INTRODUCTION

The title "The Emergence and Growth of Select Dargahs in Tamil Nadu from 13th century A.D. to 20th century A.D." is chosen by me for research since the rhythm of Muslim life in India and especially in Tamil Nadu a state in South India and which geographically lies between longitude 76° 15' and 80° 20' east and latitude 8°5' and 13° 55' north has been marked by cultural and religious festivals relating to dargahs, \(^1\) which have been a creation of their followers.

The cult of dargahs is based on the principles of Sufism, a name given to Islamic mysticism from its early stages. In the religious life of Muslims in Tamil Nadu, besides mosques and Islamic preachers, saints and their shrines play a central role. A dargah is fundamentally different from a mosque which is remarkably a place of worship and a centre for Islamic faith.

In dargahs, the services of dead saints are remembered and pirs and fakirs play a role. The burial sites of saintly persons have become the places of pilgrimage for people of any religious faith. They are the symbols of common culture and peaceful co-existence of Muslims and Hindus in India. The Muslims in Tamil Nadu have been living for centuries as a minority, but they live with other communities in a free and secular society. Some aspects of Muslim life remain influenced by the performance of rites, customs and festivals relating to saints. It is found necessary to make a study at the varied religio-cultural and social traditions of the beliefs and practices of Tamil Nadu Muslims.

Scope of Study

The study of select *dargah* is to make different presentation on the development of shrine culture, social interaction, socio-religious services of the saints, artistic designs, etc. It will throw light on how the visit to these shrines brings social changes and social harmony among the people of all faiths. These Muslim shrines may be placed in social, economic and political context and it may be elaborated on this topic by looking first at the internal hierarchy of the shrines. It should be stressed at the outset that each *dargah* has its own rigid social hierarchy. Muslim women who remain confined in their houses are free to visit the *dargah* and perform rituals. They are prevented from participating fully in public prayers and therefore, there had to be a substitute for the mosque and *dargah* is this alternative.\(^2\) Moreover the *dargahs* are the holy places visited by the moderates. But fortunately, the opponents of *dargah* cult have not succeeded in eradicating this form of devotion that attract masses. The *dargahs*, however, will continue to remain decisive meeting places of all religious communities. Stressing to live together by visiting the abodes of Sufi saints within the framework of a secular society and creation of awareness for harmonious living in Indo-Muslim life are the aims of this study.

Period of Study

This topic on *dargahs* is covered from thirteenth century since the *dargah* construction and its prominence came to exist from that century on in Tamil Nadu. The religious missionaries and saints began to visit Tamil Nadu from seventh century A.D. Their places of burial were left uncared or their local prominence was beyond the reach of the public.

People began to realise that the saintly living of these persons was the main cause for the spread of Islamic faith in Tamil Nadu more particularly on the coastal line and thereafter attained significance for the Sufi shrines from thirteenth century. The selection of the period of study is more appropriate to explain the performance of rites, customs and festivals relating to the saints and their tombs. It can be believed that the dargah structures were not found till thirteenth century A.D. and these specimens of Indo-Muslim architecture were being erected at later period. In Tamil Nadu the latest dargah that is believed to have been built in the first quarter of the twentieth century has been included in the study. Therefore, among the dargahs that were built from thirteenth century to twentieth century, a select few of them have been taken for research covering a period of eight centuries.

**Objectives of the Study**

This study will include not only the religio-mystical aspects, but also the sociological dimension of Sufism. Sufism is a kind of Reformation-in-reverse. It is to make an understanding of the phenomenon of saint and dargah and it is necessary to comprehend both the religio-mystical as well as the sociological dimensions. One of the objectives of the study of dargah is to draw women towards them to prevent the segregation. It shows women's strong faith and devotion to saints. The influential role not only by virtue of spiritual eminence but also of material influence by the dargahs will be studied. Veneration of saints is a common religio-cultural bond and it is the most integrative mechanism between the different communities.

**Review of Literature**

A number of books written by Indian and foreign authors tell about how Sufi practices are applicable to Muslim shrines, the way the Sufis
walked through, the rituals and ceremonies performed in the dargahs, the socio-religious changes brought about by Sufi poetry, the Indo-Islamic characteristics of art reflected on tomb monuments, etc. The literary works support the Sufi way of living by stressing that the dargah visitors should follow the footsteps of the saintly persons.

**Primary**

Annual Reports of Archaeological Survey of India furnish valuable informative materials found on the inscriptions and copper plates available at the dargahs. The Gazetteers of India published for Tamil Nadu State give the scholar additional information regarding the shrines located in different districts. The spot visit to the dargahs is much helpful to go through the stone materials and the coins available with the shrines. Interview with the committee members helps us know about the routine administrative work of the dargahs.

**Secondary**


Barbara Daly Metcalf in his work *Islamic Revival in British India* (Princeton: 1982) gives us the details about the Islamic principles which were followed by the Muslim leaders at different times. Bishop R. Caldwell, in his work, *A History of Tinnevelly* (New Delhi: 1998) gives the information about the work of Islamic missionaries and about the
Madurai region. A very useful book of C.J.Brown *The Coins of India* (New Delhi: 1988) furnishes the details of the numismatics issued by the Muslim rulers and Sufi kings in the region of Tamil Nadu.

Christian W. Troll, as an editor of his two books, *Islam in India: Studies and Commentaries* (New Delhi: 1985) and *Muslim Shrines in India* (New Delhi: 2003) throws valuable facts on the principles of Sufi movement in India and Deccan and explains how Sufism worked out in Indian sub-continent to bring the Muslim population towards it. He further gives the details about the documents related to various shrines and the rituals followed at the *dargahs* with their significance.

tells us how the invading Muslims directly or indirectly paved the way for the spread or strengthening the Islamic religion.

Md. Zubayr Siddiqi's *Khuda Bakhsh Lectures* (Patna) is useful for knowing the Indian and Islamic cultural changes which were effected by the coming of Muslims and their religion. J.L.Metha, in his *Advanced Study in the History of Medieval India* (New Delhi: 2003) tells us the effects of Muslims' rule and the spread of Islamic religion in medieval period. Mir Valiuddin's *The Quranic Sufism*, (Delhi: 1987) can be considered an authentic secondary source on the origin, spread and effects of Sufism on Indian soil. J.H.Nelson's best work, *The Madura Country A Manual* (Madras: 1868) can be studied for knowing about the history of Madurai with a significant period assigned to the rule of a Muslim saint buried at Goripalayam, Madurai. J.Raja Mohamed in his *Islamic Architecture in Tamil Nadu* (1996) gives a brief account on the architectural designs found at some dargahs in Tamil Nadu.

K.V.Raman's *Studies in South Indian Coins* (1999) is an useful book for the study of some coins with which we would come to know how the coins are informative sources as regards the Sufi kings. V.Rangacharya in his *Inscriptions of the Madras Presidency* (New Delhi: 1985 & 2002) collects the information about the land grants made by the local rulers to the saints or to their mausoleums after their death. H.G. Rawlinson in his work, *Indian Historical Studies* (New Delhi: 2001) has described in detail the historical importance of various sects and movements related to religions.

Richard M.Eaton, one of the excellent writers on Sufis, has explained how the Islamic traditions have changed the Indian life and the social services of the Sufis to the Indian society in his two valuable books
India's Islamic Traditions, 711-1750 (New Delhi: 2003) and Sufis of Bijapur 1300-1700: Social Roles of Sufis in Medieval India (Princeton: 2003). S.A.A. Rizvi's excellent study on Sufism reflects his prolific writings on the Muslim revivalist movements in India, the development of Sufism on Indian soil and how this movement reflected on the life of Muslims in his two volume study, A History of Sufism in India (New Delhi: 1978-1983) respectively.

H.A. Rose's Religious History of Islam (Delhi: 1984) gives us how the Islamic religion entered India and spread and how the religious principles were followed by the leaders to carry the faith to the public. R. Sathyanath Aiyar in his History of the Nayaks of Madura (Madras: 1991) narrates the relationship between the local Hindu kings and Muslim saintly persons. P. Subramaniam in his Social History of the Tamils (New Delhi: 1996) discusses the social life of Muslims which underwent many social changes due to the introduction of Islam and saints. Surendranath Sen in his Studies in Indian History (New Delhi: 1993) deals with the different aspects of Indian Muslims.

Tayka Shuayb Alim, in his Arabic Arwi and Persian in Sarendib and Tamil Nadu (Madras: 1993) makes an extensive study as regards the literary works of the Muslim writers and Muslim saints which help us know about the Tamil Nadu Muslim literati. Thomas Patrick Hughes in his A Dictionary of Islam (New Delhi: 2002) helps to understand the Islamic terminology. G.E. Von Grunebaum's Muhammadan Festivals, (New York: 1951) gives a clear picture on the Muslim festivals celebrated throughout the year and their importance on the life of Muslims. V. Vriddagirisan's The Nayaks of Tanjore (New Delhi: 1995) deals with the Nayak kings at Tanjore who held in high esteem the
Muslim missionaries by bestowing grants on them. Md. Yembal Thajammul's *Religious Harmony An Islamic Doctrine* (Pudukkottai: 2000) narrates how the Islamic doctrines worked to develop the social and religious amity. Ziyaud din A. Desai's *Indo Islamic Architecture* (New Delhi: 1998) is a highly valuable book for the study of Islamic art and the different designs applied to the Islamic monuments.

**Secondary - Tamil**

Abdul Razzak's *Then Pandi Seemaivile* (Keelakarai: 1997) in regional language can be studied for the life and missionary work of the saint buried at Ervadi. M.R.M. Abdur Rahim's *Islamic Kalaikalanjiam* in three volume study (Chennai: 1976), *Muslim Tamil Pulavarhal* (Chennai: 1999) and *Valimarhal Varalaru*, Vol.II & V (Chennai: 1993) can be studied as secondary sources to know about the Sufi saints of Tamil Nadu. He has dealt with the advent of Sufis to Tamil Nadu and how they taught the local people to be attracted towards Islam. Ameer Batcha's *Islamum India Samudayamum* describes in detail the role of Islam in the social development of Indian people.

Gulam Kadir Navalar's *Kanjul Karamattu* (1949) the best secondary source on the life of the saint Shahul Hameed of Nagore, goes on explaining from the birth to death of the saint with his teachings and interactions with the local people and leaders and it also throws informative facts regarding the construction of the main shrine and the minarets based on the inscriptions attached to the structures. S.M.Kamal's two works *Muslimgalum Tamilahamum* (Chennai: 1983) and *Sethupathy Mannar Cheppedugal* (Ramnad : 1992) are descriptive about the involvement of Tamil Nadu Muslims in this region for its religious growth and the grants made by the Ramanathapuram kings for
the development of *dargahs* in and around the town. Muhammad Haneef has furnished reliable facts for the social harmony created by the Islamic religion and its followers in his project paper *Islamum Samaya Nallinakkamum* (Madurai). Rahmania Sangam's *Pettaham* (Nagercoil: 2000) may be taken for the study of *dargahs* in Kanyakumari district and it gives a brief account on the development and maintenance of those shrines.

**Methodology and Source Materials**

Among the sources available for knowing the developments of the Muslim shrines, the inscriptions which will be dealt with in this study occupies the first place. Epigraphic records inscribed on buildings in Tamil and a few in Arabic and Persian installed by the kings or local chieftains during the lifetime or after the death of the saints speak about the grant of land, erection of monuments and sometimes their origin. Copper plates in some of the *dargahs* tell about the same facts. From these documents we may find out how the Hindu kings or leaders of princely states were associated with the places of Muslim pilgrimage and what their sentiments towards the Muslim brethren were and their living together as harmonious neighbours. Coins play a minor part in giving the facts for development of *dargahs*. Some of the coins issued by local chieftains and the saints themselves as an impact of their political entanglements throw light on *dargahs* as socio-religious centres. From the numismatics evidences in Arabic and Persian, the research scholars may get to know how and why these languages were used in Tamil Nadu and made a communicative means like Northern India. The Arabic and Persian terms became a common usage not only by the infiltration of political warriors but also by several religious persons. The inscriptions
in Tamil were studied by me and those inscribed in Arabic, Persian and Urdu are referred from the translated texts and the reports on archaeological finds. All the dargah monuments, which have been taken up for research work, were visited by me to hold interviews with dargah administrators, visitors and patients or their caretakers, to take down the architectural designs of the shrines and to witness the annual festivals. The literary evidences such as books and journals are available in large number. They are very much useful to know about the Sufi principles, development of dargahs, Sufi poetry, role of these shrines to foster communal harmony and rituals in the tomb monuments.

**Design of the Study**

Though a number of dargahs spread over Tamil Nadu, this research will be restricted to select ones. The popular dargahs are located on the coastline because of the visit of the saints from Arab countries by sea route and settlement along the seashore. It took many years to spread the Islamic faith there and the proximity to sea made them easier to have contact with their foreign followers and later their abodes became prominent. Tombs of popular saints which had origin in the thirteenth century but became prominent only from sixteenth century and some others which remain significant but not covered by the previous scholars will be brought under this study. The dargahs with the period of their prominence which will be dealt with for the research are the dargah of Nathar Wali, Tiruchirappalli of thirteenth century (Tiruchirappalli District); Syed Ibrahim, Ervadi of thirteenth century (Ramanathapuram District); Sultan Ala ud din, Goripalayam of fourteenth century (Madurai District); Ala ud din Sikkandar Shah, Tirupparankunram of fourteenth century (Madurai District); Shahul Hameed, Nagore of sixteenth century (Nagapattinam District); Sheikh Dawood, Muthupet of sixteenth century (Tiruvarur District); Kattu Bava, Pallivasal of seventeenth century (Pudukkottai District); Peer Muhammad, Thuckalay of seventeenth
century (Kanyakumari District); Rowther Sahib, Kottaipattinam of seventeenth century (Pudukkottai District); Naina Muhammad, Pasipattinam of eighteenth century (Ramanathapuram District); Mohideen Andavar, Pottalpudur (Tirunelveli District); Yusuf Khan, Madurai of nineteenth century (Madurai District); Kunangudi Masthan, Chennai of nineteenth century; Fasil Shah, Nagercoil (Kanyakumari District); Syed Ali Fatima, Attankarai (Tirunelveli District); and Syedani Beevi, Vellore of twentieth century (Vellore District). The century mentioned here is the period of the formation of the dargah. The dargah monuments of Nathar Wali of Tiruchirappalli and Syed Ibrahim of Ervadi who lived during the eleventh and twelfth centuries respectively too emerged conspicuous from the sixteenth century.

Chapterization

The entire work is divided into seven chapters excluding Introduction and Conclusion. The Introduction deals with the geography, scope of study, period of study, objectives of study, review of literature, methodology and source materials generated for the study.

The first chapter Dargahs and Sufism describes the principles of Sufism and discusses how the dargah veneration came into existence on the ideals of Sufi movement.

The second chapter Sufis as Social Reformers is related to describe how the Sufis worked to reform the society through the Sufi thoughts and how they carried spiritual message with the Sufi principles.

The third chapter Mystery of Tamil Nadu Dargahs describes the mystical acts of the saints and it is concerned how the mystery works out with the existence of dargahs.

The fourth chapter Festivals and Fairs and Role of Dargahs in Fostering Communal Harmony gives a lengthy account of the festivals, rituals and other practices relating to the dargahs. It further deals with the traditional attempts to preserve the communal harmony in the Hindu Muslim society.
The fifth chapter *Tomb Architecture* is related to the artistic features of the *dargahs* and it explains how the Islamic architecture came into existence and reflected on the Islamic monuments in Tamil Nadu.

The sixth chapter *Administration of Dargahs* deals with day-to-day administrative affairs of the *dargahs* and describes how the administration is carried out by the organised committee in every *dargah*.

The seventh chapter *Role of Sufis as Literati* is concerned with the poetic contributions of the Sufis and it furnishes details on spiritual knowledge through Sufi literature and brings about an understanding between the Sufi poets and the people.

The *Conclusion* brings out in detail an estimate of the entire *dargah* aspects of the period of study.

**Chapter I : Dargahs and Sufism**

*Dargahs* are venerated with the practices of Sufism, a movement of those who enunciated the temporal life to seek path towards God. Those who profess Sufism are called Sufis. Sufism in Tamil Nadu developed as an outcome of *silsilas* or mystic orders which were introduced by saints in different times. The basic truth of Sufism is to work not only on spiritual plane but also for removing feelings of enmity and exclusiveness and it seeks to reconstruct the society on the principles of amity and brotherhood. It opposes orthodoxy, denounces hypocrisy and emphasises equality of all men and essential unity of all religions. It is a movement to cultivate the virtues of humanity and tolerance. This research will bring to light the Sufi impact on Indian masses and how Sufi principles penetrated through the people to play a role in religious and cultural history of Indian Muslims.

**Chapter II : Sufis as Social Reformers**

The second chapter under this study will be dealing with the role of Sufis as Social Reformers. The *Sufi* saints literally called *auliya* the singular form of whom is *Wali* whose tombs became famed for the
religious and cultural experiences are revered in the history of Islam in Tamil Nadu. In their lifetime as well as after their death they have been looked upon by a large number of people as exemplars of spiritual excellence. The concise history of social roles on which only authentic information are available will be written up. The Sufi saints were really religious missionaries but when they were prevented from discharging this work or driven out of their stay, they were forced to engage in fighting against the enemies. The argument by some scholars that these fighting Sufis could be called as warrior saints will be discussed. The status of dargah monument of the "so called" Sufi, Yusuf Khan of Madurai will be put in argument since he did not behave like a missionary. Being a hero with political activities, the question of treating his mausoleum as dargah will be an analysis of this research. The noble qualities of saints in their lifetime and spiritual greatness of their successors will be an addition. It is necessary to analyse briefly the historical material about the life and teachings of the Sufis. Though biographical sources and details are available in less number, later writers have incorporated popular legends and literary sources known to be true. The writings on the events of their life will include their spirit of religion, wanderings and propagation of social, moral, ethical and religious ideologies to the masses. It is a significant fact to write about their supernatural powers with which the people believe that they are the friends of God.

Chapter III: Mystery of Tamil Nadu Dargahs

Mystical acts of the saints considered to be "miracles" by the visitors to the shrines is a part of research. The word "mysticism" is, in a sense, a word of confrontation. The acts of mystery during the life time of the auliya might be believed because of some supernatural qualities by way of adherence to the religious thoughts or abnormality of human brain. But belief in the mystical acts of saints after death may remain unapproved. A khanqah, the hospice of Sufis was used by them for their stay and for imparting tarbiyyat which means mystical education to
their disciples. The dargah visitors happen to be the believers in the mysticism of the Sufis when they are forcibly aggresed and depressed by the acts of nature and their bodily sufferings. They prefer these abodes of saintly persons as an asylum to relieve themselves of the mental illness. They have faith that their loss of material or pain in mind would be cured by offering prayer or appealing to God blessed personalities. People from different parts of Tamil Nadu and neighbouring states visit the dargahs for veneration and even to meet spiritual directors. Visiting the dargah premises and taking away some amulets and eatables from the dargah are believed to be holy ones. Reciting the Quranic versions and drinking the preserved water in the dargah are very much desired by the people. There are visitors who even believe that the diseases not cured by the medicine are cured by the intense and concentrated prayer at the dargah and solution for their request to the auliya would be a surprising miracle of the saint. Pilgrims stress that the holiness of the shrine and its surroundings lay in the close association of saint with God. They wish the blessings of the auliya to be extended even to those who do not visit the shrines. Offering money and material to the tombs, covering the graves with decorated clothes, walking around the grave or tomb, sitting and reading some versions of Quran near the graves, helping the poor within dargah surroundings, etc. are some of the religious and social acts that are done to get favours from these spiritual leaders.

Chapter IV: Festivals and Fairs and Role of Dargahs in Fostering Communal Harmony

Festivals, and other customary practices related to them are significant events in Sufi shrines. These festivals are celebrated with rituals and devotion. Everyday rites are marked with specific performance and made more solemn on Thursday and Friday of every week. Annual Urs festival is attended by thousands of pilgrims including those from other faiths and distant places too. The date of this festival falls on the date of death anniversary of the saint and fixed according to
Islamic lunar calendar. When a number of pilgrims come from remote places they reveal a contrasting picture of rituals of various origins. Some unIslamic practices established in dargahs will be a matter of condemnation in this study. But the core of some celebrations are of Islamic origin with offerings accompanied by invocations to God, not to the saint and prayers being made to Him through the mediation of buried person. Musical concert is arranged by dargah administrators to sing in praise of God and saints but it is organised only in a few of the shrines in Tamil Nadu. It may be termed a mystical concert in case of Sufi shrines for the reason that it is not an entertainment but to arouse mystical emotions through which the devotees feel united with God.

The dargahs play a significant role in preserving harmony between the Muslims and the people belonging to other faiths. The evolution of dargah culture with its customary practices and influenced by the Hindu traditions brought this unity among the religions from thirteenth century. It was also the work of Sufi saints to develop peaceable way in the society by their religious discourses in their lifetime. Not a single record of either contemporaries or present legendary writers has been found to lay the blame on them that the Sufis behaved against the wishes of the people of other religions or they carried a harmful propaganda. We can see the impact of these good acts in Sufi shrines today. The mere visit of the people other than Muslims is the best witness for communal integration. The cooperation which includes making of festival arrangements, drum beating, maintaining peace during the festivals, etc., is extended by the Hindu brethren.

Chapter V : Tomb Architecture

Tomb architecture will be a decorating aspect of this research. The architectural designs in the dargah monuments for which a map showing the location of the select dargahs in Tamil Nadu will be presented are the best specimens of the saracenic style. The only thing that is not found on the walls of the shrines are the painting and sculpture. The walls
with mosaics and marble flooring are not new in the dargah buildings since these decorative designs had been used in Islamic monuments all over the world. The horseshoe form of arch which became a characteristic of Muslim architecture was introduced in these shrines in Tamil Nadu. The pointed arch first used in Ummayyad mosque in Damascus became a distinctive feature in Tamil Nadu dargahs. Another contribution which was truly original was the system of vaulting based on intersecting arches and visible intersecting ribs. The Muslim tradition merged with the Indian and there arose a definite style characterized by almost regular use of arches and vault. In the hands of Indian workmen, this mixed art attained great beauty and perfection and became Indian national style. The Indian languages inclusive of Tamil preserved several architectural terms which attest an Arabic or Persian origin. Erection of domes on the outer top of a building is an exclusive feature.

Chapter VI: Administration of Dargahs

Administration of the dargahs is another chapter in this research work. An administrative committee commonly known as Dargah Managing Committee is organised with a President, a Secretary, a Treasurer and a few executive members. Though it is a common feature in the management, a few of the dargahs in Tamil Nadu have only one head superseding all other office bearers. Trust formation is not seen in all the shrines. Indeed, the government interferes in the dargah affairs where the management is found guilty or if faulty things take place and a special officer is appointed. This government administrator will continue in office till the disputes are settled either by court, Tamil Nadu Wakf Board or Dargah Committee itself. The income for the administration of the shrines could be classified into regular and charitable donations. The regular income is fetched from golaks which mean money boxes in Persian placed in all the dargahs and income from lands and rent from commercial premises is received only by those dargahs which own these properties. The collections in money boxes vary depending upon the number of visitors and bigger the dargah, larger the collection is.
commonly seen. Donations by the private individuals are limited. Offerings in the form of gold or ornaments such as those in Hindu temples are not made in the **dargahs**. Money collected is spent for workers' salary, celebrations of festivals, etc.

### Chapter VII: Role of Sufis as Literati

Sufi poetry will be forming a literary contribution by the **Sufi** saints. Well versed in Arabic or Persian, some of the saints wrote literary songs in praise of God. The poems further stress the socio-religious setup. They requested the public to pay complete veneration to God and no saint had composed poems in his own favour. They passed their thoughts and passions of Islamic religion to the followers through their literary works. The saints like Kunangudi Masthan and Peer Muhammad contributed a vast trail of hymns in a beautiful Tamil language. They made an appeal to the people to associate with God only with good behaviour they have and good customs they follow in their life. Their songs evince spiritual fervour with a fine language rhetoric.

As a part of inference, it is argued by the scholars and Islamists that tomb construction and its veneration are Islamic or unIslamic. The **Sufi** saints, for the rendering of their socio-religious services may be remembered. Building the tomb over his grave and preserving and visiting it for social and historical ideals cannot be unIslamic since the shrines remain a meeting place of different religious communities. But worship of grave and tomb, prostration before it, following of unreligious practices and some superstitions relating to tombs would turn the **dargah** monument into a place of worship with anti-Islamic principles.