



Research Paper

A review of Kottupalli Kunhi Marakkar Shaheed Mala: An Anti-colonial Mappila Ballad

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Abstract: This article sheds light on the historical significance of Kottupalli Mala, war ballad composed by eminent Mappila poets in Arabic Malayalam dialect at different times. This genre of songs creates sound historical conception and instigate a brave sense of resistance attitude to the minds of readers. The theme of song also conveys moral value and respects women's pride by depicting Kunhimarakkar, a young man who has dedicated his life to save a virgin girl from the cruel hands of Portuguese invaders. In this way article demands the importance of revisit of these kinds of Mappila ballad written in Arabic Malayalam through the passage of time. The song is particularly notable due to its style of narration, mode of words, phrases and idioms which are used in the poem.

Key words: warballad, Kottupalli mala, Arabi-Malayalam dialect, Mappilappattu, Anti-colonial literature, Uroos, Nercas

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Mappila songs or Mappilappattu are the folksongs of Mappila community in Kerala. These are composed within a melodic frame work blended with cultural and ethnical Identity. Generally, two types of themes are seen in Mappila songs. they are loving and struggles in nature. Loving song are called Kesspattu and struggles poems are called Padapattu. Kothupallimalas are among these fighting poems. Kottupallimalas are the war ballads composed in the last decades of 16th century based on apathetic incident in Malabar.

These are the Ishals (songs) portraying the horrible invasions and diabolical atrocities committed by the Portuguese in Malabar during this period. The protagonist of these ballads is ManathuVeettilKunhiMarakkar¹ who was a favoured disciple of Shaikh Zainudin Makhdum I (1467-1522)², the prominent scholar who declared war on Colonialism in Malabar and Purathiyil Abdul Qadir Sheikh, a revered spiritual persona of the time.³

The ballads sing the brave struggle of the protagonist against the mighty Colonial power and his venerable martyrdom. There are three ballads (Malas) in Mappila literature available now in this regard. The first one is the *KottupalliAthbhutha Ratna Mala* composed by famous balladeer NallamBeeran (1878-1970). The second one is the *KunhiMarakkar Shaheed Mala* authored by K.T.Muhammed of Tirurangadi. The work by K.T.Muhammed was published from Noorul Islam Press, Tirurangadi on 19th October 1972 (10th Ramazan 1392 A.H). Chettuvai Abdul Qadir penned a short biography entitled *KunhiMarakkar Shaheed* based on the ballads and it is published by Bayaniyya Press in 1980. KottupalliKunjiMarakkarsahahidQissaAlbhutha Ratna Mala by KuniyilImbichikkoyaVaidyar published by C.H. Mohammad & Sons at Amirul Islam Lithopower Press, Tirurangadi, 1978. The present article is authored based on all the above-mentioned literary works.

The Historical Backdrop

The colonial epoch was a turbulent period in the history of Kerala. The Portuguese dominance in Kerala spanned between 1498 C.E and 1663 C.E, was a critical era for the Kerala society in general and Mappila community in particular. The Portuguese dominance that lasted for 165 years rocked the foundations of the social and economic life of the Mappilas. The Portuguese deprived the Mappilas of the economic strength that they harnessed through the facilitator role they played in the international trade with the Arabs. The Portuguese further denuded them of the socio-political patronage they enjoyed from the local princes. The Portuguese foray into the Malabar Coast had, besides the economic and political designs, some hidden religious

agenda too. It was a continuation of the European conquest of Muslim Spain in Iberian Peninsula in 1495 C.E. The Pope had granted King John of Portugal the permission to convert the whole world into the Christianity in 1454 C.E. Vasco da Gama ventured the voyage to India on January 8, 1497 and anchored at Kappad in May, 1498 with the auspice of King Manuel, the successor of King John. The Zamorin of Calicut offered a warm welcome to Vasco da Gama and granted him the permission to trade. The advent of Portuguese imperialists marked the end of peaceful social life in Malabar and it ushered the turbulent and bloody period of greed and religious fanaticism. M.N. Pearson, an authority in Indian Ocean Studies, opined that the fundamental mission of Vasco da Gama was to promote the Politics of Ocean to grab the monopoly over maritime trade, destroy the hitherto held mercantile hegemony of the Arabs and subjugate the Mappilas who maintained cultural allegiance to the Arabs.⁴

The atrocities committed by the Portuguese in furtherance of these objectives are narrated by Qazi Muhammed (1579-1615 C.E) in *Fatahul Mubeen* (verses 168-196),⁵ Shaikh Zainudin Makhdam I (1467-1515) *Tahreel* (verses 8-25) and Shaikh Zainudin Makhdam II (1532-1618) in *Tuhfatul Mujahideen* (chapter iii). Shaikh Zainudin Makhdam writes: "they plundered the property of the Muslims. They set the mosques and towns afire; seized the ships and vessels; sacrilegged Quran and Holy Scriptures. They massacred Hajj pilgrims, tortured Muslims and insulted the Holy Prophet. They tortured some with fire, enslaved some and ravished the Muslim women. They baptised the children born out of such rape. They committed heinous crimes. They were loathsome atrocities; too loathsome to utter."⁶

The social tune of the *Kottupalli Malas* surfaced in the arena of Mappila literature, should be discerned from the above-mentioned historical background. Kunhi Marakkar, the much-eulogised protagonist of the ballads, is most probably an imaginary figure. Even though the story of the protagonist is transmitted from generation to generation through folk stories and songs, there is no historical clue on him from the medieval Kerala history. The ballads are not to be weighed on its historicity. They are a deliberate attempt of the oppressed people to ignite the resistance through weaving such cogent myths and images.

The eminent historian K.K.N. Kurup's observation on the legend of Kunhi Marakkar Shaheed strengthens this observation: "it inevitable to all communities in all times to propagate an ideology for their survival. Preservation of human life, property and chastity of women is a universal longing of all societies. It is an absolute necessity of a society to mould its people in such way that they would dare to sacrifice their life for these purposes. The social psyche performs this duty by glorifying historical events, spreading legends, weaving myths and idealizing hero-worship."⁷ The words of K.K.N. Kurup indicate into such folkloric traditions of Mappila social life.

The Chivalry of a Fish Monger- Turned-Fighter

The theme of *Kottupalli Malas* is the heart alluring tale of the chivalry of Kunhi Marakkar. The protagonist was born in a lineage which started with the wedding of a Tamil Brahmin man belonging to Marakkar clan with a Muslim woman. This family later on shifted to Chaliyam. They were known by family nomenclature 'Mammasraliyath'.⁸ The protagonist was born in this family. Abdullah was his father. This family then settled in Manathuparamba in Veliyamkode. Hence the protagonist came to known as Manathuparambil Kunhi Marakkar. He learned Holy Quran and martial arts in childhood up to 12 years. But the sudden death of his father disrupted his joyful family life. Poverty marred their life. Having no other option, his mother persuaded him to work as fish monger. The young boy roamed in hamlets for selling fish for making a living.⁹

Once he was walking with fish basket in front of Ponnani Grand Mosque. The eminent scholars, Shaikh Zainudin Makhdam and Purathiyil Abdul Qadir Shaikh, who was speaking each other in the Mosque, noticed the boy. They summoned the boy and inquired about his plight. Understanding the sorry plight of the boy, the scholars blessed him and directed to give up fish-mongering and join the mosque for religious studies and pious life. The boy rushed home and informed his mother the incident. The mother turned very happy. The boy started his religious studies at the mosque and his family came under the maintenance of Shaikh Zainudin Makhdam.

The boy passed adolescence and attained youth. His mother desire to see her son married. A suitable bride was chosen and wedding day was fixed. Accordingly wedding ceremony was celebrated. While the bridegroom was sitting in the nuptial tent, an old man rushed there and cried: "folks, two Portuguese ships have anchored at Ponnani harbour. The hooligans from the ship have unleashed atrocities in the town. Two sailors have abducted a Muslim girl. Is not anybody here to fight with these hooligans to protect the chastity of our mothers and sisters, desiring the exalted position in the heaven?". The bad tidings incited the protagonist. He silently pledged to fight with the Portuguese savages. He left the nuptial tent, rushed home. He removed the wedding dress and wore the armouries and taken a shining sword. Approached his mother and sought her blessings.

He rushed to the harbour with a boat man. He ordered the boat man to approach the Portuguese ship. He ordered the boat man keep his boat away from ship after he entered the ship and come to ship only when he raises his cry. Kunhi Marakkar, very proficient in martial art, jumped into the ship. He butchered the drunken Portuguese sailors, freed the girl from the go-down of the ship and handed her over to the boatman. He ordered the boat man to rescue her at once. Kunhi Marakkar returned to the ship and continued to fight. Thinking that the last Portuguese was dead, he retreated. But he pondered a while disappointed as that he missed the holy martyrdom. Suddenly a Portuguese sailor hid himself among the dead, hit Kunhi Marakkar from the back. He fought with sailor and attained martyrdom. The Portuguese cut his corpus into seven pieces and threw them in the sea. The pieces were landed in seven places and tombs were erected in these sites- Veliyamkode, Tanur, Kozhikode, Vadakara, Bepore, Vaippin and Kotta. *Urs* or annual Remembrance Day is celebrated in some of these shrines.¹⁰

Style of Presentation

Besides its awe- inspiring theme, *Kottupalli Malas* have immense beauty of exposition and sweet musical qualities. These ballads are composed in the popular metres like *Thonkal*, *Kambi*, *Annawaki*, *Kandarakattumal*, *Malarkayyal*, *Pole nadappu*, *Bahumanarorunalil* which have always been favourites of the Mappila pattu lovers. The Kottupalli Mala composed by K.T. Muhammed has 12 songs in it. He opens the ballad in the cultural tradition of the Arabic-Malayalam dialect. The opening lines offer praise to Allah the most merciful and greetings to the Holy Prophet, his family and companions:

*‘‘Aalangalmuvaralifumamaithe
Alankaramakkiathellamchamaithe
Al hamdudayapurane sthuthithe
Aattalnabiylswalathumthudarne
Aalumazhabimarkkumsalama
Aruli kavithathudangunnukema
Moolamislamiyathinsabeelil
Munnittirangishaheedennahalil’’*

The Kunhi Marakkar’s childhood experience of fish-mongering and his tryst with Shaikh Zainudin Makhdam is portrayed in following lines:

*‘‘Chennukadappurathuninum machi vangithalayilchumannane
Varavumchelilmasjidinmunpakapokumbolpallyilundane
Manarum Zainudin ennahojakanduparanjane
Chilarilchennuvilikkukachumadumaypokunna aa kuttieonne
Udane Makhdam Thangalekalpana pole aduthare
Thangal un mamukamnettimuththimanathidumkuttiyoduuthare’’*

The old man who rushed into the wedding celebration of Kunhi Marakkar explains the atrocities of the Portuguese:

*Innalekappalranduirumpathiyulundu
‘‘Nindy Nasranimaram per athilrandu
Karayilnee leirangimasthilaadiyumkondu
Pinned awarmuslimpenninepidichu
Vanne sambokilyettikappalilvechu
Chennuvalliyeevededppinsuwargamashichu’’*

The chivalrous fight of Kunhi Marakkar with the Portuguese is portrayed in these lines:

*‘‘Haqquillaimaanurachuvallumyenthikayyilum
Asad pole illapedithellumdillilmeyyilum
Mattildushtarmasthadichukondurakkamkondathai
Mukkiyarucharichuvalchuzhattikondathay
Ketta kafirintemandavettianganaruthathai
Kevalamothukkipinnepenninethirachilai’’¹¹*

The Relevance

Kottupalli Mala reminds us of the paths of intense fighting that a people trod in its past. Today the cultural colonialism is curling up the Kerala’s social life. Hence it is a need of hour to re-explore the *Kottapalli*

Malas in the light of the moral strength and self-confidence that they emanate. All the genres in Mappila literature show special sympathy and respect towards the martyrs. They usually eulogize martyrs and seek providential help in mediation of the martyrs.

The *Kottapalli Malas* are the historical ballads evolved out of immense anti-colonial rancour that rocked Malabar in past centuries. In single term, they may be summarised as the 'musical paths of counter-discourse'. They are born out of hitherto held micro-alertness of Mappila literati against cultural invasion. But unfortunately, these works were not conferred due attention and literary recognition by the mainstream society. We have a cultural ethos that celebrate and glorify martyrs and revolutionaries. From PuthooramVeettilUnniyarcha to Rani Laxmi Bhai of Jhansi and from Bhagat Singh to Kayyoor Revolutionaries are the splendid heroines and heroes of ours. But anti-colonial ballads like *Kottupalli Malas* and *Ramanthali Shuhada Mala*, composed in the Arabic- Malayalam dialect, made little impact in Malayalam literary world. It shows the parochial attitude of Malayalam literati and it demands a better expansion in the breadth and depth of its scope.¹²

Last but not least, it is noted that the theme of *Kottupalli Mala* is the glorious chivalry of a young man who sacrificed his life itself in the altar of women's chastity and honour. When the media are aplenty with the news of anti-women offences like rape and molestation, *Kottualli Mala* that uphold the messages of morality and chivalry, is a timely message-poem to the Kerala society.

End Notes

¹ Chetuvay Abdul Kader, Kunji Marakkar Shahid,

² Abu Yahya Zainuddin bin Shaikh Ali bin Shaikh Ahmed al Mabari popularly known as Shaikh Zainuddin al Kabir born in 1467 and later settled in Ponnani. He has contributed 20 books on different subjects in Islamic Studies, among which Tahrid Ahlil Imam al ala jihadi Abadati al Sulban, considered to be the first anti-colonial poem composed against the Portuguese invasion. His other notable books are Sirajul Muneer, Sirajul Huda, Shuib al Iman etc.

³ K. K. Muhammed Abdul Kareem, C.N. Ahmed Maulavi, Mahataya Mappila sahitya paramaryam, (Glorious Mappila Heritage), Kozhikode, 1978, p. 61

⁴ M.N. Pearson, India and the Indian Ocean in the 16th Century, Oxford University Press, Calcutta, p.36.

⁵ Qazi Muhammed, Fatuhul Mubeen, Tr. Prof. Mankada Abdul Aziz, Al Huda Book stall, Kozhikode, 1996.

⁶ Shaikh Zainudin Makhdam, *Tuhafatul Mujahideen*, Tr. C. Hamza, Al Huda, 1995, p.31.

⁷ Dr K.K.N. Kurup, *Mappila Paramaryam*, Irshad, Kozhikode, 1998, p.43.

⁸ Dr. Husain Randathani Ed., Madqumum Ponnaniyum, Ponnani Valiya Jumamasjid Jammath Committee, Ponnani,

⁹ K.T. Muhammed, Kothupally Kunju Marakkar Shahid Mala, AH 1392, Ramzan 10, October 19 1972, Noorul Islam press Tirurangadi,

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ K.T Muhammed, Kothupalli Kunji Marakkar Sahid Mala, op.cit., pp. 67.