CHAPTER – III

ISLAMIC MONUMENTS
CHAPTER – III

ISLAMIC MONUMENTS

The erstwhile South Travancore which is now called as Kanyakumari district was highly influenced by Hinduism through the ages. So construction of temples, mandapas, flag staffs, temple ponds (holy tanks), gopuras and vimanas was very common due to the royal patronage.\(^1\) References are available regarding the donations given by the Cholas, the Pandyas, the Nayaks, the Venad kings and the Travancore kings for the construction of various temples, mandapas and tanks etc.\(^2\)

Christianity entered this holy land after the 12\(^{th}\) century. The net result was the introduction of new form of architecture which was alien to the local people. Churches with Gothic, Roman and Greek architecture was introduced.\(^3\)

Regarding the Islamic influence in this land’s end, there is no concrete information available regarding the exact period of its arrival to this region. But it is believed that because of the Islamic conquest on India during the 10\(^{th}\) century, Islam began to spread

\(^1\) Travancore Directory, 1938, Trivandrum, 1938, pp. 93 – 100.
in India. In the southern most end, it might have been spread due to the Sufi saints who came from outside for the spread of Islamic teachings. Saints like Malik Ibn Dhinar and Paavaa Kasim came to Kottar, preached Islamic teachings among the local people the resulted spread of Islam in this region. The net result was the emergence of mosques and durgahs in this area. The Sufi saints were the inspiring force behind the introduction of Sorasanic, Arabian, Turkish and Islamic architecture in India in general and South Travancore in particular.

A number of mosques, dargahs and other Islamic places of worship emerged at Kottar, Edalakudy, Thengapattinam, Thiruvithancode, Azhagiyanandapam, Aloor, Thittuvilai and Madhavalayam etc.

In this chapter an attempt has been made to highlight the important Islamic monuments of this district.

Malik Ibn Dhinar, a Sufi saint and his companions on the way to Srilanka to visit Adam’s peak got down at Cranganore, Kerala. They happened to meet the ruler of that place. The ruler came to

know about Islam and with his permission the visiting team came to Thiruvithancode, Thengapathinam, Colachel and Kottar. They preached Islam among the local people. The tomb of Malik Mohammed, a relative of Malik Ibn Dhinar at Thiruvithancode bears witness to the early establishment of Islam in this region.  

The tomb of saint Paavaa Kassim at Kottar is one of the ancient tombs of this district. The celebrated poet Aalippulavar, author of *Mugurujumaalai* paid a visit to this mosque. In the shore of Colachel a tomb of a lady could be seen where many Muslim ladies are coming.

At Thuckalay saint Peer Mohammed has been buried. His tomb also attracts thousands of people irrespective of all religions. The area around the tomb was donated by the Travancore kingdom.

As the Muslim population increased the number of mosques also increased side by side. In the district of Kanyakumari there are 56 *Jamaaths* (Muslim Mahallas). In each Jamaath there are number of mosques depending upon the need of the locality. Mosque is not only a place of workship but also the centre of learning. All Muslim functions are conducted in the mosque campus.

Thanks to the Delhi sultans and Mughal emperors, Islamic influence reached up to Madurai region. The emergence of Mabaar state and the successive establishments of Muslim rule in this region witnessed huge amount of land donations to this people. These lands were later called as wakf lands. Wakf means permanent dedication of any movable or immovable properties for religious, pious and charitable purposes recognized by Islamic law.

In Kanyakumari District there are 141 wakf institutions are there. Among them five institutions are considered as the biggest. They are (i) Hazarat Fazil Shah Avulia Thaika, Kottar, (ii) Malik Dinar Baithulmal, Kottar, (iii) Ilangadai Muslim Samudaya Trust, Nagercoil, (iv) Muslim Mohallam, Colachel and (v) Anjuvanam Peer Muhammadia Muslim Association, Thuckalay.

Let us discuss the important durgahs and mosques of Kanyakumari District one by one.

Paavaa Kaasim Palli or Vempadi Palli, Elankadai

It is an Islamic place of worship situated at Elankadai near Kottar, a suburb of present day Nagercoil town.\textsuperscript{12} Hazruth Paava Kasim, a Sufi saint came from outside India reached the lands end and preached Islam there.

\textsuperscript{12} Personal interview with K.M.A. Syed Mohamed, aged 61, Al-Jamilul Anvar Arabic College, Thiruvithancode on 1\textsuperscript{st} March, 2012.
A native of Dhaskant city in the present Ukraine country, Paava Kasim had received proper Islamic basic education and the hereditary medical treatment of his ancestors and started his religious pilgrimage throughout the world.¹³

After visiting so many countries and places, he came to the southern tip of India and landed at Manakudy coast. Since time immemorial, Kottar, the celebrated commercial centre was mentioned by all the foreign scholars, travellers and geographers. So naturally Paava Kasim learned a lot about the place and he reached Kottar and stayed at Elankadai, nearer to Kottar.

Through his medical practice he became popular in this region and the local people began to listen his preachings. Gradually a large number of people embraced Islam particularly those Jains and Buddhists of this region, who faced severe punishments from the Government.¹⁴

After so many years of preaching activities Paava Kasim lost his breath and his body was buried at Elankadai. A durgah was built at that site which is called as Paavaa Kaasim Palli.¹⁵ The durgah has a neem tree so it is otherwise called as Vempadi Palli.(Neem tree mosque).

When Kulothunka Chola, founder of Chola – Chalukya line of the imperial Chola dynasty conducted an expedition against Kottar, an attempt was made to demolish the cemetery of Paava Kassim. An elephant was directed to demolish it and the latter refused to obey the royal order and paid homage to the grave. The king realised his mistake and donated an elephant to the Paavaa kaasim Palli to participate in the ten days celebration every year. Land donations and gifts were also presented to the Palli by the same Chola Chalukya ruler.

*Mugurujumaalai* written by Aalipulavar was demonstrated in A.D.1585 at this durgah. Annual anniversary celebrations of Paava Kaasim are being held in this durgah. Another Sufi saint Sheik Abdul Rahman Sahib also came from Bagdad i.e present Iraq and continued the preaching activities and finally he was also buried in this durgah after his death.\(^{16}\)

Some notable Islamic Saints like Maluik Mudali alias Hazrath Gnaniyar Sahib, Kunjah Mannaan Sheik, Sheik Uduman Sahib, Peevi Paathima Nachiar, Hamsah Lebbai, Fakir Mannaan Muhammad, Hayathe Avuliya were buried in this mosque.

**Gnaniyar Palli, Kottar**

A mosque famous for communal harmony in this region is the Gnaniyar Palli which was built after the death of Sheik Muheideen

Maluk Mudali alias Hazrath Gnaniyar Sahib. He did meritorious services for the propagation of Islam in Ramnad region and finally he reached Kottar and passed away in A.D.1788.\(^\text{17}\)

He was a poet. He left his family life and through his yoga practice he became popular at that time. His grave is also there with in this mosque. Every year during the Islamic month of Rubyusaani, 12 days festival is conducted in which a saffron flag is hoisted on the first day. A *Kuthuvilakku* (brass lamp) has been installed near the grave of this durgah. It is a typical example for Hindu – Muslim unity in this region.\(^\text{18}\)

**Malik Dinar Palli, Edalakudy**

A mosque has been named after Malik Dinar, a Sufi saint which is situated at Edalakudy, a suburb of Kottar. In front of the mosque, there is a street by name *Aripputheru* (filtering of gold ore). It has a historical background. Kottar was famous for weaving and goldsmithy. It is believed that the Arab traders came to Kottar and collected the rare items of this region against gold biscuits. The goldsmiths collected the gold and created beautiful ornaments. *Maicad*, the remains of the process was filtered near the pond near this street. In Tamil, filteration means *Arippu*. Now the pond has been


converted into a ground. But the name of the street speaks about its historic background.\(^{19}\)

**Kutpapalli, Kottar**

When Malik Kafur, the commander-in-chief of Ala-ud-din Khilji conducted his southern expedition, Sheik Nurdin, a Sufi saint from Cannanoore became his friend. Sheik Nurdin came to Kottar and got attracted with the atmosphere and stayed there. With his initiative a mosque was constructed ie Kottar Kutpapalli.\(^{20}\)

Peer Muhammad Sahib was a saint who was born at Kanihapuram near Tenkasi in the Tirunelveli region. His mother was Aameena and his father was Sirumalukkar.\(^{21}\) His grandfather was Vavaanch. A pious Muslim, Peer Muhammad had wandered in a number of places, conducted meditation and at last he came and settled at Thuckalay. In the Western Ghats, he took meditation in a beautiful location which has been named after him as *Peerumedu*.\(^{22}\)


Surprisingly he wrote 18,000 devotional songs. Islamic works like *Thirunevigeetham*, *Bismilkuran*, *Marifathmaalai*, *Gnanakuravanchi*, *Gnanapuhalchi*, were written by Peer Muhammad. Because of his close contact with the local people, the latter called him as *Peerappa*. It is said that he buried himself in a small grave and in that present place, the present durgah has been constructed.\(^\text{23}\)

**Kallupalli, Thengapattinam**

It is situated in the coastal village of Thengapattinam. The village is otherwise called as *Thenpathan*, *Kuzhanthai nagar*, *Thenpattanam*, *Thekkepattanam* etc. A saint by name Malik Ibn dhinar who lived there constructed a mosque namely *Kallupalli*.\(^\text{24}\) Eventhough there are six mosques at present, but Kallupalli is the important one with historicity.

**Ethamozhi Mosque**

Ethamozhi is a small village situated 10 kms from Nagercoil. It is an emerging Islamic centre also. In this village a number of mosques like *Reebai* mosque, *Muhaideen* mosque, *Meerama* mosque etc are there.\(^\text{25}\) Among them Muhaideen Aandahai Kupta Palli


deserves special mention. Started as a small thatched sheet mosque during the 18th Century A.D. and later it was converted into a big one and recently it was once again renovated in 1971.

**North Churankudi Mosque**

At the end of 17th century, a saint *Fakir Sahib* otherwise called as Tharves Meeran left his family life and became a wanderer. He, visited Nahoor Durgah and finally came to Kottar where he conducted *Namaaz* at Elankadai Paavaa Kaasim Mosque and stayed at Churankudi, a small Muslim hamlet situated 4 kms from Nagercoil town.\(^{26}\) He requested a local landlord Mr. Sridharan for denoting a small land for the construction of a mosque for namaaz. In the meantime the saint made a miracle of recovering the son of Sridharan from severe stomach pain. With much enthusiasm and encouragement received from local philanthrophists, Fakir Sahib started the construction of a mosque which is called as *Hameed Nayagam Mosque*.\(^{27}\)

**Udhuman Lebbai Syed Jimmah Masjid, Thittuvilai**

It is strongly believed that before the arrival of Paava Kasim, a Sufi Saint from Saudi Arabia, Udhuman Lebbai Syed came to


South Travancore and settled at Thittuvilai village situated 8 kms from Nagercoil town. He was a cloth merchant. He did miracles among the local people. He maintained a simple life along with his wife and two children. He was locally called as Appachi Appa.

The local inhabitants liberally donated him with agricultural lands. At present the local Jamaath has more than 100 acres of land, the commercial established of Thittuvilai, and also a mandapa worth of Rs.50 crores. A towel prepared by the Sufi sait is kept preserved at a Chettiar’s house at Azhagiapandyapuram.

Thittuvilai is one of the important centres of Islam in this district. During the 15th century A.D. Uduman Lebbai Mashaik, a saint constructed a small mosque there. It was just like the Malik Dinaar mosque of Kottar. Significantly it was a granite mosque and later in 1955 it was expanded. Again renovation work was started in 1984 and it was completed in 1989. Once again expansion and modification works were conducted and at present 2000 people can able to attend the prayer. Another mosque situated near the main road has been named after Vaahaiyadi Fakir Paava Oliyullah, a Sufi Saint. It is a holy place because the body of Saint Vaahaiyadi Fakir Bava Oliyullah has been buried there.

**Vadasery Mosque**

It is situated near the Kanahamoolam vegetable market\(^{29}\) in Nagercoil. During the 19\(^{th}\) Century A.D., the Jamaath was constituted and a small *palli* (mosque) was built there. Later during the dawn of 20\(^{th}\) century modifications were conducted and a biggest mosque has been constructed now. It is also a holy place for the Muslims because Thulkaasa Oliyullah, a Sufi saint from North India came to this place and did miracles in 1850’s and his body has been buried in this mosque.\(^{30}\)

**Kottar Elankadai Mosque**

Kottar, a suburb of Nagercoil was a popular commercial centre since time immemorial. Even now it is a busy commercial centre. Ptolemy and other Greeco-Roman writers made references about Kottar. It was called as *Kottar, the Metropolis*.\(^{31}\) So many popular Hindu temples and Christian churches are decorating the beauty of this town. Islam also established its hold over this region since 12\(^{th}\) century A.D.\(^{32}\)

\(^{29}\) Kanahamoola vegetable market has been named after His Highness Moolam Thirunal Maharaja of Travancore during his 50\(^{th}\) birth day celebrations.


A Sufi saint Syyaduna Paavaa Kaasim started propagation of Islamic basic principles in this region.\textsuperscript{33} In this connection he built a small mosque in A.D.1250.\textsuperscript{34} Later it was modified and today it is a majestic mosque in this area. Another mosque has been also named after Syyaduna Paava Kasim situated in the same locality.

**Malik Muhammad Palli, Thiruvithancode**

Malik Ibn Dhinar, a Sufi saint along with his son Malik Muhammed came from Soudhi Arabia and reached south Travancore, preached Islam at Thengappattinam and constructed a mosque there.

Then Malik Muhammad came to Thiruvithancode, a place which had close association with Venad Kingdom. He preached Islamic principles and built a Jummah mosque there. When he lost his breath, his body was buried there with in the mosque complex. Now it is called on Malik Muhammad Pallivaasal. Gradually Thiruvithancode became the biggest Jamaath in south Travancore. It is also the oldest Jamaath also. In memory of his great services, a tomb was built in the mosque.

We can see another tomb in the name of Syed Muhammed Sahib Oliyullah and another one for Masthan Madhar Sahib are found.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} S.M.Kamal, *Muslimkalum Tamilahamum* (Tamil), Madras, 1990, pp. 30 – 33.
\item \textsuperscript{34} C. Kumerasa Pillai, *Sadhavathani Sheik Thampi Pavalar*, Madras, 1980, pp. 48 – 50.
\end{itemize}
Ummar Oli, the son of Syed Mohammed Sahib is affectionately called by the local Muslims as Kaivetti Sahib. In memory of this great saint, an annual festival is celebrated on Rabiul Avval Dirai 22nd (Kasthuri festival).

R.Vasudeva Poduval, a renowned Archaeologist of Travancore identified some Muslim names in the inscription at Kallukulam (Granite pond) near Kallupalli at Thiruvithancode.\textsuperscript{35}

In this centre, we can see another mosque in the name of Sheik Norrudheen Oli. In praise of him Maulud is conducted here from Dulhuji pirai 11\textsuperscript{th} to 14\textsuperscript{th}. This festival attracts people from all over this district. In addition with this, one Habaradi Palli and another one Thaikkappalli are there.

**Jummah Palli, Mathavalayam**

Mathavalayam has been named after the existence of layam (shed fro horses) of the Travancore kings in this place nearly 400 years back.\textsuperscript{36} In that place the horse division of the Travancore army was stationed and maintained. Two hundred years back a mosque was built there and called as Sheikuna Sheik Saamion Nayagam Jumma Palli. It was renovated and opened in 1986. Another mosque


is also there at this tiny village called as *Paarai Palli*, built on the small hillock.\(^{37}\)

**Peer Appa Durgah, Thuckalay**

It is otherwise called as Asheik Peer Mohammad Sahib Appa Oliyullah Durgah. It has been named after Peer Mohammed, a saint turned poet who was born at Kanihapuram near Tenkasi. He belonged to 15th century A.D. He took meditation, for several years. His hereditary profession was weaving. The durgah named after Peer Appa is a typical example for communal harmony.\(^{38}\)

It is said that he made a miracle during the construction of the fortification around Padmanabhapuram palace.\(^{39}\) The construction workers insulted Peerappa one day and as a result the construction of the wall fell down continuously and finally the workers expressed their regret and as a result Peerappa came to the spot and laid the first stone for the construction and it was completed without any problem.\(^{40}\)

---

To summarize, the Sufi saints who came from Saudi Arabia did a commendable role for the propagation of Islam in India in general and south Travancore i.e. present Kanyakumari District in particular. Gradually mosques and masjids and dargahs emerged in this soil. The alien style of architecture like Islamic, Arabian and Turkish were utilized for the construction of tombs and mosques. At present Kanyakumari District has a number of beautiful, decorative, stylistic mosques and dargahs reflecting the hoary past of the Sufi saints.

In addition with the Islamic monuments, this region witnessed the introduction of Jain and Buddhist architecture in the form of viharas, pallies, monasteries etc. Let us discuss in detail about the various Jain and Buddhist monuments of this Kanyakumari District in the forthcoming chapter.