

AN EXPERIENCE OF COMMUNAL HARMONY IN ALAMIKKALI

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Abstract

In Malabar especially in North Malabar we can see a variety of folk arts and ritual arts. Among the varied folk arts Alamikali occupied a prominent position of the pre-modern Kerala society. Alamikali is a great symbol of religious solidarity. Both hindus and muslims were participated in this art. This paper mainly focused on the aspect of communal harmony in Alamikali. The Alamikali belongs to Kasargode district, and now it lost its identity.

Key Words: Malabar,Folk Art, Ritual Art, Kasargode

Folk art is a simple art form of the common people. Folk art has its origin in the society which is characterized by simplicity and directness. Folk arts have always had an organic link with the community life of the prevalent age. Many of them originate from rituals that are part of magical and religious rites undertaken by human beings to overcome crisis, gather courage and ward off despair. In northern part of Malabar, we can see a variety of folk arts and ritual arts. Due to various reasons many of them vanished from our society. Many of the folk Arts and ritual arts are directly or indirectly related to our customs, traditions, beliefs, entertainments etc. The basic theme of every folk art is the real life situations of human beings. These types of folk arts and rituals helped in reducing the intensity of caste discrimination prevailing in the society to a great extent. The main aims of these folk arts are recuperation, prosperity of life etc. They are being performed at *Kavus*, open grounds, houses etc., in connection with some beliefs. Among the varied folk arts which are being performed in northern parts of Kerala, Alamikali occupies a prominent position in the pre - modern society.

Alamikali was a famous offering by devotees of northern end of Kerala. It is the best instance of communal harmony between the Muslims and the Hindus. (Shajil Kumar,2014;1) Alamikali was performed only once in a year. This folk art has a glorious past. At present it has lost its identity. The devotees participated in Alamikali, mainly for complacency and recuperation. (Vishnu Namboothiri,2000;40)

Main centers of this ritual practice are Kasaragode and Kanhangad. The rituals of Alamikali were performed at a place named *Alamipalli* at Putukkotta near Kasaragode. It is being said that *Alamikali* was also performed at places named Chittari and Kottikulam. There was no structural building in the form of a mosque for the *Alami*. There was only a stone platform in the shape of a hearth.(Balanc,2007;337)

Alamipalli is a place of religious importance for a category of Muslims called *Hanafi*. They were also known as *Sahibs* or *Talukkans*. It is believed that they were the militants of Tippus. After the conquest of Tipu, many of his militants remained in this place. These militant groups were the main proponents of Alamikali and they have started their living near Hosdurg fort. They celebrate *Alami festival* in this *Alamipalli*.(Shiju,2013;8) But *Alamipalli* is not only the pilgrim centre of the Muslims but also of the Hindus. Hindus, especially *avarna* Hindus participated in the Alamikali. The Muslims were the organizers of *Alamikali*, whereas the *avarna* Hindus were the real performers. (Vishnu Namboothiri,2000;40)

The rituals of Alamikkali started with *Muharam* 1st. At *Alamipalli*, there is a silver image of human hand which was worshipped in the place of an idol. On the first day of *Muharam*, the silver image is taken as a procession from the *Sahib's* family to the *Alamipalli* situated at Putukotta. On that day, the Hindu youths will visit the *Palli* and give offering to the *Alami* god and receive a sacred string from the *Sahib*, who is the organizer of the Alamikali. The *avarna* Hindus, who reside around the *Alamipalli*, treated the silver image as *Alami* god. On the same day the performers of Alamikali set out as wanderers abstaining themselves and started mendicancy for ten days. (Shiju,2013;8)

A group of *Alami* consisted of 9 to 10 people. The devotees who performed Alamikali were not only performing their dance at *Palli* but also at nearby streets. Being an *Alami*, they can collect anything that they need for themselves. For example during their long walks, usually they collected fruits like mangoes, jackfruits, coconuts etc. So no one had the right to question them. They visited each and every house of that area. Each family gives rice and other items to this *Alami*. The rituals of Alamikali came to an end on 10th day of *Muharam*. (Balan.C,2007;337)

On that day the *Alami* and other devotees returned to the *Alamipalli* at night. They offer all the items they had collected throughout the journey to *palli*. They set on fire the branches of *Champaka* (*Plumieria Rubra*) tree that they had collected on the way. The devotees believed that the logs of *Champaka* tree burning in the hearth shows the divine power of *Alami*. After that they started dancing around the hearth and circumambulating the same. These kinds of ritual practices were mainly done with great devotion. They avoid non-vegetarian food during these times. (Sanjeevan Azeekode,2007;78). A representative from the *Sahib* family picks a handful of ember from the hearth and prays to the god. Many related rituals are also being performed till morning. (Shiju,2013;8)

The closing ceremony of the Alamikali begins when the silver image is taken to *Arayili* river for its holy bath. It is being taken in a palanquin, which was carried by the members of *Sahib's* family followed by the *Alami* performers belonging to Hindu community. Then the *Alami* also takes a holy bath from the river with the silver image and remove their trappings and other make ups. (Shajil Kumar,2014;1)

The *Alami* performers dressed and painted with black charcoal and white dots in between. They wore garlands of fruits and leaves and long hats on the head decorated with red chrysanthemum flowers. Costumes of Alamikali are dhotis reaching up to the knee and carrying small sticks with bells attached. The costumes of the *Alami* were terrifying, so it was very fearful for small children. (Balan.C,2007;337)

Alamikali was celebrated to commemorate the Karbala war, an important event in the history of Islam. (Vishnu Namboothiri,2000;40) Another story behind the Alamikali is based on a Muslim devotee who get boon from a Hindu god. Being wanders, the *Alami* go about singing songs based on a special rhythm. The dialogues of *Alami* as like a song which starts and ends with "*Lasso Layma, Lasso Layma, Layma Lo.....*" which literally means 'calling the god'. (Sanjeevan Azeekode,2007;78).

Alamikali is a great symbol of religious solidarity. A confluence Hindu –Muslim culture can be discerned in this art form. Alamikali went beyond the religious barriers with its togetherness between Hindu and Muslim communities. Later it shrinks only as a religious ritual. Some of the cross culture that could be noticed in Alamikali were idol worship, circumambulating the fire (*agni pradakshina*), deities mounted in procession etc. ([www.Kerala Culture.org](http://www.KeralaCulture.org)) For this reason Muslim community raised certain disagreements with Alamikali. Thus, the *Sahib's* family has recourse the organization of this festival. In a proclamation published in the newspapers they informed people to about this. This unique ritual came to an end in 1936 either due to the development of the society or changes happened in the beliefs of people. (Balan.C,2007;337-339)

After this, the land of *Alami* god was being converted to Christian community. They felt some trouble in that area. So they leave that land, and then the land was appropriated to the Muslim. They started to make buildings in that area. Then gradually that place lost its identity as *Alamipalli*. Related with the name of *Alami*, there is a place called *Bibi Alami* Road in Mangalore even now. Now a day, some clubs have come forward in performing this Alamikali as a stage performance. They succeeded in reproducing the Alamikali in a non ritualistic form without any objections from the society. (Chandera,2004;47-48)

Thus, it is said that most of the folk art of Kerala are virtually vanishing. Their existence is threatened by the process of modernization and commercialization of life in the contemporary age and the accompanying changes in social and economic structure. Like that Alamikali also lost its identity when people started looking at the rituals of this folk art with religious perspective. So Alamikali remains a beacon of light in the annals of the cultural history of North Kerala.

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