



*A profile on
Shaikh Ahmad Zainuddeen Ibn Muhammad Ghazzali,
the author of
the first real historical work on Malabar.
A fascinating peep
into the first stirrings
of the centuries-old Mappila
cultural heritage.*

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**A MAPPILA SAVANT OF THE
16TH CENTURY**

The author of the first real historical work on Malabar was a Mappila Savant of the 16th Century A.D. Written in Arabic, the full title of the book is 'Thuhfathul Mujahideen fiba'zi Akhbaril Burthaghaliyyeen' and the author was Shaikh Ahmad Zainudeen Ibn Muhammad Ghazzali Ibn Zainuddeen Ibn Ali Ibn Ahmad al Ma'baril Funnani. The author of the 'Thuhfath' was also known as the Junior Zainudeen Makhdoom to distinguish him from his paternal grand father, the Senior Zainudeen Makhdoom, who also was a great theologian and author of several books. The incidents that took place on the Malabar coast since the arrival of the Portuguese in 1498 till 1584 have been described in glowing detail in the Thuhfath exposing the base and barbarous atrocities perpetrated by them particularly on the Muslims and their homes and places of worship. Besides, it contains an exhortation to the Muslims to fight against the Portuguese, and also gives an account of the Muslims and other communities in Malabar. Not much, however, is known about the life of the author of the Thuhfath. There is no reliable record of the dates of his birth and death. A brief account of the family to which he belonged is given by Abdul Azeez, son of the Senior Zainudeen Makhdoom in his book 'Maslakul Athkiyya' written in AH 993 (A.D. 1585).

The Makhdoom family to which Ahmad Zainudeen belonged came to Ponnani (an old sea-port on the Malabar coast) originally from Malbar, the name given by the Arabs to the eastern coast of Peninsular India facing Srilanka (Ceylon). That Muslim scholars from this region had contacts with the West coast is clear from a statement of the 14th Century African traveller 'Ibn Batuta', in his book of travel accounts (Rihla) that the Qazi at Mangalore at the time of his visit to that place was Badruddeen Ma'bari. It was his paternal uncle Zainudeen Ibrahim Ib Ahmad Ma'bari who was the Qazi at Ponnani who brought the first Makhdoom (Shaikh Zainuddeen Ibn Ali Ibn Ahmad Ma'bari) while he was a child to Ponnani from Cochin where he was born in 1467. He was reputed scholar and as the founder of the Big Juma Mosque of Ponnani to which was attached a theological college (dars) and as the leader of the Muslims, he was given the title of Makhdoom (literally one to whom service is due). He passed away in 1522 and was succeeded to the dignity by his elder son Abdul Azeez. Of the two sons of the first Makhdoom, Abdul Azeez and Ghazzali, the latter died during the life time of his elder brother. Ghazzali had married in Chombal (on the sea coast near Mahe) an important Muslim settlement of those days with a number of mosques but it was practically destroyed by the frequent depredations of the Portuguese as a result of which many of the old Muslim families of the locality moved to the interior. The Junior Zainuddeen Makhdoom was born of

this union. Because of the association of Ponnani with several renowned Muslim scholars mostly belonging to the Makhdoom family and because of the large number of Muslims coming from various places inside and outside the country who pursued their religious studies at the Big Juma Mosque, Ponnani became celebrated as the 'Little Makka'. Ahmad Zainuddeen Ibn Ghazzali, according to tradition, lies buried in the graveyard attached to the mosque called 'Kunhippalli' in Chombal. The grave is said to be in the shade of an old tree on the eastern side of the mosque but there is no tombstone there.

After the death of Makhdoom Abdul Aziz who had no sons, Ahmad Zainuddeen, the eldest male member of the family, is said to have succeeded to the position of Makhdoom. In later days, however, the matrilineal system of descent prevalent in the locality came to be adopted by the family.

Apart from Thuhfathul Mujahiddeen several books on Islamic theology have been written by Shaikh Ahmad Zainuddeen. Of these the most well-known is 'Fathhul Mueen', which is recognised as an authoritative work among the Shafi sect of Muslims in several countries including Arabia, Egypt, Malaya and Java. The book was completed in AH 982 (AD 1574-5). It is in fact a commentary on the author's own "Quarrathul Ain". Commentaries on Fathhul Mueen have also been written by several scholars of Arabia among which those of Sayyid Ahmad Alawi Saqaf written in AH 1295 (AD 1878) in two volumes and of Shaikh Arif Abu Bakar Dimyathi written in AH 1300 (AD 1882/3) in four volumes are the most well-known.

The late P.M. Muhammad Moulavi Falak In an article in "Chandrika Weekly" of 3rd February 1951 wrote thus: "The dars in Valiya Kulankara Palli of Tanur is one of the oldest in Malabar.....The library of that mosque is also one of the oldest.....There are several books in manuscripts there.....I happened to see there a very old manuscript copy of Fathhul Mueen. In that the name of the author is written as Zainuddeen Ibn Ghazzali Musilyar".

Apart from Thuhfathul Mujahiddeen and Fathhul Mueen, a note in the Malabar edition of Fathhul Mueen lists the following other works of Shaikh Ahmad Zainuddeen:- (1) Qurathul Ain (2) Minhajul Walih (3) Ahkamunnikah (4) Ajwibathul Ajeeba (5) Irshadul Ibad and (6) Mukhtasar Sharahussudoor.

Another work of Shaikh Ahmad Zainuddeen in manuscript with the title of 'Fathawal Hindliyya' is known to be in the India Office Library in London.

'Thuhfathul Mujahiddeen' was written during the period when Emperor Akbar was on the throne at Delhi. The book became well-known in European countries also. It was translated by Rowlandson into English in 1833 for the Oriental Translation Fund of London. More recently another English translation was brought out in 1942 by



Muhammad Hussain Nainar for the Madras University. Parts of the book have been translated into Portuguese and several other languages. The Persian historian Muhammad Kasim Ferishta has included portions of the Thuhfath in his book published in 1612. The book was translated into Malayalam (with the exception of the first chapter which deals with the virtues of Jihad) by K. Moosan Kutty Moulvi of Tirurangadi and published in 1937. Shaikh Ahmad Zainuddeen's Thuhfathul Majahideen has been dedicated to 'Sultan Ali Adil Shah I' of Bijapur who died in 1580.

Ahmad Zainuddeen's 'Ajwibathul Ajeeba' which does not appear to be much in circulation particularly outside Malabar gives a few bits of information concerning the author. It gives the names of his father and grand father and thus dispels the erroneous notion among some that he was the son of Abdul Azeez, probably because Ghazzali, who dies while young, was little known compared to his well-known brother Abdul Azeez and he (Ahmad Zainuddeen) refers often to his grand father Zainuddeen Ibn Ali. It is also evident from the book that he was at Makka in AH 966 (AD 1558/9) and that the questions and answers which form the subject matter of the book took place at Makka before AH 977 (AD 1569/70). A list of the ten teachers of the author is also given in the book:- (1) Shaikh Shihabuddeen Ahmad Ibn Hajar (2) Wajeehuddeen Abdur Rahman Ibn Ziyad (3) Abdullah ba Makrumah (4) Abdul Azeez al Zemziyya (5) Muhammad al Ramli (6) Al Allama Muhammed al Khathib al Shirbeeni (7) Abdul Raof Ibn Yahya (8) Abdul Azeez al Ma'bariyya (9) Zainul Abideen Abi Bakar Muhammad al Bakriyya (10) Abu Bakar Ahmad al Ma'bari.

Ahmad Zainuddeen was for some years in the court of Sultan Ali Adil Shah I of Bijapur as the custodian of the Library there. He was fond of donating to mosques stones with passages from the Holy Quran engraved on them.

The ancestral house of Shaikh Ahmad Zainuddeen in Ponnani is known by the name of 'Ghazzali Musliyarakam'.