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Author(s) Thulasidas

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Cultural History of Tanur

Thulasidas
BA History
Government College
Malappuram

Introduction

The thinker John Dryden once said that 'first we make habits and then habits make us'. In the case of Tanur the question arises 'is the specific habits and styles of Tanur's locale and their social formation consciously created by someone? Whether it is natural or not? Tanur is a land that deserves special importance in the cultural field of Kerala.

As regards the origin of the place name Tanur, there can see mainly two versions. One version is that once Tanur was famous for its *Thanni* trees(Terminlia bellirica), which was used to treat sores on the skin. In olden days, there were many *Thanni* trees growing on the southern side of Vazhakkatheru, Tanur. It may be the reason why this land got the name Tanniyur and later Tanur. Another opinion is that the name Tanur comes from the meaning of low area or *thazhnna ur*[1].

Geographical features

Arabian Sea in the west, the green hills and *PunjaPadarm* the east and the Poorapuzha and Tirur puzha define the northern and southern border of the vast Tanur. The sea has been a permanent and decisive factor in the history of Kerala. It has invested the state with a maritime tradition of its own[2]. The sea has a crucial place in the history and geography of Kerala. The sea, ports and coastal areas have played an important role in shaping the culture of Kerala. Kerala had established relations with foreign countries. Christianity and Islam came in and first established influence among the people of the coastal region of Kerala. Kerala has 590 km of coastline and 236 coastal villages[3]. The land was characterized by low fertile sand soil. Because of this, people were engaged in fishing, related jobs, and trading from ancient times. However, the punjapadam which stretches from Morya and Kunnumpuram areas in the east is the largest paddy fields were cultivated twice a

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year including summer[4]. This geography played a major role in shaping the social environment of Tanur.

Tanur panchayat was formed in 1964, was part of kozhikode district. Parappanagadi panchayat is on the northern side of Tanur, Ozhur and Nannabra panchayat on the east, Niramaruthur panchayat and Tanalur panchayat on the south and the Arabian sea on the west. Tanur is a important region where hindu and muslim community live in harmony.

Occupation

Fishing is the main occupation of the coastal people. Although the new generation is moving into the Gulf and other sectors in recent times, most are still able to adopt traditional jobs. This occupation has had the greatest impact on the spoken language in this area where fishing has been adopted as its main occupation. Many expressions and phrases related to this occupation can be found in colloquial language here. Living close proximity to the sea, their social environment is completely different from the other people. Sardine, Mackerel and solefish are easily available here[5]. Sometimes expensive fishes and shrimp are also available. Vazhakkatheru is one of the important trading center.

It has been reported that barter system existed in Tanur long years in a customary nature. Outsiders who came to Tanur and buy fish from the market traders. Jackfruit was an important commodity that flowed easily to Tanur. Since jackfruit plantation was rare in coastal region, the neighboring villagers carry jackfruit on their heads and sell in the market in return of fish. The logic behind the proverb *chakka thinnan tanurilek* (go to Tanur to eat jackfruit) is explained[6].

There are some people live in the market area and some are live in the coast. Fisherman and merchants were used to live as two separate communities at the eastern end of Tanur. *Purakkal* address like *Elarakante purakkal, Alikante purakkal, Musakkante purakkal* were generally known to fisherman families, whereas the address end with *Akath* such as, *Aminummanakath, Ummaithanakanth* etc. were usually refers to trader's families[7].

Religious Diversities

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The coastal residents of Tanur were Muslims and Hindus. The ancient Keraladeswarapuram Temple located three kilometers south of the Tanur and the Valiyakulangara mosque located in the West along the Conolly Canal prove that both Hindus and Muslims lived here in Tanur from very past[8]. The ancestors of this fishing community converted from Hinduism to Islam in ancient times[9].

It can be said that the western part of Tanur was filled with Muslim. The *Pramanis* or chiefs of Tanur were Namboothiri families like *Elamkulam, Muthedam, Attiri,* the Nair families like *Pekaat, Thekkepuram*, and Muslims like *Valiyakath, Maliyekkal, Pazhayakath.*When Islam came to Kerala there was also religious propaganda in Tanur too. Malik Dinar and his team who came with the religious instruction were mainly concentrating in the coastal areas. So, some of them must have reached here during their journey from Kodungallur to Mangalapuram. Until 18th century Muslims lived only in coastal areas. Islam began to spread to the inlands of Kerala with the 18th century. The Muslims who mainly rooted in the port of cities of Kerala, did not spread to the inlands of Kerala. Even before 9th century Arabs had reached Kerala[10].

Tanur is known in history for its religious harmony. The *Kalangari Utsav* held at Sri Sobhaparambu Bagavathy temple is eternal vision of religious harmony. It is celebrated as a unique and native festival of Tanur[11]. It is held on Tuesday or Friday immediately after the Sabarimala mandala Puja. This festival lasted for three days in which *kodi varavu* came from seven areas to the temple. It was the most popular festival in Malabar. Tanur is the land of religious harmony. The prime role in conducting the annual *kalangari* festival of Temple is attributed to a muslim family called *Pazhayakam.* It was Bapu Haji, the elder member of Tharavadu who select the the Temple Aaven and give permission to conduct the festival. There is a legend that, when a woman of Vettath king's family fell into the water, it was male member of Muslim family who saved her life by holding her hand. Because of untouchability, which was strictly practiced at that time, she was caste out from the royal family. But the Muslim family accepted her and later she was converted to Islam. The Vettath royal family gave a portion of family property to that lady and Sri Kurumba Temple belongs to this property. This family later known as Pazhayakam. That is why, the

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consent of the Pazhayakam Tharavadu was taken for conducting the temple festival at Shobaparambu. Even today the position of Aven is assigned by the Pazhayakath family[12].

Some people argued that *Narimada* found in the eastern areas of Morya and Kunnumpuram were the centers of Buddhist worship in ancient times. Tanur Pariyapuram Mahabodha Budhashram is an institution in Pariyapuram. The foundation was laid by Srei Bhiskhu Darma Skanda Swamikal and K. Kelappan in 1928 during the joint anniversary of of Sree Narayana Sramodharana Sangam and pariyapuram cental up school[13].

Tanur is a unique region where people still celebrate the traditional practices like *koottamparachil, Kurikkalyanam, Nattu Maulud.*

Koottamparachil

Koottamparachil is the most important cultural symbol that doesn't go away from Tanur. The social and family problems of a *Mahal* were solved under the guidance of *Karnavans* or the elders, it is the system of local panchayat that revolves neighborhood-disputes, boundary issues, problem related with family disintegration, assault cases and material issues etc. people refer to this local gathering as *koottam parachil*. It played a great role in prevent the tendency of running to police station or court for any silly reason and keep relation intact. *Koottamparachil* can solve the cases, which cannot solved by the court by sitting together plaintiff and defendant. The name of Pariyapuram was arrived from Pariharapuram. Pandyala was the important dispute resolution center, which was near to the home of Saithali Kutty Master, who was prominent Muslim civic leader who take important decisions regarding the problems[14].

Kurikalyanam

*Kurikalyanam*is a financial transaction that still bear the cultural symbol of Tanur. Before the advent of Gulf money and modern banking system, people conduct kurikalyanam for financial needs. Gradually this system was disappeared from all region, but it can be said with certainly, that even today it existed in Tanur[15]. It was generally conduct at Friday evening When a person need financial assistance due to many problems, he will conduct kurikalyanam and he could receive enough money.

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This money will be re pay by him in another person's kurikalyanam. Apart from financial transaction it helps to maintain good social relationship and unity and peace of community.

Naattu Maulud

Naattu Maulud is a prayer ceremony and local festival of Tanur conducted by every household in Tanur. *Naattu Maulud* is organized in every *Mahal* on every Thursday in the month of *Rabbiul Akhir* of Arabic calendar. Every household prepares in advance and decorates the house and its surroundings for this day. All distant relatives and friends ere invited to the ceremony. Many alimees and Muallims from neighbouring religious institutions will arrive to the Maulud. After prayer, food served. In olden days after two *perunnals*, *Eid al-fitar* and *Eidal-Adha* most houses have prepared meet and ghee rice Only in Maulud. when Nattumaulud is held in the homes of the economically advantaged merchants, the poor coastal people used to go there[16].

Puthiyapla Nombuthura

Puthiyapla Nombuthura has been an age-old tradition in coastal villages during the Ramzan Season. In houses where girls are married, the groom must break his fast within the first three days of Ramadan from his wife house. It was considered a matter of prestige and pride. It is considered auspicious to perform it during the first three days of Ramzan with the spirit of a small ceremony. An array of dishes ranging from *kozhiyada* to *Tharikanji* is prepared for this.

Like any region Tanur has its own taste and flavourings Since, most people are fisherman, fish is an essential food item on all day, except Friday. The spicy fish curry is very prominent. In addition to fish curry, people used to boil fish with salt water. Crabs, Squid, sardine are simply boiled and eaten like this. *Koonthal choor* and and cooking sardine with tapioca considered as another special food item in Tanur. They had a habit of grilling fishes without cleaning inside of fish. The most special non-fish dish In Tanur is *Masalachakkara* Another special is Ada, which was made in rice flour with jaggery on special days like *Bara at*, and *Muharam*[17]

Fishing

Tanur coastal area consists of ten shores namely Anchudi Kadappuram, Cheeran Kadappuram, Edakkadappuram Marakkar kadappuram, Ossan kadappuram,

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Pandaram kadappuaram, Albazar kadappuram, Fakir kadappuram,and Farook Kadappuram. Most people depend on fishing and related jobs. Fishing shapes the culture, language, custom, ritual and family structure of society. Traditional occupation made them aware of waves, stars and winds. As they needed, they developed local strategies of fishing and knowledge about sea and marine life[18].

Most of people in Tanur depend on fishing jobs for their livelihood. There are many occupations like catching, storing, shipping and selling of fish. There two sections for fishing, they are *Thonikkar* and *Vallakkar*. The *thonikkar* conduct fishing in small boats while *vallakar* use relatively large canoes(*chundanvallam)* for large scale fishing[19]. Fishing is the most economic pursuit all along the Malabar coast, which considerably export to foreign countries. Tanur being an important fishing center, fisherman form bulk of population[20].

Fisherman live in seven wards on the western border of Tanur Panchayath. More than 95 percent of them were Muslims. Before the coming of modern equipments, the fishermen used traditional tools like *Kattamaram, Kettuvallam and Ottathadivallam*, *pankayaam, ottapaya, katrika paya* Stem, rudder etc. were also used to determine the course of the boats. Nowdays these were replaced by motor and outboard engines. In olden days, fishing Canoes were made of trees like Jackfruit and Ayin and nets were made of threads of cotton and Jute. *Peythuvala, Chalavala, Kolpi, Veeshuvala, Padivala* etc. were used as fishing nets. There were many fishing workers known as, *thonikkar, ozhikkal panikkar, chalavalakkar, pothanvalakkar, discovalakkar*. This categorisation was on the basis of their fish catching technique and use of tools. After catching fish, koral companikkar (collecting labourers) collect fish from canoes. The kayattal companikkar(loading workers) stood for loading works and marketing companies are the exporters of fish. There were also local sellers[21].

Most of the catches are sold in fresh Fish condition. Fish is preserved only when the catches cannot be disposed of in fresh condition. Fish is preserved by conventional means. The methods employed are sun-drying with salt and salt curing either by dry or wet process[22].

Conclusion

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Tanur had a unique geographical location Kerala coast. Fishing was their main occupation of the area. People of Tanur stuck on on their traditional beliefs, the existance of tradional practices like Nattumaulud kurikkalyanam koottamparachil were the example for this. Oter than these traditional practices gave a gave a unique position to the land. The secular nature and religious tolerance of the area was visible from annual Kalangarari festival of Shobhaparambhu devi temple. There was a belief that the influence if Buddhism also spread here.

End notes:

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