



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Spread of various religions in Kanyakumari district areas

N. Austin John Manohar, T. S. Sasikala *

Department of History, Nesamony Memorial Christian College, Marthandam-630 165, Kanyakumari District, Tamil Nadu, India

Received 04 January 2019; Accepted 14 March 2019
Available online 18 March 2019

Abstract

The important religions of this Kanyakumari District are Hinduism, Christianity and Islam. Majority of people are Hindus. But Christianity claims a fairly high percentage of the population. The third major community is Muslims. Mosques are erected in convenient places and slowly made many converts to Islam from other religion. Significantly a considerable number of Jains are living in the district. Many people from the northern states came for business to Nagercoil and later they settled there. Temples are the mainstay and back-bone of religion. Kanyakumari District is blessed with several reputed legendary, historical, architectural and artistic importance. The Hindu religion is one of the most popular religions of Kanyakumari District. About 60 percent of the population are Hindus. Most of the temples were dedicated to lord Siva and there is always an image of his consort Parvathi or Durga executed for worship. The Goddess is supposed to rule over the minor divinities worshipped by the lower order of the Hindus. The people of the village are believed that her presence in the village protect people from the epidemics disasters and from the evil influence of devils. The people worshiped her periodically and special offerings are performed whenever cholera or small pox breaks out in the village.

Keywords

Muslims
Hinduism
Christianity
Buddhism
Jainism

stretches of paddy fields, coconut groves, Rubber garden and luxurious forests and the rare earth of the western sea shore and stretched valley mountain of the Western Ghats. The people of Kanyakumari District belong to different religions. As per 2001 census in Kanyakumari District, Hindus are 859307, Muslims 70360, Christians 745406, Sikhs 31, Buddhists 26, Jains 77, Other Religions 113 and Other Religions not stated 714. Total population is 1676034. Adhi Kesavaperumal Temple, Thiruvattar, Murugan Temple, Kumarakoil, Magadevar Temple,

Introduction

Kanniyakumari district is the smallest district in Tamil Nadu. Even though it is the smallest in terms of area (1672/Sq.Km), the density of population is the highest 1119/Sq.Km in Tamil Nadu next to Chennai. In literacy it stands first. By its very location, the District occupies a unique place amongst the districts of Tamil Nadu. It is the only place in the entire world where one can witness both the rising and setting of the sun. It has a coastal line of 71.5 kms stretched on the three sides. This small district is famous on its vast green

*Corresponding author Tel. + 91 9445976117
E-mail : sasikalats232@gmail.com

Munchirai, Siva Temple, Tirparappu, Parthasarathi Temple, Partheevapuram, Bhagavathi Amman Temple, kanyakumari and Nagaraja Temple, Nagercoil are historically important.

Hinduism

Hinduism is the world's oldest religion, according to many scholars, with roots and customs dating back more than 4,000 years. Today, with about 900 million followers, Hinduism is the third-largest religion behind Christianity and Islam. Roughly 95 percent of the world's Hindus live in India. Because the religion has no specific founder, it's difficult to trace its origins and history. Hinduism is unique in that it's not a single religion but a compilation of many traditions and philosophies.

Vaishnavism

Vishnu is worshiped by most of the people in Kanniyakumari District. There are plenty of Vishnu Temples in this district. The most important Vishnu Temples are Atikasava Perumal temple at Thiruvattar, Parthivapuram Temple, Suchindram Temple, Kariamanikapuram Temple, Paraveseri Temple, Krishnan Temple and Thirupathisaram Temple. Suchindram is another Vaishnava Centre, situated on the way to Kanniyakumari. Perumal is the deity of this temple. Every year temple car festival is conducted in grand scale.

Kariamanickapuram Alwar temple is another Vaishnava Centre. The Vaishnavites considered that the deity of this temple is more powerful. Paravaseri temple is situated at a distance of one kilometer from Nagercoil. Many inscriptions show that this temple is very famous even during the time of the cholas.

Vishnu is worshipped in this name. The Vishnu temple at Thiruvithancode was also one of the important Vaishnavites Centres. Krishnancoil is a suburb of Nagercoil, fame for the Vishnu temples. The deity of this temple is called Balakrishna and it belongs to 1770 A.D. It is stated that Srimoolam Thirunal Maharaja came to this temple often for worshipping Lord Krishna [1].

Thiruppathisaram is another important Vishnu temple place where Vaishnava Nammalvar glorified the Lord of Thiruppathisaram in his verses as "Vanparisarattu iruthaen Thiruvaimarbar [2]. Inscriptions show that the temple belongs to 1613 A.D. and 1785 A. D. [3] Thus Kanniyakumari District is filled with Vishnu temples and at the same time we cannot deny that Saivism temples are non-existent.

Saivism

Saivism is one of the most popular religions in parts of Kanniyakumari District. That does not mean that the western part has no Saivite temple. Lord Siva is worshipped in different appellations such as Mahadevar, Easwarar, and Arthanareeswarar. Siva temples are important in Kanniyakumari district. Some of the important Siva temples that exist in Kanniyakumari district are Pannipakam Temple, Thirparappu Temple, Ponmanai Temple, Suchindram Temple, Siva Temple at Paravaseri, Vadiveeswaram Temple, Thalakady Temple, and Bhoothapandy Bhoothalingar Swamy Temple.

Minor deities

Cultic worship was common among the Nadars. They worshipped many Gods like Putham, Pey, Pisasu etc. [4] Their Gods are lodged mainly in their own homes [5]. They worshipped female deities too; Bhadrakali was the tutelary deity of the Nadars [6]. They feared that it inflicted epidemics like small-pox and cholera [7]. They also worshipped Agni, Madan, Thambiran/Manthiramoorthi, Katan, Mamnkali, Uchinimahali, Parvathi, Neeti, Sudalai Petchi and Amman [8]. The devil temple of Elatharamman at Agasteeswaram is said to have been built in those days with the aid of demons [9].

Ezhavas and Nadars worshipped the female deity Bhadrakali and male deities like Sastha, Veerabhadran etc. [10]. Some of them also worshipped the images of serpent [11]. They sacrificed animals and birds to please their Gods. So that they would not do any harm to them [12]. They sacrificed animals and toddy were given to their deities [13]. They had many superstitious beliefs also. In the case of sickness, the people first consulted the magician; sometimes the devil dancer foretold the fortunes of the devotees. The people listened to them with reverence.

There were many towns of the modern type, commanding the facilities of access and the conveniences and comforts of life. Nagercoil, the capital of Kanniyakumari District is a town of rising importance. It lies at the head of the Aramboly pass about 12 km, on the Trivandrum to Tirunelveli road. Nagaraja temple is situated in the heart of the Nageroil town. It is surrounded by paddy fields, flower gardens and coconut growers. The garden is famous for its Naga Flower (*Couroupita guianensis*) a symbolic representation of Nagaraja [14].

The outstanding feature of this temple is the sanctum. Sanctum is surrounded by walls of mud and has a simple roof thatched with coconut leaves and bamboo sticks. The legend says that the king of kalakkad had a dream in which Maharaja intimated him, not to remove thatched roof over the sanctum. The artistic gateway of the temple represents the typical Malabar style of architecture [15]. On Sundays and especially the days of Ayilyaa lot of people worship and offer milk to Nagaraja is considered very sacred. On Sunday in the month of Avani this temple wears a festive look. On that day people from the surrounding villages come here and offer milk, salt and pepper and wooden toys to the deity. Even people belong to other religions submit their offerings to the God.

The contribution of this temple to a typically cultural synthesis is patent by original. The presiding deity Thanu (siva) mal (Vishnu) Ayan (Brahma) is the term, the top, the middle and the base of which are identified with the Trinity (in the above order) [16]. Once again, there is a tradition that in this place that the Trimurtis agreed to grant perpetual Darshan to Anusuya when she won over them in course of testing her chastity [17]. Suchindram is the confluence of Shankar's again six cults for here, along with others, tradition presents and work ships the presence of Surya as well, through that open space of about a decimeter square, over the Kaimukku square, that permits sun rays to pass inside [18]. The formless supreme also can be seen accommodated in the Chitra Sabha. Even at the entrance, one can find the strange coexistence of Vedic Gods and folk Gods side by side-in Udayamarthanda Vinayagar, Theradi Madan and Teradi Bopthathan. It is the main temple house of all the God heads of Hindu pantheon. Besides, there are exclusive temples for Sakthi (Munnottom Nangai), Nataraja (Perambalan) Namasivaya Murthi (Thiruvadaduthurai Multt) and Krishna (Dwaraka Emperuman) outside the main temple [19].

Reference are also found in the Sthalapuram of the Chola king Somavarma, who being constantly troubled by his enemies, had to flee from his capital and go on a long pilgrimage and came to this temple, stayed there for some time and prayed to the presiding deity for the restoration of his lost kingdom. As his prayer was heard and granted by God, his later efforts were crowned with success and he succeeded in regaining his lost kingdom. He has visited the temple again on the Mikunta Edadasi day when he is reputed to have attained Nirvana. The Vaikunta Ekadasi day is held very sacred by all who go to the temple for worship. There is sufficient evidence to show that Thimmala of Madura (17th century A.D) visited the temple and the legend that is connected with the temple

he had constructed the beautiful fleet of steps down the Somatheertha and gave valuable presents to the temple.

On the 11th day of the month of karkataka in the kollam year 639, which corresponded to a Monday, fifth tithi of the first fortnight, the provision made as charity by Dirgha-bhattar, an Arya immigrant from Antarvedi-rajya, for feeding one Brahman daily during the midday-service in the temple of Rupanarayana-vinnagar-Emberuman of vadaseri alias Srimat Adityavarma-chaturvedimangalam. A Brahmadeya in Nanjinadu offered 2 nali of rice, 5 nali of paddy and for salt, 1 uri of paddy, in all 5 nali and one uri of paddy for one day, i.e., 1 kollam 2 tuni 5 nali for a month and 12 kottai of paddy for a year inclusive of the excess of 6 days. With this, the charity had to be conducted [20].

The temple is closely connected with the history of the Chola kings. During the reign of Rajendra Chola, the temple might have been built in the Chola artistic style. From this temple, we come to know the architect skills of Chola kings. Kariyamanikapuram is another center for Vishnu worship. The Vishnu temple here is called 'Kariyamanikkapuram Alwar Temple'. The Srikoil consists of a Garpagraham has a wooden ceiling with a sikharam over it [21]. The other rooms and the mukhappu (portico) are terraced [22]. The pilgrims who visit this temple believed that the deity amore powerful.

Puravaseri, a village situated at a distance of one kilometer from Nagercoil, is a reputed Vaishnava center. The Puravaseri Vishnu temple consist of a Karapagraham, Arthamandapam and Gamdamandapam, all built in granite [23]. The Garpagraham has a Sikharam, and the over mandapams are terraced. On the other sides of the Srikovil, there is an ambalam. The Garudamandapam of this temple serves as the Mukhamandapam.

Another mandapam which is attached to the Garudamandapam, is terraced by granite, serve as the eastern ambalam. In front of this mandapam there is a Mukhappu built in granite and terraced. Several inscriptions reveal that this temple was very famous even during the time of the Cholas [24].

The first record is dated in the 16th year of the Pandya king Maravarman alias Tribhuvanacharavartin Srivallabhadeva (A.D. 1132 – 69?). When the king was seated on the throne Singan – Arangan of

Pasingulam in Tennadu submitted the petition to request that some lands may be granted tax free, for the expenses of conducting worship in the temple. Accordingly, the king was pleased to grant single and double crop lands to the extent of $\frac{3}{4}$ (veli) + 2 ma in Virakerala – mangalam under the Nattarruppokku, as tax free devadana, and to order further that the taxes such as silvari etc., shall not be levied thereon.

The Vrishabhamandapam referred to under Sreecoil, serves as the Mukhamandapam and in addition, there is another mandapam called Velimandapam attached to it in its front [25]. This also is made of terraced granite structure. The northern side of this mandapam consists of the Ammancoil and a room. There is no Ambalam on the south-eastern corner of the Velimandapam in the Madappali [26].

The Vishnu temple, on the other hand, must have been one of sufficient antiquity as testified by a pandya epigraph engraved on what is now the saptamatrika-balikkal. Kilar mangalam is also been mentioned in some of the records as Valikolli Kilar mangalam. Valikolli-kila probably signifies the Goddess Durga, who destroys the strength of enemies, but as the form of the word used, namely killer connotes a headman as chieftain, Kilar mangalam would then mean the village of or named after, a kilar (honorific kilar). It may be noted that kilar has also the meanings of a garden, an irrigation basket, but these have no appropriateness here.

Sri Vaikunda Swamikal was a saint reformer. He belonged to Nadar community. He worked for the uplift of Nadar community. With the coming of Vaikunda Swamikal, a new set of Hinduism had started. He appealed his followers to live unity, fearlessness and good faith [27].

He was born on 16 March 1809 at Sasthankovilvilai (now known as Swamithoppu), village 8 miles south east of Nagercoil in Agasteeswaram Taluk [28]. Mudichoodum Perumal was the real name given to him. But upper-class leaders asked to change 'Perumal', because only upper class was eligible to use that name. So, parents called him Muthukutty [29]. He fought against the economic exploitation of the upper caste Hindus and warned them of its evil consequences. He was also against untouchability [30]. In the order of life he profound, there is no room for idol worship, animal sacrifice and inequality. He discarded incense, camphor, holy ash, sandal, flowers and all other Paraphernalia from worship. He condemned demon worship and preached against all mythological stories [31].

The followers of Ayya Vaikundar Swamikal were called as 'Ayyavazhi'. The devotees from different parts of Tamilnadu and from neighboring Kerala visited Swamithoppu to worship Ayya Vaikundar at Swamithoppu. The majority of Ayyavazhi followers were from poorer sections of the society and most of them belong to Nadar and Channar caste. By the middle of 19th century Ayyavazhi was recognized and flourished in the region of south Travancore. After the death of Vaikundar, the religion was propagated through his teaching and through the holy texts of "Ahilathirattu Ammanai" and "Arulnaol" [32].

The disciples of Ayya Vaikundar and their descendants travelled in several parts of country to spread the mission of Ayyavazhi. During that time the Payyan dynasty ruled Swamithoppu Path and it came under the control of Ayyavazhi followers. Hundreds of "Nizhal Thengals" (place of worship) were built across the country [33]. The main headquarter is situated in the national highways in Eathankodu Junction in Nagercoil, Agasteeswaram Taluk. In the remembrance of Ayya, every year on Vaikasi 11th holy ceremonies are conducted.

Every year from the middle of February to Middle of March, Ayya's rebirth is celebrated in a grand manner. Lakhs of people come to render obeisance to Ayya Vaikunda Swami Pathi in Swamithoppu.

Buddhism

Before 300 B.C Buddhism, a northern religion began to spread all over the state of Travancore. Temples were dedicated to various deities along the coast and the Sasta [34] and temples were vestiges of the Buddhist influence. Sasta worship was common in Agasteeswaram. The Kuthumangalam Sasta temple [35] in Kalkulam stands witness to the people of Kalkulam who worshipped Sasta as their God. The chief deity of the temple is Sastha. Under the Venad rulers Kuthumangalam Sastha temple made Registration cum Land Revenue Office. The temple was built by the Krishnavahakars. Poojas in the temple were performed by a Brahmin priest. In course of time this temple fell into disuse [36]. When Buddhism was unable to keep its prominent position for long, it left behind permanent landmarks in the form of Hindu worship by bequeathing the God Sasta to the Hindu pantheon [37]. At Thiruvaidicode, a small hamlet about three miles to the east of

Padmanabhapuram, a Siva temple is situated. After the decline of Buddhism, the doctrine of Ahimsa which was an essential feature of Buddhism was incorporated into Hinduism [38]. Uthsavams and religious processions, which form part and parcel of the Hindu, form of worship, were essentially Buddhist in origin [39].

Jainism

The Jains, the Saivites and the Vaishnavites came and established their religion in Kanniyakumari District. Vardhamana Mahavira founded a religion called Jainism [40] and preached the people about the adverse impact of caste system and sectarianism. So, Jainism flourished very soon in Kanniyakumari District. Many Kings offered lands as Pallichantham to the Jains as their patronage to Jainism. Rajaraja Chola I offered lands to Jains. Naga worship is generally found in all Jain centres and then it was followed in all the Siva temples.

The origin of Jainism in Kanniyakumari, the southernmost district of India, is a mystery. The Jains believe that their religion is as old as Vedic religion. The religion of Jains was probably founded by Parsvanath known as the twenty-third Jain Tirthankara. Jainism spread throughout India and as well as over-seas. In course of time hundreds and thousands of people joined Jainism due to its simplicity. Jains follow the teachings of 24 Jinas, who are known as Tirthankaras. The Cape Comorin or Kanniyakumari was once a centre of Jain pilgrimage.

Archaeological references are found in different places of the district which belong to the Neolithic period. Jain monuments found in Kanniyakumari District prove that Jainism flourished in this area in the olden days. There is epigraphic evidence shows that there were flourishing Jain settlements in Kottar, Kurandi, Thirunandikkarai and Chitharal which are all in the district of Kanniyakumari [41]. Among these Chitharal appears to be the regional Headquarters of Jainism next to Seravanabelgola [42]. The serpent shrine of Nagercoil is believed to be a Hindu temple was originally a Jain one. Evidence of Jain origin of the temple is seen in the inscriptions and sculptural images found in it [43].

On the pillars of the temple at Nagercoil, there are images of Jain Tirthankaras. The image in standing pose under the hood of a five-headed serpent is

Parsvanath. In the temple, we can say that the temple passed into the hands of the Hindus at the time of its reconstruction and renovation in the year (696 M.E.) 1520 A.D. [44]. The archaeologists and the Government of Kerala remark that the remnants of a large Colony of Jains were seen in the temple vicinity. It was converted as a Hindu-Naga Temple after the time of the King Bhutalavira Marthanda Varma Maharaja. Six Jain images worshipped in this temple and two brass images of later period depicting Parsvanatha and Yakshi Padmavathidevi is in standing posture [45]. Twenty years ago K.V.Soundarajan found the gateway to the temple seen now in typical Kerala style. It is called "Mahameru Malikai". But, it has its connection with Jain Mythology. From the above evidences, may easily believe that the Madapa called Mahameru Malikai.

The Jain Temple should have been used in olden days, for the ritual of Jina Janma Abhisheka. Kurandi is a small village, seven miles North-East of Nagercoil in the Kanniyakumari District. The name Kurandi is derived from the word "Kurandu" a kind of plant available there in plenty. In inscriptions the place is named as "Thirukkurandi". It was once a sacred place for the Jains [46].

With the help of royal patrons, Jainism spread very quickly in the 3rd century B.C. [47]. Jainism had a complete sway over the whole of Kanniyakumari District between 5th and 8th Century A.D. [48]. Kottar, Kurandi, Thiruchcharanathumalai and Thirunandikkara situated in Kalkulam taluk were the four famous Jain centers of Kanniyakumari District. The disciples from the four Jain centres left votive images and cut on the rocks in the Jain centres. These centres became the propagating centres of Jainism and many Jain scholars from different countries had visited these places [49]. With the disappearance of Jainism, the Jain temples were converted into Hindu temples. The cave temple at Thirunandikkara was originally a Jain shrine, [50] upto the 9th century A.D. and it was converted into a Hindu Temple later on.

With the coming of Aryans from the north, Buddhism and Jainism began to decline from the 8th century A.D. being great scholars; the Brahmins could defeat the Buddhists in arguments and there by establish the supremacy of Hinduism [51]. To popularise the Hindu religion and culture, the Brahmins established many temples and introduced several festivals. They accepted the non-Aryan Gods such as Murugan, Siva and

Thirumal as their Gods and their practices into the Hindu fold.

The vast majority of people in the Sangam age had no special religion. Dravidian practiced no particular religion. The war Goddess Korravai was the most favourite deity and she was propitiated with elaborate offerings of meat and toddy not only by kings but also by commoners like the Vedas and Maravas [52]. The Dravidian practices were thus followed by the bulk of the population, Hindus, Jainism and Buddhism also existed side by side and each of these religions had its own followers among the people of the land [53]. From the fifth century A.D. onwards, Aryan culture began to spread over large parts of Kerala including Kanniyakumari district and exercised a dominant influence in society [54].

Silapathikaram and some sangam literature mention the arrival of the Brahmins and their settlements there. Though they came to Kanniyakumari to take 'Holy bath' and gradually they settled in these areas, because of its prosperity and the respect given by the Ay kings and got special privileges. There is great probability that even a century earlier; Suchindrum had been established as a Brahma-dheya. This may be inferred from an inscription belonging to the 5th year of Maran chadayan, [55] which mentions Wripashe Kara Valanallu (modern karkadu) a village situated hardly a mile to the east of Suchindrum, as a Devadhana of 'Emperuman of Thiruchivintharam'. It is not likely that Suchindrum itself had been settled as a Brahmahdheya by the time when an adjoining village was best owed as a gift on the deity [56].

Though it is not possible to determine the exact, it is not far fetched to suggest that Suchindrum was endowed as a Brahma-dhey by one of the Pandya kings of 9th century A.D. This is evident from the fact that the earliest inscriptions bear the years of these rulers. Therefore, the early constitution of the Suchindrum village was similar to these of the Brahmahdheya in the Southern part of the Pandyan Kingdom.

Regarding the maintenance of these temples, a reliable source throws light on the existence of Mahasabhas. It is learnt from several epigraphs of the temple that a Mahasabha was actively functioning in almost all the major temples. The Mahasabha was in the temples raised a supreme control over the affairs of the temples. In the yogam or administrative council of the temples there was a sathanam, or position

known as uranma [57]. The term uranma or Uralar literally means rulers of the villages [58]. Uranma are of two lands viz. Dhevanadi and uranma Adi Devan. In the former the persons in possession has the right of governing the temple affairs and they are appointed by the founder of the temple. In the later the family which built the temple and acquired for its maintenance, exercise authority even now [59]. The uralars were rich Jenmis, entrusted with the general management of temples in villages [60]. Thus in the beginning uralars were the trustees of the temples of Kanniyakumari District.

According to Sangoony Menon and Nagam Aiya 'the king had little or no influence over the temple and was simply required to be present at the usual periodical ceremonies [61]. This view is counter to the specific statements found in a large number of authentic documents preserved in the temple. The swamiyar was appointed by the king; Royal authority was exercised in all matters related to temple. In 600 M.E. (1425 A.D) we find the yokam seeking the sanction of the king even for trivial matters such as the appointment of temple sweepers [62]. Again, in 644 M.E. (1469 A.D) the royal command was taken as to what should be done to remove the pollution which occurred within the precincts caused by the spilling of blood by a servant falling down through accident [63]. This was essentially a matter for the spiritual authority. The expiatory rites were prescribed by the Thanthrasamuchaya and other treatises relating to the management of temples. In 1680 M.E (1505 A.D), we find the king commanding the preparation of correct accounts as to the revenues appertaining to the temple from Viranarayanasserri and the yokam implicitly obeying the royal direction [64]. In fact, the budget of income and expenditure had to be finally sanctioned by ruler. This means that there was nothing of any importance which was done except under the command or with the specific statements found in a large number of authentic documents approval of the sovereign. Further, it is seen from records that on a great many occasions disputes arose between the officers of the king and the tenants of the Devathanam lands, and on all those occasions the king was successful.

Christian Religion

Christian religion is the second major community in Agasteeswaram Taluk. The origin of Christianity in Agasteeswaram taluk of Kanyakumari District began with the arrival of St. Thomas. He was one of the disciples of Jesus Christ who came to India and

neighboring countries to spread Christianity to establish Christian churches in various places [65]. When he came to Mylaudy there were full of problems like social injustice, superstitious beliefs, women slavery and uneducation of women.

The Roman Catholic faith was first to be introduced in Agasteeswaram taluk. St. Francis Xavier, a Roman Catholic, who was the earliest missionary from Europe came and settle down in Agasteeswaram taluk. St. Francis Xavier landed at cape in October 1542 after spending some times in Tuticorin made Kottar his headquarters and established several churches in this locality within a very short time, the famous among them being those at cape comorin and Kottar. The mission had also established a number of educational institutions in Agasteeswaram taluk. Cottage Industries such as lace and embroidery are being taught in the converts, especially in Nagercoil and Cape Comorin. Majority of the churches of the Roman Catholic faith are from the coastal areas [66].

Following the Roman Catholics, the London Mission Society, which is now a consignment body, the Church of South India, is the first important protestant. Organization attempted proselytism in Agasteeswaram taluk. The South Travancore Mission of the London Missionary Society began its work in the year 1806 with the arrival of Rev. Ringletaube at Mylaudy a small village in Agateeswaram taluk [67]. Rev. Ringletaube settled at Mylaudy and built the first protestant church with the help of Col. Macantay, the British Resident at Trivandrum and the Maharaja of Travancore. The headquarters of the mission ways shifted from Mylaudy to Nagercoil in 1819. A seminary, the first institution to offer regular instruction in English was founded by the mission in the same year. This has now developed in the present Scott Christian College at Nagercoil. The society established a printing press in 1820 at Nagercoil.

The Missionary also devoted his attention to the cause of female education. Very early in its history the mission started teaching lace manufacture to the women in Nagercoil. Now it has grown to be a flourishing cottage industry for Christian women in and around Nagercoil [68] and prohibition of women from upper cloths. He worked hard for ten years and built seven churches. But he became ill because of his hard work. So he handed over the responsibilities to one of his assistants Vedamanikam of Mylaudy and left for his motherland [69].

Rev. Charles Mead came to Agasteeswaram taluk to do ministry in 1818 instead of Ringletaube. Ringle Taube's assistant, Vedamanikam met him and took him Mylaudy [70]. A big crowd was waiting there to see him. Most of them were women. They did not wear upper cloth. When he saw them, he grieved for them. He determined to change this situation and changed his office from Mylaudy to Nagercoil [71]. The Salvation Army is another Missionary enterprise, which started work in Travancore in 1889, secured a firm footing at Krishnankovil a suburb of Nagercoil in 1892 and later in 1924 it established its south India territorial headquarters at Trivandrum. The Salvation Army has been doing good work, as a result of which the backward communities in the area have derived great benefits, particularly in education and medical relief. The Salvation Army opened schools and trained teachers to carry on the work. Special work for women was also begun and industries were taught and practiced. The Lutheran mission society also started their work in Nagercoil. They are working chiefly among backward classes and have established a few churches and schools in Agasteeswaram taluk [72].

Francis Xavier began his missionary enterprises on Agasteeswaram Taluk with the help of Portuguese authorities. The king of Travancore (Venad) not merely supplied him with money occasionally but also allowed him ample scope for his Evangelizing mission [73]. He fixed his headquarters at Kottar [74]. During his stay at Kottar, he used to worship St. Mary in a small chapel [75]. While he was at Kottar, he averted the invasion of padagas on the people of Venad which was appreciated by the Venad king who became closer to the priest. In recognition of Xavier's service, the king allotted a land to him for the purpose of constructing a Catholic Church at Kottar.

For many people it is a pilgrim center which has earned the title "Second Goa" where the body of St. Xavier is kept. On 17th January 1603 Buccerio started the construction work of the church with the help of the Nadar Christians of Pallam. It is said that the construction work of the church, the priest house and the shrine were started simultaneously [76]. The cathedral of Kottar is a complex of many structures built at various times. The church records that the

church was built in the year 1600. On 12 March 1622, the fifteenth point made Xavier in the year 1865, the church was enlarged and the shrine of our lady was also renovated and vaulted over. In 1930, the church raised the area from Kanniyakumari to Neerodi and was separated from sion diocese and a new diocese in the name of Kottar was formed with the Kottar. In 1955, the church was further extended and the chapel of our lady was incorporated in to an enlarged church.

Buccerio, the founder of the first church at Kottar died on 24.1.1617 in the Jesuit house at Madurai. In 1622 the Jesuits again assumed the Manage merit of the church and in 1640 sainthood was awarded to Xavier [77]. To commemorate this occasion people demolished the church and, in its place, built a new stone church called St. Xavier's church [78].

The church spots many styles of architecture. The painting of the church is artistic and has a good masterpiece. The artist Raja Ravi Varma painted St. Mary and presented the same to the church [79].

The St. Xavier's Church enjoys a great fame as a place of miracles from early times. The fame of the miracles spread far and wide and ever since the church has been visited by thousands of pilgrims for fulfilling their desires. It has become almost proverbial to say that "Xavier of Kottar grants all prayers". Every year the annual festival of the church which lasts for ten days is held from 24 November to 3 December. The car festival on the ninth day is most important. During these festival days the shrine attracts people of all castes and religions from all over south India. The tenth day of the festival is declared as a district holiday [80].

Muslims

The Muslims who are the third major community in Agasteeswaram taluk forms 5 percent of its population. The first batch of Muslims reached Malabar by about 712 AD. They came as traders and settled in the coastal regions. They not only respected the customs and usages of the country but also maintained cordial relations with the native people. They erected mosques in convenient places and slowly made many converts to Islam [81]. The Muslims of Agasteeswaram taluk followed the Mohammedan law of inheritance, which is based on the principle enunciated in the Quran. The Muslim law for the succession was followed. The Education of Muslims

was from Ootupallie (religious school). In those Ootupallie only reading and learning the Quran rote and some elementary religious knowledge were provided. Schooling of Muslim boys was discouraged and the education of girls was definitely interdicted [82]. The mosque also served as classroom. In mosques the religious teacher known as masalas, taught the students Arabic and Islamic studies [83].

The major occupations of Muslims are Business. They do all types of Business. Edalakudy in the Agasteeswaram taluk, there are large number of Muslims mostly engaged in trading activities. Eathamozhi is situated ten miles away from Kottar; this village is situated and praised the history of Islam. Before the advent of Muslims, the Greeks came through sea. Before Malik Ifinu Thenar reached Kaasarkodu, four of the great Islamic men came there and started preaching Islam in Eathamozhi.

From the discussion of 'Religious in Kanyakumari District, a religious bound area has played a predominant role. Hindu religion is a traditional one among other religions. Next to Hinduism, the Christian missionaries played a major role in abolition of Slavery and raised their protest against evil activities. Continuous agitations and oppositions waged by the low caste resulted, the abolition of dress restrictions from the society. Buddhism began to spread all over the state from 300 B.C and was unable to keep its prominent position for long. Besides Buddhism, a group of people followed Jainism and their religion and Jains preached the people about the adverse impact of caste system. Muslims are the third major community in Agasteeswaram taluk. They maintained cordial relations with the native people. Hence it is proved that the religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Christianity and Muslim have reputed historical importance to the district.

References

- [1] *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol.IV, 198.
- [2] *Ibid.*, 125.
- [3] *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol.IV, 198.
- [4] *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol.VI, Part I, 198.
- [5] Nagam Aiya, V., *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol. I, Trivandrum, 1906, 395.

- [6] Yesudhas, R.N., *A People Revolt in Travancore*, Trivandrum, 1975, 26.
- [7] *Ibid.*, 27.
- [8] Matter, S., *Native Life in Travancore*, London, 1883, 191.
- [9] Nagam Aiya, V., *The Travancore State Manual* Vol.II, Trivandrum, 1906, 56.
- [10] Panikkar, K.K., *Sree Narayan Paramahamsan*, Alleppy, 1950, 141.
- [11] Matter, S., *Native Life in Travancore*, London, 1883, 85.
- [12] "Parish Caste in Travancore" *Journal of The Royal Asiatic Society* 1884, p.180.
- [13] Matter, S., *op. cit.* p.85.
- [14] Padmanabhan, S., *op. cit.*, p.50.
- [15] Gopalakrishnan, M., (ed), *Kanniyakumari District Gazetteer*, Madras, 1995.
- [16] Padmanabhan, S., *op.cit.*, 50.
- [17] Personal Interview with Venkat Raman, S., Devasham Member.
- [18] Report from the Collection of Kanniyakumari District, dated, 28/10/1987.
- [19] Nagam Aiya, V., *Travancore State Manual*, Vol.III, 590.
- [20] *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol.V, 126.
- [21] Gopalakrishnan, M., (ed). *op. cit.*, 217.
- [22] *Ibid.*
- [23] *Ibid.*
- [24] *Ibid.*
- [25] P.W.D. File No. 316.4, Vol.III, 21.
- [26] *Ibid.*
- [27] Ravindran, T.K., Sri Vaikunda Swamikal - A Forgotten Social Reformer, *Journal of Kerala Studies*, Vol.VII, Part. I to IV, Trivandrum, 1980, 1.
- [28] Amalar, N., *Ayya Vaikundarin Mun Pin Kala Nigalvukal* (Tamil), Nagercoil, 2010, 14.
- [29] Immanuel, M., *Kanniyakumari Aspects and Architects*, Nagercoil, 2007, 113.
- [30] Sen, S.P., *Social And Neligious Reform Movement in the Nineteenth Centuries*, Calcutta, 1970, 146.
- [31] Seen, S.P., *op.cit.*, 147.
- [32] Mohanelhar - *Ayya Vaikundav's Testing Times, Thoughts, Talks and Tasks, Chattu Neetolai and Nadutheervaiulla*, Nagercoil, 2008, 10.
- [33] *The Hindu*, English Daily, 5th March, 2010, 7.
- [34] Sastha is one of the names associated with the Buddha, Aiyandar or Aiyappan is an equivalent of Sastha, Pillay, K.K., *op. cit.*, 516.
- [35] List of Temples H.R. & C.E. Office, Nagercoil.
- [36] Vikraman Thambi, G.T., *Varalattil Mandaicadu*, Parapattu, 1988, 22.
- [37] *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol.I, 140.
- [38] Local tradition derives the name of the temple from Tiru-beautiful or sacred, vidai-bull (Nandi) and kodu-hill top, *Ibid.*
- [39] *Census of Travancore*, Trivandrum, 1941, 127.
- [40] Vidhusekhar Sastri, *Elements of Jainism*, Calcutta, 1953, 10.
- [41] Vaiyapuripillai, S.*Kavimony Desikavinayagam Pillai*, Madras, 1967, 146.
- [42] *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol.I, Trivandrum, 1988, 17.
- [43] Selvaraj, C., *Jain Centres in Kanniyakumari District: A Study*, Madras, 1993, 82.
- [44] Kambaranatha, A., *Jaina Iconography*, Lucknow, 1993, 113.
- [45] Soundarajan, V., *Glimpses of Indian Culture, Art and Religion*, New Delhi, K.1981, 110.
- [46] Aswathi Thirunal Gowri Lakshmi Bayi, *Thulasi Garland*, Mumbai, 1998, 39.
- [47] George Menachery (Ed), *The St. Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India*, Vol. II, Trichur, 1973, 181.
- [48] Thangamoni, S., *Political Social History of Kanniyakumari District*, Chennai, 2005, 9.
- [49] Padmanabhan, S., *The Contributions of Kanniyakumari to the Tamil World*, Nagercoil, 1982, 17.
- [50] Padmanabhan, S., *op.cit.*, 119.
- [51] George Menachery, *The St.Thomas Christian Encyclopedia of India*, Vol.II, Trichur, 1973, 181.
- [52] Sivaraja pillai, K.N., *The Chronology of the Early Tamils*. Madras, 1932, 82.
- [53] *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol.1, 192 - 196.
- [54] Sreedhara Menon, A., *A survey of Kerala, History*, Madras, 1994, 80-81.
- [55] *Travancore Archeological Series*, Vol, IV, 118.
- [56] *A.R.E.*, 1913, 85.

- [56] A.R.E., 1913, p.85.
- [57] *Devaswom Communication*, No, 418/363, Dated 10th Dhanu 1060, M.E. 1864.
- [58] *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol.II, 139.
- [59] Report on the census of Travancore, 1891, 333.
- [60] *Travancore Archaeological Series*, Vol.II, 139.
- [61] History of Travancore. 97.
- [62] Vellupillai, T.K.. *op.cit.*, Vol.II, APP. M.Doc. 111, 2-3.
- [63] *Ibid.*, App. Doc. XIX, 17.
- [64] *Ibid.*, App.Doc. XXXVIII, 33.
- [65] L.B.Firth, *Indian Church History*, Bangalore, 1961, 3.
- [66] Nambiar, P.K., *Census of India 1961*, Kanniyakumari District, Volumes I and II, Madras, 1996, 18.
- [67] Joy Gnanthason, *A Forgotten History*, Madras, 1944, 53.
- [68] Nambiar, P.K., *op.cit.*, 18.
- [69] George, D.H., *Study of the Women Liberation Movement of Kanniyakumari District*, Chennai, 1982, 4.
- [70] *Annual Report of Mead Memorial District Church*, Kotticode, 2007, 46.
- [71] Cover File, *Petition of Missionaries of the L.M.S. to His Highness The Raja of Travancore*, dated, 12th March 1959.
- [72] Nambiar, P.K., *op.cit.*, 19.
- [73] Gopalakrishnan, M., *op.cit.*, 1192.
- [74] Velupillai, T.K., *The Travancore State Manual*, Vol.I, 682.
- [75] *Ibid.*, 173.
- [76] Vinicious.S., Thiruthalam Kottar (Tamil), Nagercoil, 1988, 27.
- [77] Vinicious.S., *op.cit.*, 43.
- [78] Alex Khursh Malhiah, Thenpandi Mandalamana Veeranadu (Tamil) Azhagappapuram, 1995, 257.
- [79] Dhina Thanthi, Thahaval Kalanjiyam, Nagercoil, 2008, 20.
- [80] Annual Festival Program Notice, St, Xavier Church, Kottar, dated 19th November 2005.
- [81] Narayan Thampi. N., *Census of India, 1941*, Vol.XXV, Part.I, New Delhi, 141.
- [82] Peter, D., *Liberation of Oppressed a Continuous Struggle, A Case Study Since 1882 AD*, Nagercoil, 2009, 16.
- [83] Chopra, P.N., *History of South India*, Vol.II, New Delhi, 1979, 209.