



Available online at: <http://www.advancedscientificjournal.com>
<http://www.krishmapublication.com>
IJMASRI, Vol. 1, issue 1, pp. 47 - 53, Oct. -2023
<https://doi.org/10.53633/ijmasri>

**INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY
ADVANCED SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH AND INNOVATION
(IJMASRI)**

ISSN: 2582-9130

IBI IMPACT FACTOR 1.5

DOI: 10.53633/IJMASRI

RESEARCH ARTICLE

**CHRONOLOGY OF THE ANCIENT MUSLIM MONUMENTS IN TAMIL NADU - A STUDY
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Abstract

Monuments serve as a reminder of our rich cultural past, as well as a national treasure and a source of civilization pride. The identity of a nation, region, community, or group lies in its past pieces of evidence. The historical and cultural heritage which is unique to that group or society, reflects the rich and diverse creations of humankind. Heritage is often considered as the protection and memory of the past. There are a lot of contradictions that exist in the chronology of the advent of Muslims in India because there is a myth that Islam was spread by force with a sword in one hand and the Quran in the other many historians the view that Islam came to India based on force and sword through Arab invasion of Sind. Many sources claim that Arabs were in contact with South India on the Coromandel Coast much earlier than the birth of Islam and their trade contacts continued and progressed much better after Islam was humbly introduced in India and brought harmony to the indigenous people in India. Thus, an authentic study is necessary to explore the truth behind the introduction of Islam on a chronological basis. The present study is an attempt to explore the data through the ancient Muslim monuments on a chronological basis, to establish the fact that how and when Islam came to India either based on a peace message or power.

Keywords: Maritime Trade, Kallu palli, Mosque, argah, awabs

Introduction

Monuments serve as a reminder of our rich cultural past, as well as a national treasure and a source of civilization pride. The identity of a nation, region, community, or group lies in its past pieces of evidence. The historical and cultural heritage which is unique to that group or society, reflects the rich and diverse

creations of humankind. Heritage is often considered as the protection and memory of the past. There are a lot of contradictions that exist in the chronology of the advent of Muslims in India because there is a myth that Islam was spread by force with a sword in one hand and the Quran in the other many historians the view that Islam came to India based on force and sword through Arab invasion of Sind in 712 A.D. Many

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sources claim that Arabs were in contact with South India on the Coromandel Coast much earlier than the birth of Islam and their trade contacts continued and progressed much better after Islam was humbly introduced in India and brought harmony to the indigenous people in India. Thus, an authentic study is necessary to explore the truth behind the introduction of Islam on a chronological basis. The present study is an attempt to explore the data through the ancient Muslim monuments on a chronological basis, to establish the fact that how and when Islam came to India either based on a peace message or power.

Maritime Trade Relations with Arabia

Maritime trade relations between Arabia and South India date back to ancient times. Long before the advent of Islam in Arabia, the Arabs used to visit the coast of Southern India. After the Arab traders became Muslim, they brought Islam to South India. Several local Indians living in the coastal areas embraced Islam. The myth that Islam was spread by force with a sword in one hand and the Quran in the other, has no substance about Coromandel Coast. Here the propagation of Islam was the achievement of peaceful traders and pious Sufi missionaries. It is a fact that the vast majority of Indian Muslims are converts. It is said that force was used on several occasions but the existing historical evidence does not enable us to estimate either the scale or the effectiveness of such conversion.¹

Causes for Arab invasion of Sind in 712 A. D

The Arab invasion of Sind is a historical episode not related to religious propagation. Accordingly, during the reign of the great Umayyad Caliph Walid bin Abdul Malik, Hajjaj bin Yousaf was appointed as the governor of the Eastern Provinces. At that time, Raja Dahir, a Brahman, ruled Sind. However, the majority of the people living in the region were Shudders or Buddhists. Dahir treated members of these denominations inhumanly. They were not allowed to ride horses or to wear a turban or shoes. Sindhi pirates, protected by Dahir, were active in the coastal areas and whenever they got a chance, they plundered the ships passing by Debal.

During those times, some Muslim traders living in Ceylon died and the ruler of Ceylon sent their widows and orphans back to Baghdad. They made their journey by sea. The King of Ceylon also sent many valuable presents for Walid and Hajjaj. As the eight-ship caravan passed by the seaport of Debal, Sindhi pirates looted it and took the women and children prisoner. When news of this attack reached Hajjaj, he demanded that Dahir return the Muslim captives and the looted items. He also demanded that the culprits be punished. Dahir replied that he had no control over the pirates and was, therefore, powerless to rebuke them. On this, Hajjaj decided to invade Sindh. Two small expeditions sent by him failed to accomplish their goal. Thus, to free the prisoners and to punish the guilty party, Hajjaj decided to undertake a huge offensive against Dahir, who was patronizing the pirates.

In 712, Hajjaj sent 6,000 select Syrian and Iraqi soldiers, a camel corps of equal strength, and a baggage train of 3,000 camels to Sindh under the command of his nephew and son-in-law, Imad-ud-din Muhammad bin Qasim, a young boy of just seventeen years. On his way, the governor of Makran, who provided him with additional forces, joined him. Also, a good number of Jats and Meds, who had suffered at the hands of native rulers, joined the Arab forces. Muhammad bin Qasim first captured Debal. After a fierce struggle, Dahir was overpowered and killed. Muhammad bin Qasim was planning to proceed forward when the new Caliph Suleman bin Abdul Malik recalled him. After the departure of Muhammad bin Qasim, different Muslim generals declared their independence in different areas.²

The Muslim conquest of Sindh brought peace and prosperity to the region. Law and order were restored. The sea pirates of Sind, who were protected by Raja Dahir, were crushed. As a result of this, sea trade flourished. The port of Debal became a very busy and prosperous commercial center. When Muhammad bin Qasim conquered Sindh, the local people, who had been living a life of misery, breathed a sigh of relief. Qasim followed a lenient policy and treated the local population generously. Everyone had full religious freedom and even the spiritual leaders of local religions were given salaries from the government fund. No

changes were made in the local administration and local people were allowed to hold offices – particularly in the revenue department. All taxes were abolished and Jazia was imposed. Everyone was treated equally. Poor people, especially Buddhists, were very impressed by his policies and many of them embraced Islam. Several mosques and madrasas were constructed in important towns. In a short period, Sind became a centre of Islamic learning. Many religious scholars, writers, and poets emerged and they spread their knowledge. The Muslims learned Indian sciences like medicine, astronomy, and mathematics. Sanskrit books on various subjects were translated into Arabic. During the reign of Haroon-al-Rasheed, many Hindu scholars were even invited to Baghdad.

The early Arab Muslims who migrated and settled along the coastal towns of the east coast, much before the Arab conquest of Sind in 712 A. D., were considered the progenitors of the Islamic society in the region. Muslims have to fulfill this religious obligation in their daily life, so they want a place free from the disturbance of day-to-day human activities. Because of these sentiments, places of worship called 'Palli' came into being in the Muslim settlements. "Palli" in Tamil means a place of worship in general. In the case of Muslims, it is the mosque. The Jain place of worship is also called Palli. The early mosque or palli was in the form of a small mandapam, as found in the temples, supported by massive pillars, made in the local style of architecture. When the local artisans were engaged in the construction of mosques they followed their traditional style of construction, the Dravidian style, but all kinds of figures were avoided. The entire structure was built of stone. Such early mosques were known as Kalluppalli (Stone Mosque). The Muslims who were traders enriched the country with precious foreign exchange, and hence were accorded a special place by the Tamil rulers of the day, and often received grants to build mosques. The earliest mosques are the best examples of this type.

Cheraman Juma Masjid, Kerala, 629 A. D.

Cheraman Juma Masjid is the first mosque in India, built in 629 A.D. by Malik Ibn Dinar, and is located in the district of Thrissur in Kerala. This historical

mosque was built in Kodungallur, Kerala, during the Madani period of the Prophet Muhammad and is considered the oldest mosque in India and South Asia and one of the oldest mosques in the world.

The oral tradition is that Cheraman Perumal, the Chera king, went to Arabia where he met the Prophet Muhammad and embraced Islam. From Arabia he had sent letters with Malik Ibn Dinar to his relatives in Kerala, asking them to be courteous to the latter. The masjid is believed to have been renovated in the 11th century and also 300 years ago.³

Palaiya Jumma Palli, Kilakarai, 630 A. D.

Palaiya Jumma Palli (Old Jumma Masjid) or Meen Kadai Palli is a mosque in Kilakarai, Tamil Nadu. It was built in 628–630 A. D., it is believed to be one of the oldest mosques in the world and along with Cheraman Juma Masjid in Kodungallur, Kerala, and Barwada Mosque in Ghogha, Gujarat in 623 A. D., the first mosque in India. It has an Islamic heritage of more than 1000 years. It is located in Kilakarai, an ancient port town in the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu known for its Islamic culture. It was reconstructed in 1036. The mosque, along with the others in the town, is one of the greatest examples of Dravidian Islamic architecture. Kilakkarai is associated with the celebrated Tamil Muslim philanthropist Seethakkathi alias Shaik Abdul Kadar Marakkayar, a business magnet of the seventeenth century in this region.⁴

Malik Bin Deenar Juma Masjid, Kasaragod, Kerala, 642 A. D.

Malik Deenar Juma Masjid is a historic Muslim pilgrim center in Kerala. This beautiful mosque is believed to have been established by Malik Ibn Deenar, an Arab saint who has brought Islam to India. It is among the most charming and well-preserved mosques in the Kasargod district of Kerala. Cheraman Perumal, the then ruler of the region was attracted by the unique way of trade by Arabs and the proliferation of Islam. So, he embraced the religion and helped Malik Ibn Deenar to establish this mosque.

The mosque is believed to have been built in AD 642 and appointed Malik Ibn Muhammad, the son

of Malik Bin Deenar, as the Qazi of it. The place contains the grave of him and Muslims in the state considered it as a sacred place. This mosque celebrates an annual festival every year in association with the arrival of Malik Ibn Dinar to the country. Malik Ibn Deenar Mosque is one of the most popular pilgrim spots for Sunni Muslims in India.⁵

Kalluppalli, Tiruchirappalli, 734 A. D.

Tiruchirappalli was the capital of the Cholas from the 2nd century A.D. and continued to be an important city in the history of the region. Since it was the capital city of the Chola kings, the Arab traders frequented this town for their trade and after the birth of Islam they came as Arab Muslims. Though trade was the main concern of the early Arab Muslim traders they also faithfully preached the teachings of Islam among the people and a large number of people embraced the faith. Thus, in the hinterland of Chola country a Muslim settlement could have emerged. For their prayer, a small mosque or Pallivasal, popularly known as 'Kalluppalli' was constructed in the year 734 A.D. This is the earliest surviving Islamic monument, Mosque, in Tamil Nadu. This mosque is located near the Kottai Railway Station at Tiruchirappalli. This mosque was built by one Mohamed Ibn Hameed Ibn Abdullah in Hijiri 116 corresponding to 734 A.D. Further, the names of the four Khalifas, Aboobakar, Umar, Usman, and Ali are also mentioned in the inscription. The inscription is archaic and accepted by scholars to belong to the 8th century A.D.⁶ This small mosque is a landmark in the art and religious history of Islam in Tamil Nadu.

Karuppudaiyar Palli, Kayalpattanam, 946 A. D.

Kayalpattanam, in Thirunelveli district, was one of the earliest Muslim settlements in the peninsula. The pious Muslims who used to wear long black dresses at that time mostly practiced seclusion (Itikaf) in this mosque. Therefore, this mosque was called Karup-Udaiyar Palli (based on their Karuppu-Udai, black dress). The exact date of the construction of this mosque was unknown. One inscription found at the entrance of the mosque provides enough information about the mosque and this village. For the maintenance of this mosque, a king by the name of Veera Pandiyan

granted lands within the boundary of Kayalpattanam. Veera Pandiya ruled Madurai between the years 946 A.D and 966 A.D.⁷ Hence this mosque belongs to this contemporary period. Karuppudaiyar Palli which was near the sea shore has been destroyed and its plinth alone remains. According to an inscription found on this site Sri Vira Pandya, the Pandya king, had endowed Deva Danas, landed properties, for the maintenance of this mosque, called Karuppudaiyar Sonava palli (Sonavan means Muslim) and also for the conduct of five-time prayer (Anjuvanna Thozhuhai). (Anjuvannam was the trade guild of the Muslims and the members were known as Anjuvannam or Anjuvannathar).⁸

Though Islamic architecture was introduced in North India at the beginning of the twelfth century A.D. the Southern region was unmoved by this architectural revolution. Islamic architectural style came to Tamil Nadu along with the invasion of the Muslims from Delhi in the first quarter of the fourteenth century⁹ At a later stage when the Islamic architectural style was introduced in the territory, the Dravidian style amalgamated with the Islamic, and mosques and tombs were constructed with characteristics of both. Hence the Islamic architectural style as found in Tamil Nadu is unique in the art history of India, and it can be aptly called "Indo-Dravidian Islamic Art"¹⁰

Abel-Cain Dargah and Mosque, Rameswaram

Rameswaram, the nearest point to Ceylon was also one of the earliest Muslim centres of the region. The mosque near the railway station is very old. It is a very small structure with two big minars in the front which are later additions. The pillars inside are similar to the other early mosques. Adjoining the northern wall of the mosque there are two long graves lying side by side. They are 40 feet in length and are said to be the graves of Abel (Abil) and Cain (Habil), the sons of Adam and Eve. The graves were covered over originally by a tailed shed. Muslim pilgrims visit this place in large numbers because of the presence of these graves. It is popularly called as Abel-Cain dargah¹¹

Most of these mosques on the coast were constructed between 1200 and 1300 A.D and they

adopted features of temples constructed at that time. While many such mosques disappeared over the period, a handful of such mosques along the coast survived and stand witness to this style today.

Kazimar Periya Pallivasal or Kazimar Big Mosque, Madurai, 1284 A. D.

The oldest mosque in Madurai city was constructed in the year 1284 A. D. and continues to be in existence for more than 7 centuries till today. The mosque was founded by Kazi Syed Tajuddin, a descendant of the Islamic prophet Muhammad, who came from Yemen during the 13th century and received this land from King Kulasekara (Kun) Pandiyan. It is believed that Tajuddin came from Arabia to Kerala and reached Madurai where he established a mosque. He became popular for his divine healing powers. The Pandya king was irked by his fame, but Tajuddin cured the king himself when he suffered from a stomach ailment. The king gave away a land for a mosque in gratitude. The mosque was the first Muslim place of worship in Madurai¹²

The structural style of these buildings would have had some influence on the sultanate monuments. The mosque of Khazi Jamal al-Din or the Kazimar Masjid is claimed to have been founded during the Khalji period, although its structure may be datable to the fourteenth century or later. The sultanate and later monuments in the vicinity are those in the compound of the shrine of Ala-al-Din, and the tomb of Sikandar Shah.¹³

Goripalayam Masjid

The mosque of Ala-al-Din, also known as Goripalayam Masjid stands next to the shrine of Ala-al-Din on its northern side. The mosque is a relatively small building standing on a plinth measuring 13.00x7.30 m and about one meter high. The structure is built of large blocks of roughly dressed stone and consists of a prayer chamber on the western side with a colonnade to the east¹⁴

Goripalayam Mosque, which is huge, features the tombs of two Delhi sultans who ruled the Madurai Sultanate. The mosque is 70 feet wide with 20 feet high

dome carved from single stone. Makka Masjid is an eminent mosque in Chennai. It is also a large structure that can accommodate hundreds of worshippers simultaneously.

Makhдум mosque at Virapandiyanpattanam in Tiruchchendur, 1387

The traditions of the Muslims of Tamil Nadu we get a very different picture of Sultan Sikandar Shah, as he is regarded as a pious saint who defended the Muslims up to his last breath, and who was martyred together with his wazir and a handful of remaining soldiers when he was surrounded by the enemy army on the Tiruparangundram hill near Madura. The sultan's shrine at the top of the hill is one of the most revered Muslim sites in the region and a fine example of Muslim architecture in South India. Makhдум mosque at Virapandiyanpattanam in Tiruchchendur District. The inscription, dated Kollam 1387 A. D. refers to the order of one Khazi Abu Bakr, who imposed a quarter of one percent tax on the value of the commodities passing through the port of Shonadukondanpattanam and allocated it to the maintenance of the Jami Mosque of the port. Tiruchchendur district was part of the sultanate of Malabar, and the date of the inscription is only 10 years after the death of Sikandar Shah. This inscription shows that the Islamic community maintained its considerable influence in commerce.¹⁵

Masjid Mamoor is a significant place of worship for Muslims of the Mannady area of Chennai. It was built in the 18th century. The Grand Mosque is also popular among tourists. During the 18th century a gemstone (Emerald) merchant by the name of Suleiman

Labbai Alim, a descendant of Shafi and a resident of Mannadi approached Wallajah Nawab with an appeal of erecting a Mosque for performing the religious routine of the Muslim population. Accordingly, the land was acquired from Muthaial Nayakkar, the then local zaman of the locality, and the Mosque was constructed in the year 1777 and the same was inaugurated and Wakfed by the Nawab of Arcot Abdul Ali Khan Wallajah. The total extent of land got

from Muthaial Nayakkar was 35 grounds. Of which only fifteen grounds were utilized for the construction of the Mosque.

Triplicane Big Mosque

Triplicane Big Mosque (also called Wallajah Mosque) is a mosque located in Triplicane High Road, Triplicane in Chennai, the capital of the South Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Constructed in the Mughal architectural style, the mosque was built in 1795 by the family of Muhammad Ali Khan Wallajah, the Nawab of Arcot. It has a large prayer hall, a tank, and a large ground in front. The entire structure is constructed with granite without the use of iron or wood. The Nawab of Arcot was friendly towards fellow Hindus, appointing a Hindu as his chief personal secretary. A chronogram written in Persian by Raja Makhhan Lal Bahadur Khirat, the Hindu Munshi of the Nawab, is found at the entrance to the prayer hall. The mosque is the largest and one of the oldest in Chennai and is active as a place of worship. It is administered by the Prince of Arcot Endowments Trust. There is a graveyard there beside the mosque.

Athar Jamad Masjid

Athar Jamad Masjid also known as The Big Mosque is located at Oppanakara Street within Coimbatore. It is one of the oldest and biggest mosques in Coimbatore. A perfume merchant named Athar, who migrated from Tirunelveli, built the structure. It took 44 years to complete, with construction beginning in 1860 and finishing in 1904. The structure is made up of limestone and mortar and polished with egg white. The facade is covered with cusped arches surrounding the open courtyard, where the prayer halls stand. There is a covered ablution pond in the southeastern corner and a small library on the eastern side. There's also a kitchen that prepares fasting kanji (rice soup) during the fasting period during Ramadan. Hawkers line the entrance with amulets and items of worship.

Athar Jamad Masjid, also called The Big Mosque, is situated at Oppanakara Street and Town Hall in Coimbatore. This is one of the biggest and oldest mosques in Coimbatore. It is a witness of the

city's history. The masjid was built by merchants of perfumes called Athar. They were migrants from Tirunelveli. Construction started in 1844 and ended in 1904.

Nathhar Wali Dargah, Tiruchirappalli

Tiruchirappalli, apart from having the distinction of having the earliest surviving mosque, has also another specialty in having the tomb of one of the earliest Muslim saints, Nathhar wali, whose peaceful preachings brought many into the Islamic fold. This saint is revered very much by the Muslims of south India. Because of this, the Nawabs of Arcot named Tiruchirappalli as Nathar Nagar. The tomb of this saint presents a majestic appearance to the city with its big dome. The period of this saint is said to be 969-1039 A.D. He hailed from a royal descent in Syria. After extensive travels, he came to Tiruchirappalli and settled here peacefully preached Islamic principles, and attracted the masses toward the faith of Islam. The celebrated Nagore Andavar, Shahul Hameed Wali, came to the dargah of this saint and stayed in penance for several months around 1556 A.D.¹⁶ On the left side of the entrance of the main cell, (in the front mandapam) Mohammed Ali Wallajah, the Nawab of Arcot lay buried. Just outside the northern wall of the dargah, the headless body of Chanda Sahib, the political rival of Mohamed Ali is buried

Shahul Hameed Wali Dargah, Nagore

Nagore is famous for its dargah of Shahul Hameed alias Meeran Sahib Wali. He is popularly known as Nagore Andavar (Andavar means God). Shahul Hameed Wali is believed to have lived in the latter half of the sixteenth century¹⁷ Shahul Hameed Wali was born in 1490 in Manikkappur near Allahabad. He is said to belong to the 23rd generation of the Prophet Mohamed. After travelling far and wide in India and Arabia he came to Nagore and settled and lived here for about 28 years. He died in 1558. His place of settlement and his tomb came to be venerated as a pilgrimage centre after his death.

Conclusion

The chronology of Muslim monuments clarifies a long-standing puzzle in the history of India, regarding the advent of Islam in India. The findings bring out the data through the concrete pieces of evidence that Islam entered India through the Coromandel Coast in a peaceful manner during the life of Prophet Muhammad and the king Cheraman Perumal and his subjects in Kerala voluntarily accepted Islam and converted to Islam. As a place of worship many mosques were constructed within a short period and in a Dravidian style with the invasion of Malikafur in Madurai in the Medieval Period Islamic architecture was introduced and a new form of architecture was established named "Indi-Dravidian Islamic Architecture". The findings of the study make it necessary to rewrite the histories of the marginalized sections of the communities.

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