

Emergence of Islamic Revivalism in Kerala

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Historical background

The Islamic movement has been treated by Muslims as in different perspectives. It connected with a sincere urge to preserve the cultural heritage of Islam keeping in view the role model of Prophet Muhammed and the early Islamic Caliphs while executing Islamic teaching in the society. In most of the cases this term is associated with the revivalist vision with the aim of covering all the socio-religious dimension of Islamic awakening. These Islamic activities are originated in 16th century onwards through Islamic education among the keralites was taken over by the first time by the reputed Makhдум Arab family of Ponnani in a systematic and organized way¹. The scholars like Qadi Muhammed, Valiyamkode Umer Qadi (d. 1852), Mamburam Syed Alavi Thangal (d. 1844), Fasal Pookoya Thangal (d. 1901) were the other important personalities, who worked for the upliftment of Muslim community. During these days the European powers demoralized the Muslims in all walks of – social, cultural, educational and economic aspects. So the Muslim leaders did not pay much attention to non-Islamic practices of neo-Muslims because of the political and social condition had affected the Muslims at worst and religious scholars were interested mainly to restore their lost glory. Their activities helped the Muslims to respond positively towards the reformation movement.

The Muslim scene in the second half of the 19th century forced some scholars to think about the necessity of starting the revivalism in Kerala. A taboo in modern education and women education, superstitious believes and un-Islamic practices worst the scene. These

situations attracted some of the right thinking scholars to start a reformation and revivalist movement in the Muslim society. The most important among them were Sayyid Snaullah Makthi Thangal (1842-1912 A D), Shaikh Muhammed Hamadani Thangal (d.1922 A D), Vakkom Muhammed Abdul Qadir Moulavi) (1873-1932 AD), K M Moulavi (1896-1964 AD).

Sanaullah Makthi Thangal.

Makthi Thangal was born at Veliyamkode in Ponnani Taluk in 1847. He completed his primary religious education under his father in a traditional way and secular education in higher secondary school, Chavakad in Thrissur District. He completed his religious education from different Dars institutions. He also learned Malayalam and Arabic, Urdu, Persian, Tamil, English and Sanskrit². Due to his academic proficiency, the British government appointed him as an Excise inspector which post he resigned to enter the arena of social service.

The social activities of Makthi Thangal can classify into two. The first one was the fighting against superstitious beliefs and evil practices of Muslim community and the other was the propaganda unleashed by the Christian community against Islam. As a social reformer Makthi Thangal tried his best to put an end the evil practices of Muslim community. He strongly opposed the practices like Nercha, practice of offering animals to the name of Muhiyadeen Shaikh and Badaringal (Martyrs in the Battle of Badar) for the fulfillments of wish of an individual. He also criticized the recitation of Maulid, a liturgical recital in honor of the Prophet or saint written in Arabic Language. It is being recited at the occasion of Nercha or death anniversaries. Besides, the same has been recited at the time between Salat-Al-Maghrib and Salat-Al-Isha as a means of piety. Malappattu was another literature which literarily means garland or necklace, is a devotional song praising or glorify the miracles of the Prophet and Sufi saints in an excessive way. These religious songs are written in Arabic or Arabi-Malayalam languages. Another vehement criticism of Makthi Thangal was against the system of Marumakkathayam, which prevailed in some areas of Kannur, Calicut and Travancore. He denounced this practice as un- Islamic because which denying the inheritance rights of male children. He also took great effort to

make the Khutuba (speech in the Friday prayer) in vernacular language. He also found fault with Tariqah which he considered was against the principles of Tauhid³. He argued that all these were no-islamic and against the principles of Islam. He strongly opposed the term, La Maujuood Illa Allah because it created a lot of esoteric implication in Islamic literature. This however might have created confusion about the concept of tauhid among the common Muslims that might lead to them to non-Islamic practices. Makthi thangal therefore declared it against the pristine teaching of Islam

Another important activity of Makthi Thangal was to defend the religion of Islam and respond seriously to the religious propagation of Christian missionaries in the Muslim areas. Their anti-Islamic activities especially their defaming of Muhammed (SAW), the Prophet of Islam, were vehemently criticized by Makthi Thangal. He resigned as a protest from the government service in 1882 and exclusively committed to counter the Christian missionaries⁴. He published articles, pamphlets and books on Islamic concepts and saved the Muslim community from the Christian missionaries' unholy attacks. In 1884 he published the book 'Kadora Kudaram' and 'Kadora Wajram' that criticized the Trinity concept. He challenged the Christian missionaries and announced a reward of Rs. 200 for those who countered his arguments. Nobody came out to accept his challenge⁵. In 1891 he wrote another book, Nabi Nanayam to point out the mistakes committed by Hermen Gundart in his book, History of Muhammad. Moreover he published a research work 'Parkalitha Porkkalam', which proved Muhammad (SAW) as a prophet was mentioned in the Holy Scriptures also⁶. The Christian missionaries complained the government to ban his public speeches on the ground that this would create law and order problem in the society. The police arrested him and was imposed on him a fine Rs.300 by local court⁷. Even after this he continued his missionary activities, he wrote more than ten books against Christian missionaries.

Makthi Thangal realized that lack of proper education was the reason for the backwardness of Muslim Community. The misunderstood and misconceived Taqwa Notion (fear of God), British education system, lack of true knowledge in Malayalam, attitude of

orthodox Ulama towards the secular education system and confinement of Ulama into Arabi-Malayalam were the main obstacles in their way to learning. He advised the Ulama to modify their education system and syllabus. He wrote many articles explaining the importance of education and inspired them to learn. He strongly argued for learning script of the Malayalam language. He said that studying of Malayalam would help the Muslim to communicate the message of the Holy Quran to the people comfortably.

For the promotion of Muslim education he published an educational chart showing Malayalam, Arabic, English and Arithmetic as a core subject. The book Muallim Al Ikhwan was written by Makthi Thangal as a part of restructuring the Arabi-Malayalam⁸. In 1899 he formed a Muslim organization called Muhammadiyya Sabah to spread Islamic ideology⁹. Moreover he published two magazines Paropakari and Sathyaprakasam in Malayalam in 1899 and news Paper called Thuhufathul Akhyar Wa Hidayathul Asrar in Arabi-Malayalam and an evening daily called Thurki Samajar was published in 1909¹⁰. In short, Makthi Thangal tried to introduce pristine Islam among the Muslim community. His teachings helped the Muslims to understand the importance of modern education. His publications and Organizations helped the emergence of Islahi Movement in Kerala.

Chalilakath Kunnahamad Haji

Chalilakath Kunnahamad Haji was born to Adirassery Moothattukala Moideen Haji and Fathima, the daughter of Chalilakath Ibrahim, in 1866 at Tirur in a scholarly family and initiated his primary education in Arabic language and Fiqh in a traditional way in his own family. He completed the religious education in various dars such as Naduvilappalli Jama Masjid at Tirur, Madakara Jama Masjid at Calicut and Valiya Juma Masjid Ponnani. Then he went to Vellore and spent seven years at Baqiyyath. Salihat and Lathifiya Arabic College and studied astrology, astronomy and philosophy¹¹. Apart from Arabic, he also learned Malayalam, Tamil, Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit and English languages

He started his career as a teacher at Tarammal mosque in Tirur and later worked at Mayyazhi, Valapattanom and Pulikkal. During this time he published many books and articles to counter

the advancement of Qadianism which had started functioning in the coast of Kerala. Meantime he published a research work called 'Risalat al-Hisab' which generated a controversy among the Muslim scholars. He contended that the mosque must be directed exactly towards Ka'ba and the qiblah must be followed properly, which was opposed by some scholars who argued that the qiblah's approximate direction would be sufficient. The approach adopted by Kunnamad Haji was known as Ain-e-Qiblah and the rest was known as 'Qiblah jihat'. Both the groups produced supplementary evidences to support their arguments. At last Chalilakath collected fatwa from Makkah, Madinah and Sind to support his argument and published another book 'Thuhfat al Ahbab' in Arabic-Malayalam¹².

The most important contribution of Chalilakath was the modernization of Muslim educational system. He realized that the existing system of education was not sufficient for the upliftment of Muslim community and decided to modernize the system. He criticized the traditional system of learning and introduced new methods in teaching. He started to use black board and gave preference to teach Arabic language over the religious studies¹³. Moreover he modified the syllabus of dars by including history, geography, mathematics, jurisprudence and physical science. Malayalam became an additional language to the dars students.

His educational reforms were accelerated after his appointment as the Principal of Darul Uloom at Vazhakkad in 1909, which was managed by Koyapathodi family and established in 1871 as madrasa. The Manager, Moideen Kutty Sahib gave him full freedom to revamp the system in his institution. He raised the Madrasa up to the status of an Arabic college and introduced many revolutionary changes in its functioning. Students were divided into classes according to their level and standard. New subjects like logic, astronomy, geography, natural science, mathematics, Malayalam, tafsir, hadith jurisprudence, grammar, rhetoric etc. were introduced. Teaching tools like globes, maps, charts, models were used. He arranged libraries and assured the availability of news papers in the libraries. 'Al-Hilal' and 'Al-Balagh' published by Abul Kalam Azad were available in his library.

With the advice of the manager, Kunnahammad Haji started a new madrasa for the native students and prepared a syllabus for the same. The text books included in his syllabus were Ta'leemul Quran, Diniyath, Amaliyath, Arabic alphabets Mabadi al-Bira'a, Kitab al-Sarj; kitab al-Nahve al-Kabeer and al-Lugha't al-Arabia. The renovation of Madrasa education attracted much attention as well as criticism. The orthodox ulama who were critical to the new experiment in the madrasa education

objected the use the Waqf properties for such purposes. On this occasion, the management invited the well known Ulama like Makhdum Cherya Bava Musliyar Ponnani and Kattilassery Muhammed Ali Musliyar to Darul Uloom for inspecting the text books and teaching methods. The inspection team unanimously approved the syllabus and text books of the Madrasa.

At that time 'the education of Muslim girls were positively discouraged by orthodox ulama, he set a new example to others by sending his own daughters to school. He advised the Muslim community to send their sons and daughters to school for secular education. Apart from this he also made his own contribution to the modification of Arabic-Malayalam which helped the students to learn Malayalam language. But all these reforms were opposed by the orthodox Ulama who forced him to leave Vazhakkad. He later on joined the Madrasa of Kalladi Moidutty Sahib in 1917 at Mannarkad. He continued there for the next two years, and died in 1919 at Mannarkad. The reformation started by Chalilakath was carried out by almost all the religious groups in Kerala. New form of madrasas was established in different parts of Kerala in the beginning of 20th century and it helped the awakening of Kerala Muslims.

Hamadani Thangal.

Sheikh Muhammad Mahin Hamadani Thangal, a scholar turned public worker, born in a poor family at Vaduthala, in Ernakulam district. He completed his primary education in his native place. Then he joined the Dars in Kodugalur Jama Masjid and completed his religious education from Lathifiya Arabic College, at Vellore. He also learned Tamil, Persian, urdu and Arabic. It was during his stay at Vellore that he joined the Hamadani Tariqah and become a sole

propagator in Kerala. He got a lot of followers from Haripad, Alapuzha, Aluva and Chirayinkeezhu¹⁴.

Among the activities of Hamadani sheikh, the Most Important was his educational movement. He wanted to raise the Muslim community from its slumber and make them conscious their backwardness in education. So he conducted a Muslim conference in the model of All India Muslim Educational Conference organized by Sir Sayyid Ahamed Khan (d.1898) to promote education among the Muslim¹⁵. He published many articles in Arabi-Malayalam journal Al-Mualim to inspire the Muslim youth. He also decided to establish a Muslim University in Kerala for which he formed an Islamic Culture Society and acquired eight acres from Travancore Kingdom for establishing an educational institution at Alwaye¹⁶. But it was not materialized due to the lack of co-operation on behalf of the Muslim Community. As a nominated member in the Sri Mulam Praja Sabha of Travancore, by representing the community, he persuaded the government to make provision for the teaching of Arabic to Muslim students along with Malayalam and English¹⁷. He had also an intention to change the educational system of that time. He chalked out a new system for providing a technical education along with religious studies. To promote Muslim education he established adult education centers and local Madrassas in the model of government primary schools. He also promotes religious education for women along with secular education. For the economic progress of Muslim community he formed companies and co-operative societies. Apart from these he constituted a welfare committee to extend the assistance and advice to the weaker section of society.

Along with the reformation, he also worked to strengthen the unity in the Muslim community. It was very common that the clashes among the Muslim families caused conflict and even bloodshed. So he founded an eleven member committee to settle the disputes among the Muslim families. It is known as Nispaksha Sangam. Later this organization changed its name into Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangam as a part of widening the activities. Apart from this he also founded some organization like Lajanatul Muhammadiya at Alleppey, Lajanatul Hamadaniya at Kodungaloor, Lajanatul Islam Sangam at Eriyad. All

these organization played an important role in the social, educational, cultural, economic, religious and political development of Muslim community. In brief we can say that he worked hard for solving the problems of Muslim community. He accelerated the educational movement started by earlier reformers. Moreover he always stood for the religious harmony and unity among the people who hold different faith. He passed away in 1922 at Vaduthala.

Vakkam Abdul Qader Moulavi.

The pioneering Muslim social and religious reformer, Vakkam Muhammed Abdul Qader Moulavi, better known as Vakkam Moulavi, was born on 28th December 1873 at Vakkam In Travancore state. His reformation activities touched all the areas of the backwardness of Muslim community he worked for the religious, social, educational, cultural, political and literary progress of Muslim community. His activities for the progress of Muslim community raised his status into Imam al-Muslihin (leader of the reformer)¹⁸. He learn proficiency in Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Sanskrit and English languages¹⁹. His readings and researches helped him to understand the condition of Muslim community. So he decided to work exclusively against the superstitious and innovative religious practices which he considered as his sole mission.

But things which greatly affected his mind was that the irreligious way of life of Muslim such as Nerchas, conducting Urs, constructing tombs on the graves and offering prayers there in. moreover the pathetic condition of Muslim women also disturbed him greatly. They had no equal rights and many rights were denied to them. They did not get proper religious and secular education. His articles in al-Muslim, started publishing in 1906 January, mentioned the percentage of Muslim women education of that period as I% only and 0.16% for the Kerala Muslims²⁰. This backwardness of Muslim community forced him to work for their upliftment and this introduced him a social reformer. His activities helped the Muslims to develop their cultural ethos. He was the first Muslim leader, who helped the cultural renaissance of Kerala Muslim.

The Religious Reform.

The Muslims of Kerala had been completing their religious education in a traditional way. The Arabic Alphabet, reading the Holy Quran and some Baith or Moulids or Malapattu their curricula in their primary education. Maulavi started a movement that provided proper religious education, based on the Quran and Sunna of the prophet (s) to eradicate all the superstitious beliefs and practices of the Muslims. Maulavi released a journal, Al Muslim and published article on the title Islahu Diniya, which advised his followers to wage a struggle to revive pristine Islam²¹.

Maulavi soon felt that, Al-Muslim, published in Malayalam language, was not useful to majority of Muslims, especially to women. He therefore started another journal entitled Al-Islam in Arabic-Malayalam in 1918, the popular language of Muslim Community. He also conducted public lectures and distributed pamphlets among Muslim explaining Shirk and Tauhid. Moreover he started an organization called Islam Darma Paripalana Sangam at Nilakkal Mukku in 1918 for the same. He wrote an introduction to Holy Quran to emphasis on the reading of the Quran with the translation. Apart from these he translated Kimiya e sa'adat written by Imama Al-Ghazali to Malayalam language. All these helped to create a renaissance in the Muslim community.

Social and Educational Reform.

He started the reformation and revivalism in the basic education system. He implemented new teaching methods in the traditional education which helped the learner to study systematically. This may cause to improve the condition of existing Madrasas and Dars education. He forced the government to include Arabic language in the curriculum of public education system. He started a newspaper Al-Muslim in 1906 to motivate and aware the Muslim community of the needs of education and the problem faced by them. Moreover, he published articles in Malayalam and Arabi-Malayalam languages in different magazines regarding the importance of education and the backwardness of Muslims. He forced the Muslim representatives in the assemblies to force the government to take necessary steps for the promotion of Muslim education and he published their speeches in

his newspaper²². Apart from this a combined efforts were promoted for the social and educational upliftment of Muslim community. Muslim Samajam formed at Chirayinkeezhu, Akhila Thiruvidadamkur Muslim Mahajana Sabha formed in 1920 were some of the effort taken by Maulavi in this regards²³.

He conducted direct discussion with government regarding the education of Muslim community and demanded the following;

- a) Form local committees for promoting education of Muslim
- b) Appoint Munshies in school
- c) Provide scholarship for Muslim students and
- d) Pay full salary to teachers in Muslim grand-in-aid school. All his efforts for the above were accomplished later.

All these helped to some changes in the attitude Muslims and they started to send their children to school. Within a short period, 75 schools were launched in different parts of Thiruvidadamcore state²⁴. The government appointed him to check the qualification of the Muslim teachers and asked him to prepare a curriculum for Muslim student. He became the member of examination board of Travancore state. In short his educational activities helped the Muslim community to realize the importance of education. His activities accelerated the progress of Muslim community in Kerala.

Political Reform

The political view of Vakkam Maulavi was revolutionary. He decided to fight red-tapism, nepotism, and corruption rampant in the society and in the state machinery. He was astounded at the activities of Divan, palace servant and their henchmen who made the administration a mockery and trampled the human rights under their feet and oppressed the downtrodden people. Maulavi opposed these evils through his journal. He decided to publish a news paper and views in the weekly papers. The first issue of the swadeshabhmani came out on 1905 from anjengo under the editorial ship of C.P. Govinda Pillai. The editorial note of that day concluded with the word “our chief wish is to bring good to people through the action of the Swadeshabhmani. We will do our utmost to achieve this end; we will not certainly conceal any of the public grievances because of any

harassment”²⁵. This was the first news paper in Kerala to establish a link with Reuter to get international news coverage²⁶.

In 1906 January, it started publication from Vakkam under new editor K. Ramakrishnapillai. The editorial and news items sharply criticized the bureaucracy and the Dewan. Many of his friends advised him to reduce the criticism of Swadeshabhimani against the Government. But instead of interfering the day today affairs, he gave full freedom to his editor in editing and publishing the paper. The journal also published articles on social issues and he requested the government to separate the income from Dewaswam from the revenue of the state which helped the Muslim and others to get job in the Government service. Encouraging widow remarriage, opposing child marriage, emphasizing on the importance of Muslim education, need of organization to achieve the rights and so on were some of the issues raised by him.

Moreover the Swadeshabhimani criticized the government when Yakub Hassan Madhavan Nair and Gopala Menon, the prominent freedom fighters, were arrested in connection with the Non Co-Operation movement. The newspaper also made powerful criticism against the government and its politics which led into confiscating the newspaper and press and even deported Ramakrishna Pillai (1878-1916) to Madras²⁷. His anti- imperialistic views greatly influenced the Muslim community. It helped the Muslims to struggle against the British and also against the injustice of the local rulers. In every walk of life Vakkam Maulavi proved himself to be the torch bearer.

K M Maulavi.

A legendary name in the Islahi movement of chronicles of Kerala, K M Maulavi was born in 1886. He completed his primary education in Tirurangadi and Paravanna. Then he joined Darul Uloom Vazhakad under the great scholar Chalilakath Kunahamed Haji. Later he works in the above institution as member of faculty. When his master, Kunahamed haji left the above institution, he also followed him. His unique leadership and capability brought a lot of young Muslim scholars like E. K. Maulavi, E. Moidu Moualvi, P K Musa Maulavi, K M Seethe Sahib, N B Abdul Salam Maulavi, M. C. C. Brothers, Alavi

maulavi etc. With the help of these scholars, he started his relentless fight against Shirk (Polytheism) which grass rooted among the orthodox Muslim of Kerala from the southern part of Kerala to the northern territories his presence had been sparking upturning of beliefs. Ignorant Muslims who lived under the spell of ill- motivated priests found truth in his preaching. He wrote many articles in al-Murshid and al-Manar to educate the Muslim community and bring them on right path.

During the Malabar rebellion he left Malabar and took refuge in Kodugallur and there he engaged many social activities for a period of eleven years. During these periods he worked hard for the materialization of Kerala Muslim Aikya Sangam which came into exists in 1921. This was the starting point of Islahi movement in Karala. After returning from Kodugallur, he continued his fight against un-Islamic practices. He took initiative in the establishment of educational institutions to spread religious and modern education among the Muslim community. He vigorously attacked the orthodox practices such as visiting the tomb of saints' holy men, Nerchas, Maulids, Ratib, and so on.

The reformation activities started by these great scholars in the end of 19th century greatly influenced the Muslim community. All their teachings were in Arabi-Malayalam, helped them greatly to communicate their ideas among the Muslim Masses. Their activities encouraged the early Muslim organization like Himayatul Islam Sabha formed in 1889 in Calicut, Hidayathul Muslimeen Sabha founded in Manjeri in 1897, Maunath al Islam Sabha at Ponnani in 1900, Lajanat Muhamadiya Sangam at Alapuzha in 1915, Ansar al Islam Fi Ta'lim al Anamformed in 1918 at Calicut, J D T Islam Sabha founded at Calicut in 1921. All these helped to enhance the activities of Islahi movement in Kerala.

Conclusion

The reformist activities started by Makthi Thangal, Hamadani Thangal, Vakkam Moulavi, Chalilakath Kunjahammed Haji, etc .. cause for the emergence of Islamic Movement in Kerala. Socio-religious and educational reforms of these leaders helped to the formation of different organization in the nook and corner of Kerala state. Darma Traga, an organization formed at Kozhikode in 1881 for the welfare