

Goddesses, Saints and Kings: Turkic influence in South India

Tanrıçalar, Şeyhler ve Krallar: Güney Hindistan'da Türk Etkisi

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ABSTRACT

Steeped in history and diversity, South India, also known as Peninsular India, covers 19.31% of India's area and accounts for 20% of India's population. The region stands as a testament to the ebb and flow of civilisations that have left an indelible mark on its landscape, which is dotted with scores of historical sites, from India's largest Hindu temple complex, the Srirangam Sri Ranganathaswamy Kovil, where a Turkic princess is deified, to Natharvali Dargah in Trichinopoly, dedicated to Pir Hazrat Nathar Shah, a saint from Rûm, Anatolia, who is credited with having introduced Sufism to South India and Sri Lanka. Sufi orders (tariqas), such as the Naqshbandi, have long been popular in Sri Lanka and South India, where Turkish Cypriot Imams (leaders) of the Haqqani stream are revered by some sections of the Muslim society. Though much has been written about the Turkic dynasties that held sway in North India, the history of Turkic incursions into the south, the founding of kingdoms, Hindu-Muslim syncretic shrines, and the settlement of Turkic communities remain largely relegated to the margins of historical accounts. Drawing on archival and secondary sources, this article seeks to bridge this gap by exploring this overlooked history, focusing largely on the period between the 12th and 14th centuries. By doing so, this article aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how Turkic influences have shaped South India's cultural heritage, thereby hoping that the religio-cultural relations between India and Turkic states will further strengthen.

Keywords: India, Hindu-Muslim syncretism, Sufism, Turkic People, Türkiye

ÖZ

Gömülü olduğu tarih ve çeşitlilikle, aynı zamanda Yarımada Hindistanı olarak da bilinen Güney Hindistan, Hindistan'ın alanının %19.31'ini kaplar ve Hindistan nüfusunun %20'sini oluşturur. Bölge, manzarasında iz bırakan medeniyetlerin gelgitlerinin bir kanıtı olarak durur; burası, Hindistan'ın en büyük Hindu tapınak kompleksi olan Srirangam Sri Ranganathaswamy Kovil'den, bir Türk prensesi tanrılaşdırılan, Nadirveli Dergâhına, Hazret-i Pîr Nadir Şah'a adanan Trikinopolî'deki dergâha kadar uzanan çok sayıda tarihî mekâna sahiptir. Nadir Şah, Rûm yani Anadolu'dan gelen bir veli olup sufizmi Güney Hindistan ve Sri Lanka'ya tanıtan kişi olarak kabul edilir. Sufi tarikatları, Nakşibendilik gibi, uzun süredir Sri Lanka ve Güney Hindistan'da popüler olup Hakkâni kolunun Kıbrıslı Türk imamları bazı Müslüman toplum kesimleri tarafından saygı görmektedir. Kuzey Hindistan'da egemen olan Türk hanedanları hakkında çok şey yazılmasına rağmen, Türklerin güneye yönelik akınlarının tarihi, devletlerinin kuruluşu, Hindu-Müslüman muhtelit

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dergâhları ve Türk topluluklarının yerleşimi genellikle tarih anlatılarının kıyısında bırakılmıştır. Arşiv ve ikincil kaynaklara dayanarak hazırlanan bu makale, genellikle 12. ve 14. yüzyıllar arasındaki döneme odaklanarak, bu göz ardı edilen tarihi keşfetmeyi ve anlamayı ve söz konusu bu boşluğu doldurmayı amaçlar. Böylelikle, bu makale, Türk etkilerinin Güney Hindistan'ın kültürel mirasını nasıl şekillendirdiğine daha derin bir kavrayış sağlamayı hedefleyerek, Hindistan ve Türk devletleri arasındaki din-kültür ilişkilerinin daha da güçlenmesini hedeflemektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Hindistan, Hindu-Müslüman sentezciliği, Sufizm, Türk halkı, Türkiye

Introduction

South India, which covers 19.31% of the total land mass and accounts for 20% of India's total population, comprises the states of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Telangana, along with the union territories of Lakshadweep and Puducherry. The region is a major contributor to India's food production, has a markedly higher literacy rate and GDP per capita, and scores considerably higher on health parameters than the rest of India.¹ Home to major innovation hubs like Chennai, Bangalore, Hyderabad, and Thiruvananthapuram, South India, which has witnessed robust economic growth driven by sectors such as information and technology, software services, manufacturing, textiles, and tourism, outperforms the rest of the country in education, health, and economic opportunities.² Hailed as the heartland of Dravidian culture and identity, South India is where classical languages like Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, Carnatic music, classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, and Mohiniyattam, wood crafts like Channapatna and Kondapalli, an array of embroidery including Banjara, Jangaon, Kasuti, and Kalamkari, Kancheepuram weaves, Tanjore paintings, Bidriware, and a myriad of other crafts and artforms originated.³ South India, where some of India's puissant dynasties like the Pallava, Chera, Chola, and Pandya thrived for centuries, is hailed as the bastion of Hinduism and time-honoured traditions, and notwithstanding, it is also a haven and secure base for those adhering to other religions, including Abrahamic faiths, which reached and spread across south India centuries before they reached the North.⁴ Though much has been written about the promulgation of Islam in north India, substantially less has been published on the same subject in the context of south India, particularly on the role played by Turkic missionaries and Sufi mystics in disseminating Islam. Likewise, little has been published hitherto on Turkic dynasties and their varied influences, especially on religion,

- 1 Monica Das Gupta, *Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité: Exploring the Role of Governance in Fertility Decline* (World Bank Publications, 1999); Mohan Guruswamy and Zorawar Daulet Singh, *Chasing the Dragon: Will India Catch Up with China?* (Pearson Education India, 2010); Pundarik Mukhopadhaya, G. Shantakumar, and V. V. Bhanaji Rao, *Economic Growth and Income Inequality in China, India and Singapore: Trends and Policy Implications*, 2011, <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB06669686>; William Antholis, *Inside Out India and China: Local Politics Go Global*, 2013, <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB14623873>; William Wright Eaton, *The Adoption of Maternity Services in South India*, 1970.
- 2 Ashutosh Shyam, "Southern States Outshine Rest of India in Key Sectors' Growth," *The Economic Times*, January 27, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/southern-states-outshine-rest-of-india-in-key-sectors-growth/articleshow/56820003.cms?from=mdr>; BBC News, "Why South India Outperforms the North," *BBC*, September 20, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-62951951>;
- 3 Bhadriraju Krishnamurti, *The Dravidian Languages*, 2003, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511486876>; George Michell, *Architecture and Art of Southern India: Vijayanagara and the Successor States 1350-1750* (Cambridge University Press, 1995); Ludwig Pesch, *The Illustrated Companion to South Indian Classical Music* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1999).
- 4 J. B. Prashant More, *Religion and Society in South India: Hindus, Muslims, and Christians*, 2006; Lisa Mitchell, *Language, Emotion, and Politics in South India: The Making of a Mother Tongue* (Indiana University Press, 2009); Kallidaikurichi Aiyah Nilakanta Sastri, *A History of South India From Prehistoric Times to the Fall of Vijayanagar*, 1958; Sudhakar Chattopadhyaya, *Some Early Dynasties of South India* (Motilal Banarsidass Publ., 1974); Gabriel Jouveau-Dubreuil, *The Pallavas* (Asian Educational Services, 1995).

culture, and the numerous syncretic shrines where Turkic royals and Sufis are venerated and even deified by the South Indians. Drawing from archival and secondary sources, this article seeks to fill these existing knowledge gaps and contribute to a better understanding of the history of the Turkic peoples in the Indian subcontinent.

Advent of Islam and Other Abrahamic Faiths

Unlike in the case of north India, where Arab, Turkic, and Afghan invasions led to the dissemination of Islam, with reported incidents of forceful proselytising, persecution of non-Muslims, and destruction and looting of temples⁵, Islam was introduced in south India in a rather peaceful way, without any form of oppression or bloodshed, mainly through traders, missionaries and Sufi mystics from Arabia and Anatolia⁶, whose influence led to throngs embracing Islam in their free will without any compulsion⁷. It is worth noting that Islam reached South India centuries before the Turkic conquests in the north, and in contrast to what happened in north India, where the conquerors are said to have erected their mosques on sites where temples were vandalised and razed⁸, a multitude of mosques were built along the Malabar and Coromandel coasts of South India with the support and patronage of the Hindu natives and their rulers. Chief among them being the Cheraman Juma Manzil, the oldest mosque in the Indian subcontinent, named in honour of Cheraman Perumal Rama Varma Kulashekhar⁹, one of the Chera kings of south India, who embraced Islam after witnessing the splitting of the moon in two (*Shaqul Qamar*) by Prophet Muhammed¹⁰. According to the historical manuscript of anonymous authorship written in Arabic called '*Qissat Shakarwati Farmad*' which is currently

- 5 Richard M. Eaton, "TEMPLE DESECRATION AND INDO-MUSLIM STATES," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 11, no. 3 (September 1, 2000): 283–319, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/11.3.283>; A. Azfar Moin, "Sovereign Violence: Temple Destruction in India and Shrine Desecration in Iran and Central Asia," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 57, no. 2 (March 20, 2015): 467–96, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0010417515000109>; Robert Layton and Julian Thomas, "Introduction: The Destruction and Conservation of Cultural Property," in *Routledge eBooks*, 2003, 17–37, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203165096-5>.
- 6 Susan Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); J. C. Heesterman, *India and Indonesia: General Perspectives* (BRILL, 1989); Malik Mohamed, *The Foundations of the Composite Culture in India* (Taylor & Francis, 2023).
- 7 Stephen F. Dale, "Trade, Conversion and the Growth of the Islamic Community of Kerala, South India," *Studia Islamica*, no. 71 (January 1, 1990): 155, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595642>; Frank S. Fanselow, "Muslim Society in Tamil Nadu (India): An Historical Perspective," *Journal - Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 10, no. 1 (January 1, 1989): 264–89, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02666958908716118>; Mohd Rijal Ilias, "Mappila Muslims and the Cultural Content of Trading Arab Diaspora on the Malabar Coast," *Asian Journal of Social Science (Print)* 35, no. 4–5 (January 1, 2007): 434–56, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156853107x240288>.
- 8 Anwar Shaikh and Rizwan Salim, *Why Muslims Destroy Hindu Temples*, 2001, <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB12024120>; Ved Mehta, "The Mosque and the Temple: The Rise of Fundamentalism," *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 2 (January 1, 1993): 16, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20045520>; Paola Bacchetta, "Sacred Space in Conflict in India: The Babri Masjid Affair," *Growth and Change* 31, no. 2 (January 1, 2000): 255–84, <https://doi.org/10.1111/0017-4815.00128>.
- 9 Haseena VA, "Historical Aspects of the Legend of Cheraman Perumal of Kodungallur in Kerala," *Historical Research Letter* 17 (January 1, 2015): 47–51, <https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/HRL/article/download/20143/20152>.
- 10 A. Sreedhara Menon, *Kerala History and Its Makers* (D C Books, 2011); Praveen Swami, "The Transnational Terror Threat to India: Lashkar-e-Taiba as the Key Actor," *India's National Security*, February 27, 2012, 354–71, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203814123-20>.

preserved in the British Library¹¹, Cheruman Perumal witnessed the miracle while relaxing on the rooftop of his palace¹², but some other versions of this legend suggest that he saw it in his dream¹³ or while taking a constitutional walk with his queen¹⁴. Bemused by what he saw, he rushed to his astrologers, who too were confounded by the miracle and weren't aware of what caused it. A group of Arab merchants in Cranganore met with the king and explained to him that it was Prophet Muhammed who invoked God's blessings and cleaved the moon in two. After learning about the prophet, his miracles, and his teachings, Cheraman Perumal renounced his kingdom, shared it among his kin, gave up his worldly possessions, and travelled to Haramain¹⁵, heedless of the perils of the sea, to perform Hajj and meet the prophet himself. When Cheraman Perumal was all set to return to Malabar, he fell gravely ill, and while he was confined to his deathbed, he instructed Malik Ibn Dinar to go to Malabar, erect a mosque there, and preach Islam to his former subjects¹⁶. Assenting to the request, Malik Ibn Dinar and a coterie of missionaries sailed from Arabia for Malabar, where they were welcomed warmly by the local ruler, who granted them permission to erect a mosque in Cranganore, which was named Cheraman Juma Manzil/Masjid¹⁷, which is believed to have been built as far back as C.E. 629 during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammed. Contrary to the mosques in north India, those in the south, particularly those built between the 7th and 10th centuries, such as Cheraman Juma Manzil and Palaiya Jumma Palli in Kilakarai, for example, epitomise styles of Hindu temple architecture.¹⁸ Alas, the majority of these ancient mosques, which survived the ransacking and destruction by colonial forces, have been reconstructed according to north Indian, Persian, or Arabian styles, leaving no trace of their original styles based on Dravidian temple architecture. Though South India has long been the bastion for protecting Hinduism

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- 11 India Office Records, MS. Islamic 2807d, fols. 81a-104a; Great Britain. India Office. Library and Otto Loth, A Catalogue of the Arabic Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office, 1877.
- 12 "The Kerala King Who Embraced Islam," Arab News, February 9, 2012, <https://www.arabnews.com/node/406092>;
- 13 Andrew Forbes, "Sources Towards a History of the Laccadive Islands," *South Asia* 2, no. 1-2 (March 1, 1979): 130-50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00856407908722989>; Luke Yarbrough, "Cheraman Perumal and Islam on the Malabar Coast," in *University of California Press eBooks*, 2020, 256-62, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1b742qw.51>;
- VA, "Historical Aspects of the Legend of Cheraman Perumal of Kodungallur in Kerala.," Ta, "Modernity and Reformist Rhetoric Among the Muslims of Malabar," *Journal of Islamic and Muslim Studies* 5, no. 2 (January 1, 2020): 65, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jims.5.2.04>.
- 14 VA, "Historical Aspects of the Legend of Cheraman Perumal of Kodungallur in Kerala."
- 15 Husain Raṅṭattāni, *Mappila Muslims: A Study on Society and Anti Colonial Struggles* (Other Books, 2007); Swami, "The Transnational Terror Threat to India: Lashkar-e-Taiba as the Key Actor."
- 16 Abbas Panakkal, "The Chronicle of Waqf and Inception of Mosques in Malabar: A Study Based on Qissat Manuscript," *Intellectual Discourse*, December 21, 2018, 1167-89, <https://journals.iium.edu.my/intdiscourse/index.php/id/article/view/1262>; JUSSAY, "A JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN MEDIEVAL KERALA on JSTOR," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, no. 57 (1996): 277-84, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/44133319>; VA, "Historical Aspects of the Legend of Cheraman Perumal of Kodungallur in Kerala."
- 17 VA, "Historical Aspects of the Legend of Cheraman Perumal of Kodungallur in Kerala.," Farooq Hassan, "MULTICULTURALISM AND SOCIAL INCLUSION IN MEDIEVAL ARAB-MUSLIM CULTURE," *Islamic Sciences (Karachi)* 04, no. 01 (June 30, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.52337/islsci.v4i1.53>; Ian Hemphill and Kate Hemphill, *The Spice and Herb Bible* (Robert Rose, 2006).
- 18 JUSSAY, "A JEWISH SETTLEMENT IN MEDIEVAL KERALA on JSTOR."

and its age-old traditions, a surfeit of other religions and philosophies, including Buddhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, have, for centuries, peacefully co-existed alongside each other, enriching the cultural and religious fabric of the region. Akin to the case of Islam, even Judaism and Christianity were first introduced through traders and missionaries in the south, centuries before the arrival of European colonists. As per recorded history, India's oldest synagogue is the Kochangadi (Misro) Synagogue in Cochin, built by the Malabar Jews in 1344 A.D., but it is said that the mercantile Jewish communities that settled along the southwest coast of India had built several other synagogues in the preceding centuries, yet there isn't ample evidence to attest to such claims.¹⁹ Similarly, churches were established in south India centuries before European colonists set foot on Indian soil. St. Thomas Church, Palayoor, which tradition says was founded by St. Thomas, is the oldest church in India and traces its origins to the year 52 AD, at a time when paganism was widespread in Europe and Christianity was beginning to be disseminated throughout the Mediterranean and Nubia by the apostles of Jesus. As evinced by inscriptions dating back to the Perumal, Pallava and Chola periods, west Asian traders, particularly Arabs, Jews, Persians, Syrian Christians, and Zoroastrians, who were actively involved in the trade of spices, textiles, diamonds, and other precious commodities, established merchant guilds called "Anjuvannam" that played a crucial role in the commercial activities of the region²⁰.

Turkic Incursions

Trade relations between south India and central Asia can be traced back to the period preceding the Turkic conquests of the Indian subcontinent. As horses were difficult to breed in the Indian climate, they were imported in large numbers, usually from Central Asia, the heartland of the Turkic people.²¹ It is reasonable to surmise that with the horses, the horse-keepers would have also travelled to south India, and given that the Turks are famed for their cavalry skills and classical horsemanship, they would have found employment in the service of the south Indian kings. The south Indian Thalassocracy of the Cholas, which at its apogee in the 11th century

19 Edna Fernandes, *The Last Jews of Kerala* (Granta Books, 2011); Jay A. Waronker, "The Synagogues of Kerala, India: Their Architecture, History, Context, and Meaning" (2010), <http://ecommons.cornell.edu/bitstream/1813/17604/3/Waronker%20Jay.pdf>; Nathan Katz and Ellen Goldberg, "THE SEPHARDI DIASPORA IN COCHIN, INDIA," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 5 (January 1, 1993): 97–140, <http://jcpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/indian-sephardi-diaspora.pdf>.

20 Pius Malekandathil, "Winds of Change and Links of Continuity: A Study on the Merchant Groups of Kerala and the Channels of Their Trade, 1000-1800," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient/ Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient (Online)* 50, no. 2–3 (January 1, 2007): 259–86, <https://doi.org/10.1163/156852007781787422>; Shalva Weil, "THE PLACE OF ALWAYS IN MODERN COCHIN JEWISH HISTORY," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 8, no. 3 (September 28, 2009): 319–35, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725880903263044>.

21 Pamela Kyle Crossley, "The Influence of Central Asia on Horse Use," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*, April 19, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190277727.013.494>; Angela Schottenhammer, *Early Global Interconnectivity Across the Indian Ocean World, Volume I*, Springer eBooks, 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-97667-9>.

stretched from the Maldivian atolls in the south to as far north as the Ganges River and from the Malabar coast in the west to the remote islands of the Indonesian archipelago, employed Turkic people as mercenaries, and the Rowther (Ravuthar) community in south India claims to be descendants of the Turkic cavalymen who served the Cholas.²² Between the 8th and 10th centuries, Arabs led many a foray into the Indian subcontinent and managed to seize control over territories in Sindh, but their attempts to conquer kingdoms beyond this point largely proved to be futile. The 11th century marked the beginning of Turkic conquests into India, with Mahmud of Ghazni of the Ghaznavid Empire launching seventeen expeditions into the Indian subcontinent and annexing considerable territory to his expanding empire, which included regions that encompass modern Afghanistan and Pakistan that were later conquered by the brothers Ghiyath al-Din Muhammad (1140–1203) and Muhammad Ghori (1144–1206), rulers from the Tajik Ghurid dynasty, who, through countless battles and skirmishes, extended the frontiers of the Ghurid Empire all the way up to Bengal. The Ghurid empire was succeeded by five dynasties of Turko-Afghan origin that ruled over the Delhi Sultanate sequentially: the Mamluk dynasty (1206–1290), the Khalji dynasty (1290–1320), the Tughlaq dynasty (1320–1414), the Sayyid dynasty (1414–1451), and the Lodi dynasty (1451–1526). The Mamluk dynasty, founded in 1206 by Qutb ud-Din Aibak, a Turkic Mamluk slave-general of the Ghurid Empire from Central Asia, was triumphant in conquering large swaths of north India and major cities like Thatta, Multan, Lahore, Banaras, and Gaur, yet was not successful in expanding the borders southwards. The Khaljis, whose forebears were Turkic people from Central Asia who migrated to the south and eastern regions of modern-day Afghanistan, served as minor nobles under the Mamluks, but following the assassination of the 17-year-old Muiz ud din Qaiqabad, the last ruler of the Turkic Mamluk dynasty, the Khaljis replaced the Mamluks as rightful rulers of the Delhi Sultanate. Alauddin Khalji (r. 1296–1316), who succeeded Jalal ud din Firuz Khalji (1220–1296), the founder and first Sultan of the Khalji dynasty, fought many battles against the Mongols and Rajputs and became the first Turkic potentate to succeed at conquering south India through a series of military campaigns that lasted from 1308 till 1313. Malik Kafur, a prominent slave-general of Alauddin Khalji, led a series of expeditions in the south against the Yadavas (1308), the Kakatiyas (1310), the Hoysalas (1311), and the Pandyas (1311), making them Khalji tributaries. During these campaigns, many historic cities and temples were raided, ransacked, and razed, and Malik Kafur brought back many treasures, possibly including the Koh-i-Noor diamond, and hundreds of thousands of elephants and horses for the Delhi Sultanate. Within five years of Alauddin Khalji's demise in 1316, the Khaljis lost their power and were succeeded by the Turkic Tughlaq dynasty, which expanded its territorial reach and controlled much of the Indian subcontinent through a series of military campaigns led by Muhammad ibn Tughlaq (r. 1325–1351), who made Daulatabad (Devagiri) his second capital in 1327. Though the Tughlaqs proved successful in vanquishing and seizing much of southern

22 Kumar Suresh Singh, *People of India: Kerala* (3 Pts.) (Anthropological Survey of India, 2002).

India and extending the southern frontier all the way up to Madurai²³, they were not able to retain their hegemony in the south, owing to the incessant rebellions, factional rivalries, and incursions they had to deal with in the north, which eventually set the scene for the rulers of tributary states, governors who had been appointed by the Tughlaqs, and Hindu chiefs to revolt and declare independence from the Tughlaqs, thereby founding the sultanate of Madura (1335), the Vijayanagar Empire (1336), and the Bahmani Sultanate (1347). The Sultanate of Madura, which lasted for only forty-three years between 1335 CE and 1378 CE, was conquered by the armies led by Bukka Raya I's son, Kumara Kampana (Veerakamparaya) of the Vijayanagar empire, which reached its zenith under the reign of Krishna Deva Raya (r. 1509–1529), but following the Battle of Talikota in 1565, it saw a gradual decline that led to the fall of the empire in 1646. The Bahmani Sultanate, founded in 1347 following the rebellion of Ismail Mukh, lasted until 1527, after which it split up into the Deccan sultanates. The aforementioned Turkic conquests opened the way for the settlement of Turkic people in south India, who were referred to as “*Thulukkar*,” meaning ‘Tughlaqs’ or ‘Turkic people’²⁴. In South India, ‘*Tulukkar*’ was also used as a common misnomer to identify the Muslims.²⁵ According to the Tamil epic ‘*Mattakalappu Maanmiyam*’ (Glory of Batticaloa), Turkic people have also left a strong imprint on the history of Sri Lanka, where legend has it that “*Thulukkar*” traders helped the Mukkuvar community to ward off sorties by the Timilars.²⁶ In the case of Sri Lanka, the ‘*Ravuttar*’ and other communities of Turkic descent eventually assimilated into the larger Moor community; hence, during the census enumeration (from 1871 onwards), they were classified as Moors, whereas the term ‘*Thulukkar*’ was used categorically to identify the Turks who had recently migrated to Sri Lanka. For instance, as per the Census Report of 1881 of Ceylon (Sri Lanka), there were 128 ‘*Tulukkar*’ (Turks) living on the island.²⁷ In both South India and Sri Lanka, the term ‘*Thulukkar*’ gradually fell into abeyance starting in the early 20th century, and today it is an antiquated term relegated to the pages of history books.

23 Most illustrious among world's perfume houses such as Bulgari, Dior, and Guerlain purchase their jasmine oil processed from flowers picked in Madurai, an ancient city in southern India, where temples that date back centuries abound.

24 The term is sometimes used interchangeably as a misnomer to identify Muslims in general, particularly in Tamil Nadu. *Rebel Sultans: The Deccan from Khilji to Shivaji*; Sivakumar Sethuraman, *Masala History by Siva Volume - I: The History they don't teach at School* (Notion Press, 2021); Supriya Chaudhuri, *Religion and the City in India* (Routledge, 2021).

25 J. B. P. More, “The Marakkayar Muslims of Karikal, South India,” *Journal of Islamic Studies/Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (January 1, 1991): 25–44, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jis/2.1.25>.

26 Dennis B. McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka* (Duke University Press, 2008).

27 Ponnambalam Ramanathan, “THE ETHNOLOGY OF THE ‘MOORS’ OF CEYLON,” *The Journal of the Ceylon Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland* 36 (1888): 234–62, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45377245>.

Turkic Princess Turned Hindu Goddess

There are a great many Hindu temples of all shapes and sizes scattered throughout South India, many of which were erected, if not expanded, by some of the renowned South Indian dynasties, such as the Pallavas, the Cholas, the Cheras, the Pandyas, the Hosyalas, the Sangamas, the Saluvas, the Tuluvas, the Aravidus, and the Nayaks²⁸. Though some of them have fallen into wreckage and ruin, a good proportion of these temples have survived the turbulence of history and stand strong and in good repair, and they help exemplify the Dravidian architectural style, which has influenced not just the temples in India but also those in Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, and the rest of South and Southeast Asia²⁹. Though much has been written about the temples that were purloined, destroyed and desecrated by the Muslims, particularly during Turkic invasions³⁰, substantially less has been written about the numerous syncretic shrines that abound in India. Chief among them is the Ranganathaswamy Temple³¹, dedicated to Ranganatha, located in Srirangam (Thiruvaramangam), Tiruchirappalli, Tamil Nadu which is the largest temple compound in India and one of the world's largest temple complexes, where a Turkic Muslim princess by the name of 'Thulukka Nachiyar'³² (meaning Tughlaq/Turkic goddess in Tamil), also known by her epithet 'Bibi Nachiyar'³³, is worshipped by the masses as one of the chief goddesses and consorts of Ranganatha, a resting form of lord Vishnu. The story of Thulukka Nachiyar, who is held in great reverence by the devout Hindus of South India, has been immortalised in the Srirangam temple chronicles, the '*Koil Oluku*', and has for centuries been preserved in the form of legends and folk songs like '*Suratani Kalyanam*' and

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- 28 Albert Henry Longhurst, *Pallava Architecture* (Asian Educational Services, 1930); Arjun Appadurai, "Kings, Sects and Temples in South India, 1350-1700 A.D.," *The Indian Economic & Social History Review* 14, no. 1 (January 1, 1977): 47-73, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001946467701400103>; Crispin Peter Carpe Branfoot, *The Nayak Temple Complex: Architecture and Ritual in Southern Tamilnadu 1550-1700*, 1998; S. R. Balasubrahmanyam, *Middle Chola Temples: Rajaraja I to Kulottunga I, A.D. 985-1070* (Faridabad : Thomson Press (India), Publication Division, 1975); V. V. Subba Reddy, *Temples of South India* (Gyan Publishing House, 2009); C. Sivaramamurti, *The Great Chola Temples: Thanjavur, Gangaikondacholapuram, Darasuram*, 2007.
- 29 Parul Pandya Dhar, "Monuments, Motifs, Myths: Architecture and Its Transformations in Early India and Southeast Asia," in *Springer eBooks*, 2018, 325-45, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-7317-5_19; Sambit Datta and David Beynon, *Digital Archetypes: Adaptations of Early Temple Architecture in South and Southeast Asia*, 2014; Sriranjani Srinivasan, "Analyzing the Impact of Indian Architecture on the Architecture of Cambodia, Thailand and Indonesia," *International Journal of Architectural and Environmental Engineering* 13, no. 5 (April 1, 2019): 244-57, <https://panel.waset.org/Publications/analyzing-the-impact-of-indian-architecture-on-the-architecture-of-cambodia-thailand-and-indonesia/10010349>.
- 30 Eaton, "Temple Desecration and Indo-Muslim States.": Finbarr Barry Flood, "Pillars, Palimpsests, and Princely Practices: Translating the Past in Sultanate Delhi," *Res (Cambridge, Mass.)* 43 (March 1, 2003): 95-116, <https://doi.org/10.1086/resv43n1ms20167592>;
- 31 Neeharika Gembali, *Sri Ranganatha Swamy Temple* (Writers Pouch, 2022).
- 32 P. R. Ramachander, "Saint Ramanuja-The Great Social Reformer Born in 1000 Years Back," *Asian Journal of Professional Ethics & Management* 9, no. 1 (June 1, 2017): 8-10, <http://www.ischolar.in/index.php/ajpem/article/view/153684> ; Chaudhuri, *Religion and the City in India*.
- 33 Manoj Das, *Chasing the Rainbow: Growing up in an Indian Village*, 2004, https://openlibrary.org/books/OL3326728M/Chasing_the_rainbow; Ramachander, "Saint Ramanuja-The Great Social Reformer Born in 1000 Years Back.":

transmitted primarily in oral form.³⁴ It is said that the invading troops of the Delhi Sultan pillaged the temple and took with them the treasures, including the idol of the main processional deity, ‘*Alagiya Manavala perumal*’ (Handsome Groom in Tamil) to Delhi, where the Sultan flaunted his loot and asked his beloved daughter, princess Surathani, to pick out whatever her heart desires.³⁵ Mesmerised by the beauty of the statue, Princess Surathani chose to have it and spent aeons of time playing, singing, and even talking to the idol, which she treated as her favourite doll.³⁶ It is said that during the day *Alagiya Manavala perumal* was in the bodily form of an icon (*arcavighraha*), which came to life after the sun set in his full splendour as a human incarnation.³⁷

Months elapsed, and the princess’s obsession continued, so much so that she couldn’t bear to spend a moment without the idol, and this troubled and chagrined the Sultan. Later, a troupe of singers and dancers from south India, with the sole intention of retrieving the statue, travelled to Delhi and performed for the Sultan, who, overawed by their performance, asked them what they would like as a gift, to which they responded that they would want the statue of *Alagiya Manavalan* to be returned.³⁸ The sultan readily agreed and presented them with the statue, and the troupe returned with it to south India, and instead of reinstalling it at the temple, fearing future Turkic forays, they chose to hide in the dense forests of Thirumala (Tirupati)³⁹. The statue had been taken while the princess was asleep or sedated⁴⁰, but when she woke up and realised her favourite ‘*Alagiya Manavalan*’ had been taken, she squalled in disbelief and immediately set off with her troops to south India. When Princess Surathani reached Srirangam temple, she realised that the statue was missing, immediately fell unconscious and died at the entrance of the temple⁴¹. Upon her death, she is believed to have merged with the deity.⁴² Years passed and one of the Hindu kings decided to reinstall the statue in the Srirangam temple and perform the necessary rites and rituals. Legend has it that Lord Ranganatha appeared in

34 Richard H. Davis, “A Muslim Princess in the Temples of Viṣṇu,” *International Journal of Hindu Studies* 8, no. 1–3 (January 1, 2004): 137–56, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11407-004-0006-y>; Steven P. Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedantadesika in Their South Indian Tradition* (Oxford University Press, 2002); V. N. Hari Rao, *Kōil OḷUgu: The Chronicle of the Srirangam Temple with Historical Notes*, 1961.

35 Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedantadesika in Their South Indian Tradition*; Manu S Pillai, *Rebel Sultans: The Deccan From Khilji to Shivaji* (Juggernaut Books, 2018); Sethuraman, *Masala History by Siva Volume - 1: The History They Don’t Teach at School*; Shrikala Warriar, *Kamandalu: The Seven Sacred Rivers of Hinduism* (MAYUR University, 2014).

36 Warriar, *Kamandalu: The Seven Sacred Rivers of Hinduism*.

37 Davis, “A Muslim Princess in the Temples of Viṣṇu.”; Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedantadesika in Their South Indian Tradition*.

38 Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedantadesika in Their South Indian Tradition*; Warriar, *Kamandalu: The Seven Sacred Rivers of Hinduism*.

39 Davis, “A Muslim Princess in the Temples of Viṣṇu.”

40 Another version of the same legend has it that the troupe, with the help of a palace guard, managed to locate the princess’s room, sprayed some highly sedative powder on the princess, and took with them the statue of their deity.

41 Preetha Vetrivel Kannan, *Dance of Shiva & Other Divine Tales* (Jaico Publishing House, 2021); Warriar, *Kamandalu: The Seven Sacred Rivers of Hinduism*.

42 Warriar, *Kamandalu: The Seven Sacred Rivers of Hinduism*.

the dream of the king and explained to him the virtues, piety, love and sacrifice of princess Surathani, and that she is one of his consorts, and instructed the king to build her a shrine next to the main ‘*karuvarai*’ (sanctum sanctorum) and install her image (painting), and that the necessary rituals ought to be performed in her honour. According to other versions, God appeared in the dream of the chief priest and commanded him to recognize Surathani as his Muslim consort.⁴³ Obliging to Lord Ranganatha’s requests, even to this day, specific rituals are observed at the Srirangam temple, where Surathani, a Turkic princess, is worshipped by the name of ‘Thulukka Nachiyar’ and during the processional tour of the deity, a typical north Indian Muslim breakfast comprising of roti, chapati (bread) and milk is offered to Sri Ranganatha.⁴⁴

Unlike in Srirangam, where Thulukka Nachiyar is worshipped in the form of a painting, at the Melkote Thirunarayanapuram temple in Mandya District of Karnataka, she is worshipped as Lord Narayana’s consort in the form of an idol whose face is veiled to represent her Muslim heritage⁴⁵. According to the Melkote Thirunarayanapuram temple chronicle, ‘*Prapannamrta*’⁴⁶, it is believed that Lord Narayana appeared in the dream of Hindu philosopher, Ramanujacharya⁴⁷, and asked him to travel to the court of the Delhi Sultan and recover the ‘*Utsava vigraha*’ of Sampath Kumara (the statue taken out of the temple during processions), which had been looted by the troops of the Delhi Sultan during the conquest of Melkote. According to some versions, the Sultan facetiously told Ramanujacharya that he would present him with the idol, but only if the idol itself came forth and expressed its desire to return to Melkote; ergo, Ramanujacharya exclaimed “beloved son,” and the idol, to the shock of the Sultan and courtiers, came out of the harem and leaped onto Ramanujacharya.⁴⁸ Bewildered by what he had just witnessed, the Sultan readily agreed for the idol to be returned. The princess, in an attempt to retrieve the idol, travelled with her troops to Melkote Temple, where she fell and breathed her last. Highly impressed by the religious fervour, devotion, unfeigned love, and eventual sacrifice of the Turkic princess, who took great care of the idol during its time in Delhi, Ramanujacharya, on the request of Lord Narayana, installed her idol at the feet of the main deity of the Melkote temple, and to this day, rituals are observed in her honour.⁴⁹ Thulukka Nachiyar is also venerated during the Meenakshi Tirukalyanam festival, famously called the Chithirai Tiruviḷa or Meenakshi Kalyanam, an annual Tamil Hindu celebration in the city of Madurai.⁵⁰

43 Pillai, *Rebel Sultans: The Deccan from Khilji to Shivaji*.

44 Karan Singh, *Syncretic Shrines and Pilgrimages: Dynamics of Indian Nationalism* (Taylor & Francis, 2023); Renate Bornberg, *Urban India: Cultural Heritage, Past and Present* (Springer Nature, 2023); Sudeep Chakravarti, *The Other India*, 2000.

45 Pillai, *Rebel Sultans: The Deccan from Khilji to Shivaji*.

46 Davis, “A Muslim Princess in the Temples of Viṣṇu.”

47 It’s worth noting that Ramanujacharya (c. 1077 – 1157), lived centuries before the Turkic incursions into South India. Kolar Krishna Iyer, *Wonderful Stories for Children* (Sura Books, 2007); Sethuraman, *Masala History by Siva Volume - 1: The History They Don’t Teach at School*.

48 Davis, “A Muslim Princess in the Temples of Viṣṇu.”

49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

There are many versions of the legend surrounding Thulukka Nachiyar; some of them claim that Thulukka Nachiyar, or Princess Surathani, was a Tughlaq princess⁵¹ and that the word “Thulukku” is a corrupt version of ‘Tughlaq’, the dynasty that was in power from 1320–1413 CE, while some other versions of the same legend claim that she was a Khalji princess⁵² and that ‘Thulukku’ or ‘Thulukkan’ are corruptions of the Sanskrit word ‘Turuska,’ meaning ‘Turks’ or ‘Turkic people’.⁵³ There is ample historical evidence to testify to the conquest of south India by the Khaljis (1311 C.E.) led by Malik Kafur and a decade later by the Tughlaqs (1323 C.E.) led by Ulugh Khan⁵⁴, who, upon ascension to the throne of Delhi in 1325 C.E., changed his name to Sultan Muhammed bin Tughlaq.⁵⁵ In 1311 C.E., during Malik Kafur’s incursions into south India, several temples were looted, including a golden temple on the river ‘Kanobari’ (Cauveri), which Steven P. Hopkins (2002) surmises to be the Ranganathaswamy temple in Srirangam, which was plundered and desecrated a decade later by Ulugh Khan.⁵⁶ Therefore, it is evident that the highly romanticised story of ‘Thulukka Nachiyar’, is loosely based on historical events. It is worth noting that Nawab Muhammad Ali Wallajah, Nawab of the Carnatic (1749–1795 CE), thwarted the Ranganathaswamy temple in Srirangam against the incursions led by the French and was a notable patron of Srirangam, to which he bequeathed a considerable extent of land ‘Nawab Garden’ to cultivate flowers for the temple.⁵⁷

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- 51 Chaudhuri, *Religion and the City in India; Rebel Sultans: The Deccan from Khilji to Shivaji*; Sethuraman, *Masala History by Siva Volume - 1: The History They Don't Teach at School*; Singh, *Syncretic Shrines and Pilgrimages: Dynamics of Indian Nationalism*.
- 52 Reshmi Dasgupta, “A Tribute to Two Other Women of Alauddin Khilji’s Time,” *The Economic Times*, November 24, 2017, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/a-tribute-to-two-other-women-of-alauddin-khiljis-time/articleshow/61788539.cms?from=mdr>; Sudha G. Tilak, *Temple Tales: Secrets and Stories from India’s Sacred Places* (Hachette UK, 2019).
- 53 Crispin Branfoot, “Remaking the Past: Tamil Sacred Landscape and Temple Renovations,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 76, no. 1 (January 15, 2013): 21–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0041977x12001462>; José Andrés Alonso De La Fuente, “SOME THOUGHTS ON DRAVIDIAN-TURKIC-SANSKRIT LEXICAL COMPARISONS,” *DergiPark (Istanbul University)*, June 1, 2012, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/pub/turkbilig/issue/52811/697432>. McGilvray, *Crucible of Conflict: Tamil and Muslim Society on the East Coast of Sri Lanka*; Vidya Dehejia, *The Thief Who Stole My Heart: The Material Life of Sacred Bronzes from Chola India, 855–1280* (Princeton University Press, 2023).
- 54 Not to be confused with Almas Beg (died c. 1302), brother and a general of the Delhi Sultanate ruler Alauddin Khalji, who bore the title Ulugh Khan.
- 55 Ramesh Pokhriyal ‘Nishank, *Famous Temples in Tamil Nadu* (Diamond Pocket Books Pvt Ltd, 2023); Smith, *Religion and the Legitimation of Power in South Asia* (BRILL, 2022).
- 56 Hopkins, *Singing the Body of God: The Hymns of Vedantadesika in Their South Indian Tradition*; Gembali, *Sri Ranganatha Swamy Temple*, 2022.
- 57 Burjor Avari, *Islamic Civilization in South Asia: A History of Muslim Power and Presence in the Indian Subcontinent* (Routledge, 2013); “The Carnatic Under the Wallajah Nawabs,” n.d., <https://www.rct.uk/collection/exhibitions/eastern-encounters/the-queens-gallery-buckingham-palace/the-georgians-and-india/the-carnatic-under-the-wallajah-nawabs>; Nahla Nainar, “The Imam Pasand Mangoes of Srirangam,” *The Hindu*, May 25, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/life-and-style/food/fruit-fit-for-an-imam/article27232735.ece>; From Our Online Archive and From Our Online Archive, “King of the City,” *The New Indian Express*, May 16, 2012, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/magazine/2011/Mar/17/king-of-the-city-236240.html>.

Turkic Saints

Just four miles away from the Ranganathaswamy temple in Srirangam is located the Trichy Natharvali Dargah devoted to one of the most celebrated of all south Indian cult pirs, Hazrat Tabl-i-Ālam Bādshāh Nathar Walī Auliya, also called Dada Hayat Mir Qalandar, whose shrine attracts not just Muslim devotees but also Christians and orthodox Hindus belonging to agrarian, artisan, fishing, and trading castes, including the Chettiar merchants, who throng from afar to pay obeisance and seek blessings of the revered saint, who is credited with having introduced Sufism to both South India and Sri Lanka.⁵⁸ Among the notable figures who held Natharvali Dargah in great reverence was the late president of India, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam.⁵⁹ Akin to the case of ‘*Thulukka Nachiyar*’, the sundry legends surrounding Pir Nathar Wali and his nine hundred disciples have long been preserved in the form of devotional poems, folk songs, and written records, notable among them being ‘*Tollayiram Vidhaikal Konda Ore Oru Matulampazham*’ (one pomegranate that contains nine hundred seeds, which is a metaphorical reference to the pir and his nine hundred disciples).⁶⁰ The exact year of Hazrat Nathar’s birth is shrouded in mystery, but multitudinous biographies claim that he was born a noble in Rum⁶¹ Sultanate, Anatolia (present-day Turkey), sometime in the tenth century, while some biographical texts claim, anachronistically, that he was the sultan of Istanbul⁶² who renounced his throne to follow the Sufi path. The year of his passing is believed to be 1079 CE/ 474 AH.⁶³ The only commonality in all versions is that he was a *Qalandar* (unmarried saint) who arrived in India accompanied by nine hundred devout followers with the mission of spreading Islam on the command of God, and that he performed multifarious miracles, famous among them being how he punished a Hindu king who flouted at him by turning his infant child inside out ‘until it was just a raw lump of flesh’.⁶⁴ Hazrat Nathar is also believed to have engaged in numerous cosmic battles against the devil and the forces of evil, and at one such battle he annihilated an army of demons (Asuras) and decapitated their three-headed overlord, *Tiriasura*⁶⁵. One

58 Arun Tiwari, *A.P.J. Abdul Kalam: A Life* (Harper Collins, 2015); Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*; Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey, *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny*, 2016, <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB11994289>.

59 Tiwari, *A.P.J. Abdul Kalam: A Life*.

60 Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*; Clinton Bennett and Charles M. Ramsey, *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny*, 2016, <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB11994289>.

61 Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*; Heesterman, *India and Indonesia: General Perspectives*; Marshall et al., *Comparative History of India and Indonesia, Volume 3 India and Indonesia During the Ancien Regime: Essays* (BRILL, 2023).

62 Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*; Rishad Choudhury, *Hajj Across Empires: Pilgrimage and Political Culture after the Mughals, 1739–1857* (Cambridge University Press, 2023).

63 Bennett and Ramsey, *South Asian Sufis: Devotion, Deviation, and Destiny*.

64 Anna Libera Dallapiccola and Stephanie Zingel-Avé Lallemand, *Islam and Indian Regions: Texts* (Rudolf Steiner Press, 1993); Heesterman, *India and Indonesia: General Perspectives*; Marshall et al., *Comparative History of India and Indonesia, Volume 3 India and Indonesia During the Ancien Regime: Essays*.

65 Ibid.

of many reasons why Natharvali Dargah attracts multitudes of Hindu devotees, is because *Sheshanaga* (Adishesha), the multiheaded guardian serpent of Lord Ranganatha, resting form of Vishnu and the tutelary deity of Srirangam, is believed to have brought water for Hazrat Nathar to perform his ablution⁶⁶, and until the mid-1980s, the Srirangam temple and Rock Fort temples at Trichy maintained the tradition of sending their elephants⁶⁷ to take part in the annual procession organised by Natharvali Dargah to mark *Muharram*, the first month of the Islamic calendar and one of the four sacred months of the year when warfare is banned.

The Nawabs of Arcot (Carnatic) were ardent devotees and leading patrons of the shrine⁶⁸, and Anwaruddin Khan (1672–1749), also known as Muhammad Anwaruddin, the first Nawab of Arcot, not only chose Tiruchirappalli as the principal seat of his power in the south, but had it rechristened as ‘Natharnagar’ in honour of Hazarat Nathar Walī.⁶⁹ More so, he spruced up the city, erected handsome edifices, including the Hasjid-i-Muhammade mosque, ordered the large-scale renovation of Natharvali Dargah and had it guarded by putting up a fort.⁷⁰ The tombs of two Nawabs of Arcot, Mohammad Ali Wallajah and Umdat-ul-Umrah, and Chanda Sahib, Nawab Dost Ali Khan’s son-in-law and Dewan (a senior official), who was beheaded by the Maratha ruler of Thanjavur, Pratap Singh Bhonsle, are to be found within the precincts of Natharvali Dargah.⁷¹ Another notable syncretic shrine to which the Nawabs of Arcot directed lavish acts of religious piety is the Dargah devoted to Hazrath Sheikh Maqdoom Abdul Haq Sawi, better known as Hazrat Dastagir Sahib, a Turkic saint, closely related to the Adil Shahi rulers of Bijapur.⁷² Pir Hazrat Dastagir Sahib is believed to have died in Madras (Chennai) in 1752, and as his tomb located at Triplicane attracted throngs of devotees, including Hindus and Christians, in 1789, Nawab Muhammad Ali Wallajah, Nawab of the Carnatic (Arcot), built a mosque in his honour.⁷³

In Sri Lanka, the Naqshbandi Haqqani Sufi Order, which stems from the Naqshbandi ‘Aliyyah Tariqah, has a considerable following. The order takes the name ‘Haqqani’ from the tariqah’s revivor, Mawláná Şeyh Muhammed Nâzım Âdil El-Kıbrısî Hakkanî (1922–2014), a Turkish Cypriot Sunni Muslim imam who traces his descent to Hanbali scholar and Sufi cleric Abdul Qadir Gilani and Mawláná Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī, poet, Sufi mystic, and theologian. Mawláná Nazim Al-Haqqani had visited Sri Lanka on thirteen occasions, and during each visit, he delivered sermons at some of the premier mosques on the island and visited Kataragama with his *mureeds* (disciples), a renowned syncretic shrine, to pay homage to ‘*al-Khidr*’, the mysterious undying teacher of Islam who, according to local belief, is the presiding spirit of Kataragama

66 Ibid.

67 Krishna Mohan Shrimali, “Reflections on Recent Perceptions of Early Medieval India,” *Social Scientist* 21, no. 12 (December 1, 1993): 25, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3517748>.

68 Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*.

69 Madras and B. S. Baliga, *Madras District Gazetteers: Tiruchirappalli (2 V)*, 1998.

70 Ibid.

71 Bayly, *Saints, Goddesses and Kings: Muslims and Christians in South Indian Society, 1700-1900*.

72 George Michell, *Southern India* (Roli Books Private Limited, 2012); S. Muthiah, *Madras Discovered: A Historical Guide to Looking Around*, 1981.

73 Ibid.

or ‘Khidr-gama’.⁷⁴ Mawláná Nazim Al-Haqqani was succeeded to the office of leader of the Naqshbandi Thariqa by his eldest son, Mowlana Seyedi Shaykh Mehmet Adil Rabbani, who, following in the footsteps of his predecessors, continues the tradition of visiting Sri Lanka.⁷⁵

Conclusion

Though much has been written on the Turkic conquests in India, religious persecution, and how temples were looted, desecrated, and razed by Muslims, substantially less has been published on the history of religious tolerance and co-existence, communal harmony, contributions made by the Muslim rulers to temples, patronage extended by Hindu rulers to mosques, and on the many Hindu-Muslim syncretic shrines in India, particularly those in the South, which helps exemplify how Muslims in India have for centuries lived in friendly brotherhood with Hindus, Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, and others. The legends surrounding the shrines devoted to ‘Thulukka Nachiyar’ and Turkic pirs in South India help demonstrate how Muslims form an integral facet of the cultural fabric of the region. In addition, it contributes to a deeper understanding of the historical relations between India and the Turkic States. Unfortunately, the history of Turkic communities, Turkic Sufi mystics and saints who settled in the Deccan and Sri Lanka, trade relations between Central Asia and the Indian subcontinent, Turkic influences in the region, as well as an array of other topics that have the potential to strengthen relations between Turkic states and India, have not been subjected to sufficient academic scrutiny. Likewise, though articles have been published on Ottoman relations with the Mughals and Muslim kingdoms of north India, the ties that the South Indian Muslim rulers and Hindu Maharajas, like, for example, the Zamorin of Calicut, maintained with the Sublime Porte, remain largely underexplored. Even though substantially more has been written on the Ottoman ties with India during the Hamidian era, support for the Ottoman Caliphate, and the Khilafet movement, they focus primarily on north India, and the role played by the Muslims in south India remains understudied. The reverence that was accorded to the Ottoman Sultans by the Muslims of South India and how Hindu rulers joined forces with the Ottomans to expel the Portuguese also remain an overlooked subject that, if subjected to proper research, has the potential to contribute to academic disciplines like Turkic and Ottoman studies, history, Islam and theology, Area studies and a range of interdisciplinary subjects. I firmly believe that it is timely and relevant that there should be more academic research and dialogue on these topics conducted so that it will help not just fill existing knowledge gaps but also foster mutual understanding and cooperation between different regions and cultures.

74 “Sheikh Nazim Adil Al-Haqqani Visist to Khidr-gama or Kataragama.,” Sufi Path of Love, April 3, 2019, <https://sufipathoflove.com/sheikh-nazim-adil-al-haqqani-visist-to-khidr-gama-or-kataragama/>; Sufi Path Of Love, *99 Drops From Endless Mercy Oceans* (Lulu.com, 2018).

75 Colombo Times and Colombo Times, “Mowlana Shaykh Mehmet Adil the World Leader of the Naqshbandi Sufi Arrives in Colombo Wed. Nov. 1 - Colombo Times,” Colombo Times - First to Know News in Colombo, October 31, 2023, <https://www.colombotimes.net/mowlana-shaykh-mehmet-adil-the-world-leader-of-the-naqshbandi-sufi-arrives-in-colombo-wed-nov-1/>.

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