, Nagercoil on 03.05.2007.
\textsuperscript{208} Personal visit to the Dargahs, Attankarai on 07.05.2007 and Vellore on 23.09.2007.
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dedication, discipline and determination make the common masses understand the seeds of love to be implemented in the hearts of happy, healthy and prosperous life and society. Some of the saints gained greater popularity after their life-time and with the result their *dargahs* have emerged as centres of pilgrimage. Though Islam and other religions remained with their own identity as regards their respective doctrines, yet there has been cultural mingling between these religions in our country particularly in Tamil Nadu. Sufis gave new stimulus to Hindu principles and as a result of this, Hindu reformers emphasised the equality of caste and preached that birth was no bar to religious salvation. As an impact the shrines of these humble saints are visited, cared, respected and attended by thousands of devotees belonging to different faiths throughout the year.