

Honouring the Versatile: The Role of Sayyyid Alavi Pookoya Thangal in Kerala Secularism

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Secularism is one of the most important movements in the history of the modern West, helping differentiate the West not only from the Middle Ages and more ancient eras, but also from other cultural regions around the world. The modern West is what it is largely because of secularism; for some, that is a reason to cheer, but for others it is a reason to mourn. A better understanding of the history and nature of secularism will help people understand its role and influence in society today. Why did a secular vision of society develop in Western culture but not so much elsewhere in the world? Despite its importance, there isn't always a great deal of agreement on just what secularism really is. Part of the problem lies in the fact that the concept of "secular" can be used in a couple of ways which, while closely related, are nevertheless different enough to make it difficult to know for sure what people might mean. The word secular means "of this world" in Latin and is the opposite of religious. As a doctrine, secularism is usually used to describe any philosophy which forms its ethics without reference to religious dogmas and which promotes the development of human art and science.

It is believed Islam came to Kerala in the life time of the Prophet Muhammed, and Mappilas of Malabar had over the period of time became integrated into the life of the state. The Mappila community is an integral part of the History of Kerala fom medieval to modern period. The community has richly contributed to the political,religious , socio and cultural history of the land and has been the centre of attraction of scholarly interest in the recent years. The Mappila Muslims of Malabar is highly influenced by the localized indigenous systems and their practices, which were prevalence amongst the contemporary society.

For centuries the most important religious leaders of the Mappilas were immigrants from Arabia, who passed their own knowledge and training to indigenous Mappilas. According to Rolland E Miller these religious leaders may be divided into two categories. One included the leaders of Charismatic qualities, possession of these powers being usually connected with the membership in a specific saintly family. The others represented the orthodox Moulavis , who carried on cultic and educational monasteries in community . Mappia theology to modern times was depended on the training and teaching of these traditional leaders.

There were one hundred and sixty clans in Yemen and Hadramawt of south Arabia who claimed their origin from Prophet Muhammed through his daughter Fathima and cousins Ali. Almost all these clans were commonly known as Hadrami Sayyids. Nor can any branch of the numerous sharif and Sayyid families founded over fourteen centuries ago claim a more varied sphere of activity of achievements indeed than the Alawi sayyids of Hadramawt. However the noble descent of Ba-Alawis said to have been challenged in the year AD1000 one of the Sayyids of Ba-Alawi clan went to Busarah and produced same sixty respected Busarans to at least the relationship with the Iraqi Sayyids in presence of the Hadrami counting at the Meccan pilgrimage.

Sayyid Alawi was one of the most famous of the Ba- Alwai sayyids of Kerala. Sayyid Hasan Jifri was his maternal uncle. Though we have little knowledge about his early life, he is known to have been directly involved in mappila uprisings of the 19th century. There are ample sources to reconstruct his life and career in Malabar .Sayyid Alawi was born in 1750 AD [1163 AH] at Tarim of Hadramawt. His father sayyid Muhammed Ibn Sahl Mauludhaveela was a renowned scholar and theologian of Tarim. Sayyid for nobility and charity was his mother. He had lost his parents at the early age of his life.

Sayyid Alawi had acquired knowledge to recite the currant by hear, at an early age. He completed his primary education under a respectable scholar of Tarim. He was born and brought up in a spiritual atmosphere. The early training helped him very much to mould his career. Just like his predecessors he upheld the

puritan and uncompromising Islamic ideology. He played an important role to spread secularism among the Mappilas of Malabar.

Sayyid Alawi has arrived in Malabar on February 7 1768 AD at the age of seventeen and settle down at mamburam. Where his maternal uncle sayyid Hasan Jifri had been religious teacher. He came to Keral, probably, at the invitation of sayyid sheikh jifri. Because of his noble descent ,he enjoyed are religion authority unmatched by anybody else in Malabar at that time. Following the proud traditions of the Ba- Alwi sayyids, sayyid Alawi took special interest in missionary activites. He travelled throughout Ernad and walluwanad taluks for this purpose. He had a realized the importance of mosques in Islamic solidarity of mappilas and so took initiative to erect mosques in various parts of Ernad and walluwanad following were the mosques erected by the Tangal. Muniyur odungat mosque muttiara mosque and ponmundam mosque etc....

Sayyid Alawi's sense of justice and equality as well as his courage to protest against evils is illustrated by his Arrestment of a rich and noble man of kalpakanchery. In the course of his country wide journey sayyid Alawi visited the Banglow of Mandayapurath Ahammed kutty moopan of kalpakanchery. Moopan's servant served food to sayyid Alwai when friends. Moopan's repented and the Tangal was allowed fore turn only with a beautiful of rice and vegetables. Sayyid Alawi neither established any tariqah nor introduced practices and customs widen to the spirit of Islam. He had a called up on the Muslims to the teachings of holy Quran and Sunnah. This kondotti faqir belonged to none of these groups but to the Bohra which came under an extreme heretic shia groups called Rawthiz. During his career his achieved an undying reputation and holds a firm place as the greatest of the Ba- Alawi saints of Kerala. His life hid described as an epitome of Islamic virtues . He was keen in observing the requirements of fad and sunah. He was a well wisher of the poor and destitute so. He observed fast weekly and slept little . He has spent his time in studying quran. Hadith and meditation . He had practiced what he had preached. This was the secret behind his success as a missionary.

Sayyid Alawi was not a narrow minded aggressive missionary. He was an angle of communal harmony and brotherhood. Though he was not ready to compromise with un-Islamic practices, he never marked at the custom and traditions of others religious sectors. A large number of Hindus approached him for blessing. He maintained cordial relation with upper caste Hindu noble as well as lower castes. Sayyid Alawi viwed by the Hindus particularly belonging to the low caste. Kozhi kallyatum of muttiara, a low caste festival connecting with the being of raining season and agricultural activities was sanctioned by Sayyid Alawi. He even fixed its day as Friday being a holiday for mappilas to ensure their participation as a taken of communal harmony.

As a result Sayyid Alawi's missionary activities Mappila Muslim's large scale returned to the true faith and practices of Islam. The wide spread belief among Mappilas that the Mampuram Tanagal could do miracles also prompted them to follow his loot prints. Members of Hindu community were also moved by his supernatural powers. Sticking to the tradition of his predecessors of Malabar in particular and Ba- Alawi saints of Hadramawt in general Sayyid Alawi was always ready to help the needy the poor and the destitute. His rich disciples and devotes donated rice, vegetables , money gold and silver to the Tangal. That was given to the needy irrespective of caste and creed. Therefore there is no wonder that this saint had conquered the heart of Mappilas as well as the oppressed classes of Malabar

It is already mentioned that Sayyids Alawi and his son Sayyid Fazal adopted strong anti- colonial policy due to the change in circumstance. During the British period, British authorities did their best to appease the Tangal the religious leaders of the Mappila community. Non- co- operation was the method adopted by the Tangal and other Ulema of Malabar of the time towards the British Government. His anti- colonial outlook is Cleary depicted in famous work Assaif al Battar. This work is a collection of fatwa issued by sayyid Alawi- against the British. It is the reply of sayyid Alawi to eight questions raised by Abdulla Ibn Abdu Bari Abdul Tangal of quilandi. Sayyid Fazal compiled it and publish it

along with other fatwa of Arabi- Hindi theologians from Egypt in 1856-57 AD titled . Uddat al Umara wal Hukum Li thantil Kafarat Wa- Abdul at Asnam. Assaif. al- Battan

Sayyid Alawi gave his views in detail regarding the attitude of believers towards colonial rulers. Sayyids Alawi declares that jihad becomes compulsory for the moments the infidels exerted the country. In such a situation all including those up on whom military service is not compulsory such as old, women and children also should participate in jihad. In fatwa sayyid Alawi stated that Europeans are the worst unbelieved. If any Muslims praises the Christians and their role. It is a sin and he should repent for it. If one praises the Christians beliefs he become an infidel and God's anger will be full up on him. Those Muslims who praise the role of Kuffar are tools and they may be following all the vice of Kuffar and will become among them.

Sayyid Alawi exhorted the Muslim took take by heart the sufi texts like Nafaris at Durar , Aldayat al adkal and jawhanath Jawhid hill the English leave the country because these works are the food of swntlymen. Along with his religious factor ,socio- economic policies of the British prompted the tungal to adopt such a stand Tipu ceded Malabar to the British through the treaty of srirang patanam in 1792. British official suspected that Sayyid Alawi was behind the mappila uprising led by unni Mutha moopan manjeri. Athan Gurukkal and chemban poker during 1800-1801. Thus they had even contemplated his arrest . What held then back was fear of a possible protest riot. The reason for the proposed arrest was that two of the participants of revolt were found in the Tirurangadi mosque.

Manjeri Athan Gurikkal was killed in the revolt of 1801. His land was escheated by the state in march 1817, his son Athan Gurikkal led hundreds of Mappila brigades to besiege and occupy the lands which his father previously held. Tramal Tungal Arab by birth who had been settled in the province for upwards 40 years and whose reputation for sanctity is so great that every. Mappila muslaman in Malabar looks up on him almost as a prophet. Sayyid Alawi active involvement in the revolt of 1817. After the revolt of 1817 ,sayyid was summoned to Calicut to

report before the collector Sayyid Alavi reached with a large bond of armed party . Vowing never to surrender himself to the authority . Actually he was summoned to Calicut to be imprisoned. This fact as is clear from the message sent by the collector to his higher authorities, expressing his inability to arrest him.

The Muttiara riot of 1841 this lies on the north Western parts of mamburam apparently two Miles away from the seat of Sayyid Alavi. Tottachery Tachu panikar was an influential jenmi of the locality. He lodged a complaint against the Muslims that they encroached upon his land and one waste land belonging to him. But Mapilas denied this charge through a writing left by them and found after their Murder. Strange pointed out that if Mappilas had any complaint against the land lord, they might simply have gone to the taluk butchery . Mappila of the locality had intimated the matter to Sayyid Alawi . He advised them to resist from such activities and appended them to maintain communal harmony. Mappilas returned agreeing to abide by the order of the Tangal.

Cheror riot was the last incident which accrued during the life time of Sayyid Alawi. Therefore enough official as well as local sources to recreate the uprising in full historical light. It is a revolt of complex nature. But religious and socio-economic factors had played a dominant role in the uprising. Kaprat Krishna panikar the adigharee was the centre figure of the riot. In August 1843 a complaint was made by the mappilas of Tirurangadi village that he had thrown great dishonor on mappilas by forcing a lower caste Hindu woman convert to apostatize from Islam. Kapart Kirshna panikkar whose at recites paved the way for cherur riot, had close contact with sayyid Alawi and used to send present to the Tangal. A number of Mapilas of cherur were his employees. In order to avoid a possible rising of Hindu- Muslim brethren against colonialism. British officials explained the rift that arose between upper caste Hindus and Muslims as a result of the conversion of an ezhava woman. They moreover asked them to have their work on Friday for better observation of religious obligations. They formed the idea of congregational worship on a fixed day, and work being a necessary daily routine, they did not regularize attend Friday prayers in the mosques.

British officials had strongly suspected the involvement of Sayyid Alawi in the outbreaks which occurred during this period. Therefore the govt is reluctant to take any action against Sayyid Alawi and his family members. Though they were reluctant to take measures against Sayyid Alawi and other Arab priests, they never spread any chance to warn them against the dire consequence of their activities. There was a firm belief among the mappilas of Tirurangadi that sayyid Alawi fought incognito in the cherur riot British troops were asked to move to Tirurangadi. Then the shirestadar made a personal inquiring on the whereabouts of Sayyid Alawi. He had sent his agent to the tangal to persuade him to warn the insurgents against mis propriety of their conduct who were roaming in and around Tirurangadi with arms. Sayyid Alawi was said to have attributed all these workers to the power of Allah. Sayyid Alawi as a man who possessed supernatural powers arrested the attention of mappilas in particular and people belonging to other castes in general. Along with this, he is known to have hated the British and evidently offered his sanctified prestige in support of the activities of the rebels. Sayyid Alawi died in the night of January 29th 1844 AD. He has suffered from serious illness for several months. A number of local physicians had treated him. Before his death he summoned his close disciples and devotees and advised them to propagate the message of Islam in Kerala peacefully and told them to safeguard the Hindu- Muslim unity and revitalize the freedom struggle of the people. When he died his close friend, Umar Quzi of veliyankode mourned. His dead body was buried near the tomb of Sayyid it as an jifri at Mamburam.

The historical analysis of the life and career of Ba- Alawi Sayyids in Kerala reveals certain basic issues relating to the socio- religious as well as economic features of Mappilia society during the 18th and 19th c. Alawi Sayyids succeeded to bring notable changes in the then Mappila society. It is true that their reforms and preaching's in this respect brought about substantial results, when the history of Mappilas of the period taken as whole. On closer examination of the status of the lower caste in particular and the tenants in general, the teachings of Ba- Sayyids could be looked as an earnest effort to revolutionize the social structure of the society.

Ba- Alawi Sayyids especially Sayyid Fazal succeeded to certain extent to connect their reform activities with the reformist movements that worked among Muslims in all over the world. Therefore, the religious- social reform movements of Malabar under the guidance and leaderships of Ba- Alawi Sayyids was not an isolated phenomenon in the history of Malabar

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