

Shaduli Mosque Inscription : Text Deciphered

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to decipher an Arabic inscription found in a wooden plank at Kuttichira near Calicut city in Kerala. The inscription was found in good state with legible and beautiful calligraphic presentation. We could take estampage of the inscription and decipher it. The image of the original inscription, estamped copy, transliteration, English translation and a brief analysis of the inscription have been included in this paper.

Keywords: Calicut, Kuttichira, Inscription, Shaduli, estampage

Introduction

Calicut, one of the oldest Muslim settlements in the south western part of the Indian subcontinent, had been well known for its dynamic engagements in the transoceanic trade networks which made the city one of the renowned port cities in the Indian Ocean littoral (Prange, 2018:25-26). The Muslim settlement in Calicut is consisted of various Merchants groups like *Al Karimis*, *Marakkars* and *Mappila Muslims* in the initial period. The active involvement of these ambitious traders had played a decisive role in shaping the metropolitan nature of Calicut city in the pre-colonial period (Melekandathil, 2003). It is assumed that the Muslim settlement in Calicut and in the northern part of Malabar had created a congenial ambience for long distance trade especially with the Red Sea region and also with the Mediterranean. The impetus extended by the Zamurins, the chieftains of Calicut also made favourable atmosphere for both the trade and the expansion of Muslim settlements in Calicut. The City of Calicut is acclaimed of its multi-cultural and multi religious tradition which is evident in the making of the city (Narayanan, 2006).

As a trade emporium and a meeting point of distinct cultures, the city had been enriched with novel ideas and scholarship in the course of time. Along with Arabs and other *paradesi* Muslim traders, large number of literati must have visited Calicut and later settled in the city on various capacities including *Imams* and religious instructors. The oldest Mosques like Muchundi, Mishkal and Juma Masjid had housed many eminent scholars from various parts of the world (Randathani, 2007:66-68). They functioned as a link in disseminating knowledge on varieties of fields in the city. A kaleidoscopic view of the city during the medieval and late medieval period would definitely reveal the nature of the percolation of information among people of Calicut (Eaton, 2000:90). When the people from distant land anchored on the shore of port city of Calicut, new style in constructions of building, planning and designing of streets, housing, erecting of worshiping centres etc also made its way in the city. Of these, a new literary culture also could be seen evolving in the city by learned Muslim scholars who were keen in imparting the Islamic theological and spiritual life among them. The Qazis and Imams of the Mosques might have taken leadership in this regard. It is noticed that copying of the manuscripts and sending these copies to various learning centres had been a common practice and considered as a religious duty. Further more, the newly emerged literati who introduced Arabic calligraphy, new materials of writing including durable 'Arab ink' by which the manuscripts and calligraphic designs in the papers were composed. It is noticed that the Muslims in the city had followed a tradition of recording and documenting everything in their everyday life. It could be seen even in the headstones, epitaphs and also on the walls of the mosques.

Arab Inscriptions in Calicut City

Inscriptions in Arabic language found with variety of calligraphic styles in Calicut city from 13th century onwards (Desai, 1986: 114). Of these the *Muccunti Inscription*, a bilingual inscription in the Muccunti Mosque, is an oldest one. The Arabic inscriptions are also seen in *Darghas, Mosques, old Muslim taravadu* etc which are adorned lavishly by different variety of calligraphic decorations. Stones, wooden planks etc used for carving or embossing inscriptions. However, most of these inscriptions are found in the Mosques. As a centre of worship and a regular meeting point for congregational prayers, the Mosques were built with an advanced artistic precision and aesthetic sense (Shokoohy, 2011:137). So, enlightening qur'anic verses, the traditions of the prophet, year and other details of construction or renovations of the structure etc gracefully recorded with the help of Arabic calligraphy. Though the calligraphic

presentations of the inscriptions are bit difficult to read, it seems that, its aesthetic value must have counted and encouraged by the scholarly community of the Muslims in the City. It also reveals the collective efforts of a group of people in the city who must have either engaged directly or supported in embossing or engraving a new inscription in their settlement area. It is also noticed that a simple renovation work of even a pulpit had been documented in the mosque. It obviously points out the literary culture of the Muslim community of the historic city of Calicut. In short, the historical value and the appealing artistic presentation of the Arabic inscriptions with astonishing calligraphic style is remarkable.

Though the number of Arabic inscriptions found in the city numerous, the studies based on these inscriptions are still very scanty. During the colonial period few 'epigraphists' and administrative officials who were at work under the British in the Madras presidency had taken up some initial work to locate and identify the inscriptions and other inscribed materials in Malabar. However, the colonial meddling in this field was not comprehensive, instead they simply tried to locate and compile them only. However, the *Annual Reports of the Archaeological Survey of India* (ARASI), the *Annual Report of the Indian Epigraphy* (ARIE), *Annual Report on South Indian Epigraphy* (ARSIE) etc, have perfectly documented almost all available inscriptions in South India. Ziyauddin. A. Desai, an eminent epigraphist whose work titled as '*A Topographical list of Arabic, Persian and Urdu Inscriptions of South India*' is an attractive attempt to document such inscriptions of South India. Since the topographic, list published by Desai focussed his attention only to give a list and a long index of the major Persian, Urdu and Arabic inscriptions found in the record of the Annual report of the Archaeological Survey of India and in the Annual Report of the Indian Epigraphy. So, some of the minor inscription having sufficient historical value has failed to be enlisted there.

Prof. Meherdad Shokoohy, the renowned architectural historian, has published an extensive study on the Mosque architecture in South India titled as *Muslim Architecture of South India: The Sulthanate of Malabar and the traditions of Maritime settlers on Malabar and Coromandel Coast (Tamilnadu, Kerala and Goa)* The book has allotted a sperate chapter for Malabar region by leaving an elaborated discussion on the structure and style of architecture of the Mosques in the Malabar coast. Moreover, he also has done thorough survey of Mosques inscriptions found particularly in the city of Calicut. The scholarly approach of the author to decipher the inscriptions found in the Mosques is really a welcome addition in the history of the epigraphy of Malabar. Since his concentration was

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limited in the Kuttichira region in the western coastal line of Malabar, Prof. Shokohy, as he was concentrating on Mosque and its architectural elegances, could not include all the relevant inscriptions found in the periphery of the Calicut city. So, the present paper is an attempt to document an Inscription, which has not been properly documented in any of the standard repositories of south Indian inscriptions so far. The inscription (Shaduli Inscription) was found at Parappil area of the Calicut city.

Shaduli Mosque Inscription

Shaduli Mosque, located in Parappil near Kuttichira, is one of the popular mosques in the Calicut City. It was erected in the name of Abul Hasan Ali Shaduli a renowned 13th Century Moroccan Sufi master and founder of the *Shaduli* sufi order. There is a *Dargha* of a Sufi saint adjacent to this mosque. The *Shaduli* Sufi order had perhaps many followers in the city and there had been regular gathering for the ritual recitation of the *dikr* in the city. Hence, the mosque and its surroundings were very familiar to the people who reside in the coastal belt of Calicut. However, during 19th and 20th centuries, the differences of opinion among the Muslims with regards to certain practices like public gathering for recitation of *dikr*, ritual visitation called *ziyarath*, and other theological and polemical matters created split among the Muslim community in Kerala. The split has got visible in the form of various religious organisations, institutions, publications and so on. It had also affected the community who reside nearby *Shaduli* Mosque too. When the dispute over the rituals practiced in the *Shaduli* Mosques become intense, the ownership of the Mosque was claimed by each group who had divergent views on the theological matters to be practiced by a Muslim in his/her daily life. Consequently, the issue was taken in to court as a case for the ownership for the Mosque and its administration. However, the inscription reveals the long tradition of the mosque and socio-cultural legacy which is embossed in a piece of wooden plank inscription. It was found in one of the private godown nearby the mosque. The mosque had been constructed in the traditional architectural style with wood and thatched roof which is now renovated as a spacious concrete structure

The Original Inscription



Estampaged image



Arabic text deciphered

1. قد بني وعمر هذا المسجد المبارك المسمى بمسجد الشيخ الشادلي.
2. تغمده الله برحمته ومن علينا من بركته.
3. سنة عامين واربعين ومائة و الف من الهجرة النبوية.
4. على صاحبها أفضل الصلاة والسلام.

Transliteration

1. Qad buniya va ghummira hâdhal masjidul mubarak al musammâ bi masjid al sheikh al shâdilî
2. Taghammadahullâhu bi rahmatihîva manna ‘alainâ min barakatihî
3. Sanah ‘amaini va arba‘îna va mi’ah v a alfin min al hijrah al nabaviyah
4. ‘Ala ṣaḥibihâ afdalalsalâh va ssalâm

Translation of the Arabic Text

1. This Holy mosque was named the Sheikh Al-Shaduli Mosque, was built and commissioned (Inhabited)
2. May God bless him (Shaikh Shaduli) and shower with His mercy up on him and also those of us with his blessing
3. One thousand one hundred and forty two year of the Prophet's migration (Hijra)
4. Peace and best prayers be upon him (the owner of Hijra)

Conclusion

It is interesting to note that Ziyauddin Desai has listed this inscription in his monumental work on the Inscriptions of South India. But the list has briefly given only the first line of the inscription. Since it is only a long list of inscriptions, one cannot expect the text, transliteration and the translation of the Inscription. In addition to that the book does not intend to interpret the meaning of the inscriptions as well. So it would be difficult

to have a complete picture about the wooden plank inscription. Moreover, the year of the construction of the mosque is given in the book is as A.H 1140 = 1728, but the year mentioned in the inscription is A.H 1142=1730. So, the present paper has given full text with its transliteration and translation in to English. The paper also has given the exact year of the construction of the Shaduli Mosque in the Parappil area of the Calicut City.

Since the inscription gives us the exact year of the construction Mosque and also indicate the Sufi allegiance of the people who built this structure, evoke certain level curiosity about various aspect of the social and religious life of the Muslims settlements in the 18th century in Calicut. The inscription is composed by using a beautiful calligraphic style. The thuluth* Style (Alani,2016:43)of Arabic calligraphic script is used in this inscription.

Notes

* *Thulth*, considered the perfect form of cursive, is nicknamed the mother of calligraphy. It is the most complete style, with the richest gestures and studying it offers learner a global understanding of script.

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