

GENESIS OF MELAPALAYAM - AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**S. MOHAMED ISMAIL HUSSAIN, Dr. A. ABDULAZEEZ**

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Abstract

This research article explores the genesis of Melapalayam, a town located in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu, from a historical perspective. The study traces the origins of Melapalayam, focusing on its early settlement patterns, socio-economic evolution, and cultural transformation. Historically, Melapalayam has been a significant center for agriculture, trade, and religious activities, with its roots extending back to the influence of ancient Tamil kingdoms and later Islamic expansion. The town's development was shaped by its strategic location near the southernmost tip of India, fostering interaction with neighboring regions and diverse cultural influences. The article investigates the role of the Muslim community in the town's establishment and growth, particularly after the arrival of Islam in the region. Additionally, the socio-economic structure of Melapalayam evolved through agrarian-based livelihoods, but with time, trade and small-scale industries began to emerge, leading to diversification in the economy. The study also highlights key historical events, such as colonial and post-independence influences, which impacted the town's growth trajectory. By examining Melapalayam's history, this article provides insights into the town's cultural heritage, social fabric, and economic development, contributing to a broader understanding of the historical dynamics that shaped this unique settlement in southern Tamil Nadu.

Key words

Melapalayam, Tirunelveli Municipal Corporation, Political history, Islam.

Introduction

Melapalayam, the headquarter of Tirunelveli Municipal Corporation Zonal office. Melapalayam is situated in the westernside of Palayamkottai. Palayamkottai, Melapalayam and Tirunelveli Junction are there important towns situated in triangular shape at equal distance. Melapalayam is located at a little distance away from the Thamiraparani river. It is four kilometers always from Tirunelveli Junction. It is density populated town of the Muslims. The Palayam channel runs touching many of streets of Melapalayam in the west north and east. As Melapalayam got its name by its location at westernside of Palayamkottai. Another view is that the world Melorvazhum Palayam was shortened and came to be known as Melapalayam. A Third view is that about forty Arabians from Egypt came to India with the intention of spreading Islam. They stepped into Kerala first. Then they moved town as east and came to the place which was then known as MangaiNadu. At present the place is called Melapalayam.

Melapalayam is bound by Tirunelveli Junction in the north, Palayamkottai in the east, Karungulam in the west and Paddy fields in the south. It is a region of Tirunelveli Municipal Corporation. Melapalayam is bounded by Tirunelveli Junction in the north. The area of Melapalayam is about 16.83 square kilometers. Palayamkottai, Ambasamudram National Highway road passes through this town. The town is also connected by broad-gauge Railway line, viz., Tirunelveli – Nagercoil line. Melapalayam Railway station is located at the western fringe of the town. The nearest sea port and Airport are at Thoothukudi and Vagaigulam. Melapalayam as a revenue Firka under the control of Palayamkottai taluk administration. Under Revenue firka consists of Melapalayam and Kerala Viraraghavapuram. It is lying between $8^{\circ} 5'$ and $9^{\circ} 45'$ North longitude and $77^{\circ} 20'$ and $78^{\circ} 20'$ east latitude. The town in general is having dry climate except the monsoon period. The normal Annual rainfall is 27.57 CMS. The mean daily maximum temperature is 37.1°C and the minimum temperature is below 80° degrees. The rainfall is high during October, November and December.

Political History

The history of Melapalayam dates back to ancient times, with early settlers likely establishing the region due to its fertile land and proximity to the Tamaraparani River. This river, which flows through Tirunelveli, has long supported agriculture, and Melapalayam, as part of the larger region, benefited from this. The early inhabitants were predominantly agrarian, with the cultivation of crops such as rice, millet, and pulses being the primary economic activities. Implements relating to megalithic age have been discovered at Kunnathur. Sangam Pandyas ruled over this region upto 250 A.D. From 275 A.D. to 570 A.D. Kalabhras ruled over this region. Kadungon, the petty Pandya ruler of Korkai liberate the entire pandya country from the clutches of Kalabhras and established Early Pandya rule, Tirunelveli including Melapalayam became one among 100 Nadus of Pandya mandalam known as Kilvembunadu. The complete overthrow of the early pandya by the cholas took place only during the reign of RajaRajachola I. He named Pandya country as RajaRaja Pandinadu in 1022 A.D. RajaRaja Pandinadu was sub-divided into Valanadus and the areas of Tirunelveli district including Melapalayam became kilvembunadu Kurram in the Mudikondacholavalanadu. The Second Pandya empire was established by Maravarmasundarapandya by defeating Kulotungachola III in 1216 A.D. The Second Pandya empire came to an end by the Malikafur invasion in 1310 – 1311. In continuation of Malikafurs invasion. Madurai Sultanate was established by Hasan Hungu Bhamini in 1334 A.D. Kumarakempana son of Bukka, the rule of Vijayanagar defeated the Sultan and took over the most part of the Sultan area under the Vijayanagar empire. Yet the Afghans continued to rule over a part of Madurai country. Bukka II the emperor of Vijayanagar killed Alaudin Sikkendar, the last of Sultans in about 1378 A.D. and annexed Madurai. Though the Malikafur invasion Madurai Sultanate and Vijayanagar expedition wiped out the Pandya rule in and around Madurai they actually moved South ward and ruled small principalities with headquarters at Tenkasi and Tirunelveli including Melapalayam as a tributaries of Madurai Nayaker upto 17th, Century.

From 1530 – 1650 successors of Ariyanatha, Madurai were served as Dalavay and Prathani of Madurai Nayak. In 1650 A.D. TirumalaiNayak created Tirunelveli seemai as

separate province from Madurai Country and appointed his Dalavay Nayinattimudali as the first Nayak Governor of Tirunelveli Seemai. All the poligars in Tirunelveli Seemai came under the control of Dalavay Governors and they paid tribute to them. From 1736 – 1744, Tirunelveli region was under the control of Chandasahib of Arcot from 1741 – 1744. It was under the control of Marathas. In 1744, Nizam Asafjah made Kuwajah Abdulla as Nawab of Madurai including Tirunelveli. After the death of Kuwajah Anwaruddin was appointed as the Government of Madurai. The Navayat Prince Sadetullah Khan was killed by Anwaruddin. Anwaruddin made as the Nawab of carnatic by Nizam Asafjah. From 1744 to 1801 A.D. Tirunelveli region was under the rule of Arcot Nawab. On acquisition from Nawab of Arcot in 1801 A.D. the British named Tirunelveli as Tinnevely. From 1801 to till date Tirunelveli served as the Headquarter of Tirunelveli district as well as the headquarter of Tirunelveli taluk including Melapalayam. Upto 1948, Melapalayam was administered by village Panchayat. On 03.09.1948 Melapalayam became second grade Municipality. In 1994, Melapalayam became one among the three zone of Tirunelveli corporation. Melapalayam served as the part of Palayamkottai Legislative Assembly constituency and Tirunelveli Parliamentary constituency.

Islamic Influence of Melapalayam

The historical transformation of Melapalayam can be attributed significantly to the arrival of Islam in the region, which began to influence the socio-cultural landscape during the medieval period. While Islam spread across southern India starting from the 13th century, it gained considerable prominence in the southernmost districts like Tirunelveli during the rule of Muslim sultans and the later spread through the merchant class and missionaries. The Muslim community in Melapalayam played a crucial role in the town's development. They contributed not only to the agricultural sector but also to the commercial and industrial sectors, establishing businesses, schools, and mosques. As trade routes expanded, Melapalayam became an important hub for both local and regional commerce. Many Muslim settlers from different parts of the subcontinent brought with them valuable skills, including trade, crafts, and administration, which significantly shaped the town's growth. Today, Melapalayam is a bustling town with a rich mix of cultural, economic, and social activities. The town's population remains predominantly Muslim, and it is a center of commerce, education, and agriculture. The town's mosques, schools, and community organizations continue to be vital to its identity, while the surrounding areas are home to vibrant agricultural practices, especially paddy cultivation.

Conclusion

The historical evolution of Melapalayam in the Tirunelveli district of Tamil Nadu reveals a rich and multifaceted narrative shaped by various socio-political and cultural forces over centuries. From its early settlement as an agrarian community to its growth into a vibrant town with a diverse socio-economic structure, Melapalayam has seen the convergence of different cultural influences, particularly through the establishment of Islam in the region. The Muslim community played a pivotal role in the town's development, contributing to its economic growth through agriculture, trade, and later, small industries. The town's historical trajectory reflects the broader shifts in Tamil Nadu's history, including the impact of colonialism and post-independence transformations. While Melapalayam has maintained a strong cultural identity

rooted in traditional practices, it has also adapted to the changing times, balancing its historical roots with modern economic and social realities. The genesis of Melapalayam is a testament to the resilience and adaptability of its people. The town's growth has been influenced by various historical, cultural, and economic factors, and understanding its evolution provides valuable insights into the larger patterns of development in southern Tamil Nadu. Continued attention to its history will help guide future efforts to preserve its heritage while fostering sustainable growth and development in the region.

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