

LOCAL HISTORY OF MAVELIKKARA

The ancient town of Mavelikkara is situated in the Alappuzha district of Kerala on the banks of River Acchankovil. Its geographical location is 9km east of national highway NH 47 and 15 km west of Main Central road. The State Highway and MC road lies at latitude 6.15° north and longitude 76.32° east and 8 meters above Mean Sea Level. Blessed by natural resources, Mavelikkara has flourished from very ancient times as a settlement of rich traditions in art, culture and religion and has registered prosperity in agriculture and trade activities.

Local history is generally understood as a range of historical writings, focusing on specific, geographically small areas, usually by non – professional historians for popular reading. Local history started as amateur attempts to promote a locality or community as a matter of pride and even now such trends prevail and the term local history continues to be linked with antiquarianism and amateur historiography. It often incorporates cultural and social aspects of life in a particular locality. Historic plaques are one form of documentation of significant occurrences in the past and oral histories are other sources that are depended for by local history narratives. Many works of local history are compiled by amateur historians working independently or engaged by local organizations.

The importance of local history has been recognized world over since the appearance of the Annales School .One of the early attempts to use the term micro-

history as a self – defined term for local history was an American scholar, George R Stewart (1959). A few years later, independently of Stewart, an American scholar Luis Gonzales used the word micro-history in the subtitle of a monograph which investigates the transformation experienced by a tiny forgotten village in the span of few centuries with the writing of the micro histories of each locality, the hitherto banished locality, movements, struggles, sacrifices and people started to occupy a place of respect in historical writings. These local histories helped to bring more light on the hitherto unknown, ignored or neglected aspects of human life in small locales and enabled the critical reading of the mainstream histories and necessitated changes in them. This effort is also aimed towards enriching the existing corpus of knowledge related to human life in and around the region of Mavelikkara.

HYPOTHESIS

Local traditions and cultural forms of Mavelikkara truly reveal the agrarian character of the region. The prosperity gained through different agrarian practices played a crucial role in shaping the socio-economic history of the region. Development of agriculture, emergence of new classes and resultant changes in the cultural landscape of the region are probed in the thesis to understand various strands in the construction of its local history. Though a micro level application of research methodology is undertaken in the work, it is contextualized within the broad contours of Kerala history. It is argued that the emergence of Mavelikkara as a unique cultural entity cannot be well explained without shedding light on the agrarian expansion and commercial development of the region.

OBJECTIVES

1. To trace the historical roots of Mavelikkara and identify the structures that propelled social changes in its history.
- 2 .To critically examine the political lineages of the region.
3. To trace the Buddhist tradition and its vestiges.
- 4 .To explicate the religious life of Mavelikara.
- 5 .To document the artistic and cultural heritage of Mavelikara.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted in the thesis is mainly descriptive cum analytical .The work is done with an inter disciplinary perspective. No work on local history would be fruitful unless insights from other disciplines are not intergrated. An effort is made to employ different techniques employed in other disciplines to collect data. Appropriate authentication is made in the form of foot notes. Oral interviews were conducted to extract otherwise unavailable information for which oral methodology was employed.

SOURCES

Documented information about the history of this place is very scanty .So the researcher used various sources that usually merit the attention of academic research. There hardly exist any study on the region and the information had to be collected from various social including families and caste based institutions. The

present study has utilized both primary and secondary source materials. Apart from the oral evidence, careful effort has been made to collect information from the available records such as Administrative Reports (Travancore), South Indian Temple Inscriptions, Grandhavaries, Records from Panchayath offices, Census Reports, Travelogues, Family Records, Kerala Society Papers, News Papers, Pamphlets, hand written journals, archaeological reports etc.

There are differences of opinion regarding the origin of the term Mavelikara as one notion observes that it is the shore of a great ocean and so they call it as Mavelikara. Mavelikkara, since the very ancient times was a part of Onattukara (north to Desinganadu) and was governed by the Kayamkulam rulers, with its capital at Kandiyoor Mattom. In the 11th century literature, Thiruvallacheppedu, Unniyadi charitham and Unnuneelisandhesam there are references to the history of Odanadu and Kandiyoor.

It is believed that during the Sangam period, the regions including Mavelikara have been under the control of Ayi rulers. Many of the festivals in this region indicate the presence of an agricultural society during that period. In the course of time, this place witnessed different religious and cultural formations like Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. Under the influence of various cultural streams, Mavelikkara evolved into a cultural locale moulded under specific socio-economic conditions.

Onattukara consisted of four kovilakams-*Perakathu, Cherayi, Puthiyidathu,* and *Pazhedathu*. The eldest member of these kovilakams was made the king of Onattukara. Later Onattukara splitted into two, one conjoined to Venad and the

other remained as Kayamkulam. In 1737, Ramayyan became the Dhalava of Venad. In 1746, Marthandavarma conquered the land was annexed it to Travancore. During his period, Mavelikara came into prominence as a major business centre of Venad. After this, Ramayyan constructed a '*Pandakasala*' (Warehouse) at Mavelikkara.

An agreement of mutual territorial integrity was signed between the Dutch and Travancore in 1753 at Mavelikkara. As a memorial to this agreement, Dutch donated a pillar light (*sthamba vilakku*) to the Sree Krishna temple at Mavelikara. Ramayyan also constructed a '*kotta*' (fort) at Mavelikkara. Later, Lord Mekkala destroyed it in 1809. This place today at the heart of the town is also known as Kottakkakam, and the Dhalava Madom near the Sree Krishna Temple is also considered as a monument of these events.

Mavelikkara is also famous as a land of palaces, royalty of these castles is reflected all over the place. The site of the Royal Palace Gate which is situated at the back side of Raja Ravi Varma College is an example for this. Archeologists uphold the view that the peculiar feature of Mavelikkara was the presence of Buddha Mandapams, which indicate the presence of Buddhism in the 6th & 7th AD. In the festivals of Mavelikara viz. *Chettikulangara Kumbha Bharani*, Vettiayar temple's *Vishu Utsavam* etc, the chariots have a similarity with the chariots of North Indian temples. The museum of Kerala Panini A.R Raja Raja Varma, the person who has built a foundation to Malayalam language, Sharada Mandiram, is situated near the temple of Lord Sree Krishna. The table, chair, crown, *pallaku* etc used by him and many of his paintings are preserved here. The Sree Krishna

Temple, Kandiyoor Lord Shiva temple, Chettikulangara Devi temple, Puthiyakavu St. Marys Cathedral, C.S.I Christ Church, Pathichira St Johns Valiya Palli, Mavelikara Muslim Palli (pookada junction) etc are the epitome of religious harmony. The mutual love and affection of Hindu and Christian communities of Mavelikara are evident from the ‘*Purathezhunnallippu*’ and ‘*Ethirelppu*’ processions of Puthiyakavu Devi Temple which start in front of the Puthiyakavu St.Mary’s Cathredal Church.Mutual faith and harmony between these religions remain unaffected since decades.

Yusthus Youseph, the founder of Yuyomaya Society established a new religious sect in 1881 at Mavelikkara. Followers of this religious sect is leading a pure and satisfactory life without the knowledge of much people in the world. In this Hindu social rituals and Christian Principles are organized. The followers of Sabha do not wear ornaments, do not consume liquor and avoid eating known vegetarian foods. To them, the meaning of believing in God is the belief without any special indebtedness to any religion. There is no separate priesthood or a separate place of worship. Attenders are there to transmit their faith and belief to others who work without any desire of reward. They are called Missionaries or Ministers. There are no religious rituals accepting salary and rewards or there is no arrangement for giving speech by accepting payment among them.

During his Kerala visit, Mahatma Gandhi attended a meeting on 19th January 1934 at Mavelikara. Gandhiji’s reception was in Thattarambalam Sree Chitrolsava Mandiram. Eminent personalities like Artist Rama Varma Thampuran,

Thattarambalam Raman Pillai, Sree Subhananda Guru Devan et. al. participated at the meeting. The conversations between Subhananda Guru Devan and Gandhiji were translated by Mannar Gopalan Nair. Either by paternal or maternal relation, many eminent personalities were born and brought up in Mavelikara. They have been proud of their connection with Mavelikara.

The present study is an attempt to sketch the history of Mavelikkara region from the ancient to medieval and modern times.

CHAPTERISATION

- 1 Chapter one is the *introductory chapter* which gives a general introduction including the objectives, methodology of the study, and hypothesis followed by a literature review.
- 2 The second chapter "*Land and people*" deals with geography and topography of Mavelikara . It also gives the details of the land and people of Mavelikkara.
3. The third chapter "*The Economy of Mavelikara* " focuses on the economic changes in Mavelikkara from the ancient times to the present . It reveals the transition of a tribal economy to a monetary economy and the flourishing trade and commerce in Mavelikara in the ancient to medieval and modern times.
4. Fourth chapter "*Polity of Mavelikara*" attempts to explore the political history of this place from ancient times to the present. It throws light on the tribal polity in each and every *Tina* related to this place and the *Ayis* who made Mavelikara a centre of administration. It also throws

light on the methods of administration, customs and rites ,system of adoption and the importance of royal dynasty.

5. Fifth chapter “*Religious Institution*” deals with the religious traditions of the region and the religious life of the people of Mavelikkara.
6. Sixth chapter “*Cultural Pattern and Social Organization*” analyses the cultural and social progress of Mavelikara through the ages. Mavelikkara is a place which is adorned with a number of ancient and medieval monuments and they are described in this chapter. Social organization in Mavelikkara from the ancient times to the present is discussed. Special attention has been paid to discuss the Brahmin settlement and the emergence of social stratification on the basis of castes. A historic approach is used to discuss each and every caste of this region.
7. Seventh chapter is the *Conclusion*. The concluding part of the work discusses the findings of the study. They include the formation of the agrarian pattern of this ancient settlement and the various changes it underwent in different historical periods. In the cultural realm, the study could document among other streams the Buddhist vestiges of the region and its continuing influence. The study further attempts to map the cultural contributions of various institutions/ communities and individuals. The study also documents the remnants of ‘Yoyumaya’ sect that demands closer study.