

## **Muslims under Hindu rulers in Malabar**

**Faizal TK, Assistant Professor of History**

The Muslims are the foremost section of the Malabar society. So the advent and legitimization of Islam in Malabar is an interesting story of Kerala history. The presence of Muslims in Malabar was closely related to the long distance trade between Malabar and Arabs. It was the major factors of the spread of Islam in Malabar in earlier time. The Arabs played a leading role in the trading activity in Indian Ocean. The Arabs were probably the careers and merchants of the Indian Ocean before anybody else<sup>i</sup>. So that before the spread of Muhammadan' ideology in the world the Arabs were settled in Malabar Coast long time. The Arab traders who were in close commercial and mercantile ties with the Malabaries played crucial role in bringing the teaching and ideology of Prophet Muhammed to the land of cultural symbiosis i.e. Kerala<sup>ii</sup>. I.H. Qureshi observes that Islam therefore entered within a few years of the proclamation by the Prophet of his mission<sup>iii</sup>. S S Nadvis views that, it is an open fact that long before the Muslims settled in north India, there were colonies in southern India<sup>iv</sup>.

The advent and spread of Islam in Malabar is concerned the local tradition of the conversion of the Chera ruler may be scrutinized. This tradition has also been recorded in 'Keralolpathi'<sup>v</sup>. The local Hindu tradition recorded in Keralolpathi (Origin of Kerala) also agrees in general with the Muslim tradition and the conversion of Cheraman, the last Perumal ruler. The main difference is that according to Keralolpathi Cheraman partitioned his empire among his relatives and dependents before his departure to Mecca<sup>vi</sup>. The tradition believes the current among both native Hindus and Muslim represents the conversion and migration of the last Cera ruler to Arabia.

The spread of Muslim community from 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> century in Malabar, Roland E. Miller writes that "Islam grew as it began, peacefully and it grew steadily<sup>vii</sup>". The first four centuries of Mappila growth following the establishment of Islam in Kerala were marked by a calm forward movement. The peaceful contact

and development stand in sharp contrast to the progress of Islam in north India<sup>viii</sup>. Commenting on the same Nafis Ahmad also writes that 'Islam has come to these region without any political help whatsoever and remained rooted in the soil for centuries away from the turmoil of Mahmud's invasion of India, and the struggle between the cross and crescent in the world of West<sup>ix</sup>. Prominent local historian K .M Panicker (1896-1963) also accredits this fact by stating that "Malabar was leading a comparatively happy though politically isolated life. In many her organization was primitive, but she had evolved a system in which trade flourished, different communities lived together without fraction and absolute religious toleration existed<sup>x</sup>.

The co-operation of the local rulers like a Zamorin of Calicut, Kolathiri Rajas to the north, and Cochin Rajas to the south and the inland Valluvanad Rajas, who ruled over the region from 11<sup>th</sup> century to 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, provided them protection and had given full support for their commercial settlement and religious activities in their territories. It also they provided circumstantial facilities for the spread of Islam in Malabar. The rulers had taken from the Muslims only a tenth part of the Income of their trade.

One of the most interesting and important factors of the spread of Islam on the Malabar Coast was the role played by Zamorin rulers of Calicut, who ordered that, "In every family of fisherman in his dominion one or more of the male members should be brought up as Muhammadans"<sup>xi</sup>. It enabled an adequate supply of manpower to man his navy and sea trade, because the Hindus were averse to sea and sea-trade, and left such 'vulgar' professions either to the lower castes or to the foreigners. This helped in the large scale conversion of fisherman community now known as Puisselan, poosalan evidently a corruption of Pudu Islam (New Muslims)<sup>xii</sup>. Tara Chand observed the purpose of this deliberate encouragement of conversion of lower castes of sailors was to obtain mariners to man his warships and to conduct his sea-trade<sup>xiii</sup>. This policy strengthened the Muslim power in coastal area.

Another best example, which shows the influence of Muslims, is mentioned in the pioneering works, 'The Zamorins of Calicut', in describing the coronation

procession of Zamorin, K.V. Krishna Ayyar notes: The Muhammadan 'Qazi' or Judge, Sabandra Koya as former of port duties, Tura Marakkyar or Chief pilot and the Palli Musliyar or eider in charge of Mosque should be at Jetty for akampati (escort)<sup>xiv</sup>. Also the Zamorin received betel leaf from a Muslim, dressed as lady of certain family. Another example of greatest honour was the right of 'Kozhikottu Koya' (The Muslim chieftain of Calicut) to stand on the right side of Zamorin in the prestigious Mamankam Festival<sup>xv</sup>. Because, according to tradition, it was the Calicut Koya who recommended to the Zamorin the conquest of Valluvanad in order to acquire the custodianship of the Mamankam festival of Tirunavaya. The financial and military support provided by the Muslims helped the Zamorin to extend his sway over Valluvanad. Thus the need of the hour and political exigencies compelled him to create a congenial atmosphere, resulting in the increase of Arab trade and the consequent spread of Islamic ideology in Kerala. It created ties of dependence between ruler and traders. So the Muslim merchants enjoyed good status in the Zamorin's court.

The rulers of Malabar other than Zamorin also largely supported the Muslim merchants. Their generous support ultimately contributed to the steady growth of the Mappila community. In the north of Calicut, Ali Raja established the Arakkal Swarupom in Cannanore. By twelfth century the influence of the Ali Rajas of Arakkal often called Arakkal Srarupam had increased so much that the Kolathiris, were induced to seek their help by bestowing Laccdives Island on them.

Farther north, in the kingdom of "Eli Mala" also Muslims were honorably treated. In the 'Musakavamsakavya', an eleventh century Sanskrit work, there are references to the foundation of two cities of Marahi (Madayi) and Vallabhappattanam (Valapattanam), where merchants from distant islands were settled for trade. These two cities and surrounding areas became important Muslim activities. Valapattanam, especially in the 16th and 17th centuries became an important center of Islamic learning and here the Sufis also played a major role in propagating the religion<sup>xvi</sup>.

In southern part of the Kerala, the rulers provided good status and facilities for the Muslim merchants. As mentioned earlier the importance of Muslim merchant

communities in Quilon (Kollam) is attested by the Terisapalli copper plates of Ayyan Atikal Tiru Atikal<sup>xvii</sup>. We also noticed one of the ten mosques constructed by Malik Ibn Dinar. It shows the presence of a large Muslim settlement. Another mosque situated at Kodungallure (Muziris) and the influential presence of Muslim community in Cochin was a deciding factor in fixing the price of spices<sup>xviii</sup>.

The support of the native rulers encouraged large scale conversion to Islam. People of lower castes who were suffering from the cruel inhibitions of the Hindu caste system came forward in large numbers to embrace the new religion.

It is the warm reception that the Muslim Arabs received by local Hindu rulers may also be taken into consideration. The religious teachings of Muslim scholars and appreciation of Islam by Hindu kings also played their part. The native kings not only respected the new faith, but also rendered all possible help and protection for its propagation. Thus Islam took roots and its adherents increased in number<sup>xix</sup>. The Muslims steadily increased in number by Immigration and proselytization. Traders from different parts of the world began to flock to the coastal towns and new inland as well coastal centers developed.

## Reference

- <sup>1</sup> William Vincent, *Commerce and Navigation of the Ancient in the Indian Ocean*, Vol I, published, 1807, p. 62.
- <sup>1</sup> M.G.S. Narayanan used the term *Cultural Symbiosis* to the nature of accommodating different religions, culture, ideologies and practices by the Keralites since the origin of their land.
- <sup>1</sup> I. H. Qureshi, *The Muslim Community of Indo-Pak Subcontinent, 610-1947 AD*, New York, 1947, p. 72.
- <sup>1</sup> S.S. Nadvi, *The Muslim colonies in India before the muslim conquests*, Islamic Culture, XIII (1934), p. 478.
- <sup>1</sup> Hermond Gundert, *Keralolpathi* , Balan publication, 1961 pp. 66-78.
- <sup>1</sup> K.V. Krishna Ayyer, *Zamorins of Calicut*, 1938, Second edition, University of Calicut ,1999, pp. 60-65
- <sup>1</sup> Roland E. Miller, Op. cit, p. 51.
- <sup>1</sup> Ibid., p. 51.
- <sup>1</sup> Nafis Ahmed, *Arabs Knowledge of Ceylon*, Islamic Culture, XIV, (1945), p. 226.
- <sup>1</sup> K. M. PaniKkar, *Malabar and Portuguese*, Bombay, 1923, p. 24.
- <sup>1</sup> C. A. Innes, *Malabar and Anjengo*, Dist Gazetteer, 1951, p.190.
- <sup>1</sup> M. G. S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, Kerala Historical Society, Thiruvananthapuram 1972, pp. 6, 40.
- <sup>1</sup> Tara Chand, *influence of Islam*, Op. cit., p. 36.

<sup>1</sup> K. V. Krishna Ayyer, *Zamorins of Calicut*, 1938, Second edition, University of Calicut, 1999, p. 39

<sup>1</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 92-106.

<sup>1</sup> V, Kunhali, *Op.cit*, p. 42.

<sup>1</sup> M .G. S. Narayanan, *Cultural Symbiosis in Kerala*, *Op. cit*, pp. 31-37.

<sup>1</sup> A. P. Ibrahim Kunju, “Origin and Spread of Islam in Kerala”, in Asghar Ali Engineer (ed.,) *Kerala Muslims; A Historical Perspective*, Ajanta Publication, 1995, p. 31.

<sup>1</sup> S. M. H. Nainar, *Op.cit*, p. 12