

## **Impact of religious cohesion on the formation of Islamic identity in Kerala as a result of reformers' efforts**

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*The character of a society's reflection on the outside world, which is expressed by religion, traditions, beliefs, and other factors, determines its identity. Religious identity is formed as a result of the efforts of religious leaders or reformers who paint a picture in the minds of their followers. Religious reformers played a significant role in the formation of religious identity among Muslims in Kerala. This article examines the impact of religious leaders' activities on Kerala's Muslim community, which was deteriorated during British colonialism but was transformed into a progressive and organised community by religious cohesion. How much did the development of group feeling, or asabiyyah, among this community as a result of the teaching of Islam contribute to the formation of Islamic identity in Kerala?*

**Key words:** Asabiyyah or social solidarity- Islamic identity- socio religious reformers-modernisation-religious cohesion.

“In his classic “Introduction to History,” Muqaddimah, Ibn Khaldun describes the stages of nation-building through his comprehensive theory of history and society, or, better yet, sociology, which he refers to as ‘ilm al-‘umran. He identifies ethnic, religious, economic, geographic, and socio-psychological influences that shape human history and society.”

Harold Bridger stated in the forward of the book edited by Gilles Amedo entitled *Transitional approach to Change*, that the nature of change can take many forms and all too readily we use the term for many different kinds of movement from one state of being to another. According to Gilles Amedo, the transitional process of change requires (1) time, (2) space and (3) a form of cover. Hence, the essence of the term 'transitional change' in this context is the overall changes that happen to a society through the suitable factors and sufficient time in particular region or place.

In the history of the Muslims of Kerala, The community underwent several changes such as economic, social, and political during these five decades. The advent of Islam in Kerala was in a peaceful manner. The international trade relations between Kerala and Arabia, support of local Hindu rulers and the rigid caste system among the Hindus were the favourable factors for the speedy and easy spread of a Semitic religion like Islam in Kerala. The community formation of Islam in Malabar was different from that of North India. Islam entered Kerala without any bloodshed. According to Gilles Amedo, the transitional process of change requires (1) time, (2) space and a (3) form of cover. Since the time of the origin and spread of Islam in Kerala, the religious political and social life of Muslims has undergone significant changes. The space of Muslims under the patronage of local rulers in Kerala was favourable for their religious expansion. The third aspect, the form of cover that is Islam itself and Islamic social solidarity or *Asabiyyah* helped a lot in the transitional process of Muslims in Kerala. According to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the Arabic word *Asabiyyah* means 'spirit of kinship' in the family or tribe. Already used in Hadith (tradition of the prophet) in which the prophet condemns *Asabiyyah* as contrary to the spirit of Islam, the term became famous as a result of the use to which it was put by Ibn Khaldun, who made this concept on the basis of his interpretation of history and his doctrine of the state. *Asabiyyah* is, for Ibn Khaldun, the fundamental bond of human society and the basic motive force of history. It is the core of Ibn Khaldun's thought concerning the rise and decline of the civilization. It is also a source for economic development and political stability. In *Muqaddimah*, Ibn Khaldun emphasizes the impor-

tance of having a sense of solidarity is the state of mind that makes individuals identify with a group and subordinate self to the group, in order to establish peace and social development. The implication of Ibn Khaldun's social solidarity concept to the present world is imperative. Writing Overall, Ibn Khaldun's theory of Asabiyyah has its place in the modern period. Moreover, it could be an alternative form of social solidarity for the modern world and for the long-term future, adopted solely for the purpose of unity. Therefore, the Islamic social solidarity developed by the religious teachings of Islam in a peaceful manner in Kerala positively affected the politicalisation and social change among Mappilas of Kerala.

The major components that make up a Muslim's Islamic identity shape his beliefs and thoughts toward himself, God, humanity, animals, plants, and the rest of the world. In the Muslim mind, answers to questions like origination, secret of life, and salvation create dimensions of time and place that are beyond the prison walls of material world time and the barriers of present place. The Islamic environmental perspective and the preservation of nature in its entirety, including all of its animals, plants, mountains, seas, and other natural features, arose from the Islamic concept of brotherhood, which is an outer perception of the universe as nothing more than a Divine gift to humans that should be treated with admiration, gratefulness, and care. Also, Muslims believe that the entire universe is constantly praising God, so they share the act of praising with Muslims, but each in their own amazing natural way. Aside from the direction towards the universe, the Islamic external perception has another direction towards other people. Under the divine umbrella of mercy, Islam established rules for dealing with human beings, which shape the Muslim's outlook on life. Muslims consider all people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, to be their brothers and sisters in humanity. The development of Islamic solidarity among Kerala's Muslims has two distinct stages, the first as a religious community and the second as a political community. Through the teachings of early reformers such as Sanaulla Makthi Thangal, Chalilakath Kunjahamad Hajee, Vakkom Abdul Khader Moulavi, and others, this study describes the emergence of Asabiyyah, or Muslim social solidarity. Religious leaders, especially those in the home and

community, have the power to raise awareness and influence attitudes, behaviours, and practises. They have the power to shape social values based on religious teachings. Religious leaders wield a great deal of power over their followers, and they're in a good position to influence people to change their minds.

**Sanah ullah Makthi Thangal made significant contributions to educational advancement and Islamic identity.**

Sanah ullah Makthi Thangal was born in 1847 at Veliancode in Malappuram district. He was a great reformer and advocate of modern education. He began his career in the British government as an excise inspector. This was a time when Muslims in Kerala were closed off to public education, were enslaved by superstitions, and were too trusting to accept anyone as their spiritual leader. The threat of conversion, which was backed by the government, was added to the mix. Thangal resigned from his job and entered the public eye. His goal was to assist his community in rising from the social and cultural abyss into which it had sunk. Thangal began writing, speaking, and spreading his bold, poetic, reformist, and beneficial to the Muslim community viewpoints. Thangal wrote in the newspapers that were in circulation at the time, those that were willing to publish his articles, and he also published books on topics that were important to the British Indian community. Many who followed his line of thought found his speeches and everything he wrote to be a clarion call. Thangal is credited with being the first Muslim to publish books and start a daily newsletter.

He wrote several books and articles in Malayalam language, which inspired the common people among the Muslim community. It made awareness among the community to educate and modernize. He also worked for the purification of religion of Islam through the pan - Islamic ideology. His famous work Kadora kudaram was a strong weapon against the ideological attack of Christian Missionaries on Islam and the Prophet. He was agitated by this debasement of missionaries and resigned his government job in 1882, at the age 35, and started his crusade against Christian Missionaries. He used his pen and speeches, both sharp as razor, to counter the arguments of Christian missionaries against Islam.<sup>1</sup> He used Malayali identity as a tool to

unite the Muslims against Christian Missionaries. In Desabhimanam (Patriotism), he exhorted the Mappilas to have patriotic feeling towards one's country. 'Though Keralites are divided into many religious groups, their birthplace is Kerala and hence forms a community. It is the bounden duty of every Keralite to honour the motherland and to strive for its progress. All Muslims of Kerala have to be patriotic and work for the progress of the Malayali community.'<sup>2</sup> His works focused on inspiring his community to educate and develop themselves through English. He was considered as the pioneer of Islamic renaissance in Kerala. His speeches and writings created solidarity among the community by preaching the basic tenets of Islam especially Thouheed or unity of God.<sup>3</sup> His efforts were focused on the following areas: Protect Islam from Christian encroachment, eradicate the evils that have crept into Muslims' Iman (belief) and religious education, protect Muslims by dragging them away from the path of violence, open doors of progress for Muslims, and provide materials for religious sermons and eliminate stage fright among Muslim preachers..

Despite being a reformer, he maintained his orthodox Muslim lineage and was a proponent of Islamic ideology. He promoted women's empowerment, which he based on Islamic gender discrimination and was influenced by primitive ways of praising the prophet. In his work, he informed about Muhammad and answered Christian missionaries' questions about Islam and the prophet Muhamed. He also urges Muslims to return to "Thouheed." And he worked to dispel people's misconceptions about Islam and Prophet Muhammed, earning him the title of "pioneer of Kerala muslim renaissance" and the "Islahi movements of Kerala."

**Chalilakath Kunjahammad Hajee is credited with modernising madrassa education and bringing instructional practices together.**

Chalilakath Kunjahammad Hajee (1864-1919) was the second important Muslim reformer of Kerala. In the backdrop of his efforts to improve the system of religious education, he was the 'Sir Sayyid of Kerala'.<sup>4</sup> He was the real founder of Madrassa movement in Kerala. He got a degree from the famous Latheefiya Arabic College located at Vellore. He was a good scholar in philosophy, astronomy,

astrology and proficient in languages like Urdu, Persian and Tamil. It was his scholarship in astronomy that made him capable to write *Risalathul Hisab*, a treatise for determining the timings of Namaz, the daily prayers. His tract regarding the direction of mosque triggered off a controversy in Malabar known as Qibla dispute.<sup>5</sup> On the basis of an Arabic text, *Risalathul Maradini*, He argued that the mosque should be directed to the west straightly but with slight deviation to the north.<sup>6</sup> This controversy on daily prayer of Muslims got the attention of all the strata of the Muslim community and this created a religious spirit and ultimately a religious consciousness among them through the unification of the construction method of the mosques in Kerala. He modernized the education system of Madrasahs and used modern techniques of teachings like globe and map during that time. He made many contributions to the script of Arabi-Malayalam.

Muslims in ancient Kerala studied religious subjects using the Ponnani model. This system was threatened by the rise of the innovative system in its early years. Initially, there was some dissatisfaction and discrimination among Muslim scholars. Chalilakath reformed and regulated the Darul Uloom situation on January 1, 1913, with the help of Koyappathoti Muhyaddeen Kutti Haji, and he implemented the new system that Darul Uloom different instructional conditions. He wanted to be a part of such a reformation, and he explained what he wanted to achieve through it. To strengthen religious education, he submitted a new syllabus and curriculum to Darul Uloom, regulating the periods for Thafseer, Hadeeth, Fiqh, Manthiq, Mahani, Hisab, Tharik (history), geography, Haiath, Handusa, Munalara, Swarf, Nahv, and other subjects, as well as to enlarge their extra ordinary skills in Arabic language both in oration and writing. He also encouraged them to practise Malayalam-to-Arabic translation. He punctuated the periods and asked his coworkers to follow his methodical approach in their personal lives as well. He instituted an attendance system and a vacation system to track his students' attendance. Darul Uloom now has a library system thanks to him. He instilled in his student the desire to learn. It was a watershed moment in Islamic history, with unprecedented reforms and a pivotal turning point. He modernised the system of education in Madrasahs by using black board, chalk and other

teaching aids and techniques. He also gave his attention to coaching the Ulemas to speak in Arabic who lacked this even after completing seven or eight years of Madrassa education. Darul Uloom now has a library system thanks to him. He encouraged his students to participate in all aspects of education. He also encouraged them to learn Malayalam grammar to help them with their problems. This was a significant step forward in the Madrasa system's renovation. Through the modernization of education he inculcated the spirit of knowledge and Islamic unity among the newly educated Ulemas.

**Abdul Khader Maulavi significantly contributed to the society's educational and social progress.**

The father of Muslim renaissance in Kerala, Abdul Khader Maulavi contributed much to the educational and social upliftment of the society. He was a propagator of the ideologies of Sayyid Jamaluddin Al Afgani (1838-1898), Sheikh Muhammed Abdu (1849-1905) and Sayyid Rasheed Rida (1868-1935) through his reading of Al Manar, an Arabic journal published from Egypt. By this, he acted as a string between the Middle East - bound Pan-Islamism and the Kerala Muslim renaissance. In south Kerala, the Thiruvithamcore Muslim

Mahajanasabha, which was the sole representative organisation of Muslims in Travancore formed in 1928. In addition to it, some other associations were also formed in different parts of Travancore like the Islam Dharma Paripalana Sangham of Nilakkamukku, Hadiyyul Islam Sangham of Pallippuam, Chirayinkil Taluk Samajam and Lajanattul Muhammaddiya of Alappuzha and Nasarathul Islam Sabha (1915) of Alappuzha.<sup>7</sup> He was the real spirit behind the adventure of Swadeshabhimani Ramakrishnapillai who was expelled from Travancore due to his criticism of the mal administration of the government through the political tongue named Swadeshabhimani. Thus Abdul Khader Maulavi became the hero of Muslims and caught the attention of the common people which helped to develop social solidarity by the religious teachings of the Maulavi.

**Social solidarity as a means of forming Islamic identity**

The religious spirit among the speeches, literature and songs grounded in Islam and its ideology provided them a separate identity,

which moulded social solidarity among them. The attack of Christian missionaries through the print media and their propaganda against Islam and its Prophet resulted in the unification of Muslims under the banner of Islam. The fear of Muslims in degeneration of religion of Islam by this external attack and internal threats of practicing un-Islamic beliefs compelled them to resist and unite. Muslim writers tried to glorify the Islamic achievements in the past and generate a sense of pride to their religion through this. They advised the common man to lead the life of the glorious time by strictly following the tenets of Islam. This tendency of reformers contributed to the development of Pan- Islamism later. In order to create emotional thinking in readers about the glorious past, they narrated story of the great personalities and their touching anecdotes in their works. The writers tried to give a clear picture about the life of the Prophet to save the people from un-Islamic practices. They propagated every sanctity and glory of early Muslim life to purify the religion of Islam in Kerala that opened the door of social solidarity. Some scholars and writers changed their attention to overcome the problem of modernity by combating with contemporary demands. From the very beginning of reform during the time of Makthi Thangal onwards, the literary men among the community advocated for education of both secular and religious. Later literary works of Islamic organisations like Jama-at-e-Islami etc marked changes in the usage of Malayalam language, which had undergone drastic changes. Thus, the Muslim literature from ancient and modern reflect the ideas of the purification of religion of Islam and Muslims. Mappila literature also contributed to a range of major developments in Kerala Muslim culture. It helped the emergence of literary expansion of Islam as against oral traditions of Islam. It also did its share in the strengthening of Pan-Islamic ideology among the Muslims. In short, Mappila literature and activities of social reformers revolutionized religious understanding among the Muslims of Malabar and contributed much for forging Islamic social solidarity amongst them.

### **End notes**

1. K.K.Mohammed Abdul Kareem, Sayid Sannaulla Makthi Thangal (Mal.), p.14.
2. Makthi Thangal, "Desabhimanam", Makthi Thangalude Sampoorana Krithikal (Mal.), p.510.
3. Makthi Thangal, "Maudyadambara Nasam", Ibid., p. 695.

4. C.N. Ahmed Moulavi and K.K. Mohammad Abdul Kareem (ed.), Mahathaya Mappila Sahitya Paramaryam (Mal.), p.68.
5. Mecca is the Qibla (direction) of Muslims all over the world. Hence mosques are built heading towards Ka'ba (the holy shrine of Mecca) which lies to North West of Kerala.
6. K. Moidu Moulavi, Ormakurippukal (Mal.), p.56. Also see K.K.Mohammed Abdul Kareem, K.M. Moulavi Sahib (Mal.), p.38.
7. A.P. Ibrahim Kunju, Mapplia Muslims of Malabar, p. 151.

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