

## Biography of Sufi Saint Peer Mohamed Appa as Gleaned from his Tamil Literature

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### Abstract

Peer Mohamed Oliyullah Dargha is named after the Sufi philosopher, and Tamil poet Peer Mohamed Appa, born in Tenkasi of Tirunelveli District and having spent formative years of meditation in the Peermedu of Kerala State, came to Thuckalay and chose to stay permanently. It is now one of the most renowned Sufi pilgrim centers in Kanyakumari, the southernmost district of Tamil Nadu. He was renowned as a poet and philosopher, and made many writings in Tamil. He had a very close relationship with the rulers of Chera dynasty in Travancore. This article plans to bring out his life history from his own literatures.

**Keywords:** Dargah, Appa, Sufi, Wali, Gnanapukazhchi, Ravuther, Karamaths, Jamaath, silsila, Tariqah, paalkudam, Urs, Chishti.

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The Religious tolerance that was nurtured and instilled in the minds of Tamil people much earlier to this century through saints of various Religions, viz. Tamil Siddhas (Hinduism), Sufi saints (Islam), and Catholic saints (Christianity) etc.” In this article the researcher tries to bring out one among the famous personality this kind Peer Mohammed Appa. Sufi Saint Peer Mohammed Appa life history was not properly recorded. Hence an attempt was made to find out his life History through his various works. There is a famous Dargah at Thuckalay in Kanyakumari District which stands as the historical monument of Peer Mohammed Appa. Peer Mohammed Appa, who recognized by his devotees for his love and affection, good manners, submission towards God, and generosity. He was also called ‘Wali’ by his followers. The word “Wali” means “friends of God” as used in Quran verses. This article is in bilingual (both Tamil and English combined) which is necessary to quote the phrases of the literature he has provided to us.

He himself has quoted in the phrases of song titled “Rosumeesakkumaalai” he sung close to 18000 songs. The songs sung by him were compiled later in the below titles.

- ✓ Gnanapukazhchi (ஞான புகழ்ச்சி)
- ✓ Gnanappaal (ஞானப்பால்)
- ✓ Gnanappoottu (ஞானப்பூட்டு)
- ✓ Gnanamanimalai (ஞானமணிமாலை)
- ✓ Gnanakkuram (ஞானக்குறம்)
- ✓ Gnanarathinakuravanji (ஞானரத்தினக்குறவஞ்சி)
- ✓ Bismilkuram (பிஸ்மில் குறம்)
- ✓ GnanaAnanthakalippu (ஞான ஆனந்தக் களிப்பு)
- ✓ Thirumeignanacharanool (திருமெய்ஞானச் சரநூல்)
- ✓ Gnananadanam (ஞான நடனம்)
- ✓ GnanaMuchudarp-pathikankal (ஞான முச்சுடர்ப் பதிகங்கள்)
- ✓ Gnavikatasamarththu (ஞானவிகட சமர்த்து)

- ✓ Marifatmaalai (மரிஃபத்து மாலை)
- ✓ Meignanaamirthakkalai (மெய்ஞான அமிர்தக்கலை)
- ✓ Mikuraasuvalam (மிகுராசு வளம்)
- ✓ Edetramalai (ஈடேற்றமாலை)
- ✓ Thirunerineetham (திருநெறிநீதம்)
- ✓ Gnanaththiravukol (ஞானத்திறவுகோல்)
- ✓ Gnanasiththi (ஞானசித்தி)
- ✓ GnanaUlakaUrulai (ஞான உலக உருளை)
- ✓ Gnanakkan (ஞானக்கண்)
- ✓ Gnanamalaivalam (ஞான மலைவளம்)
- ✓ Meignanakkalanjiyam (மெய்ஞானக் களஞ்சியம்)
- ✓ Rosumeesakkumalai (றோசு மீசாக்கு மாலை)

Based on the details provided by him in the phrases of the songs sung by him, we infer his biography as follows.

In his *Rosumeesakkumalai* and also in *Gnanapukazhchi*, he quotes his birthplace as follows:

“உளந்தனைப் புகுந்து ஞஹ் உதித்துள்ளவாறு தன்னை  
பழம்பொருள் குரானில் தேடி பகரவென்றருளிச் செய்தோர்  
அருள்நகர் தென்காசி நடுப்பேட்டை சிறுமலுக்கரீன்ற அருள்  
பீர்முஹம்மது கல்பினில் வாதும் வளர்நபி ஷபாஅத்துண்டாமே”  
“தென்காசி நாடு சிறுமலுக்க ரென்னுமவர்  
தன்பால னிக்கதையைச் சாற்றினான்”

These phrases clearly enumerates that Peer Appa was born in Tenkasi town of Tirunelveli District and his father's name was *sirumalukkar* and his Grandfathers name was *Vaavanji*. A.J Stuart in his Manual of Tinnevely District mentioned that Kasi Viswanatha Temple was built in a Town erstwhile called in sixteen different names such as Sachidanandapuram, Thenpuzhiyuretc etc, were renamed as Tenkasi during the year 1431. As Peer Appa mentioned the name of the town as Tenkasi, we can infer that he would have been born after the construction of Kasi Viswanathar Temple in the year 1431. Based on these we can come to the conclusion that Peer Mohammed Appa's birth period would be during the end of Fifteenth century or beginning of sixteenth century.

During this period, social harmony prevailed in the Tenkasi region. Apart from Muslims, Thevars, Mudaliars, Yadavas, Dalits, Vanniyars, Brahmins, Nadars were lived there in peaceful manner. Peer Appa's Father belonged to Ravuther clan of Muslim descended from samoor group. This detail can be inferred from the following phrases of Rosu Meesakku Maalai:

அரிய சாமூர் சிறுமலுக்கர் மைந்தன் பிரசங்க றோசு மீசாக்குமாலை  
அரிய குறானுள்ள ஹதீதுதன்னை அதுவே கவியாக அருளலுற்றேன்

Ravuthers were known for their Horse riding and Medical treatment. Peer Appa's father *sirumalukkar* was an expert in Tamil, Arabi, Parsi and Malayalam Languages along with he acquired the Philosophical knowledge too. So, to seek clarifications on Philosophical debates many of them throng in to his house. Among them a prominent person who visits him was

Shri Venkatramasastiri, happened to be hereditary Trustee of Kasi Viswanathar Temple, Tenkasi. Their bondage descended to their next generation in form of friendship of Peer Mohammed and Sastri's son.

Once he and his friend, a sastri's son took bath in the holy tank of the Temple. It raised eyebrows among the Brahmins who argued about sastras and customs which forced the families to separate both of them. Sastri used to blame Peer Mohammed Appa for their closeness and breaching customs. Sastri's son became sick and was in critical condition chanting his friend's name "Peer Mohammed" since he is not able to meet his close friend Peer Appa. On seeing his condition sastri's family brought Peer Appa to their house. On seeing friend's condition, Peer Appa asked for cup of curd to his mother and he made his friend to swallow it by opening his mouth. Within short time, his friend recovered from the sickness. This incident sparked a wave of surprise about the divine nature of Peer Appa at his little age itself.

It is noteworthy to mention here that the incident mentioned above and others provided here without any literature evidences were gleaned from the publication made by Pavalar Naina Mohammed published in the year 1914. Also, some other incidents were taken out from the Tamil book authored by Thuckalay Haleema.

When he attained adolescent age, he started wandering to understand the way to reach GOD, leaving their parents. He started walking through many villages and towns like Rajapalayam, Srivilliputhur, Theni, Bodi and reached Thevaram. He spent quite some time there and spends his most of the time for meditation. The stone block house with vacant land is still available there to supplement his living there in. A Dargah named "கனி பீர் தர்கா" is still in use and the Muslims living around this place still utilize this place as their prayer place for the festivals time.

After spending certain period of time in Thevaram, Peer Appa restarted his wandering to Peermedu forest passing Kumily, Vandi Periyar through *Kuthiraipathai* (Horse Path) to kuttikanam forest. Most of the biographies of Sufi saints will always have history of wanderings in the forests area and their Karamaths after attaining all stages of *Sufism*. The name "peermedu" came in to prominence in the mid of sixteenth century after peer appa visited this place. "Peeruvanthavanam" is later transformed in to Peer medu (Hill of Peer Mohammed). This can be traced from the official documents of Kerala Government. In the order of "Kuram" literature, Peer Appa produced three texts namely, Gnanak Kuram, Bismil Kuram, Gnanarethinakkuravanji. Peer Mohammed Appa is the only person who sung three texts in "Kuram" order. Those who spend considerable amount of time in thick forests mountains with satisfied mind only can write this Kuram literature with blooming nature.

During the period, 1565 to 1601 Peer Mohammed Appa completed his meditation in Peer Medu. He started getting down from Peer Medu like falls falling down from Mountain. Many Kings around the area were interested in providing respect to him by bringing him to their Palace. King of Kochi, Kesava Rama Varma also wanted to celebrate him and invited him to the palace. The Experts present in the courtyard of palace lost them in the philosophical debates with Peer Appa. The experts asked many questions to check his spiritual wisdom. Answers provided by the saint Peer Appa convinced some of the members of Courtyard to embrace him as spiritual Guru. Ekkeen Mohammed (Viswakarma clan) is one among them who rested in peace with him at Peer Appa Dargah at Thuckalay. The descendants of viswakarma clan still live around Peer Appa Dargah. They are the one who bring "paalkudam" (பால்குடம்) during Urs festival of Peer Appa. After accepting respects

from King Kesavarama Varma, he started moving towards Kalkulam from where Vendau King ruled the Kingdom.

வீரம்புகழும் தென்காசி நகர்  
சிறுமலுக்கர் மைந்தன் பீருமுகம்மதன்  
மீறாவாக்குக் காரக்கவிதை நபி சபாகத்தனருள்  
பார்புகழும் தக்கலை கொந்தால் கான்முகமாய் வந்துதித்த  
இனம்புகழ மாமனர்க்கும் ஈமானியன்பாகச் சொல்லும்  
(ரோசு மீசாக்கு மாலை பாடல் 1202)

Through this above mentioned song, Peer Appa clearly explained his visit to Thuckalay and also provides the reasons behind his visit. He beautifully narrates in Tamil; He came to Thuckalay to preach the news of GOD to Venad King in the second stance of the song (ஈமானை இயம்பிட). He depicts that he was accompanied by a person called Konthalkaan through stance “கொந்தால் கான்முகமாய்”. Even now, many persons with the names “கொந்தால் முஹம்மது, கொந்தால், கொந்தால் கான்” were living in the areas of Uthamapalayam, Thenkasi, Rajapalayam, peraiyur, T. Kalluppatti, Nellupettai of Madurai District. This substantiates our views on his wanderings through these areas.

There was one word of mouth *Karamath* by Peer Appa with reference to the Prince of Venad King. Once, Prince of Venad suddenly fell ill and fainted without symptoms of any diseases. At that time, The Peer Appa visited the palace and cured his illness by his spiritual power. This legend can be proved as real incident from these two stances of *Rosu Meesakku Maalai*

சின்ன மனர்க்கும் துய்யத்தன நன்மைபெற வல்லவனே  
உதவி செய் துவாவருள்வாய் நலம்புகழ

In this song, he refers Prince as “சின்ன மனர்க்கும்” and also he prays God to cure him from the illness.

There are no evidences about the marriage of Peer Appa in his literatures. Also, there are no historical evidences available about his marriage with their clan vavanji of Tenkasi Naduppettai. Peer Mohammed Appa came to Thuckalay during second half of sixteenth century.

Those aspiring to follow the Sufi path approach a sheikh to be initiated into a spiritual lineage or, silsila. As every lineage goes back to the Prophet, all the orders (silsilas) are necessarily traced to one or the other of the companions whom the Prophet initiated himself. In the early phase of Sufism there were many great Sufi masters and they had their followers, but the movement was not institutionalized. The regular orders began to be established only in the 11th and 12 century AD and the first great Sufi order was the Qadri order, or Tariqah, founded by Shaykh Abdul Qadir Jilani (1071-1166). This was followed by the Suhrawardi order of Abu'l Najib Suhrawardi (1098-1168) and the Naqshbandi order of Khwaja Baha' ud din Naqshbandi (1318-1389). Another great order, the Chishti order, traces its origin to Chisht near Herat, where the spiritual founder of the order, Khwaja Abu IshaqShami (d. 940) dwelled. However it was Muinuddin Chishti (d.1236) who brought the silsila to India and laid its foundations by establishing a flourishing centre in Ajmer.

Both the physical and the spiritual life of a Sufi revolves around his sheikh and the sheikh dispenses any guidance his disciple might require, starting from the exigencies of everyday life and ending with the spiritual guidance that aims at losing oneself in God. Such

guidance is personalized and tailored to the individual capacities and needs of the disciple, gradually introducing him to techniques that would effectively enable him to attain the spiritual goal. Of these techniques the most numerous are those pertaining to *dhikr* – remembrance of God.

As explained above, the sufi silsila order starts from Prophet. Peer Mohammed appa talks about the need for the silsila in attaining God. In Gnanapukazhchi, he conveyed that Knowing Prophet Mohammed is predominant.

சூஃபிக்குக்கு சோபனம் மெய் இறகூல் நபியை தெரிதல்.

He also conveys in Bismil Kuram the need for sufi order.

சரியான குருவில்லா வணக்கமுள தெல்லாம்

சாவவில்லாக் கோழி முட்டை யிட்டது போலுவமை

சொர்ப்பனத்தில் வந்துகுரு சொன்னவுபதேசம்

சொர்ப்பனத்திர் சேர்ந்தபெண்ணு மதளையின்றதுவமை

There are 7 main stages of Sufism. There are differences in Sufis in regard to "Stages" but the main stages are as follows:-

- I. Repentance (Tawbah)
- II. Abstinence (Wizr)
- III. Renunciation (Zuhd)
- IV. Poverty (Faqr)
- V. Patience (Sabr)
- VI. Trust (Tawakkul)
- VII. Satisfaction (Ridza)

These stages constitute the ascetic and ethical discipline of Sufi. These Stages are by one's own efforts. Each of the stages is the result of the stage preceding it. The path of Sufi is not finished until he travels all the stages.

எத்திசைக்கும் குருவான ஏகன் மஹ்முதர்

எல்லவர்க்குங் குருவாகும் எளியேனுக்குங் குருவாம்

As always, the ultimate sufi order claimed by all Sufis including Peer Appa from Prophet Mohammed. He confirms the same with the above mentioned lines of the song (Bismil Kuram 119).

Peer Mohammed conveys to the world that Meeran Kani Dharvesh Kadiri is the last sufi order for him through two verses of his songs.

இந்தப்படிச் சீட்டு ஈயும்நாளில்

இயலும் பகுதாதுமீறாவுடன்

விந்தை மலரடி மூடிமேல்வைத்த

மீறாகனி சீசர் பீர்முஹம்மதுக்கும்

முந்த வலதுகைச் சீட்டோருடன்

முன்னோ னுதவிச் செய்தருள் ஆமீன்

எந்தன் துவாமொழி தப்பாமலே

எளியோன் துவாத்தன்னை கபூல் செய்வாயே

In this stance, the Meerakkani is Hazrat shahi meeran Kani Dharvesh Kadiri.

தக்கரை நகரில் வாழும்

சாய்பு மீறாக்கனிதன் சிச்சன்

## Conclusion

Saint Peer Mohammed Sahib was born in Tenkasi of Tirunelveli District in Tamil Nadu and had spent some time in the spiritual world at Peermedu in Kerala and he came to Thuckalay and stayed there. He was also a great and renowned Tamil Poet and has written several books on Philosophy and was very close to the Chera Kings of erstwhile days. It is believed that he was responsible for laying the foundation for the Padmanabhapuram Granite Fort. The Anniversary of this Sufi philosopher and poet is celebrated every year in the Arabic month of Rajab This event is being conducted by Thuckalai APMA Jamaath; People from various parts of Kerala and Tamil Nadu visit the Dargha irrespective of their religion during this month. The festival day is declared as a local holiday by the state government for the whole district of Kanyakumari. The vow of sleeping in the Dargah premises is considered sacred. The annual festival is celebrated during the month of Rajab and this festival devotee all over Tamil Nadu and Kerala take part in this event.

## End Notes

1. BismilKuram Songs
2. RosuMeesakkuMaalai songs
3. Gnanappukazhchi songs
4. A Survey of Kerala History, A Sreetharmonon
5. ஞானம் முழக்கிக் குளித்த நதி
6. Manual of Tinnevely District, A.J Stuart