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PAKSHIPPATTU: A BRIEF STUDY

RAMESH.V.K

Assistant Professor (Contract)

College of Applied Sciences, Muthuvallur, Kondotty, Malappuram Dt., Kerala



RAMESH.V.K

INTRODUCTION

Muslims of Kerala have been maintaining their own religious and creative identity. For centuries, their text language was Arabic - Malayalam. This was a hybrid language written in Arabic script. Both in prose and poetry several works have come out in this hybrid language. *Pakshippattu* is one among them. This study makes an earnest attempt to reveal the characteristics features of *Pakshippattu* and its influence on all aspects of Kerala Muslims.

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Mappila poetry developed as an influential literary movement across Kerala in its various forms: Pangyrics called Malapattukal, Ballads called Khissabattukal, war narratives called Padapatukal, didactic verse called Urudi pattukal, each with its own dimension. But there are also poems, distinguished by both theme and narrative skill, which have chosen to go down untrodden paths. Among these "*Pakshippattu*" deserves the foremost attention.

Nadutholil Abdulla, the author of *Pakshippattu* was born in Mogralin Kasargode district. Not much is known about his life. But *Pakshippattu*, which is also known as "*Akbar Sadakha*", noted both for its simplicity and charm became a pervasive influence among Mappila Muslim community in Kerala. The plot of *Pakshippattu* is very simple. The story takes place during the time of Prophet Muhammad. Akbar Sadakha is a he-bird which had been living with its mate for forty years on the Thurissina Mountain where Prophet Musa (Moses) was born. One-day, when the she-bird laid two eggs, it raised Akbar's suspicions about her chastity. He drove her out of the nest. The she-bird went to the Prophet and aired her grievance. The Prophet asked her to bring Akbar Sadakha to him. But the she-bird said Akbar would refuse to come with her. The Prophet then sent Bilal, his trusted lieutenant to Akbar. But Akbar brushed off Bilal contemptuously, saying that he knew the rulers of three hundred cities, but not somebody called Muhammad. If Muhammad wanted to see him, let him come to the Thurissina mountain. When Bilal returned and told the Prophet about what had happened, the Prophet sent Umar. But Umar also met with the same fate as Bilal.

This made the Prophet wonder whether his nephew Ali would have been the right person for the job. But Ali was far away in the battlefield. But Ali had a dream in which he learned about the Prophet's wish. Ali set out on horseback to meet Akbar Sadakha. But Akbar had the same reply ready for Ali. He also told Ali that Muhammad had failed to implement the dictates of the Quran. The daughter of Ibn Ubaidulla, a disciple of the Prophet had been kidnapped by a jinn named Ifreeth when she was just sixty three days old. The jinn was

bringing her up as a 'Kafir', he said. What had the Prophet done to rescue her from Ifreeth's clutches, Akbar Sadakha asked Ali derisively.

Ali was provoked. He set out to confront Ifreeth. Ifreeth had kept IbnUbaidullah's daughter in captivity in a cave on the Thurissinamountain. A warning was scrawled on the entrance to the cave: Any human being entering the cave will be burned alive. Undaunted by the warning, Ali left his horse outside and entered the cave. Crossing a lake and fighting his way through a horde of snakes which guarded the cave, Ali reached a tree. The tree gave Ali the keys to Ifreeth's palace. Ali opened the gates to the seven ramparts that surround the palace and found IbnUbaidullah's daughter, guarded by a jinn. She told Ali that Ifreeth had gone hunting and that she could hear the commotion of the hunting party coming back. Soon Ifreeth entered the cave and was enraged at discovering the doors of the ramparts lying open. Ali confronted Ifreeth and asked him to embrace Islam, which he refused. A fight ensued and Ali killed Ifreeth, freed Ubaidullah's daughter and went with her to Akbar Sadakha. Akbar Sadakha was finally convinced that Muhammad was Allah's prophet. He went to the Prophet with Ali. When Akbar Sadakha put his grievance before the Prophet, the Prophet told him that the eggs were God's blessing to the she-bird. Akbar Sadakha repented for his deeds, begged forgiveness from the Prophet and left with his mate to their abode in the Thurissinamountain. IbnUbaidullah's daughter tells the Prophet of her experiences in captivity and the poem ends on a happy note (*Abdulla, Page No.1 to 32*).

As a poem, *Pakshippattu* is remarkable in many ways. Birds are a pervasive presence in literature. Often, they are not merely humanized beings, but the symbols of peace. The renowned Sufi poet Fareduddin Akhtar presents in his poem "Manthwikhuthwayri" a group of birds who transcend mundane desires to attain spiritual fulfillment. Attar here compares the liberation of Man from his worldly bonds to the flight of birds. Parrots and fish appear as tropes in Sufi literature. It says in the Qur-an that the Prophet Sulaiman was taught the language of birds. In IbnSinna's *Risalathu-Thvair*, the major characters are birds. Imam Gassali, the theologian has also dwelt extensively on birds.

Birds figure in a big way in poetry in Dravidian literatures too. The poetic forms like *kilidooth* and *kilividuthth* and the poetic modes like *painkilikkanni* and *paraaparakkanni* attest to the role of birds in Tamil literature. In Malayalam, it was Thunchath Ezhuththachan who established the *Kilippattu* (bird-song) as a movement. The transactions between Mappila literature and other Dravidian literatures could have been a decisive factor in the representation of birds (*Ramachandran Nair, Page No.110*).

The narrative techniques of *Pakshippattu* are, however different from other such "bird songs". In Ezhuththachan's *skilippattu* the bird does not appear as a character. But the central characters in *Pakshippattu* are two birds. As in a beast fable, birds behave like human beings. They move as equals among human characters like Prophet Muhammad, Bilal, Ali, Umar and Ifreeth.

In its charm of narration, *Pakshippattu* successfully emulates the great poems in world literature. It successfully represents the change of time and clime. In narrative technique and poetic devices *Pakshippattu* resembles *Muhyuddin Mala* in some ways. There are parallels in diction, incremental repetition and rhyming. There is a magical quality to the narration and imagery. Supernatural elements predominate. The ingredients of a fairy tale are all there: castles, jinns, talking animals. The narration is fast-moving. The poem, with its original plot, is remarkable for its lucidity, which accounts for its popularity. The poet begins the poem with a prayer, asking forgiveness for any shortcomings that may be seen in his poem. His respect and admiration for the Prophet is evident.

Although *Pakshippattu* is written in Arabic-Malayalam, the literary language of Malayali Muslims, there is a large admixture of words from the Malayalam spoken in the Kasargod region. Unlike in the other major Arabic-Malayalam poems, words from Persian, Tulu, Tamil and Sanskrit are conspicuous by their absence in *Pakshippattu*. Words, even whole sentences are repeated for rhythmic effect.

The religious implications of *Pakshippattu* should also be noted – something that really sets it apart. It was composed at a time when Shia influence was widespread in Kerala. In fact, one of the objectives of the poem seems to be to valorize Ali as the most accomplished of the Prophet's disciples. The attempt is clearly to embellish Hazrat Ali's image considerably. The Prophet himself refers to his son-in-law's 'tiger-like valour'.

Akbar Sadakha describes Ali as a 'lion, at whose words, heaven and earth tremble'. The poem makes it clear that only Ali could have entered Ifreeth's cave, took on his cohorts and finally slayed him. It is Ali who convinces Akbar Sadakha that Muhammad is indeed Allah's prophet. Ali is also portrayed in the poem as a knight of Islam. All these make the Shia leanings of the poem evident.

The social acceptability of *Pakshippattu* is remarkable. In Northern Kerala, especially in the Kasargod region, Muslim women used to recite the poem daily like scripture – something like the recitation of Ezhuththachan's *Ramayana* and Cherusseri's *Krishnagatha* in Hindu household. After the *maghribnamaz* at dusk, like the Qur-an, *pakshippattu* was also recited along with other texts of a scriptural nature. *Pakshippattu* certainly played a great role in the religious instruction of women who had much less access to education than their menfolk. One of the messages of the poem is that women should lead an ideal moral life and be faithful to their husbands. By implying that conjugal fidelity is an ideal even among birds, the poem seeks to cement the husband-wife relationship within the community. Undoubtedly, the quality of a fable accounts, in a large measure, to the popularity of *Pakshippattu* (Ibrahim, Page No.30).

The critical response to the poem moves, primarily, along religious lines, rather than aesthetics. There were certain religious scholars who forbade the reading of the poem. They considered it Un-Islamic in perpetuating heresies. It belittled not only Bilal and Umar, who gained the unstinted respect of the faithful with their exemplary lives and valour, but also the Prophet. In the poem, the snakes which guarded the lake in Ifreeth's cave entreats Ali for a place in Heaven, which Ali grants them. The scholars thought such a depiction absurd, when Islam did not give even the Prophet such a divine right. The giant tree in the cave points out to Ali that the Prophet and his disciples used the twigs of trees for brushing their teeth and asks him to grant it the good fortune of providing twigs for the purpose. And the poet was, perhaps, a little too indulgent to Ali, in whom he saw divine qualities, eulogizing him through Akbar Sadakha. But one must not fail to see that the poet brings out the greatness of the Prophet, who in forgiving Akbar Sadakha, was living up to his ideal of loving even his enemies. Above all, the poet has asked forgiveness from God for anything that was amiss in the poem. Everything taken together, one can only say that the intentions of the poet were noble (*Kareem and Moulavi, Page No.474*).

Conclusion

Pakshippattu, which is also known by the title *Akbar Sadakha* is one of the most important works in Mappila literature. It is most appropriate that it was written in Mogral, often described as the hamlet of *ishals* (songs/tunes). It is a literary text which has influenced many discourses in the life of Kerala's Muslim community. It has traversed generations to remain influential even today, attesting to the ways in which literature transcends the age of its production.

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